

Students' Perceptions of Teachers' Own-Language Use: A Case Study in an Indonesian EFL Senior High School

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ABSTRACT

The dominant position of the monolingual approach in English language teaching has been questioned and the incorporation of students' own language has been increasingly encouraged. This study investigated students' perceptions of the desirability of teachers' own language-use and their views regarding for what purposes teachers should use students' own language in an immersion senior high school in Indonesia. This case study used a sequential explanatory design, gathering quantitative data from questionnaires to 89 students and qualitative data from semi-structured interviews to 4 students. The findings of this research revealed that the students' perceptions were complex because although English was expected to be mainly used, many of the students wanted the teachers to use the own language for language-related purposes, classroom management purposes, and affective purposes. The main pedagogical implication of this study calls for bi/multilingual education in this context. Further research may explore the impacts of the monolingual approach and the power of English language on students' identities in Indonesia.

Keywords: Own language, New language, Students' perceptions, Bi/multilingual approach

INTRODUCTION

Own language (OL) use in new language (NL) classrooms has become the subject of much debate in the literature in English language teaching (Hall & Cook, 2012). Around the 1880s, the discouragement of OL use was favoured in the teaching of NLs (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012) due to the assumption that the more students were exposed to NL, the more quickly they learnt (Auerbach, 1993). Despite this prevalent assumption, the theory underpinning it was "never clearly defined, nor was it substantiated with empirical study" (Brook-Lewis, 2009, p. 218).

This study attempts to touch upon the discussion of terminology surrounding OL use in NL classrooms. The notion that a language should be taught without making reference to another language refers to the monolingual approach (Cummins, 2007; Hall & Cook, 2012), and that two or more languages being used to learn a language refers to the bi/multilingual approach (Boun et al., 2015).

The terms ‘first language’ (L1) and ‘second language’ (L2) are deemed to lack accuracy in some contexts. The term L1 referring to the language learnt first is problematic because the language students share is not always the ‘first language’ of all students (Hall & Cook, 2012). Davies (2003) argues that this term is not always straightforward in multilingual contexts because students may have more than one L1. Additionally, the term L2 may imply that all students acquire only one another language, showing a disregard for the fact that many of them are probably bi/multilingual (Cook, 2010; Hall & Cook, 2012).

This study uses the terms proposed by Cook (2010). He suggests using the terms own language (OL), i.e. “the language which the students already know and through which (if allowed), they can approach the new language” (ibid, p. xxi), and new language (NL), i.e. “the language being learned” (ibid, p. xxii). Indonesian classrooms are mostly bi/multilingual where teachers and students speak two or more languages (Zacharias, 2012). Although the first language of most Indonesians is Bahasa Indonesia, it also coexists alongside more than 200 local languages (Cohn & Ravindranath, 2014). Thus, using these terms acknowledge that students might have been exposed to other L1s as they live in a bi/multilingual environment. In this paper, OL refers to Bahasa Indonesia, and NL refers to English.

This case study explored students’ perceptions of the desirability of teachers’ OL use and their views on teachers’ purposes in using OL in English classrooms in an Indonesian immersion senior high school, where English should be exclusively used particularly in English classrooms.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A Shift to Bi/Multilingual Classrooms

The proponents of the monolingual approach highlight its benefits. Some of them (e.g. Chambers, 1991; Macdonald, 1993; Seliger, 1983) argue that OL omission makes the language real through classroom communication since exclusive use of NL promotes its natural use in authentic contexts. Moreover, students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts are assumed to need more exposure to NL as they are rarely able to practise NL outside the classroom (Chaudron, 1988). These arguments may indicate that OL use may decrease authentic language use, resulting in poor learning outcomes (Macdonald, 1993; Polio & Duff, 1994).

Nevertheless, in the last twenty years, the re-evaluation of monolingual education has opened the door for the bi/multilingual approach. Researchers in the field of Socio Cultural

Theory Theory (e.g. Anton & DiCamilla, 1999; Brooks & Donato, 1994; Swain & Lapkin, 2000) argue that OL is needed for the practical demands of the classroom and for a scaffolding tool. In other words, it enables students to engage in collaborative activities by providing help to each other and mediates the cognitive processes students use in problem-solving tasks.

