BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A WAY TO PROMOTE ENGLISH LITERACY?

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Abstract

The purpose of this research was to find out whether or not the bilingual education could promote English literacy of the first year students in the bilingual program class at SMPN 1 in Jambi. This study assumed that with limited time available for studying English at school, the first year students are, in general, at the performative level. The design of the study was descriptive. The data were collected through observation, interview, and the students’ realizations under the assigned topic. The result of the study revealed that most of the students were in a functional literacy level and only few of them were still in performative literacy level. However, as evidenced in the students’ spoken and written realization tests, the language they used still contained linguistic errors. In fact, that all of the students enjoyed being in the bilingual program class and showed their great enthusiasm in learning English might signal that bilingual education program could be an alternative program. This program can provide more English exposure to students within the very limited time available to study English at school, so that the optimal expectation of learning English at school can be achieved.

Keywords: Bilingual, Promote, Literacy

Background

As a global language, English is used by more than one billion people in the world to access information, do business, and maintain social communication. It is also a main language on the internet and computer’s storage systems. Therefore, a good mastery of English is a very essential skill in this global communication era.

To be considered literate in English, one needs to be able to communicate effectively in English which requires more than just the ability to produce English words and structurally correct sentences. It implies that the person should have a good mastery of English Literacy.

Literacy is commonly defined as the ability to read and write. In the specific context of academic second language and foreign language, literacy refers to: “… the use of socially, historically, and culturally situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their context of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships… It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on the knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge.” (Kern, 200:16).
Based on the definition above, there are seven principles of Literacy that arise out of definition i.e. Literacy involves interpretation, collaboration, conventions, cultural knowledge, problem solving, reflection and self-reflection, and language use. These principles can be summarized by the macro principle i.e. “literacy involves communication.”

The macro principle makes a link between literacy and communication. It drives to the shifting in the language pedagogy from language usage to language use. In the context of teaching literacy, this implicates an extension of focus beyond text (i.e. stretches of concrete, observable language data) to discourse (i.e. text plus the social and cognitive process involved in its realization as an expressive or communicate act) (Kern, 2000:19).

There are four level of literacy namely performative, functional, informational, and epistemic. Moreover, Wells (as cited in Hammond, 1992:9) describes performative level as emphasizing on the code as code. It implies becoming literate is simply a matter of acquiring those skills that allow written message to be decoded into speech in order to ascertain its meaning and those skills that allow the spoken message to be encoded in writing. Functional refers to the use of literacy in interpersonal communication. To be literate means to be able to cope with the demands of everyday life that involve written language such as reading a popular magazine, writing a job application, and following procedural instructions. Furthermore, in Informational level, literacy plays the important role in the communication of knowledge, particularly discipline-based knowledge such as comprehending scientific journals and other academic writing. Epistemic level, according to this perspective, is to have available ways of acting upon and transforming knowledge and experience that are in general unavailable to those who have never learned to read and write. Regarding the junior high school (SLTP) students in Indonesia, the Curriculum 2004 demands that the literacy level of the students should be at the Functional Level.

In the model of language education program, Hammond (1992) proposed that the literacy perspective entails some points: (i) the focus of language education program is on language at the whole text level rather than at the sentences level; (ii) the language should be taught in context; (iii) assessment should be done based on the models introduced to the students; (iv) spoken and written language are different in nature and play different roles in education and therefore, the students should be taught accordingly; (v) the different natures between spoken and written language implies that writing is not a speech written down. In other words, writing has an autonomous system and so is speaking.

An approach to gain the objectives above is through Bilingual Education. Bilingual education’s purpose is to help students to maintain their native language or to continue to grow in their native language while acquiring the second language. The term bilingual education itself may refer to the use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects (Richards et al, 1997:36); or it may refer to an education scheme in which the child receives educational instruction in at least two languages with one of these being the mother tongue of some or all the students in the classroom (Walter, 2005:4)
In general, there are two models of bilingual education, *additive* bilingual education and *subtractive* bilingual education. The purpose of additive bilingual education program is to develop full bilingualism, biliteracy, and biculturism by adding the second language and maintaining and developing the first language. In contrast, the primary purpose of subtractive bilingual education is to become monolingual in the second language by abandoning the native language (Cummin in Soltero, 2004).

**The Implementation of Bilingual Education Program at SMPN 1 Jambi**

The Bilingual education program implemented at SMPN 1 Jambi is the Maintenance Bilingual Education Model. In this model the language instruction the students receive initially mostly in their native language, Indonesian, while English is added gradually in increasing amounts from time to time before finally both languages are equally used in instruction. The primary aim of maintenance bilingual education is for the students to develop and achieve academically bilingual and biliterate proficiencies (Soltero, 2004).

Before the bilingual program started in 2004, all the teachers teaching Math and Science (Biology and Physics) were tested their English ability. Three selected teachers of teaching the content subjects together with a teacher of English of SMPN 1 Jambi were sent to Surabaya for a three-week enrichment training program for English and content subjects. The Headmaster was also sent to Surabaya for three days to have orientation about the bilingual education program. The students who were placed in the class of bilingual education program were also tested their English ability through a written test sent by the Ministry of National Education (DEPDIKNAS) in Jakarta. The results of the test scores were ranked and only 40 students with the highest scores were accepted to attend the bilingual class.

