

# Students' and Lecturer's Perception of the Implementation of Direct Method in EFL Classroom: A Case Study in a Tertiary Level

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**Abstract**—Teaching English using Direct Method (DM), which only uses the target language and refrains from using the learners' native one, does not always seem understandable for some students, especially those who are in the first year of study in a tertiary level context. Responding to such an issue, this study was aimed at investigating students' understanding and perceptions of the implementation of DM in an EFL classroom. This study applied a case study of qualitative research design, where the researcher took one experienced-English lecturer who is an expert in using DM and thirty students of English major in the first year of study. The data of the study were gained through interviewing the lecturer, and questionnaires with open-ended questions distributed to forty-one students. The result of this study showed that the causes of difficulty are lack of vocabularies, infrequent practice, and inability to understand the explanation in a fast tempo, and unfamiliar pronunciation. Moreover, there are three proposed suggestions to effectively implement the DM, namely a lot of exposure, reading the materials before the class is begun, and working in a group consisting of high and low achievers.

**Keywords:** *Direct Method, students' perceptions, students' difficulties, teachers' perception, suggestion*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the context of non-native English country like Indonesia, the implementation of the Direct Method (DM) – a language teaching method that ignores the use of the first language – in teaching English does not always seem effective to apply, although it is intended to make its learners accustomed to decoding and encoding spoken message. Such an issue might be caused by some reasons such as students' unfamiliarity in listening to English spoken messages in a long duration, inadequate English learning background, or students' perception affirming that the English language is difficult to understand. This kind of issue is important to be paid attention because being unable to understand the lecturer's explanation using English will probably lead the students to get a low grade in a final test of the chosen course.

In line with the statement of Brown (2001), asserting that the Direct Method does not utilize the first language, this study was conducted based on the researcher's experience as a graduate student of the first year of study. The researcher found that when the lecturer explained the lesson using English without any translation between the second language and the first language, some students could not comprehend

what was being explained by the lecturer. Looking at such a situation, the researcher initiated to conduct the research on investigating students' understanding towards the lesson explained by the lecturer using English from the beginning to the end of the learning process, aiming at revealing students' weaknesses in understanding and practically getting insight on how students should learn to be able to understand such explanation. Thus, the final results of this study are expected to produce a view and some suggestions for the lecturer and the students to create a mutually effective classroom atmosphere; where he can comfortably explain the lesson in 'full' English and they can comprehend what is being explained.

There are many studies regarding the implementation of the Direct Method. Pongpuen, Kimura, Kijpoonphol, and Anupan (2018) conducted a research study on the effect of the Direct Method on the fifth-grade students' acquisition of verb inflection morphemes (-s, -es, -ed, -ing). The result of this study showed that both groups, high and low achieving students, enhanced their acquisition of morphemes, measured through the score of pre-tests and post-tests. Moreover, the result based on the students' perception, this method was perceived positively because of some reasons such as direct correction conveyed by a teacher and enhancing their confidence in using the target language. In a similar vein, Li (2019) asserted that in DM, students are directly corrected in terms of speaking performance. This correction was meant to exemplify how good speaking occurs. Furthermore, the implementation of DM could enhance students' reading comprehension (Hakim, 2019). It thus indicated that DM may be effective to enhance some language skills.

Another research related to the implementation of the Direct Method is the one conducted by Anwar and Fitriani (2016). They conducted a study on the comparison between implementing Total Physical Response (TPR) and the Direct Method in teaching vocabulary. The result of this study showed that both groups experienced an improvement measured through the scores of pre-tests and post-tests with the note the experimental class developed higher than the control group taught using the Direct Method. This study is similar to a study conducted by Naeini and Shahrokhi (2016) which resulted in the same.

In a similar vein, another research on the Direct Method was conducted by Awan and Nawaz (2015). The research was also conducted to compare two teaching methods, namely between the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the

Direct Method. The result of this study showed that the teachers mostly implemented GTM rather than DM, but they have a positive perception of this implementation and argued and assumed that the DM is interesting to be implemented. On the other hand, GTM and DM are assumed better if those are combined at the same time in the learning process (Bhatti & Mukhtar, 2017).

Looking at those previous researches, it can be identified that the first two previous research emphasized the use of the Direct Method to affect students' language aspects mastery, and the third one was focused on the investigation of the teacher's implementation of the Direct Method. It was intended to investigate the elementary school English Teachers' perceptions of the comparison of the implementation of two teaching methods, GTM and DM. In terms of a research gap, while other studies were emphasized on the use of the Direct Method to affect students' language skills and both positive and negative perceptions on the implementation of the Direct Method in the classroom, this study exploration is focused on the investigation on students' understanding towards an explanation using the Direct Method, which is followed by lecturer's suggestion on how the Direct Method can effectively be implemented.

