



Teachers' Narratives on The Use of English to Teach Bahasa Melayu as Language Other Than English

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Abstract

Internationalization of education has made it even more important to have a good command of English, a global language. Concurrently, a similar trend recently surfaced in research, rivalling English, i.e., Languages other than English (LOTE). Review of the existing literature reveals prolific literature on the roles and functions of first, second, or students' native language in teaching of English. The question arises whether these findings and theories undergirding these researches are equally applicable, to the teaching of LOTEs. This study explored teachers' perspective of teaching *Bahasa Melayu* (Malay language) as a LOTE and the role of English in teaching it. A narrative research design was utilized, with a sample of six *Bahasa Melayu* teachers from universities in Malaysia, who reported how the use of English enhanced or impeded the delivery of *Bahasa Melayu* curriculum. The data primarily came from teachers' semi-structured interviews, and was complemented by field notes, memos, and casual phone calls. Findings showed that teachers' decisions are mainly influenced by institutional atmosphere, and students' linguistic and cultural background. Teachers' stories revealed the importance of English owing to internationalization of education. This study will help LOTE teachers reflect on their own their decision to use English for teaching LOTE.

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Keywords: Internationalization of Higher Education, Teacher's decision making, *Bahasa Melayu*, Narrative research, teaching languages other than English

Introduction

Internationalization for higher education is on the rise. Globally students are moving to other countries for educational purposes. This is not only beneficial for the students but it also benefits the host country culturally, economically, and socially (Pace, 2015; Tham, 2013). Consequently, many countries, including Malaysia (Trahar, 2014), have set targets on attracting large number of international students. It is for this reason that increasing international students' population in Malaysia is one of its targets to achieve its vision 2025. However, while catering to international students, it is not a simple task since to promote national language, *Bahasa Melayu Komunikasi* has been made a compulsory course for all international students (Aziz et al., 2011). This occurred despite the fact that English enjoys the status of ESL in Malaysia (Coluzzi, 2017; Samuel, 2018). The preference of *Bahasa Melayu* over English and vice versa has always created challenging situations for teachers in Malaysian classrooms (Pandian, 2002).

Research is of the view that the use of students' language should be kept to minimum when teaching target language (Hamad, 2013), but what about the mediation of English in teaching *Bahasa Melayu* as a LOTE? Important aspects addressed are teachers' perspective in ESL context rather than the learners'

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responses in EFL or LOTE classrooms (Turnbull, 2018), and teachers teaching *Bahasa Melayu* to international students at tertiary level where all the learners shared English as a common language instead of school learners in EFL setting learning LOTE (Sugita McEown, Sawaki, & Harada, 2017). Thus, how do the teachers explain their decision to use English language when teaching *Bahasa Melayu* as a LOTE, is addressed throughout the article. The goal of this study was therefore to explore *Bahasa Melayu* teachers' decisions of using English when teaching *Bahasa Melayu* to international students.

Literature Review

The literature on teacher's decisions and use of students' native language, L1 or L2 in teaching of English is extensively available, ranging from teacher's decisions in English classroom (Borg, 1999; Borg & Burns, 2008) to teaching LOTE in EFL setting (Rose, 2017; Turnbull, 2018; Zheng, 2014). Prevalent studies have addressed the motivational theories and social factors affecting learning of LOTE (Collins & Muñoz, 2016; Duff, 2017; Sugita McEown et al., 2017) but what is clearly missing in the existing literature is the mediating role of English in teaching LOTE in ESL setting from teachers' perspective (Duff, 2017; Gayton, 2018).

Till nineteenth century the general belief was that in target language classrooms students should not be encouraged to communicate in their native languages (Hall & Cook, 2012). But the twentieth century literature is not in favour of this monolingual teaching and has accepted that using students' language (L1) in the educational context has its advantages (Hall & Cook, 2012). Monolingual teaching technique can be adopted for teaching ESL or EFL because of its *lingua franca* status, but the same monolingual assumption may not stand effective for teaching LOTE.

Research done in Malaysian context has focused mainly on the mediation of *Bahasa Melayu* in teaching of English (Lee, 2016; Romli & Abd Aziz, 2015; Sua, Raman, & Darussalam, 2007). These studies have been conducted in English classroom with a focus on the role of students' language and have adopted different multilingual practices for teaching (Macalister, 2017; Mohd Nor, Leong, & Mohd Salleh, 2017). In the field of LOTE, study has been conducted in Australia on teaching of Chinese and it has been found that English impacts the teaching of Chinese (Liu & Lo Bianco, 2007).

