

L1 Usage in English Teaching: Students' Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to explore the usage of L1 in teaching English based on the students' perspectives. The study employed questionnaire and interview to obtain the data about the students' perspectives on the usage of L1 in EFL classroom, the proper contexts where the lecturer must use L1, and whether there are differences from the low and high achiever students' perspectives. There are 163 participants from English education students contribute to this study and 37 of them are interviewed. The results suggest that the students have positive attitude toward the using of Bahasa Indonesia as the students first language (L1) in their English classroom, particularly when the lecturers explaining difficult linguistic concept and clarifying their instructions. There is no different opinion between the low and high achiever students toward the using of L1 in the teaching and learning process. They all agree that Bahasa Indonesia as the students' first language still holds an important role in the process of learning foreign languages.

Keywords

L1
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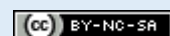
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Introduction

The existence of L1 in English as foreign language teaching has become a massive debate from the era of Grammar Translation Method until now the era of Communicative Approach. In reality both theorists and researchers separated into two groups, one that supports the necessity of L1 use in EFL teaching while the other supports that L1 should be dismissed in EFL teaching. There are a lot of researches conducting researches in a field of L1 use in EFL classroom all over the world. Those researches also categorized into the group which agree with the use of L1 in EFL classroom and the other group which disagree with the use of L1 in EFL classroom. Some experts argue that the using of L1 in teaching foreign language will only interfere the process of learning a new language but in reality the using of L1 in teaching a foreign language cannot be avoided by most teachers/lecturers.

Many studies have investigated about the use of L1 in EFL classroom around the globe such as Kayaoğlu (2012), Kalanzadeh, et.al (2013), Timuçin & Baytar (2014), Karimian & Mohammadi (2015), Galali & Cinkara (2017), Tajgozari (2017), and Shabir (2017). The results of these researches are all varied into the two categories whether supporting the use of L1 or opposing the use of L1 in EFL classroom.

Kayaoğlu (2012) found that a practical and pragmatic position in using L1 were taken by the teachers. The teachers are aware of the L1 possible benefits, and presumably the more experienced the teachers are, the more predispose they become to apply it systematically in their language instruction. While Kalanzadeh, et.al (2013) concluded that an enormous use of L1 could have an overwhelming effect on the students and it might lead to students' dissatisfaction. Timuçin & Baytar (2014) discovered that the use of L1 generally indicates pedagogical intentions. As it is used to help the students during the teaching and learning process. Karimian & Mohammadi (2015) uncovered that the teachers assume that L1 should carefully be used to get more benefits in EFL teaching. From the teachers' perspectives, L1 should be used more during the beginner or elementary stage, as the last solution in learning process, and should be reduced and dropped completely as the learners' proficiency improves to a higher level. Galali & Cinkara (2017) found that participants had an inconsiderably positive attitude towards their L1 use specially to nourish their target language learning. Tajgozari (2017) revealed that students had positive perceptions toward engaging L1 in L2 classes. He suggested that future studies can investigate teachers' and students' perceptions concerning the issue, using L1 in L2 classes, in high schools or universities. Shabir (2017) reported that the limited use of L1 is unavoidable and its affects certain activities in a positive way.

The above research findings not only show some positive perspectives but also show a negative perspective on the use of the first language in teaching English as a foreign language. This is what wants to be investigated further if it is adjusted to the context of Makassar which uses Bahasa Indonesia as a unifying language. The result of this research shows the Makassar students thought about the suing of L1 in English teaching whether they think otherwise or they have some specific views about the use of L1 in teaching English, moreover they are prospective teachers who will teach English to students who also use Bahasa Indonesia as their first or unifying language in the future.

In its application, the first language plays a strong and useful role in teaching foreign languages. The role that is most easily identified is as an alternative communication medium when foreign languages are no longer effective to use. Cook (2008) also suggests several uses of the first language in the classroom, such as maintaining order and discipline in the classroom, the use of bilingual dictionaries by students, or when teachers take exams. Sometimes, to maintain class effectiveness, teachers are forced to use the first language.

