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Teaching Indonesian for other language speakers

Hesti Widayarsi¹, Hanandyo Dardjito²

¹Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, ²Universitas Sarjanawiyata Tamansiswa,

dardjit@gmail.com

Abstract. Previous studies suggested immersing the language learners in the target language when learning a foreign language. It is, to some extent, difficult to apply because of several factors; therefore, English operates as a medium of instruction in the classroom where the learners have different cultures and different first languages. This study aimed at finding out the use of English as a medium of instruction in teaching Indonesian for foreign language speakers or Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA). It applied a qualitative design involving a semi-structured interview with three BIPA teachers selected using purposive sampling. The interview data were analysed interpretively. The findings revealed that English was employed when giving instruction, explaining complex concepts and grammar, defining vocabulary, checking the students' comprehension, and keeping the classroom interaction. However, English was used limitedly because the learners needed to learn and practice the target language.

Keywords. Indonesian language; BIPA; English; medium of instruction; foreign language

1. Introduction

The teaching of Indonesian for Foreign Speakers or Bahasa Indonesia bagi Penutur Asing (BIPA) becomes essential nowadays. It is because people from many countries want to learn Indonesian language (bahasa Indonesia). They want to be able to use bahasa Indonesia for some reasons. Some of them want to work, travel, or study in Indonesia. Others want to communicate with their families or friends in Indonesia. The teaching of bahasa Indonesia in the classroom needs a medium of instruction that can help students learn it. English as international language can be used as the medium of instruction. It is needed to bridge between their language and Indonesian as the target language.

The domination of English language in international academic, business, and communication atmosphere leads to the use of this language as the language of instruction and learning. The use of English as a medium of instruction to teach language remains debatable; which language is better to use whether the target language, the mother tongue, or other language. Some studies state that learning language(s) is best achieved when using the target language. Moeller and Roberts [1] suggest that the use of target language in the classroom will engage the language experience for learners and provide authenticity of the language use as well as making the learning more meaningful. Bahasa Indonesia as the medium of instruction can benefit the learners to learn the target language.

Some other studies, on the other hand, find out that the learners' first language (L1) helps them take full advantage of their learning. Sah [2] reveals a positive attitude when teachers mix the L1 and the target language as they believe it improves comprehensibility, vocabulary and grammar understanding, and classroom interaction. Cholakova [3] mentions that the use of English can (1) decrease the level of ethnocentrism and become a bridge to connect the learners' language to the target language and (2) help communicate and diminish the misunderstanding. These findings are in line with Wang [4] who finds the fact that English as lingua franca (ELF) is used to interpret Chinese words and culture for pedagogical purposes to manage the classroom and build rapport with students for practical purposes. It implies that the findings can be applied in teaching not only Chinese but also other languages including Indonesian.

These studies show that the use of either the target language or the learners' first language has its own benefits. The use of English as the language of instruction in teaching of other languages is still limited and needs to be investigated. To the best of our knowledge, the research on English as the language of instruction in teaching Indonesian for other language speakers is infrequent. Therefore, this study is aimed at finding out the roles of English in teaching Indonesian for foreign language speakers. The research put forward a question of how English is used in teaching BIPA?

Recently, many students from different nationalities come and study Indonesia and they require bahasa Indonesia to communicate or study. Kusmiatun, et al. [5] differentiates bahasa Indonesia untuk Penutur Asing (BIPA) or Indonesian for foreign speakers learning and Indonesian learning in terms of its learners. BIPA is learned by non-Indonesian speakers who have mastered the mother tongue or other language(s). Therefore, BIPA can be called as a foreign language for those learners. Moeller and Catalano [6] defines that a language is considered a foreign language if it is learned largely in the classroom and is not spoken in the society where the teaching occurs. Study of another language allows the individual to communicate effectively and creatively and to participate in real-life situations through the language of the authentic culture itself. It implies that language learning could not be separated from the culture of the target language [7]. According to Laizane [8], foreign language refers to the acquisition of a language that is not the native language of a language learner and it is a language that the person wants to learn for a purpose, not naturally. It is taught and the language learner learn it. She adds that the term foreign language is used when a person stays in a country temporarily for work or education.