Though the extant literature on teacher's decisions is immense (Borg, 2015; Borko & Shavelson, 2013; Eggleston, 2018; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2017; Smith, 1996), it does not address when and why LOTE teachers use English to teach, specifically in case of *Bahasa Melayu* teaching in ESL setting. Therefore, this article aimed to shed light on the role of English in an ESL context as the previous studies have been conducted in EFL settings. Teachers' narratives helped in identifying their decision of use of English in *Bahasa Melayu* teaching to meet the needs of international students.

Materials and Methods

- *Theoretical framework*

Constructivism was used as a framework in this study to gauge teachers' decisions of use of instructional language (Biggs, 1996; Lotherington, 2001). In this process, Borg's (2005) model for language teacher's cognition was selected because of its comprehensive nature, and secondly, it demonstrates extensive knowledge regarding teachers' cognition. In addition, the framework was supported by narrative interviews to examine teachers' decisions in their use of English in teaching LOTE and explore their experiences. Webster and Mertova (2007), p. 17 asserted, "study of narrative is one way of approaching a number of theoretical and practical problems in education". Thus narrative inquiry helped in better understanding of teachers' cognition (Cross, 2010). Narrative inquiry involves telling reliable, rigorous, and authentic stories from participants' perspective and interpreting these stories in the context of people's daily lives and social setting (Darawsheh, 2014). To enhance the authenticity and accuracy of the study (Bignold & Su, 2013), researchers were responsible to make those narratives valid, authentic, and trustworthy.

- *Research site and participants*

The sites for this study were two public and two private universities of Malaysia. These universities were chosen bearing the following criteria in mind: the institutions were well-recognized and highly ranked in Malaysia; they had international students enrolled within; and *Bahasa Melayu* was taught as a compulsory course to international students.

Since qualitative research is about meaning and not generalization (Alasuutari, 2010), therefore, fewer participants were required (Morse, 2000). Keeping the research questions in mind, six participants were selected for the study (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Morse, 1994). For selection of cases the following criteria were created: first, participants had to be teachers of public or private university in Malaysia; second, they should be teachers of *Bahasa Melayu* language course; and thirdly, during the course of the study, they should be teaching *Bahasa Melayu* to international students.

- *Data Collection, analysis, and process*

Table 1. *Participants' profile*

| Name | University | Age | Teaching Experience | Gender | L1 | L2 | Qualification |
|--------|------------|-----|---------------------|--------|---------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Wahaj | Public | 41 | 20 | M | Bahasa Melayu | English | PhD in progress |
| Zafish | Public | 31 | 4 | F | Bahasa Melayu | English | Masters |
| Zila | Public | 43 | 15 | F | Bahasa Melayu | English | PhD |
| Abzar | Private | 45 | 23 | M | Tamil | Bahasa Melayu | Masters |
| Adi | Private | 39 | 16 | M | Mandarin | Bahasa Melayu | PhD in progress |
| Amilia | Private | 36 | 8 | F | Bahasa Melayu | English | Masters |

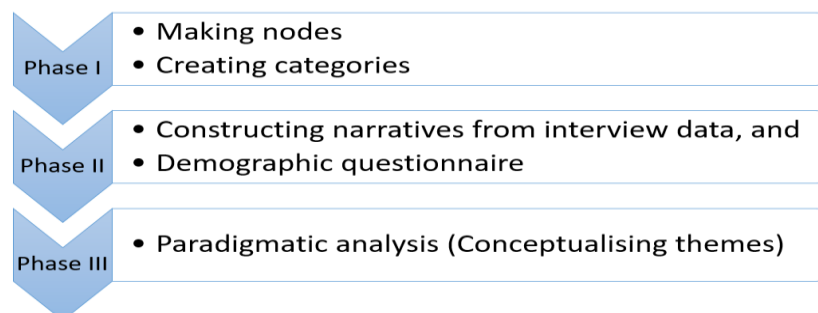
The sources of data in this study included demographic questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. To obtain biographical data of the participants, a demographic questionnaire was used followed by 8 open-ended interview questions. The demographic questionnaire was used to create their profiles as can be seen in Table 1. The data for interview was collected from January – June 2019. 15 interviews with 6 participants were conducted using an interview protocol. On average, each interview lasted 60-80 minutes. The interviews were digitally audio taped. The transcription of the interviews started as soon as the first interview was conducted. Even during the analysis process, the audio tapes were replayed to ensure accuracy. The transcribed data was shared with the participants for data audit. The purpose of involving participants in the transcription process was to assure validity and clarity.

- *Ethical issues in the study*

To ensure that the participants are treated in an ethical manner, ethical procedure laid down by the researcher's institution was followed. Once application was approved by Human Ethics Committee, each participant was approached and a brief study plan was shared with them. To protect the identity of the participants, pseudonyms were used. Moreover, their employer institutions were not named. Special attention was paid to preserving anonymity even at the earliest analysis stage. This was done by ensuring that participants' identity was not disclosed in the quotations that were derived from the transcripts. To ensure that the stories meet the ethical requirements, each narrative was revisited several times to add or exclude the information which could potentially intrude the participants' privacy.

