

EFL Students' Disposition towards Classroom Bilingual Interaction

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ABSTRACT

Fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment could ultimately support better academic outcomes and language acquisition, Thus, this study explores the disposition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students towards bilingual interaction in the classroom. The research employs a case study design, gathering data through handing out questionnaire and classroom observations to understand students' attitudes and perceptions. The questionnaire is divided into four parts, they are attitudes towards bilingual interaction, benefits and challenges, teacher's role and strategies, and personal preferences and suggestions. This study was conducted in class IX Bilingual Class at MTsN Tsanawiyah Makassar with ten students as subjects of this research. By exploring Cummin's Interdependence Hypothesis (1979), findings indicate that students generally have a positive disposition towards bilingual interaction, recognizing its benefits in enhancing comprehension and facilitating language acquisition. The use of the first language (L1) alongside the target language (TL) in classroom settings is perceived as supportive, helping students grasp complex concepts more effectively. Additionally, bilingual interaction is seen to foster a more inclusive and engaging learning environment, promoting active participation and reducing anxiety associated with learning a new language. These insights suggest that incorporating bilingual strategies in EFL instruction can significantly improve students' learning experiences and outcomes. The study underscores the importance of teacher training in bilingual education methods to maximize the potential benefits for EFL learners.

Keywords: Bilingual; EFL Classroom; Interaction

INTRODUCTION

Being the first foreign language to be learned and spoken on an international scale, English has become an integral part of human life and a means of communication in all aspects of human endeavors. The fields of international relations, politics, advertising, and science all make extensive use of the English language. English is taught as the first foreign language in Indonesian schools, despite the fact that the country is home to many different languages. The English language is widely used and respected across the globe for a very basic reason. As a result, the Indonesian people will evolve into an intelligent and skilled community capable of dealing with both national and international development (Zein et al., 2020).

Currently, the government has made significant efforts to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia (Hamied, 2012). Numerous public schools are advocating for the implementation of a bilingual system, although this proposal has faced significant criticism. This approach has been implemented for several years in Indonesian public junior and senior high schools that adhere to standardized curriculum. Teachers in bilingual classrooms should possess two types of competencies (E. E. García, 2005). A balanced bilingual is a teacher that possesses fluency in two separate languages and can effectively

communicate in both languages across many contexts. Acquiring this particular ability in Indonesia can be rather challenging. Secondly, a dominant bilingual refers to a teacher who possesses superior proficiency in a specific language, typically the local language (Christian, 1994). Indonesia has numerous schools that implement multilingual education.

The government's significant efforts to enhance the quality of education in Indonesia have led to various innovative approaches and policies aimed at improving learning outcomes (Suherdi, 2012). One such approach is the incorporation of students' first languages in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) curriculum. By acknowledging and utilizing the native languages of EFL students, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment. This strategy not only helps in bridging linguistic gaps but also in fostering a deeper understanding of English, ultimately aligning with the government's broader educational objectives.

In the process of learning, the teacher is not the sole source of knowledge and instruction (De Swaan, 2013). Students also play a crucial role in achieving success in the classroom, as the learning process is centered around them. The fulfilment of a student's achievement hinges upon the presence of a clear emphasis in the learning process, which necessitates essential interaction between teachers and students to get the most effective conclusion.

Over years, the issue of utilizing the first language (L1) of English Foreign Language (EFL) students in a language learning context has been the subject of extensive scholarly investigation (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009; Carson, 2014; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Ellis, 2005; Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Macaro, 2002, 2005). Experts continue to reexamine whether the use of L1 in EFL classrooms is permissible, as no definitive decision has yet been reached. In the sphere of education, advocates for a monolingual or bilingual approach each have their own justifications for whether or not L1 can be used in an EFL classroom. They acknowledge their respective strengths and limitations; therefore, it is not possible to establish absolute prohibitions against either of these contrasting perspectives.

