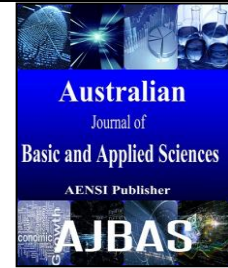




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Teachers' Beliefs and Students' Perceptions of Bilingual Use in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: Identity and Classroom Discourse

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ABSTRACT

Language use in a foreign language (FL) classroom plays a very important role in developing students' skills in the target language. In fact, where FL learning is concerned, classroom constitutes an exclusive setting where the students can learn and practise the target language intensively. That is, classroom interactions between teacher and students and among the students are indispensable for the sake of communication practice in the target language. In accordance with such notion, the paper reports the study conducted about teachers' beliefs and students' perceptions of bilingual use in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The study was primarily intended to reveal Indonesian EFL teachers' beliefs of the proper use of Indonesian and English during the process of classroom EFL teaching and learning as well as the students' perceptions of the different degree of which Indonesian and English were used in the classrooms. The data were collected through an observation, a questionnaire and semi structured interviews. Eventually, it was found that different teachers held different beliefs of the proper bilingual use in the classrooms and so did the students as regards their perceptions. Factors that might influence the beliefs and perceptions are critically discussed thereafter. In particular, however, it is reckoned that different aspects of identity maintained by the teachers and students produce distinctive beliefs and perceptions towards particular language use in the classroom.

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INTRODUCTION

In the contexts of classroom language teaching and learning, there have been lots of studies conducted which successfully reveal the effective or productive patterns of teacher-student interactions in both monolingual and bilingual classes (e.g. Cullen, 2002; Dailey-O'Cain & Liebscher, 2009). The by-product of the research also reveals a number of ineffective or unproductive teacher-student interactional patterns that teachers need to avoid, for such interactional patterns can obstruct the development of students' communicative competence in the target language.

In his critical review of the research focusing on teacher-student classroom interactions, Richards (2006) contends that "shifts in the orientation to different aspects of identity produce distinctively different interactional patterns" (p. 52). In other words, different aspects of identity that are maintained by language teachers during the process of teaching and learning constitute a significant factor which determines the degree of

communicativeness of the interactions. In the light of identity theory in the context of second or foreign language teaching and learning, the teachers and students are believed to maintain particular beliefs and values as regards how classroom teaching and learning is best conducted, including the use of language in the classroom as well. Teachers' and students' preferences on the type of language used in the classroom, therefore, constitute a significant aspect of which teacher and student identity is built (Gee, 2008; MacLure, 1993); be it default, situated, or transportable (Richards, 2006; Zimmerman, 1998).

In line with the context of this study, the concept of identity may be classified and defined as follows:

- *Identity* refers to cultural, ideological, or personal beliefs, values, and attitudes towards the use of first language (L1) and second or foreign language (L2) in the classroom.
- *Default identity* derives entirely from culturally-based inheritance which causes desirable attitude to L1 and quite undesirable attitude to L2.

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- *Situated identity* derives from ideological orientation to situating L1 and L2 equally on the basis of contexts or situations.
- *Transportable identity* refers to personal alignment of “self” as an L2 user and thus causes highly desirable attitude to L2.

With regard specifically to the institution where the study was conducted, teaching by using both Indonesian and English has long been a standard practice. Still, the degree of which each of the two languages is used in the classrooms varies among the teachers. Also, different students respond differently to the teachers’ different frequency of using the two languages during the process of classroom teaching and learning. In other words, there have been vast inconsistencies among the teachers regarding the degree of which Indonesian and English are used in the classrooms; that is, one teacher may prefer using more Indonesian to using English language while another teacher prefers using more Indonesian to using English.

The inconsistencies also relate to the communicative circumstances where the teachers think one instead of the other language would be more appropriate to use; for example, one teacher may think that using English rather than Indonesian is more appropriate in explaining the previous concepts taught to the students, while another teacher may think that the opposite is more appropriate.

The inconsistencies pertained to the teachers’ use of language further affect the students’ perception of which Indonesian and English are used in the classrooms, such as some groups of students may expect maximum use of English in the classroom, while other groups may perceive that more Indonesian would be more helpful. Stemming from these attitudinal factors of both the teachers and the students towards the use of L1 (Indonesian) and L2 (English) in the classroom was thus the research project conducted.