Results

Data analysis took place in three systematic phases while the research was still in progress (Bernard, Wutich, & Ryan, 2016; Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019). For data analysis, the procedure established by Denley and Bishop was followed (2010) that "involved applying coding system to the transcript data", "generating accounts", and integrating "own commentary" in the accounts (pp. 119-120). This three phased data analysis is shown in Figure 1:

**Figure 1.** *Data Analysis process*

The phase 1 started as soon as the first participant's transcribed data was imported into nVivo 12 software. By following thematic analysis, a coding system was applied to the transcription (Denley & Bishop, 2010). An inductive approach was adopted during this coding cycle (Saldaña, 2016), which resulted in 181 nodes. During the Phase 2, the next step in the analysis was to re-read the data of each individual and construct narrative for each participant (Cumming, 2009) from the main categories. While doing this, it was assured to preserve the participants' narratives without letting the researcher's interpretation influence it. The final phase (Phase 3) was an analysis of narratives, where stories collected as data were analysed by paradigmatic process (Polkinghorne, 1995). Paradigmatic analysis was employed to find common themes across the data by looking at similarities and differences in each individual's narrative (Phoenix, 2013). Segments of the narratives grouped by categories were conceptualised into themes. Moreover, it was at this final level of analysis that the researcher's interpretation of the data came in (Denley & Bishop, 2010).

During the data analysis process, each individual's narrative was analyzed through a three dimensional narrative inquiry lens of temporality, place, and sociality (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Webster & Mertova, 2007), while focusing on the themes related to teachers' decisions. When analyzed within the framework of temporality, Bahasa Melayu teachers' stories talked of how their past experience of teaching international students affected their decision of using English as an instructional language. Moreover, the stories not only moved back and forth in time but also talk of different context and situations. Situated in specific time and place, and are regarding people and their experiences, the same narratives were also about the communities that these people dwell in (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Furthermore, relationship between the participant and the researcher was another feature of the social condition. A researcher cannot distance herself from this relationship as her inquiries are closely related with participants' lives. Researcher's role as an international student and Bahasa Melayu teachers' teaching international students influenced the inquiry to some extent. To get an in-depth knowledge of the participants' accounts, the process of construction of stories was adopted, to provide interpretive and descriptive stories of their accounts (McCormack, 2004).

The following is an account of the narratives of the participants of the study. This process involved segmenting the narratives into smaller units and then reorganizing these units into the framework of interpretivism. In this process the researcher was guided by the three dimensional inquiry framework together with the categories which had emerged in phase 1.

- *Wahaj's Narrative*

The first participant of the study, Wahaj, was in his 40s, teaching *Bahasa Melayu* at a reputable public university. He had 20 years teaching experience. *Bahasa Melayu* was his native language and he was proficient at it. During the data collection phase he was pursuing his PhD. However proficient in *Bahasa*, his English was not very good and most of the times he would unconsciously switch from English to *Bahasa* during conversation. Teaching the same language course for years, he preferred that *Bahasa* should not be taught with the help of other languages. He would say: "*Bahasa Melayu* definitely! English is prohibited. Because this is *Malay* language class." He would rather use visuals and pictures than use English to teach *Bahasa Melayu*: "numbers and places normally they [students] understand without any guidance or instruction in English. Definitely, for the places they [students] will understand *Bahasa* because it's the name. I don't use English, unless it is badly required."

Time and place played a major role in changing his beliefs. While teaching young beginners Wahaj never taught *Bahasa Melayu* with the help of English but when he joined a university, he understood that teaching children was different than teaching adults. Once a firm believer of '*Bahasa* only' instructions for language teaching, he had to change his teaching to his university level students' need. Comparing his past teaching experience of tutoring young learners to his present university he said: "over here a large number of learners were English users" which influenced his choice of language, thus: "making it difficult for me to completely exclude English".

Wahaj took both planned and unplanned decisions when it came to teaching international students. He knew his class composition and had to plan his course accordingly. He added contents to his course outlines: "Mostly I do more than course outline. I give them extra." Thus while designing syllabus he always took into account his students' level. The same was the case with his use of language, "It is [the] teacher's decision which language to use but for me, when it comes to basic [level] then definitely I have to use English language." His unplanned decisions not only included adding extra contents and switching to English, but also using students' native language whenever possible: "to develop bond with students, it's a good idea to know their language, sometimes I do use that."