Cook (1999) is among those who support the utilization of L1 in the instruction of foreign languages. He holds the belief that the use of the first language (L1) is a helpful tool in teaching and learning the second language (L2), and it does not impede the learning process in the classroom. Integrating the use of the first language (L1) is essential in the elementary and pre-intermediate levels of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction and should be included in the course syllabi. This is because students at these levels are not sufficiently proficient in the target language and may not fully grasp crucial concepts during classroom interactions. Cook provides examples of instances in which English teachers employ their native language (L1) when teaching a foreign language. L1 is utilized to communicate the meaning of words or phrases and to provide explanations of grammar. (2) English teachers utilize L1 as a means of structuring the classroom, managing student behavior, providing directions, conducting teaching activities, and administering assessments.

Although numerous studies have examined the topic, there are no fundamental justifications for prohibiting the use of the first language other than to maximize students' exposure to the second language. The findings of Carson and Kashihara's (2012) study provide empirical evidence that L1 use is advantageous for students' L2 acquisition. They discovered that connecting L2 to L1 is the quickest method for students to learn L2. Hung et al. (2012) provides evidence for the reevaluation of L1 usage in ESL classrooms by

arguing that the use of one's native tongue should not be perceived as having disadvantages. One effective and efficient teaching strategy for clarifying meaning is to utilize the mother dialect. Once more, Cook (2001) contends that an exemplary bilingual could be a teacher who efficiently and effectively uses two languages.

This study provides valuable insights into effective strategies for enhancing bilingual abilities among EFL students. There is limited empirical evidence on the long-term impact of these strategies on students' proficiency in both their first language and English. Most studies focus on short-term outcomes, leaving a gap in understanding the sustained benefits and potential drawbacks of such approaches over an extended period.

METHOD

This study investigates the disposition of EFL students towards bilingual interaction in the classroom by using a case study design. The research employs a case study approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of students' attitudes and perceptions (Feagin et al., 2016). Within the qualitative design of a case study, the researcher delves deeply into a program, event, activity, process, or one or more people. Time and activity constrain the case(s), and over an extended length of time, researchers gather comprehensive information through a range of data collecting techniques. This study focuses on students at Class IX Bilingual at MTsN Tsanawiyah Makassar. A whole class consists 10 students becoming the subject of this study.

In collecting data, researchers handed out questionnaires to all subjects. A structured questionnaire is distributed to a larger group of students to collect quantitative data on their general attitudes towards bilingual interaction. The survey includes Likert-scale questions to measure the extent of students' agreement or disagreement with various statements about bilingual education. Besides, classroom observation is carried out in EFL classrooms to examine the actual use of bilingual interaction during lessons. To explore EFL students' attitudes and experiences regarding bilingual interaction in the classroom, researchers handed out questionnaires to students with Likert Scale as the measurement (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). The questionnaire is divided into four parts, they are: Attitudes towards Bilingual Interaction, Benefits and Challenges, Teacher's Role and Strategies, and Personal Preferences and Suggestions.

No.	Statements
Attitudes towards Bilingual Interaction	
1.	I feel more comfortable using my native language in the classroom.
2.	Using my native language helps me understand English better.
3.	I prefer to use my native language during difficult English lessons.
4.	Bilingual interaction slows down my English learning process.
5.	Using both languages in the classroom improves my overall language skills.
Benefits and Challenges	
6.	Using my native language in the classroom reduces my anxiety about learning English.

7.	Bilingual interaction in the classroom encourages me to participate more in activities.
8.	I find it challenging to switch between my native language and English in the classroom.
Teacher's Role and Strategies	
9.	My teacher often uses my native language to explain difficult concepts.
10.	It is helpful when my teacher uses my native language in the classroom.
11.	My teacher balances the use of both languages well in the classroom.
12.	I would like my teacher to use more of my native language in the classroom.
Personal Preferences and Suggestions	
13.	I prefer a classroom environment where both my native language and English are used.
14.	Bilingual interaction should be a part of the language learning curriculum.
15.	I am satisfied with the current use of bilingual interaction in my English classroom.
16.	I believe bilingual interaction positively impacts my English learning experience.
17.	Using my native language makes learning English more enjoyable for me.

The survey data is analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize students' overall attitudes towards bilingual interaction. The results provide a broader picture of the general disposition of the student population. The data from classroom observations is analyzed to identify the types and frequency of bilingual interactions. This analysis helps to contextualize the students' attitudes within their actual classroom experiences.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As this study aimed to explore how students perceive and react to the use of both English and their native language in the classroom setting, here is the results indicated several key findings based on the questionnaires handed out.