In addition, the issues of students' linguistic and cultural identity in English language teaching (ELT) also support the classroom bi/multilingualism. Davies (2004) argues that the exclusive use of English can reinforce the basic tenets of English-only policy. These principles include the belief that (1) English is best taught monolingually; (2) native speakers are the ideal English teachers; (3) English should be taught in early age, (4) the more English is used, the better the results (4) if OL is used, English standard will decline (Phillipson, 1992). These tenets may legitimate OL exclusion in the classroom, which can lead to the marginalisation of OL and threaten one's sense of identity (Davies, 2004). Instead, incorporating OL may prevent the denial of students' identity and cultures (Schweers, 1999). Hence, OL use is not only a matter of how languages are learnt, but it can also "underpin learners' sense of who they are and who they want to be in a complex multilingual world" (Hall & Cook, 2012, p. 279).

In their research in monolingual classrooms, some scholars found that OL use could be inevitable. Lucas' and Katz's (1994) observation showed that teachers and students utilised OL although the policy was against it. Turnbull et al. (2011, p. 195) also found that although teachers' OL use was not explicitly incorporated in the interventions in their quasi-experimental study, they found that "it just happened". Thus, it could be argued that OL use cannot be separated from language classrooms because it is a normal behaviour of bi/multilinguals and a natural process of learning as they tend to rely on their OL even if only in their minds (Cook, 2010; Levine, 2009; Widdowson, 2014). In contrast, NL exclusivity may impose unnatural conditions where students restrict themselves to NL (Widdowson, 2014). As OL use may be unavoidable, language classrooms in bi/multilingual contexts may remain a bi/multilingual environment despite the imposition of monolingual approach.

Empirical Research on Students' Perceptions of Teachers Own-Language Use

Some scholars have investigated students' perceptions of teachers' OL use. Brook-Lewis (2009) undertook research on 256 Mexican university students. Similar to Thongwichit's (2013) study on Thai university students, the result demonstrated that many of the students had positive perceptions of teachers' OL use because it could enhance the affective environment for

English learning, reduce anxiety, and facilitate the incorporation of students' life experiences. They also perceived that the teachers' OL use could lessen their sense of their identity being replaced. Like Macaro (2005), Kitjaroonchai's and Lampadan's (2016) study on 158 Thai university students thought that OL was necessary to aid their language learning, especially for explaining grammar, defining vocabulary, and clarifying difficult concepts. Nevertheless, their perceptions seemed nuanced as demonstrated in Brook-Lewis's (2009) study which revealed that there were those who showed scepticism. Kitjaroonchai and Lampadan (2016) found that although the students recognised the positive roles of OL, many of them expected the teachers to mainly use English because its use increased their motivation and provided more exposure to English.

Similar to Shuchi's and Islam's (2016) research, Hall and Cook (2013) found that while OL was preferred for explaining grammar, translating vocabulary, and maintain discipline, it was less favoured for giving feedback, correcting errors, and assessing students. Noor et al., (2015) interviewed Malaysian secondary school students and found that teachers' OL use was preferred in giving instructions, explaining grammar, and translating vocabulary. Like Macaro (2001), this study revealed students' lack of English proficiency seemed to underpin teachers' decisions to use OL. Subsequently, these findings were also identified in some other studies (e.g. Ja'afar & Maarof, 2016; Kitjaroonchai & Lampadan, 2016).

In Indonesian contexts, some studies have examined this subject in Indonesian universities. Similar to Shuchi's and Islam's (2016) study, Manara's (2007) research on three universities showed that the majority of the students agreed that the teachers should primarily utilise English. Interestingly, in the observation, like Turnbull et al.'s (2011) research, OL was still used by the teachers to explain grammar and assist students' comprehension. Similar to Warsono's and Mujiyanto's (2015) research, the findings also revealed that teachers' OL use was primarily for giving instructions, correcting errors, explaining vocabulary, checking students' comprehension, and building rapport. A study conducted by Hidayati (2012) also showed comparable results. The observation in this research enriched previous research findings (e.g. Brook-Lewis, 2009) as the study revealed that to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere, the teachers utilised Bahasa Indonesia to make jokes to students.

The lack of empirical studies into teachers' OL use in Indonesian senior high schools has become the rationale for this research. As students in senior high schools may have different levels of English proficiency from those in universities, students may have different perceptions

of the desirability of teachers' OL use and teachers' purposes in using OL. This study presents a case study to provide in-depth investigation of students' perceptions of teachers' OL use in an Indonesian immersion senior high school, where both teachers and students have a shared language, i.e. Bahasa Indonesia.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Instruments

This research used the case study methodology, defined as an in-depth exploration from multiple viewpoints on phenomena in real life contexts (Simons, 2009). The case itself includes an Indonesian immersion senior high school that applies English-only policy, especially in English classrooms. It is expected that the case study can facilitate a detailed description of phenomena (Dornyei, 2007; Thomas, 2011). Although the generalisability of case study is often criticised, this is not necessarily its aim because the purpose is to understand the case with its complexity within the given context (Punch, 2009; Thomas, 2011).

