

Exploring Translanguaging Practices in a Secondary EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This research investigates how translanguaging is practiced in a secondary EFL classroom and how it affects students' comprehension and participation. A qualitative method was used, involving classroom observations and interviews with one English teacher and students. The findings show that translanguaging was used intentionally through code-switching, translation, and interpreting to explain materials, clarify instructions, and manage classroom interaction. Students also used Indonesian during group discussions and switched to English when presenting their work. The results further reveal that translanguaging improved students' comprehension by making input more understandable and reducing confusion. It also increased participation and confidence, especially among lower-proficiency students, as they felt more comfortable expressing ideas using both languages. Therefore, translanguaging serves as an effective pedagogical strategy in EFL classrooms when applied purposefully. Future research is suggested to explore its long-term impact on language proficiency.

Keywords: Translanguaging; EFL Classroom; Comprehension; Participation; Secondary Students

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia remains challenging because most students use Indonesian as their first language. Despite early English instruction, learners still face difficulties due to linguistic and cultural differences between the two languages, which often hinder comprehension and communication (Liando & Tatipang, 2022; Putri & Indra, 2023). These conditions suggest the need for pedagogical strategies that integrate students' first language to enhance understanding and participation. Translanguaging has recently emerged as a promising approach to address these challenges. It allows learners to utilize their full linguistic repertoire in meaning-making and communication, rather than separating languages into rigid systems (Vogel & García, 2017; García & Kley, 2020). In the EFL context, translanguaging functions as a pedagogical tool that supports comprehension, encourages participation, and reduces anxiety through strategic alternation between L1 and L2 (Rabidge, 2019; Siregar, 2020; Kwihangana, 2021). Recent studies have reaffirmed these benefits, highlighting how translanguaging fosters inclusion and deeper learning engagement across various multilingual classrooms (Parra & Proctor, 2021; Khair, 2022; Nurfauziah, Nugraha, & Kartini, 2023).

In Indonesian settings, translanguaging has been increasingly recognized as an effective instructional strategy that bridges gaps between English input and students' background knowledge (Arisandi, Sudrajat, & Fajrin, 2023; Liando et al., 2023). It enables teachers to scaffold meaning while maintaining communicative balance, which is crucial for students who are still developing their English proficiency. However, much of the existing literature focuses on higher education or adult learners. As noted by Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020), limited

attention has been given to translanguaging at the secondary level, where students are still developing both linguistic competence and academic literacy. More recent reviews (Wijayanti & Mahmudah, 2024) also emphasize the need to explore translanguaging practices among adolescents to understand how it contributes to communicative confidence and content understanding in early stages of academic English learning. To fill this gap, this research therefore focuses on understanding how translanguaging is practiced in an Indonesian secondary school EFL classroom. It explores (1) how translanguaging practices occur during teaching and learning activities and (2) how these practices affect students' comprehension and participation. The results are expected to contribute to the ongoing discussion about multilingual education and provide insights for EFL teachers in similar contexts.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach to gain a comprehensive understanding of translanguaging in classroom settings. The qualitative approach is selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of the experiences and perceptions of both teachers and students, particularly regarding the role of Translanguaging in enhancing learning. According to Creswell and Poth (2016), qualitative research focuses on understanding social phenomena from the participants' perspectives and seeks to explore how individuals make sense of their experiences within natural settings. The study took place at a public secondary school in Karawang, West Java, involving one English teacher and five 10th-grade students. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The observations focused on teacher-student and student-student interactions to identify instances of code-switching, translation, and interpreting. The interviews explored participants' perceptions of translanguaging, particularly how it affected comprehension and confidence. All data were transcribed and analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006), producing categories that reflected patterns of translanguaging practice, pedagogical functions, and learning outcomes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. The Occurrence of Translanguaging Practices in the EFL Classroom

1.1 Teacher's strategic use of Translanguaging

The teacher deliberately alternated between English and Indonesian to ensure students' comprehension due to varied proficiency levels. She confirmed that bilingual use was negotiated with students:

Vignette 1 Mrs. Dewi (pseudonym):

"When I asked if I should speak 100% English, they said 'No, Miss, we don't understand.' So, we agreed to use 50:50 English and Indonesian."

