

Investigating the Use of Instructional Language in English Language Teaching

Shadia Luthmailia¹, Jismulatif², Supriusman³

English Study Program, Faculty of Teachers Training and Education,
Riau University, Indonesia

¹ shadia.luthmailia0613@student.unri.ac.id, ² jismulatif@lecturer.unri.ac.id,

³ supriusman62@gmail.com

Abstract

This research aims to analyze the use of the language of instruction in English language teaching at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau, as well as students' perceptions of the use of the language of instruction. This research used a descriptive qualitative method approach and involved three teachers and fifteen grade XI students selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using the Miles and Huberman flow model. The findings showed that the language of instruction most often used by teachers was mixed language (English and Indonesian) to facilitate students' understanding of the material taught. Students supported using mixed language because it helped them understand the material better, enriched vocabulary, created a more comfortable learning atmosphere, and reduced anxiety in the learning process. In addition, over-reliance on the mother tongue could hinder the development of students' English language skills. In conclusion, a balanced use of mixed language could improve the effectiveness of English language teaching while accelerating students' language acquisition.

Keywords: Language of Instruction; English Language Teaching; Mixed Language

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching in Indonesia dates back to the Dutch colonial era. When Indonesia became independent from the Netherlands in the late 1940s, English was chosen as the official foreign language taught in Indonesia (Dardjowidjojo, 2003). The instruction of English was significantly reinforced by the enactment of the Minister of Education and Culture Decree No. 096/1967, a regulation that remains in force to this day. Subsequently, the Indonesian government further underscored the formal recognition of English within the nation.

Globally, English functions as a lingua franca, enabling communication across a vast majority of countries. In the context of teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in classroom environments, the use of the first language (L1) is a widely observed practice. This phenomenon is particularly evident in nations where English is not the native tongue, such as Indonesia. Within the Indonesian educational system, English is designated as a foreign language and is systematically incorporated into the curriculum at all academic levels, from primary education to tertiary institutions. Educators in EFL classrooms often employ Indonesian as a supplementary medium of instruction. They contend that, in place of regional languages, Indonesian is predominantly utilized as the official language of instruction in schools. As a result, the use of Indonesian in EFL classrooms is an inevitable and practical necessity.

Teaching English in a country where most of the population uses their mother tongue as a means of communication is a big challenge for English teachers. Teachers need to put in more effort to make their students understand the material being learned and try to make the lessons have

value and meaning for their students. Teaching a foreign language is not easy. Teachers have to introduce a language other than their mother tongue.

In the region of Duri, the majority of the population regards Indonesian as their primary language or mother tongue. Indonesian serves as the principal medium of daily communication among community members. It is the predominant language utilized within the area and is also the language instilled in children from birth, forming the foundation of their linguistic development. Based on the survey conducted at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau, the researcher found that Indonesian is the mother tongue or first language for the students. In the teaching and learning process, the teacher uses mixed language which is Indonesian and English as the language of instruction in English language teaching in the classroom.

According to Sibarani (2019), using Indonesian in English classes is beneficial as it helps students understand difficult concepts more easily and safely. Experts suggest that using the first language can aid teachers in conveying points, giving instructions, and checking students' understanding (Atkinson, 1987). Teachers often use L1 to clarify material after attempting to explain it in the target language (Cook, 2001), providing better input for students to process and understand the target language (Turnbull & Arnet, 2002).

The role of a student's mother tongue in second language education, particularly in English as a second or foreign language, has been a long-standing controversy (Pardede, 2018). While some argue for reducing the use of the mother tongue to enhance target language acquisition, teachers should strive to teach in English as much as possible to help students master the language faster. However, in situations like explaining difficult concepts or providing additional explanations, teachers can use their native language.

Previous studies have shown that using the mother tongue as a language of instruction in English language teaching can contribute meaningfully to the learning process (Moningka, 2021). While teachers prefer using English as the language of instruction, the mother tongue can still be used alongside the target language. Using the mother tongue can facilitate tasks, increase students' confidence and motivation, and help them better understand the teacher's explanations (Ozfidan, 2017). Larsen-Freeman, as cited in Pardede (2018), argues that the complete avoidance of students' native language in second or foreign language classrooms is neither practical nor beneficial. Instead, the thoughtful and systematic integration of students' mother tongue can have a positive impact on language learning. For foreign language learners, particularly those with lower proficiency levels, the use of their first language (L1) can serve as an effective tool to facilitate the acquisition of the target language. Similarly, Macaro, as cited in Anggrahini (2019), identifies specific roles for L1 in L2 learning environments. These include using L1 to provide instructions and to translate and confirm students' understanding. An English-only policy in the classroom can lead to challenges, potentially disrupting communication and interaction between students and teachers. The strategic use of students' mother tongue, when appropriate, can act as a valuable support mechanism, particularly in situations where it enhances comprehension or addresses misunderstandings. In this regard, the mother tongue is generally viewed as a facilitative resource, employed selectively and primarily in circumstances where it aids the learning process.