Ulumuddin and Wismanto [9] describes that learning BIPA is like growing up a newly born baby who needs to be taken care professionally with the scientific responsibility involving several parties. Ningrum, et al. [10] mention that the characteristics of the learners are they have already had their first languages (L1) and have cultural background. Because the learners might come from different cultural backgrounds and characteristics, there are a lot of thing to consider in the teaching and learning process. On the basis of the definitions above, this study proposes that BIPA is considered a foreign language for those whose first language is not Indonesian (bahasa Indonesia). They speak their first language and are willing to learn another language for several reasons. Therefore, the teaching of BIPA for those learners must be treated in a same way how foreign language should be taught.

To teach a foreign language in a multicultural and multilingual classroom, a language of instruction is needed. Mkude as cited by Komba and Bosco [11] defines language of instruction (LoI) as the language used for the purpose of conveying knowledge in education system and normally selected by the government of the country to meet the demands of the dynamics of knowledge growth and expansion. In some cases, the language of instruction is

selected based on the academic people preference because of some reasons . Owu-Ewie and Eshun [12] state that the language of instruction plays an important role in ensuring effective communication in the classroom. It is in line with Alieto as cited by Lim-Ramos, et al. [13] that the success of the delivery of quality education greatly depends on the language used as the tool to transmit the knowledge. As language of instruction is important, teachers of BIPA must be able to use language of instruction appropriately so that they can help the learners to achieve a maximum result in their learning.

In BIPA classrooms where many learners have different first languages and cultural backgrounds, there can be some obstacles in learning bahasa Indonesia. As a foreign language for them, some problems might emerge. Unal and Ilhan [14] claims that both students and instructors feel problematic in language learning especially when the students had resistance and lack motivation and self-awareness in the foreign language process. Another problem is suggested by Civan and Coskun [15] that students who are not fluent in the language of instruction which is not their native language have difficulty in grasping the course abstract of knowledge. They add that many other researchers find out that students who are more proficient in the instruction language on average more successful. In line with it, Ibrahim, et al. [16] confirms that in any teaching and learning situation the language of instruction plays a very vital role in facilitating learning of subject contents. Therefore, the use of language as the medium of instruction that can facilitate the learning is essential.

English bridges the communication between the teacher simply because the international students speak English. Gunantar [17] asserts that in the level of international interaction, English is chosen as communication medium because it is spoken by many people with various backgrounds such as the speaker from English as second or foreign languages. Dearden [18] defines English as a medium of instruction (EMI) as the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English. This can ease the learners who do not share the same mother tongue to learn the same topics. Islam [19] argues that English as medium of instruction has been developing widely in Asia. Nunan [20] also alleges that many Asian countries have been adopting English as medium of instruction. English as the medium of instruction has been used in countries such as India, Singapore, Malaysia, Hongkong, China, Japan, and Korea. Using English in learning BIPA can be beneficial for learners who have different languages because they need English that functions as the medium of instruction.

Learning bahasa Indonesia means learning language skill and culture. Solikhah and Budiharso [21] reveals that there are five skills in language teaching including listening, speaking, reading, and the cultural competence. It implies that learning another language requires learning about another culture to experience a different culture from the inside. Therefore, the cultural competence should be delivered in the teaching process. Language as part of culture paves a way to learn the new target language. The learners' previous language proficiency helps the learners learn the new language. It is much easier to learn something of which a learner already has experienced. Learners should always be encouraged to make comparisons between the language(s) they know and the language they are learning and to express in class the comparisons they are making. Learners will also build their understanding of the new culture they are learning on the basis of their own cultural understandings and values. In teaching BIPA, English can be used to help teachers teach the cultures to the students to improve their competence.

It is necessary for the teachers and learners to use the language of instruction appropriately for enhancing effective teaching and learning. When there is a conflict regarding

the medium of instruction used at the early learning stage, the situation may have negative effect on the subsequent educational level of the learners. The use of the target, the first, or mix language in teaching foreign language is debatable. However, in some cases, BIPA teachers in this study still need to use English to help the learners understand better. It is sometimes hard for the teachers to explain the specific terms and trying to explain in the target language but it takes time.

A previous study was conducted by Wang [4] on the use of English as a lingua franca in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. It was a case study of native Chinese teachers in Beijing. He found out the fact that English as Lingua Franca (ELF) is used to interpret Chinese words and culture for pedagogical purposes, to manage the classroom and build rapport with students for practical purposes. ELF is also found to be used for enhancing CFL teachers' academic research ability and increasing their social mobility through giving them the opportunity to teach Chinese overseas. Turnbull [22] in his research on the use of English as a lingua franca in the Japanese second language classroom finds out that English forms a unique bridge between their native and additional languages, and the target language, Japanese, to build connections between the known and the unknown. From the result, it can be concluded that English offers benefit in the teaching of other language.