The learning process that uses foreign languages in the classroom often faces unpleasant situations when students have run out of words to describe their ideas in the target language. In this case, Jamshidnejad (2020) states that when students who are learning have the same first language, they will usually convey their ideas using the first language if they are confused about what word to be used in the target language. They do this

because the ideas they will convey will be easier to issue without having to find the right equivalent. The use of L1 in transferring ideas is a strategy that is easy and effective.

In line with this, Kelilo (2012) summarizes that at least there are three main roles of L1 in EFL classrooms, they are pedagogical roles, psychological roles, and socio-cultural roles. The three main roles here are closely related to what happens in EFL classroom if L1 is being used. Auerbach (1993) concludes that beginning with the first language provides a safe sensation and validates students' life experiences, provides space for them to express themselves and the first language reduces psychological barriers to English learning and provides faster progress. L1 creates positive vibes for the students and L1 use ends up in their comfortability and practicality learning the foreign language.

Deller (2003) mentions that there are at least seven uses of L1 in a foreign language class. They are students need to know the contrasts between L1 and the target language, though the materials are tough for them they can appreciate them, students can create and expand their own materials, permitting the use of L1 can improve fluency and improvisation, using L1 can provide students with the words and expressions they want and need in English, using L1 can have a valuable effect in dynamic groups, and using L1 assures that students can maintain continuous feedback.

Furthermore Choffey (2001) suggests three main reasons for using the culture and physical environment of the first language to learn a second language. These three main reasons are linking activities with students' situations (experiences), students learn how to describe specific lexical items between first language culture and second language, and building close relationships between the first language and the second language .

Method

This research is combined descriptive quantitative research (mixed method) with the concurrent triangulation model. The data source is 163 students of the English Department, Universitas Negeri Makassar. Students who have a GPA above 3.51 will be categorized as students who have adequate English language skills and students who have a GPA below 3.51 will be categorized as students who have sufficient English language skills. In collecting data, the researchers use questionnaire and interview. Both research instruments were conducted via online platform namely Google Form, Meet, WhatsApp, and Zoom. The role of the researchers in this research is important because they act as observers and interviewers of this study to collect valid data. The results of quantitative and qualitative research that are conducted simultaneously are compared. The qualitative data are analyzed based on the steps by Miles & Huberman (1994), i.e. data reduction, data display, and conclusion or verification.

Results

The results of this research are divided into three major findings, and they are students' perspective on the L1 use in English teaching by the lecturers, contexts where L1 should be used in EFL teaching, and the low and high achiever opinion on the use of L1.

Students' Perspective on the Use of L1 in English Teaching

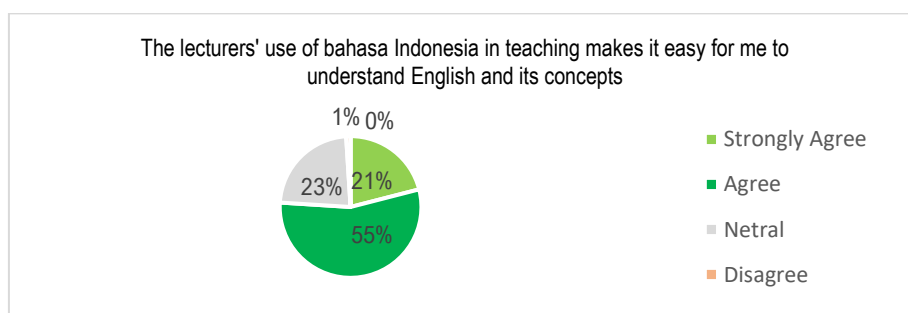


Figure 1. Students' perceptions about the use of bahasa Indonesia by lecturers in teaching makes it easy for students to understand English and its concepts

The result of the questionnaire in Figure 1 shows that 55% students agree, 21% students strongly agree, 23% students are in neutral position, and 1% students disagree that the using of L1 (bahasa Indonesia) simplify the students in understanding English and its concepts. This result means that 76% students agree with the using of L1 simplify the students in understanding English and its concept. In line with the questionnaire result, the students who were interviewed also agree that the use of L1 facilitate the process of learning foreign language for them. The use of L1 by the lecturers contributes to the level of students' understanding.

