



Is the Local Language Allowed in EFL Classrooms?

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Introduction

The English language has achieved linguistic superiority in the Asian continent (Fernandes & Alsaeed, 2014) and this has created a relatively complicated situation for English teachers in meeting its specific purpose. One of these is the language of instruction to be used by the teachers during the teaching process and this is in line with the argument of Sowell (2017) that the ability to provide good instruction directly affects the learning process. This means a learner's inability to comprehend the language used in teaching would lead to unsuccessful learning.

Nambisan (2014) believed the instructional language is very critical in a bilingual or multilingual environment and this has led to the application of translanguaging practice by several English teachers. According to Portoles and Marti (2017), this involves loose utilization of more than one language to communicate while Canagarajah (2011) has defined the concept as "the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system" (p. 401).

The utilization of the learners' mother tongue in English classes has been a subject of debate by many experts (Butzkamm, 2003) and, in support of this, Vogel and Garcia (2017) have claimed that the application of translanguaging practice in an educational setting has triggered different opinions. For example, Cenoz, Gorter, and May (2017) argued that English teachers should be allowed to speak only the English language in the class. This idea fits with Zakaria's (2013) argument that the learners' opportunity to speak the target language should be optimized by reducing the use of the mother tongue in every phase of learning. The objective is to swiftly build the learners' abilities in mastering the targeted language. However, some others believe that speaking only the target language in EFL/ESL classes is not easy and may also influence educational procedures and practices. For example, the "Speak English only" rule is mostly used to build a supportive atmosphere in developing the learners' learning abilities. Some universities have also placed a ban on the use of languages other than English during English classes (Gaebler, 2013).

The application of the rule is supported by research conducted by Bezzina (2016) who discovered the negative effects of translingual practice on learners in English classes in Malta such that when the students were permitted to speak in their first language, they were found to have less motivation to master the target language. This is in line with the idea proposed by Wright (2010) that translating from English to the learners' native language or vice versa affects the abilities to use the target language vocabulary effectively. Moreover, Iqbal (2011) argued that teachers are considered incompetent by their students if they frequently apply code-switching which is a type of translingual practice. Bezzina (2016) also believed learners have a better comprehension of vocabulary through the utilization of signs and images during vocabulary class than the application of the translingual practices due to the possibilities of confusion with the use of more than one language.

Many Indonesian EFL teachers presume that successful learners of English are learners who are highly proficient in English. This means that they have very good English, know how to speak and to write well in English, in addition to understanding all aspects of English such as grammar and vocabulary. This is in contradiction with our definition of successful learners. In our perspective, successful learners are able to use the target language they have learnt in their difficult situations and the language they use helps them to solve problems. For example, not many people who are going overseas are highly proficient in English. However, despite their limited English, they try to use and ask questions in the target language to find, for example, information about the new transport system, the banking system, the accommodations, food or restaurants, and flight schedules. Even though these learners may not be highly proficient users, they are confidently using the language they have learnt to get solve difficulties they have encountered in contexts outside their country. Therefore, it is important for teachers to redefine what they consider successful language learners. The new understanding of successful learning will help teachers to more flexibly understand the students' outcomes of learning. Besides, English is not spoken daily by Indonesian learners, it is difficult for teachers to urge their students to speak only English during classroom activities. For example, in discussion activities, students are shuttled between the local or national language and English even when the teachers give simple topics. These phenomena are commonly observed in EFL classrooms in Indonesia and beyond.

Creese and Blackledge (2010) have argued that the teachers' ability to flexibly switch between native and target languages may possibly influence learners' participation through adequate comprehensible input (Krashen, 1981). García and Kleyn (2016) also claimed that translingual practice aids teachers' standard development in mastering the target language, increases learners' linguistic repertoire, assists in bilingualism and understanding the acquired language to fit the educational level. This is similar to what Reyes (2018) has found in his study of an elementary school in Zamboanga, the Philippines where the teachers and students were allowed to speak native languages such as Chabacano, Cebuano or Biyasa, Tausug, and Filipino or Tagalog in the English class. This rule enabled them to enjoy a more efficient and effective teaching and learning process and improved the activity level of the discussion because the learners were able to comprehend better the topics discussed. This translingual rule also facilitated better control of the students' behaviors by the teachers while multilingual classroom members benefitted from the language practices through the determination of the important aspects of their needs and tasks.

Hassan and Ahmed (2015) also conducted a study to examine the multilingual competencies of Tower Hamlet's Faculty students in East London Borough, England. This was an Islamic school in which most of the students were immigrants from Bangladesh and the translingual practice was applied to maintain the meaning and support a thorough comprehension of certain subjects. The teachers and students were found to be switching from English to local languages such as Bengali and Urdu when comprehending the meaning of a word. Moreover, the students preferred to use English because they were contented and more confident while the teachers mostly communicated in Bengali to give unambiguous instruction. Therefore, the three languages were jointly used in the classrooms.

