Investigating Language Teachers' Instructional Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Teachers' instructional strategies contribute to the development of students' language skills. This study aimed to explore language teachers' instructional strategies implemented in the classroom. We investigated seven language school teachers on their choices of strategies and the rationales behind the choices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The study revealed that teachers use both L1 and L2 as the language of instruction, focusing more on communication than grammar—the use of translation aimed at scaffolding students' acquisition. Teachers also recognized the importance of using authentic materials and technology to enhance students' language skills.

Keywords: Language Teachers, EFL Teachers, Instructional Strategies, Grammar Teaching, Communicative Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Teachers' implementation of instructional strategies greatly influences effective learning. Student achievement and engagement are evident when teachers employ various strategies to assist the teaching and learning process. To guarantee that the learning strategies lead to comprehension, a teacher must prepare and carry them out effectively. Good preparation and organization will result in positive outcomes for students. Teachers' instructional strategies reflect teachers' perception, behavior, and encouragement to establish learning motivation for the good of learning (Bandura, Freeman, & Lightsey, 1997). Teaching practice is reflected in how teachers conceive their thought and capability in developing their instruction (Al-Awaid, 2020; Chacón, 2005).

Language learning strategies implemented in the language classroom are crucial in improving students' skills. Therefore, English teachers must use instructional strategies based on student's learning needs and competencies. In the Indonesian context, the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture promotes communicative language teaching. However, many teachers do not employ teaching strategies fostering communicative language teaching. Students become demotivated as the learning is more grammar focus. Many teachers might not exert activities that include a communicative approach, even if it is already encouraged by the curriculum (Maba & Mantra, 2018). Furthermore, some teachers still hesitate to use English as instruction. As a result, students do not feel the need to use the language.

In the context of English language teaching, several previous studies conceptualize teachers' instructional strategies into two views; communicative-oriented strategy and grammar-oriented strategy (Eslami &

Fatahi, 2008; Yilmaz, 2011). A communication-oriented strategy is communicative language teaching, i.e., learning a language by emphasizing the language function instead of patterning only grammar and vocabulary. In other words, students are allowed to learn a language by knowing how the language is used in communication (Harmer, 2007b). Communicative language teaching is also valued as the teaching practices in which teachers expose students to the language in use and provide students with the opportunity of using the language. In this learning strategy, role-play simulation and group work activities become the most popular in classroom practices (Harmer, 2007a; Richards, 2006). Contrary to communicative language teaching, grammar-oriented language teaching emphasizes the use of grammar-related activities, such as using grammatical rules to explain complex sentences, asking students to memorize some vocabularies and phrases, and implementing activities that are not paying much attention to the language context integration of the actual language use (Harmer, 2007b; Yilmaz, 2011).

Several studies were conducted to explore teachers' instructional strategies. Hu & Gao (2021) investigated four secondary mathematics' teachers and integrated science in Hong Kong who used English as a medium of instruction. Findings revealed that teachers supported students using their first language to assist students in comprehending teaching materials in integrated language classes. Teachers in this study believe that it is students' need to do code-switching to allow the learning process to occur. Al-Awaid (2020) explores one hundred English teachers in Saudi Arabia. The study found that teachers are highly aware of vocabulary enrichment strategies to encourage students to communicate using English during learning.

Furthermore, Sumardi & Nugrahani (2021) explored 17 pre-service language teachers from Indonesian universities enrolled in microteaching courses that used English as the medium of instruction in the class. This research reinforced the importance of quality interaction and engagement during lectures, encouraging students to communicate actively with a classmate, engage with content and use English without hesitation.

Yilmaz (2011) investigated 54 Turkish primary and high schools EFL teachers teaching in from various school districts in Turkey. This quantitative research found that the teachers tend to implement communication approach to teaching than grammar approach. Teachers promote activities to encourage students active learning such working in groups and communicating with each other. Eslami & Fatahi (2008) studied 40 English teachers in different high schools in Tehran. This quantitative research revealed that teachers developed instruction based on a communication-oriented strategy instead of a grammar-oriented one. In this research, teachers

designed instructions for communication-based activities, focusing more on meaning than accuracy. Although several studies have been conducted about teachers' instructional strategies, not many were delving more through the interview, asking for more detail about what instructional strategies teachers employ and how they implement such strategies.