For example, if a lecturer explains the material using Bahasa Indonesia, it might help the students who still lack in English. (Student 31)

I think it will not limit the student understanding if it is only used for certain reasons. On the contrary, it will help students who do not understand to understand. (Student 10)

In my opinion, it does not hinder the students understanding but makes it easier because the use of L1 helps avoiding misunderstanding. (Student 4)

I think the use of Bahasa Indonesia in English teaching by lecturers will make it easier for students if the quantity or portion given by the lecturer is not excessive. (Student 2)

It shows a consistency in the other result of the questionnaire asking about whether the use of Bahasa Indonesia by the lecturers makes the students more confused in learning English. The result in Figure 2 shows that 69% students disagree, 11% students strongly disagree, 16% students are in neutral position, and 4% students agree with the statement. In conclusion, 80% students generally agree that L1 use of the lecturer is necessary for them.

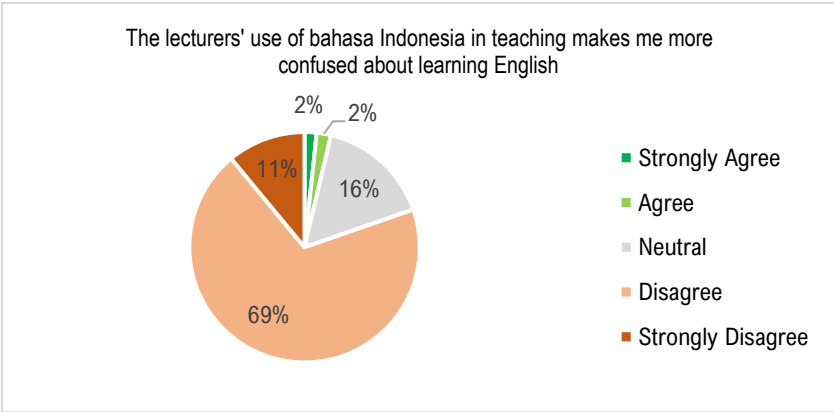


Figure 2. Students' perceptions about the use of bahasa Indonesia by lecturers in teaching makes students more confused in learning English.

Contexts Where L1 Should Be Used in EFL Teaching

L1 Use as Instructional Language

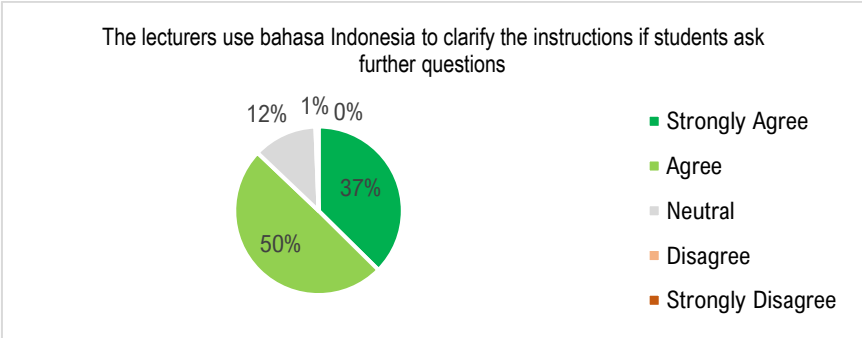


Figure 3. Student perceptions about the use of bahasa Indonesia by lecturers to clarify instructions if students ask further questions

The result of the questionnaire in Figure 3 shows that around 50% students agree, 37% students strongly agree, 12% students are neutral, and 1% students disagree that Bahasa Indonesia used to clarify the lecturers' instruction. It can be concluded that 87% students commonly agree that their L1 is a language that can be functioned as media of clarification. This result is also supported by the result of the questionnaire about the lecturers' use of Bahasa Indonesia in giving instructions especially in giving assignments or in explaining the classroom activity in Figure 4 displays that 37% students agree, 14% students strongly agree, 38% are neutral, and 10% students disagree of it. It means half of the respondents (51%) agree that the using of L1 for instruction is necessity.