This research utilised quantitative and qualitative methods in a sequential explanatory design (SED), which uses prior quantitative data as a basis of the qualitative stage to explain quantitative results (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011). In this study, questionnaires were used to collect the quantitative data, while semi-structured interviews were used to obtain the qualitative data.

Sampling and Participants

This study used sequential mixed-methods sampling, using the information from the quantitative phase to inform the sampling for the qualitative phase (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). In this research, 89 students filled in the questionnaires and 4 students were interviewed. The limited sampling and scope of the study may affect the implication of this research perhaps making it not applicable in many learning contexts, thus, this study is therefore careful about making claims of the findings.

Table 1: *Information of the Students in the Interviews*

Participant (pseudonyms)	Gender	Grade	English Learning Experiences (years)
Catherine	Female	12	14
Anna	Female	11	8
Lauren	Female	11	11
Mike	Male	10	7

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using descriptive statistics to look for frequency distribution (Robson, 2013). The data was shown in the form of percentage in participants' responses to enable an assessment of broad patterns of students' perceptions and the identification of areas for further exploration in the qualitative phase. The qualitative data was analysed using the thematic analysis (see Robson, 2013) to identify themes in the qualitative stage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Students' Language Preference

The data shows that 50.6% of the students wanted the teachers to use English *often* in English classrooms and 42.7% of the students perceived that English should *always* be used (see Figure 1). Furthermore, only 5.6% of the students chose *sometimes* and none wanted the elimination of English. Superficially, these findings seem to show that the majority of the students preferred English as the medium of instruction in English classrooms. Nevertheless, only 7.9% of the students expected the teachers to exclude OL, while 50.6% of them thought that the teachers should *sometimes* use OL (see Figure 2). Moreover, 31.5% of the students chose *rarely* and none chose *always*.

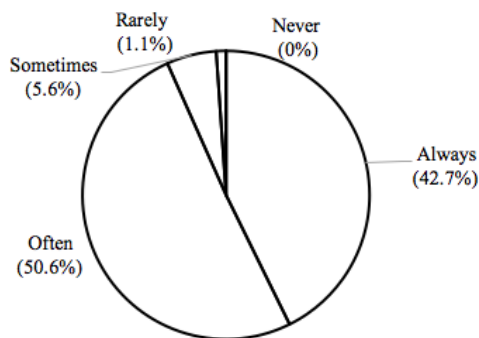


Figure 1: *Teachers' Use of English*

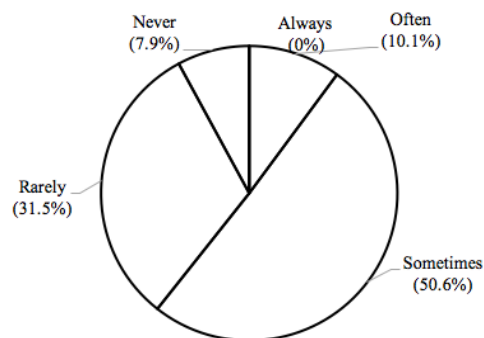


Figure 2: *Teachers' Use of OL*

These results may imply that although many of the students perceived that the teachers should mainly use English, they still wanted the incorporation of Bahasa Indonesia. The findings support the results of some studies (e.g. Brook-Lewis, 2009; Kitjaroonchai & Lampadan, 2016) which revealed that students might have complex views on this matter

because despite their expectations to receive NL input, they thought that the teachers could utilise OL at some points.

During the interviews, Catherine said, “If they use Bahasa Indonesia, perhaps they want to clarify something...make the other students understand more about the materials.” Mike also said that the exclusive use of English made him difficult to understand the materials. He preferred the inclusion of OL:

“I’m a new student here...our English abilities such as speaking, reading, and listening are not as good as those in grade 11 and 12.” (Mike, grade 10)

The finding demonstrating that teachers’ OL use might assist students’ comprehension is shown in some studies (e.g. Manara, 2007; Warsono & Mujiyanto, 2015). In addition, some of the students considered the cultural aspect of OL as they answered the open question in the questionnaires:

“We need to keep it as our culture by speaking Bahasa.”

“Bahasa Indonesia is our national language, which everybody in the classroom knows.”