- *Zafish's Narrative*

The second participant of the study, Zafish, was a young lecturer with four years teaching experience at a public university. Her native language was *Bahasa Melayu*, but she was a proficient user of English language. She believed that English was an important language but the importance of learning other languages could not be denied either. She learned *Arabic* and *Urdu*, the native language for most of her students, because she felt that it was required for building rapport with students: "we can speak other languages with students to show them that we care for them, to build rapport with them." When it came to Zafish's preferred language for teaching international students, there was a transition in her choice of language from solely *Bahasa Melayu* to use of English for teaching. She believed that teacher is the main source of exposure in language classroom, therefore, she preferred using *Bahasa* to its maximum: "In every session, I speak *Bahasa Ingeris* (English) and *Bahasa Melayu*. But towards the, I mean last week of lecture, I speak *Bahasa Melayu* more than English."

Using English was not Zafish's first choice when teaching *Bahasa* and she thought that it interferes in the learning of *Bahasa Melayu*. But her language preferences changed over the time. She recounted how one day some students came and told her: "May be for beginning you can start to communicate in English".

- *Zila's Narrative*

Zila was PhD in *Malay* studies and Translation. She was the third participant of the study who also preferred using *Bahasa Melayu* for teaching it and claimed that monolingual instructions have better results as compared to bilingual ones: "English is interfering in learning of *Bahasa*. I prefer to be monolingual than bilingual." Zila went to Thailand on an exchange program from her university and there she had the chance to teach *Bahasa Melayu* to *Thai* students. During her stay she faced quite challenging situations because of communication gap. To overcome language barrier, she learned *Thai*. As her stay period was for three months, she started exposing herself to *Thai* language. But when it came to teaching *Bahasa Melayu* she would use only the classroom language or unconsciously switch to English for explanation.

Recollecting her experience of teaching international students in Malaysia and teaching international students in Thailand, she juxtaposed her experiences: "Here [in Malaysia] all students know English but there [in Thailand] they couldn't speak or understand it; here I can use English more frequently for teaching *Bahasa Melayu*, there I had to use *Bahasa* only or *Thai* for teaching *Bahasa Melayu*." Her experience of exchange program shaped her language teaching to a greater extent and it reflected in her teaching too, "My teaching was monolingual there but here I am more towards bilingual instructions." Her past experience of teaching *Thai* students shaped her language preferences and she started believing that language teachers should not use other languages as a scaffold because rather than making students independent learners it makes them depend too much on L1 or English in case of *Bahasa Melayu*.

Teaching the same language course for 15 years made Zila aware of her students' needs and she always planned her syllabus keeping the same in mind. She preferred planning her syllabus in such a way that it addressed the needs of diverse learners. Rather than taking extra time explaining to 'slow learners' she would arrange one-to-one meetings and consultations for them. Moreover, the environment at Zila's university was unfavorable for *Bahasa Melayu* learners and, therefore, she had to put extra efforts to make language learning easy for the students, "when they go outside the class, the environment sometimes doesn't help them to learn *Bahasa Melayu*." But contextual factors didn't deter Zila and pre-planning helped her achieve her course objectives, "I need to use different techniques and I have to plan everything before the semester." Though she firmly believed that pre-planning is effective for language teaching, she knew that students' display of visual signals should not be ignored.

- *Abzar's Narrative*

Abzar was the oldest amongst all the participants. He had 23 years teaching experience and was teaching *Bahasa Melayu* since 1996. Abzar was a witness to *Bahasa* losing its status as a dominant language to its counterpart English, "English will always be the main language, because it is a *lingua franca*. The students are more in it and they are thinking high of that language." Familiar with the changing statuses of the two languages, he valued *Bahasa* and English equally, "we need to keep a balance." But when it came to teaching international students, "they [international pupils] come here with zero knowledge of *Malay* language, definitely, I cannot start anything in *Malay* language. I use English more with international students." He recollected, "Using *Malay* all the way would be a bit tough because some may not understand... so English is there." Further he added, "I need to balance. I use English and *Bahasa* both."

Being an experienced teacher, he knew that a language teacher cannot plan everything in advance and he needed to take some unplanned decisions in-class based on his students' observable behaviour. He would switch from one language to another: "we have [a] mix of students, who come from various nationalities: the Indonesian students, Singaporean students, Brunei, they know very well *Malay* language. They get bored when you teach them '*Ayam*' [chicken] they will '*hahaha*', they will laugh."

- *Adi's Narrative*

Adi was pursuing his PhD in Teaching of *Malay* as a foreign language. He had 16 years of teaching experience. Previously he was employed at a private university but after serving it for 8 years, he decided to change his workplace and moved to another private university. While talking about his students he mentioned, "at my old university there were international students too but I think here [where I work currently] the students are from more diversified linguistic and cultural background." He was a hyper polyglot as well as a tech-savvy person, who believed that if teachers integrate technology in the teaching of languages, it can result in effective language learning and teaching. He had introduced technologically integrated teaching methodologies at his workplace and was working on its advancement with specific reference to teaching *Bahasa Melayu* related modules. Though a multilingual, his stance was, "the importance and presence of English language cannot be denied in this modern era."