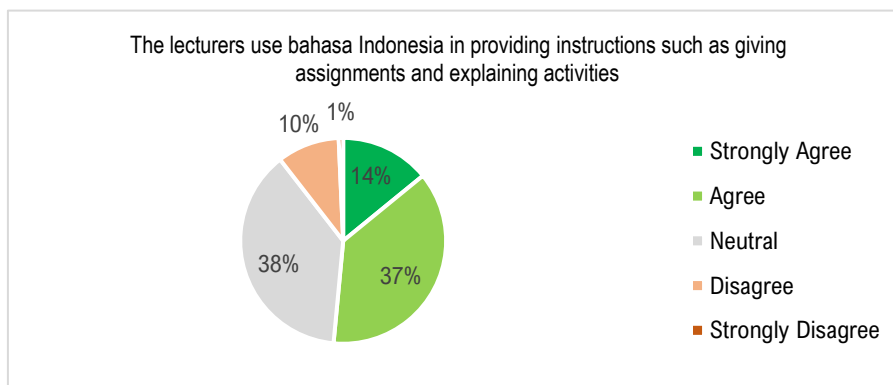


Figure 4. Student perceptions about the use of bahasa Indonesia by lecturers in providing instructions such as giving assignments or explaining activities

The questionnaire result is also supported by the response from the students' interview dealing with L1 use as instructional language.

To clarify further activity, we need instruction in Bahasa Indonesia because once upon a time a lecturer gave instructions in English, we all have different interpretation and it ended up with different assignment format. (Student 1)

Bahasa Indonesia is used to re-explain what has been said and to give assignments because if lecturers give assignment in English, sometimes it is difficult to understand. (Student 4)

It doesn't matter if the lecturer teaches English using Bahasa Indonesia, if she/he only uses it to clarify something that the students don't understand. (Student 8)

When there are students do not understand the lecturer's explanation after it is explained in English or when the lecturer feels the need to emphasize what he said. (Student 10)

Lecturers are expected to use Indonesian to emphasize the instructions given, such as in terms of assigning assignments and clarify information or material that has been explained previously, especially if there are still students who do not understand.

There are students who don't understand, so the lecturer will use Bahasa Indonesia (Student 11)

When a student asks about material that has not been understood. (Student 16)

...giving assignments using Bahasa Indonesia that is easy to understand for the students because if the lecturer explains in English, it gives too many interpretations, so that we, students, are usually still wondering what the purpose of the assignment is. (Student 17)

For example, when a lecturer sees a student who may not really understand the material presented in English, the lecturer may use Bahasa Indonesia to explain the material. (Student 26)

I prefer that the lecturer occasionally uses Bahasa Indonesia for some reason. For example, when giving assignments, giving instructions about questions or exercises to be done. (Student 34)

If there are students who ask about explanations that they find difficult to understand. (Student 36)

Based on the interview extract above, students want their lecturers to use Indonesian to provide understanding for students who do not understand, especially if the material presented is considered difficult by students.

... Or giving assignments using Indonesian which is easy to understand for students because if English is too plural, we students are usually still wondering what the assignment means. (Student 17)

I prefer that the lecturer occasionally uses Indonesian for some reason. For example, when giving assignments, giving instructions about questions or exercises to be done. (Student 34)

From the students' interview results, it was believed that the using of Bahasa Indonesia can help clarifying the lecturers' instruction especially in the process of giving assignment and giving instruction to avoid any kind of misunderstanding that ends up in the ineffective teaching and learning process.