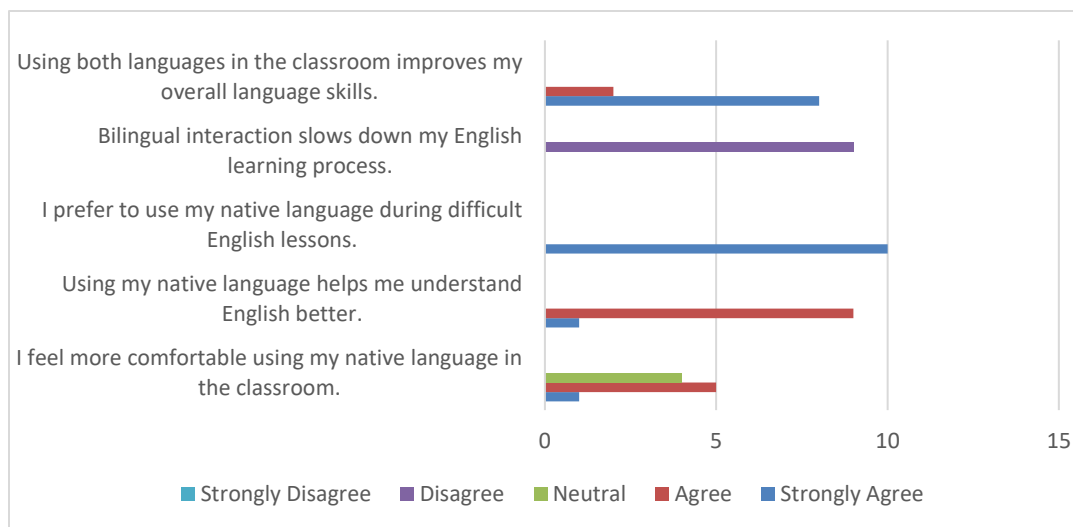


Figure 1. Findings of attitudes towards bilingual interaction

Based on the responses to the questionnaire, it is evident that EFL students have varied but generally positive attitudes towards bilingual interaction in the classroom. The majority of students reported feeling more comfortable using their native language during English lessons, suggesting that this practice helps alleviate anxiety and fosters a more supportive learning environment. Many students indicated that using their native language aids their understanding of complex English concepts, highlighting its role in enhancing comprehension and retention of new material.

A significant portion of the students expressed positive attitudes towards the use of bilingual interaction in the classroom. They felt that it helped them better understand the material and facilitated smoother communication with their peers and teachers. Specifically, students reported that when complex concepts were initially explained in English and then clarified in their native language, their comprehension improved significantly. This dual-language approach allowed them to grasp difficult topics more easily, as they could rely on their native language to fill in any gaps in their understanding of the English explanations.

Furthermore, bilingual interaction provided a bridge for students to engage more actively in classroom discussions and activities. When students encountered unfamiliar English vocabulary or intricate grammatical structures, they felt more comfortable asking questions and seeking clarification in their native language. This reduced the hesitation and anxiety often associated with speaking up in a foreign language, leading to more dynamic and inclusive classroom interactions.

Additionally, the use of bilingual interaction fostered a sense of community among students. They were able to collaborate more effectively with their peers, as the flexibility to switch between languages minimized misunderstandings and allowed for clearer communication. This not only enhanced their learning experience but also strengthened their social connections within the classroom.

Overall, the positive disposition towards bilingual interaction underscores its potential as a valuable pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms. By accommodating the linguistic needs of students, educators can create a more supportive and effective learning environment that promotes both academic success and personal growth.

