




INVESTIGATING THE TEACHERS' AMOUNT AND CONSIDERATIONS ON THE USE OF L₁ IN EFL CLASSROOMS



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Abstract

The use of L₁ in the classroom has become a highly practical issue, even though it is discouraged in the classroom since students need to be exposed to English. In practice, many teachers are using L₁ in EFL classrooms. Because of that, it is crucial to investigate the teachers' amount and considerations on the use of L₁. Therefore, this paper aimed to reveal the frequency, to find out the teachers' considerations, and to explore the function of L₁ use in the EFL classrooms. Data were generated from classroom observations and semi-structured interview of 4 English teachers in 4 senior high schools in Indonesia. Data condensation, data display, and drawing conclusions were used as the data analysis. The results showed that the teachers used L₁ quite high in the classrooms and they did it because they have several considerations. Following that, the various purposes of L₁ use showed that the teachers used L₁ as a tool to help them achieve a wide range of their goals. It is hoped that this research can be used for teacher to be aware of using L₁ in the classroom.

Abstrak

Penggunaan L₁ di dalam kelas telah menjadi isu yang sangat praktis, meskipun tidak dianjurkan di dalam kelas karena siswa harus terpapar dengan bahasa Inggris. Dalam praktiknya, banyak guru yang menggunakan L₁ di kelas EFL. Oleh karena itu, sangat penting untuk menyelidiki jumlah dan pertimbangan guru dalam penggunaan L₁. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap frekuensi, mengetahui pertimbangan guru, dan mengeksplorasi fungsi penggunaan L₁ di kelas EFL. Data diperoleh dari observasi kelas dan wawancara semi-terstruktur dengan 4 guru bahasa Inggris di 4 sekolah menengah atas di Indonesia. Kondensasi data, tampilan data, dan penarikan kesimpulan digunakan sebagai analisis data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa para guru menggunakan L₁ cukup tinggi di dalam kelas dan mereka melakukannya karena memiliki beberapa pertimbangan. Kemudian, berbagai tujuan penggunaan L₁ menunjukkan bahwa para guru menggunakan L₁ sebagai alat untuk membantu mereka mencapai berbagai macam tujuan. Diharapkan penelitian ini dapat digunakan sebagai bahan pertimbangan bagi para guru untuk menggunakan L₁ di dalam kelas

INTRODUCTION

In facing the era of globalization, we are faced with an extraordinarily strong of outside influences. One of the influences is language ability. Language plays a significant role in human life. By using language, a person can make statements, express opinions, explain something, and maintain social relationships between language users. This shows that people can express their ideas, feelings, and information through communication by using language. One of the most spoken languages is English.

English is one of the most widely spoken international languages (Mahu, 2012). Many fields have implemented English, such as technology, research, education, etc. In the education field, English was taught by teachers from elementary school until the university level. However, some

students are difficult to understand in learning English. Students may feel intimidated by English. One of the ways teachers teach English is by using students' L1. Often, teachers will mix English and their L1 so that their students are able to understand English.

Even so, the use of native language (L1) in the second language (L2) classes has always been a controversial issue. For many years, the debate over whether or not native language should be included in the English language classrooms. The use of L1 in L2 learning contexts has become an issue for researchers and practitioners. There are a number of researches that either agree or disagree with the use of mother tongue in a foreign language classroom. Some of them argue that the mother tongue helps in explaining complicated things (Inal & Turhal, 2019; Mahmud, 2018; Suhayati, 2018). It also reduces anxiety when using the mother tongue. Those who support the use of L1 also argue that to reduce pupils' demotivation and confusion when studying English, L1 is preferred (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021a). When teachers are using L2/foreign language, the students do not fully comprehend. Consequently, teachers are failed to deliver the information, communication, and instruction. In consequence, students feel lost and not interested in learning L2/foreign language.