The questions posed in the study were formulated as follows:

- 1) How do a group of Indonesian EFL teachers define the proper use of Indonesian and English during the process of classroom English language teaching and learning?
- 2) How do Indonesian EFL students perceive the different degree of which Indonesian and English are used by their teachers in the classrooms?
- 3) What aspects of identity does each teacher maintain as reflected by his/her beliefs?
- 4) What aspects of identity do students maintain as reflected by their perceptions?

In line with the questions, the project primarily aimed to reveal:

- a) a group of Indonesian EFL teachers’ beliefs of the proper use of Indonesian and English during the process of classroom English language teaching and learning.

b) students’ perceptions of the different degree of which Indonesian and English are used by their teachers in the classrooms.

c) aspects of identity the teachers maintain as reflected by their beliefs.

d) aspects of identity the students maintain as reflected by their perceptions.

The assumption underlying the research project is that teachers’ beliefs of which Indonesian and English are used to a different degree and necessity in the classroom are conformed to the different aspects of identity they maintain, be it default, situated, or transportable (Richards, 2006; Zimmerman, 1998). Similarly, students’ perceptions regarding the degree and necessity of which Indonesian and English are used in the classrooms are also conformed to the different aspects of identity they maintain as well.

The Study:

This is a small scale case study incorporating the principles of qualitative research approach to the type of data and data analysis. To collect data for the study, semi structured interviews with a group of English teachers were done and one-shot open-ended questionnaire was administered to groups of Indonesian EFL students. Also, observations to classroom teaching and learning activities were carried out to know how Indonesian and English language were actually used by the teachers and how the students during the instructional processes in the classrooms responded to the use of the two languages.

Research Participants:

Four teachers were involved in the study. Among the four teachers, two of them taught Academic English Writing course, while the other two taught English speaking skills. As the same as the majority of English teachers in Indonesia, the four teachers are Indonesians who are non-native English speakers. Still, the four teachers have previously had professional education and/or training in English language teaching from Indonesian universities and have had years of experience in teaching English to different groups of English language learners in Indonesia.

With regard to the students, a group of a hundred and seventy three (173) of Indonesian students studying with or were taught by the four teachers were also involved in the study. What is worth noting about the teachers and the students is that both of them have a lot in common, especially in terms of the languages they speak. That is, in addition that both the teachers and the students share the same national language (Indonesian language) which surely makes it much easier for them to fall back to the use of the language whenever they get difficulty in using English to communicate in the classroom, they also

share the same ability in the use of the local languages as well, especially Javanese and Madurese. Hence, there has always been a great temptation to always fall back to the use of the languages that both the teachers and the students mutually understand (Indonesian, Javanese or Madurese) and if so the use of English in the classroom will get reduced.

Data and Data Analysis:

As regards the methods for collecting the data, the study included both participant and non-participant reports. The participant reports were obtained through semi-structured interviews with the teachers and the questionnaire delivered to the students. While the data obtained from the semi-structured interviews were primarily intended to mark the teachers' beliefs about the use of Indonesian and English language in the classroom teaching activities, the data obtained from the questionnaire were intended to reveal the students' perceptions of the teachers' use of the language in the classroom.

Lastly, both the reports given by the teachers and the students were triangulated with the results of the classroom observations. That is, classroom observations help verify if the teachers' and the students' reports were consistent or inconsistent with their behaviour during the real classroom teaching and learning processes. Through these triangulation data, more reliable data analyses are more possible to achieve.

Semi-structured interviews:

The interviews were conducted before and after the classroom teaching activities. The interviews were semi-structured because they allowed questions of new ideas, which were not listed in the guideline, to be asked during the interviews as a result of the interviewees' reports. The interviews conducted before the classroom teaching activities mainly aimed to clarify the teachers' thoughts related to the proper form of language use in the classroom, while the interviews conducted after the teaching activities primarily aimed to clarify their situated classroom practice.

Table 1: The students' perceptions of the proper language use in the classroom.

