

Language Dynamics in EFL Classrooms: Insights from Islamic Junior High School Teachers in Jambi on the Use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Islamic junior high schools in Jambi, Indonesia. The research aimed to understand the dynamics of using these languages in EFL classrooms and to gather teachers' perspectives on this practice. Through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, the study identified the benefits, challenges, and impacts of incorporating Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic into EFL instruction. The findings suggested that strategic use of these languages can enhance comprehension, classroom management, and cultural relevance, but also presented challenges in balancing language use and meeting institutional and community expectations.

Keywords: Language Dynamics; EFL Classrooms; Use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan Bahasa Indonesia dan Bahasa Arab dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di SMP Islam di Jambi, Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami dinamika penggunaan bahasa-bahasa ini di kelas-kelas EFL dan untuk mengumpulkan perspektif guru tentang praktik ini. Melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi kelas, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi manfaat, tantangan, dan dampak dari penggabungan Bahasa Indonesia dan Bahasa Arab ke dalam pengajaran EFL. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan bahasa-bahasa ini secara strategis dapat meningkatkan pemahaman, manajemen kelas, dan relevansi budaya, tetapi juga menghadirkan tantangan dalam menyeimbangkan penggunaan bahasa dan memenuhi harapan lembaga dan masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Dinamika Bahasa; Kelas EFL; Penggunaan Bahasa Indonesia dan Bahasa Arab

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia, especially in Islamic schools, presents unique challenges. Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, and Arabic, a language of religious importance, are often used alongside English in the classroom. This study focused on one Islamic junior high school in Jambi, where students' success in learning English and the teaching-learning process are affected by the employment of these languages.

As the country's official language, Indonesian is essential to both education and communication in Indonesia. Numerous courses, such as physics, math, and social studies, are taught using it. (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). Its use in EFL classrooms facilitates concept clarification and vocabulary building, providing a foundation for English language learning. Additionally, Arabic holds significant importance in Islamic education, particularly for comprehending religious texts and practices. Its inclusion in the curriculum contributes to religious literacy and enhances students' language skills.

The utilization of the first language (L1) in EFL teaching has been a subject of debate among scholars. While some advocate for its strategic use to aid comprehension, manage the classroom effectively, and provide emotional support (Cook, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Alrabai, 2014), others caution against overreliance on L1, which may hinder students' immersion in the target language and impede their language development (Krashen, 1985).

Teachers' perceptions significantly influence their language instruction practices and, consequently, student learning outcomes. Factors such as training, experience, and institutional policies shape teachers' attitudes towards L1 use, impacting language proficiency, engagement, and motivation among students (Brown, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Zacharias, 2012).

Nurul Ilmi Islamic junior high school in Jambi provide a unique context for language instruction, integrating religious education with general education. The curriculum encompasses both national subjects taught in Bahasa Indonesia and religious studies conducted in Arabic, reflecting the cultural and religious relevance of language use within this institution.

While there exists substantial research on L1 use in EFL classrooms, studies specific to the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in Islamic education in Jambi are limited. This research aimed to bridge this gap by exploring teachers' perceptions and the dynamics of language use in this unique educational setting, considering its implications for student learning outcomes and language proficiency in English.

Understanding the interplay between teachers' perceptions and language use is essential for comprehensively addressing the challenges and opportunities in EFL teaching within the context of Islamic education in Jambi.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design employed a qualitative case study approach, drawing inspiration from Yin (2014), to delve deeply into the intricacies of teachers' perceptions and the complex dynamics of language use within a specific educational context.

The participants consisted of two female English language teachers selected from an Islamic junior high school in Jambi. Teacher A, with 14 years of teaching experience, holds a background in English education and has previously taught at both primary (*SD*) and junior high school (*SMP*) levels. On the other hand, Teacher B, with 10 years of teaching experience, also possesses a background in English

education and has taught in various settings, including courses, tutoring centers (*bimbel*), and primary schools and junior high school.