L1 Use to Explain New or Difficult Concept in English

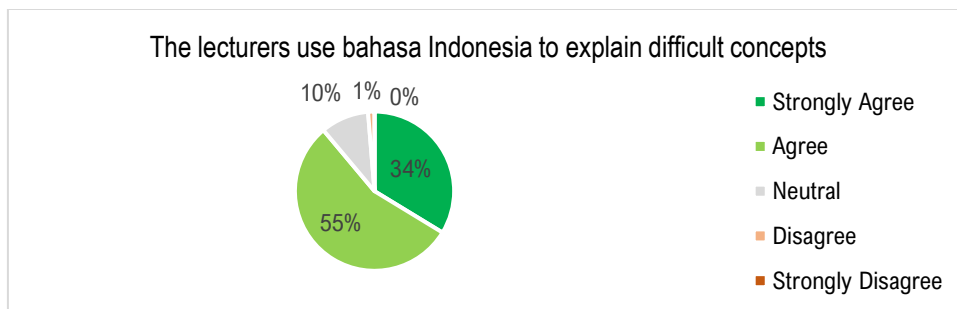


Figure 5. Student perceptions about the use of bahasa Indonesia by lecturers to explain difficult concepts

The result of questionnaire in Figure 5 shows that 55% students agree, 34% students strongly agree, 10% students are neutral, and 1% students disagree with the statement that the students like if their lecturers explain the difficult concept using Bahasa Indonesia. To summarize, it means that 88.9% students agree with the use of L1 in explaining difficult concept. It is then assisted by the interview results that also shows argument that the lecturers' use of L1 to explain complex theory, difficult concept or material, and further explanation are preferred by the students.

I personally really hope that my lecturer also teaches the Language Assessment course in Bahasa Indonesia because this course is closely related to the theories of formulas, which I take for example, many mathematical terms in English that I don't know yet, so, in my opinion, it would be nice if the lecturer used Bahasa Indonesia. (Student 5)

Student 5 assumes that the Language Assessment course which discusses the method of making language tests, types of language tests, how to evaluate tests, methods of giving language tests, and how to calculate student scores is a subject that has a difficult concept so he feels the lecturer needs to provide an explanation in Indonesian so that it is easier for students to understand the material.

When the lecturer explains a material and it is found that there are words or sentences that are considered difficult, it should be explained back into Bahasa Indonesia. (Student 7)

When the lecturer teaches materials that contain complex theories or concepts that may be difficult for students to understand, or when students ask questions about material, they have not understood yet, the lecturer is better off answering them in Indonesian. (Student 9)

In explaining complicated material... (Student 12)

The lecturer must use Bahasa Indonesia in the context or in a situation where the material presented or explained by the lecturer is difficult to understand if it is delivered in English. (Student 23)

When the material or theory presented is quite difficult to understand, or when providing explanations or instructions regarding assignments. (Student 25)

In my opinion, maybe the lecturer using Bahasa Indonesia in teaching English because it makes it easier for students to understand the lecturers' explanation of their courses. (Student 32)

Students assume that lecturers need to use their first language when there is material that contains complex theories or concepts and the material makes it difficult for students to understand the material. If you continue to use English there is a concern that students will not understand what the lecturer explains.

If there are words that are unfamiliar to students because not all students are familiar with the words the lecturers say or there is material that is difficult for students to understand. (Student 13)

When there are words that sounds new for the students or when trying to translate a sentence from English that is considered difficult. (Student 18)

When there are things students don't understand. (Student 19)

The use of the first language by the lecturer is also needed by students if there are words that are unfamiliar to them and they are not familiar with hearing so that the use of Indonesian in this situation is needed by students. The use of the first language in explaining difficult concepts is closely related to the initial abilities of students. If the student still has low English proficiency, of course, it will be difficult to understand the material explained in English.