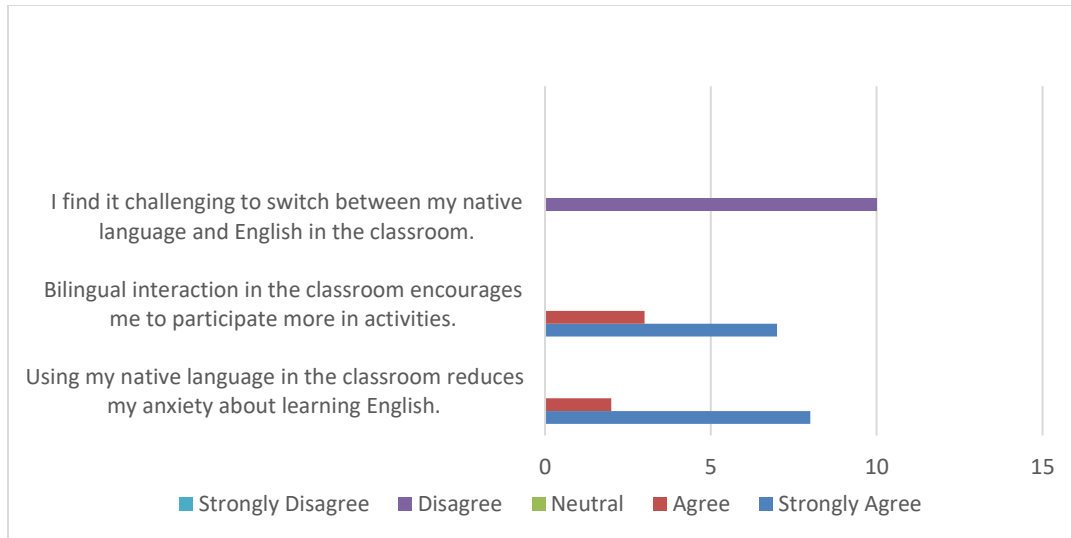


Figure 2. Findings of benefits and challenges

The findings from the questionnaire on the benefits and challenges of bilingual interaction in the EFL classroom reveal a nuanced perspective from students. On the benefits side, students overwhelmingly indicated that the use of their native language significantly reduces anxiety associated with learning English. This reduction in anxiety appears to facilitate a more comfortable and less intimidating learning environment, enabling students to engage more freely and confidently. Many students noted that bilingual interaction helps them grasp difficult concepts more effectively. When teachers switch to the native language to explain complex ideas, students find that their comprehension improves, which in turn boosts their overall academic performance and confidence.

Another major benefit identified is the increased participation in classroom activities. Students feel more at ease to contribute to discussions and ask questions when they know they can resort to their native language if needed. This inclusivity encourages a more dynamic and interactive classroom atmosphere, which is beneficial for language acquisition. Additionally, bilingual interaction seems to support the retention of new vocabulary and grammar, as students can draw parallels between their native language and English, aiding in the learning process.

However, the questionnaire also highlighted several challenges associated with bilingual interaction. A significant challenge reported by students is the difficulty in switching between languages, which can sometimes lead to confusion and cognitive overload. This challenge is particularly pronounced during more complex or fast-paced lessons, where the constant back-and-forth between languages can be disruptive. Some students expressed concern that relying too much on their native language might hinder their immersion in English, potentially slowing down their progress in achieving fluency.

There is also a perception among some students that bilingual interaction might create a dependency on their native language, reducing the imperative to practice and improve their English skills rigorously. This could lead to less exposure to English and fewer opportunities to develop language skills in a purely English-speaking context.

In conclusion, while the benefits of bilingual interaction in the EFL classroom are substantial—particularly in terms of reducing anxiety, enhancing comprehension, and

fostering participation—there are notable challenges that need to be addressed. Balancing the use of both languages to maximize the benefits while minimizing the drawbacks is crucial. This balance requires careful consideration and strategic planning by educators to ensure that bilingual interaction supports, rather than hinders, the language learning process.

