STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO MONOLINGUAL AND BILINGUAL INSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

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Abstract

English proficiency is essential for global communication, but many Indonesian students face challenges in comprehension due to limited exposure. One key factor affecting student engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is the choice between monolingual (English only) and bilingual (English and Indonesian) instruction. While monolingual instruction promotes immersion, it often causes hesitation and confusion, particularly among lower proficiency learners. In contrast, bilingual instruction enhances comprehension and participation but may reduce English exposure. This study investigates students' responses to these instructional methods in an EFL Classroom at SMA Negeri 2 Batang. Employing a descriptive qualitative approach, data where gathered through classroom observations. The findings reveal that students in monolingual settings frequently exhibit silence, confusion, or reliance on peer assistance, whereas bilingual instruction lowers anxiety and fosters more active engagement. Teachers tend to adjust their strategies, primarily using English before incorporating Indonesian when necessary. The study suggests that a balanced instructional approach, prioritizing English while strategically using Indonesian can optimize student comprehension and participation. These findings contribute to ongoing discussions on effective language teaching strategies in EFL contexts.

Keywords: Student responses; Monolingual Instruction; Bilingual Instruction; EFL Classroom

INTRODUCTION

The role of English in global communication has made it a fundamental subject in education systems worldwide, including Indonesia. However, many Indonesian students struggle with English proficiency, particularly in speaking and listening. Limited exposure to English in daily life, coupled with anxiety about making mistakes, often hinders their confidence and participation. As a result, selecting an appropriate instructional approach is essential to facilitating effective language learning in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

Two instructional approaches are widely debated in EFL contexts: monolingual (English only) and bilingual (English and Indonesian) instruction. Proponents of monolingual instruction, such as Krashen (1985), argue that full immersion in the target language maximizes exposure, thereby enhancing acquisition and fluency. Diyani (2023) found that students in immersive English environments demonstrated greater speaking confidence due to consistent practice. However, this approach also presents challenges,

particularly for lower proficiency learners, as the absence of L1 support can lead to confusion, frustration, and disengagement (Cummins, 2000). Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982) suggests that heightened anxiety negatively impacts language acquisition, making it difficult for students to process and internalize new linguistic input.

Conversely, bilingual instruction integrates students' first language as a scaffolding tool, making lessons more accessible and reducing anxiety. Studies by McGroarty (2001) and Lestari et al., (2022) highlight that bilingual instruction, particularly through code switching and translation, enhances comprehension and promotes classroom participation. Manik & Suputra(2023) further emphasize that a bilingual approach fosters a supportive learning environment, increasing students' willingness to engage. However, some scholars caution that overreliance on L1 may reduce English exposure, potentially slowing down language acquisition (Baker, 2011). This tension underscores the ongoing debate over the balance between linguistic immersion and comprehension support in EFL classrooms.

Several studies have examined teacher-student interactions in Indonesian EFL contexts. Handayani & Cahyono(2024) found that while teacher talk, such as giving explanations and providing encouragement, positively influenced student engagement, the use of Indonesian limited immersive English practice. Similarly, Rahmawati et al., (2024) observed that while display (close ended) questions encouraged quick responses, they often led to passive participation, whereas referential (open ended) questions facilitated deeper engagement. These findings suggest that student responses vary depending on instructional strategies and the balance between English and Indonesian usage.

Building on these discussions, the present study investigates how monolingual and bilingual instruction influence student responses in senior high school EFL classrooms. It examines the types of responses exhibited under each instructional approach, including verbal expressions such as answering questions and seeking clarification, as well as non-verbal cues such as hesitation and reliance on gestures. Additionally, it explores interactional patterns, such as turn taking and the frequency of student-initiated responses. By analyzing these aspects, this study aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on effective instructional methods for fostering comprehension, participation, and confidence in EFL learners.

This research advocates for a balanced instructional approach, in which English remains the primary medium of instruction while Indonesian is strategically employed to enhance comprehension. Rather than adhering rigidly to one method, teachers should adopt a flexible approach that aligns with students' proficiency levels and cognitive needs. The findings of this study are expected to provide practical insights for educators, enabling them to navigate the complexities of instructional language choice and optimize student engagement in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

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METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, which is appropriate for exploring the complexity of classroom interactions and student responses. The research focuses on classroom observations at SMA Negeri 2 Batang to analyse student engagement under monolingual and bilingual instruction. Descriptive qualitative research allows for in depth exploration without manipulating variables, making it suitable for understanding naturally occurring behaviours in an educational setting. The study examines variables such as student participation, comprehension, and engagement within different instructional approaches.

Subject

The subjects of this study were senior high school students and their English teachers at SMA Negeri 2 Batang. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, ensuring they had experience with both monolingual and bilingual instruction. This approach allowed for a focused examination of student responses under different instructional methods. The selection criteria included students' proficiency levels and their exposure to various teaching styles. Teachers involved in the study were chosen based on their implementation of both instructional approaches in the classroom.

Instruments

Data were collected through classroom observations, during which the researcher took detailed field notes and recorded teacher student interactions using audio recordings. These methods ensured a comprehensive and accurate representation of student responses, engagement levels, and comprehension challenges during both monolingual and bilingual instructions. Observations were conducted systematically, and all recorded data were reviewed and cross checked to ensure reliability prior to analysis.

