CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

1. 1. Background

Until recently, the debate regarding to pros and cons of the use of L1 (first language) in the second (L2) or foreign language (FL) classroom still exists. In various language forums around the globe, the controversy of the use of the students’ L1 in the EFL/ ESL teaching practice is still often being discussed by many language experts and practitioners (Holthouse, 1992; Brown, 2000:195 in Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009; Kim & Petraki in Huang & Radant, 2009; Grim, 2010; Moeller & Roberts, 2013; Kavari, 2014). If some English teachers or practitioners believe that promoting English-only policy in the teaching and learning activity can be considered as the best choice to help students develop their ability in mastering the target language (McKay in Burns & Richards, 2012: 18), some other teachers share different ideas about it. For some of them, it is quite unnecessary and even difficult to totally exclude the use of L1 of foreign language teaching practice.

For the last four decades, substantial conclusion still could not be reached regarding the use of L1 in ELT in foreign language classroom context (Debreli, 2016a). Despite strong support for English-only policies, in many language education institutions, a number of scholars have come to realize that appropriate use of L1 might be beneficial for learners (Hawk, 2001 as cited in Debreli, 2016a). In the context where English is being taught not as a second but as a foreign language, some English teachers and practitioners believe that the interference of L1 in foreign language learning can be considered as an important aspect of language learning (Johnson, 2001: 63).

Especially in the situation where English is being taught as a foreign language by non-native teacher who shares the same first language with learners, the possibility of the teacher to use L1 in his/ her teaching practice in the EFL classroom can be quite high (Duff & Polio, 1990 as cited in Cummins, 2007). Despite huge support for the idea of English-only policy in the EFL classroom, not all EFL teachers seem to feel confident about it; often, but not always, teachers feel afraid that they will not be able to consistently use only English in
their teaching practices. The reasons for this situation are commonly varied. The teacher, for instance, might use L1 to build rapport with students, or help students who are categorized as low achievers to understand difficult tasks, vocabularies or grammar of the target language.

Several studies had been conducted by some researchers to investigate how L1 is being perceived and used by teachers and students in the EFL/ESL classroom in the last decade. Studies conducted by Joyce et.,al (2010), Al-Nofaie (2010), Afzal (2013), Mahadeo (2013), Adnan et.,al (2014) for instances, investigated how L1 is being used by both students and teachers in various EFL classroom contexts (see also Carless, 2008; Norman, 2008; De La Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Jones, 2010; Anh, 2010; Simsek, 2011; Mahmoudi & Amirkhiz, 2011; Ariffin & Husin, 2011; Timor, 2012; Sharaeai, 2012; Grasso, 2012; Carson & Kashihara, 2012; Hashemi & Sabet, 2013; Makulloluwa, 2013; Broomhead, 2013; Ghorbani, et.,al, 2013; Sali, 2014; Aslikhosh et.,al, 2014; Alvarez, 2014; Turin, 2014; Bhooth et.,al, 2014; Branch, 2014; Romli et.,al, 2015; Bozorgian & Fallahpour, 2015; Debreli & Oyman, 2015; Rukh, 2015; Limtrairat & Aksornjarung, 2015; Timucin et.,al, 2015; Sa’d & Qadermazi, 2015; Ahmed, 2016; Tria et.,al, 2015, Al-balawi, 2016; Alrabah et.,al, 2016; Debreli, 2016; Hasan & Jukil, 2016).

By referring to the results of empirical studies mentioned above, the inevitable use of L1 in the EFL/ESL teaching practice can be suggested. The use of L1 in the teaching learning process seems quite beneficial in certain classroom context. Both students and teachers seem to still depend heavily on the use of L1 to teach and learn English as the target language. Instead of totally excluding it from foreign language teaching and learning process, it will be more beneficial to use L1 as facilitating tool that can help students in developing their English language skills. For all L2 learners, actually, the previous language knowledge can be quite useful to be used as an important source of L2 acquisition (Ortega, 2013: 31). If both teachers and learners are able to use L1 judiciously in the English teaching and learning process, there is a high possibility that the use of L1 might not hinder the exposure to the target language.
If we specifically discuss about EFL teaching and learning in the Indonesian context, we can also sometimes deal with the situation being elaborated above. As English is being taught as a foreign language in Indonesia, Indonesian EFL teachers are often faced with the dilemma related to whether or not they are allowed to include L1 in their teaching practices. In Indonesia, English as a foreign language is not being taught as a compulsory part of the primary curriculum; although in almost all primary schools, it is still taught as a subject (Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2012: 32). Most public and private schools in Indonesia emphasize the need of providing great exposure of English to students within or outside the classroom context. Despite the changing of the national curriculum, in the teaching and learning process, EFL teachers are still expected to be able to provide students with great exposure of English as the target language. In most cases, EFL teachers who are teaching in public or private learning institutions starting from the primary to the university level are expected to support English-only policy or monolingualism in the ELT practices in Indonesia.