The problem appearing in this study is the students' inability to understand the explanation conveyed in a way of the Direct Method, which ignores the use of the mother tongue language (L1). It is therefore important to investigate such a problem to reveal the causes and difficulties that make the learners unable to comprehend so that some suggestions and notions appear to help them be able to. To make the scope of this study clear, this study is guided by three research questions:

1. What are the causes (difficulties) of students' inability to comprehend the lesson explained using the Direct Method?
2. How do the students perceive the use of the Direct Method in the classroom?
3. What does the lecturer suggest the students be able to comprehend the explanation in 'full' English?

Regarding the research questions mentioned above, this study is limited only on the investigation on the students' inability to comprehend the explanation conveyed in 'full' English because dealing with such issue is considered new to the researcher if it is compared to other researches on the implementation of the Direct Method in the EFL Classroom.

After investigating some phenomena that the students could not understand the lesson explained by the lecturer in 'full' English, the significances of this study are described both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, this study can be additional information and suggestion for the lecturer about the causes of students' inability to understand the explanation, so that he can recognize to what extent that the Direct Method is effective in the EFL classroom. Practically, after revealing the causes, the lecturer will give them some suggestions – hopefully, motivations and learning strategies – on how they should learn to be able to comprehend an explanation in 'full' English.

The Direct Method (DM), which is commonly called "naturalistic" or "natural way", was historically established based on the notion claiming that learning the second language (L2) should be exposed as well as learning the first language (L1) – 'lots of oral interaction, spontaneous use of the language, no translation between first and second languages, and little or no analysis of grammatical rules' (Brown, 2001). The principles of the Direct Method were mentioned by Richards and Rogers (1986) as follows:

- Classroom instruction was conducted exclusively in the target language.
- Only everyday vocabulary and sentences were taught.
- Oral communication skills were built up in a progression gradually, organized around question-and-answer exchanges between teachers and students in small, intensive classes.
- Grammar was taught inductively
- New teaching points were taught through modeling and practice.
- The concrete vocabulary was thought through demonstration, objects, and pictures; abstract vocabulary was taught by association of ideas.
- Both speech and listening comprehension were taught.
- Correct pronunciation and grammar were emphasized.

In line with the statement of Nosrati, Karimi, Malekian, and Hariri (2013) mentioned that in the learning strategy of the Direct Method, the students are not allowed to use their mother tongue to speak; they are only allowed to use the target language (L2).

Besides, as can be seen above, even though the characteristics of the Direct Method points out the media or tools that are used to explain the lesson, this study is more focused on the use of the target language that is utilized during the process of teaching and learning.

Another study relating to this implementation was done by Nurhayani (2015), targeting the enhancement of students' vocabularies mastery. The study was conducted based on the notion that the students should be exposed as frequently as possible to the target language to make them get used to communicating in English both inside and outside of the classroom. This study involving thirty-one students resulted in a significant enhancement of students' vocabulary mastery after giving some classroom treatment using the Direct Method.

On the other hand, as has been mentioned earlier, the study conducted by Anwar and Fitriani (2016) resulted differently. The result of this study showed that the Direct Method did not affect students' vocabulary mastery, but the other method, Total Physical Response (TPR), in its comparison did. It thus can be inferred that the implementation of the Direct Method will result differently in different places, proficiency levels, students' learning backgrounds, and other circumstances.

In summary, the implementation of the Direct Method is meant to get the learners, especially the EFL ones, exposed frequently to the target language in the hope that they can get used to using it. This implementation is also assumed as an effective language teaching methodology if it is viewed from its principles mentioned by Brown (2001) who believed that the more students exposed to the target language, the more they can get used to using it. However, some studies (mentioned in this study) conducted in different places involving students with different English proficiency showed various results. Some affected students' language proficiency and some did not. For this study, because the previous studies have not ensured whether the students who got this treatment or exposure to the 'full' English explanation can understand or not, it is essential to understand the circumstances of why the students cannot fully understand what is being explained in a 'full' English.

