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The use of Bahasa Melayu in the English Language Classroom by 'Non-Optionist' English Teachers

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Abstract

This research attempts to investigate the extent of the use of Bahasa Melayu to teach English. Fifty four inexperienced and experienced 'non-optionist' English teachers from three districts in Pahang took part in this study by responding to a set of questionnaire. These teachers were originally trained to teach other subjects but were given the task to teach the second language due to the lack of 'optionist' English teachers. The results of the findings show that there are differences on the extent of the use of Bahasa Melayu by inexperienced and experienced 'non-optionist' English teachers.

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Keywords: English as a Second Language; Bahasa Melayu; Non-Optionist Teachers

1. Introduction

English is taught as a second language in primary and secondary schools in Malaysia since the introduction of the New Education Policy in 1970. However, realizing the influence and the importance of the language for the nation's development, former prime minister of Malaysia Tun Dr Mahathir, implemented a number of quite controversial language policies to achieve Vision 2020 or 'Wawasan 2020' to make Malaysia an industrialized country by the year 2020. The Ministry of Education too has been implementing some crucial moves towards achieving that vision. Among

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the moves are the Ops English Programme, the Teaching of Science and Mathematics in English, and the adoption of the philosophy of To Uphold Bahasa Malaysia and To Strengthen the English Language policy (Memartabatkan Bahasa Malaysia, Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI).

According to Goh Lai Kuah (2011) the non-optionist English teachers are those teachers who are trained in other subjects but appointed to teach English for a temporary period of time to overcome the shortage of English teachers in schools in the country. However pedagogically, it has to be pointed out that some of these teachers have not received any proper training to teach English because they were originally trained to teach other subjects such as Science and Mathematics.

The learning of a second language is never an easy task especially when there are many factors that could affect the teaching and learning of the second language. It is not uncommon to come across our young graduates who are not proficient in English even after being in the school for a period of twelve years. These graduates are more fluent in Bahasa Melayu than English. As a result, they are facing a lot of problems when applying for jobs due to their lack of competency in the language. Could the lack of proficiency in English among recent graduates due to the policy of MOE in utilizing the non-optionist English language teachers? Could it be that the teaching of English in some of the classes were conducted to a greater extent in Bahasa Melayu? Hence, it is important to investigate how English teachers, especially the non-optionist teachers teach English in the classrooms. As noted in previous studies Zuana Hanom (2003) and Jahabar (2004), they have shown that optionist English teachers did use Bahasa Melayu in the teaching of English. Thus, it must be pointed out that the use of Bahasa Melayu is not unusual but to use it excessively might create other problems.

1.1. Research objectives

The main aim of this study is to investigate the extent of the use of Bahasa Melayu by non-optionist English teachers to teach English in secondary schools. The specific aim of the study is to find out the extent of the use of Bahasa Melayu by inexperienced and experienced non-optionist English teachers. The researcher wanted to find out the extent of the use of Bahasa Melayu between these two groups of the 'non-optionist' teachers. Another aim of the study is to find out in which situations do these teachers use Bahasa Melayu and what are the reasons for using the language. In order to investigate the objectives of the study, several questions were formulated.

1.2. Research questions

The following are the three research questions:
1. To what extent do inexperienced and experienced non-optionist English teachers use Bahasa Melayu in the classroom?
2. In which situations do inexperienced and experienced teachers use Bahasa Melayu to teach English?
3. What are the reasons for using Bahasa Melayu to teach English amongst the inexperienced and experienced teachers?

2. Review of literature

Schweers (1999) investigated the use of first language (Spanish) in second language classrooms, by checking the frequency of use, purposes and the teachers' and students' attitudes towards the L1. He observed four English teachers and recorded their lessons, at the beginning, middle and end of the semester. A set of questionnaire was also distributed to the four teachers as well as other nineteen university teachers and students from the participating teachers' classes to investigate their attitudes towards the use of Spanish during teaching and learning. A high percentage of students and teachers felt that Spanish should be used in the classroom but only in certain situations.