Rasman (2018) studied translingual practice among EFL learners between the ages 14 and 15 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia. The learners were found to have the capacity to utilize their full repertoire of the meaning of words when discussing with friends as well as the use of some codes such as Javanese,

Bahasa Indonesia, and English for assignments. This study also discovered the ability of the translingual practice to help students expand multilingual competencies, one of which is English.

In some EFL contexts the translingual practice was observed at the elementary level. Bezzina (2016) studied translingual practice in Malta and found that 50% of the teachers favoured the use of local languages specifically for beginner levels of English while 49% believed that local languages are still used in all classes despite their levels. Moreover, Horasan (2014) discovered that both teachers and students considered the practice suitable for the lower-level classes, especially to trigger students' interest or to deliver a funny story. This study concluded that the translingual approach should not be used heavily at higher levels.

According to the translingual practice theory, code-switching and code-mixing could be utilized interchangeably and used as a unique linguistic repertoire by a bilingual speaker to communicate effectively. Furthermore, it was found that the practice helps in creating a less stressful classroom (Makulloluwa, 2013).

Why Teachers Utilize Translingual Practices

There are several reasons teachers utilize translingual practice in EFL classrooms and the first is associated with academic circumstances to ensure the words use fit with the condition of the students, provide clear information, evade monotonous clarification, emphasize instructions, request information, offer suggestions, suit the language competence of the students, appropriately deliver the message intended (Mujiono, Poedjosoedarmo, Subroto, & Wiratno, 2013), make dialogue easier, and deliver unambiguous points (Bista, 2010). Rezvani and Rasekh (2011), and Reyes (2018) also showed it is useful to present learning materials in the class, conduct classroom discussions, raise and confirm students' interest, ensure concentration, increase comprehension ability, and control students' behaviors. It has also been discovered that some teachers apply the concept to ensure more efficient teaching time and to motivate the students (Bensen & Cavuşoğlu, 2013). Furthermore, Qian, Tian, and Wang (2009) proposed the utilization of translingual practice to endorse the students' interaction in the EFL setting and guarantee effectual management of the class. It also has the ability to raise and support positive learning routines and aid the delivery of effective instruction through the use of the native language when necessary.

These professional ideas and opinions show the translingual practice is an excellent approach to facilitate the EFL teaching and learning process. In agreement with this, Baker (2001) also suggested four major advantageous features of this practice. Firstly, it has the ability of stimulating learners to obtain more information about topics being taught and also help the teachers in triggering friendly interactions in the class during presentations and discussions. Secondly, it assists the improvement of learners with poor abilities by persuading them to be more active in the class, especially through the permission to speak the native language when communicating with their classmates and expressing words they do not understand. Thirdly, it is helpful for home-schooled learners, especially when communications with other family members such as parents and siblings are conducted in English such that certain words from the L1 are learned during the conversation. Lastly, it helps the integration of fluent and poor students towards improving the ability to learn the target language.

Translingual Practice in Indonesia

There is a continuous argument about the application of translingual practice in the Indonesian educational setting. An abundance of studies have demonstrated that this practice is seemingly difficult to avoid. This report uses a literature review of published academic works describing the translingual practices and discusses the contributing factors on the practices in Indonesia.

The analysis revealed possible ways for teachers to model a new attitude towards languages, and utilise their students' language resources. The report provides recommendations for facing future challenges in the field.

The Social Bonding

The enforcement of English only classroom instruction may lead to the students' feeling that their own local language is undervalued. The ban of local languages in the classrooms will cause the misperception that local languages are not important for them to learn and to use. Especially when highly proficient teachers demand 'Speak English' badly, students consider that mastering their local language may not bring them any benefits and this may potentially lead to the extinction of the local language's existence. As far as the social context is concerned, some linguists may feel that local language is observed with the critical roles it plays in how learners communicate and interact socially such as the demonstration of romantic feelings (Al-Qahtani, 2014), illustration of hatred, delivery of jokes (Mujiono, Poedjosoedarmo, Subroto, & Wiratno, 2013), display of sentiments (Rezvani & Rasekh, 2011; Reyes, 2018), conveyance of tiredness and resentment for the teachers (Mujiono, 2016), maintenance of classified information (Bista, 2010) and the development of a stronger bond between the teachers and students (Qian, Tian, & Wang, 2009). Students in Indonesia learn English mostly for economic welfare reasons such as to be more competitive in job markets either nationally or globally. However, for social and historical aspects reasons such as to have stronger bonds with society and family, students need to have skills in using their local language as well since there lies knowledge of their local wisdoms, concepts, and cultures.

Comprehensible Input

The use of the native language in L2 learning provides a valuable benefit to the achievement of success for learners. According to Krashen (1985), the most vital source of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is the comprehensible input in the target language processed by the students for meaning. At first, students try to understand an L2 expression by translating it to L1 in their mind and, if no meaning is found for the word, it is not comprehensible input and the effort towards acquiring the L2 would be unsuccessful.

Ellis (2008) believed L1 could serve an important basis for the fundamental set of knowledge and information to prepare learners for L2 input. Moreover, Hutabarat (2016) studied the connection between the SLA process and EFL education in Indonesia and found the knowledge of SLA to be helpful for both educators and learners in the EFL setting. Another study conducted by Agustin, Warsono, and Mujiyanto (2015) found that both lecturers and college students had positive attitudes towards the use of L1 in English classes as observed in the use of Bahasa Indonesia. The use of the language was also discovered to be helpful for both lecturers and students when used proportionally and properly.