Data Analysis

The classroom observation data were analysed using Miles and Huberman (2014) framework, consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data condensation involved selecting relevant information from field notes and recordings, focusing on student engagement, participation, and comprehension. The organized data were displayed in descriptive summaries to identify trends in student responses. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on recurring patterns observed in classroom interactions, highlighting the impact of monolingual and bilingual instruction on student participation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results from classroom observations reveal significant differences in student responses to teacher instructions when using monolingual (English only) and bilingual (English and Indonesian) instructional approaches. The observations focused on how students processed, understood, and acted upon teacher instructions in various classroom situations.

1. Student Responses to Monolingual Instructions
a. Simple Instruction

When given simple instructions such as *"Please open page 54"* several students remained still, looking at their peers for clarification, indicating hesitation and confusion.

b. Complex instructions

When instructions were more detailed, such as *"Now it's time for you to discuss with your friend in pairs, then go directly to the column here and try to fill this column together with your friend. I'll give you 10 minutes,"* resulted in delayed responses. Some students asked for clarification, demonstrating difficulty in processing English only instructions.

c. Numbers and Pronunciation Challenges

Instructions involving numbers posed challenges. For instance, where students were asked to say *"1347"* in English, they frowned and looked puzzled until the teacher provided a visual aid, such as circling digits to guide pronunciation.

2. Student Responses to Bilingual

a. When the teacher reinforced instructions by code switching into *Indonesian*, student responses were significantly faster and more accurate. For example, when give instruction:

"Please buka page 54," Students responded with immediate action.

b. Instructions that were initially unclear, such as:

"Work in pairs,"
Become more effective when reinforced as:
"Work in pairs, berpasangan"
This clarification led to quick student compliance without hesitation.

c. The Role of Non-verbal Cues:

Non-verbal communication also played a crucial role in student comprehension. When students hesitated to flip to the correct page, the teacher demonstrated the action, which resulted in immediate and accurate responses.

3. Reinforcement through Repetition and Gestures

a. Improved Comprehension through Repetition: Students demonstrated better comprehension when the teacher repeated instructions in both languages. For instance, the instruction

"Write your answer in the column,"
Some students initially misunderstood the instruction. However, when the teacher pointed to the correct section while repeating the instruction, students followed it correctly.

b. Code Switching as an Effective Strategy: The use of code switching proved to be an effective strategy for ensuring student engagement and reducing passive behavior during the lesson.

The discussion section interprets the findings in relation to existing theories and research, aiming to explore how monolingual and bilingual instructional approaches influence student responses and engagement.

The results indicate that students struggled with comprehension when instructions were delivered exclusively in English. This led to hesitation, silence, or reliance on peers for clarification. This observation aligns with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis(1982),

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which suggests that language anxiety can hinder learning. When students encounter unfamiliar language input, their ability to process and retain information diminishes. The delayed responses observed in monolingual instruction further support Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985), which highlights the importance of interaction and feedback in language learning. Without opportunities to confirm their understanding through reinforcement in their first language, students were less likely to participate actively in classroom tasks. Despite these challenges, monolingual instruction was found to be beneficial for students with higher proficiency. Those who had greater exposure to English exhibited better comprehension and engagement, suggesting that full English immersion can be effective for advanced learners.

The use of bilingual reinforcement significantly enhanced student comprehension, participation, and confidence. This finding aligns with Cummins' Threshold Hypothesis(2000), which suggests that proficiency in the first language aids second language acquisition. By providing clarification in Indonesian, students were able to bridge gaps between their existing knowledge and new English input. Code-switching emerged as a key instructional strategy. The teacher's practice of delivering instructions first in English and then reinforcing them in Indonesian aligns with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), which emphasizes scaffolding as a crucial component of learning. When students received additional support in their native language, they were more likely to process and execute instructions accurately. The effectiveness of bilingual instruction is also reflected in research by Marian et al.,(2013), which found that bilingual learners often outperform monolingual learners in cognitive flexibility. Alternating between English and Indonesian allowed students to engage in active problem solving, fostering a more interactive and responsive classroom environment.

The observations suggest that a flexible instructional approach is the most effective. The teacher's strategy of starting with English and then reinforcing instructions in Indonesian aligns with Bruner's Scaffolding Theory(1983), which proposes that gradually reducing linguistic support helps students develop independence in language learning. Non-verbal reinforcement, such as gestures and visual cues, also played a significant role in enhancing student comprehension. This finding is consistent with research on multimodal learning, which suggests that combining verbal and visual elements improves retention and engagement (Mayer, 2009). Peer collaboration further supported student responses. When bilingual reinforcement was used, students participated more actively in discussions with their peers, reinforcing Vygotsky's(1978) argument that social interaction is essential to learning. By working together, students were able to clarify instructions and reinforce their understanding of the material.

CONCLUSION

This study highlights the significant impact of instructional language choice on student comprehension and participation. While monolingual instruction provides full exposure to English, it often leads to confusion, hesitation, and passive classroom behavior, particularly among students with lower proficiency. In contrast, bilingual reinforcement facilitates better comprehension and engagement, as students feel more confident in responding to instructions when provided with additional support in Indonesian.

The use of bilingual strategies such as code switching, repetition, and visual cues effectively bridged comprehension gaps, ensuring that students could follow instructions with minimal delay. These findings suggest that an optimal instructional approach involves a balance between monolingual exposure and bilingual reinforcement, ensuring both language acquisition and active classroom participation.

Future research could explore long-term impacts of bilingual instruction on language retention and whether gradual reductions in L1 support improve English comprehension over time. Implementing structured bilingual teaching strategies may enhance learning outcomes for EFL students, particularly in contexts where English proficiency varies widely among learners.

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