Code Switching in BIPA Classes: Teachers and Students' Attitudes

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Abstract

The controversy of using L1 or L2 only in second language classes has been widely discussed in many studies. Some teachers, however, opt for the middle ground by employing the bilingual approach; they practice code switching to some extent to facilitate teaching learning process. In the context of BIPA teaching and learning this issue has not been sufficiently addressed. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the teachers as well as the students' attitude towards the practice of code-switching in BIPA classes, specifically in the basic level classes. The factors behind its practice will also be discussed in the light of its benefit and hindrance for teaching learning process. This study employed a quantitative research design by conducting a survey and a qualitative research design by interpreting the result of the interview with the teachers and students. In general the study indicates the need of code-switching to support teaching and learning process, especially for the beginner level classes.

Keywords: attitudes, code-switching, BIPA , L1, L2, teaching and learning process

Abstrak

Kontroversi penggunaan hanya bahasa pertama atau bahasa kedua saja dalam kelas bahasa kedua telah banyak dibahas dalam banyak penelitian. Meskipun demikian, sebagian pengajar memilih jalan tengah dengan menggunakan pendekatan dwi-bahasa; mereka menggunakan alih kode sampai kadar tertentu untuk memudahkan proses belajar mengajar. Dalam konteks belajar mengajar BIPA isu ini kurang banyak dibahas. Karena itu, studi ini ingin mengkaji sikap para pengajar maupun pelajar terhadap praktek alih kode di kelas BIPA, khususnya di kelas tingkat dasar. Faktor-faktor di balik praktek tsb juga akan dibahas

dalam perspektif kelebihan dan kekurangannya untuk proses belajar mengajar. Penelitian ini bersifat kuantitatif dengan mengadakan survei dan juga kualitatif dengan melakukan intepretasi terhadap hasil wawancara dengan pengajar dan pelajarnya. Secara umum, studi ini mengindikasikan perlunya alih kode untuk mendukung proses belajar mengajar, khusunya untuk kelas tingkat dasar.

Kata kunci: sikap, alih kode, BIPA, bahasa pertama, bahasa kedua, proses belajar mengajar

Introduction

Wardaugh (2006, 96) lables a code as " a language or a variety of language"; thus code-switching as Nunan and Carter (2001, 275) described can refer to "a phenomenon of switching from one language to another in the same discourse". In terms of occurrence Wardaugh (p. 104) divides code-switching into two kinds: situational and metaphorical. The first one occurs when one code or language is used in a certain situation such as at school, home, office, etc, without a change of topic whereas the metaphorical code-switching happens when the topic of the conversation changes. Moreover, metaphorical code-switching also involves the participants' feeling towards the situation, whether it is formal or informal, personal or official, serious or humorous, or they feel the need to be polite or not. In the context of teaching Bahasa Indonesia in BIPA classes there is a direct interaction between the Indonesian teachers and the students who are the native speakers of various languages or codes. Because of the specific situation, the code-switching in a BIPA class as a foreign language class can be considered situational (Ibrahim et al., 2013). There are always issues whether teachers and or students should use Bahasa Indonesia only or they can alternate from Bahasa Indonesia to the students' first language (L1) or English as the lingua franca. Even though the practice of code-switching is common and often inevitable in teaching a foreign language, the proponents of monolingual and bilingual approaches still have disagreement over this practice. Sipra's study (2013) shows that bilingualism gives positive contribution in EFL classrooms as a teaching aid and to make instruction easier and efficient in terms of time. In their research Tian & Macaro (2012) also assert that explaining vocabulary by code-switching is more effective than doing it only in the target language. In the setting of teaching English as a second language in Srilanka, Makulloluwa (2013) reports that most teachers has a positive attitude toward the use of L1 in their classrooms. L1 plays the role as a mediator so that the interaction between teachers and students goes well. Despite the disagreement on the exclusion or inclusion of L1, there is still the issue of balancing the use of L1/English and L2. Turnbull & Arnett (2002) as cited in Littlewood and Yu (2013) state that most teachers agree on using Target language (TL) as much as possible but there seems to be no agreement on the role of L1. With those background issues in

mind this study tried to find out the attitudes of both teachers and students on the practice of code-switching in BIPA classes and explore the reasons behind the practice.