In contrast, some researchers disagree about it. They argue that using the mother tongue can slow down the learning process (Swain et al., 1990). In addition, Phan et al (Phan et al., 2021). argue that the learning environment is the one of the reasons why learners unable to communicate in the second language. The learning environment is a cause that hinders the development of students' English skills. Students live in a society that English is not very common. They have to speak their mother tongue with their family and relatives. It leads to students being unable to communicate in English well outside classrooms. Furthermore, Hussein (Hussein, 2013). argues that overusing L1 also can leads to students being unable to communicate in the second language that they are learning. It also distracts and demotivates them to use second language.

In Indonesia, the status of English is a foreign language. Most of the English teachers in Indonesia are non-native speakers (Aziez, 2015). That is the reason they use L1 in their classrooms and they cannot speak and communicate in English at any time. They did it because the students are unable to comprehend what the teacher is trying to say, so they have to use L1 to get a response from their students (Manara, 2007). This causes learning English not to be considered as a priority of their everyday conversation, while the need for communication using English is considered important in order to communicate with foreigners.

Many researchers have conducted studies in some areas, such as teachers' perspective toward L1 (Inal & Turhal, 2019; Nanda, 2021; Suhayati, 2018), the role of L1 (Iswati & Hadimulyono, 2018; Ong & Ahmad Tajuddin, 2020a; Puspawati, 2018; Schweers, 1999), and frequency of the use of L1 (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009). Based on the previous research, the research's focus are perspective and the role. The study about frequency of L1 use was conducted by Bozorgian & Fallahpour (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015). This research took a place in Iran. The objective was to examine the amount and purpose of L1 use in EFL classrooms.

This study differs from previous related research in several key aspects. Firstly, unlike earlier studies that may have involved students, this research focuses solely on teachers, specifically examining their use of L1 (first language) in the classroom. Four English teachers from senior high schools in Indonesia participated in this study. Secondly, the context—both in terms of time and location—is unique, as this research is centered on EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

classrooms in Indonesia. The study aims to explore the extent of L₁ use, its role, and the teachers' reasons for employing it during instruction. Emphasizing the importance of not overusing L₁ in English classes, the study investigates teachers' considerations in balancing L₁ and English to maintain an effective language-learning environment. Conducted across four senior high schools, the findings are expected to provide insights that can help educators make informed decisions regarding L₁ usage. Consequently, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) What proportion of L₁ is used by English teachers in EFL classrooms? (2) What are the teachers' considerations in using L₁? (3) What are the functions of L₁ use in the classroom?

METHOD

This study used descriptive qualitative method in nature using a case study approach. It described the teachers' considerations, functions, and amount of L₁ that teachers used in EFL classrooms. Qualitative research provides an understanding of a situation and describes a research problem through a description (Creswell, 2012).

This research focused on senior high school English teachers as a participant. The participants of the research were English teachers from SMAN 3 Kota Tangerang Selatan, SMA PGRI Depok, MAN 1 Bogor, and MA Arridho Depok. There were four English teachers who participated in this study. As all of the teachers had been English teachers for at least three years, the writer could see that teachers with more experience provided more information.

The first data was gathered by conducting a classroom observation. The observation was used to find out the amount of the teachers use L₁ and L₁ function in the EFL classroom. In this case, the observation was conducted by observing teachers' practices of using L₁ in the classrooms. It was a non-participant observation. The observer was not taken any parts of the activities. The activities and interactions were recorded by audiotaping and videotaping. Then, the writer transcribed the recording of the utterances to convert the data from recorded spoken into written form.

Then, the second data was gathered by doing interview. The interview was used to investigate teachers' considerations in using L₁. Interview was used to record the teachers' interview and it was recorded by audiotaping so that nothing was missed. The interview process was recorded by audiotaping to get more accurate information. The type of interview is semi-structured so that the participants can share their opinion unconstrained without any biases of the writer and provide a deeper understanding of the context being discussed. The interviews were also recorded by audiotaping. The teachers were asked their consideration and factors using L₁.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Amount of Using L₁

The result of observation found that all participant used L₁ in their English lessons. The utterance counts from the transcriptions showed that four English teachers used a total number of 2,094 utterances within 4 sessions (1 session for each teacher) and used 839 L₁ utterances, which is equivalent to 40.06% of the whole utterances. Table 1 showed that the minimum and maximum amounts of L₁ utterances for 4 sessions were 28.6% and 53.95%, respectively.