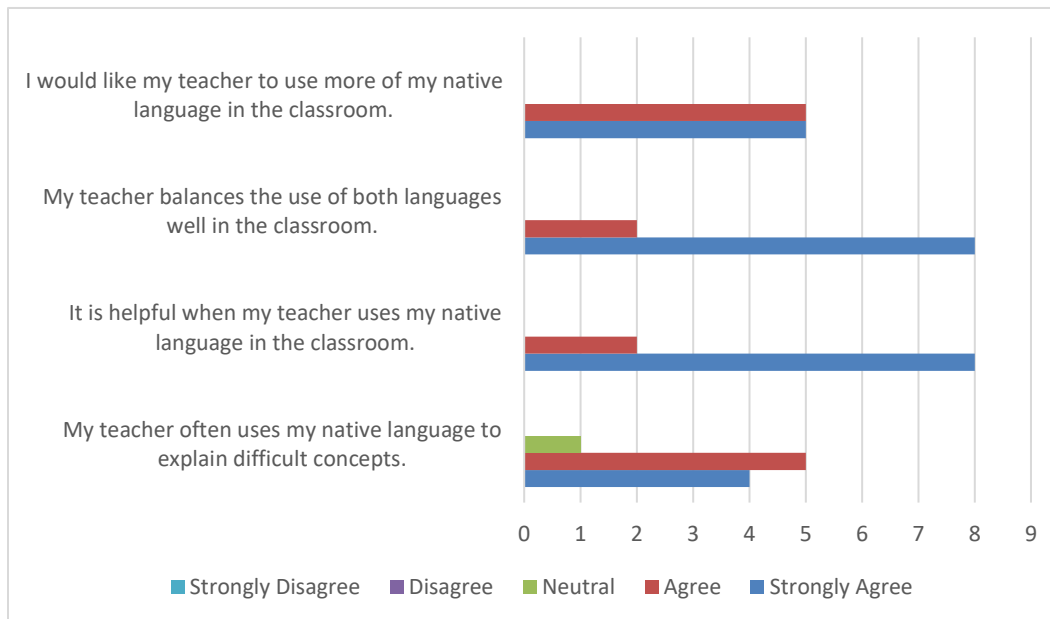


Figure 3. Findings of teacher's role and strategies

The findings from the questionnaire on the role and strategies of teachers in implementing bilingual interaction in the EFL classroom reveal several key insights into students' perceptions and experiences. Overall, students appreciate when teachers use their native language to explain difficult concepts. This strategy is widely seen as helpful and necessary, especially for clarifying complex grammar rules, vocabulary, and cultural nuances that might not be easily understood in English alone. When teachers judiciously use the native language, it bridges the gap between unfamiliar English content and students' existing knowledge, thereby enhancing understanding and retention.

Students also noted that effective teachers balance the use of both languages well, switching strategically to the native language only when absolutely necessary. This balance ensures that students are primarily exposed to English, fostering an immersive learning environment, while still providing the necessary support in their native language to avoid frustration and disengagement. Such a balanced approach is viewed positively by students, as it maintains the primary goal of learning English while acknowledging the practical need for occasional native language support.

However, there are variations in how often teachers use the native language, and students have differing opinions on the ideal frequency. Some students feel that their teachers use the native language too sparingly, leaving them struggling with understanding and feeling disconnected from the lesson. Others believe that too much reliance on the native language can impede their immersion in English, slowing down their language acquisition process. This indicates that the effectiveness of bilingual interaction heavily depends on the teacher's ability to gauge the appropriate moments for language switching.

In terms of strategies, students highlighted several that they found particularly effective. These include providing bilingual glossaries, using visual aids and bilingual explanations for complex topics, and creating bilingual handouts and resources. Additionally, some teachers encourage peer assistance in the native language, which students find helpful for collaborative learning and peer support.

Students also suggested that teachers could improve bilingual interaction by being more consistent in their approach and providing clearer guidelines on when and how the native language will be used. They appreciate when teachers explicitly state the purpose of switching languages and how it will benefit their learning process. Moreover, students feel that having opportunities to discuss their learning preferences and challenges with their teachers can lead to more tailored and effective bilingual strategies.

In summary, the role and strategies of teachers in bilingual interaction are critical to its success. Students generally support the use of their native language for clarifying difficult concepts and reducing anxiety, but they emphasize the need for a balanced approach that prioritizes English immersion. Effective bilingual strategies, clear communication from teachers, and consistency in practice are all pivotal in optimizing the benefits of bilingual interaction in the EFL classroom.

