

## EXPLORING TEACHERS' PURPOSES IN USING FIRST LANGUAGE IN EFL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES: A CASE STUDY AT SMP N 4 PALEMBANG

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### ***Abstract:***

This study aimed to find out the the teachers' purposes in using first language in EFL classroom activities at SMP N 4 Palembang. This study is needed to find out the use of the first language in English lessons. This study used a qualitative research. One of the qualitative research designs applied in this study was case study design. The participant of this study were two of the English teachers at SMP N 4 Palembang. The data were collected through interview. The results of this study showed that the use of own language in EFL classroom at SMP N 4 Palembang is very helpful by the teachers in learning process. In addition, using first language in classroom has many benefits such as to giving instruction, defining vocabulary item, checking students comprehension and etc. Besides that, first language is necessary to be used because the students understand more in teaching and learning process. Finally, the use of own language is should be used in EFL classroom especially in the emergency situation.

### ***Keywords:***

Medium of instruction;  
First language;  
EFL classroom activities

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## INTRODUCTION

Many people know that language is the soul of a nation which as an identity or characteristic of a nation and is useful as a means of communication. Language is a tool for communication with other people. Brown (2007) mentioned that language is a means of communication. There are many languages all over the world. English is an example. English is an international and a global language, which means most of countries use this language. Crystal (2003) states that English is a global language, which various country and in various field are widely used.

English was learned by students in many schools in Indonesia. But, some teachers in some schools use native language or mother tongue (in this case Bahasa Indonesia) in English class. If a teacher only uses the target language without using the first language or the mother's language students do not necessarily understand well what the teacher explain. Dujmovic (2007) states that it is not necessarily efficient to avoid the L1 learners for the sake of maximizing the exposure of learners to the L2. It is important for teachers to consider using their mother tongue in a foreign language classroom.

Furthermore, the mother tongue is a language that is someone acquires first. According to Pokharel (2001) First Language, mother tongue and native tongue are common terms for the language which a person acquires first in his childhood because it is spoken in the family and/or it is the language of the country where he is.

In addition, the use of first language in EFL classroom have some advantages for the students. Alsied (2018) states the use of first language can have many advantages such as making everything clear to students understand, make the students more interested in the class and help them to pay attention.

Moreover, using the first language or mother tongue in English classroom has been debated and a controversial topic. According to Sharma (2006), it has always been contentious whether language educators should use the first language of the learners in their second or foreign language classroom. The use of the mother tongue or first language in the foreign language classroom is necessary in an urgent situation but does not dominate as a medium of instruction.

Medium of instruction is the language used to deliver a material. Lo and Macaro (2011) state that medium of instruction is the language used for the delivery of lesson content in subject other than language learning.

Some studies related to the use of first language have been conducted by some researchers. One of the studies was conducted by Sali (2013) investigate how Turkish teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) use the first

language (L1) in their classrooms. In addition, another study related to the use of first language was conducted in Turkey. It was conducted by Paker and Karaagac (2015) that aimed to find out to what extent the instructors in the school of foreign language at Pamukkale University used mother tongue in their classes. Besides these two studies, there was research related to the use of the first language by Alshehri (2017) considered the frequency and functions of using first language in EFL classes. This study show that the EFL teachers use first language to some extent to serve pedagogical functions, such as explaining vocabulary.

However, the two studies above focus on the use of first language at school and university level. In other words, the studies only focused on the use of first language in the class. Then, in the research the researcher focused on the used of first language and also the teachers' purposes in using first language. So, the researcher wanted to know about what the teachers' purposes in using first language in the class. This is important to know because a teacher must know what conditions require the use of the first language in the classroom.

The researcher concerned that there was no local study that exploring English teachers' purposes in using first language in the classroom at junior high school level. Moreover, what causes the teacher to use the first language in the classroom and what is the purpose. Hence, the researcher wanted to conduct this research, entitled "Exploring Teachers' Purposes in Using First Language in EFL Classroom Activities: A Case Study at SMP N 4 Palembang".

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Concept of Native Language**

To distinguish the concept of first language, mother tongue, native language, it is sometimes difficult because the distinctions are not always clear-cut. According to Saville and Troike (2012) to distinguish among the concepts of first language, native language, primary language and mother tongue, although these are usually treated as a roughly synonymous set of terms. Alja'arat and Hasan (2017) stated that the mother tongue is someone's first language.

