MEANING NEGOTIATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN A FLEDGLING INTERNATIONAL STANDARDIZED SCHOOL

Andi Rustandi

Lecturer, Dept of English Education,
Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, Galuh University, Ciamis,
West Java, Indonesia

Abstract: This study investigates meaning negotiation between teachers and students in an fledgling international standardized school, particularly at a science class. Meaning negotiation is a process that the speakers go through to reach a clear understanding of each other. In this regard, three questions are addressed: (1) Have the teachers implemented fledgling international curriculum in terms of the use of English as a medium interaction in a science class?, (2) What problems do the students and the teacher encounter when they are negotiating meaning in the science class?, and (3) What are their strategies in conducting negotiation of meaning in the science class?. To get the data, the researchers administered questionnaires and conducted classroom observation to 5 teachers and 10 students in a fledgling international school. The results show that the meaning negotiation does not reflect an international standardized class. To negotiate meaning, teachers and students use discussion, question or confirmation, and translation strategies. The results will become useful feedback for the government concerning the implementation of Fledgling International Standardized Curriculum in Junior High Schools.
Key words: meaning negotiation, fledgling international standardized school

Introduction

Regardless of the controversy among educators, the implementation of international standardized schools (henceforth SBI) in Indonesia has been disseminated by the government in 2006 based on the Law No. 20, 2003 about national education system. Prior to the establishment of the SBI, the school should set forth initiation or feldgling (the so called *Rintisan* (R)) until it is acredited by ISO within four years (Suara Merdeka). With regard to the school's effort in initiating the SBI, all teachers try to implement the established curriculum in their classroom interactions. However, the implementation itself faces numerous problems (Zaenuri, 2007). These problems usually come up during the early introduction of a new concept in Indonesian education context. As an instance, when teachers are faced with new teaching methods integrated in the new curriculum, they usually feel worry and even difficult to understand the new methods, which will further influence the practical implementation.

With regard to the dissemination of international standardized schools in Indonesia, many schools in Indonesia are not prepared to implement this new thing in their institutions. It is due to the fact that an international standardized school does not only carry its fabulous name 'international standardized' but are also obliged to implement a new learning environment which

is, to some extent, very much challenging to educators. Everybody knows that almost all school personnels must learn hard to understand and speak English. Science and mathematics teachers are also challenged to use both English and Bahasa Indonesia in the classroom activities. Of course, it is a difficult thing for them.

In particular, several sproblems which come up during the dissemination of international standardized is highlighted by Zaenuri (2007). He underlines that the problems include teachers' readiness, learning sources, infrastructures, and facilities. He then concludes that the most crucial problem is the teachers' readiness to teach in the classroom. They are not ready to use English as a medium of interaction, whereas is one of the requirements of the RSBI's implementation in science and mathematics classes as suggested by the Center of Curriculum or *Puskur* (2007). This unfortunate fact is reasonable; the non-English teachers are not used to saying English words during an interaction. They use Bahasa Indonesia in delivering material and interacting with students and other teachers.

Indonesian government introduces RSBI curriculum with a particular goal. The implementation of RSBI curriculum is aimed at improving the quality of education in Indonesia in order to have the same level as the other countries (Depdiknas, 2007). More specifically, such implementation is hoped to enable students to compete in the global era. One effort to compete in the global era is being able to speak English communicatively. Therefore, students must be exposed to a new learning environment which uses two languages in the classroom interaction. Likewise, their textbooks are also written in two languages, i.e. English and Bahasa Indonesia. This fact also creates another new problem: the availability of bilingual textbooks. This kind of textbook are not readily found in the bookstores. Even though the government has published a relevant textbook, an outstanding school usually needs more sources in addition to the available books. When the books are already available, the biggest problem lies on the teacher's side; they must learn harder not only to understand the contents but also to pronounce the English words well. What a challenging task it is!

