EXAMINING INDONESIAN EFL TEACHER EDUCATORS' VIEWS ON UTILISING L1 IN L2 CLASSROOMS

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Abstract – *The role of first language (L1) use in second language (L2) classrooms in various English language teaching (ELT) contexts have been studied extensively. Among the many roles that L1 uses play in L2 classrooms which have been recognised, there are also drawbacks that interfere as a result of, for instance, unbalanced uses of both L1 and L2. To complement insightful findings presented in the existing literature on this L1 use topic, this present study, therefore, aims to explore L1 uses in EFL L2 classrooms in a teacher training program in Indonesia. Drawing on a qualitative research approach, the study collected data from three English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher educators teaching an English speaking subject in an Indonesian university using a semi-structured interview protocol and a classroom observation fieldnote. Findings revealed that all the participants shared the same views on L1 in their L2 classrooms that its uses were mainly related to cognitive and pedagogical aspects. The study suggests that a formal training seeking to arouse awareness on the role that L1 can play in L2 classroom is of necessity in the context of the EFL teacher training program in order to foster learners' optimal L2 output.*

Keywords: L1 use, L2 classroom, EFL teacher educator

INTRODUCTION

Using learners' L1 in L2 classroom has been an issue of ongoing debate among researchers in L2 teaching. While several researchers acknowledge that the use of L1 within L2 classroom has limited role on L2 learning progress (e.g. Auerbach, 1993; Ellis, 2005; Tang, 2002), others believe that its uses support learners in making the most of their L2 learning. McMillan & Rivers (2011, p. 2), for instance, contends that the use of L1 in L2 classroom helps learners, in particular, to get "additional cognitive support", while Tsagari and Giannikas (2018) believes that its uses in a

principled way help teachers and learners to foster L2 teaching and learning. To complement the existing research on this issue by presenting the views of language teachers in an EFL classroom setting, the study reported in this article, therefore, seeks to explore teacher educators' (TEs) views on the use of L1 in their L2 classrooms in the context of teacher training institution in Indonesia.

In recent years, there has been a shift in the way L1 use in L2 classroom is manifested, and research into this area has been extensively done. For the proponent of maximum L2 use in L2 classroom, Krashen's (1981) language acquisition theories seem to be the influential concept. Krashen's natural hypothesis, for example, suggests that because people learn another language in the same way as they acquire their first language or mother tongue, they should not be exposed to the dominant use of their L1 for effective L2 result to take place. The input hypothesis, furthermore, states that to fully learn a L2, an optimal use of L2 among teachers and learners should be facilitated (Krashen, 1981), which means that the use of L1 need to be eliminated. As Brown (1994, p. 45) argued, "the target language system is learned through the process of struggling to communicate". It is on this ground that most opinion on limiting the use of L1 in L2 classroom has been based and, thus, suggesting that L2 learners should, in fact, have meaningful exposure to the L2 to obtain the most benefit (Cummins, 2007; de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Karimian & Mohammadi, 2015).

However, there has been a widely accepted consensus to date which elucidated that the use

of L1 in L2 classroom, on the other hand, serves as a potential tool that help increase chances of success in teaching and learning a L2. In other words, the inclusion of L1 as a working language along with L2 in L2 classroom can benefit both teachers and learners, provided that its uses is carefully planned and organised, particularly in the context of EFL, as seen in the following studies. First, Köylü (2018) examined to what extent EFL lecturers switch to their L1 in their L2 classroom. Data were collected from 155 EFL lecturers who were working in six state universities in Turkey using an online questionnaire. Findings showed what caused the participating lecturers to utilise their L1was the difference in the linguistic aspects of Turkish and English. The lecturer reported that they viewed the use of L1 as useful for providing detail clarification on particular target language structure. They also said that referring to L1 was intended for building rapport with their students and for coping with their lack of confidence on English proficiency.

Second, Tsagari & Giannikas (2018) conducted a study on the use of L1 and L2 by teachers and advanced learners in the context of EFL situated in the Republic of Cyprus. Informed by a mixed method approach, this study revealed that there was a need for a balanced use of L1 and L2. While the teachers viewed the use of L1 played an important role in teaching English, they reported that L1 uses symbolised a pedagogical and linguistic-related flaws, however. On the other hand, despite feeling linguistically comfortable in a L2 classroom with permission for referring to L1 at particular communication situations, the learners realised that what they also need was sufficient exposure to English. Given this, the study suggests that the use of L1 should be well-defined and carefully enacted within the L2 classroom in order to facilitate the learners' L2 development.