Table 1. Amount of L1 Utterances

	L1 Utterances	Total of Utterances	Percentage of L1 Use
MA	266	493	53.95 ⁰ % (Max.)
MAN	260	570	46.14%
SMA	79	324	28.6% (Min.)
SMAN	221	707	31.26%
Total	839	2,094	40.06%

The total number of utterances spoken by each of the teachers is reported and the numbers show a variable amount of L1 use in different schools due to the material of the lesson taught by the teachers and classroom conditions. For example, SMA teacher used the lowest number of total utterances (324 utterances) and she also used the least amount of L1 utterances (28.6%) in the classroom. In contrast, MA teacher used the highest amount of L1 utterances (53.95%). Therefore, the amount of L1 use in EFL classrooms is varied and depends on the teacher, the content of lesson, and classroom context.

The Use of L1

The findings in this study found that the teachers in all schools used L1 for 13 purposes and teachers frequently used it for activity instruction (35.87%), elicitation of student contribution (12.63%), personal comment (9.29%), administrative issues (9.17%), translation, (8.46%), humor (6.43%), and evaluation (5.84%) (see table 2). Teacher used activity instruction most frequently, but classroom equipment (0%), repetition of student L1 utterance (0.35%), and L1-L2 contrast (1.31%) were the least frequently in EFL classrooms.

Table 2. L1 Function

L1 Function	MA	MAN	SMA	SMAN	Total Frequency (%)
Translation	33	14	4	20	71 (8.46%)
Classroom equipment	0	0	0	0	0 (0%)
L1-L2 contrast	0	4	0	7	11 (1.31%)
Administrative issues	49	16	10	2	77 (9.17%)
Evaluation	11	23	6	9	49 (5.84%)
Repetition of student L1 utterance	0	0	2	1	3 (0.35%)
Activity instruction	96	104	3	98	301 (35.87%)
Reaction to student question	9	7	14	0	30 (3.57%)
Activity objective	12	8	2	6	28 (3.33%)
Humor	21	15	6	12	54 (6.43%)
Elicitation of student contribution	26	33	12	35	106 (12.63%)
Instructor as bilingual: Arbitrary code-mixing and L1 words from L1 culture	1	5	1	8	15 (1.78%)
Personal comment	7	25	17	29	78 (9.29%)
Comprehension check	1	6	1	8	16 (1.9%)

From the table above, *Activity instruction* is the most frequently used function. This indicated that the teachers preferred to use Bahasa Indonesia (L1) to deliver the material of the lesson and how the students to do the tasks in the classroom. The L1 use is more preferable to express the instruction such as:

"Coba dibaca sekilas dialognya tentang apa?" [Read it briefly, what is the dialogue about?].

Furthermore, the function of *Elicitation of student contribution* was the next highest occurrences with 106 times of occurrences. These indicated that the teacher tends to use Bahasa Indonesia to engage students' contribution. In addition, the teacher used L1 to students to translate Indonesian word to English. The examples can be seen on the excerpt below:

"Duduk apa Bahasa inggrisnya?" [What is the English for sit?].

Personal comment is the third most-used function. There were 78 occurrences in this study. This function was to take a personal note. Below are some examples of personal comment excerpt: *"Kamu ekskul English club?"* [Do you join English club?].

Administrative issues of L1 use were observed when the teachers called out students' attendance, instructed class rules, and gave information. There were 77 times of occurrences. The followings are the example:

"Jadi kalian boleh mendengarkan lagu tapi Bahasa inggris tapi liat di situasinya kalian sedang apa, apa kalian sedang merangkum or writing? it's like that." [So, you can listen to song but English song and watch the situation, is it summarizing or writing? It's like that.].