Soon after the RSBI curriculum has been introduced and numerous problems have been identified, many researchers become interested in researching such problems and the real implementatiom as well. In this case, much research has been done to find out the problems encountered by the schools during the implementation of RSBI curriculum. Besides, most researchers also studied the implementation of the curriculum in general. There have been only few researchers who investigated the implementation of curriculum in international standardized schools. For example, Zaenuri (2006) investigated the teachers' readiness, learning sources, infrastructures, and facilities, without elaborating the reality of the implementation of this curriculum in the classroom.

To fill this gap, the present study is intended to investigate the implementation of the RSBI curriculum in the classroom interaction between teacher and students. The reason of

choosing this topic is because the teaching-learning activities is the most important aspect which will make students understand the materials. It is generally assumed that if the clasroom activities run well, the results of teaching and learning will also result better outcomes.

The study of classroom interaction has received much attention in the field of SLA. A considerable amount of empirical research has been conducted in this area. Several updated research studies have focused on the communication strategies during classroom interaction such as done by Cervantes and Rodriguez (2012). They investigated the communication strategies used by two EFL teachers and their beginner level students. What they did has a close relationship with the present study, because communication strategies is always connected to the concept of meaning negotiation. Another research entitled "Negotiating Meaning in Interaction between English and Spanish Speakers via Communicative Strategies" was conducted by Dobao and Matinez in 2007. They found that learners coordinate their use of communication strategies, negotiation of meaning strategies and grounding procedures in order to be able to reach a mutual agreement on the learner's originally intended meaning. The successful communication of the message is the result of the collaborative effort of all the interactants (Dobao and Martinez, 2007:101). In other words, negotiation of meaning is one of the determinant factors of effective teaching and learning.

By definition, classroom interaction can be defined as a two-way process between the participants in the learning process. The teacher influences the learners and vice versa (Dagarin, 2004:128). Moreover, she continues by quoting Brown's statement (2001, 165) that *"…interaction is, in fact, the heart of communication: it is what communication is all about"*. Thus, learning will occur when there is co-operation between teacher and student which make communication take place. The definition of classroom interaction can be depicted in the following diagram:
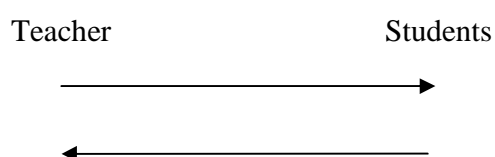
Teacher   Students

Communication is done because the interactants have some goals to acvhieve. In a clasroom, communication takes place because teacher has something to transfer to the students, i.e. new knowledge. Likewise, students communicate with their teachers and peers because they want to get new knowledge and share their ideas. Regarding this idea, the present study focused on the classroom activities conducted by both teacher and students.

As highligthed previously, this study particularly deals with a popular term 'negotiation of meaning'. In order to be more focused, this study intends to discover how meaning

negotiation between teachers and students takes place in the science classroom where English is used as a medium of interaction. Negotiation of meaning or meaning negotiation is a very well-known concept in cognitive approaches to second language acquisition. Krashen (1981, 1982, 1985) asserts that knowledge of a second language is acquired through exposure to comprehensible input. In other words, the concept of negotiation of meaning is always connected to the concept of comprehensible input. To emphasize, Long (1985, 1996) as cited in Foster and Ohta (2005:405) mentions that comprehensible input gained through interactional adjustments such as negotiating meaning and modifying output is central to second language acquisition, and much research has been undertaken to discover which classroom activities give learners the greatest benefit from this type of interaction.

The concept of comprehensible input itself has been popular among SLA researchers for years. Corder (1967) as cited in Gass and Selinker (2008:305) has simply defined input as "what is available to the learner". The learners learn in the classroom by capturing what the teacher says. It implies that without understanding the language, no learning can take place in the classroom. In accordance with this idea, Krashen has developed a hypothesis known as the Input Hypothesis. The Input Hypothesis holds a view that languages are acquired "by understanding messages, or by receiving 'comprehensible input' " (Krashen, 1985, as cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008:309). In Krashen's view, the Input Hypothesis is central to all of acquisition and also has implications for the classroom. In this regard, the teacher's main role is to ensure that students receive comprehensible input which will make them understand the messages that their teacher has delivered.