Related to English as a medium of instruction, Alanshori [23] in his research found out that using English as medium of instruction will disassociate with symbiotic context where the condition shows positive development between bilingual education and cognitive development. The using of English as medium of instruction tends to drive student to be excel in both contexts. However, when the students fail in language, it will affect their cognitive development as it is naturally can be stimulate easily through mother tongue.

This study employs a qualitative design which concerns with developing explanations of social phenomena. In other words, it aims to help us understand the social world in which we live and why things are the way they are. Based on the above-mentioned studies, English as the medium of instruction must have significant roles in helping the learners of BIPA to gain more skills in their learning. This study is aimed at finding out the use of English as the medium of instruction on the learning of BIPA.

2. Method

The study used qualitative design. It employed qualitative data gathering techniques. A semi-structured interview was conducted to gather the data. It was carried out to find out the teachers' perspectives in using English as medium of instruction in their BIPA classes. A list of questions was prepared and all the interviews were recorded. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling by which the research subjects were selected based on the specific purpose. By applying purposive sampling, the research subjects are most likely to yield appropriate and useful information and is a way of identifying and selecting cases that will use limited research resources effectively. The participants of this study were three BIPA teachers; whose students coming from English speaking countries and non-English speaking countries. Later, the qualitative data gathered from individual interviews were analyzed interpretively. Chan, et al. [24] state that an analysis using an interpretive description technique helps to understand the recalled experiences of the teachers that are interviewed.

3. Findings and discussion

The purpose of this study is to find out the use of English as a medium of instruction in BIPA class. The findings of the study indicated that English was used in giving instruction,

explaining complex concepts and grammar, defining new vocabulary, checking students' comprehension, and keeping the classroom interaction.

3.1. Findings.

In BIPA class, most learners are able to speak English even though they do not come from English speaking countries. In the beginner level, the learners have not got sufficient vocabulary and knowledge about bahasa Indonesia. Being exposed to a lot of new words is frustrating. In this case, to firstly introduce bahasa Indonesia, English is needed to convey the instruction. English can help them understand what is being learned so they can follow the lesson and start learning bahasa Indonesia. The following statements portray what the teachers thought.

I try to use the target language during the class but it is sometimes difficult in the beginner level class. Therefore, I repeat my instruction using English. It helps them know what they are doing in the class. After several meetings, I used simple bahasa Indonesia and repeat my instructions several times so they can learn bahasa Indonesia little by little. It worked in my class.

The instructions are mostly in bahasa Indonesia for higher levels. Usually, they have been familiar with the instructions so I do not need to explain them in English. For the beginners, I use mixed languages because I think if I use English all the time, they will feel scared with the lesson. I can I imagine when I get forced to learn a new language when I know nothing at all. It feels that I am lost.

I use English for the instructions for the beginner level but when it comes to do some practices, we use bahasa Indonesia. It is challenging to teach beginners because we must start from zero. With the help of English, as the language they have already known, it helps me to teach.

As their level goes up, the use of English is reduced. The higher the students are, the lesser the teachers use English. The teachers agreed that the use of English should be minimized to force the learners to learn and use the target language that is bahasa Indonesia. The teacher should avoid the use of English in the class because the learners should be exposed with the target language as much as possible. However, for pure beginners, English is employed to enable them understand what they learn and what to do in the classroom.

The teachers also use English for explaining complex concepts and grammar. Grammar is one aspect of languages that cannot be neglected. Sometimes, it is difficult to teach basic rules in the target language. English helps to explain the specific rules and concepts. It does not mean that the teachers use English for the whole lesson. The teachers can mix and switch between two languages when explaining the concept and language rules and try to compare the grammar or sentence structure in English. The teachers suggested as follows.

With various students coming from different countries and different mother languages, teaching and explaining about grammar is easier by using English. We can explain how the bahasa Indonesia sentence structures is formed compared to English structures. We need to make them understand the concept first. Then, we allow them to practice creating sentences in bahasa Indonesia.