OPTIONS	More English	English and Indonesian	More Indonesian
Number of Students	10 (5.8%)	163 (94.2%)	0%

Question 3 and 4:

Despite some similarities among the teachers regarding their beliefs and among the students regarding their perceptions, however, both of the teachers and the students had their own reasons regarding their beliefs or perceptions. Still, based on the teachers' reports in the interviews and the students' responses to the questionnaire, it is believed that their beliefs or perceptions of the classroom language were conformed to the different

Questionnaire:

"[A] good deal of precision and clarity" constitute one of the most important criteria of good questionnaire (McDonough and McDonough, 1997: 171), and one of the most important aspects that ensures precision and clarity is the use of language. Thus, Indonesian was used in the questionnaire to ensure clarity of the questions as to what was asked and precision of the students' responses to the questions. In the questionnaire the questions asked were mainly about how they liked their teachers teach them in the classroom, i.e. if they liked them to use English more than Indonesian, or vice versa, or use both of the languages equally. Furthermore, the students were asked then to provide their reasons.

Observation:

The observations were conducted in four classes taught by the four teachers. The observations were mainly intended to see how the teachers used the language in the classroom and how the students responded to it.

Findings:

Question 1 and 2:

As regards the teachers' beliefs, three out of four teachers believed that English should be used as much as possible in the classroom, and their reports were confirmed by their real classroom teaching activities; that is, English was used most of the time and L1 was used only occasionally. One teacher, on the other hand, believed that balanced use of Indonesian and English was preferable for the sake of clarity. However, the results of the classroom observation revealed that the teacher used Indonesian more than he used English language.

Meanwhile, the students' responses to the questionnaire show only ten (5.8%) out of a hundred and seventy three (173) of them perceived that more use of English than Indonesian was necessary, while the rest of a hundred and sixty three (94.2%) of them perceived it was necessary that English and Indonesian were used equally by the teachers in the classroom, and none of the students perceived that Indonesian should be used more than English by the teachers in the classroom.

aspects of identity they maintained. That is, three teachers maintained *transportable identity* and one teacher maintained *situated identity*. Conversely, there were a hundred and sixty three students maintained *situated identity* and ten students maintained *transportable identity*, and neither the teachers nor the students maintained *default identity* per se. Further discussion of the findings is provided in the next section.

Discussion:

In the light of Vygotskian paradigm, talks constitute the medium which facilitates learning. Through talks the teachers as the more knowledgeable persons in the classroom can help the learners learn a new skill. Since the skills which the learners intend to develop in foreign language teaching and learning contexts refer to their ability in using the target language accurately and appropriately in authentic communication, then the target language should be used by the teachers as much as possible to communicate with the learners. Similarly, the learners are also expected to practise using the target language as much as possible in the classroom to build their proficiency in it. However, when the teachers and the students encounter difficulty to communicate ideas with each other in the target language, it would be foolish to deny using their first language (Harmer, 2007: 39). In such a case, first language offers facilitating effect on the learning process.

The findings of this study concerning the teachers' beliefs and the students' perceptions of bilingual use in the classroom agree with such notion in which none of both teachers and students maintain that the target language should be the only language in the classroom, although they have different opinions as to how much and in what situation L1 ought to be used.

Notwithstanding, with respect to the extent and the demand of teacher use of L1 in the classroom, the small number of students (the 10 students) who reckoned that L1 should be used only when problems in communication were encountered were obviously more tolerant with ambiguity (Johnson, 2001: 141). That is, although as the same as other students in learning EFL in the classrooms they too faced a number of problems in understanding particular words, especially during the early stages of their learning, yet they were not easily discouraged by such experience. As a result, as seen from their performance during the instructional process, the ten (10) students were far more proficient in the use of English as compared with those who were easily discouraged with the sense of ambiguity resulting from lack of understanding to particular use of English in the classroom and thus preferred to using L1 mostly. This finding agrees with the study conducted by Naiman *et al.* (1978 cited in Johnson, 2001: 142) in which the students who tolerate more use of the second/foreign language in the classrooms, even if they cannot understand all of the words spoken by the teachers, are better language learners than those do not.