Interaction, particularly classroom interaction, involves a number of components including negotiation, recasts, and feedback. The components are integrated each other as can be seen in the following figure:
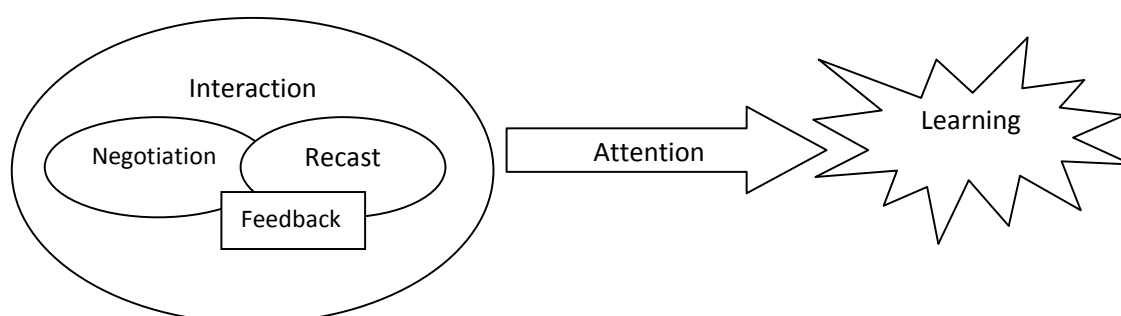
Figure 1: A model of interaction
(Adapted from Gass & Selinker, 2008:331)

The figure above shows that negotiation is one of the components which can draw students' attention which enables learning to take place in the classroom. In the conversations, especially those involving NNSs, negotiations are frequent and occupy a major portion of the conversation.

The concept of meaning negotiation has been defined almost similarly by several experts. As an instance, Gebhard (2009) defines meaning negotiation as one of three ways of making language comprehensible to students. The other two ways are simplifying speech and adding media. Regarding this concept, the teacher can open up communication by asking questions that aim at clarification and confirmation.

Furthermore, in second language learning, it is important that learners be facilitated by several factors which in turn will accelerate the process of learning such language. Negotiation of meaning, in the viewpoint of Gibbons (2009), is one of the factors which facilitate second language learning. She further conceptualizes it in terms of classroom interaction by pointing out that in conversation with peers and more expert users, "meanings are constantly being negotiated through clarification questions, confirmations of meaning, and adjustments to what has been said".

A broader definition of meaning negotiation is set forth by Lightbown and Spada (1999). They apply the definition in the two questions below:
1. Do the teachers and students work to understand what the other speakers are saying? and
2. What efforts are made by the teacher and the students?

These questions, together with other categories, can be used in a classroom discourse analysis (see Nunan, 1993 and Suherdi, 2006). In this sense, Nunan (1993) sees meaning negotiation as "the joint efforts of the participants to make sense to each other."

In summary, meaning negotiation can be found within a classroom interaction between teacher and students and students with their peers. The meaning is negotiated through clarification questions, confirmations of meaning, and adjustments to what have been said. This activity is primarily intended to facilitate second language learning, or particularly to make language comprehensible.

Research dealing with meaning negotiation in the classroom is still rarely found. A study conducted by Langman (2005) found that meaning negotiation in the classroom was done by utilizing classroom as a community practice, lab group and representative negotiation, and lab table. This strategy is effective in enhancing students' mastery of English, especially because it combines immigrants with English native speakers. His research is inspired by social constructivist's view (see Kaufman, 2004 and Lantolf, 2000) which concerns learning through collaboration and in planned and unplanned educational or everyday setting, examining the way novice and expert and peers negotiate meaning as their problem solving. Such interaction is also

suggested by who studied how the learner interpreted the environments and learnt to modify behavior within it in order to match the frame. However, this idea depends on the learner's capacity to acquire the language.