This result is similar to prior studies (e.g. Brook-Lewis, 2009; Thongwichit, 2013) showing that teachers’ OL use showed the acknowledgement of students’ OL and bi/multicultural identities. As a result, it can avoid a feeling of rejection of students’ cultures (Schweers, 1999). Thus, the finding may demonstrate that students’ sense of identity is bound up with their OL, leading them to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity while using English.

In addition, one interviewee felt that she were the same as the students in mainstream schools if OL was used by the teachers:

“If they [the teacher] use English exclusively, I just feel special... they [people] may think that we are better students... [and] have better competence.” (Lauren, grade 11)

The concern of power in English language may be evident in this research. English has become the dominant language, raising issues of power relations which are viewed as a threat to other languages. Moreover, this may lead to a perception that English is essential to gain social status (Tollefson, 1991), resulting in reproducing unequal power relationships between groups established on the basis of language (Auerbach, 1993).

Translation

The finding that many of the students expected that the teachers should *sometimes* use OL in English classrooms corresponds to their responses (see Figure 3). None answered that they strongly disagreed with the teachers' OL use for translation and only 6.7% of the students disagreed with the statement, while 89.9% of them strongly agreed or agreed that translation helped them learn English.

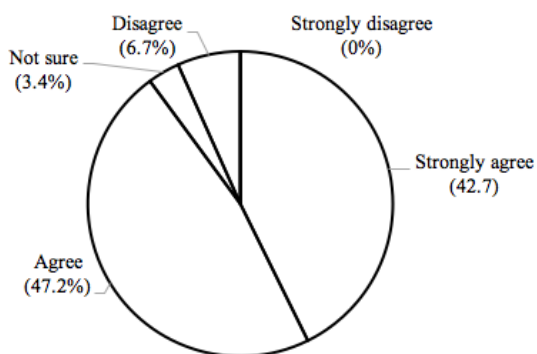


Figure 3: Teachers' Use of Translation

During the interviews, Catherine said that teachers' OL use helped her understand the materials. Meanwhile, the other two interviewees said:

"It's helpful to compare the English words and the Indonesian words." (Mike, grade 10)

"...they [the teachers] can use simple words to explain difficult vocabulary. I can learn the synonyms..." (Lauren, grade 11)

The result showing that most of the participants were in favour of translation is similar to prior research (e.g. Hidayati, 2012; Noor et al., 2015). Imposing the monolingual approach may be unrealistic since students may need to act as if they were monolinguals. Thus, using translation is considered a natural language behaviour as students tend to rely on their OL knowledge (Widdowson, 2014). As Widdowson (2014, p. 233) argues, NL exclusivity may hinder students from "their own experience of language" and the process of translation in which NL "is made real, realised, as an extension of that experience". It could be argued that translation is a learning strategy for students to make sense of NL input and to draw on their linguistic resources, hence, it should not be eliminated even in monolingual language classrooms.

Affective Factors

The results of this study demonstrated that 25.9% of the students disagreed or strongly disagreed that teachers' OL use could reduce their anxiety in learning English, with 68.5% of them strongly agreed or agreed with the statement and only 5.6% were not sure about it (see Figure 4).

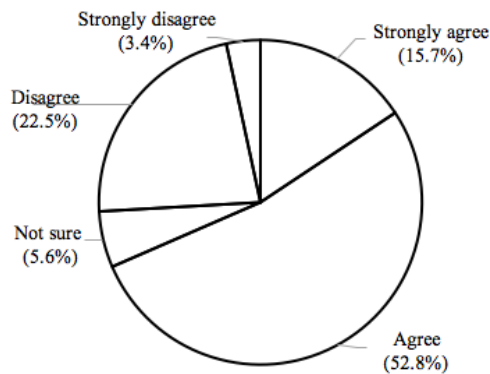


Figure 4: *Teachers' OL use for reducing anxiety*

During the interviews, some of the students said that the teachers' OL use could make them less anxious. Anna explained what happened in the classroom when the teachers used English exclusively:

"They [students] rarely respond to the teacher or are busy talking with their friends. But when she [the teacher] uses Bahasa Indonesia, they are more excited to learn and I feel that they are more engaged in the lesson." (Anna, grade 11)

This finding is similar to prior research (e.g. Brook-Lewis, 2009; Thongwichit, 2013). In this sense, teachers' OL use may make students feel secure and allow them to express themselves (Auerbach, 1993). Also, the acknowledgment of students' OL in the classroom may increase receptivity to learning English and diminish negative perspectives towards the language (Schweers, 1999).