Based on the research background mentioned above, the researcher is interested in conducting a study entitled "An Analysis of the Language of Instruction Used in English Language Teaching by Teachers and Perception of Students of SMA Negeri 5 Mandau," which aims to analyze the effective language of instruction used in the classroom learning process. It is hoped that this research could contribute to a better understanding of the appropriate use of language of instruction in English language teaching in the classroom, to improve the quality of learning and students' understanding of the material being taught.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive method approach. This research aims to analyze which language of instruction is more widely used in English language teaching by SMA Negeri 5 Mandau teachers and investigate students' perceptions of the language of instruction in English language teaching. Furthermore, descriptive qualitative research is research that explains the phenomenon of the research subject, behavior, perception, motivation, action, etc., holistically and describes the research results in the form of words and sentences (Moleong, 2010). The population of this research were teachers and second-year students of SMA Negeri 5 Mandau. In this research, the sample was selected using a purposive sampling technique. Fauzy (2019) explains that purposive sampling is a sampling method that is carried out by deliberately selecting samples that fulfill the specific criteria needed. The characteristics of the sample in this research were English teachers who use their first language or mother tongue and English as the language of instruction in teaching English and how students perceive the language of instruction. In this research, researchers used semi-structured interviews to collect data thoroughly.

Table 1. The Blueprint of the Interview

Variable	Indicator	Item Number	Total Item	Reference
An Analysis of the Language of Instruction Used in English Language Teaching by Teachers and Perception of Students of SMA Negeri 5 Mandau	Use of the Language of Instruction	QT: 1, 2, 4 QS: 1, 2, 4	6	(Alkarima, 2019), (Syandri, 2023)
	The Important Role of the Language of Instruction	QT: 3, 5, 10 QS: 3, 6, 10	6	(Alkarima, 2019), (Yoga Purandina et al., 2021)
	Advantages and Disadvantages of the Language of Instruction	QT: 6, 7, 8, 9 QS: 5, 7, 8, 9	8	(MohammedGibreel, 2018), (Yahya & Suwarjo, 2013)

The blueprint above is a reference for researchers to adjust in determining the interview questions respondents use to collect data. The interview questions used in this research consisted of 10 questions for each teacher and student. The data collected after the interview was analyzed using the flow model by Miles and Huberman (1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The researcher analyzed the data based on the research questions; (1) which language of instruction is more widely used in English language teaching by teachers of SMA Negeri 5 Mandau: English, Indonesian, or mixed language and; (2) what are the students' perceptions of the language of instructions used by their teacher. It was specified as follows:

1. The Analysis of the Language of Instruction is Used More in ELT by Teachers of SMA Negeri 5 Mandau
 - a. Students' Choice of Teacher's Language of Instruction in ELT

In this section, the researcher explains the results of the study regarding the language of instruction used by teachers in ELT. There are 3 items related to students' perceptions of the language instruction used by their teachers, namely items number 1, 2, and 4.

Table 2. The Finding of the Language of Instruction Used by Teachers in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage		
		English	Indonesian	Mixed
1.	Which language of instruction does your teacher use more in teaching English? English/Indonesian/mixed language?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)
2.	Do you agree that your teacher uses English/Indonesian/mixed language in ELT?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)
4.	Does your teacher often use English/Indonesian/mixed language in English learning?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)

Table 2 shows that teachers had consistent responses regarding the language used in their classrooms. T1, T2, and T3 use mixed language (English and Indonesian), where Indonesian is the students' mother tongue or first language (L1), and they use it both at home and school.

b. The Important Role of Mixed Language Use in ELT

In this section, the researcher explains the results of the important role of mixed language use in ELT for teachers. There are 3 items related to the important role of mixed language use for students, namely item numbers 3, 5, and 10.

