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Indonesian high school students' attitudes towards bilingual classroom instructions

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Abstract

This study investigates Indonesian high school students' attitude towards the benefits of bilingual classroom instructions. The researchers also share the view that bilingual program which is advocates the use of two languages in teaching and learning processes strengthens the concept of the two languages and constructs an automatic good translating system in learners' brain which is fruitful to establish meta-cognitive and cognitive strands. For this study, the data were obtained from the distribution of a questionnaire adapted from synthesising some benefit of learning other languages that learners could experience in bilingual education: 1) the language benefit for communication, 2) a better understanding of ideas and concepts, 3) access to more opportunities in life and 4) social and inter-cultural. The finding suggests that most students of the eleventh 11th grade of Madrasah Aliyah Negeri Cendekia Jambi had a positive attitude towards the benefits of bilingual instruction.

Keywords: Bilingualism, bilingual instruction, attitude.

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1. Background of the study

Attitude has been received significant attention from language acquisition and learning researchers. Most of the research studies on the issue have concluded that student's attitude is a fundamental part of learning. Therefore; it should become an essential component of second language learning pedagogy. Evidences reveal that the student who has positive attitude towards her learning other language correlate to her language learning process. First, attitudes towards learning are believed to influence behaviours, such as selecting and reading books, speaking in a foreign language (Kaballa & Crowley in Weinburgh, 1998). Also, second, a relationship between attitudes and achievement has been shown to exist as Schibeci and Riley (in Weinburgh, 1998) show that there is a support for the proposition that attitudes influence achievement, rather than achievement influencing attitudes.

Specifically in language education, attitude studies explore how people react to language interactions and how they evaluate others based on the language behaviour they observe. In bilingual education, teachers use two languages as a means of classroom instructions not only in language class but also in some selected subjects such as natural sciences, social science, mathematics and humanities (Margana, 2009). The aim of this bilingual education is to develop students' competencies in both their first and second or foreign language. Being able to interact and communicate using a language, they like can raise the students' interest in that language and, as a result, it makes them very enthusiastic about it and improves their success in learning the subject matter as well. That also means that they build positive attitudes towards language learning which can raise motivation and help them to learn. So, if the students have negative attitudes towards bilingualism, the purposes and benefits of bilingual education will not be achieved. Clearly, both positive and negative attitudes have been demonstrated a strong impact on students' language learning.

However, children will develop good attitudes towards bilingualism if they think bilingualism is an advantage for them (Lambert, 1977; Romaine, 1995). It has been found that bilingual children's language networks, opportunities to use languages, as well as their attitudes towards bilingualism and their bilingual abilities are crucial components in developing and maintaining their bilingual proficiency (Baker, 1992). It was expected that students in bilingual classes would have a significantly more positive attitude and behaviour concerning studying through English than their peers in the monolingual classes. Moreover, Gardner and Lambert (1972) in their extensive studies give evidence that positive attitudes towards language enhance proficiency as well. They claim that the positive attitudes enhance language learning; otherwise, the negative attitudes lower the second language learning. The almost similar findings were revealed by Chamber (1999) who asserts that learning occurs more easily when the learner has a positive attitude towards the language and learning and Merisuo-Storm (2007) in his experimental studied, investigating students' attitudes with regard to foreign language learning and the development of literacy skills in bilingual education, indicated that the students in bilingual classes showed significantly more positive attitudes towards foreign language learning than the students in the monolingual classes.

Garcia (2009) defines bilingual education as the use of two or more languages in the instruction and assessment of learners, on the condition that the languages are used as a medium of instruction, not merely taught as an additional language. Conforming to the definition, Cummins (2011) refers bilingual education to the use of two (or more) languages of instruction and also added by Appel and Muysken (1987) as 'any system of school education in which, at a given moment in time and for a varying amount of time, simultaneously or consecutively, an instruction is planned and given in at least two languages'. Along the same vein, Berk (1989) notes that children may become bilingual in two ways; through a simultaneous acquisition of both languages or through subsequent acquisition in which second language learning follows proficient mastery of the first.

In Berk's view, the cognitive advantages of bilingualism provide strong justification for the expansion of bilingual education programs. Bilingualism provides one of the best examples of how language, once learned, becomes an essential tool of the intellect and fosters cognitive growth. From this definition,

most programs of bilingual education suit into one of these categories: a) instruction is given in both languages simultaneously; b) instruction is given first in LI, and the pupil is taught until such time when he can use L2 as a mean of learning and c) the most substantial part of the instruction is given through L2, and LI is introduced at a later stage, first as a subject and later as a medium of instruction.

In many multicultural countries, there must be more than one distinct language as the device to communicate with others. People seem to be required to learn a second language and even to learn or at least to understand some additional languages. Some people say that bilingualism could help to overcome the language barrier. The implementation of the bilingual program in Indonesia is very worthwhile in endeavouring to prepare students of secondary school level to be competent bilinguals to face global challenges who are capable of performing high competencies in their fields (Margana, 2009). Most of Indonesian people are basically bilingual from early birth. Indonesian people communicate in their mother languages at home. In classroom context, mostly, teachers use Bahasa Indonesia as the National language and additionally English as mandated foreign language. That condition should be very useful as Romaine (1995) suggests that in terms of meta-cognitive strands, students who use of two or more languages as a means of classroom communication practices, students gain meta-cognitive awareness to deal with the use of the activated languages during communication practises both spoken and written communication.