Research Questions
a. What is teachers' attitude towards the practice of code-switching in BIPA classes?
b. What is students' attitude towards the practice of code-switching in BIPA classes?

Research Methodology
This study employed quantitative as well as qualitative approaches to acquire the data. Two types of questionnaires were distributed to BIPA teachers and students respectively; interviews were conducted to confirm and elicit more in depth responses. The question format is the combination of short answer, multiple choice, and Likert scale. The short answer and multiple choice questions were intended to elicit the respondents' background whereas the Likert scale would give information on the respondents' attitude towards code-switching.

Teacher Participants
This study involved 44 teachers with the composition six respondents teaching BIPA overseas (Qatar, US, England, Holland, Australia) and 38 teaching in Indonesia (Bali, Tangerang, Bandung, Surabaya, and Jakarta). In terms of teaching experience, almost half of the respondents (48%) teach between 1-5 years and 25 % teach between 6-10 years. The rest teach BIPA between 11 to 25 years and even one respondent has taught for 40 years. In addition to the table in terms of class composition 72% teachers have multilingual students and 28 % teachers teach homogenous classes. In terms of the ability of speaking English as the lingua franca, 72% of the students that they teach speak English well; whereas 28% does not speak English well. For interviews, there are 14 respondents who were available for the interview to confirm their responses in the questionnaires.

Student Participants
There are 40 students taking part in this survey consisting of six respondents learning BIPA overseas and the other 34 from Indonesia. Half of the respondents (54%) speak Korean as their mother tongue; 23% speak English and the rest speak Spanish, Japanese, Mandarin, Thai and Malayalam. There are 11 students who were available to be interviewed. In terms of place of study more than half (68%) learned BIPA at various language courses and 29% learned it at international schools and universities that offer international programs for foreign students. Only one participant took the lesson in a private class.
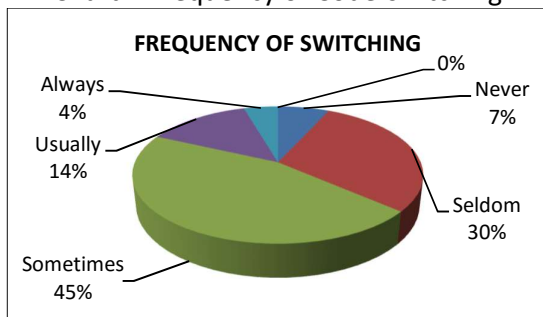
Findings and discussion

The findings and discussion are divided into two parts: teachers and students based on their answer in the questionnaires and interviews.
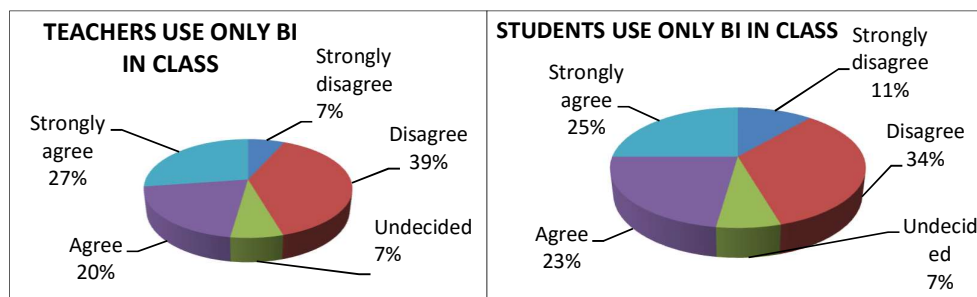
Teachers