Meanwhile, another research area which is based upon social cognitive tradition focuses on the nature of discourse employed to facilitate and "actuate" learning. As cited in Hicks (1996), Rogoff (1990), "Through reoccurrence participation in social activities at home and in certain 'proximal' institutional settings, children are cognitively apprenticed". In the area of classroom research, recent work examines how teachers orchestrate thinking (Hicks, 1996; O'Connor and Michaels, 1996) or facilitate students' efforts to "go for the zone" (e.g. Erickson, 1996) in which learning can occur. Such research focuses on the nature of talk directly related to task negotiation, but explores the surrounding off-task talk relatively little.

Focusing on peer group interactions, Levine and Moreland outline two assumptions about the effective configuration of groups: 1) "most work groups develop cultures that are helpful rather than harmful", and 2) "such groups function best when their members view the world from a common perspective" (2001). If this is the case, then we need to examine how groups come to develop a common culture and a common perspective on the world, including in the case of classroom groups, the ways in which they weave in and out of task talk and social talk.

Besides that, work within a community of practice (CofP) framework (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) offers a means of broadening the scope of research into learning through interaction by examining the ways in which individuals participate to create environments suitable to their learning needs as well as the construction of identity through these interactions (Norton, 2000; Toohey, 2000). With respect to university level second language learners, Leki (2001) suggests that we need to expand our definition of "thinking systems to include not just a focus on the task, but also on the social academic relationships the learners develop with native-speaking peers" (2001).

Relatively little does research in these areas focuses on the implementation of the RSBI curriculum in teaching science, where English is used as a medium of interaction of the teachers and the students in the classroom. Accordingly, the present study is designed to find the answers to the following research questions:

1. Have the teachers implemented RSBI curriculum in terms of the use of English as a medium intraction in a science class?
2. What problems do the students and the teacher encounter when they are negotiating meaning in the science class?
3. What are their strategies in conducting negotiation of meaning in the science class?

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative approach in obtaining the data. It means that the researchers dealt with naturalistic setting which happened in the classroom. In particular, a case study design was used by means of conducting observation and giving questionnaires to the respondents. The design is appropriate with the characteristics of the present study since it identifies specific question(s) of interest, defines the obtained data based on careful analysis of multiple instruments about the case, and the results are reported in a narrative form (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006:10).

Five science teachers who teach in a junior high school in Ciamis regency were taken as the participants of this research. The reason for choosing this school was because this school had been appointed by the local government as an RSBI. The samples were drawn from the pool of six teachers of science. One teacher was omitted because he did not answer the questionnaire. In addition, ten students were also taken as participants to be given questionnaire. They were also chosen to observe their ways of meaning negotiation in teaching science by using English as a medium of interaction. The science teachers who participated in this study have been teaching science at the research site for years with relevant background knowledge. Hence, they were assumed to have a lot of teaching experiences and knowledge in teaching science.

The necessary data were gained by administering two different questionnaires to the teachers and the students and conducting classroom observation. To enhance and validate the data from teacher and student questionnaires, the non-participant observation was also conducted. It was aimed at finding out the real implementation of RSBI curriculum in teaching science. In addition, the most salient purpose of observation was to capture the practices of meaning negotiation between teacher and students.

The questionnaire consisted of three questions (appendix 1 and 2) which reflected the implementation of teaching-learning activities based on the RSBI curriculum (Depdiknas, 2006). The questions dealt with the use of English as a medium of interaction in RSBI classes, teachers and students' problems in negotiating meaning in bilingual science classroom, and their strategies in negotiating meaning in the classroom. The questionnaires were not given during the classroom sessions. Instead, they were given when the respondents had leisure time. After three days, they had to submit the questionnaires to the researcher. The questions were constructed in form of close-ended and open-ended items. The open-ended questions were aimed at getting more clear answers from both teacher and students concerning the process of meaning negotiation in their classroom activities.