These interview findings are supported by observations showing that teachers actively use Translanguaging occurred mainly through *code-switching, translation, and interpreting*, with *language brokering* not observed

1.1.1 Code-Switching

Code-switching is the strategy most frequently used by teachers. This study found several teacher utterances that contained code-switching in the form of Tag-switching, Intra-sentential switching, and Inter-sentential switching. In this study, code-switching is understood as the strategic alternation between English and Indonesian to accomplish instructional and interactional goals. In classroom settings, such alternation often serves scaffolding functions,

clarifying task demands, negotiating meaning, and maintaining the flow of interaction (Lin, 2013). Within a translanguaging perspective, these moves reflect learners' and teachers' deployment of their unitary linguistic repertoire to make sense of content and to participate (Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015; Li, 2018).

a) Tag-switching (TS)

Teacher used several forms of tag switching (TS) during learning activities. Tag Switching involves inserting a single word or phrase from one language into a sentence that is otherwise in another language (Tse, 1996). Based on the data found in the teacher's utterances, this can be explained as follows:

Vignette 2 (Mrs. Dewi, teacher; tag switching).

"Okay, can you answer this question, come'on yuk"

As stated by Mrs. Dewi (pseudonym) in Vignette 2, "Okay, can you answer this question, come'on yuk", her utterance is a clear example of tag-switching. This sentence is dominantly in English, but the teacher inserts the Indonesian pragmatic particle "yuk" at the end. The word "yuk" in Indonesian functions as an invitation or encouragement marker, similar to "let's" or "come on" in English. This addition is not part of the grammatical structure of the sentence; instead, it serves a pragmatic function to soften the command, create rapport, and motivate students to respond.

b) Intra-sentential switching (Int-SS)

In addition to Tag Switching, teachers also use Intra-sentential switching (Int-SS). This type mixing two languages inside the same sentence. This type needs good skill in both languages because the sentence still needs to be grammatically correct (Poplack, 1980). Here are some findings from expressions that are classified as Int-SS:

Vignette 3 (Mrs. Dewi, teacher; Intra-sentential switching).

"Jadi minimal nilai kita 75, under seventy-five ya."

The utterance "Jadi minimal nilai kita 75, under seventy-five ya" is categorized as intra-sentential switching because the teacher inserts an English phrase inside an Indonesian sentence without ending the clause. The sentence starts in Indonesian: "Jadi" (so), "minimal nilai kita 75" (our minimum score is 75), then switches to English with the meaningful phrase "under seventy-five" to clarify the score limit. This English phrase is not just a tag, but part of the sentence's meaning. Finally, the sentence ends with the Indonesian pragmatic marker "ya" to seek agreement. Because the switch to English happens within the same sentence structure, not between sentences or as a simple tag, it fits Poplack's (1980) definition of intra-sentential code-switching.

c) Inter-sentential switching (ISS)

Inter-Sentential Switching (ISS) is also used by teachers in classroom teaching activities. This type occurs when the switch happens between complete sentences or clauses. One sentence is spoken in one language, and the next sentence is in another (Poplack, 1980). Here are some findings from expressions that are classified as ISS:

Vignette 4 (Mrs. Dewi, teacher; Inter-sentential switching).

"From the malin Kundang story, what is the resolution? Apa itu resolusinya?"

The teacher's utterance above is an example of inter-sentential switching because the language switch occurs between two separate sentences, not within one sentence. The first sentence, "From the Malin Kundang story, what is the resolution?", is fully in English and grammatically complete. The teacher then shifts to a second sentence in Indonesian, "Apa itu resolusinya?", which carries the same meaning but is expressed in the students' first language to ensure

understanding. Unlike intra-sentential switching, where languages are mixed inside a single sentence, here the switch happens after a full stop or complete idea, which fits Poplack's (1980) definition of inter-sentential switching a switch occurring at sentence boundaries.

1.1.2 Translation and Interpreting

According to Tse (1996), translation refers to the process of rendering written or documented messages from one language into another, while interpreting involves real-time oral mediation between speakers of different languages. In these findings teacher also use translation and interpreting to clarify the meaning of difficult words or instructions. For example, when explaining parts of the Malin Kundang story, teachers combine two languages to make it easier for students to understand.

Vignette 5 (Mrs. Dewi, teacher; Translation).

"Orientation is knowing the character, and the place itu tempantya, where does the story take place? Dimana sih storynya itu?"

In these cases, the teacher acts as both a communicator and an interpreter, facilitating students' comprehension by translating or explaining the English expressions into their first language. This strategy helps bridge linguistic gaps and supports the learning process, especially when students encounter unfamiliar English terms or concepts.