Chart 1 Frequency of Code-switching

With only 7% respondents admitted never doing it in class, the result confirms that code-switching was a common practice with a note that it was done at various degree. The percentage on those who sometimes, usually and always practiced code-switching is much higher (59%) than those who seldom and never (37%) practiced it. This could mean there is a tendency for teachers to do code-switching in class. This result is confirmed by the interview. Most of the respondents found it difficult to avoid code-switching. There are various reasons for doing it; however, the foremost reason is the students' low proficiency in the target language (TL) since the teachers in this study are the ones teaching in the basic level. In this situation they need to use English as a medium of instruction for the sake of their students' comprehension. One respondent reported that she had no choice but to switch to English for explanation since the students' parents would complain if their children did not understand the lesson when the lesson was fully conducted in BI. Other respondents stated that using English helped their students to understand the lesson more quickly and this was more efficient in terms of time. Nation (2003) states that it is such a waste not to use L1 as it has been proven effective to communicate meaning just like any other teaching aids such as pictures and real objects.
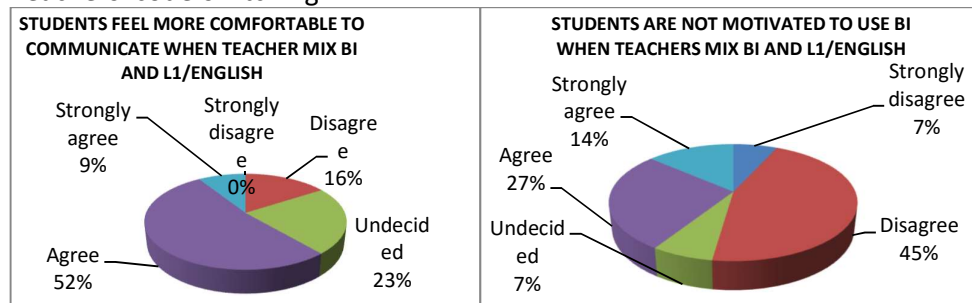
Chart 2 Teachers use only BI in class   Chart 3 Students use only BI in class

For the language used in class there are two groups: those who are in favour of using BI only and those who are against using BI only. The proportion of the the groups seem to be quite equal for teachers and students, with a small percentage (7%) on the undecided group. The result is in line with the frequency of code-switching by the teachers in table 4.1. The interview indicated that most teachers agree on the importance of using the target language, BI, as much as possible, as it is usually also the institution policy to use BI only in class, however, they cannot avoid using L1/English for the sake of their students' comprehension. The respondents who are in favor of using BI only in class stated that L1/English should not be used or should be limited. They believed that students need to be familiar to hearing and using the target language since this would enhance the students' learning progress. In the context of heterogeneous classes, of which there is no common language, not even English, among the students and teachers, most teachers interviewed agree that they have to use BI as they have no choice but to do so.
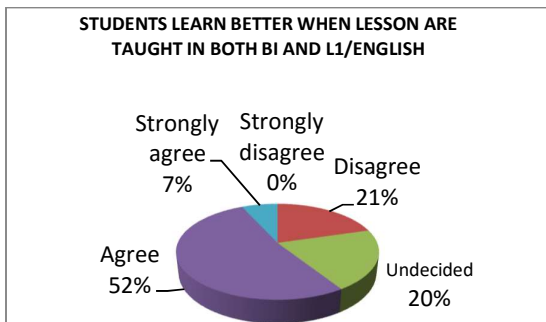
Chart 4 Students' feeling towards Teachers' code-switching

Chart 5 Students' motivation

STUDENTS FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE TO COMMUNICATE WHEN TEACHER MIX BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly agree 9%
Strongly disagree 0%
Disagree 16%
Undecided 23%
Agree 52%

STUDENTS ARE NOT MOTIVATED TO USE BI WHEN TEACHERS MIX BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly agree 14%
Strongly disagree 7%
Agree 27%
Undecided 7%
Disagree 45%

Both tables showed the same tendency that the teachers have a dividing response on students' feeling and motivation when teachers code-switch from BI to L1/English. Almost half of the teacher respondents believed that the students felt more comfortable communicating with mixed language without feeling demotivated; the other half believed in just the opposite. However, in chart 4 there are 23% respondents who are not sure whether their students' feel more comfortable in a mixed language class or not. The interview reveals that the teachers' respondents really could not give their opinion on this issue. One respondent said that we need to conduct experiments employing bilingual and monolingual approach in order to compare what the the students really feel and think about this matter. Moreover, others stated that in heterogenous classes it is hard to tell whether students who do not speak English or speak little English, for example, feel more comfortable compared to the classmates who understand English well.