The results of the questionnaire regarding the use of Indonesian by lecturers in teaching make it easier for students who still have limited abilities in English in Graph 4.6 shows the similarity of student perceptions with the data in Graph 4.5 where both support the use of Indonesian in English class. The data in Graph 4.6 shows that 47% of students agree, 34% of students strongly agree, 15% of students are neutral, and 4% of students disagree about this statement. This shows that about 81% of students agree with the statement that the use of Indonesian by lecturers in teaching makes it easier for students who still have limited abilities in English.

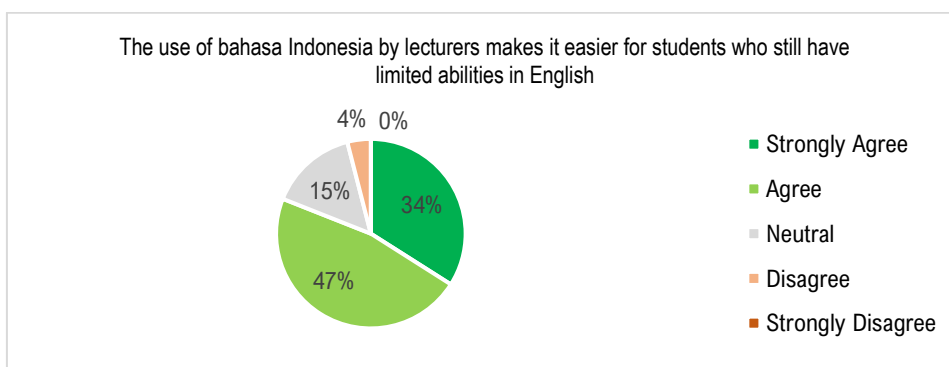


Figure 6. Student perceptions about the use of bahasa Indonesia by lecturers makes it easier for students who still have limited abilities in English

L1 Use in the Freshmen Year

Based on the results of students' interview, it is found that the needs of L1 in EFL classroom are mostly needed on the first phase of the students become a university member. As the freshman, they found it important and necessary to have L1 in their classroom because it facilitates them to capture and understand the material which is being discussed. The use of L1 in the freshman year is also believed as a factor that can create effective classroom interaction.

.... It will be easier for students to understand what is conveyed by the lecturer, especially considering that in the early semesters, not all students have the same reasons for entering the English department. (Student 1)

From experience also in the early semesters, especially like in semester 1, there were a lot of friends who confided and said they really didn't understand what was explained so even a few asked for help like re-explaining what was actually learned because they only copied ppt or photo ppt. (Student 3)

The students assumed that when they were new students their English skills were still varied and some even didn't understand the meaning of the lecturer's explanation, so after class they just asked their friends about it. In connection with this, a lecturer is required to pay attention to the condition of his students in the teaching and learning process. Furthermore, students stated that they were still very dependent on Indonesian as their first language in the early semesters. Indonesian helps them to interact with lecturers or classmates, especially if they want to ask something. They also think that the use of Indonesian by lecturers also allows the class to run effectively.

I prefer that the lecturer occasionally uses Indonesian, but not often. The use of language like this is likely to be more effective, compared to using full English, especially for new students. (Student 22)

For now, for me personally because I am still in the 3rd semester and there are still many things or there are still many words in English I don't understand or I don't know so I prefer that the lecturer occasionally uses Indonesian ... (Student 23)

The use of Indonesian in teaching English, especially for new students, really helps students in discussing the material. (Student 34)

Based on the data from the student perceptions interview that have been discussed previously, it shows that the use of Indonesian by lecturers during the first semester is considered beneficial for students by considering the background and student knowledge that is still minimal in English. This is of course a consideration because the environment in which they live, which is dominated by the first language, still greatly affects their English skills.

L1 Use in the First Part of the Semester

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L1 Use to Explain Difficult Linguistic Terms

Based on the data from the interview results more specifically, the students stated that in addition to a difficult concept, they also focused on subjects that had many linguistic terms in them. Courses that focus more on linguistics include Introduction to Linguistics, Morphology, Phonology, Semantics, and Syntax.