As demanding as it sounds, surprisingly, some teachers argue that it is quite challenging to be able to consistently use only English in the ELT practices in Indonesian classroom context (Manara, 2007). Not a few of them feel a bit frustrated about it. Despite the fact that the judicious L1 use in EFL teaching now can be promoted in the EFL classroom, many EFL teachers in Indonesia feel afraid to admit that they sometimes still use L1 (bahasa Indonesia) in their EFL teaching practices to help students learn the target language optimally. Most of EFL teachers in Indonesia believe that monolingualism should be the only norm that can be promoted in the EFL classroom. By demanding the practice of English only policy, however, the teacher in certain case might need to neglect students’ needs and preferences in the teaching learning process. The implementation of this policy in the classroom somehow can bring disadvantages to the teaching learning process; especially in the context where English is being taught by the teacher to low achiever learners.

Despite such reluctance to admit that there is a need to still use L1 in the teaching and learning process, however, in the actual ELT practices, most of EFL teachers in Indonesia still depends a lot on L1 use in delivering various
pedagogical functions. For example, when the teacher needs to explain difficult grammatical concepts to students, most of the EFL teachers in Indonesia often switch to L1 to help students understand the concept being explained. L1 is also often being used when teachers need to explain the task or difficult vocabularies or when there is a need to build rapport with the students. When EFL teachers need to deal with low proficiency EFL learners, they also often use more L1 in their teaching practices. The use of L1 might also be needed by teachers to create a more relaxing atmosphere in the EFL classroom.

In the study conducted by Nitiswari (2012), Primary, (2012), Floris, (2013) and Agustin et al.,( 2015) for instances, some evidence of how L1 is still being used by EFL teachers in Indonesia in the classroom can be suggested. In a study conducted by Primary (2012) which investigated the stage of learning in which the teacher use L1 in the teaching-learning process, the functions and also the reasons for L1 use in primary school context, it can be seen that EFL teachers in the primary school context used quite high amount of L1 in all three stages of the teaching process. L1 is used for instructional, managerial, and affective purposes (Primary, 2012). The reasons for the use of L1 mostly to facilitate communication, facilitate teacher-student relationships and facilitate the learning of L2 (Primary, 2012). In line with that, in other studies conducted by Nitiswari (2012), Floris (2013), it also suggested that L1 is used by teachers judiciously in the EFL classroom for particular reasons e.g explaining difficult vocabularies, managing classroom, explaining difficult concepts or grammar, making jokes, giving instruction, providing feedback and also checking student’s understanding. Both teacher and students show positive attitude toward it in the classroom (Nitiswari, 2012). When teachers need to teach difficult learning material to low proficiency English learners, L1 is also inevitably used in the teaching learning process (Agustin et.,al, 2015).

Since it cannot be denied that the use of L1 use in the EFL classroom might influence the overall outcome of the teaching-learning process, it is very important for us to understand thoroughly how L1 is being perceived by teachers and students from the various classroom contexts. Among studies of the use of L1 in Indonesian classroom context being elaborated previously, quite limited studies
had been conducted to specifically investigate how L1 is being perceived and used by professional English teachers at a private or public in the vocational high school context in Indonesia. Whereas, it is also quite important for both teachers and students in this school context to fully understand how and to what extent L1 should or should not be used in the teaching and learning process.

As the attempt to fill in the gap, this study is conducted to investigate the use of L1 in ELT practice in vocational high school context in Indonesia. This study seeks for the information on how EFL teachers in the vocational high school in Indonesia perceive L1 use in their EFL teaching practices (do they have positive or negative perceptions about it), is there any discrepancy between their perceptions and their actual classroom practices of the L1 use, and what can be the pedagogical functions of L1 use if they are currently using it in their ELT practices. In short, this study is entitled “Vocational Teachers’ Perceptions Regarding the Use of L1 in the EFL classroom: (A case study at a public Vocational High School In Bandung, Indonesia)”.