Tang (2002) also carried similar study in China. She studied the use of first language in English language classroom in China. The participants were 100 first year English majors in a university and there were also twenty teachers from the same university with teaching experience ranging from 1 to 30 years. Data was collected through classroom observations, interviews and also through the use of a questionnaire. The results showed that students and teachers

responded positively towards its use during the English class. However, they also insisted on the limited and judicious use of L1 so that it would help learners get use to TL instead of depending on their L1.

In another study, Hashemi and Sabet (2013) investigated teachers' and students' perceptions towards the use of L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) in General English classes at university level. The participants were 345 students and 25 teachers at the University of Guilan, Rasht, Iran. The students had to answer a questionnaire while the teachers had to complete another set of questionnaire and lastly ten of them were selected for a semi-structured interview. The results somehow showed contrastive perceptions between the teachers and students. While students supported the use of L1 in the class, the teachers displayed a strong tendency to use more TL in their teaching to explain grammatical items, abstracts words or to check comprehension.

Shimizu (2006) who was moved by Schweers and Tang' studies, also carried out a study to examine responses from English teachers and students on the use of Japanese in English language classroom. The results confirmed the findings from Schweers (1999) and Tang (2002). Both teachers and students indicated that it is necessary for them to use L1 (Japanese) in language class. Similar results are obtained by Moza (2008) in which she studied 56 female Omani teachers' on the use of L1 in teaching English. The results showed that teachers used using L1 for three main areas which were to explain concepts, vocabulary, give instructions, provide feedbacks and to manage classrooms.

İn another study, Littlewood and Yu (2011) interviewed 50 second-year tertiary students from Hong Kong and mainland China to recall the proportion of L1 (Cantonese or Putonghua) in their junior-secondary-school English lessons. They found out that the most common purposes of the teachers using L1 (Cantonese or Putonghua) were to establish constructive social relationships with students, communicating complex meanings and also to maintain control over classroom environment.

Marzook (2011) carried out a research to investigate the use of mother tongue in English classes at two Saudi technical colleges. A total of 13 teachers and 95 pre-intermediate English students responded to the questionnaire to check their attitudes towards Arabic and the different occasions where they think Arabic should be used in TL classrooms. Majority of the students (61%) and teachers (69%) believed that it is necessary to use L1 in English language classroom. They perceived that Arabic is helpful to explain grammatical points, new vocabulary or difficult concepts and ideas. The teachers stated that the use of L1 helps to save teaching time, improves students' comprehension and thus makes TL learning more effective. Ashok (2011) also reported excessive use of first language (Nepali) in most EFL classrooms in Nepal. She observed three English teachers in their classrooms and conducted two focus groups discussions involving ten teachers and ten students. The maximum use of Nepali was due to the reason that most Nepali students had low language proficiency, thus, L1 was used to gain the students interest and later they could add more input using the TL itself.

Nonetheless, there are some guidelines for teachers on how to use L1 to teach L2. Vivian Cook (2001) and David Atkinson (1987) have proposed a few guidelines on how to use L1 in second language classroom. According to Vivian Cook (2001) there are several ways for teachers to use L1 positively in the second language classroom. They can use it to make arrangements during teaching and learning process. For instance, teachers use L1 to give instructions for the students during activities and they can also use L1 to maintain students' discipline in the classroom. Creating closer relationship with students through an individual approach will foster positive attitudes among students towards the target language. David Atkinson (1987) proposes several ideas on how teachers can use L1 correctly in second language classroom. The students' first language can be used in these situations; to elicit language (how do you say X in English), checking comprehension, giving instructions, cooperation among learners, and discussion on classroom methodology. It can also be used for checking for sense, testing and development of useful learning strategies such as the skills of paraphrasing, explanation or simplification.