Table 3. The Finding of the Important Role of Mixed Language Use in ELT for Teachers

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Agree	Disagree
3.	Does using mixed language improve students' understanding and ability of English during the learning process?	3 (100%)	0 (0%)
5.	Do you think using mixed languages plays an important role in ELT?	3 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 3 illustrates that in English language teaching, especially in EFL classes, the use of mixed language plays a very important role. Teachers can understand students better and can provide a clear understanding because they learn the material in both English and their mother tongue (L1), which also makes it easier for students to absorb and learn the material.

Table 4. The Effectiveness of Mixed Language Use in ELT for Teachers

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage		
		Effective	Most Effective	More Effective
10.	How effective is mixed language in helping students' understanding of English learning?	2 (66.7%)	0 (0%)	1 (33.3%)

Based on Table 4, 66.7% is effective which shows that the use of mixed language is effective to implement in the classroom if used wisely in ELT.

c. Advantages And Disadvantages of Using Mixed Language in ELT

In this section, the researcher explains the results of the advantages and disadvantages of using mixed languages in ELT. There are 4 items related to the advantages and disadvantages of using mixed languages for teachers, namely item numbers 6, 7, 8, and 9.

Table 5. The Finding of Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Mixed Language in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Improved Understanding	Mother Tongue Dependency
6.	Does the use of mixed languages in ELT have advantages and disadvantages?	3 (100%)	2 (66.7%)

Based on Table 5, the researcher found the advantages and disadvantages of using mixed language when teaching English. Teachers stated that using mixed language makes students understand complex material and concepts faster because it uses the language they use daily.

Table 6. Finding of Strategies Used in Mixed Language in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Agree	Disagree
7.	Does the strategy used in the use of mixed language support students' understanding of the learning material during the learning process?	3 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 6 demonstrates that the strategy of using mixed languages supports students' understanding to be better during the learning process.

Table 7. The Finding of Feedback Used in Mixed Language in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Agree	Disagree
8.	Does the feedback you get from students make students feel comfortable when using mixed language during the learning process?	3 (100%)	0 (0%)

Based on Table 7, the researcher stated that students feel comfortable and confident when the teacher uses mixed language because they know that they can ask questions in a broader context in Indonesian if they do not understand what to say in English.

Table 8 .The finding of the Challenge of Using Mixed Language in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Ensure Non-Reliance on Mother Tongue	Slow English Mastery
9.	What challenges do you face when using mixed language during the learning process?	2 (66.7%)	2 (66.7%)

Based on Table 8, the researcher found that the biggest challenge was ensuring that students did not rely too much on their Indonesian or mother tongue, which could slow down their English acquisition.

2. The Analysis of Students' Perceptions of the Language of Instruction Used by Their Teacher

a. Students' Choice of Teacher's Language of Instruction in ELT

In this section, the researcher explained the results of the study regarding students' choice of teachers' language of instruction in ELT. There are 3 items related to students' perceptions of the language instructions used by their teacher, namely items 1, 2, and 4.

Table 9. The Finding of Students' Choice of Teachers' Language of Instructions in ELT

No. —	Questions	Frequency and Percentage		
		English	Indonesian	Mixed

1.	Which language of instruction does your teacher use more in teaching English? English/Indonesian/mixed language?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)
2.	Do you agree that your teacher uses English/Indonesian/mixed language in ELT?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)
4.	Does your teacher often use English/Indonesian/mixed language in English learning?	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	15 (100%)

In Table 9, it can be seen that all respondents (100%) stated that students agreed when their teachers used mixed language (English and Indonesian) in English learning. In addition, all respondents (100%) indicated that their teachers often use mixed language in English learning whenever they teach them in class.

b. The Important Role of Mixed Language Use in ELT for Students

In this section, the researcher explains the results of the important role of mixed language use in ELT for students. There are 3 items related to the important role of mixed language use for students, namely item numbers 3, 6, and 10.

Table 10. The Finding of Important Role of Mixed Language Use in ELT for Students

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Agree	Disagree
3.	Do you think using mixed languages plays an important role in ELT?	15 (100%)	0 (0%)
6.	Does using mixed languages during the learning process make you understand the material better?	15 (100%)	0 (0%)

In Table 10, it can be seen that all respondents (100%) stated that students agreed that the use of mixed language as a language of instruction had a very important role. Based on their respective perspectives, each participant gave the same response regarding the importance of using a mixed language.