The data were then analyzed qualitatively. In analyzing the results from teacher and student questionnaires, the researchers employed the percentage quantification to describe the

data as suggested by Hatch and Farhady (1981). Meanwhile, the results from classroom observation were firstly transribed and several necessary data were collected. Data description and interpretation was done by comparing the results of both questionnaire and observation. The answers from questionnaires was were used to crosscheck the extent to which the participants' answers were relevant with the actual happenings in the classroom. What followed was the final step of the research, i.e. conclusion drawing. The conslcusions were drawn based on the description and interpretation presented earlier.

Findings

In describing and interpreting the data, the researchers analyzed all the answers written by both teachers and students. First of all, the data from tecaher questionnaire were analyzed. The data from the first question of using English in negotiating meaning in the classroom, the teachers responded various answers. The responses are 40 % of the teacher only used English at the opening of the lesson and 60 % of them used English at the opening and the closing as can be seen below.
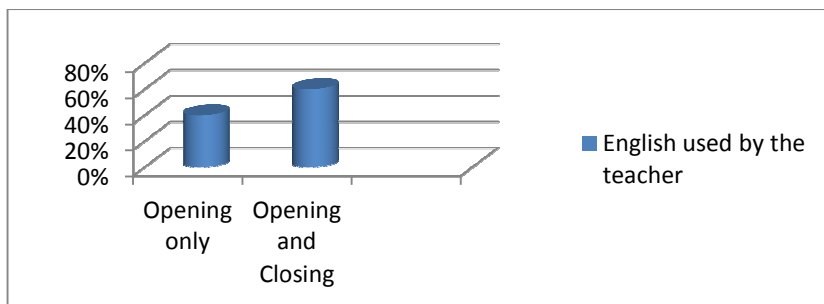

Moreover, the second question related to the problems encountered in negotiating meaning, the teachers answered severals reponses. The responses are 20 % of the teachers have problems with the use the use of terminology in science classroom, and 80 % of them have problems in translating and speaking as depicted in the following graph.
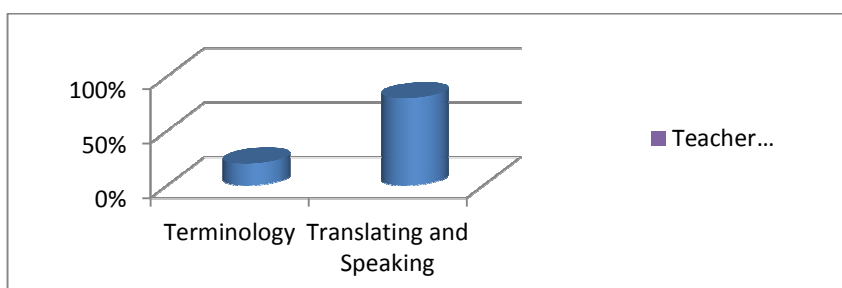
Then, for the question related to the use of strategy to overcome the peoblems, the teachers responded various answers. The responses are 80 % of the teachers use discussion and 20 % of them give an extra time to translate as their strategy in negotiating meaning in the classroom (see the graph below).
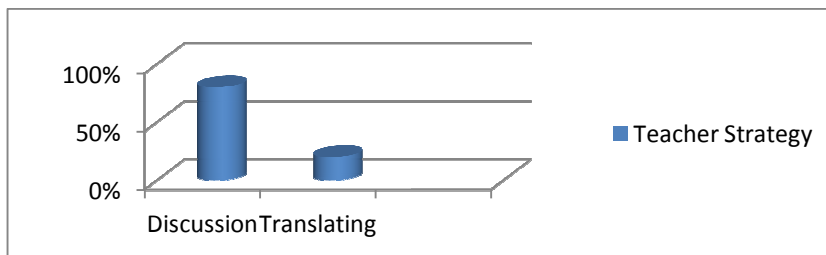