In Malaysia, there are a handful of research that have been done that focus on 'non- optionist' English teachers. These studies, however, give minor attention towards the 'non-optionist' English teachers and how they use Bahasa Melayu in the teaching process. Nonetheless, there is one study that was carried out by Jai et al. (2014) that highlighted the 'non-optionist' English teachers in the state of Melaka. A total of ninety 'non-optionist' English teachers from several primary schools in Melaka took part in this study. This study attempted to investigate the teachers' level of proficiency by looking at the OPT (Oxford Placement Test) results and their after course   self-evaluation instrument (Pedagogy Standards for English Language Teaching / PCELT). Jahabar (2004) and Zuana Hanom (2003) also carried out similar studies to check on the use of Bahasa Melayu in the second language classrooms in several

secondary schools. However, they focus on how the 'optionist' English teachers use Bahasa Melayu to teach English. There are other studies, for instance Lee (2010) and Engku Haliza et al. (2013) in which they investigated the teachers' attitudes towards code-switching and the functions of Bahasa Melayu in the teaching of English. Their studies however, are more towards the linguistics aspects of the language. Thus, the lack of previous studies on the use of Bahasa Melayu by inexperienced and experienced 'non-optionist' English teachers had encouraged the researcher to investigate these important issues.

3. Research methodology

3.1. Participants

Fifty four 'non-optionist' English teachers from three districts Temerloh, Maran and Bentong in Pahang were identified to be the participants of this study. These teachers teach in 25 different secondary schools in the three districts. All the teachers in the study have academic qualifications in fields other than English such as in Communication, History, Geography, Civil Engineering, Economics, Accounting, Biology, Physics, and Bahasa Melayu. For this study, non-optionist English teachers were divided into two groups; inexperienced and experienced teachers. From the total of fifty four non-optionist English teachers twenty four are inexperienced teachers while the other thirty are the experienced teachers. The questionnaires were delivered to all non-optionist teachers through mail (Skynet Mail Service). However, only forty one sets of questionnaires were returned to the researcher after a month and a half. A total of 21 sets were from the inexperienced teachers and 20 sets from the experienced teachers.

3.2. Instrument

The questionnaire for the study was taken   from Jahabar (2004), Tang (2002), and Schweers (1999). It was then adapted to suit the current research. The questionnaire was validated by several college lecturers, and was pilot tested to check on the reliability of the items. For that purpose, a total of thirty English teachers from several states (friends and colleagues of the researcher) took part in answering the questionnaire. There are 36 items using a   4-Likert scale which are arranged into Section A: The use of Bahasa Melayu in the Teaching English, Section B: Areas or Situations when Bahasa Melayu is used, and C: Reasons for using Bahasa Melayu to teach English. Reliability test showed Cronbach's Alpha for overall items in the questionnaire is 0.971. For every section, Cronbach Alpha is 0.879 (Section A), 0.919 (Section B), 0.953 and (Section C).

4. Results

Mean values between the two groups of teachers were compared to check their responses towards the items in the questionnaire. A mean score that shows value of 0 to 1.25 is categorized as a Very Negative response, a mean score between 1.26 until 3.25 is considered as a Negative response, a mean score from 2.51 until 3.25 is categorized as a Positive response and lastly, a mean score that shows value 3.26 to 4.00 is accepted as a Very Positive response (Mohamad Amin et al. 2001).

Table 1. Mean score descriptions

Mean Score	Mean Score Interpretation
0 - 1.25	Very Negative Response
1.26 – 2.50	Negative Response
2.51 – 3.25	Positive Response
3.26 – 4.00	Very Positive Response

4.1. Research question one: To what extent do inexperienced and experienced non-optionist English teachers use Bahasa Melayu in the second language classroom?