Both times Adi was employed at private institutions where he had to teach international students. He shared, "About 200 international students that come from 30 different countries, for them I have to deliver my lectures in English. If I speak 100 percent *Malay*, they will not be able to understand." Being a public university graduate himself, he was aware that contextual factors do play a major role in learning of L2 or L3, "At private university, where students get maximum exposure to English, if they could utter even a few

Bahasa words that made me happy.” Adi’s preferred language was English, therefore, online courses he had designed for *Bahasa Melayu* were both in English and *Bahasa*, “I will write primarily in English but the details I will give like ‘the deadline is *jumat*’ [Friday], I will write that in *Malay* so at least they will try to find ‘okay oh!’.” Not only for delivering lectures but also for written correspondence, he used English, “I send the announcement to the students, and I remind them to do a task, of course I will write primarily in English.”

Adi’s mother tongue was *Mandarin* but he did not find it easy to acquire it until he was in his primary school. Since it was a compulsory language course, he was sent to a *Mandarin* tutor to learn it. Though he knew some basics of *Mandarin* but was unable to grasp it as a language for communication. He recollected how his *Mandarin* teacher would motivate him to speak target language. It was only with the help of his Chinese friends that he started getting command on *Mandarin*. His own schooling impacted his belief which in turn affected his choice of language for teaching. Even though he believed that English cannot be completely ruled out from *Bahasa Melayu*, “when it comes to actual conversation on their podcast and their work, everything has to be done in *Malay*.”

Adi was a strategist for whom planning mattered a lot. Having students from diverse background, he always planned his courses carefully, “I have to plan my modules in such a way that they cater to the need of all the groups in class. If I go against my planning, I might miss on some important aspects I planned for that specific class.”

- *Amilia’s Narrative*

The final participant of this study was Amilia, a 36-year-old *Bahasa Melayu* teacher, who had been teaching *Bahasa Melayu* related subjects for 10 years. She talked of herself as a very friendly and open-minded person who enjoys teaching international students. During her own degree studies, Malaysian language education policies changed, and with the same change, she needed to translate her dissertations from English to *Bahasa Melayu*, “we needed to translate though some of my exams were in English, but my university demanded to translate all the written text including my final thesis from English to *Bahasa*.” This change in policy affected Amilia’s language teaching to a greater extent.

Right after her graduation when she was offered teaching position at a private university, that was her first experience of teaching *Bahasa Melayu*. At that time *Bahasa* Malaysia was the medium of instruction in all the private and public institutions, therefore, she had to adopt monolingual teaching practices: “Teaching *Bahasa Kebangsaan* and Modern Studies that was my 1st experience. Actually during that time I was teaching all of *Bahasa Melayu* subjects in *Malay* language. Because the text book was *Bahasa Kebangsaan*, the modern studies, so that’s why we needed to fulfil the requirement in *Malay* language.”

Later she joined another private university but that was, “an international university, and I had to teach international students. International students I know, I had to converse in English. I knew how difficult it would be to make them understand only in *Malay* language, therefore, I tried my best to help them by using English.” Moreover, studying from English medium institutions herself, it was not an easy task for her to use *Bahasa Melayu* solely for instruction, “*Bahasa Melayu* is my native language but when it comes to teaching international students, we need another language for explanation.” On the other hand, delivering all the contents in English was also not her preference, “I will use *Malay* language, when we are in week 6, week 7 and 8. I will focus more on their writing and the communication, so they need to speak in *Malay* language.”

Time and place played an important role in Amilia’s decision of using English to teach *Bahasa Melayu* to international students. A few years ago, when she started teaching *Bahasa Melayu*, it was obligatory for her to use *Bahasa* solely but the change in language educational policy affected her decisions, “before this we had policy called in *Malay* language, *Akta Kebangsaan* policy. In 1969, English was compulsory in our education but then *Bahasa* became all important.” Being aware that in international classroom, she would have students with different linguistic background, she had to conduct classes in English, “for I need to speak English because I have students from different countries. Like I have from Egypt, I cannot speak Arabic (laughs). So that’s why I prefer English.” Having diversified learners, English was a common language among her students, therefore, she did not feel the need of learning other languages, “I believe English language is enough to keep the students engaged”, she expressed.

