

The Use of First Language in English Class in Accounting Study Program, Semarang State Polytechnic (A Case Study)

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Abstract: *The purpose of this study is to find out the students' opinions concerning the use of the first language (Indonesian language) in English class. The participants of this study are the Accounting Study Program students in the first and third semester whom I was teaching in 2012, consisting of 2 classes from the first semester and two classes from the third semester. The total number of the respondents are 103 students. Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are used. The data are taken by interviewing the students through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and questionnaires. The research result shows that, although the percentages between the students in the first semester and those in the third semester are different, both of them think that the use of Indonesian (L1) is still necessary. However, the higher the level (semester) of the students, the less necessary the use of L1 is. And this study also shows that the use of L1 in English class can necessarily help the students to learn English better, but it can be the opposite if it is not used only when necessary or appropriately.*

Keywords: *First Language (L1), Second Language (L2), Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

Semarang State Polytechnic is a tertiary vocational education institution which produces graduates ready to work in engineering and commerce workplaces. In Semarang State Polytechnic, English is only as one of the supporting subjects. In each study program it has different teaching hours (SKS). There are some study programs which give more teaching hours for English, however, in some study programs English only have 2 SKS. Fortunately, it is a favour that English has quite enough teaching hours in Accounting Study Program comparing with others which have less. Since the students of Semarang State Polytechnic are from different cities and background, as a result, they have different English proficiency which need to be paid attention. To bridge the differences of the students' English proficiency among the students some lectures use Indonesian in their English class, however, some others only use English. The different teaching methods of the English teachers in Accounting Study Program in Semarang State polytechnic is quite understandable since there have been contradicting views whether to use the first language (Indonesian language) in English classroom.

In some countries, English becomes as a second language. Meanwhile, in other countries, it becomes a foreign language. Either as a foreign or a second language (L2), there is a contradicting views of how teaching it, whether to use first language (L1) in second or foreign language classroom or not. Since there is a different point of views whether the use of the first language is allowed or prohibited in English class, so up to now it is still becoming a hot debate concerning that. Some scholars argue that the way people or students learn second or foreign language is similar with the way the acquire

their first language. Meanwhile some others say that the use of the first language in English classroom can help the learner acquire the language.

Tang (2007:36) states that professionals in second language acquisition have become increasingly aware of the role that the first language plays in the English as a Foreign Language classrooms. Nunan and Lamb (1996:121), for example, contend that EFL teachers monolingual students at lower levels of English find prohibition of the mother tongue. Dornyei and Kormos (1998:349) find that the first language is used by second language learners as a strategy to compensate for deficiencies in the target language. Auerbach (1993:73) not only acknowledge the positive role of the mother tongue in the classroom, but also identifies the following uses for it: the management, language analysis, presenting rules that govern grammar, discussing cross culture, giving instructions or prompts, explaining errors, and checking for comprehension.

In contrast with the professionals above who agree with the use of the first language or the mother tongue in English class, these scholars, such as: Haycraft, Hubbard et al do not agree with that (Tang, 2007:36). Harmer (1997:231) do not address or pay very little attention to the use of the first language or mother tongue in English language teaching. Jaszczolt (1995:15) argues that the interference of the first language can help the learners to acquire the target language. Smith (1996:129) also proposes similar opinion about the use of L1 in language learning.

Schweers (1999; 6) conducted a study dealing with the use of the first language in English language teaching in a Spanish context to investigate whether Spanish should be used or not. Similar with that Tang (2007:22) also conducted a research concerning with the use of Chinese to aid and facilitate the learning and teaching English in China.

Inspired by those two researches above and also with the different attitudes of the English teachers towards the use of Indonesian as our National Language in teaching English, and also driven by own interest, I decided to carry out a similar study.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study is focusing more on the students rather than the teachers. The reason is because in this study is aimed to find out about the students opinions dealing with the use of the first language in English class. Moreover, the students are the subjects in the teaching and learning process, meanwhile the teachers are only as the instructor or facilitator in transmitting the knowledge, or enable the students to acquire the second language, in this case is English.

The participants of this study are the Accounting Study Program students in the first and third semester whom I was teaching. There are 2 classes from the first semester and two classes from the third semester as well. In each class usually consists of 24 up to 26 students. And the number of the students from the first semester becoming the respondents in this study are 52, and the number of the students from the third semester are 51, so the total number of the respondents are 103.

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. The quantitative data was taken through questionnaires, and the qualitative data was taken through Focus Group Discussion (FGD). Since the respondents of this study were my own English classes that I handled, so the whole four (4) classes were fully participated in this study, either in answering the questionnaires and participated in Focus Group Discussion (FGD). There were eight (8) numbers of questions in the questionnaires and three (3) questions being discussed in FGD.