Table 2. Results for Section A

No	Statement	Inexperienced Teachers				Mean	Experienced Teachers				Mean
1	Bahasa Melayu should be used in teaching English	10	40	45	5	2.45	5	60	35	-	2.30
2	Bahasa Melayu facilitates in learning of English	10	25	60	5	2.60	5	35	60	-	2.55
3	The use of Bahasa Melayu makes teaching and learning more effective	10	40	40	10	2.50	10	25	60	5	2.35
4	The use of Bahasa Melayu helps students' comprehension in English	10	25	50	15	2.70	15	50	30	5	2.60
5	It saves more time when using Bahasa Melayu	10	40	30	20	2.60	15	50	30	5	2.25
6	The use of Bahasa Melayu helps students feel more comfortable to learn English	15	20	45	20	2.70	15	30	45	10	2.50
7	Students will not grasp English better if the teacher uses only the target language (English)	10	35	35	20	2.65	15	40	40	5	2.35
8	My students learn English better if I use Bahasa Melayu in the classroom	20	40	30	10	2.30	15	40	40	5	2.35
9	My students will learn English better if I teach fully in English.	5	40	30	25	2.75	5	50	30	15	2.55
10	The use of Bahasa Melayu in the classroom can result in the competency in English	10	40	35	15	2.55	20	45	35	-	2.15
11	The use of Bahasa Melayu in English language classroom does not hinder or reduce students' exposure to the target language.	20	25	45	10	2.45	10	35	55	-	2.45

Research question 1 is addressed in item 1 to 11. The results show that inexperienced and experienced teachers displayed positive response towards items 2, 4 and 9. They agreed that Bahasa Melayu (BM) facilitates in the learning of English (Item 1) with a mean value of 2.60 for inexperienced teachers and 2.55 experienced teachers. They also showed positive responses for item 4 (The use of Bahasa Melayu helps students' comprehension in English) with a mean value of 2.70 for inexperienced teachers and 2.60 for experienced teachers. Lastly, both groups of teachers showed positive response for item 9 (My students will learn English better if I teach fully English) with a mean value 2.75 and 2.55 for each group respectively.

In addition to that, they also disagreed on several items (for example items 1, 3, 8 and 11). For item 1, mean values of both groups of teachers (2.45 and 2.30) showed that they did not agree that Bahasa Melayu should be used in the teaching of English. Then, they also disagreed that the use of Bahasa Melayu makes teaching and learning more effective (item 3) with a mean value 2.50 for inexperienced teachers and 2.35 for experienced teachers. Both groups of teachers also showed a negative response for item 8 (My students learn English better if I use Bahasa Melayu in the classroom) with mean value 2.30 for inexperienced teachers and 2.35 for experienced teachers. Finally, for item 11, they disagreed (Mean value of 2.45 for both groups) that the use of Bahasa Melayu in English language classroom does not hinder or reduce students' exposure to the target language.

There are four items (item 5, 6, 7 and 10) that show different responses from the teachers. First, for item 5 (It saves more time when using Bahasa Melayu), inexperienced teachers displayed a positive response (Mean : 2.60) while experienced teachers showed negative response (Mean score of : 2.25). Secondly, for item 6 (The use of Bahasa Melayu helps students feel more comfortable to learn English), inexperienced teachers agreed with that statement (Mean : 2.70) while experienced teachers disagreed (Mean : 2.50). Then, for item 7, inexperienced teachers believed (Mean : 2.65) that students would not grasp English better if the teacher uses only TL while the experienced teachers disagreed (Mean : 2.35). Lastly, for item 10, inexperienced teachers responded positively (Mean : 2.55) that the use of BM in the classroom could result in the competency in English while the experienced teachers did not believe it (Mean : 2.15).

4.2. Research question two: In which situations do inexperienced and experienced teachers use Bahasa Melayu to teach English?

