

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Study

English has become a crucial part of global education, serving as a key language for communication, access to information, and professional advancement Brutt-Griffler (2017). English is taught widely in countries like Indonesia, where students are expected to develop the language skills needed to compete in today's globalised world. However, teaching English is not always straightforward, especially in multilingual classrooms, where students bring a variety of first languages and varying levels of English proficiency. Indonesia's rich linguistic diversity, with over 700 regional languages spoken alongside Bahasa Indonesia Ethnologue (2023), makes English language instruction particularly complex. Such complexity raises important discussions about how English should be effectively used in a multilingual educational context.

Multilingual classrooms are learning environments where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and regularly use more than one language to communicate both socially and academically Wei (2021). These classrooms mirror the country's rich cultural and linguistic diversity, but they also come with both advantages and challenges.

On one hand, multilingual classrooms promote metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and problem-solving skills Bialystok (2017). English in such

settings can open access to global knowledge and future opportunities Brutt-Griffler (2017). On the other hand, implementing English-only instruction can be difficult, especially for students who are still developing their language skills and strict language policies may reduce engagement, increase anxiety, and limit students' ability to fully participate Cummins (2020). Therefore, teachers must find a balance between providing adequate English exposure and maintaining an inclusive approach that respects students' native languages. How teachers manage this balance is closely tied to their beliefs and perspectives towards multilingualism.

Teachers' beliefs are shaped by their education, professional training, teaching experience, and the language policies they are expected to follow (Karim, (2010); Borg, (2015)). Some teachers see students' first languages (L1) as useful tools that can help with comprehension, especially when introducing complex material. Others prefer a more rigid English-only approach, believing that full immersion is key to language development (Macaro, (2019); Cenoz & Gorter, (2020)). These differing views affect how teachers plan their lessons, interact with students, and respond to the linguistic diversity in the classroom. However, studies exploring how Indonesian English teachers manage this in real-life multilingual classrooms, especially in local contexts, are still limited.

An observation at SMA Swasta Panglima Polem Rantauprapat illustrates how multilingual language use plays out in practice. During a class discussion, one eleventh-grade student said,

“*Ancua le? I don’t understand how to explain it to her. Kau aja lah yang jelaskan*” (MLU/S11/001).

The utterance mixes *Hokkien*, English, and *Bahasa Indonesia* in a single expression. In this case, the student appears to be expressing confusion in her first language, reasoning in English, and then requesting help from a peer in Bahasa Indonesia. This brief example reveals how naturally students switch between languages to communicate, make meaning, and interact in the classroom. Such moments highlight the need to examine how teachers perceive this kind of language use: is it a learning strategy, a distraction, or something else entirely?

Understanding teachers’ interpretations of multilingual language use is essential, as their perspectives directly shape classroom practices. Teachers who allow some flexibility in language use may foster more inclusive and supportive environments, while those who prefer English-only approaches may prioritize fluency and immersion Cenoz & Gorter (2020). These decisions can influence students’ confidence, motivation, and overall learning outcomes. By exploring how teachers perceive and respond to multilingual classroom realities, we can better understand the connection between teacher beliefs and instructional practices.

Therefore, the study aims to explore the challenges that English teachers face when working in multilingual classrooms and examine how their perspectives influence the strategies they use. By understanding how teachers view and respond to linguistic diversity, this research seeks to contribute to more inclusive and

effective English instruction in Indonesian schools where multiple languages coexist.

## **1.2 Problems of the Study**

The problems addressed in this research are:

1. What are the challenges perceived by English teacher in teaching English in the multilingual classroom in SMA Panglima Polem Rantauprapat?
2. How do teacher's perspectives influence the strategies they apply in a multilingual classroom in SMA Panglima Polem Rantauprapat?

## **1.3 Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of this research are:

1. Identify the challenges perceived by English teacher in teaching English within multilingual classroom in SMA Panglima Polem Rantauprapat.
2. Examine how English teacher's perspective influences their instructional strategies and classroom practices in multilingual classroom at SMA Panglima Polem Rantauprapat.

## **1.4 The Scope of the Study**

This study focuses on identifying the kinds of perspectives English teacher adopt to address the challenges in multilingual classroom at SMA Swasta Panglima Polem Rantauprapat. This research will also focus on exploring the reasons behind

these perspectives, particularly about their instructional strategies and language use during English lessons.

### **1.5 The Significance of the Study**

Theoretically, this study will contribute to the growing body of knowledge on multilingual education by examining English teacher's perspectives on English language use in multilingual classrooms. By examining the interplay between teachers' perspective and their pedagogical practices, the research will enhance understanding of teacher cognition in multilingual classrooms. Furthermore, the findings may help establish a theoretical framework for effective multilingual education, identifying best practices that can be integrated into educational theory and policy. It aims to provide insights into how established language use in education is applied in real classroom settings.

Practically, the insights gained from this study will have practical implications for teacher training programs, curriculum development, and educational policy. By addressing the specific needs and challenges faced by teachers in multilingual classrooms, the research can inform the design of training programs that equip educators with effective strategies for integrating English instruction with students' native languages. Additionally, the findings can guide curriculum developers in creating relevant materials that support language learning while respecting linguistic diversity. Ultimately, by improving teachers' understanding and practices regarding English language instruction, the study aims

to enhance students' engagement and learning outcomes, fostering a more inclusive and effective educational environment.



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