DISCUSSION

The result of this research shows that in general almost all the students in Accounting Study Program in Semarang State polytechnic feel that it is necessary to use

Indonesian language in English class, especially the students in the lower semester (first semester) who stated that they all (100%) disagree if Indonesian language is prohibited in English classroom. The detail information about the result of the questionnaire is presented in table 1.

The students in the first semester who agree that English is fully used in English class are only 2 students (4%). Almost all (96%) disagree with that. Not much different with the students in the first semester, the majority of the students in the third semester (86%) say that they do not like their English teacher to speak English the whole time during the lesson without mixing it with the Indonesian language. And only 7 students (14%) who want their English teacher speak English all the time during the lesson.

Moreover, there is no students in the first semester agree that Indonesian language (L1) is prohibited in English class. Meanwhile, the students in the third semester most of them (90%) disagree and only 5 students out of 51 students (10%) agree that Indonesian language (L1) is prohibited in English class.

The students' answers of the first and the second questions in the questionnaire shows that according to the students the use of L1 in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) in Accounting Study Program, Semarang State Polytechnic is still necessary.

From the total respondents in the first semester, only 29 students (56%) claimed that they can not understand well all what their English teacher explains or says in English. So almost half of the students find it is difficult to understand the lesson well unless the first language (L1), that is Indonesian language, is being used in English class. The number of the students who can understand well their teacher explanation in English shows an increase for the respondents from the third semester, and it is very common since they are more senior and have longer time learning English. It is 38 students (75%) and only 25% who can not understand well.

However, it is contradictory and surprising with the statement above. Even though 75% of the students in the third semester stated that they can understand their teacher's explanation in English, but the percentage of the answer for question number 4, that is whether Indonesian language should be used in English class, is still high, that is 90%. Hence all the students in the first semester do not agree that Indonesian language is prohibited in English class.

The percentage of the students who want the first language (Indonesian) is being used in English class is high, it is 50 students (96%), and only 2 students (4%) who do not want Indonesian language is used in English class. Comparing with the percentage of the respondents from the first semester, although it is lower but the percentage of the respondents from the first semester who still demand that Indonesian language is being used in English class is high too, it is 46 students (90%).

From table 1, we can see that the number of the students from the respondents in the first semester is exactly the same percentage in answering the fourth and the fifth questions from the questionnaire. The fourth question is about the use of Indonesian language in English class, meanwhile the fifth question is asking the students opinion whether the use of Indonesian language in English class will help them to understand their English lesson better. There are 96% of the respondents from the first semester that agree with this, and only 4% (2 students) disagree. The respondents from the third semester who agree is 46 students out of 51 students, and the rest 5 students (10%) disagree.

There are 32 students (62%) from the first semester students think that the use of Indonesian language will improve their English. And the number of the students who have the same opinion concerning with this matter from the respondents in the third semester is only 19 students (37%) and the rest 63% say that the use of L1 (Indonesian language) in their English class will not improve their English.

The result of the study shows that although there is a high percentage (almost all) of the students who want that L1 (Indonesian language) is being used in English class, but there is only 11 students (21%) of the students in the first semester that think it will unenable them to speak English more fluently. A good thing from the result of this study is that the students in the third semester who think that the use of Indonesian language in English class disable them from speaking English more fluently increases sharply comparing with the respondents from the first semester, that is 67%. This reflects that the students in the higher semester are aware that they need to be more expose in English speaking environment in order to enable them to communicate in English better and improve their English.

Another good thing from the result of this study is that the percentage of the respondents who claim that the use of Indonesian language (L1) in English class will discourage them to learn or study English is only a few. There is only 1 student (2%) from the respondents from the first semester students, and 5 students (10%) of the respondents from the third semester. And the rest of them think that the use of Indonesian language will have contribution in acquiring English.

Table 1. The Tabulation of The Questionnaire

No.	THE QUESTIONS	Respondents from Sem. 1				Respondents from Sem. 3			
		YES		NO		YES		NO	
		No. of Stu.	%	No. of Stu.	%	No. of Stu.	%	No. of Stu.	%
1	Do you like your English teacher use fully English in your English class?	2	4%	50	96%	7	14%	44	86%
2	Do you agree that Indonesian is prohibited in English class?	0	2%	52	100%	5	10%	46	90%
3	Can you understand well all what your English teacher says or explains in English?	29	56%	23	44%	38	75%	13	25%
4	Should Indonesian be used in English class?	50	96%	2	4%	46	90%	5	10%
5	Do you think that the use of Indonesian in English class will help you understand the English lesson better?	50	96%	2	4%	46	90%	5	10%
6	Do you think that the use of Indonesian in English class will improve your English?	32	62%	20	38%	19	37%	32	63%
7	Do you think that the use of Indonesian in English class will unenable you to communicate in English better?	11	21%	41	79%	34	67%	17	33%
8	Do you think that the use of Indonesian will discourage you to learn or study English?	1	2%	51	98%	5	10%	46	90%

Focus Group Discussion (FGD) is used in order to have deeper information about the students' opinion concerning with the use of Indonesian language in English class. It discussed the questions which have not been asked in the questionnaire.