Chart 6 Students learn better when lessons are taught in BI and L1/English

STUDENTS LEARN BETTER WHEN LESSON ARE TAUGHT IN BOTH BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly agree 7%
Strongly disagree 0%
Disagree 21%
Undecided 20%
Agree 52%

More than half of the teacher respondents (59%) agreed and strongly agreed that students would learn better when the delivery of the lesson are done in both BI and L1/English. Aside from 21% of those who disagreed, there is 20% of the respondents who felt undecided about this notion. From the interview it was found out that they really could not answer this questions. The groups of teachers who are not in favour for code-switching could not really tell whether students would learn better. Once again to be fair there should be an experiment to compare the result of learning with two approaches.
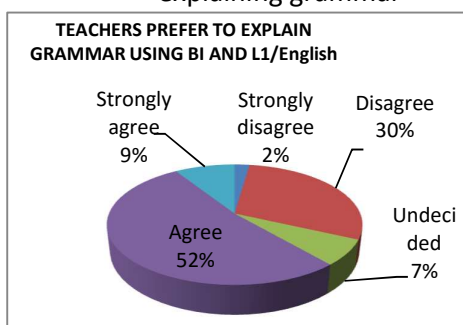
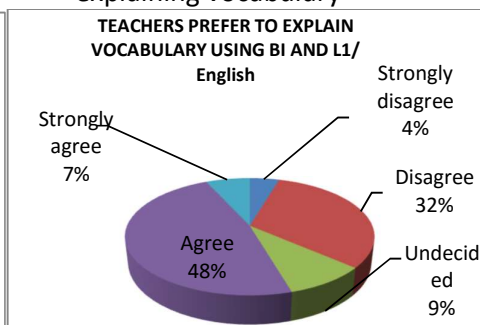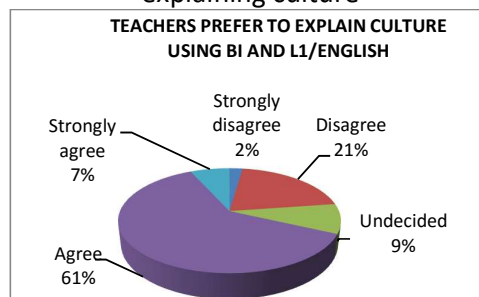## Chart 7 Preference in explaining grammar

TEACHERS PREFER TO EXPLAIN GRAMMAR USING BI AND L1/English

Strongly agree 9%
Strongly disagree 2%
Disagree 30%
Undecided 7%
Agree 52%

Chart 8 Preference in explaining vocabulary

TEACHERS PREFER TO EXPLAIN VOCABULARY USING BI AND L1/English

Strongly agree 7%
Strongly disagree 4%
Disagree 32%
Undecided 9%
Agree 48%

Chart 9 Preference in explaining culture

TEACHERS PREFER TO EXPLAIN CULTURE USING BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly agree 7%
Strongly disagree 2%
Disagree 21%
Undecided 9%
Agree 61%

The three charts above indicate the teacher respondents' preference over using mixed language to explain grammar, vocabulary, and culture. In general the result from the three charts shows the same trend more towards agreement and strong agreement on using mixed language. However, the percentage of teachers' preference on using mixed language to explain culture is higher (61%

& 7%) which is comparable to grammar (52% & 9%). The preference for vocabulary is the lowest among the three (48% & 7%). In the interview the respondents agreed that teachers need to use mixed language in explaining difficult concept in grammar and culture. Using L1/English enables the teachers to compare the grammar of BI and the students' L1. The interviews also reveal that the teachers felt the need to be more cautious in explaining culture since misunderstanding in this concept may cause serious problems communication problems. Moreover, the interview also indicates that there are more possibilities to use BI in explaining vocabulary. In fact some teachers believe that direct explanation by using examples in BI is better than code-switching. Besides, the use of teaching aids in introducing vocabulary is quite effective so that teacher do not need to explain a new word at length in L1/English.
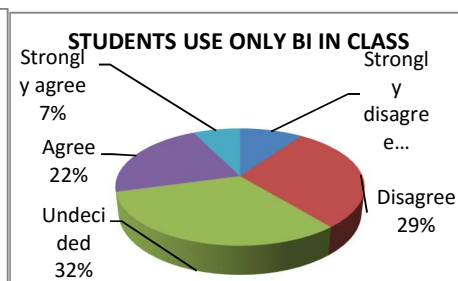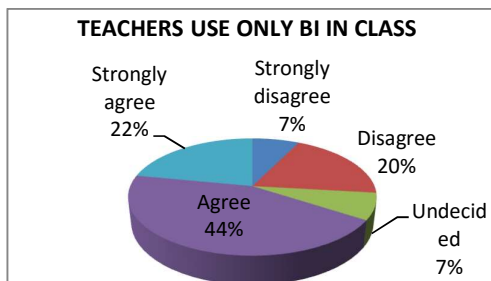
Students