When the lecturer explains a theory or concept, for example, when the lecturer teaches linguistics courses such as Phonology, Morphology. (Student 3)

They still find it difficult to understand a lesson if it is delivered only in full English. For example, in Phonology lessons there are some terms that are difficult to understand if we only explain them in English. (Student 20)

On the other hand, if subjects like Morphology and Semantics, in my opinion, it would be better if the lecturer explained a rather difficult context using Indonesian. (Student 27)

In addition to the aforementioned courses, courses related to grammar also get the attention of students where 28 students focus on the use of Indonesian by the lecturer in explaining history, grammar, courses that contain scientific terms or formulas.

There are two contexts or certain circumstances in which lecturers can use Indonesian. The first is during a discussion session or the second discussion session When giving material relating to scientific terms in the learning process. (Student 21)

When there is material that must be used in Indonesian language, such as when explaining history or grammar problems, the lecturer must provide a comparison between Indonesian and English so that students can understand. In addition, when explaining methods or formulas in English, for example materials that are considered difficult such as Phonology or Morphology. (Student 28).

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The Low and High Achiever Opinion on the Use of L1

Based on the data obtained from both questionnaires and interview data, it shows that there is no difference in opinion regarding the use of Indonesian by lecturers from students who have a GPA above 3.5 and students who have a GPA below 3.5. Student 1, a 5th semester student with a GPA of 3.98, thinks that the use of Indonesian by lecturers is okay because Indonesian is the first language of students, especially if the purpose of its use is to facilitate the communication process between lecturers and students.

In my opinion, the use of Indonesian in teaching English is okay in my opinion because basically Indonesian is our first language, so using Indonesian will facilitate the communication process between lecturers and students themselves. (Student 1, Semester 5, GPA 3.98)

While Student 20, a 3rd semester student with a GPA of 4, argued that if the lecturer used Indonesian it was natural because he felt that even though he was in a class that was considered academically capable, according to him there were still many of his classmates who were not fluent in English so that of course will help students in understanding the material they consider difficult.

In my opinion, the use of Indonesian in teaching English is something normal and, in my opinion, it is natural why because for example in my class. Yes, my class is English Education Class A. I realize that many of my friends are not very fluent in English itself. (Student 20, Semester 3, GPA 4)

Student 11 and Student 12 are 5th semester students with GPA below 3.5 in line with the statements of the 2 previous students, they also think that the use of Indonesian by the lecturer in teaching English is something normal and even necessary. There are still students who do not really understand English is the reason they put forward.

In my opinion, the use of Indonesian in teaching English is something that is normal for a teacher, lecturer, and teacher because after all, even though there are students who understand English or understand the context taught by the lecturer, there must be some who do not understand it. (Student 11, Semester 5, GPA 2.84)

In my opinion, the use of Indonesian in teaching English is necessary because usually there are students who are not very good at using or interpreting English well. (Student 12, Semester 5, GPA 3.05)

The interview data is in line with the results of the student questionnaire which did not show a significant difference in the percentage between students who had a GPA above 3.5 and students who had a GPA below 3.5, although there were only 27 students who had a GPA below 3.5 and the other 136 students who had a GPA below 3.5. GPA above 3.5.

Discussion

The use of L1 by teachers or lecturers in teaching English should be initiated as a tool or resource in learning. The findings in this study also contributed as an evidence that supports the positive role of teacher's in English teaching. This is in line with what Auerbach (1993) states regarding the evidence indicating that the use of a first language or bilingual system in teaching English to students who are no longer young learners is both effective and necessary, as well as linguistic resources that come from mastery. In this case Meisel (2011) also mentions the use of the first language as a means of conveying information.