In FGD, when the students in the first semester are asked when Indonesian language should be used in English class, they have various answers. Some of them (34%) say that the Indonesian language had better used for explaining difficult or new vocabularies. There are 16 students (31%) think that Indonesian should be used for explaining grammar, and 13 students (25%) say that Indonesian should be used whenever the teacher gives instruction to the students. The rest of 5 students (10%) fell

that Indonesian should be used only whenever necessary, since new vocabularies, grammar, and instructions are sometimes easy to understand.

Table 2 shows the result of FGD dealing with the time when Indonesian language should be used in English class, this study shows that there is different point of view between the students in the first semester with the students in the third semester. Most of the students in the third semester (53%) claim that it is better to use Indonesian language in English class. The rest 22% (11 students) say that Indonesian language should be used in explaining new vocabularies, 8 respondents (16%) in explaining grammar, and 9% (5 respondents) think that English should be used in giving instructions. However, they actually claim that the use of Indonesian language is necessary only whenever the students seem to have difficulties in understanding the teacher's explanation on new vocabularies, grammar or giving instructions.

Table 2. The Time When Indonesian is Used in English Class

No.	EXPLANATION	Respondents from Sem. 1		Respondents from Sem. 3	
		No. of Stu.	Percentage	No. of Stu.	Percentage
1	Difficult / new vocabularies	18	34%	11	22%
2	Explaining grammar	16	31%	8	16%
3	Giving instruction	13	25%	5	9%
4	Whenever Necessary	5	10%	27	53%
Total		52	100%	51	100%

When the respondents are asked why Indonesian language should be used in their English class, all of the respondents, either from the first semester or from the third semester have the same opinion that Indonesian language should be used because it will make them easier to catch the teacher's explanations.

The students opinion about the frequency of the Indonesian language should be used in English class is presented in table 3. This research result shows that the students in the higher semester claim that they want to have lower frequency of the use Indonesian language in English class. The respondents from the first semester who wants the frequency of using Indonesian language in English class very often is only 2 students (5%), meanwhile, it is only 2% (1 student) from the third semester that want to have very often frequency of Indonesian language in English class. The students in the first semester who think that Indonesian language should be used often is 37% (19 students), and the students in the third semester is 18% (9 students). The percentage of the students who wants to have Indonesian language sometimes be used in English class is 46% (the first year students) and 42% (the third semester students). Although not significant, but the percentage of the frequency of using Indonesian language in English class reduces with the respondents in the third semester, it is possible that it is as the effect of their English fluency which increases due to the higher level and the more duration of time they learn English. This decrease clearly shows from the increasing number of the students in the first semester who wants to have rarely or never use Indonesian language in English class comparing with the students from the third semester. The frequency of the students in the first semester who want to have rare frequency of the Indonesian language used in English class is 7 students (12%) and the students in the third semester is 17 students (33%). It is surprising that there are 2 students (5%) claim that they think Indonesian language should not be used at all in English class. Although it is not significant, however, the difference of the percentage of the use of first language in English class between the respondents in the first semester comparing with the students in the third semester shows a decrease.

Table 3. The Students' Opinion About The Use of Indonesian Language in English Class

No	FREQUENCY	Total Respondents in Sem 1		Total Respondents in Sem. 3	
		No. of Stu.	Percentage	No. of Stu.	Percentage
1	Very often	2	5%	1	2%
2	Often	19	37%	9	18%
3	Sometimes	24	46%	22	42%
4	Rarely	7	12%	17	33%
5	Never	0	0%	2	5%
Total		52	100%	51	100%

THE IMPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

The implication of the research is to make the English teachers aware that the use of Indonesian language is still necessary in English class, since it can help the students to learn English better and to enable them to understand the teachers' explanations easier. Therefore, the English teachers should not feel discourage to use Indonesian in their English classes.

CONCLUSION

The result of this study shows that according to the students' opinions (almost all), Indonesian language (L1) is still needed in English class in certain situation, such as in the the case that the students find it is difficult to catch the teacher's explanations. Most of them fell that the use of Indonesian in English classes help them learning English better, instead of discourage them. However, according to them the use of English should be appropriate, that is whenever necessary. The frequency of using Indonesian language in English class decreases in the higher level.

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