Opportunities to Listen to and Speak English

This research revealed that 58.5% of the students strongly agreed or agreed that teachers' OL use reduced their opportunities to listen to English, with 32.6% of them stating that they disagreed or strongly agreed with this statement (see Figure 5). Moreover, while

65.2% of the students strongly agreed or agreed that teachers' OL use could discourage their speaking practice, 30.4% of them thought otherwise (see Figure 6).

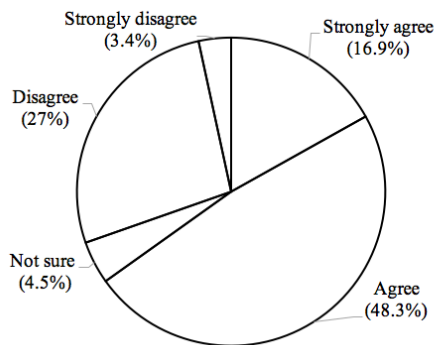
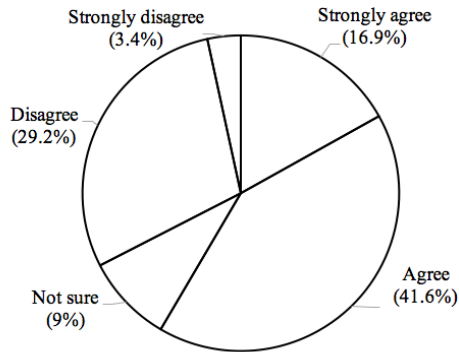


Figure 5: *Opportunities to Listen to English*

Figure 6: *Opportunities to Speak English*

The result of this study can be further explained by some of the responses in the open questions, such as “If the teachers use Bahasa Indonesia too much, it will make me lazy to speak ... English.” Catherine also commented that the excessive use of OL made “the learning process mean nothing.” This finding supports Hall’s and Cook’s (2013) research results demonstrating although the students suggested the teachers to incorporate OL in the classroom, they also concerned about the amount of exposure to English and the opportunities to use English.

Language-Related Purposes

The majority of the students expected the teachers to utilise OL for a range of purposes (see Table 2). Regarding language-related functions, 73% of the students reported that they wanted the teachers to explain vocabulary using OL *often* or *sometimes*, with 18% of them

expecting that the teachers should *always* use OL and none wanted the teachers to exclude OL for this purpose. Three interviewees also mentioned that the teachers' OL use was useful to help them comprehend word meanings. Anna said:

“...my friends like...listing English words with the Indonesian equivalent...it's useful to use Indonesian translation to help them.” (Anna, grade 11)

Additionally, more than half of the students believed that the teachers should *often* or *sometimes* utilise OL to explain grammar with only 18% of them choosing *rarely* or *never* for this function. The results revealing that many of the students required teachers' scaffolding using OL when learning vocabulary and grammar are similar to recent studies (e.g. Kitjaroonchai & Lampadan, 2016; Noor et al., 2015; Warsono & Mujiyanto, 2015).

Table 2: Percentage of Students' Expectations of Teachers' Purposes for Using OL

	Always (%)	Often (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never (%)
Explain vocabulary	18	39.3	33.7	9	0
Giving instructions	14.6	21.3	30.3	22.5	11.2
Explain grammar	16.9	29.2	36	13.5	4.5
Build relationships with students	20.2	27	33.7	10.1	9
Develop a relaxed classroom atmosphere	23.6	25.8	34.8	9	6.7
Correct spoken errors	24.7	21.3	32.6	14.6	6.7
Check students' comprehension	15.7	30.3	29.2	16.9	7.9
Giving feedback to students' written assignments	9	27	27	20.2	16.9
Test and assess students	1.1	2.2	12.4	30.3	53.9
Maintain discipline	9	30.3	31.5	14.6	14.6

Moreover, the majority of the students thought that the teachers should integrate OL to correct errors and give feedback. 53.9% of them chose *often* or *sometimes* regarding teachers' OL use in correcting spoken errors, with 24.7% of them choosing *always* and only 7.9% expecting its omission. Meanwhile, 54% of the students perceived that the teachers should *often* or *sometimes* use OL in giving feedback for written assignments, while only 16.9% chose *never*. These findings of this study showing that OL use was preferred for correcting errors and giving feedback are different from those in some previous studies (e.g. Hall & Cook, 2013; Ja'afar & Maarof, 2016).