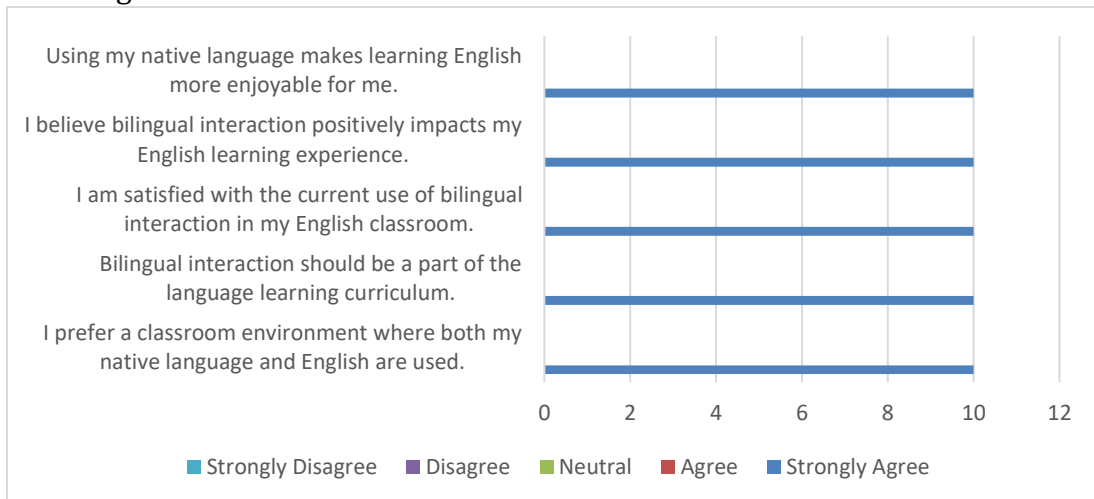


Figure 4. Findings of personal preferences and suggestions

The findings from the questionnaire on personal preferences and suggestions regarding bilingual interaction in the EFL classroom provide a comprehensive view of students' individual needs and aspirations for their learning environment. Overall, students express a strong preference for a balanced approach to bilingual interaction, where both their native language and English are used strategically to maximize understanding and learning efficiency. Many students highlighted that this balance helps them feel more secure and supported, particularly when grappling with difficult material or concepts.

A significant number of students prefer more frequent use of their native language, especially in initial stages of learning new topics. They believe this approach reduces cognitive overload and enhances their ability to grasp new concepts without feeling overwhelmed. However, they also recognize the importance of gradually increasing English exposure to build confidence and proficiency. This phased approach is seen as a way to

scaffold their learning, providing a solid foundation in understanding before moving towards greater immersion in English.

Several students suggested that the use of bilingual materials, such as glossaries, handouts, and visual aids, is particularly beneficial. These resources allow them to reference their native language while engaging with English content, aiding retention and comprehension. Additionally, students appreciate when teachers provide bilingual summaries or reviews at the end of lessons to reinforce key points and ensure clarity.

There is also a call for more personalized learning strategies. Students indicated that having opportunities to discuss their individual learning preferences and challenges with teachers can lead to more tailored support. They suggested that teachers could hold regular feedback sessions to understand better how bilingual interaction is impacting their learning and to make necessary adjustments.

Some students proposed incorporating more interactive and collaborative activities that utilize both languages. For example, group discussions or projects where students can initially plan and brainstorm in their native language before presenting in English. This approach not only builds confidence but also fosters a deeper understanding of the material.

Despite the general preference for bilingual interaction, a minority of students voiced concerns about becoming too dependent on their native language. They suggested that teachers should gradually decrease the use of the native language as students advance, to encourage greater immersion in English. This gradual reduction can help students become more comfortable with English and improve their fluency and confidence over time.

In conclusion, the personal preferences and suggestions from students underscore the importance of a balanced and flexible approach to bilingual interaction in the EFL classroom. Students value the use of their native language for support and clarity but also recognize the need for increased English exposure as their proficiency grows. Personalized strategies, bilingual resources, and interactive activities are key elements that can enhance the learning experience, making it more inclusive and effective. Teachers who actively seek and incorporate student feedback are likely to create a more responsive and supportive learning environment that caters to the diverse needs of their students.

Discussion

A significant portion of the students expressed positive attitudes towards the use of bilingual interaction in the classroom. They felt that it helped them better understand the material and facilitated smoother communication with their peers and teachers. This finding aligns with several theoretical frameworks and perspectives from scholars and recent research in the field of bilingual education and second language acquisition.