Madrasah Aliyah Negeri (MAN) Cendekia Jambi, known as Islamic senior high school, is a public school which is at the same level as a senior high school. There is no significant difference with other high schools. The difference is from the language that is used; teachers and students in MAN Cendekia Jambi use both Arabic and English as their language of communication inside and outside the classroom. Corresponding to the above perspective towards the importance of attitudes towards the benefits of bilingual education, the writers have the intention to investigate the students' attitudes towards the benefit of bilingual instruction in MAN Cendekia Jambi.

2. Method of study

This research employs quantitative research using a simple survey. The research instrument which used in this research was a questionnaire. The questionnaire is generally used to take someone's opinion and feeling from their point of view. It consists of many questions or items on paper that a respondent reads and answers. There were 21 items of the questionnaire distributed to the 11th-grade students of MAN Insan Cendekia Jambi. The researcher put some personal information about respondents in the questionnaire sheets; they were gender and class. There are three classes of XI IPA, and they are: XI IPA 1 which has 23 students, XI IPA 2 which has 19 students and XI IPA 3 which has 24 students. The sum of 11th-grade students in XI IPA was 66 students. The total number of students consisted 29 (44%) males and 37 (56%) females. The detailed profile can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents profile

Respondent profile		
Gender	N	%
Male	29	44
Female	37	56
Total	66	100

In this research, the researcher used the closed-ended questionnaire in collecting the data. Closed-ended questionnaire for the students was in the form of statements. Close-ended questionnaires for counting the Students' perception used five choices, namely, 'strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree'. Likert scale was used in formulating the closed-ended questionnaires, which are only five possible answers to each question. According to Sugiyono (2008), a Likert scale is used for measuring the attitude, opinion and perception, understanding of respondents about a

phenomenon. The questionnaire will be scored by using the Likert scale below, and Cronbach-Alpha formula was used to test the reliability.

Table 2. Likert scale score of questionnaire (Sugiyono, 2008)

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Positive	5	4	3	2	1

3. Finding

Generally, the findings show that most students of MAN Cendekia Jambi had a positive attitude towards the benefits of bilingual instruction. It can be seen from the interpretation of the total mean score category 1–4 which interpreted as high. Based on the calculation of the questionnaire from the first category, this present study found that item number 1 yielded a mean score of 4.53 was interpreted as very high. Item number 2 yielded a mean score of 3.92 was interpreted as high. Then, item number 3 yielded a mean score of 3.26 was interpreted as average. Item numbers 4 and 5 yielded a mean score of 3.58 and 3.56 which were interpreted as high. The total mean score from this category is 3.77, which was interpreted as high.

Table 3. Findings

Indicator	Number of questions	Total mean score	Level
1. The language benefit for communication	1–5	3.77	High
2. Better understanding of ideas and concepts	5–10	4.03	High
3. Access to more opportunities in life	11–15	4.46	Very high
4. Social and inter-cultural awareness	16–21	4.11	High

It means that most of the students had a positive attitude and agreed that bilingual instruction is an addition, could not detract them from having more chances to enrich their vocabulary. They also think that easy to communicate and switch between the languages that they have known. It can be seen from the interpretation of items in the questionnaire from the first to fifth item of the questionnaire from this category.

It is line with Cummins' (1979) view that once the students' language capability achieves a certain level of skills, they find themselves able to exchange the information and attitudes obtained in one language to the other. This ability allows bilingual students to switch between the languages that they have understood. Furthermore, it also reveals that the bilingual language-learning advantage might be rooted in the ability to focus on information about the new language while reducing obstruction from the languages they already know (Bartolotti & Marian, 2012). This ability would allow a bilingual individual to access recently learned words more easily, chances to enrich their vocabulary.

Evidence from Canadian and other research in bilingual education suggests that bilingual children show greater cognitive flexibility and creativity in problem-solving (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). Bilingual children have two or more words for each object and idea, and different meanings are sometimes attached to words by the two languages. This means a bilingual person may develop the ability to think more flexible.

Regarding this, most of the participant agreed that bilingual instruction could help them looking at issues from a different perspective, they could easily transfer the ideas into another language that they have understood, and they thought that it was helpful to have more choices in literature. It can be seen from the calculation of the items from the second categories of the questionnaire which had total mean score 4.03 that was interpreted as high. Moreover, this study also found that bilingual students had a positive attitude to the item that said that bilingual instruction would allow them to apply their knowledge into many different situations.

From the calculation of the third category, this study found that bilingual instruction also could be access to more opportunities. Most of the student agreed to the statement that said that bilingual

instruction would give them a more professional option as well as higher salary, to be a more creative student, and it also an opportunity to study abroad. It is in line with Baker (2001, p. 9) that said that bilingual person could use their languages that they have understood with different people, different context and different purposes. It means that bilingual instruction can be useful preparation for later careers where bilingual workers are needed.

From these study also found that being aware of another culture is another of the advantages of bilingual education. Learning another language can assist in learning about one's own culture, and lead to recognising one's cultural conditioning (Liddio et al., 1997). Reading and writing in two languages means a bilingual person can enjoy literature in both original languages. This can create a deeper understanding of different traditions and ways of thinking and behaving. Moreover, it can make students interact appropriately with their peers.

It can be seen from the calculation of items from the fourth category of the benefit of bilingual instruction. Most of the students agreed that by bilingual instruction, they could appreciate the diversity of ideas that working with different peers, they also agreed that it allows them to interact appropriately with peers. They also thought that they know which language and manners to speak with whom and where.

In conclusion, most of the 11th-grade students from MAN Cendekia Jambi have a positive attitude towards the benefits of bilingual instruction. Mostly, they strongly agree that bilingual instructions will later allow them to gain access to more opportunities in life. They agree that the bilingual instruction is an addition, not subtraction, which also would allow them to have better understanding of ideas and concepts, have access to more opportunities and also become aware of another culture.

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