Chart 10 Frequency of switching from BI to L1/English

Frequency of switching from BI to L1/English

Always 7%
Never 8%
Usually 29%
Seldom 12%
Sometimes 44%
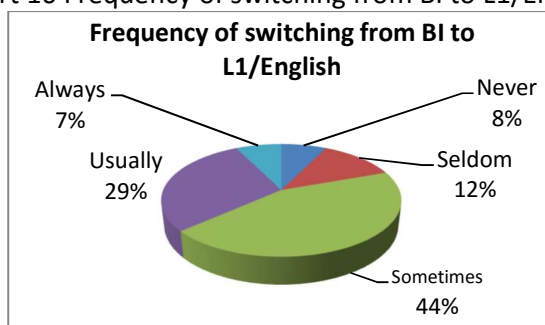
The result shows that students have a higher frequency of code-switching compared to the teacher respondents. The total 80% of the students use L1/English at various degree and only 12 % & 8% of the respondents seldom and never use their L1/English. This is understandable since being basic level students their BI is very limited and it is almost impossible for them to communicate without code-switching.

Chart 11 Teachers use only BI in class   Chart 12 Students use only BI in class

TEACHERS USE ONLY BI IN CLASS

Strongly agree 22%
Strongly disagree 7%
Disagree 20%
Agree 44%
Undecided 7%

STUDENTS USE ONLY BI IN CLASS

Strongly agree 7%
Strongly disagree…
Agree 22%
Disagree 29%
Undecided 32%

The two charts above indicate that the student respondents preferred the teachers to use BI (22% & 22%) whereas for the students using only BI 39% disagreed and strongly disagreed. Those who were undecided is quite high

(32%). This result shows that students prefer and expect the teachers to use BI only in class even though the students' BI is limited. However, the student respondents seem to be undecided (32%) for the policy of using BI only for students.

Chart 13 Students feel more comfortable to communicate when teachers mix language to use BI
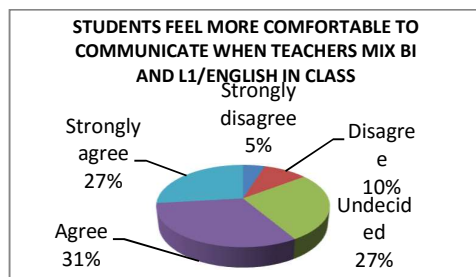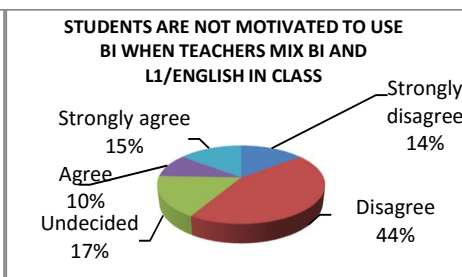
Chart 14 Students are not motivated to communicate when teachers mix language to use BI

STUDENTS FEEL MORE COMFORTABLE TO COMMUNICATE WHEN TEACHERS MIX BI AND L1/ENGLISH IN CLASS

Strongly disagree 5%
Disagree 10%
Undecided 27%
Agree 31%
Strongly agree 27%

STUDENTS ARE NOT MOTIVATED TO USE BI WHEN TEACHERS MIX BI AND L1/ENGLISH IN CLASS

Strongly disagree 14%
Disagree 44%
Undecided 17%
Agree 10%
Strongly agree 15%

In terms of feeling comfortable and motivation when teachers mix TL and L1/English more than half of the student respondents indicate that they are more in favour with the use of mixed language in class. However, the undecided groups show a similar trend to the teachers' results. This is especially true for heterogenous classes of which there is no common language as a bridge except Bahasa Indonesia. Moreover, one interviewee reported that he felt more comfortable hearing BI than some of his classmates who had a mix of English and Indonesian class. In this way he would think more in BI and do less translation in his mind as he heard less English spoken in class.