### **First Language in EFL Classroom**

The use of first language in the classroom has a positively influenced for students in learning of target language (Fitriani et al., 2017). According to Alshehri (2017) English teachers allowed the use of L1 to some extent in their classroom. Therefore, the use of a first language can be a facilitator in the teaching process (Kayaoglu, 2012). First language or mother language it can

be a good way to learn target language. First language should not be a medium of instruction in the classroom or the other word first language should minimize in the classroom.

### **The Use of First Language**

According to Silvani (2014) there are some points about the use of first language by teachers, they were:

(a) Giving Instruction

The teachers often used English first in giving instruction, then when the students did not respond or understand it, the teachers translated the instruction into the first language, to make the students understand about what they should do. Sowell (2017) stated that, giving instruction has a direct effect on learning, such as lesson or activity become chaotic and fail when students do not understand what they are supposed to do.

(b) Explaining Complex Concepts

The teachers also preferred to use the first language in explaining complex concepts, especially grammar points to the students. It aims to help the students grasp the material more easily. In line with this, Khati (2011) states that most students felt that mother tongue should be used to understand the difficult concept better. In the other words, it is used to enhance students' comprehension about the concepts in target language.

(c) Defining Vocabulary Item

Beside those points, it is also found that the first language was used by the teachers and the students to define or to explain the new vocabulary items. Khati (2011) and Schweers (1999) claim that mother tongue or first language can be used to provide a quick and accurate translation of an English word that might take several minutes for the teacher to explain.

(d) Checking Students Comprehension

First language was also used for checking how well the students had understood the material. At the end of the lesson, the teachers often used first language to clarify the previous materials and check students' understanding by proposing several questions. Littlewood and Yu (2009) state that, teachers commonly use first language for ensuring understanding.

(e) Maintain Class Atmosphere

Sometimes, during the teaching and learning process, the teachers used first language to make a joke. When the teachers made a joke by using their first language, the students responded quickly and positively by laughing at the joke. Thus, the class felt more comfortable during the

teaching and learning process. Hayness and Backwell (2011) state that, when positive classroom exists, students feel a sense of belonging and are prepared to work and share information together.

### **Current Trend of Using First Language in EFL Classroom**

Trend of using first language in EFL classroom have their own impact. The impact or role given can be positive or negative. Sibarani (2019) also states that using first language in English classroom is positive. The students viewed Bahasa Indonesia use during English classroom is positive, since they found it easier and safer to understand the difficult concept. Beside that, Resmini (2019) in her study in Siliwangi shows that the use of Bahasa Indonesia by the teacher in general English classroom brought negative perception to the students.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

In writing this research, the researcher used a qualitative method. It is a method to understand the phenomenon. According to Creswell (2012) a qualitative study is needed to explore the phenomenon from the perspective of students. A case study as one approach of a qualitative method was used by the researcher. Case study is a sort of ethnographic study focused on a single unit, such as a person, group, organisation or a program (Ary et al., 2010). In addition Creswell (2007) states that case study research includes the study of a problem that has been investigated over time through one or more instances within a bounded scheme or various bounded systems, in-depth information collection involving various information sources.

We used interview to investigate orally some English teachers in order to get more information about teaching and learning at SMP N 4 Palembang to support the data. The purpose of the study was to know the purposes of using first language in EFL classrooms by the teachers.

### **Research Site and Participants**

The researcher conducted at SMP N 4 Palembang by using purposeful sampling technique. Creswell (2012) stated that in purposeful sampling, researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon.

Futhermore, convenience sampling were taken as one of purposeful sampling strategies to choose the participants. At SMP N 4 Palembang, there are four teachers of English and the researcher chose two of them by convenience sampling. In addition, convenience sampling is affordable, easy and subjects are readily available (Etikan et al., 2016). At that time only a few

English teachers were available. So participants of the study were two teachers of English at SMP N 4 Palembang.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### FINDING

The data obtained from the interview analyzed by using a thematic analysis were described as follows.

