

## **Language Dynamics in EFL Classrooms: Insights from Islamic Junior High School Teachers in Jambi on the Use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic**

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### **Abstract**

*This study explored the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Islamic junior high schools in Jambi, Indonesia. The research aimed to understand the dynamics of using these languages in EFL classrooms and to gather teachers' perspectives on this practice. Through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, the study identified the benefits, challenges, and impacts of incorporating Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic into EFL instruction. The findings suggested that strategic use of these languages can enhance comprehension, classroom management, and cultural relevance, but also presented challenges in balancing language use and meeting institutional and community expectations.*

**Keywords:** *EFL Teaching, Bahasa Indonesia, Arabic Language, Teacher Perceptions, Islamic School.*

### **Abstrak**

Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi penggunaan Bahasa Indonesia dan Bahasa Arab dalam pengajaran Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL) di SMP Islam di Jambi, Indonesia. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk memahami dinamika penggunaan bahasa-bahasa tersebut di kelas EFL dan untuk mengumpulkan perspektif guru mengenai praktik ini. Melalui wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi kelas, penelitian ini mengidentifikasi manfaat, tantangan, dan dampak memasukkan Bahasa Indonesia dan Arab ke dalam pengajaran EFL. Temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan bahasa-bahasa tersebut secara strategis dapat meningkatkan pemahaman, pengelolaan kelas, dan relevansi budaya, namun juga menghadirkan tantangan dalam menyeimbangkan penggunaan bahasa dan memenuhi harapan institusi dan komunitas.

**Kata Kunci:** Pengajaran EFL, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Arab, Persepsi Guru, Sekolah Islam.

## **A. INTRODUCTION**

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesia, especially in Islamic schools, presents unique challenges. Bahasa Indonesia, the national language, and Arabic, a language of religious importance, are often used alongside English in the classroom. This study focused on one Islamic junior high school in Jambi, where the use of these languages impacts the teaching-learning process and students' success in mastering English.

Bahasa Indonesia, as the national language, plays a central role in communication and education in Indonesia. It is used to teach a variety of subjects, including science, mathematics, and social studies (Raja & Nagasubramani, 2018). Its use in EFL classrooms

facilitates concept clarification and vocabulary building, providing a foundation for English language learning. Additionally, Arabic holds significant importance in Islamic education, particularly for comprehending religious texts and practices. Its inclusion in the curriculum contributes to religious literacy and enhances students' language skills.

The utilization of the first language (L1) in EFL teaching has been a subject of debate among scholars. While some advocate for its strategic use to aid comprehension, manage the classroom effectively, and provide emotional support (Cook, 2001; Harmer, 2007; Alrabai, 2014), others caution against overreliance on L1, which may hinder students' immersion in the target language and impede their language development (Krashen, 1985).

Teachers' perceptions significantly influence their language instruction practices and, consequently, student learning outcomes. Factors such as training, experience, and institutional policies shape teachers' attitudes towards L1 use, impacting language proficiency, engagement, and motivation among students (Brown, 2007; Creswell, 2014; Zacharias, 2012).

Nurul Ilmi Islamic junior high school in Jambi provide a unique context for language instruction, integrating religious education with general education. The curriculum encompasses both national subjects taught in Bahasa Indonesia and religious studies conducted in Arabic, reflecting the cultural and religious relevance of language use within this institution.

While there exists substantial research on L1 use in EFL classrooms, studies specific to the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in Islamic education in Jambi are limited. This research aimed to bridge this gap by exploring teachers' perceptions and the dynamics of language use in this unique educational setting, considering its implications for student learning outcomes and language proficiency in English.

Understanding the interplay between teachers' perceptions and language use is essential for comprehensively addressing the challenges and opportunities in EFL teaching within the context of Islamic education in Jambi.

### **Problem Formulation**

This research addressed the following questions:

1. What are teachers' perceptions of using Bahasa Indonesia in EFL teaching in Islamic junior high schools in Jambi?

2. What are teachers' perceptions of using Arabic in EFL teaching in Islamic junior high schools in Jambi?
3. How does the dynamic use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic affect the teaching-learning process in EFL classrooms?
4. What are the challenges and benefits faced by teachers in using these two languages in EFL teaching?

### **Research Objectives**

1. Identify teachers' perceptions regarding the use of Bahasa Indonesia in EFL teaching.
2. Identify teachers' perceptions regarding the use of Arabic in EFL teaching.
3. Analyze the impact of using Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic on the teaching-learning process in EFL classrooms.
4. Explore the challenges and benefits faced by teachers in using these languages in EFL teaching.

### **Significance of the Study**

#### **a. Theoretical Benefits**

This research enriches the academic literature on the use of instructional languages in EFL teaching, particularly within Islamic schools in Indonesia.

#### **b. Practical Benefits**

It offers guidance for EFL teachers in Islamic schools on effective strategies for using Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in teaching.

#### **c. Policy Benefits**

The study provides insights for educational policymakers in designing curricula and policies that support effective language use in EFL teaching.

### **Scope of the Study**

The study focuses on Islamic junior high schools in Jambi, gathering data from teachers' perceptions without deeply including students' perspectives. It relies on interviews and observations rather than experimental interventions.