Method
This research employs a qualitative case study. Seven English teachers consented to participate in this research. Five participants were female junior high school teachers, and two were male teachers teaching in senior high school. All participants held bachelor's degrees in English Education. Participants' teaching experiences range from one to 20 years. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. All interviews were conducted face-to-face using participants' first language, i.e., Bahasa Indonesia, to allow them to express themselves and avoid ambiguity. The interviews were audio-recorded. The data analysis followed Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis.

Table 1. Participant teachers' profile

Teachers	School	Years of teachin experiences (years)
1	Junior high school	3
2	Senior high school	1
3	Junior high school	6
4	Junior high school	20
5	Junior high school	5
6	Junior high school	1
7	Senior high school	6

Findings
The present section reports participants' instructional strategies in teaching English as a foreign language in the classroom. From the qualitative data analysis, we report several dominant themes emerging from the data.

Language of instruction
All teachers reported that they use L1 and L2 as the language of instruction. "Personally, when I explain material in the class, I use two languages [Indonesian and English]." "I mixed the language; sometimes I use English, sometimes Indonesian." Teachers further explained when to use L1 and L2 in the classroom. One teacher said, "When explaining learning materials, I usually use English, but for specific or technical terms, I use Indonesian because students have different language competencies." Similarly, another teacher stated, "I switched between Indonesian and English. I use Indonesian to motivate students."

Furthermore, findings revealed that several teachers use translation in their instruction to facilitate students' meaning-making. "I give students time to do sentence translation, and students could learn how to translate contextually with teachers' assistance. In my opinion,

when students understand the meaning of a sentence contextually, they would be able to produce meaningful sentences." I asked the students to translate sentences. The purpose is to have students become familiar with the type of text in a test or examination."

Teachers reported that students utilized bilingual dictionaries to assist with translation, especially with less competent students. "I ask the students [less competence] to translate words or sentences using a bilingual dictionary, and I pay more attention to the error that students make in their translation." "So far, students used dictionary. After that, I gave them feedback by giving the correct sentence based on the language function discussed that week".

Emphasize communication than grammar
Teachers in this study shared their practices concerning teaching language skills and grammar teaching. Interestingly, all teachers only discussed their strategies for teaching two skills, i.e., speaking and writing. When teaching speaking, most teachers did not emphasize grammar for similar reasons. One teacher stated, "I let students speak without overthinking about grammar. The most important thing is the meaning is understood, and

the idea is contextual." Similarly, another teacher asserted, "Grammar distracts students from expressing their ideas, and they are afraid of making grammar mistakes."

Two teachers affirmed that they focus on grammar when teaching writing than speaking.

> For me grammar is more about writing, and good writing requires good grammar knowledge. As for speaking, fluency is more important; especially when both teachers and students share the same mother tongue, it is essential to encourage students to speak as a priority.

Along the same line, one teacher contended that grammar is more emphasized in teaching academic writing.

> In encouraging speaking skills, I ignore grammar use, though the students sometimes make grammatical mistakes. Grammar mistakes are expected as long as students can communicate meaning. Nevertheless, when it comes to academic writing, I pay attention to grammar; I correct students' sentence structure, for example.

Using technology and authentic materials
Teachers recognized the importance of providing authentic materials. Teachers utilized technology to resource and expose students to the materials.

> I try my best to use authentic materials in my teaching. Primarily we teach language, we as teachers need to expose our students to authentic materials. I usually use flash or Macromedia. I give students examples of conversations in English related to the topic discussed in the classroom so that the students know appropriate expressions to be used in a conversation.

Similarly, one teacher acknowledged the need to expose students to the authentic use of language to improve students' language skills.