Her students were more comfortable when she spoke and taught in English as they all had some level of proficiency in English. She recollected, “they [students] enjoy my using English. They would be asking ‘Miss, what is this? Can you explain in English?’” As per her past practice, Amilia knew about the two distinct groups of students in her international classroom, one group “from China, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Thailand, and the other group from Brunei, Indonesian, and Singapore. This latter group have some know-how of *Bahasa Malay* but the others are difficult.” Therefore, when it comes to planning syllabus she designed it according to the level of students, “In the 1st class, before the semester has started I don’t know them or their level of language, therefore, I cannot plan everything in advance”.

Amilia narrated her experience of teaching a student who had no knowledge of *Bahasa* but knew very Basic English. That was a challenging experience for her as she could not speak student’s native language,

neither did student understand *Bahasa*. “I always remember my course leader say that bring down your level because we need to understand our students, and their level. So I knew I must do something that he understands. I had to change my teaching style for him and that was totally an unplanned step.” She further added, “Sometimes I need to switch looking at their behaviour”.

Discussion

The study can be summarized and examined in four aspects: contextual factors, students’ linguistic background, language preference and teachers’ planning, each of these aspects hinted at the teachers’ decision and use of preferred language to teach *Bahasa Melayu*.

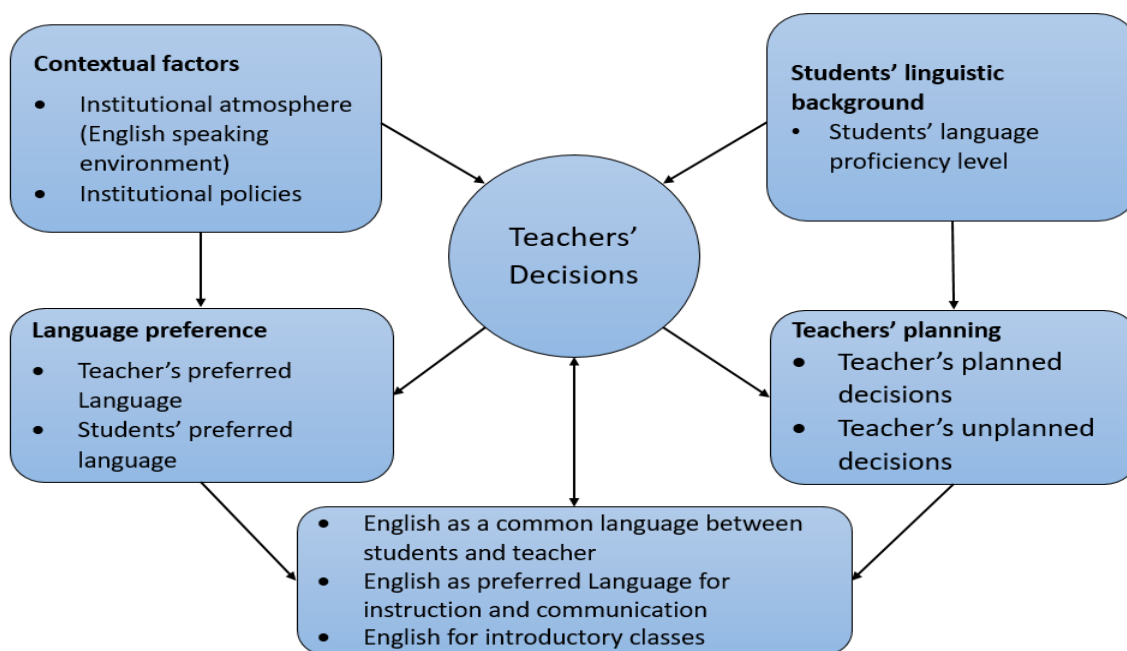


Figure 2. Teachers’ Decision and use of preferred language to teach *Bahasa Melayu*

• Contextual Factors

It has been found that institutional atmosphere (which is called “organizational atmosphere” or “institutional context” by Öztürk and Gürbüz (2017), p.13) and institutional policies affect teachers’ decisions, which in turn shape their classroom practices and influence their use of instructional language. Findings showed that English speaking environment played a major role in Abzar’s decision of using English to teach *Bahasa Melayu* the same way as it had an impact on Amilia’s classroom practices. Likewise, in the case of Zafish, her institutional atmosphere positioned her as the main source of exposure to *Bahasa Melayu*. For Adi, English speaking atmosphere of his institution influenced his decision of using English rather than *Bahasa* as a preferred language for teaching. Whereas his institutional policies demanded from him technologically enhanced teaching. Related to Adi’s situation, Zila was required to follow a pre-set curriculum as per her institutional policies.

