

# The Role of Local Languages in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: A Systematic Literature Review

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## Abstract

In Indonesia, English is taught as a foreign language from elementary to university levels. The country has over 700 local languages, which bring both opportunities and challenges for teaching English. Local languages are often used to help students understand difficult concepts or materials. The local language does not seem to be considered to have a role in translanguaging to support the development of the second or foreign language learning. This study employed a systematic literature review method, analyzing sixteen research articles published between 2020 and 2025 that explore how local languages are used alongside Indonesian and English by teachers and students, as well as to identify the benefits and challenges. The results show that local languages are mostly used informally by teachers, for example, to let students plan ideas in their mother tongue, switch languages, give instructions, or explain difficult points. These practices help students participate more easily, understand lessons better, gain confidence, preserve their culture, and improve their language learning. Although there are some benefits, teachers still face problems like unclear policies, lack of materials, and limited preparation. Schools need clear rules, trained teachers, and good materials to use local languages well. Careful planning is also important for balancing the learning of English and culture.

**Keywords:** Local Languages; Indonesian EFL Classrooms; Translanguaging; Multilingual Education

## INTRODUCTION

English is an important language for global communication. According to Syafii and Rojabi (2021), it is widely used and understood worldwide and serves as a main medium for communication in business, science, and technology. Çiftlikli and Demirel (2022) state that English is also an essential skill for surviving in a globalized world because it enables communication across different cultures and countries. Therefore, governments and schools in non-English speaking countries include English language programs in their curricula to prepare students for global engagement and future careers (Guo & Wang, 2022; Prajapati, 2022).

In Indonesia, English is taught from elementary to university levels and is considered important even though it is a foreign language (Rahmah, 2023). According to the latest curriculum (hereafter, Merdeka Curriculum), teachers train students to develop communication skills in real-life situations (Kemdikbudristek, 2022). Learning focuses on combining listening, speaking, reading, viewing, writing, and presenting in different kinds of texts and ways (Nurnaningrum et al., 2025). Teachers also encourage critical thinking and independent learning. This approach helps students communicate globally and participate in the connected world (Fikni & Ningrum, 2021; Rahmah, 2023). To support this approach, the learning process is enhanced by active and engaging teaching methods to ensure effective language acquisition (Rahmah, 2023).

Indonesia has many local languages, and they play an important role in students' English learning and reflect their cultural identity. According to Salim and Hanif (2021), more than seven hundred local languages are spoken in different ethnic groups. This language diversity, including both local languages and Bahasa Indonesia, strongly affects how students think and learn English (Nursanti, 2021; Liando et al., 2022). Ratminingsih et al. (2024) state that teaching methods need to use students' existing languages while also helping them improve their English, instead of relying only on traditional monolingual approaches.

This diversity brings both opportunities and challenges for teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Rasmin and Samsudin (2024) state that using local languages in teaching can be helpful but also difficult. The advantages of using local languages in English learning include helping students understand new concepts by connecting them with familiar language and cultural contexts, which can increase engagement and participation (Prastiwi, 2013). However, relying too much on direct translation from local languages to English may slow the development of real English skills and independent thinking in the target language (Salim & Hanif, 2021). A careful approach is needed to balance the benefits of using local languages with the need for regular exposure to English, ensuring effective language learning (Khatima et al., 2025; Ratminingsih et al., 2024).

Translanguaging is a new way of teaching English that gives freedom and independence to teachers and students (Ratminingsih et al., 2024). According to Langkau and Sulaiman (2025) and Choi and Poudel (2024), it helps students use all their languages to understand lessons better and pay more attention to difficult topics. Furthermore, Ratminingsih et al. (2024) point out that using all available languages creates a friendly and flexible learning environment, which is helpful in classrooms where students speak many different languages. This method also shows that using a student's first language as a base for learning can be very useful and follows UNESCO's advice for teaching in many languages.

In the classroom, teachers use translanguaging through explanations in two languages, switching between languages, and group activities. According to Robillos and Art-in (2023), difficult ideas are explained in students' first language before English is used, or students are allowed to discuss in their own language to improve understanding. According to Emilia and Hamied (2022), teachers include books and videos in different languages to help students connect ideas and learn more. Activities are planned so that students first think in their own language and then share their ideas in English, using all their language skills (Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024), and this method is useful when English is a foreign language because students' languages are respected and their prior knowledge is used to help English learning (Ratminingsih, et al., 2024).