Chart 15 Students learn better when lessons are taught in mixed language

STUDENTS LEARN BETTER WHEN LESSONS ARE TAUGHT IN BOTH BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly disagree 7%
Disagree 10%
Undecided 15%
Agree 41%
Strongly agree 27%
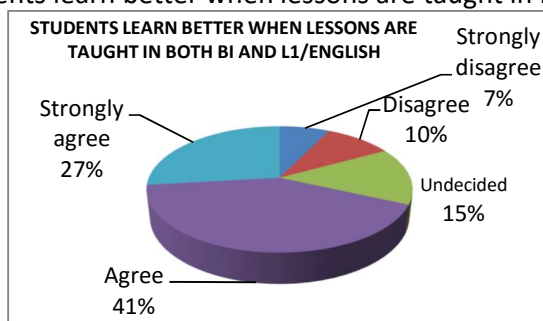
The above chart indicates the students' belief (27% & 41%) that they can learn better when teachers are more accomodating in the medium of instruction. The interviews reveals that the students could learn better when the lessons were delivered in the language that they understand. In other words comprehensible input is crucial for learning (Krashen, 1985). In doing so Fennema-Bloom (2009/2010) argues that code-switching for pedagogical reason in bilingual classrooms can be considered as teachers' scaffolding to help

students understand the lesson. This kind of scaffolding is actually similar to what teachers normally do in monolingual classroom setting.

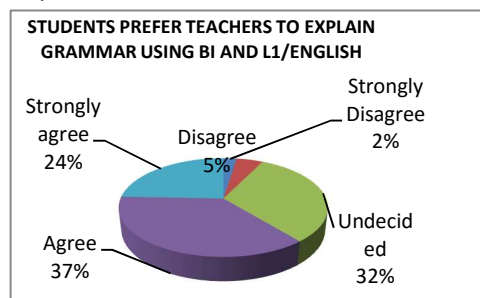Chart 16 Preference for grammar explanation

STUDENTS PREFER TEACHERS TO EXPLAIN GRAMMAR USING BI AND L1/ENGLISH
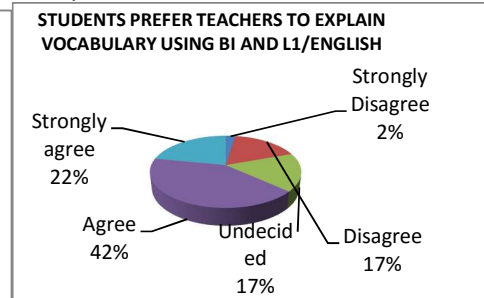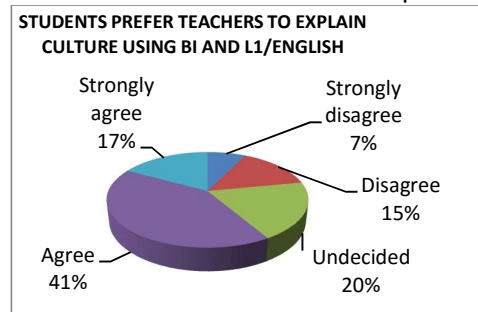
Strongly agree 24%
Disagree 5%
Strongly Disagree 2%
Undecided 32%
Agree 37%

Chart 17 Preference for vocabulary explanation

STUDENTS PREFER TEACHERS TO EXPLAIN VOCABULARY USING BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly agree 22%
Strongly Disagree 2%
Agree 42%
Undecided 17%
Disagree 17%

Chart 18 Preference for culture explanation

STUDENTS PREFER TEACHERS TO EXPLAIN CULTURE USING BI AND L1/ENGLISH

Strongly agree 17%
Strongly disagree 7%
Disagree 15%
Agree 41%
Undecided 20%

There is a strong tendency that the student respondents prefer to have teachers explain grammar, vocabulary and culture in mixed language. There is 32% of the respondents felt undecided about code-switching for grammar explanation. The interview reveals some respondents were rather cautious about teachers' using L1/English to help them understand the lesson. The use of L1/English should only become the last resort when students do not understand the explanation by considering the various native languages and English proficiency of the students in the class.

Conclusion

The study shows that there is a strong indication of the pervasive practice of code-switching in BIPA classrooms. It might not be too much to say that this practice is actually a reflection of the teachers and students' attitude towards code-switching in these classes. Aside from disagreement and undecideness, both teachers and students are more in favour of code-switching practice in BIPA classes. Bilingual approach in foreign language classrooms such as BIPA proves to be more beneficial and accomodating for teaching learning process. Students feel less threatened and it is less burdensome for teachers since teachers are not restricted to use L1/English as one of the teaching aids to provide students with comprehensible input.

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