Table 3. Results for Section B

No	Statement	Inexperienced Teachers				Mean	Experienced Teachers				Mean
12	I use Bahasa Melayu to help in some vocabulary items (e.g., abstracts or new words)	5	30	30	35	2.95	15	5	70	10	2.75
13	I use Bahasa Melayu to explain complex grammatical points	5	20	65	10	2.80	20	20	55	5	2.45
14	I use Bahasa Melayu to explain difficult concepts	5	20	55	20	2.90	15	10	70	5	2.65
15	I use Bahasa Melayu to introduce new materials	10	55	25	10	2.35	15	55	30	-	2.15
16	I use Bahasa Melayu to convey meanings (words or sentences)	5	40	40	15	2.65	15	30	55	-	2.40
17	I use Bahasa Melayu to check for comprehension of meaning (words etc.)	5	45	40	10	2.60	10	30	55	5	2.55
18	I use Bahasa Melayu to summarize materials already covered	5	65	30	-	2.25	15	70	15	-	2.00
19	I use Bahasa Melayu to give instructions about activities	15	80	15	-	2.10	20	60	20	-	2.00
20	I use Bahasa Melayu to give feedback to students	5	85	10	-	2.05	20	65	15	-	1.95
21	I use Bahasa Melayu to converse with students	5	70	20	5	2.25	15	60	25	-	2.10
22	I use Bahasa Melayu to make jokes with students	5	65	20	10	2.35	20	50	30	-	2.10
23	I use Bahasa Melayu to introduce the topic of the lesson	15	70	20	5	2.00	25	65	10	-	1.85
24	I use Bahasa Melayu to conclude the lesson	15	80	5	-	1.90	25	65	10	-	1.85
25	I use Bahasa Melayu for classroom management	5	80	15	-	2.10	20	55	25	-	2.05

This research question is covered in item number 12 to item 25. Both inexperienced and experienced teachers agreed that they use Bahasa Melayu to help in some vocabulary items (item 12), to explain difficult concepts (item 14), and to check comprehension of meaning (item 17). The mean values for these items are (2.95 & 2.75), (2.90 & 2.65) and (2.60 & 2.55) respectively for each group of teachers. On the other hand, both groups of teachers similarly disagreed that they use Bahasa Melayu to introduce new materials (item 15), to summarize previous materials (item 18), to give instructions about activities (item 19), to give feedback to students (item 20), to converse with them (item 21), to make jokes (item 22), to introduce topic (item 23), to conclude the lesson (item 24) and to manage the classroom (item 25).

In this section, only two items displayed different responses from both groups of teachers (items 13 and 16). For items 13 and 16, inexperienced teachers agreed that they used Bahasa Melayu to explain complex grammatical points

(Mean : 2.80) and to convey meaning of words or sentences (Mean : 2.65). However, experienced teachers showed negative responses towards those two items with mean values of 2.45 and 2.40 respectively.

4.3. Research question three: What are the reasons for using Bahasa Melayu to teach English amongst inexperienced and experienced teachers?

Table 4. Results for Section C

No	Statement	Inexperienced Teachers				Mean	Experienced Teachers				Mean
26	Using Bahasa Melayu can reduce misunderstanding in conveying meaning of words and sentences	10	25	40	25	2.80	10	35	45	10	2.55
27	Using Bahasa Melayu makes it easier to conduct lessons in the second language	10	35	45	10	2.55	10	35	55	-	2.45
28	Using Bahasa Melayu can help keep an English language conversations going and open space for my students	10	30	50	10	2.60	15	40	45	-	2.30
29	Using Bahasa Melayu allows me to use richer, more difficult texts sooner.	10	40	40	10	2.50	15	50	35	-	2.20
30	Using Bahasa Melayu can help my students achieve better results in their English tests/examinations	15	45	35	5	2.30	25	50	25	-	2.20
31	Using Bahasa Melayu helps to improve students' development in English language	10	50	30	10	2.40	25	45	30	-	2.05
32	Using Bahasa Melayu allows my students to produce more authentic messages in communication	15	40	40	5	2.35	20	50	25	5	2.15
33	Using Bahasa Melayu allows my students to voice out their opinions	15	20	60	5	2.55	15	30	55	-	2.40
34	Using Bahasa Melayu helps my students to associate new language to their first language	15	25	55	5	2.50	20	30	50	-	2.30
35	Using Bahasa Melayu can help to avoid misunderstanding in learning English	10	30	45	15	2.65	10	30	50	10	2.60
36	Using Bahasa Melayu can help to motivate my students to use English better	15	45	25	15	2.40	25	30	40	5	2.25