**Table 1**  
**Themes and Codes of Qualitative Data Gained from Interview**

Themes	Codes
Giving instruction	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Both teachers used first language in giving instruction for students in the classroom.</li> <li>2. The teachers used first language in providing direction on students' assignments to avoid their misunderstanding in doing the assignment.</li> </ol>
Explaining complex grammar	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Both teachers used first language in explaining complex grammar in the class.</li> <li>2. The teacher used first language in order to help students understand the material more easily about tenses.</li> <li>3. The teacher used first language to help students grasp in learning the part of speech.</li> </ol>
Defining vocabulary	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Both teachers used first language directly in defining vocabulary.</li> <li>2. The teacher used first language in explaining vocabulary item for students to give an accurate translation.</li> <li>3. The teacher used first language in teaching vocabulary to give a clear meaning without spending much time.</li> </ol>
Checking students comprehension	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Both teachers used first language in the classroom to check the students' understanding.</li> </ol>

Keeping classroom atmosphere	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Both teachers used first language in giving some questions to make it easier for students answer the questions and ensure the students are fully understand about the lesson.</li> <li>1. To make a classroom more comfortable when teaching and learning process, teacher 1 used first language to make a joke</li> <li>2. The teacher used first language in playing a game in the class to reduce the tension after learning the target language.</li> <li>3. Both teachers used first language in keeping classroom atmosphere to help students play an active role in the games or in a joke.</li> </ol>
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## DISCUSSION

After the researcher analyzed the results of the research by using thematic analysis, the researcher found that there were several purposes in using first language in EFL classroom activities. Those purposes are (a) to give instruction, (b) to explain complex grammar, (c) to define new vocabulary item, (d) to check students comprehension, (e) to keep classroom atmosphere. Therefore, the explanation of the purposes were described as following in order to know further much information about them.

Based on the findings from the teachers' response of interview, the researcher found that the teachers used first language to give instruction. It has a direct effect on learning, activity or lesson became fails when students do not understand what they are supposed to do. Using first language to instruct the students is considered to have a positive role in foreign language teaching. Silvani (2014) discovered that giving students' instruction by using first language could get the faster respond as the students easily understood about what they should do.

Besides, the reasearcher also found that the teachers used first language to explain complex grammar. This purpose was emergence because the use of first language can help the students in understanding the explanation of complex grammar from the teachers because first language is more easily to understand by them. Based on the observation, 52% of the teachers preferred to use first language in explaining grammar rules. A study conducted Khati

(2011) states that most students felt that first language should be used to understand the difficult concept better.

Then, the teachers also used first language to to define new vocabulary item is also the teachers' purposes in using first language. Based on the observation, the teachers used first language to gave students a new vocabulary. According to Fachriyah (2017), translation was needed to make the listener better understand the meaning of the statement or question in order to avoid misunderstanding. In addition, Khati (2011) claimed that mother tongue or first language can be used to provide a quick and accurate translation of an English word that might take several minutes for the teacher to explain.

The other teachers' purposes in using first language that we found to check students' comprehension. First language can help students for get a better understanding about the lesson. The use of first language in checking students' comprehension can helped the teacher to evaluate the success of teaching and learning process. According to Silvani (2014), the use of first language for checking students' comprehension may helped the teacher to evaluate the success of teaching and learning process. In addition, Littlewood and Yu (2009) mentioned that the teachers commonly use L1 for ensuring understanding.

Futhermore, another teachers' purposes in using first language to keeping classroom atmosphere. Establish rapport with students make a good classroom atmosphere. First language in establish good relation is needed to reduce students' anxiety in learning the target language. A study conducted by Silvani (2016) she found that first language can be used by the teachers for establishing good relationship with the students and also has beneficial effect to reduce students' anxiety in learning the target language.

In short, based on the research, the researcher found there were several teachers' purposes in using first language in EFL classroom activities. They were: (a) to give instruction, (b) to explain grammar, (c) to define new vocabulary, (d) to check students comprehension, (e) to keep classroom atmosphere.

## CONCLUSION

After the research was conducted, the teachers' purposes in using first language in EFL classroom activities at SMP N 4 Palembang consisted of five purposes, there were: (a) To give instruction as one of the teachers' purposes in using first language. Giving clear instruction to the students can ensure that the students fully comprehend what they need to do in the classroom; (b) To explain complex grammar, first language should be used to understand the difficult concept better; (c) To define vocabulary item, this was emerged to



make the students better understand the meaning and also provide a quick and accurate translation of target language; (d) To check students comprehension, the use of first language may helped the teacher to evaluate the success of teaching and learning process; (e) The last teachers' purposes in using first language to keep classroom atmosphere. The purpose emerged because it was important to help students to reduce their anxiety in learning target language.

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