Non-native English-Speaking Teachers

The first language for most Indonesian teachers and students is Bahasa Indonesia. Cook (2007) defined a native speaker as a person that has been speaking a particular language since early childhood. This means English proficiency would be difficult for most students considering the fact the language is not used for everyday conversation and most had only started learning it in elementary school. Therefore, more time would be required to acquire the language. According to Panggabean (2007), native speakers acquire LI through continuous learning by thinking, listening, and speaking with the language every day while the use of English was found by Panggabean (2015) to be used scarcely. The acquisition of the second language is based on class activities which are only conducted for two meetings per week, each of which is around 60 minutes and this means English is only used for approximately two hours a week. As

a consequence, despite the fact that English is learned for several years, the true time spent learning the language is just a few weeks or some months.

Most of the English teachers in Indonesia are non-native English speakers and they are defined by Medgyes (2006) to be individuals seeing English from a perspective of the second or foreign language, working in the EFL class, and teaching monolingual learners speaking the same language with them. According to a survey conducted by Novianti (2018), the majority of students in Indonesia prefer being taught by non-native English teachers due to the belief they have more capabilities to solve problems observed during the process of learning the second language based on experience. This was expected to lead to more understanding of the students' challenges and needs and the provision of appropriate advice and tactics to overcome them.

Language Transfer

This is one of the critical features affecting students' development in learning the target language. It was defined by Odlin (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 27) as the influence of similar and different features of a target language on those acquired with the similar ones known as the positive transfer while the different ones are negative. Moreover, positive transfer leads to the use of the same language attributes all the time and this is known as overuse while the negative one causes the exclusion of some particular structure of L2 that is not in L1. Several causes are attached to the occurrence of these attributes by Kellerman (1992) and this includes the inability to utter some words in L2 in order not to violate their traditional rules. This is in line with the findings of Pageyasa (2017) on the avoidance and overuse of Bahasa Indonesian among kids in Bali, where most students avoid the use of some L2 words due to politeness while others struggle with cultural barriers while conversing with their teachers or other students with higher cultural class due to the lack of civility in the English language. However, overuse was found to be caused by the oversimplification of the meaning of a word. Therefore, teachers are expected to develop students' cultural understanding to decrease the consequences of these negative and positive transfers in L2 learning and also involve their first language in instructing to bridge the cultural differences between the L1 and L2.

Linguistic Diversity

Indonesia is a multicultural and multilingual nation with more than 726 languages with prominent ones including Bahasa Indonesia as the official language, numerous local native languages, and some foreign ones (Alwi, 2000). The majority of EFL learners in Indonesia speak Bahasa Indonesia as the national language while mastering at least one local language. Moreover, Cook (2012) defined the knowledge of more than one language by an individual as multi-competence and this is observed among EFL students that understand at least Bahasa Indonesia and another local language. Furthermore, Cook and Wei (2016) argue that L2 learners utilize other functions of the mind while speaking in the L2 and this is the reason the use of language is strongly related to the mind.

According to Cook (2001), target language acquisition theory states that L1 and L2 should not be separated while learning the L2. In order to explain this assertion, an analogy of a house was made of the mind of L2 students and the rooms were observed to be for the language learners that already have the ability to speak while a new room is created for those to be acquired. During the process of language acquisition, there is no need to attach a new building to the house but to conduct a renovation to ensure the new rooms fit well in the structure and are strongly attached to the other rooms. According to this theory, L1 should be applied mostly for instructions to aid the acquisition of L2. For instance, if the students are unable to comprehend a particular vocabulary in L2, the teachers should utilize L1 for effective understanding.

In a situation where EFL students use Bahasa Indonesia as a first language and attempt to learn a regional language, translanguaging practice could be the adopted as a pedagogical model of language learning.

This means the linguistic intelligence of Bahasa Indonesia, as the national language, needs to be mastered by both educators and learners.

Based on the aforementioned theories and research findings, the translanguaging practice was observed to be a critical element for the L2 teaching and learning process, especially to assist students in identifying the language input and develop their language learning abilities.

Conclusion

Although educators and linguistics experts keep debating the role of Bahasa Indonesia in the EFL setting, several schools allow teachers and students to use the language for instruction. Nevertheless, overuse should be avoided considering the primary target of language learning is to acquire the L2. The students should only use the first language with the teachers' permission and with proper monitoring and adequate restrictions when necessary. Moreover, the L2 should be implemented as a medium of communication on a daily basis.

It is also essential for teachers to realize that translanguaging practice is normal in L2 learning even though it is mostly observed with adults having proficiency in more than one language mainly to stress utterances or demonstrate cultural identities (Espinosa, 2007). However, parents and teachers should not be concerned with the practice in SLA but the focus should be on the improvement of communication competencies without forcing the learners to follow obligatory regulations of the use of the language.

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