Third, Turnbull (2018) ho investigated the views of a pre-service ESL teachers about using L1 in L2 learning in a New Zealand university. Using questionnaire and interview with 30 participants who were a group of native and non-native speakers of English, results of this study showed that the participating teachers had a mixed opinions on the topic being investigated. While some had negative views of

L1 use in L2 classrooms, others showed positive attitude towards its uses. Yet, the findings also revealed that there was a gap in the teachers' knowledge about how to deal with L1 as a potential learning tool for their ESL students; thus, the study suggested ESL teacher education program need to accommodate the use of L1 in its curriculum "with a specific focus on the indirect, underlying beneficial and facilitating roles of the L1 for both the teacher and students in the classroom" (Turnbull, 2018, p.16). This will ensure that the teacher candidates will be aware of the need to incorporate L1 use in L2 classroom and how this should be enacted for effective L2 teaching.

All these studies suggest that there are some good reasons for using L1 in L2 classroom across English language teaching contexts, such as for promoting good rapport between teachers and students and facilitating better understanding on particular target language aspects. In fact, as there has been an increasing number in EFL classrooms across the world, it is reasonable to re-examine the traditional view of limiting the use of L1 in L2 classroom as this is no longer relevant to the dynamic today's EFL teaching praxis. Saruwatashi (2020) argues that "it can be very challenging to promote, actualize, and maintain constant use of the TL [target language]" by both teachers and learners in an EFL classroom who share the same L1. This is particularly the case with low proficient learners who are often challenged with making use of classroom L2 interaction as useful and meaningful input to learn, and who find limited opportunity to expose themselves in L2 interaction beyond classroom (MacPherson, 2019; Saruwatashi, 2020). That is why, within such EFL situation, L2 may not always serve as the predominant language of instruction (García Mayo and Hidalgo, 2017) as misunderstanding can interfere because of difficulties in understanding L2 expressions among teachers and learners.

To what extent this dynamic view on L1 use within L2 classroom is present within the context of EFL teacher training program in Indonesia, the present study, therefore, asks a key research question: what are teacher educators views on the use of L1 in their English speaking classes? By asking such

question, the study aims to inform current EFL teacher training program in addressing the role of L1 within L2 classroom and whether or not the use of L1 has been carefully well-defined and designed in the prevailing curriculum of the program.

METHODS

A qualitative research approach was chosen as a framework for conducting the study reported in this article. Three teacher educators (TEs) working in a English teacher training program of an Indonesian university agreed to participate voluntarily. This program is the institution that has a mandate from the Indonesian government to educate candidates for English language teachers at the school level. The duration for completing the course is within four years, along with a compulsory undergraduate thesis writing requirement. In this program, the English majors (EMs) learn a range of language knowledge, such as linguistics, research, and English for your learners; language skills, such as listening, reading, speaking and writing for academic purposes; as well as teaching practices and community service program.

All the participating TEs in this present study hold a postgraduate degree in English education, graduating from Indonesia and overseas universities, and reported to be advanced users of the English language. They were speakers of Bahasa Indonesia as their first language, a language that is also shared by all their EMs. These TEs were teaching speaking class, which suit the research objective of the study. To collect data from these TEs, an interview protocol was conducted in Bahasa Indonesia, and lasted between 30-45 minutes. Classroom observations on the TEs classes were also done to crosscheck the TEs responses found in the interview transcripts. For analysing data, a thematic analysis method was used. This assist in generating relevant themes that best address the research questions from the interview transcripts and observation field-notes. Upon the collection of data, interview transcripts were returned for a member checking purpose for establishing the trustworthiness of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion section show how the author interpret the results in light of what was already known, and to explain the new understanding of the problem after taking your results into consideration. The discussion must connect with the Introduction so it tells how your study contribute to the body of knowledge and society. Data collected from the interviews with the participating teacher educators (TEs) showed that all these TEs tolerated the use of Bahasa Indonesia to complement the use of English during oral interaction in the classroom. The use of this L1, either by the TEs, TEs with English majors (EMs) or between EMs, is confined within particular situations. TE1, for example, as seen in the interview quote below, suggested that because the majority of EMs had grown up speaking Bahasa Indonesia as their everyday language of communication, the use of this language in English classroom shall be tolerated. This does not mean that L1 uses would outweigh the use of English as the primary language of instruction in the English classroom. It functions, however, as a complementary language to English for specific reasons, such as to accommodate mixed proficiency level of EMs to understand task instructions or explanations of a concept by the TEs.