In the semi-structured interviews, participants shared detailed insights into their perceptions and experiences, with a specific focus on the utilization of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL teaching. These interviews aimed to capture nuanced perspectives and understand the dynamics of language use in the classroom.

Complementing the interview data, classroom observations offered valuable contextual information, enriching and validating the findings from the interviews. These observations delved into language use frequency, instructional strategies employed by teachers, and levels of student engagement during EFL lessons. By triangulating data from interviews and observations, a comprehensive understanding of the role of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL teaching was achieved, shedding light on effective practices and areas for improvement.

The data analysis followed a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and observation notes underwent coding using a blend of deductive and inductive methods. This coding process enabled the organization of coded data into coherent themes that captured the essential aspects of teachers' perceptions and practices. Throughout the study, ethical considerations were of utmost importance. Every participant gave their informed consent, guaranteeing that they were aware of the study's goals and their freedom to discontinue participation at any time. To uphold confidentiality, both participants and the school were anonymized, with pseudonyms used in all data presentations. Furthermore, stringent measures were implemented to safeguard data security, with access restricted solely to the researcher. Following the study's conclusion, audio recordings and transcripts will be securely destroyed.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Bahasa Indonesia in EFL Classrooms

Facilitation of Comprehension

Teachers emphasized that using Bahasa Indonesia helps students understand complex concepts more quickly.

- Teacher A: "Explaining grammar points in Bahasa Indonesia helps students grasp concepts more quickly."
- Teacher B: "Using Bahasa Indonesia clarifies difficult topics, making lessons more accessible."

Classroom Management and Discipline

Bahasa Indonesia is crucial for classroom management and maintaining discipline.

- Teacher A: "For instructions and managing behavior, Bahasa Indonesia ensures all students understand what is expected."
- Teacher B: "Bahasa Indonesia keeps the class orderly and focused, especially for complex instructions."

Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Arabic in EFL Classrooms

Religious and Cultural Relevance

Arabic helps reinforce students' religious and cultural identity.

- Teacher A: "Using Arabic helps students stay connected to their roots."
- Teacher B: "Integrating Arabic makes learning more meaningful as it aligns with religious studies."

Cognitive and Linguistic Benefits

Learning Arabic contributes to overall linguistic development and complements English learning.

- Teacher A: "Learning Arabic develops cognitive skills beneficial for learning English."
- Teacher B: "Arabic's linguistic structure aids in understanding English grammar and vocabulary"

The Impact of Language Dynamics on Teaching and Learning

Enhanced Comprehension and Engagement

Strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic improves comprehension and student engagement.

- Teacher A: "Switching between languages keeps students engaged and helps them understand better."
- Teacher B: "Using familiar languages motivates students and makes learning more interactive."

Balancing Language Use

Teachers face challenges in balancing language use to ensure sufficient exposure to English.

- Teacher A: "Finding the right balance is crucial. Too much L1 can hinder English immersion."
- Teacher B: "We need to ensure students get enough English practice while using L1 for support."

Challenges and Benefits of Using Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL Teaching

Benefits

- Enhanced Understanding: Using L1 aids comprehension and reduces cognitive load.
- Cultural Relevance: Arabic use strengthens cultural and religious connections.
- Classroom Management: L1 ensures clarity in instructions and behavior management.

Challenges

- **Balancing Exposure:** Ensuring enough English exposure while using L1 for support.
- **Student Dependence:** Preventing over-reliance on L1, which can impede English proficiency.
- **Institutional Expectations:** Aligning language use with institutional and community expectations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study reveals that teachers view the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic as beneficial for comprehension, cultural relevance, and classroom management. However, they also acknowledge the need to balance language use to ensure sufficient exposure to English.

The strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL classrooms in Islamic junior high schools in Jambi enhances student comprehension, engagement, and cultural relevance. Teachers recognize both the benefits and challenges of this practice, emphasizing the importance of balancing language use.

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