According to Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1979) proficiency in the first language (L1) can support and enhance the learning of a second language (L2). In this context, students' positive attitudes towards bilingual interaction can be attributed to the cognitive and linguistic support provided by their L1, which scaffolds their understanding of L2 content. By leveraging their native language, students are able to build on their existing knowledge base, making complex concepts in English more accessible. Cummin posits that there is a significant interrelationship between a learner's first

language (L1) and their second language (L2) proficiency. According to this hypothesis, the skills and knowledge acquired in L1 can transfer to L2, thus facilitating the learning process in the second language. This theory underscores the importance of a strong foundation in the native language, suggesting that bilingual education can be more effective when it builds upon a student's existing linguistic competencies.

Cummins argues that underlying cognitive and academic skills, which he refers to as Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP), are shared between languages. This means that literacy skills, critical thinking abilities, and conceptual knowledge developed in L1 can support and enhance the acquisition of L2. For instance, if a student has developed strong reading skills in their native language, these skills can transfer to reading in a second language, as both activities draw on similar cognitive processes such as decoding, comprehension, and inferencing.

The Interdependence Hypothesis challenges the notion that languages operate in isolation within the mind. Instead, it presents a more integrated view of bilingualism, where knowledge and skills in one language can bolster learning in another. This perspective has significant implications for educational practices, particularly in EFL contexts. It suggests that rather than viewing the use of L1 in the classroom as a hindrance, educators should see it as a valuable resource that can enhance L2 learning. Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis provides a robust theoretical framework for understanding the interconnectedness of bilingualism. It highlights the potential benefits of leveraging students' native language to support their second language learning and underscores the importance of bilingual education practices that recognize and build upon students' existing linguistic strengths.

Empirical studies supporting Cummins' hypothesis have shown that students who receive instruction in both their native language and the target language often achieve higher levels of academic success than those who are taught exclusively in the target language. For example, research indicates that bilingual students who develop strong literacy skills in their L1 are better equipped to transfer these skills to L2, leading to improved outcomes in both languages (Cummins, 2000). In line with Cummins, findings of García and Wei (2014) on translanguaging further underscores the benefits of bilingual interaction. Translanguaging refers to the dynamic process of using multiple languages in an integrated manner to make sense of the world and communicate. In the context of EFL classrooms, translanguaging practices enable students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, which enhances comprehension and allows for more meaningful participation. García and Wei argue that translanguaging not only supports academic achievement but also validates students' linguistic identities, fostering a more inclusive and affirming educational experience (O. García & Wei, 2015).

Moreover, studies have shown that bilingual education can lead to improved cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness. Bialystok (2011) found that bilingual individuals often demonstrate superior executive control, which helps them to switch between tasks and languages more efficiently. In the classroom, this cognitive flexibility translates to better problem-solving skills and adaptability, enabling students to navigate learning challenges more effectively.

In summary, the positive disposition of students towards bilingual interaction is supported by various theoretical perspectives and empirical research. The use of students' native language alongside English not only enhances comprehension and communication

but also aligns with best practices in bilingual education. By recognizing and integrating these insights, educators can create more effective and inclusive EFL classrooms that cater to the diverse linguistic needs of their students. Also, fostering a bilingual classroom environment for educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning experience for their students.

CONCLUSION

The research on EFL students' disposition towards classroom bilingual interaction reveals a generally positive attitude among students towards the use of bilingual methods in the classroom. Findings indicate that students in Class IX Bilingual at MTSn Tsanawiyah Makassar perceive bilingual interaction as beneficial for their language learning process. For instance, a study on students' perceptions towards teachers' bilingual language use in an EFL classroom found that a significant portion of students responded positively, indicating that bilingual interaction helps them understand the material better and facilitates their learning.

Moreover, the flexibility and fluidity in the use of the first language (L1) alongside the target language (TL) in the classroom are seen as advantageous by both students and teachers. This approach allows for a more inclusive and supportive learning environment, which can enhance students' engagement and participation. Additionally, the implementation of techniques such as translanguaging, where students use both languages interchangeably, has been shown to support communicative purposes and positively impact students' self-identity development.

Overall, the disposition of EFL students towards bilingual interaction in the classroom is favorable, with students recognizing the practical benefits of such an approach in enhancing their language proficiency and overall learning experience. This positive disposition underscores the importance of incorporating bilingual strategies in EFL teaching to create more effective and engaging learning environments.

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