At first, I always try to explain the grammar in bahasa Indonesia but most of the time they look confused especially in a beginner class. So, I repeat my explanation in English to help them understand better. When they have understood the grammar and the concepts, they will be drilled with practices such as writing sentences or speaking using the concepts taught.

Well, Indonesian grammar is sometimes difficult to explain and do not have a fixed rule. For example, when I have to explain about affixes me-kan and me-i, I write the sentence containing those words and give the English translation. I explain what the sentences are in English. I myself cannot avoid using English because for me it is much easier.

English is also used for defining new words. The use of English to teach vocabulary seems practical and saves time. Vocabulary is basic in learning language and teaching vocabulary is challenging. It because sometimes the teachers find it difficult to tell the meaning of a certain words using the target language. For concrete words, teachers can avoid using English to name them. They can use synonyms, pictures, or gestures to help learners understand the intended words. Some abstract words are hard to describe. Teachers need to give contextual situation to help learners understand the words. It consumes time so teachers decide to use English. The teachers shared their techniques as follows.

It is not easy to teach beginner level students. They do not have many words in their mind. I try to use bahasa Indonesia first and try to use gestures to help them know what the words mean. Sometimes, it does not work so I tell them the meanings of the words in English.

I use English to translate the new words. If I can find the words in the classroom, I can show the things. For other words such as abstract nouns, verbs, or adjectives that are hard to describe, I translate the words in English. Trying to explain in bahasa Indonesia takes too much time.

If the students have learned the words previously, I try to help them memorize what the words mean. However, when it is a new word for them, I usually give the English translation. The students also like to make flash cards to help them memorize the words. I think it will help them with their flash cards.

English is also used for checking students' comprehension after discussing a certain topic, explaining a concept, or evaluating the students' understanding at the end of the lesson. The teachers must ensure whether the learners understand or not. The use of English depends on the level of the learners. Teachers avoid using English for the higher level to check the learners' understanding by having a two-way discussion. For the lower level, English is used as follows.

I include Indonesian cultures in my lesson. So, when I explain about it, I speak English. I do not want them to get mistaken of what they hear. We also share stories when the class gets tense. It is just to make the class feel comfortable.

We use a module in our class but when the class starts to get boring, we talk about anything in English such as about their culture shocks while in Indonesia or their Indonesian favourite cuisines. Giving 3 to 5 minutes break in the middle of the lesson can refresh their mind.

When we have small talks both inside and outside the class, we use English to strengthen our relationship. I do not want to make any distance with my students. Even though I am their teacher in the classroom, I also want to be their friend after the class.

3.2. Discussion

In general, the findings of this study relate to the findings of a study investigating the use of English in foreign language classrooms. English is employed for the explanation and translation of the vocabulary, the grammar explanation, checking for comprehension, and giving instruction [22] and becomes a good communicative tool to maintain classroom interaction in multilingual context [25]. Okuni and Widyanti [26] suggest that instructors should attempt to develop instruction materials in the language that students are fluent in and also use

the same language during instruction. For those aspects, the use of English in BIPA classroom is needed especially for lower level students. It helps them feel connected to the language that they have known.

However, Nugroho [27] contends that teachers can tolerate the use of English in the first two weeks of the class. It is because the learners do not have sufficient vocabulary to communicate in bahasa Indonesia as well as to introduce the learning environment that they are going to deal with. However, the frequency of using English in the classroom must be reduced as the learners have known some words in bahasa Indonesia and the interaction between the teacher and learners have been built. He adds that the teacher must be able to maintain the use of bahasa Indonesia in the classroom to help learners communicate in the targeted language.

4. Conclusion

In the teaching of BIPA, teachers cannot use the target language fully in the class because of the limited Indonesian proficiency of the language learners. The use of English as the language of instruction is unavoidable because it is also recognized as an international lingua franca. For some reasons mentioned in the discussion section above, BIPA teachers used English in the classrooms (1) to help teachers deliver the instructions, (2) to explain complex concepts and grammar, (3) to define the vocabulary, (4) to check the students' comprehension, (5) to maintain the classroom interaction. For those reasons, English as a medium of instruction is used. The use of English is most beneficial for the students in beginner level because they have not got sufficient vocabulary. However, the use of English is minimized when they are already in the higher level. Further research in this field is recommended to find out the students' perspective of using English as the medium of instruction in the classroom.

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