1.2. Statement of the Problems

Basically, this study is conducted to address the following research questions:

1. What are the perceptions of EFL teachers regarding the use of L1 in the vocational high school context in Indonesia?
2. How is that perception reflected in the EFL classroom in the vocational high school context in Indonesia?
3. What are the functions of L1 used by EFL teachers in vocational high school context?

1.3 Purposes of the Study

Based on what has been elaborated on the background above, there are at least three main objectives of this study. First, the study is conducted to find out the information related to English teachers’ perceptions toward the use of L1 in EFL classroom; specifically in the situation where English is being taught by the teachers for specific purposes in vocational high school context in Indonesia.
Second, the study explored the extent to which the teacher’s perception regarding the use of L1 implemented in the EFL classroom; is there any discrepancy between EFL teachers’ perceptions and their actual classroom behaviors. Third, this study seeks for the functions of L1 used by EFL teachers in vocational high schools context in Indonesia.

1.4 Significances of the Study

Based on the answers of the proposed research questions, it is expected that both professional and novice Indonesian teachers can get the better perspective of the use of L1 in the EFL classroom especially in the vocational high school context in Indonesia. If EFL teachers in Indonesia at some point have been decided or are currently using L1 in their EFL teaching practices, by referring to the results of the study, at least they can be more careful in using L1 in the teaching-learning process. The results of the study undoubtedly can also provide the teacher with the framework of how to use L1 effectively in the EFL classroom; particularly for EFL teachers who teach in vocational high school context in Indonesia. Hopefully, after reading this paper, later on professional and novice EFL teachers can be inspired to examine their own policies and practices regarding the use of L1 as the target language in the EFL classroom context. In other similar EFL contexts where teachers and learners share the same mother tongue and/ or first language, the findings of this study certainly can also be used as a valuable reference for both professional and novice EFL teachers who are currently using L1 in their EFL teaching practices.

1.5 Scope of the Study

There are several points that will become the focus of the study. Those are including teachers’ perceptions of the use of L1 in the EFL teaching practice; the possibility of any discrepancy between teachers’ perceptions and their behaviors regarding the use of L1 in their actual classroom teaching practices; and the functions of L1 used by vocational English teachers in vocational high school context in Bandung, Indonesia.
1.6 Clarifications of terms

The definition of key terms used in this study is elaborated as follows:

1. English as Foreign Language (EFL) refers to the study of English by people who live in places where English is not used as the first language in communication; English is being taught outside English speaking country (McDonough et. al., 2013). In the EFL settings, the chance for students to use English outside the classroom is quite limited; most of students learn English to pass English entrance exams to enter good high schools or universities or to use English as a global language (Gebhard, 2009: 39-40).

2. L1 refers to first language/ mother tongue, or the first language that we learn in our life (Goh & Silver, 2006: 38; Gass & Selinker, 1994).

3. L2 refers to any language that we learn later in life in addition to our first language. It may refer to both second and foreign language (Goh & Silver, 2006: 38).

4. Target language refers to the language being learned (Gass & Selinker, 1994)

1.7 Organization of the Paper

This paper is divided into five major sections. In the introduction part in chapter one, there are some explanations related to the background of the study, a statement of the problems, purposes of the study, the scope of the study, clarification of terms and organization of the paper.

The literature review is presented in the second chapter. Theory related to the use of L1 in EFL or ESL teaching practice, the argument for L1 use, arguments against L1 use, and also EFL teaching in the context of vocational high school in Indonesia are elaborated immensely in this chapter of the study. Previous related theories are also provided in this chapter, followed by some concluding remarks.

In the third chapter, there are some elaborations related to the research methodology. In this chapter, the design of the study, data collection, participants of the study, procedure of administering the questionnaire, classroom observation,
and the interview and also the procedure of data analysis are presented in a
detailed fashion.

Next, in the fourth chapter, it contains the elaboration of the research
findings, followed by some discussions related to the interpretation of those
findings.

Last, in the fifth chapter, there are some conclusions and recommendations
for further researchers.

1.8 Concluding Remark

Some points related to the background of the research, a statement of the
problems, aims of the research, the significance of the research, clarification of
terms, and organization of the paper have been reviewed clearly in this chapter.