Previous studies show that translanguaging helps students join activities, feel more confident, and think more clearly. Neokleous and Karpava (2023) and Huang and Chalmers (2023) explain that students do better in discussions and tasks when they can use all their languages. This creates a more supportive classroom. Allowing students to express themselves in any language increases their confidence and enhances their understanding of lessons (Ulum, 2024; Francis & Le, 2024). When learners switch between languages, ideas become clearer, which accelerates knowledge acquisition (Ratminingsih et al., 2024). Other studies show that teachers have positive attitudes toward it to help students perform better (Sutrisno, 2023; Raja et al., 2022). The use of translanguaging may slow down the development of fluency and independent use of English (Ratminingsih, et al., 2024). This problem becomes more complex because of different national policies, as some countries fully use English as a medium of instruction while others

prefer local or bilingual approaches (Nyoni, et al., 2023). As a matter of fact, according to Murtiningsih et al. (2022), using too many other languages can make students hear and practice English less, which slows their learning. Therefore, Anisah and Nasrullah (2023) and Muttaqin and Chuang (2022) suggest teachers should use other languages only to help understanding, while giving students enough English to practice.

In contrast, many studies have found that the use of local languages in Indonesian EFL classrooms gives learning and social benefits (Al-Musthofa & D'Angelo, 2024; Ningrum & Sahiruddin, 2023). However, few systematic literature reviews focus specifically on these empirical evidences. Therefore, this systematic literature review is an attempt to fill this gap. It analyzes and synthesizes previous studies about the role of local languages in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The review specifically identifies how local languages are used, what their functions are, and what benefits and challenges they bring to the teaching and learning of EFL. This review is expected to provide teachers with research-based knowledge about the contribution of local languages to Indonesian students' learning of EFL. The purposes of this review are to answer the following research questions:

1. How do teachers and students use local languages together with Indonesian and English in Indonesian EFL classrooms?
2. What functions do local languages serve in supporting teaching and learning in these classrooms?
3. What pedagogical benefits and challenges do local languages bring to these classrooms?

## **METHOD**

### **Research Design**

To explore the role of local languages in Indonesian EFL classrooms, sixteen research articles were reviewed. These studies were published between 2020 and 2025 in indexed journals. Following the procedures of Systematic Literature Review, this study employed Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Nguyen et al., 2022). The PRISMA approach was used to organize and explain the stages of identifying, screening, and selecting relevant research articles included in the review. This study used a qualitative approach to analyze and explain the findings from the selected studies.