Translation occurred in 71 times of occurrences. This function was used to translate L1 utterances. However, MA teacher used *translation* (33) more than twice as much as MAN teacher (14). The examples can be seen on the excerpt below: *"I would rather. What does it mean?" "Lebih suka. Saya akan memilih ini karena saya lebih suka apa."*

In addition to providing information and translating, the teacher also used Bahasa Indonesia to joke in the classroom. This not only lessens learners' concern about learning, but it also helps teachers and students create relationships. In this study, *humor* was occurred 54 times. The followings are the example: *"Kata Bang Imin misal gini 'kuponang kau dengan bismika allhuma ahywa wa bismika amut'."* [Bang Imin said, for instance *"kuponang kau dengan bismika allhuma ahywa wa bismika amut"*].

Considerations of Using L1

In order to get answer for teachers' considerations of using L1, the writer asked, "Why do you use L1 in the classrooms?" and "What are your considerations of using L1?" to four English teachers. There are several reasons of the teachers using L1 in classroom.

Table 3. Teachers' Considerations

Teacher		Consideration			
SMAN	Students understand	did	not		
SMA	Students' level	proficiency			
MAN	Students understand	did	not	English is not	students' mother tongue

MA	Students' level	proficiency
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a. Students' proficiency level

First reason the teachers used L₁ in the classroom is because students' proficiency level. Teachers may believe that students' proficiency level affect the amounts of L₁ use in the classroom. For example, SMA teacher pointed out:

"Because of the level of student for the placement test before and for the first I give them pre-test to know their level. So, in the student, their level of intermediate but the little bit of the advance and it's so more its beginner. *Jadi saya campur lah ya bahasanya karena masih banyak yang* (so, I mix the language use because there are a lot of students) didn't know about foreign language."

MA teacher also claimed:

"I presented L₁ and L₂ when I, it depends. When there are students have high perform or high intelligent level in the English, I'm using the English too much than they are. *Jadi, ketika ada murid yang lebih tinggi kemampuannya ketika mereka, saya menggunakan dengan* (So, when there is one student with high proficiency level, I use it) just for him or her. Because when I showing and using the full English, almost, class is not understand what I'm saying."

It is clear that teachers think that students with lower proficiency levels require more L₁ usage than students with higher proficiency levels, and that the L₁ could be a useful teaching tool to help these students understand the L₂. Additionally, since classes typically contain students with varying levels of proficiency and background, teachers employed more L₁ with students who are less proficient can help close the proficiency gap between the students in their L₂ classroom.

b. English is not students' mother tongue

The second reason teacher used L₁ is because English is not students' mother tongue. MAN teacher stated:

"Because English is not their mother tongue I think and actually now many students in grade tenth especially, their English is quite good, but when I use English mostly in the classroom, they still find some difficulties in understand the vocabularies. That's why I tried to explain it using L₁ but when they find difficulties."

The fact that English is not their mother tongue impacts the way students learn and process the language, requiring specific instructional strategies to address these differences so that, teachers used L₁ to make their students understand.

c. Students did not understand the material

The last reason why teachers used L₁ is because students did not understand the material. SMAN teacher said:

"Because all of the students didn't understand maybe if I always speak in English and if I speak in Indonesian language maybe they can more understand what I say, what I give the material in the class."

The excerpt above claimed that L₁ is very useful to help students understand the English material. Additionally, the teacher stated that when she utilised English (L₂) only, the students became lost, and she used L₁ in order to clarify the material in class.