The positive views of students on the use of the first language as a medium to clarify instructions and information which are the findings of this study are also in line with several other research results such as Timucin & Baitar (2014) which show that the use of the first language generally provides pedagogical benefits. The same thing was shown in this study where students suggested that the use of the first language can have a positive influence on class effectiveness. Especially for students who still have low English proficiency, their first language can be an alternative language when it is used to communicate with lecturers or classmates. This is also in line with the findings of Galali & Cinkara (2017) which also reveal that students' first language has a role as a facilitator in acquiring foreign languages under certain conditions. Furthermore, Du (2016) mentions that the class effectiveness factor is a factor that causes lecturers to use students' first language.

Students' understanding of the material is indispensable. In this study, it is found that a situation where students not only think that difficult English material must be explained using the first language, they even more specifically mention the teaching of linguistics which only uses English or a foreign language is difficult thing for them. The description of concepts that students find difficult by using their first language is also supported by the findings of Al Shareai (2012).

The results of this study also indicate that although it is recommended to use students' L1, the use of L1 must also consider the students' need level in the classroom. There must still be a limit on the proportion of L1 use so that English as the target language still gets the largest portion. Teachers or lecturers should use bahasa Indonesia if there is an urge to do it or because the students will not understand the material if it is explained in English. Karimian & Mohammadi (2015) findings also imply that the first language should still be used but should be used with caution in order to get more benefit in English teaching. Lecturers are expected to use English more so that they can become models for students.

The first language is also more expected at the level of new students who generally have diverse English skills. This finding also has similarities with the findings of Tajgozari which indicates that the use of first language at the secondary school level is considered more important than at the university level. This finding is also in line with the aspects put forward by Kerr (2019) where one of these aspects mentions the level of students who are still beginners causing more use of the first language. This is very likely due to limited English language skills at the secondary school level. The case is the same with new students who are just beginning their university level and as explained in the research results section, many students get into the English department without a good English background since the type of test they took did not fully test their English skills.

This study also found that students foresee lecturers to use English at the first meeting at the beginning of the semester to ensure students understand what the learning objectives of the course are. Besides being expected to be used at the beginning of the semester, students often also want lecturers to use their first language at the end of the lesson to check student understanding, especially for new students. This is part of a pedagogical element to maintain class effectiveness as expressed by Cook (2008), Deller (2003), and Kelilo (2012).

The psychological aspect is also considered to play a role in the use of the first language because when a lecturer uses Indonesian this is considered a green light for students who do not yet have sufficient English skills to participate in class such as when they want to ask questions but are embarrassed to use English and only can ask questions in bahasa Indonesia, especially for new students. Students also think that with the Indonesian language in the classroom they can relax a little because they hear things or languages that are familiar to them. It is also easier for them to express their thought.

There is no different opinion between students who have higher GPAs and students with lower GPAs. All students at all levels have positive perceptions about the use of the first language by lecturers in English. This finding is in line with the findings of Tajgozari which concluded that all students have positive opinions about the use of first language in foreign language teaching [6]. In the context of this research, this finding seems to appear as a result of the participants are prospective English teachers who understand very well that they need a deep understanding of English and its concepts. They realize that they need to interact more and communicate using English. However, to better understand the material they need the help of their first language, namely bahasa Indonesia, to understand difficult concepts such as understanding linguistic terms.

Conclusion

The results suggest that the students have positive attitude concerning the using of Bahasa Indonesia as the students first language (L1) in their English class, particularly when the lecturers explain difficult concept and clarify their instructions. The students suggest that the lecturers should use Bahasa Indonesia in several contexts such as in the freshman year, in the first part of the semester especially when the lecturers explain the objective of the course, at the end of the meeting to clarify what the students have learned during the meeting, and in explaining difficult linguistic terms. There is no different opinion between the low and high achiever students toward the using of L1 in the teaching and learning process. They all agree that Bahasa Indonesia has an important role in the process of learning foreign languages.

The limitation of this research focuses on students' perceptions only without investigating the teacher or lecturer perceptions. It would be better if the next study conducted an in-depth investigation with a qualitative approach by directly investigating the situation of the English class at the University level and reinvestigate the perception from the students and the teachers.

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