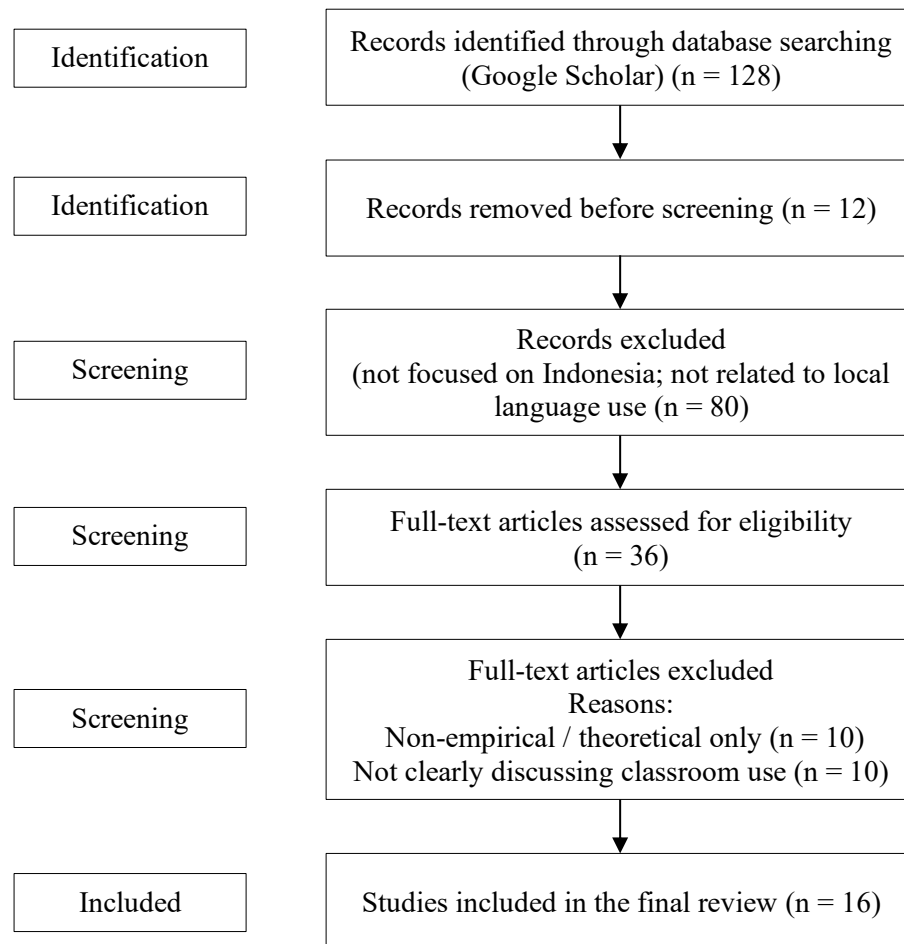
### **Data Collection**

All reviewed studies were obtained from Google Scholar, which was selected as the main database because it provides a wide range of accessible academic resources. The search was carried out by entering several keywords related to the topic. The main keywords were “local languages in EFL classrooms,” “translanguaging in Indonesian EFL context,” and “bilingual teaching in Indonesian EFL classrooms.” The publication year filter was set between 2020 and 2025 to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant research. The three steps in the review of previous studies in the database were to search the database and search terms, apply inclusion and exclusion criteria, and conduct selection. From the search in the database, about 128 articles were found. Then, inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to determine the articles that were suitable for the research by using Publish or Perish tools. After applying these criteria, sixteen articles were finally selected and reviewed in this study. All the steps were carried out in weeks 1-2. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used to select relevant studies in this research are presented in the table below.

**Table 1.** Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criteria Type	Description
Inclusion Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Studies that discussed English learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms.</li> <li>2. Focused on the role of local languages.</li> <li>3. Provided empirical findings or analysis of classroom practices.</li> </ol>
Exclusion Criteria	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Studies that focused on other countries.</li> <li>2. Non-research papers.</li> <li>3. Did not clearly discuss the use of local languages in teaching and learning.</li> </ol>

The PRISMA flowchart was used to describe the selection process of the reviewed studies.



**Figure 1.** Data Collection Technique

### Data Analysis

After the sixteen articles were selected, the data analysis process began to investigate and organize the information in a clear and structured way. Each article was read several times to understand its content deeply. Important points related to the research focus, such as the role of

local languages, learning context, and classroom interaction, were highlighted and coded. These codes were used to make it easier to group and compare data between studies. The coded data were organized into simple categories. Similar ideas were grouped together to find common patterns across the studies. This step made the data easier to manage and understand. To explore deeper meanings, thematic analysis was carried out, and several key themes were found from the grouped data. After the themes were identified, they were checked again to ensure accuracy and consistency with the data. The themes were also compared to see how they were connected. Notes were written during this process to record important points and reflections. Finally, all themes were summarized and interpreted. The results were arranged clearly and connected to the research questions. This process made the analysis organized, fair, and suitable for the purpose of the study. All the procedures mentioned above were conducted in weeks 3-4.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Results

This part shares what the reviewed articles found about how local languages are used in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The explanation is divided into three parts: (1) how local languages are used in class, (2) what their functions are, and (3) what benefits and challenges they bring to teaching and learning.

### Implementation of Local Languages in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

According to Rasmin and Samsudin (2024), including local languages in English learning is essential for protecting linguistic diversity and reinforcing cultural identity among students. It also helps them connect what they learn in class with their local culture (Giyatmi, 2020). In Indonesia, this approach allows students to use their language background in English learning and supports more inclusive education (Nurhayati, 2023).

However, as stated by Permana and Rohmah (2024), there are many schools that still focus mainly on English because of national and global expectations. This situation makes it difficult to apply multilingual education policies well (Nugraheni et al., 2023). Another problem is the lack of teaching materials and resources that include local languages (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). Some teachers have tried simple ways to include local languages. For example, they let students use their mother tongue to plan ideas or explain difficult points before switching to English (Liando et al., 2023). Teachers also use local languages to give instructions, feedback, or clarify lessons (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020). These methods make students feel more confident and help them take part more actively in class (Permana & Rohmah, 2024). In addition, Rasmin and Samsudin (2024) point out that teachers need training programs, so translanguaging can be used more effectively. With such training, lessons can be planned to keep a good balance between English and local languages (Liando et al., 2023). Schools are also encouraged to make learning materials that show local culture and language (Giyatmi, 2020).

### Functions of Local Languages in EFL Classrooms

The use of local languages in EFL classrooms serves several important functions. One of the main functions is to help students understand difficult material. As explained by Emilia and Hamied (2022), local languages make it easier for students to connect new English knowledge with what they already know in their first language. This connection can support to improve comprehension and memory. Local languages also have a social and emotional function. They make students feel accepted and confident because they can express themselves freely (Barkah et al., 2022). This function helps reduce anxiety and promotes participation in class discussions

(Nurhayati, 2023). According to Permana and Rohmah (2024) and Muthalib et al. (2024), local languages also perform an interpretive function, helping students understand pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary in English. Teachers can translate or explain key ideas in the local language to make sure students fully understand the lesson. In addition, local languages have a managerial function, which helps teachers manage classroom activities and communication (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Putrawan, 2022). They can use it to give instructions, check understanding, or motivate students (Emilia & Hamied, 2022). The use of local languages also supports interaction and cooperation between teachers and students, helping them build a closer relationship (Nurhayati, 2023; Triastuti et al., 2023).