Discussion

The findings above indicated that all participants used L1 in their classroom. However, the result among teachers were various. The first question concerned on the frequencies of L1 use. The results in this study provided an overview of L1 frequencies in four senior high schools. It was revealed that L1 was used 40.06% of the time in total by four English teachers in four senior high schools. This result showed a high amount of L1 use which implied the overuse of L1 by teachers. Teachers used L1 at various rates, as table 1 showed obvious. To illustrate, teacher in MA, MAN, SMA, and SMA used 53.95%, 46.14%, 28.6%, and 31.26%, respectively. All participant English teachers' usage of Bahasa Indonesia (L1) cannot be tolerated. Atkinson (Atkinson, 1987) recommends the use of 5% native language and 95% target language use at early levels. This study was done at senior high schools, which was not an early level school. The overuse of L1, however, has many disadvantages in the classroom. According to Voicu (Voicu, 2012), when teaching EFL students in L1, mistakes could occur because of the L1 transfer. For example, The syntactic structures of sentences may also present challenges for Arab learners. In Arabic, the sentence structure is V-S-O while English sentences are built following the S-V-O structure.

Although these results are quite high, this does not mean that teachers should ignore the use of L1. Maximising the TL does not, and should not, imply that using the L1 is negative to the teacher. In this study, teachers had several considerations for why this figure was quite high. Moreover, English in Indonesia act as a foreign language, not a second language. The study on challenges in teaching English from Agung (Agung, 2019) found that limited infrastructures and facilities led to demotivated students' motivation in learning. However, when program design limits instructional time, relying too much on the L1 would be a regrettable waste of time and would probably demotivate students (Turnbull, 2001).

Among the studies conducted in similar topic, Kacho (Kacho, 2019) found out that from 12 teachers, the highest frequency of using L1 is 58.7%. Meanwhile, the smallest frequency of L1 used by the teacher is 0.2% L1 in the EFL classrooms. Moreover, Sundari & Febriyanti (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021b) also found that the teacher used L1 287 times (29%) of 1300 total utterances, but the percentage rose to 35% when L1 utterances were combined with one word/phrase in L2. In contrast, writer's result was much higher than what were found by De La Campa & Nassaji (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009) and Bozorgian & Fallahpour (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015) with only 11.3% and 3.14% of the use of L1.

Then, the second question highlighted the teachers' considerations in using L1 in EFL classrooms. The use of L1 preferred by the teacher participants are based on some considerations. At first, students' proficiency level of English is the first aspect to consider. The teachers, in the class, face many students that come from different backgrounds and characteristics. According to Agung (Agung, 2019), most of students have low proficiency in English language comprehension. The first language is typically used when the class have students with relatively low levels of English proficiency in the classroom; the more proficient the learners are in L2, the more often L2 is used. The identical consideration was discovered in the study by De La Campa & Nassaji (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009) in which student' level determines how much L1 use in the classroom. Moreover, there are many previous studies also showed that students' proficiency level affected the use of L1 (Inal & Turhal, 2019; Tadashi & Sato, n.d.; Tekin & Garton, 2020). Even, the conclusion on Pan & Pan's study (Pan & Pan, 2011) stated that the use of L1 is useful for the students who has limited language proficiency because L1 use can facilitated the learning process and reduced the students' anxiety.

The second consideration of using L₁ was English is not students' mother tongue. As a result, many students find it challenging to comprehend abstract ideas, complicated concepts, or instructions that are presented only in English. Students can better understand the subject matter by using L₁ as a bridge to assist explain these difficulties. Additionally, using L₁ can help students focus on learning new skills and knowledge by lowering the cognitive load and anxiety that can accompany learning a foreign language. This method takes into account the students' linguistic background and makes use of their current language skills to improve the learning process. This result was supported by Alrabah et al.'s study (Alrabah et al., 2015) in Kuwait. They found that sharing a shared language with the students influenced teacher's L₁ use in the classroom.

The last consideration expressed by the teachers to use L₁ in the classroom was for explaining material. Based on interview data, it was said that students did not understand English lesson if the teacher used mostly English in the classroom. So, that is why the teacher used L₁ to make sure the students comprehend and understand. This result was in line with Sundari & Febriyanti's research (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021b) who found that the students do not fully understand when teachers use L₂ words. Because of that, students are unable to interpret the teachers' information, communications, and instructions. They consequently experience confusion, frustration, and a loss of focus when learning L₂. They could become demotivated by the sense of failure. This reason was also expressed by Puspawati (Puspawati, 2018) who argued that when teaching complex material with L₂, teachers must repeat the instructions and explanations multiple times.