The findings indicate that the researcher identified several types of Translanguaging practices employed by the teacher, including Code-switching, Translation, and Interpreting. However, instances of Language Brokering were not observed in the data up to the final stage of analysis.

1.2 Translanguaging in collaborative activities

Collaborative tasks were a fertile site for bilingual meaning-making. Students typically brainstormed, negotiated roles, and clarified concepts in Indonesian while reserving English for more public, assessable outputs (e.g., presentations). This division of labor is a common classroom ecology in EFL contexts and is consistent with the literature on translanguaging-as-design for learning (Li, 2018).

Vignette 6 (Reno, student; pseudonym)

"...for active discussions, we use Indonesian, but for the presentation, we use English."

As stated in Vignette 6, Indonesian provided cognitive economy during ideation and problem-solving, while English remained the display language for formal products. Rather than a deficiency, this pattern evidences functional complementarity: students lean on L1 to generate understanding and on L2 to demonstrate it (Lin, 2013; Li, 2018).

2. The Impact of Translanguaging on Comprehension and Participation

The findings under this theme address the second research question, which explores "How Translanguaging practices affect students' comprehension and participation in the classroom?". The data reveal that Translanguaging has several positive impacts on students' learning process. It helps them understand lessons more effectively, increases their confidence to participate, and promotes active collaboration during classroom activities. The discussion below presents these impacts in detail, supported by both interview and observation data.

2.1 Facilitating comprehension and learning

One of the most significant impacts of Translanguaging is its role in helping students comprehend lesson content more effectively. Many students stated that the use of both English

and Indonesian made it easier for them to understand vocabulary, instructions, and overall meaning in class.

Vignette 7 (Silla, student; pseudonym)

“When the teacher uses English, I actually understand it better...”

Observation data confirm this statement. During classroom activities, students appeared more attentive and showed clearer understanding after the teacher provided explanations using both languages.

2.2 Enhancing participation and collaboration

Translanguaging also promotes active participation and collaboration in classroom discussions and group activities. Students reported that using both languages made them feel more comfortable expressing ideas and participating in tasks.

Vignette 8 (Juni, student; pseudonym)

“I become more active and can help my groupmates complete the tasks.”

Observation results further support this finding. When the teacher used both languages to explain instructions, students responded more frequently, asked questions, and interacted with peers without hesitation.

2.3 Boosting students’ confidence and engagement

Another positive impact of Translanguaging is the development of students’ confidence and engagement in learning. Many students expressed that they felt more confident to speak and share opinions when mixing English and Indonesian.

Vignette 9 (Juni, student; pseudonym)

“I feel more comfortable speaking by mixing both languages.”

Observation notes confirmed that student engagement increased when both languages were used. Students asked more questions, responded to prompts, and interacted more actively with peers during bilingual instruction. This suggests that Translanguaging fosters a supportive environment in which students feel empowered to communicate and take academic risks.

Discussion

This section interprets the findings presented in the results by relating them to relevant theoretical constructs and previous research. The discussion is organized around the two main research questions: (1) how translanguaging practices occur in the secondary EFL classroom, and (2) how these practices affect students’ comprehension and participation. Where appropriate, specific vignettes from the findings are invoked as empirical evidence to substantiate analytical claims.

1. The Occurrence of Translanguaging Practices in the EFL Classroom

The findings reveal that translanguaging practices appeared consistently throughout the teaching and learning process and were not performed randomly. Both teacher and students used translanguaging strategically to support meaning-making, classroom management, and instructional clarity. This supports García and Wei’s (2014) conceptualization of translanguaging as a deliberate pedagogical practice that enables learners to draw from their full linguistic repertoire rather than treating languages as separate systems. In this study, the teacher explicitly agreed with students to use both Indonesian and English in the classroom, demonstrating a conscious and negotiated approach to bilingual instruction.

Based on the data, several forms of translanguaging emerged, such as tag-switching, intra-sentential, and inter-sentential switching. These forms reflect Poplack's (1980) classification of code-switching, yet within the broader lens of translanguaging, they indicate flexible, functional use of language resources (Otheguy, García & Reid, 2015). For instance, tag-switching was commonly used to maintain attention or check students' understanding (e.g., "Understand, ya?"), while intra-sentential switching emerged when students mixed Indonesian and English within a sentence to maintain task flow (e.g., "Miss, ini my answer?"). Inter-sentential switching was used when the teacher shifted from English explanations to Indonesian for clarification when students appeared confused.