> "Well to me, it is okay if they mix it with Bahasa Indonesia because they are not born with English. They are here to learn English, right? If you force them to speak English all the time, they won't speak because may be they are afraid. So the first thing that you have to do is just let them speak". (TE1: 56)

For TE1, teacher educators shall always bear in mind that one of their responsibility was to ensure that they could facilitate EMs to learn English. EMs shall be guided to find ways to learn the language and to make progress in this language learning. To learn English, as TE1 implied, can also be carried out by using L1, for example, when EMs tried to ask for a clarification while listening to TEs' talk. If L2 class means prohibiting the use of L1, this TE perceived that it might be hard for EMs to make progress in L2 learning. EMs would probably feel reluctant to continue speaking English at

times of linguistic communication breakdown as they knew about the rule of L1 uses in L2 classroom. For low proficient EMs, this means experiencing anxiety. What can be the worst case resulting from this is that EMs would become demotivated to showcase their current ability in speaking English as a learning path to polishing their L2 speaking skills. Therefore, TE1 suggested that what TEs could do to anticipate with this proficiency issue or acceptability of L1 uses in L2 classes to foster L2 learners learning progress is to "let them to speak". This means allowing the use of L1 for helping EMs stay involved in L2 interaction at times of linguistic-related communication breakdowns, where they can find ways to continue express themselves in English while monitoring the progress of their English proficiency level.

In a similar vein, TE3 also supported the use of L1 in English classroom. Yet, this TE suggested that, to some extent, she would only allow those low proficient EMs to refer to using Bahasa Indonesia to stay involved when communicating in English orally. In other words, for more proficient EMs, the use of Bahasa Indonesia shall be kept at the lowest level.

> "For me, it depends on their ability. Not all of them can speak the language fluently. When they have to speak English, I don't want them to feel stressed, to do all given speaking tasks. So, I approach them persuasively. I give them an opportunity to speak English. But I have to make sure that they won't feel much pressure if they have to speak English". (TE3: 5)

TE3 implied that the main reason for tolerating the use of L1 was to create an enjoyable, yet stimulating atmosphere for English uses to be initiated and where all EMs could participate. A key aspect to be taken into account for this TE when teaching English speaking skill was to help EMs feel comfortable to explore and accomplish every given classroom tasks which demand them to speak in English. Pressure, which often arise from fear of being judged due to English low proficiency level or a lack of confidence in using the language for oral

communication, for TE3, is something that needs to be carefully addressed within the classroom. As such, it is important of all TEs to think about finding the most appropriate way to encourage all EMs to use English for communication purposes in the classroom.

TE2, on the other hand, had a slightly different view on the use of L1 in L2 classroom. For this TE, what matters the most is in what classes the use of L1 shall be tolerated. This TE perceived that if it was a speaking class, all EMs should be encouraged to speak English as much as they can, which may means limiting the opportunity to refer to Bahasa Indonesia.

> "I think, it depends on the class. If it is speaking class, I will encourage them to speak English as much as they can. If it is writing or reading, I think they can also use Bahasa Indonesia, if they get stuck, you know. But, the most important thing for me is they feel dare to communicate in English". (TE2: 25)

However, TE2 maintained, if it was a class other than speaking, such as writing or reading, EMs may speak in Bahasa Indonesia for coping with particular linguistic breakdowns. This TE implied that TEs need to consider again the main purpose of a class in order to make the right decision as to taking Bahasa Indonesia as part of the classroom working language along with English. Despite this, TE2 perceived that it remains useful for the EMs English proficiency level improvement if all TEs encouraged them to use English as much as they could when in the classroom. As TE2 put it:

> "We need to encourage them to use English orally as well, for their improvement, because they will teach English in the future. So when my students asked, "what language to use, ma'am? English or Indonesian?" I said, "try to use English", even though many of them still feel difficult to speak the language, to express themselves. But, that's okay". (TE2: 14)

Using Bahasa Indonesia during particular situation in the classroom between TEs-EMs and EMs-EMs was noticeable, as seen in the

observation quotes below. It was predominantly heard as the TEs (e.g. TE2 & TE3), for instance, attempted to re-explain particular concept/definition and to re-emphasise specific instruction for EMs to engage in task-based classroom activities. As a result, dialog in English, despite being marked by the presence of language combination (Bahasa Indonesia and English language) at some points, occurred.