II. METHODOLOGY

A case study of a qualitative research design is applied in this study. It is where 'the researcher explores deeply a program, event, activity, process of one or more individuals' (Creswell, 2009). The researcher chose purposively one experienced English lecturer who always – in his teaching – implements the Direct Method and uses 'full' English, and selected randomly forty-one university students majoring in English Education Department from the population of those who are in the first year of the study. They were randomly chosen because they, in their first year of the study, have to be able to adapt themselves with the frequent exposure of English in the classroom and have different English study background when they were still in senior high schools.

Subsequently, the researcher collected multiple forms of data by distributing a questionnaire and interview. To generate general perceptions about the issues, a guided open-ended format was used. The data collected were attitudinal (Dornyei, 2007), eliciting participants' attitudes and beliefs about the issue being investigated. The questionnaire items made were adopted from Walkinshaw and Oanh (2014) which alluded students' perceptions on the advantages and disadvantages of learning English with a native-English speaker teacher, which automatically used English-only in his/her explanation.

The data obtained from the interview were transcribed and the data obtained from the questionnaire are counted statistically. Both data gained were then described and analyzed qualitatively. Subsequently, to analyze the data, there are three things considered and aimed at influencing each other, namely: students' difficulties and perceptions, principles or theory of the Direct Method, and teacher's perception of the inability of the students to understand the explanation in English-only. Figure 1 illustrates each influence.

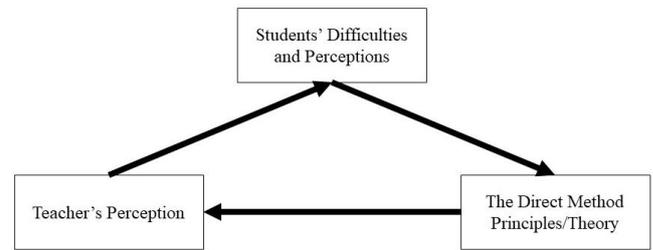


Fig. 1. The influences of the three aspects analyzed

Starting from students' difficulties and perception towards the implementation of the Direct Method, which ignores the use of L1, the researcher firstly tried to figure out some weaknesses and difficulties experienced by the students. Subsequently, these weaknesses and difficulties would affect the principles of the Direct Method, or in other words, they become a former consideration of when the Direct Method can be effectively implemented in the classroom. After that, the consideration affecting the principles of the Direct Method becomes a notion to the teacher, mentioning how the Direct Method would possibly be effective to be implemented in the classroom by looking at their difficulties. Finally, the teacher's perception revealed is expected to help the students find any solution regarding the ability to understand the explanation in English-only.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, three main points are elaborated: causes and difficulties confronted by the students, students' perception of the implementation of the Direct Method, and teacher/lecture's perception of students' ability to understand an English-only explanation.

The first elaboration is the one answering the first research question mentioned earlier, "What are the causes (difficulties) of students' inability to comprehend the lesson explained using the Direct Method?" The data found are mentioned as follows:

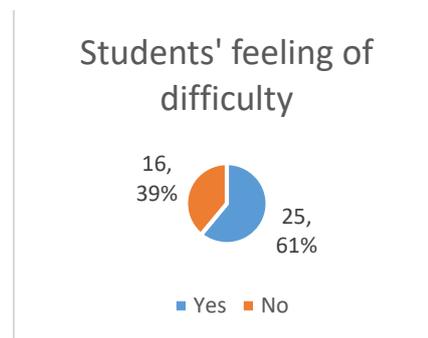


Fig. 2. Students' feeling of difficulty in understanding the explanation in English-only

As seen from Figure 2, there are twenty-five students (61%) who felt difficult in understanding an English-only explanation, and there are sixteen students (39%) who do not confront any difficulty in understanding it. Looking at that the number of the students who do not feel any difficulty is lesser than the ones who do so, it might mean that the implementation of the Direct Method, which emphasizes on no-translation

between first and second language (Brown, 2001) might not be able to attract the students in the context of EFL. The notion which tells that the implementation of the Direct Method is not attractive to them is not certainly accurate unless the causes happening are elaborated. Those are described subsequently in Figure 3.