Lastly, the last research question concerned on the function in which L₁ was used in the classrooms. The findings demonstrated that the teachers used L₁ for various kinds of objectives. Throughout the observations, 300 utterances used L₁, with the most often used function was *Activity instruction* (35.87%) in this study. This function was used to present the material of the lesson and how students should execute the activities in the classroom. This result was compatible with the study of Sundari & Febriyanti (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021b) who found out this to be the most common function. This result, however, was in contrast to previous researches where this function was significantly lower; 12.7% (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009) and 12% (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015).

The second most-used function was *Elicitation of student's contribution*, which was employed to stimulate students' response and output with 106 utterances (12.63%). This finding of this study was similar to previous studies (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Ong & Ahmad Tajuddin, 2020b; Tavoosy & Jelveh, 2019). Teachers' desire to engage students in the lesson may be the cause of this result. Then, *Personal comment* with 78 utterances (9.29%) and *Administrative issues* with 77 utterances (9.17%) were the third and fourth highest-used function in this study. These functions were used to make a personal comment and to notify students of their attendance.

The fifth one, *Translation* (8.46%) was occurred in this study. The teacher translated some words and sentences using L₁ to improve students' understanding. Even though these functions were also reported in previous studies, the result of this study was slightly different. For example, translation in Tadashi & Sato's study (Tadashi & Sato, n.d.) was occurred 94 times or 17.2% of total L₁ occurrences. Perhaps the different contexts are one reason for the variations in the results. Different settings frequently result in different attitudes and expectations between teachers and students regarding teaching and learning L₂, which is responsible for the variation in results (Ong & Ahmad Tajuddin, 2020b).

Lastly, *Humor* (6.43%), and *Evaluation* (5.84%) were occurred in this study. Then, L1 humor helps to ease the stress and anxiety in the classroom. L1 humor was selected because, in addition to the teacher's fluency in the language, the students were better able to understand humor in their L1 and the speech community as a whole. Then, teacher evaluate to talk about students' contributions. The similar finding can be found on a study by Sundari & Febriyanti (Sundari & Febriyanti, 2021b). Meanwhile, the study by Salama Jawhar (Salama Jawhar, 2018) claimed that humor using L1 can be employed to highlight communication and prevent the anxiousness that typically arises when students assert that they lack L2 knowledge.

In contrast, the functions that are not used frequently are *Classroom equipment* (o) and *Repetition of student L1 utterance* (0.35%) in this study. In (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020), classroom equipment was used to ask student to dealt with teacher's computer. This result was in line with (De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009) who found that classroom equipment only occurred 1 time. With regard to repetition of student L1 utterance, this function was used to repeat something said by a student. This result was quite similar to (Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2020) who found repetition of student L1 utterance was 2% occurrences.

CONCLUSION

This study is aimed to describe the use of L1 in EFL classes, specifically with regard to its frequency, purposes, and considerations based on teachers' practices. After analyzing and presenting the gathered data, it can be drawn summaries. The results of this study showed that the teachers used 40.06% of L1. The results were higher than other previous studies. Even though the results are quite high, teachers have several considerations why this number is quite high, such as student proficiency level, lack of student understanding, and mother tongue status. These teachers' considerations for utilizing L1 clearly indicated that the teachers who participated in this study made an informed decision to utilize L1 as a tool to assist them teach, possibly contributing to student learning. Despite of those considerations, it should not be used more frequently by teachers to overshadow their L1 exposure to L2/EFL, as this will make students lazy and hinder their ability to learn L2/EFL. Then, the diverse functions of L1 use demonstrated that the teachers employed L1 as a tool to facilitate the attainment of a broad range of their objectives. Therefore, teachers can and should use L1 as a tool to help students communicate, manage the classroom, create a welcoming environment, lower anxiety levels, explain the course objectives, and clear up any unclear areas.

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