> Let us say students are learning about "Offering Help," then I would look for the listening material that appropriates the topic. I often obtain the materials from the British Council website. I aim to have students become familiar with authentic English use to improve their skills, and I expose them to the conversation spoken by native speakers in an authentic environment.

Findings also revealed that teachers perceive that using audio and video technology could motivate students to learn. "I use songs, videos, and audio and often provide students with various links to learning resources. My students said they become more motivated as the online audio and video resources are related to their interests."

Teachers whose schools support using technology utilize audio and video materials to enhance students' learning.

> Because our school is multimedia-based, we are indeed implementing audio-visual learning. For example, in learning about a procedural text, I provide students with a video and ask them to pay attention to the language native speakers use on how to do or make something. I then ask students to retell the procedures to determine whether the students understand the video.

Nonetheless, one teacher did not use audio or audio-visual materials as the school does not have the required facilities.

> I do not provide the students with audio or video materials since there is no facility to use them. For listening activities, I use my voice to demonstrate conversation, teach pronunciation, and read aloud to students.

Discussion
Findings indicate that most teachers used English (L2) and Bahasa Indonesia (L1) as the language of instruction to execute classroom activities. Teachers' purposes in switching the language due to the students' learning needs. Previous studies found that using the target and first language consecutively supports students' language learning (Karaca Turhan, Baş, & Turhan, 2021), promotes the understanding of the specific concept, and prevents students' misunderstanding (Papaja & Wysocka-Narewska, 2020). Furthermore, switching the language to students' first language improve students' motivation in language learning (Y. Hu, Afzaal, & Alfadda, 2022; Zainil & Arsyad, 2021). In contrast with these findings, a study by Zulaiha & Mulyono (2018) found that teachers highly fostered and used English in the classroom due to the importance of exposing students to authentic English use, even though teachers realized students' low comprehension of English instruction.

Teachers in this study use translation strategies to assist students in comprehending English text contextually. Teachers, step by step, assist students in learning the meaning of words and sentences before producing English. Dressler & Mueller (2022) argued that teachers should scaffold students with basic knowledge of words meaning before asking them to speak English. Teachers were inclined to promote communicative language teaching more than grammar-oriented. This finding supports previous studies that most language teachers reinforced target language use in classroom communication (Eslami & Fatahi, 2008; Sumardi &

Nugrahani, 2021; Yilmaz, 2011). Using target language to force communication is fundamental in a language classroom. Thus, teachers' and students' encouragement to communicate in English determines the effectiveness of language instruction (Adem & Berkessa, 2022).

Participating teachers also reported exposing students to authentic materials by utilizing technology. This learning support provided by teachers enables students to develop their linguistic competence and decreases students' anxiety (Boufahja, 2018), which brings about meaningful learning experiences.

Conclusion

As teachers' instructional strategies influence the development of students' language skills, it is crucial to understand how teachers decide what strategies to use and why they do so. The findings of the study showed that teachers' choice of strategies relates to what teachers believe as students' needs and what teachers perceive as crucial for students' improvement. Switching between L1 and L2 was evident and perceived as a way to facilitate students' comprehension and production of the target language, especially those with low language competence. Translation strategies were also used for scaffolding students' language acquisition. Teachers place students' ability and willingness to communicate as more of a priority. Correct grammar was expected in students' written assignments, but grammatical mistakes were expected in students' speaking. Teachers also viewed authentic language learning materials as a means to expose students to the actual use of language. Teachers with much support from schools had more opportunities to use technology to resource authentic learning materials.

As with any research, this study has limitations. This study investigated a small number of language teachers and only employed interviews as a data collection method to look into instruction strategies from teachers' perspectives. Thus future research into teachers' instructional strategies should focus on establishing a clearer picture of how students perceive teachers' strategies. Moreover, the interview provides in-depth qualitative data; observational studies are expected to gain more insights into teachers' actual strategies practiced in the classroom.

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