Secondly, the researchers analyzed the data from student questionnaire. The data from the first question related to the use of English in meaning negotiation in the classroom, the students respond variuos responses. The responses are 70 % of the students respond that they do not speak English in the classroom and 30 % of them respond that they sometimes use English in the classroom. The following figure shows the finding:
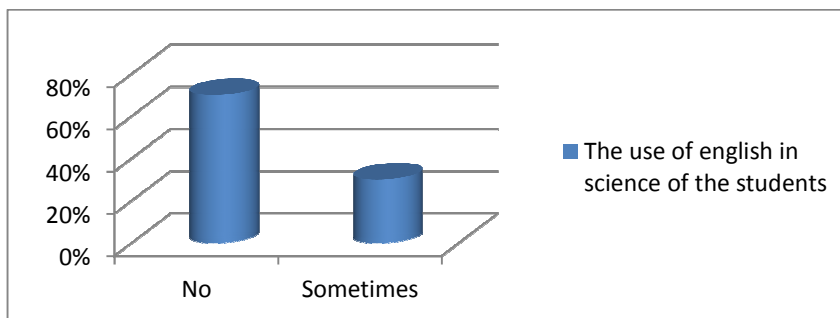
The second question is related to the problems encountered by the students in negotiating meaning, students response the following answers. The responses are 30 % of the students encounter some difficulties in learning science by using English as a medium interaction because they feel difficult in learning science. Meanwhile, 40 % of them said that the problem is the fact that English is difficult and 30 % said that they feel difficult to understand the formulas which are spoken in English as can be seen in the following graph.
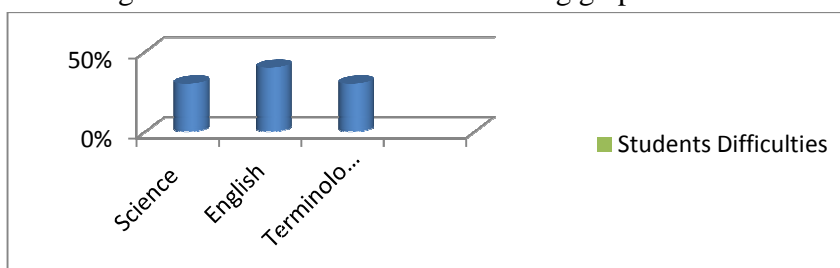
The third question related to strategies used to overcome the problems of negotiating meaning in the classroom, the students respond such as the following responses. The responses are 40 % of the students use discussion and 60 % of them ask their friends and confirm their teachers as their strategy to negotiate meaning in the classroom (see the following graph).
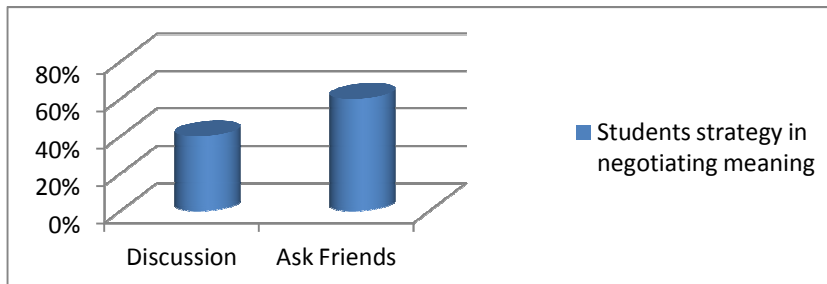
In the meantime, the data from the classroom observation were then analyzed to crosscheck the extent to which the participants' answers were relevant with the actual happenings in the classroom. With regard to the use of English in negotiating meaning, most of the teachers used English only at the opening and the closing. This phenomenon is described in the following conversation:

> T = *Good morning students?*
> S = *Good morning Mam.*

This situation was also happened in the students' conversation. The conversation is can be seen in the following example:

> S = *What is the topic for this day Mam?*
> T = *Kita akan membahas tentang "salt"* (We will discuss about "salt")
> S = *What is salt Mam?*
> T= *Garam (salt)*

In this situation, the teachers only use Good morning at the opening of the classroom. Besides that, the students also used English when they are asking the topic that will be discussed. However, the response of the teacher used Indonesian language.

The second result of observation concerns the problems encountered in meaning negotiation. In this case, the teachers are difficult in understanding and using the science terminologies. This difficulty is evident in the following conversation.