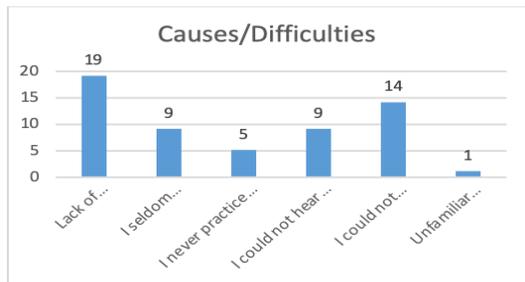


Fig. 3. Causes/difficulties of inability to understand the explanation in English-only

Mentioning any possible causes/difficulties that occur, it is found that nineteen students are stating that their inability is caused by the lack of vocabulary recognized, and fourteen students are stating that they could not understand the explanation in a fast tempo. Other causes that might affect students' inability are the clearness of the narrator's voice and the infrequent use of English outside of the classroom. Nineteen students felt that they could not understand the explanation as they could not hear the voice of the narrator clearly and seldom practice English outside of the classroom. Moreover, five students are stating that they could not understand the explanation because they never practice English outside of the classroom, which is then followed by one student who thinks that unfamiliar words might be the one causing his/her inability.

From the explanation above, It thus can be inferred that the implementation of the Direct Method, which ignores the use of L1 (Nosrati et al., 2013), might not be effective if those causes do still occur. The teachers are hoped to be able to identify students' weaknesses before beginning the lesson. However, this kind of problem can be slightly overcome through the control of speech tempo, as the data are mentioned below.

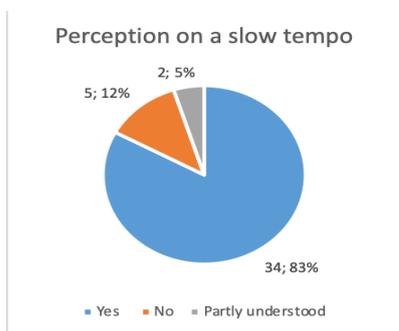


Fig. 4. Students' ability to understand the explanation in a slow tempo

Based on Figure 4, it is showed that there are: thirty-four students who agree that they can understand the English-only explanation if the teacher (who explains the lesson) speaks in a slow tempo; five students stating that the English-only explanation does not affect their understanding; and only two

students who understand partly in a slow tempo. Because the number of the students who agree is higher than the others, it thus can be inferred that the implementation of the Direct Method which ignores the use of L1 might be slightly effective if the narrator speaks or explains the lesson slowly with clear pronunciation.

The next finding elaborated in this section is to answer the second research question, "How do the students perceive the use of the Direct Method in the classroom?". The elaboration in this section firstly describes whether the students are interested in the implementation of the Direct Method, which subsequently followed by the explanation of any advantages constituting in the Direct Method. The data findings are mentioned as follows:

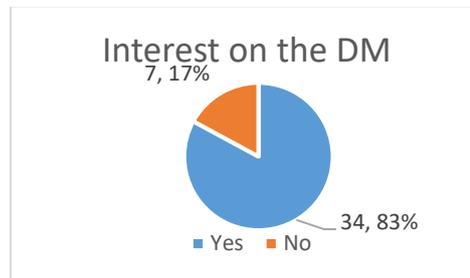


Fig. 5. Students' interest in the implementation of the DM

Although there are many causes and difficulties found in the implementation of the Direct Method earlier. The data finding of students' interest in its implementation resulted differently. According to Figure 5, it is found that there are thirty-four students (83%) stating that they are interested in the implementation of the Direct Method, and there are only seven students (17%) who are not interested in it. It thus indicated that the students are mostly interested in the class atmosphere that only uses the target language, even though any difficulties still appear. Furthermore, regarding this interest, there are some advantages based on their perception if this teaching method is exposed to them. The data findings are shown as follows:

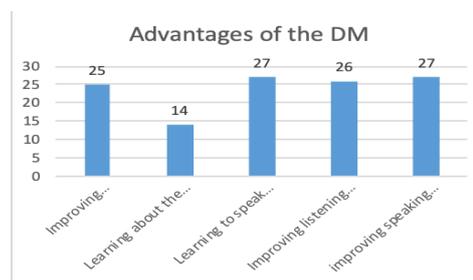


Fig. 6. Students' perception of the advantages of the DM

The statement of Brown (2001) about the exposure of learning the second language, claiming that learning the second language should be the same as learning the first language, is relevant with the data findings showed in Figure 6, where most of the students mentioned that the effective Direct Method implementation will lead them to gain some advantages, such as: improving pronunciation, learning about the target language culture, learning to speak naturally like natives do, improving listening skill, and improving speaking skill. It means that,

when they get used to deal with the target language as well as they get used to deal with the first language, those advantages are gained. Statistically, some twenty-seven students mentioned that the implementation of the Direct Method is beneficial for improving speaking skills as well as learning how to speak naturally as the natives do. Then, there are twenty-six students mentioning that it is beneficial for listening improvement, whereas twenty-five students are mentioning that it is beneficial for improving pronunciation. And the last advantage mentioned by fourteen students is learning the target language, the lowest number indicated among other advantages.