Research question 3 is addressed in item 26 until item 36. Both inexperienced and experienced teachers believed that they use Bahasa Melayu to reduce misunderstanding in conveying meaning of words and sentences (item 26) with a mean value 2.80 for inexperienced teachers and 2.55 for experienced teachers. Then, they also agreed (Mean : 2.65 and 2.60) that they use BM to avoid misunderstanding (BM) in learning English (item 35). In addition to that, they showed a negative response towards similar items 29, 30, 31, 32, 34 and 36. They did not believe that the use of Bahasa Melayu; allows them to use richer texts sooner (item 29), helps to achieve better results (item 30), improves students' development in English (item 31), allows students to produce more authentic messages (item 32), helps to associate TL to BM (item 34) and finally helps to motivate students to use English better (item 36).

There are three items that show contrastive responses between the two groups of teachers. For item 27, inexperienced teachers agreed (Mean : 2.55) that using BM makes it easier to conduct lessons in L2 while experienced teachers disagreed (Mean : 2.45). Next is item 28, in which inexperienced teachers responded positively (Mean : 2.60) whereas experienced teachers disagreed that using BM keeps an English language conversations going and open space for the students (Mean : 2.30). Lastly for item 33 (Using Bahasa Melayu allows my students to voice out their opinion), inexperienced teachers agreed (Mean : 2.55) while experienced teachers disagreed (Mean : 2.40) with that statement.

5. Discussions and conclusions

This study investigated the use of Bahasa Melayu among non-optionist English teachers from three districts in Pahang. The results from this study show that all the non-optionist English teachers acknowledged the issue of using Bahasa Melayu to teach English. Apart from that, there are many items where most of inexperienced and experienced teachers provide similar responses. However, there are also nine items that show their disagreements in which the inexperienced teachers responded positively while the experienced showed the opposite. Therefore, it can be assumed that inexperienced teachers had more positive views on the use of Bahasa Melayu to teach English if compared to the experienced teachers. The different responses between these two groups of teachers maybe are influenced from the different number of teaching experience that they have.

The results from this study are similar to previous studies in certain aspects such as in terms of the situations and reasons to use L1 to teach L2. Previous studies for instance Hashemi and Sabet (2013), Moza (2008), Littlewood and Yu (2008), Marzook (2011) , Zuana Hanom (2003) and Jahabar (2004) have discovered an array of situations and reasons where and why English teachers use L1 to teach L2. Most of their findings are similar to this current study. For instance, teachers use Bahasa Melayu to teach English when they want to explain difficult concepts, give instructions, provide feedbacks, manage classrooms, check for comprehension and etc. In addition to that, Zuana (2003) and Jahabar (2004) also investigated the use of Bahasa Melayu by English teachers by looking at the reasons and situations of L1 use. However, they did not focus on the teachers' background. The difference between this current research with previous studies is that it does not only highlight the situations or the reasons for using L1 to teach L2, but it also compares the use of Bahasa Melayu between inexperienced and experienced 'non-optionist' English teachers in Malaysian context.

This study and the findings gained imply that there should be guidelines for English teachers especially the non-optionists on how to correctly use Bahasa Melayu in the classrooms. These guidelines help to remind them that their main responsibility is to teach English and if they need to use L1, they know how and when to use it. It is also very important for non-optionist teachers or beginner teachers to understand that it is never wrong to use Bahasa Melayu, but it must be used systematically and in certain situations. Ministry of Education should take into consideration the guidelines to use L1 in the teaching of English before they implement new programmes or policies with regard to improve teachers' knowledge and skills.

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