Table 11. The Effectiveness of Mixed Language Use in ELT for Students

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage		
		Effective	Most Effective	More Effective
10.	How effective is mixed language in helping your understanding of ELT?	10 (66.7%)	1 (6.7%)	4 (26.6%)

In Table 11, it can be seen that 66.7% of the respondents considered that mixed language is effective in helping their understanding and can be implemented in the classroom

c. Advantages and Disadvantages of Using Mixed Language in ELT

In this section, the researcher explains the results of the advantages and disadvantages of using mixed language in ELT. There are 4 items related to the advantages and disadvantages of using mixed language for students, namely item numbers 5, 7, 8, and 9.

Table 12. The Finding of Advantages of Using Mixed Language in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage		
		Advantages		
		Improved Understanding	Vocabulary Improvement	No Stiffness and Miscommunication
5.	What do you think are the advantages of your teacher using mixed language in ELT?	3 (20%)	7 (46.7%)	5 (33.3%)

In Table 12, they believed that the advantage of using mixed language as the most prevalent language of instruction in the classroom is that it helps students improve their English vocabulary.

Table 13. The Finding of Disadvantages of Using Mixed Language in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage		
		Disadvantages		
		Lack of Understanding	Slow Mastery of English Vocabulary and Communication	Needing Longer Explanation Time
5.	What do you think are the advantages of your teacher using mixed languages in ELT?	5 (33.3%)	3 (20%)	7 (46.7%)

In Table 13, it can be seen that 46.7% of respondents considered that the use of mixed language requires longer explanation time. In addition, they also added that the use of mixed language can sometimes hinder students' understanding to improve their English skills.

Table 14. The Finding of Students' Sense of Comfort Mixed Language Use in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage	
		Agree	Disagree
7.	Do you feel comfortable participating actively in class when the teacher uses mixed language in ELT?	15 (100%)	0 (0%)

Table 14 shows that 100% of students agreed that the use of mixed language as the language of instruction in the classroom makes them feel comfortable to actively participate in discussions and questions and answers during the learning process.

Table 15. The Finding of Feedback of Mixed Language Use in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage			
		Positive		Negative	
		Improved Understanding	Vocabulary Improvement	Mother Tongue Dependency	Lack of English Language Skills
8.	What feedback do you get from your teacher when she uses mixed languages in ELT?	11 (73.3%)	4 (26.7%)	3 (20%)	12 (80%)

Table 15 displays that the positive feedback from using mixed language as the language of instruction in the classroom can improve students' English comprehension and vocabulary. In addition, there is a negative feedback that students get in using mixed language, which is the lack of students' skills in communicating or speaking English. Students also added that they became dependent on their mother tongue.

Table 16. The Finding of the Challenge of Mixed Language Use in ELT

No.	Questions	Frequency and Percentage
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	Spelling Sounds Similar	Mother Tongue Dependency	Lack of Understanding and Some Confusion
9. What challenges do you face when your teacher uses mixed language in ELT?	4 (26.7%)	6 (40%)	5 (33.3%)

Table 16 illustrates that 40% of students experienced reliance on their mother tongue when the teacher used mixed language. Students added that there are spellings of vocabulary that sound almost the same. Students also stated that other challenges include confusion in learning consistently which hinders their progress and understanding in communicating effectively.

Discussion

The findings of this research show that teachers use mixed language, namely English and Indonesian, and students also support the use of this mixed language in English Language teaching in the classroom. This mixed language helps the teacher in explaining the material, helps students to understand more clearly, and accelerates the mastery of English. This can be seen from the overall average results of the interviews. All participants agreed to use mixed language in teaching English in the classroom.

Based on the analysis of the interview results related to the first research problem formulation, the three teacher respondents in this research showed consistency in the choice of language of instruction used, namely the use of mixed language, to make it easier for students to understand the material taught. Teachers agreed that the use of mixed language in EFL classes has a very important role. The use of mixed language shows teachers' awareness of the importance of mastering students' first language (L1), namely Indonesian, as a bridge in teaching English. Teacher T1, for example, explained that she starts by using English in the teaching process, but then involves Indonesian to ensure students' understanding. This is done because although English remains dominant in the delivery of materials, the use of Indonesian is considered important to improve students' connectedness and comprehension skills to more complex materials.

T2 and T3 support the view that the use of mixed languages in teaching can provide comfort for students, which will ultimately improve their proficiency in English. According to Schweers, cited in Turin (2017), supports the theory that starting with L1 gives students a sense of comfort and validates their experience so that they can express themselves. They believed that the language of instruction used in the learning process has an important role in facilitating effective knowledge transfer. Therefore, the language that students use daily at home and school (Indonesian) needs to be involved in the teaching process to help students recognize and master English more easily. In addition, it can reduce anxiety during the learning process and allow students to express their ideas freely.