To justify, although the problems of the implementation of the Direct Method appear, the students are interested in it, as can be seen in Figures 5 and 6, mentioning their interest and advantages. Therefore, there must be some notions generated from the teacher/lecturer's perception of how the students can comfortably be in the Direct Method atmosphere. It is thus also aimed at answering the third research question, “

Regarding the effectiveness of the implementation of the Direct Method, the researcher gained some perceptions and notions from the date of interview with one experienced English lecturer, who always – in his teaching – utilizes only the target language and refrains from the use of the first language. Based on the data, the respondent stated that this implementation is applied to make the students communicative and get used to being exposed frequently to the target language utilization. The students are knowledgeable when they were taught using the first language, but they might not be skillful in terms of communication. He stated:

*“The communication skill should be achieved... this becomes worse... they will (be) forced to understand to get knowledge rather than to get skills, to acquire skills... they are knowledgeable but they are not skillful”*

The statement above means that it is not advisable if an English teacher only pursues the learning objectives determined in the curriculum, but he/she does not pay attention to students' communicative skills, such as speaking and listening. Therefore, responding to such a phenomenon, it is necessary to find out how the students should do to be able to understand the explanation in English-only. There are three suggestions proposed by the respondent to deal with such issues: a lot of exposures to the target language, assigning students to read materials regarding some particular topics, and making group work consisting of high and low-achieving students. He stated:

*“They need to be exposed to the real English and teacher should be a role model... help them speak... senior high school students cannot speak even understand English because since the beginning there is a lack of exposure...”*

*“You assign the students to read material of that particular topic, let's explore any resources on the internet or whatever, they come to the class... you know... full of minds... I mean with much understanding of the grammar point”*

*“when they work in the group... you know... the superior one will help the inferior one... then that could be collaborative working among the higher achiever and lower achiever... they can help each other”*

Based on the first dialogue part, the students might be encouraged and interested in blending in the atmosphere of the Direct Method which utilizes only the target language as the teacher becomes a role model for them in exposing the ‘real’ English. Secondly, another important point to highlight is that the students should be assigned to read particular materials which they can find in many sources like the internet, or other words, they come to the class prepared to be able to adapt to the atmosphere of the Direct Method. Finally, the last suggestion mentioned by the respondents is making group work. In this case, the teacher who implements the Direct Method should divide students into groups that must consist of high and low achieving students. This group division aims at making a collaborative learning situation where high-achieving students can help low-achieving students in terms of explaining the lesson difficult to understand.

Overall, the elaboration on investigating students' weaknesses, the Direct Method implementation, and teacher/lecturer's perception is meant to be an accurate consideration to conduct language teaching and learning. The investigation on students' weaknesses might be a consideration for the teacher before he/she implements the Direct Method in teaching whereas the perceptions and suggestions gained from the lecturer might be an accurate solution for the successful implementation of the Direct Method toolbar.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Direct Method, which is based on the notion that learning a second language should be the same as learning the first language still has to be considered carefully to be implemented. Based on the findings, the challenges that are probably faced by the teacher who would implement this teaching method are students' lack of vocabularies, students' infrequent practice of their English outside of the classroom, students' inability to ‘catch’ the explanation in a fast tempo, and students' inability to understand an unfamiliar pronunciation.

On the other hand, although the challenges or obstacles in implementing this method, the students – in this case – are interested in it, in regards to its advantages such as improving speaking, listening, and learning the target language culture.

The data gained from the interview with experienced-lecturer who always applies the Direct Method in his teaching are meant to generate insight about the basic purpose of the Direct Method and how the students should learn to be able to adapt in the atmosphere of the classroom which applies it. The data showed that this method is basically to improve students' communication skills besides their cognition. Furthermore, there are three suggestions proposed about how this kind of method is effectively implemented: a lot of exposure to the ‘real’ English, reading some materials related to the particular topic that will be discussed before the beginning of learning, and blending in a group work that has to consist of high and low-achieving students.

In terms of suggestions, the results of this study are expected to be able to give additional information to the readers especially EFL teachers about careful consideration in implementing this teaching method. For future researches, this study is expected to be able to be a reference for research with

a similar topic. Finally, the notion saying that there is not any single teaching method that fits in every circumstance and students' English proficiency level, is still relevant to this context of the study.

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