The students' perceptions as stated above have something in common with other students studying foreign language in other foreign language learning contexts. Brooks-Lewis (2009), for instance, challenges the exclusion use of L1 based on the findings of his research that adult learners'

perceptions of the incorporation of their L1 in FL teaching and learning were "remarkably positive, with a variety of reasons given as to why adult learners felt that the inclusion of their L1 in the classroom and its incorporation in the teaching and learning experience had been beneficial and how it had made the learning process not only meaningful but pleasurable" (p. 216).

Also, as regards the aspect of identity that the ten (10) students maintained, it belonged to the transportable one, for they have quite strong alignment of themselves as English language users and thus have highly desirable attitude to English use (Zimmerman, 1998). Meanwhile, the aspect of identity of the majority of the students, i.e. the group of a hundred and sixty three (163) students, maintained situated identity in that they situated the use of their first language and English language only on the basis of contexts or situations (*ibid.*).

With regard to the teachers, none of them believed that exclusion of L1 was necessary. In that case, the teachers' beliefs in this Indonesian EFL context agree with the EFL teachers' beliefs, especially the non-native ones, in other EFL worlds. Schweers, for instance, reported in his study that teachers believed first language use is necessary to aid the students' comprehension (Schweers, 1999).

Also, White and Storch (2012) conducted a study involving both native and non native teachers in two French as a foreign language (FL) classes at two Australian universities. The study aimed to reveal: (1) how much first language was used by the teachers in the intermediate level FL classroom; (2) what motivated the teachers to use the students' first language (English) in the French as a foreign language classes; (3) if the amount of the first language use changed over time; (4) what factors would explain the first language use by the teachers in their classroom. Classroom observations and recordings as well as interviews were carried out in collecting the data for the study. In the end of the day, the study shows that students' first language (English) was used consistently both by the non native and native French speaking teachers. Also, the first language use increased over time during the teaching period and it was mostly related to giving explanation about vocabulary and tasks. Significant increase of the first language use was also identified as the course drawing nearer to the end of the semester for general administrative purposes. Based on the result of the interviews, the use of the first language itself reflects the teachers' pedagogical beliefs and goals which were concerned with context-specific factors in their teaching.

In that case, language teachers can accommodate the students' learning more effectively or even more meaningfully through accommodating the students' first language during the instructional process. In fact, Cook (1999) presents positive assessment on non-native L2 speaking teachers, especially those

who are highly proficient in both L1 and L2. He states that non native teachers gain advantages derived from their identity as being non-native speakers not only in terms of being able to use the first language in their foreign language classroom but also in relating their former experience and beliefs as a learner of the foreign language itself to their students. Also, although non native teachers' skills do not match the native teachers', their reflection on the development of their skills when they learned the foreign language may be used as a guideline in teaching the foreign language itself to the students.

In regard to the aspects of identity, the three (3) teachers maintained the transportable one, i.e. as reflected by their belief and even teaching performance that more English than Indonesian should be used in the classroom. Meanwhile, the one (1) teacher was more oriented to the situated one, i.e. as reflected by his belief and even confirmed by his teaching performance that Indonesian was used much more than English was in the classroom. Also, although the one teacher was contending that a balanced use between first language and foreign language would prove beneficial as to aiding the students in their learning, his overuse of Indonesian might hinder rather than aid the development of the students' proficiency in English language. Furthermore, what is worth noting about balanced use of L1 and L2 in the classroom is that "There is no perfect balance or model for using the L1 [and L2 in the classroom], but instead usage should be flexible and adapted to students' needs at appropriate times and ways" (Carson and Kashihara, 2012: 42).

Conclusion And Recommendation:

Conclusion:

Different teachers have different beliefs as regards bilingual use in the classrooms, and their beliefs derive from particular aspects of identity they maintain towards the use of L1 and L2. Similarly, different students perceive differently as regards the teachers' different degree of bilingual use (L1 and L2) in the classrooms, and their perceptions also derive from the aspects of identity they maintain towards the use of L1 and L2. Further analysis towards the aspects of identity also reveals that students maintaining transportable identity, i.e. those who are tolerant to the ambiguity encountered due to lack of understanding on particular use of L2, will very likely attain high proficiency in the L2 eventually as compared with those who are not.

Lastly, the main issue raised in the article is not on whether L1 should be or should not be used in L2 classrooms, but how it can be used judiciously to help the learners learn L2 more effectively.

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