Regarding the teachers' OL use in checking students' comprehension, many of the students chose *often* and *sometimes*, 30.3% and 29.2% respectively, with 15.7% stating that they should *always* use OL for this purpose. During the interviews, Catherine mentioned:

"When the teachers utilised Bahasa for this function, more students give them response." (Catherine, grade 12)

In contrast, 24.8% of the students felt that the teachers should *rarely* or *never* utilise OL for this function. This result is consistent with the prior research (e.g. Manara, 2007). Nevertheless, like Hall's and Cook's (2013) study, OL was less preferred for assessment with 30% of the students choosing *rarely* and 53.9% choosing *never*.

Classroom Management Purposes

Most of the students thought that the teachers should maintain discipline using OL *sometimes* (31.5%), *often* (30.3%), or *always* (9%). This result is congruent with previous studies (e.g. Hall & Cook, 2013; Shuchi & Islam, 2016). Teachers' OL use can be useful to draw students' attention because indiscipline may happen when students do not understand what teachers are saying (Shuchi & Islam, 2016). One of the interviewees supports this statement:

"If English is used (to maintain discipline), most of the students may not pay attention to them [the teachers] ...because they don't understand." (Anna, grade 11)

In addition, the students chose *sometimes* (30.3%), *often* (21.3%), or *always* (14.6%) for the teachers' OL use for giving instructions. When interviewed, two students said that the teachers' OL use was needed for giving instructions for complex activities such as, making posters and collage. This research result is similar to previous research (e.g. Manara, 2007; Noor et al., 2015; Warsono & Mujiyanto, 2015).

Affective Purposes

The majority of the students wanted the teachers to use OL for affective functions. 60.7% of the students thought that OL should be used *often* or *sometimes* to build rapport with them. Only 9% of them to preclude OL for this purpose, while 20.2% of them chose *always*.

"...if they [teachers] use English just to talk to us, ...I have to speak English as well...it's quite difficult for me to express what I want to say in English fluently." (Mike, grade 10)

This finding is in line with previous research (e.g. Brook-Lewis, 2009; Thongwichit, 2013). The affective factors may not be the prominent consideration in some learning contexts where the purpose of learning English is to fulfil academic requirements (Edstrom, 2006). However, this result may show that many of the students might think that their relationship with the teachers is one of the important elements in their learning. As Cook (2001, p. 416) states, “the main benefit of the L1 for personal contact is naturalness...the teacher is treating the students as their real selves rather than dealing with assumed L2 personas.” In other words, OL use may allow students to be themselves who might need to utilise their linguistic repertoire.

Moreover, this research found that 25.8% of the students chose *often* and 34.8% of them chose *sometimes* regarding the teachers’ OL use to develop a relaxed classroom, with 23.6% selecting *always* and only 6.7% choosing *never*. Interestingly, all the interviewees said that the teachers created a good classroom situation by making jokes, for example:

“...if Bahasa Indonesia is used, of course there will be many students who laugh.”
(Catherine, grade 12)

“...typical Indonesian jokes are quite weird if they are translated into English. They are also related to cultures.” (Mike, grade 10)

In line with some studies (e.g. Brook-Lewis, 2009; Hall & Cook 2013; Hidayati, 2012), the result of this study showed that OL was preferred to create a comfortable classroom atmosphere. Following Canagarajah (1999, p. 132), teachers’ OL use should be incorporated especially in discussing issues about local events because it may help teachers in “putting students at ease, conveying teacher’s empathy and in general, creating a less threatening atmosphere”.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research revealed that the students’ perceptions of the teachers’ OL use seemed complex because even though many of the students perceived that the teachers should predominantly utilise English, they felt that OL should also be used for a range of purposes such as, for language-related purposes, classroom management purposes, and affective purposes. Additionally, the majority of the students considered it less desirable for the teachers to incorporate OL for assessment.

These research results may suggest that based on the students’ views, there is a room for the incorporation of OL in this school. However, to integrate OL, the cooperation from the

stakeholders, e.g. the school principal, the teachers, and the parents is required as the change in the policy might be needed. Despite this consideration, this study may inform that the monolingual policy may not be effectively implemented in this context due to the students' expectations of the teachers' OL use, their shared OL with the teachers, and their bi/multilingual repertoire.

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account. Due its small scale, the research results may not reflect and students' perceptions of teachers' OL use across Indonesia. Yet, this case study may be transferable to other contexts considering the usability of findings. Based on the research results, further research may discuss the extent to which the monolingual education and the power of English language may influence students' identities in Indonesia.

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