Where on one hand, contextual factors play a major role in shaping teachers’ decisions, “language policies can influence decisions about teaching methodologies” (Liddicoat, 2004). The changes brought by Malaysian educational policies did not affect Abzar’s preferred language for teaching *Bahasa Melayu*. He persistently favored the use of English to teach *Bahasa Melayu* to international students. The case was not different for Adi, whose preferred language for instruction as well as written correspondence with international students was English. But the same language policies which did not affect Abzar and Adi, influenced Amilia’s teaching practices. This finding relates to Öztürk and Gürbüz (2017) that teacher’s cognition is influenced by pre-service education.

• Students’ Linguistic Background

Participants’ data showed that *Bahasa Melayu* teachers plan their course contents according to the interest and level of their students. Zafish mentioned two groups of students in her classroom – those who have no interest in learning *Bahasa Melayu*, and those who are really motivated to learn it. Abzar, Amilia, and Zila talked about different levels of students in an international classroom: students with some proficiency of *Bahasa Melayu*, and others with no knowledge of the language at all. Thus, these teachers

planned their teaching methodologies based on their students' needs. Being aware of individual learners' needs, they tailored their lessons to suit them. Students' language proficiency level and linguistic background were found as the most influential factors in shaping teachers' in-class decisions and classroom practices. All the participants unanimously reported that they take into account their students' language proficiency level, attitude, and motivation to execute their teaching plans. This finding was in conformity with the available studies, where learners' profile shaped teacher's classroom practices (Borg, 2005; Burns, 1996; Keh, 2015; Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2017).

- *Language Preference*

When it comes to teaching LOTE, language choice is the main decision which teachers make. It was found in this study that English was the common language between the teacher and the student. Being the decision maker, the teacher's position in the classroom is important, as all classroom practices revolve around her, including her decision of when and which language to use for teaching. Though sometimes classroom instructions were delivered in *Bahasa Melayu* but most of the times it was found that teachers preferred using English. Participating teachers' responses illustrated that their decision to use English was mostly planned but at times they needed to take unplanned decisions of switching from *Bahasa Melayu* to English and vice versa. The subsequent paragraphs elaborate *Bahasa Melayu* teacher's decision of using English during classroom instructions.

- *English as teacher's preferred language.*

Participants' data showed that *Bahasa Melayu* lecturers are flexible in their choice and use of languages when teaching *Bahasa Melayu* to international students. Though they favoured maximum use of *Bahasa Melayu* but in actuality English was reported as their preferred language which can be seen in the narrations of Abzar, Adi, Wahaj and Amilia. The reason mentioned by them was that they are well aware of their classroom composition, which comprised of students from different linguistic backgrounds. In such a scenario where there are learners from diverse linguistic background, a teacher needs a common language to communicate with the students, and English is considered the only common language between *Bahasa Melayu* teacher and her international students. This makes English a frequently used instructional language for *Bahasa Melayu* teaching.

- *Use of English in introductory classes*

Bahasa Melayu teachers based their decision of using English on the stance that they cannot start their teaching in *Bahasa Melayu* from day one of the class as students are unfamiliar with it. As international students are unfamiliar with *Bahasa Melayu*, communication in this language would be time consuming as it may slow down the learning process of students. Furthermore, English was used as "ice-breaking" as Abzar called it, whereas, Wahaj and Zafish reported its use for explaining the concepts. All the participants unanimously believed that students do have some level of understanding of English, thus it can be used for the introductory classes. Unlike other participants of this study, Zila opposed the view of using English to teach *Bahasa Melayu* even in the first week of the semester. She explicitly stated that teacher's use of English "motivates students to interact in English". Though she was aware of the fact that English cannot be excluded from *Bahasa Melayu* classroom, she suggested that for effective language learning, teachers should try to exclude English from their *Bahasa Melayu* instructions. This highlights the fact that English is believed to be a hindrance in learning of LOTE (Busse, 2017). But it is nevertheless *Bahasa Melayu* teacher's preferred language for teaching international students.

- *English as Students' preferred language*

Participants' narratives showed that English is the preferred language for communication and instruction not only for teachers but also for international students. The teachers were well aware that their frequent use of English encourages students to communicate more in English than in *Bahasa Melayu*. Zila and Amilia expressed that they use English because of a few reasons i.e., in international classroom most of the students are users of English language and they feel comfortable using English with peers within and beyond classroom; English is the medium of instruction for all the other subjects, therefore, students welcome its use in teaching of *Bahasa Melayu* too; and lastly, communication solely in *Bahasa Melayu* with new learners would demand extra time and efforts from teacher. Therefore, participants believed that English cannot be completely ruled out from *Bahasa Melayu* classroom.

- *Use of Students' native language*

Data showed that teachers tried to communicate in the students' native language to build relationship with them. Moreover, it was also found that *Bahasa Melayu* teachers occasionally used students' native language for informal conversation to show togetherness with them. Similar to any other classroom, *Bahasa Melayu* teachers also hold the view that teacher-student relationship is of utmost importance. It has been affirmed by Borg (2005) that student-teacher relationship plays a vital role in shaping teacher's decisions.