**Research Methodology**

The design of the study was descriptive. This research was conducted to the first year students of bilingual class at SMPN 1 Jambi during the second semester of the academic year 2009/2010. The data collections were obtained through observation, interview, and the use of students’ realization in both spoken and written English. The speaking realization was taken by asking them individually to give description about an animal they like most. Then, in order to know how they realized the description of their favourite animal in written language, the students were asked to write a composition on the above topic. To determine the literacy level of the students’ realization, the Holistic Scoring Rubrics by O’Malley and Pierce (1996) were used. This holistic scoring divides the students’ realization into six categories which is then converted to the four levels of literacy as suggested by Wells (in Hammond, 2004).
Findings and Discussions

Table 1. The students’ realizations on spoken language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Literacy Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Epistemic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>29.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>37.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>32.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Performative</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The result showed that the literacy level of the students’ in spoken language ranged from rating 2 to 4. It also showed that the majority students (37.84 %) were in rating 3, while 10 students (29.37 %) were in rating 4, and 12 students (32.43%) were in rating 2. It indicated that all students were in functional level or above.

The Holistic scoring rubric suggested that students in rating 2 should be able to use functional vocabulary. The fact showed that the bilingual class students were able to use the functional vocabulary in their sentences such as “My favourite animal is tiger”, or “I have three cats at home”. In addition the students showed sufficient ability in understanding words and phrases. However, they sometimes required repetition to make utterances understandable, and spoke in single words, utterances, and short patterns.

On the other hand, the students in rating 3 showed sufficient performance in responding to the questions as well as describing about their favourite animals. However, it was noticeable that they had limited vocabulary as they sometimes searched for words and spoke hesitantly in their response. Besides, they demonstrated some omission and transfer errors.

The students who belonged to rating 4 showed better performance than the students in rating 2 and 3. They often initiated conversation and showed self-confidence in the way they described in details their favourite animal and how they felt toward the animal as shown in their sentences such as “I like rabbit because rabbit is very nice, fun, and cute”. However, their occasional hesitation while giving the description was still observable.

Table 2. The students’ realizations on written language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Literacy Level</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Epistemic</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>62.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Functional</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>35.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Performative</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>37</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The students’ realization on written language is quite different from the students’ realization in spoken in which the ratings were spread almost equally in rating 2, 3, and 4. It can be seen from the table 2 that most students (62.16%) were in rating 3 but no one is in rating 4, 5, or 6. 13 out of 37 (35.14) were at rating 2 and 1 student was at rating 1 (epistemic level). This finding that they did better in spoken English than in written English was rather surprising. This is because in written English, they actually had more time to think and prepare their realization.

As mentioned above, most students were at rating 3 (functional level). The common characteristics of the students found in this level were that they were able to write sentences around an idea, put some sentences in sequence, but still lacked of cohesion. In addition, they began to use compound sentences but there were many run-on sentences (e.g. Cat is the animal like tiger, but the cat is tame not like tiger tiger is the wild animal, the food cat can we buy at the market; I very love some animal, but the most I like a male tiger, coz it the wild animal and the sharp eyes make me afraid, but I like it.). Moreover, they still had difficulties in subject and verb agreement (e.g. Rabbit have long ear; The monkey drink milk) and made some omission (e.g. My cat sometime naughty; He always eating my food) and transfer error (e.g. I very like cat; Cat like steal meat; There are five cat in my house).

Regarding the lower rating (rating 2), there were thirteen students who belonged to this rating. The common characteristics of the students in this rating were that they wrote predominantly phrases and patterns of simple sentences, and used limited and repetitious vocabularies.

One important note was that although 36 out of 37 students were in functional level (rating 2 and 3), there was one in epistemic level (rating 1). This was mainly because she copied her unfinished work from a model (her friend’s work). Additionally, she showed very little awareness of spelling, capitalization, and punctuation. Moreover, she did not show enough ideas development or organizations.

Some supporting data taken during the observation showed that all of the students seemed to enjoy being in the bilingual class. The interview with the students verified that being in the bilingual class with more time in English in their classroom interaction contributed a lot to their positive attitude towards English. They also realized the importance of English in this global world.

The interview with the teachers who taught Mathematics, Physics, and Biology at the bilingual class revealed that there were some factors that might influence the students’ literacy level stated as follows:

- The teachers did not have high self-confidence with their English ability
- They considered a three-week training was not enough to make them speak English fluently.
- The facilities were insufficient to support their teaching.
- The teaching materials for bilingual class are not authentic (only translate Indonesian Texts into English).
- Teaching method applied to the students of bilingual and regular class is not different.
- Former lecturers from the universities hired to up-grade the teachers knowledge in English.
and content areas were disappointing.

These factors need researching, as they were not the focus of this study. This research was aimed at finding out the literacy level of the students in Bilingual class in order to see whether or not the bilingual education program can promote English literacy. As evidenced in the students’ spoken and written realization that their literacy level was functional and that all of the students enjoyed being in the bilingual program class and showed their great enthusiasm in learning English might signal that bilingual education program can promote English literacy. This program could be an alternative program which provide more English exposure to students within the very limited time available to study English at school, so that the optimal expectation of learning English at school can be achieved.

Summary
There are some important points emerge from the findings:
1. The realizations of the students writing in spoken English were ranged from 2 to 4 while in written English the rating ranged from 1 to 3.
2. The numbers of the students in each rating were almost equal for spoken English meanwhile written English the majority of the student were only in rating 3.
3. The literacy level of the bilingual class students was at functional level. This indicated that the achievement of the bilingual class program matches with the standard as stated in the curriculum 2006.

Meanwhile, there were two other texts namely narrative and recount that the first year students of junior high school had to master as stated in the Curriculum 2006. Due to the limitation of this research, it is strongly suggested to conduct further research under this area with a wider scope as well as a longer time.

DAFTAR PUSTAKA