> T = *Kita akan membahas "acid".*(We will discuss "acid")
> S = *Apa itu "acid"*(What's "acid")

T = Emmm.. sebentar. Coba lihat kamus. (Emmm...just a moment. Let's see a dictionary)

In this situation, the teacher is difficuit to negotiate meaning when he found a scintific terminology. The third question deals with the strategy to overcome the problems. The teacher and the students used the strategy by asking questions and grouping the students. This strategy is described in the following conversation.

T = Coba kita buat kelompok untuk membahas tentang "acid" (Lets us make groups to discuss about "acid")
S1 = Acid?
S2 = Asam (Acid)

In this conversation, the students asked the question to negotiate the meaning of the terminology. This strategy is relevant to the previous study conducted by Lave and Wenger (1991) within the framework of CofP.

DISCUSSION

Based on the results of data analysis, it can be concluded that from the teachers' questionnaire, 60 % of the teachers use English at the opening and closing, and 40 % of them use English at the opening only. It means that the teacher do not use English from the beginning until the end of the lessons. It contradicts the curriculum of SMP SBI which suggests that English be used as a medium of interaction in the classroom not only for the opening and closing, but for the overall lessons (Depdiknas, 2006). From the students' questionnaire, most of the students do not use English as a medium of interaction in the classroom. It can be proven by the fact that 70 % of them do not use English, and only 30 % of them use English as a medium interaction. It is because they feel difficult to understand English. Thus, they seem puzzled if the teachers ask questions.

Some problems are also identified from the questionnaire, i.e. 20% of the teachers stated that they feel hard to use scientific terminologies in English, while 80 % of them feel difficult to speak and understand English. Moreover, 30 % of the students find it uneasy to learn science with English as a medium of interaction. The fact shows that 40 % of them are difficult to comprehend English and 30 % of them cannot understand the scientific terminologies and the formulas. In other words, because they do not really understand English, the scientific terminologies and formulas spoken in English are very difficult to understand.

Dealing with the strategies used by the teachers, 80 % of them use discussion and the rest consult the dictionary to negotiate meaning. It means that the most useful strategy in this school is discussion. It is because they also feel difficult to negotiate meaning by themselves directly.

Also, 40 % of the students use discussion and 20 % of them ask their friends and teachers as their strategy to negotiate meaning in a science classroom.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

From the aforementioned results and discussion, the three research questions can eventually be answered. In the first place, the implementation of the RSBI Curriculum, especially the use of English as a medium of interaction, has not been fully implemented. It is because the teachers do not speak English in the overall classroom activities. They use English only at the opening and closing. This fact is supported by the teacher-student conversation taking place during the observation.

Another fact implies that both teachers and students are hindered by many problems dealing with the fact that they are not ready to use English in the science class. They feel difficult to speak and understand English scientific terminologies and formulas. Additionally, the students also find it hard to translate the meaning of English scientific terms and to speak English in the classroom because they are afraid of making mistakes.

Despite all these problems, there are some strategies used by the teachers and the students to negotiate meaning in their science class. For example, the teachers tend to use discussion to negotiate meaning. On the other hand, the students prefer to ask questions to their friends to better understand the materials.

Finally, the researchers conclude that conducting a bilingual classroom activity is not an easy task for teachers and students in a science RSBI class. They must prepare themselves to deal with a challenging yet confusing task: comprehending and using the English expressions during the class. It also means that applying an RSBI curriculum has been a somewhat difficult task for educators and learners. Regardless of the controversial issue about the romoval of RSBI curriculum from Indonesian education system, it is vital that we highlight several important conclusions drawn from this study, particularly those concerning bilingual education. To achieve better results in conducting bilingual science classroom activities, it is recommended that both teachers and students prepare their skill in all skills especially speaking. In addition, they should also master more English vocabularies to enable them to understand scientific English. In this respect, a bridging course can be a useful alternative to enhance their English skills. Due to the time constraint in conducting this research, the researchers only use two instruments to obtain the data. Therefore, it will be better for the next research studies to gather the data by using interviews to enhance the soundness of the research.

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