- *Teachers' planning*
- *Teachers' planned decisions: Syllabus Designing*

Results revealed that in public universities, teachers have to follow a set curriculum. But since in an international classroom students are from different levels, the curriculum does not meet the needs of all the students. Therefore, *Bahasa Melayu* lecturers at the public university believed that if they are given freedom to modify and update the syllabus as per students' level, it will make their learning more effective, which does not usually happen in public universities. On the contrary, in private universities there is no set curriculum to follow and teachers design their own syllabus. Participants' statements showed the influence of institutional context (Öztürk & Gürbüz, 2017) and freedom to design syllabus (Borg, 2005) on teachers' decision.

Teachers' past experience of teaching the same course to international students and their knowledge of class composition also affect their decision of designing the curriculum. All the participants had prior experience of teaching international students and were aware of students' needs in *Bahasa Melayu* class. Thus, having students from diverse linguistic background affected *Bahasa Melayu* teacher's planning.

- *Teachers' unplanned decisions: Observable behavior*

Despite the fact that the teachers planned their decisions based on their beliefs, sometimes their classroom teaching, delivery of content, and use of language are affected by their "unplanned decisions" (Perfecto, 2012). Data indicated that participants' use of English to teach *Bahasa Melayu* was a result of their unplanned decisions which included teacher's use of English during instructions, students' errors correction, and informal communication. *Bahasa Melayu* teachers took these unplanned decisions impromptu in the class by observing students' non-verbal cues and secondly, for addressing learners' imprecision. Out of 6, 4 participants believed that those unplanned decisions which were executed because of students' understanding, can potentially make the situation effective for rest of the class as well.

Regardless of teachers' beliefs, they cannot plan everything in advance. Mostly in international classroom the language proficiency of students can only be gauged after meeting them, which typically happens in the first week of a semester.

Conclusion

Upholding the use of *Bahasa Melayu* amongst international students is an objective of Malaysian education policy and it is for the said reason that *Bahasa Melayu Komunikasi* is made a compulsory language course. However, the importance of English in a multilingual and multiracial Malaysia cannot be ignored. It has been found that *Bahasa Melayu* teachers take their decision of using English when teaching international students because it is both teacher's and students' preferred instructional language. Students' linguistic background was used as a framework for teacher's planned decisions (e.g., syllabus designing) as well as unplanned decisions (e.g., observable behaviour).

It has also been found that teachers plan their course syllabus keeping in mind their students' linguistic background but in-class the same teachers take some unplanned decisions based on their students' observable behaviour. These unplanned decisions include their use of English for students' error correction and clarification, though primarily for translation and explanation purposes. Additionally, students' command on English and no knowledge of *Bahasa Melayu* made it not only their preferred instructional but also the conversational language. Similarly, *Bahasa Melayu* teachers' bilingual teaching practices and translation teaching techniques were also a result of students' linguistic incompetency in *Bahasa Melayu*.

Another important finding was the use of English for building rapport with students. It has been stated in literature (Jan, Samuel, & Shafiq, 2020; Lee, 2016; Sugita McEown et al., 2017; Turnbull, 2018) that in EFL and ESL classrooms, teachers use students' native language to overcome communication differences but in case of LOTE, this narrative study showed that teachers use English for bridging the communication gap.

The data presented confirms that though English is the main medium for communication in an international setting, it can sometimes result in delaying the process of learning *Bahasa Melayu* as a new language. This supports the notion of Henry (2010) who concluded that English interferes in the motivation to learn LOTE, but concurs with Haukås (2015) that in multilingual classrooms English helps in teaching of L3. Along the same lines, participants corroborated the use and importance of English owing to internationalization of education, as evident from literature (see, Cogo and Pitz (2013)). This was the general opinion despite the fact that none of the teachers in this study was English teacher or had English as their L1.

To recapitulate, teaching *Bahasa Melayu* with the help of English can have positive effects (building rapport, clarification, error correction, and developing understanding) or negative effects (slowing down *Bahasa Melayu* learning process, overdependence on another language for learning, time consuming) on students' learning. A good practice would be to carefully keep a balance between the two languages while teaching *Bahasa Melayu* with the help of English, as an imbalance may affect teachers' classroom implementations (i.e., using too much English for instruction can limit learners' exposure to *Bahasa Melayu*, and teacher's use of translation and bilingual approaches).

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Appendix 1

Phase 2 of Data Analysis- Categories used for construction of Narratives

Categories for teachers' decisions of use of English in *Bahasa Melayu* classroom