> "The lecturer started the class by doing an ice breaker. She then introduced the topic for today's lecture. In a few minutes later, the lecturer checked the student's answers on a given exercise in the previous meeting. Following this, she asked the students to share any challenges they faced while working on the exercise. The lecturer used both English and Bahasa Indonesia while speaking at this stage. This led to dialogs with the students with some of them ending up responding in Bahasa Indonesia". (TE2's class, 1st year EMs)

> "The TE opened the class by asking if the students had done their homework. Apparently, as the students reported, many of them had not done it yet because they did not get the worksheet for some reasons. The lecturer continued to ask the students to listen to a short talk recording and to work on some exercises. After that, she checked the students' answers by engaging them in conversation. Later on, as the lecturer also switched to ask questions in Bahasa Indonesia, some students responded in that language as well when they had difficulties to continue speaking in English". (TE3's class, 1st year EMs)

All these interview responses along with the observation fieldnotes, in short, shows several reasons for the use of L1 in the participating TEs L2 classes, in this case, speaking subject classes. First, the TEs used L1 and allowed EMs to speak in the language as well in order to accelerate in EMs L2 learning and to yield positive results. Such acceleration was also highlighted in Sali's (2014) study. This study examined one EFL Turkish classroom and

revealed that the use of L1, particularly by the teachers, helped the students cope with their anxiety during learning English and to continuously engage in the classroom communicative activities, such as rehearsing dialogs and answering teacher's questions. For less proficient English learners, teachers' use of L1, a shared language in the classroom, may assist the learners in gaining emotional support and motivation which further strengthen the classroom rapport and trust (Köylü, 2018). Given this, classroom dynamic L2 oral interaction involving teachers and learners can be facilitated as long as there are clear guidelines as to how this L1 shall be used by teacher and learners during L2 classes for the purpose of accommodating L2 output (Turnbull, 2018).

However, it also makes sense to say that using L1 in L2 classes, when it is not well defined and accommodating of L2 output, may hamper the progress of L2 learners' skills in comprehending L2 outputs. This disadvantage stems from the fact that the learners may not feel challenged to understand English utterances they hear when communicating orally in English, because they can simply find all the translations of the utterances. As Köylü (2018) reported in his study, some of his participating EFL teachers also hold a view that the use of L1 might hinder Turkish English learners from gauging useful input which help them in producing meaningful L2 output. Therefore, for L1 uses to take place effectively as supporting working language in the classroom, language teachers need to equip themselves with training courses that would allow them to make informed decisions about when and how L1 is best used within L2 classrooms (Abid, 2020; Turnbull, 2018). Subsequently, learners may benefit from their teachers pedagogical training pertaining to using L1 to compensate for their lack of L2 linguistic competency when interacting orally in a L2 (Saruwatashi, 2020). For instance, they would become aware of L1 role in L2 classroom and how to balance their uses to facilitate maximum output in L2 during various forms of collaborative engagement (Abid, 2020).

Furthermore, when it is done properly, using L1 in L2 classes could also help language learners

find ways to improve their oral proficiency level. When teachers use L1 to facilitate L2 output, learners may become aware of what target language structures they need to memorise and apply to support them when interacting using the target language (Du, 2016; Saruwatashi, 2020). As such, it is necessary for language teachers to define clearly how L1 shall be handled when teaching a L2, i.e. to serve as an aid in producing comprehensible L2 output for effective communication to take place (Mercieca, 2014). They need to be fully aware that the use of L1 in their L2 classroom shall be only used to assist in building L2 knowledge, fostering personal interaction among teachers and learners, as well as improving teaching efficacy (e.g. managing classroom) (Tsgarai & Giannikas, 2018). According to Dewi and Setiadi (2018), this will in turn help learners to make the right decision as to when to refer back to their L1 at times of L2 linguistic difficult situation in a L2 classroom. These researchers reported that their participating English majors claimed to refer back to the Indonesian language in English classroom situation where their lecturers decided on using the language because it was much simpler than in English to make particular complex explanation understandable.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions section show the answer or clarification of the research questions and opportunities for future research. The present study has shown that the three participating TEs shared the same views on the use of L1 in their L2 classroom. The TEs reported that the reasons why L1 use shall be tolerated in their L2 classrooms were related to cognitive and pedagogical aspects. As with the first aspect, the use of L1 helps TEs in explaining or giving task instruction which can be more demanding when done in the target language. As their L2 classroom involved EMs with a mixed L2 proficiency level, it makes sense that drawing on a maximum use of L2 when in the classroom is challenging. The latter aspect, on the other hand, assists TEs in creating an enjoyable, yet stimulating L2 classroom, where less proficient EMs felt secured and less anxious as compared to L2 classroom where there was a total

abandonment of L1 uses. Yet, little can be elicited from the TEs about whether or not L1 uses has been addressed in their teaching syllabus or the curriculum of their teacher training program. What this present study can suggest is that there should be a balanced use between L1 and L2 in L2 classrooms for an optimal L2 output to take place. Given this, it is relevant for the teacher training program to take into account L1 use in L2 teaching so that not only an awareness of L1 role that increases but also the ability to implement L1 uses in L2 classrooms that improves. Future research that specifically examines this topic from the perspective EMs or in-service English school teachers may aid insightful knowledge to current literature on L1 role in L2 classrooms situated in the EFL context.

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