## **B. RESEARCH METHOD**

### **Participants**

The research design employed a qualitative case study approach, drawing inspiration from Yin (2014), to delve deeply into the intricacies of teachers' perceptions and the complex dynamics of language use within a specific educational context.

### **Participants**

The participants consisted of two female English language teachers selected from an Islamic junior high school in Jambi. Teacher A, with 14 years of teaching experience, holds a background in English education and has previously taught at both primary (SD) and junior high school (SMP) levels. On the other hand, Teacher B, with 10 years of teaching experience, also possesses a background in English education and has taught in various settings, including courses, tutoring centers (bimbel), and schools at the primary and junior high school levels.

### **Data Collection Methods**

In the semi-structured interviews, participants shared detailed insights into their perceptions and experiences, with a specific focus on the utilization of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL teaching. These interviews aimed to capture nuanced perspectives and understand the dynamics of language use in the classroom.

Complementing the interview data, classroom observations offered valuable contextual information, enriching and validating the findings from the interviews. These observations delved into language use frequency, instructional strategies employed by teachers, and levels of student engagement during EFL lessons. By triangulating data from interviews and observations, a comprehensive understanding of the role of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL teaching was achieved, shedding light on effective practices and areas for improvement.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis followed a thematic approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and observation notes underwent coding using a blend of deductive and inductive methods. This coding process enabled the organization of coded data into coherent themes that captured the essential aspects of teachers' perceptions and practices. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the study. Informed consent was diligently obtained from all participants, ensuring their understanding of the study's objectives and their right to withdraw at any point. To uphold confidentiality, both participants and the school were anonymized, with pseudonyms used in all data presentations. Furthermore, stringent measures

were implemented to safeguard data security, with access restricted solely to the researcher. Following the study's conclusion, audio recordings and transcripts will be securely destroyed.

## **C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Bahasa Indonesia in EFL Classrooms**

#### **Facilitation of Comprehension**

Teachers emphasized that using Bahasa Indonesia helps students understand complex concepts more quickly.

- Teacher A: "Explaining grammar points in Bahasa Indonesia helps students grasp concepts more quickly."
- Teacher B: "Using Bahasa Indonesia clarifies difficult topics, making lessons more accessible."

#### **Classroom Management and Discipline**

Bahasa Indonesia is crucial for classroom management and maintaining discipline.

- Teacher A: "For instructions and managing behavior, Bahasa Indonesia ensures all students understand what is expected."
- Teacher B: "Bahasa Indonesia keeps the class orderly and focused, especially for complex instructions."

### **Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Arabic in EFL Classrooms**

#### **Religious and Cultural Relevance**

Arabic helps reinforce students' religious and cultural identity.

- Teacher A: "Using Arabic helps students stay connected to their roots."
- Teacher B: "Integrating Arabic makes learning more meaningful as it aligns with religious studies."

#### **Cognitive and Linguistic Benefits**

Learning Arabic contributes to overall linguistic development and complements English learning.

- Teacher A: "Learning Arabic develops cognitive skills beneficial for learning English."
- Teacher B: "Arabic's linguistic structure aids in understanding English grammar and vocabulary."

## **The Impact of Language Dynamics on Teaching and Learning Enhanced Comprehension and Engagement**

Strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic improves comprehension and student engagement.

- Teacher A: "Switching between languages keeps students engaged and helps them understand better."
- Teacher B: "Using familiar languages motivates students and makes learning more interactive."

### **Balancing Language Use**

Teachers face challenges in balancing language use to ensure sufficient exposure to English.

- Teacher A: "Finding the right balance is crucial. Too much L1 can hinder English immersion."
- Teacher B: "We need to ensure students get enough English practice while using L1 for support."

## **Challenges and Benefits of Using Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL Teaching**

### **Benefits**

- Enhanced Understanding: Using L1 aids comprehension and reduces cognitive load.
- Cultural Relevance: Arabic use strengthens cultural and religious connections.
- Classroom Management: L1 ensures clarity in instructions and behavior management.

### **Challenges**

- Balancing Exposure: Ensuring enough English exposure while using L1 for support.
- Student Dependence: Preventing over-reliance on L1, which can impede English proficiency.
- Institutional Expectations: Aligning language use with institutional and community expectations.

## **Summary of Findings**

The study reveals that teachers view the use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic as beneficial for comprehension, cultural relevance, and classroom management. However, they also acknowledge the need to balance language use to ensure sufficient exposure to English.

## **D. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

The strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic in EFL classrooms in Islamic junior high schools in Jambi enhances student comprehension, engagement, and cultural relevance. Teachers recognize both the benefits and challenges of this practice, emphasizing the importance of balancing language use.

### **Recommendations**

1. Professional Development: Training for teachers on effective strategies for using L1 and L2 in EFL teaching.
2. Curriculum Design: Developing curricula that integrate Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic without compromising English exposure.
3. Further Research: Expanding research to include students' perspectives and broader geographical areas.

### **Limitations**

The study's findings are based on a small sample size and specific context, which may limit generalizability. Future research should include a larger sample and diverse educational settings.

### **Final Thoughts**

Understanding the dynamics of language use in EFL classrooms is crucial for enhancing teaching practices and student outcomes. By recognizing the roles of Bahasa Indonesia and Arabic, educators can create more effective and culturally relevant learning environments.

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