When explaining the material, especially in classes where most students have low English proficiency, the teacher can better convey it to students by using a combination of English and their native language. The theory that L1 learner avoidance is almost impossible, especially with monolingual and low language proficiency students, is supported by Alshehri (2017). By speaking to students in their mother tongue, the teacher builds rapport with them which will enable them to achieve the objectives of the session. The teacher believed that by having a mixed language class, they do not need to explain things repeatedly. Although the explanation of the material becomes a little longer.

In English classes, speaking in one's native language also helps with understanding difficult material. Students' mother tongue helps the teacher in facilitating classroom activities, especially when it comes to target language grammar issues (Surayatika, 2019). The teacher stated that it is very important to use L1 in such situations. In English, grammar is similar to arithmetic. If the teacher speaks in a language that is foreign to the students, it will be difficult to understand.

Nonetheless, mixed language use plays an important role in the EFL classroom. Overusing the mother tongue can also hinder learning. Students become less able to communicate and cannot become better in English. Target language learning will be hindered if the teacher is allowed to use students' L1 (Mansory, 2019). In addition, since they will be dependent on using the L1, students may become stiff when speaking as a result of their lack of experience.

The teacher of SMA Negeri 5 Mandau decided to use mixed languages as the language of instruction in the classroom. However, the teacher used English more often than the students' mother tongue. Brandeker as cited in Mansory (2019) supports the idea that one of the key components of learning is giving students as much exposure to the L2 as possible. For students to quickly become fluent in the target language, the teacher felt that they must get used to using it. However, it is impossible to completely avoid using the mother tongue during the learning process. The teacher also realized that there are other situations where educating students who do not speak English well or explaining complicated material would benefit greatly from using the mother tongue.

Concerning the formulation of the second research problem, students expressed agreement with the use of a mixed-language approach as the medium of instruction in English language teaching. In this context, the mother tongue can serve as a supplementary language to enhance students' comprehension and facilitate a deeper understanding of the material. The students believed that teaching EFL students in their mother tongue was completely unavoidable. Although it is important, its use should be minimized.

Based on the interviews conducted with fifteen students, all participants expressed support for the integration of a mixed-language approach in the English learning process. This indicates their endorsement of combining both the mother tongue and English as mediums of instruction. The students expressed a preference for teachers to utilize a mixed-language strategy in the classroom, as they believe it enhances their learning experience and comprehension. The use of English more dominantly used by teachers during the learning process is one of the strategies to help students become more proficient in using the target language in daily activities. Auerbach as cited in Anggrahini (2019) supports the idea, that students learn faster if they are exposed to English more often. They do this because they are used to it. In addition, using mixed language helps improve students' understanding of more complex material, creates a more relaxed learning atmosphere, and reduces students' anxiety during the learning process. However, the excessive use of mixed language also has the negative side of students' dependence on their mother tongue, which potentially hinders their ability to communicate and improve their fluency in English.

The students also appreciated the use of mixed language in the English learning process held twice a week. They have the opportunity to practice using English. In addition, if the teacher uses English as the main language in teaching too often, it might be a challenge for students who have low English proficiency. Besides, students who often use their mother tongue will find it difficult to acquire English vocabulary, which makes them stiff when speaking in English. Metruk and Hanakova (2017) provided evidence supporting the theory that a teacher can help students get used to speaking English naturally by using the language most of the time in class by giving students more English listening and speaking practice.

CONCLUSION

Based on discussions, this research shows that the use of mixed language, which is a combination of English and Indonesian, in English language teaching at SMA Negeri 5 Mandau, is considered effective by teachers and well received by students. Teachers use mixed language as a way to explain material more clearly and to ensure students' understanding of the target language (English). By combining English as the main language and Indonesian for certain explanations, teachers provided comfort to students and reduced their anxiety in the learning process. However, excessive use of the mother tongue can hinder students' ability to develop English language skills. Therefore, teachers need to balance the use of mixed languages with more exposure to English so that students become more accustomed and skilled in using the language.

The students support the use of mixed language in English language teaching as it helps them understand the material better and creates a more relaxed learning atmosphere. Students feel that their mother tongue acts as an intermediary to understand more complex concepts in English, as well as reducing anxiety in the learning process. However, they also realized that more frequent exposure to English was necessary for their English speaking and comprehension skills to improve. While the use of a mixed language helps in learning new vocabulary, students also agreed that relying too much on Indonesian can hinder their progress in becoming more fluent in English.

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