Translanguaging was also employed through translation and interpreting. When students struggled to understand a certain English word or instruction, the teacher provided immediate meaning in Indonesian. This aligns with Tse's (1996) distinction between translation (intentional meaning transfer) and interpreting (spontaneous mediation). These practices served as scaffolding (Lin, 2013), allowing learners to stay engaged with the lesson without losing focus due to language barriers. Additionally, the findings show that translanguaging was not limited to teacher and student interactions. Students also used translanguaging in peer discussions during group assignments. They tended to use Indonesian to negotiate ideas and English to present final responses. This behavior aligns with Li's (2018) theory of translanguaging as a dynamic process that enables functional complementarity between languages: L1 for cognitive processing and L2 for academic display. Overall, the occurrence of translanguaging in this classroom demonstrates that languages were not treated as isolated systems. Instead, students and teacher utilized both English and Indonesian complementarily to co-construct meaning, manage classroom interaction, and maintain learning continuity, consistent with the pedagogical model proposed by García & Wei (2014) and Li (2018).

2. The Impact of Translanguaging on Comprehension and Participation

The findings also indicate that translanguaging had a positive impact on students' comprehension and participation during EFL learning. When the teacher used Indonesian to clarify complex English instructions or vocabulary, students were able to follow the lesson more effectively. This supports Cummins' (2017) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, which posits that skills and knowledge developed in one language can support learning in another. In this context, Indonesian served as a bridge to help students understand English input more deeply. From the observational data, it is evident that translanguaging reduced misunderstandings and minimized cognitive overload. When explanations were given solely in English, some students became silent or disengaged; however, after the teacher switched to Indonesian or translated key terms, students became more responsive. This shows that translanguaging functions as a scaffolding tool that supports students' comprehension. This is in line with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which states that language can be acquired effectively when students receive input that is understandable but still slightly above their current level of proficiency.

In terms of participation, translanguaging helped create a more inclusive classroom environment. Students with lower English proficiency felt more confident to express their ideas when allowed to use both languages. Several students stated that they were more willing to answer questions and participate in discussions because they were not afraid of making mistakes in English. This is consistent with Liando et al. (2023), who suggest that translanguaging reduces anxiety and encourages active participation in EFL settings.

Furthermore, translanguaging enabled collaborative learning. During group discussions, students used Indonesian to negotiate meaning and solve problems, then shifted to English when

presenting their answers to the teacher. This pattern demonstrates how translanguaging supports both thinking and performing functions of language (Li, 2018). It also shows functional differentiation: L1 for cognitive processing and L2 for academic communication.

However, some scholars argue that excessive use of L1 can reduce exposure to L2 (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020). In this study, this concern was minimized because the teacher maintained balance by using English in core instruction and Indonesian only when necessary for clarification. This suggests that translanguaging, when used purposefully, does not hinder language development but rather enhances it.

In summary, translanguaging positively influenced comprehension by making input more accessible and by reducing confusion among students. It also increased participation by building confidence, lowering anxiety, and supporting collaborative learning. These outcomes are aligned with previous research (García & Wei, 2014; Cummins, 2017; Parra & Proctor, 2021) and demonstrate that translanguaging can be an effective pedagogical practice in EFL classrooms when applied strategically.

CONCLUSION

This study found that translanguaging occurred naturally and strategically in the secondary EFL classroom. Both the teacher and students alternated between Indonesian and English to support understanding, manage instruction, and maintain communication. Forms of translanguaging included tag-switching, intra- and inter-sentential switching, translation, and interpreting. These practices were used not as signs of linguistic deficiency, but as purposeful strategies to scaffold learning and facilitate meaning-making. The use of translanguaging significantly improved students' comprehension. When English explanations were combined with Indonesian, students understood vocabulary, instructions, and narrative content more clearly. Translanguaging also increased student participation and confidence. Students felt more comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, and engaging in group work because they could rely on both languages without fear of making mistakes. Overall, translanguaging enhanced both the cognitive and affective aspects of language learning. It helped students understand content better, encouraged active participation, and created an inclusive classroom environment. When applied purposefully and in balance, translanguaging supported rather than hindered English acquisition in the secondary EFL context.

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