## **Benefits and Challenges of Local Language Use in EFL Classrooms**

### **For Learner Engagement**

Permana and Rohmah (2024) state that using translanguaging in teaching can increase students' engagement and motivation. As said by Liando et al. (2023), students feel more confident and active in classroom when they are permitted to switch to the most convenient language (which is the local language) to help them express meaning in EFL. Nurhayati (2023) also found that this practice helps improve English learning results and creates a more inclusive classroom. However, Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020) explain that because Indonesia has many local languages, it is not easy to apply translanguaging in every classroom. There is a possibility that students in the classroom come from different ethnics so that they use different local languages. Thus, only when teachers who share the same first language with students can use it well to support understanding and classroom interaction.

### **For Cultural Identity**

The use of local languages is seen by Permana and Rohmah (2024) as a way to build students' cultural identity and self-confidence. This practice helps students value their own culture while they learn a global language. As stated by Emilia and Hamied (2022), equality between English and local languages is also promoted through this approach, which challenges language domination. Putra and Musigrungsi (2022) warn that the strong influence of English can threaten local languages and cultures. Thus, as mentioned by Rasmin and Samsudin (2024), including local languages in education is important to protect cultural heritage and prevent language loss.

### **For Language Acquisition**

Students' cognitive growth and metalinguistic awareness are supported through the use of local languages (Munandar, 2025; Nimanuho et al., 2025). When learners relate English grammar or vocabulary to their local language, they understand more easily (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). This approach also helps reduce the difficulty of learning English, especially for students with limited exposure to it. In addition, using both global and local languages leads to better English proficiency and preserves local linguistic diversity at the same time (Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022; Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024).

### **For Material and Curriculum Development**

According to Rasmin and Samsudin (2024), one main challenge is the lack of suitable materials for multilingual learning. Teachers need books and digital media that include local examples and language content (Giyatmi, 2020). When curriculum developers design materials that place local languages at the center of learning, students can better understand both language and culture (Nugraheni et al., 2023). Materials that value local culture are found to make lessons more engaging and meaningful for students (Emilia & Hamied, 2022). However, the use of

local languages must be managed carefully so they are not seen only as a bridge to English (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024).

### **For Teacher Training and Policy Support**

Teacher readiness plays an important role in implementing multilingual education. Since many teachers were trained in English-only programs, it becomes difficult for them to apply multilingual approaches, as noted by Rasmin and Samsudin (2024). To solve this issue, Permana and Rohmah (2024) recommend that training programs be provided to help teachers learn about translanguaging strategies and how to adapt learning materials. Institutional and policy support is seen as important for improving teachers' capacity (Liando et al., 2023). Clear curriculum guidelines and regular training are also needed to keep multilingual practices running in schools (Nugraheni et al., 2023). In addition, collaboration between teachers and researchers is viewed as an effective way to share good practices and create a more inclusive EFL learning environment, as highlighted by Nurhayati (2023).

### **Challenges in Implementing Multilingual Education**

As stated by Rasmin and Samsudin (2024) and Putrawan (2022), the main challenges in multilingual education are the lack of clear policies and proper training for teachers. Because of these issues, the use of local languages in classrooms is often not effectively implemented. Many teachers are still unprepared and feel unsupported when trying to balance English and local languages during lessons. It was also reported by Fadila et al. (2024) that some students felt worried that frequent use of local languages might reduce their exposure to English and limit their opportunities to practice speaking.

### **Discussion**

The review shows that local languages are important in Indonesian EFL classrooms, although their use varies depending on the context. It has been emphasized by Rasmin and Samsudin (2024) and Giyatmi (2020) that local languages play a key role in protecting linguistic diversity and supporting students' cultural identity, but teachers' use of these strategies in the classroom is still inconsistent. This is because there are no clear teaching guidelines, and the curriculum does not fully match Indonesia's multilingual situation (Khatima et al., 2025). Many teachers feel pressured by policies and global demands that focus mainly on English (Permana & Rohmah, 2024). In addition, learning materials that include local languages are still rarely available (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). As a result, local languages are often used informally. Teachers often use strategies like code-switching or letting students brainstorm in their mother tongue (Liando et al., 2023; Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020). These methods show teachers' creativity, but schools give little formal support.

Local languages have some purposes in classrooms. Firstly, they help students understand new lessons faster and more easily (Emilia & Hamied, 2022). For example, a teacher may explain difficult grammar points in the local language before asking students to create sentences in English (Sutrisno, 2023). Secondly, they reduce anxiety and increase confidence (Barkah et al., 2022; Nurhayati, 2023). When students are allowed to use their mother tongue, the classroom feels more inclusive and less stressful, which encourages participation and confidence in learning English (Nursanti, 2021). This approach uses students' existing language knowledge to make the process of learning English smoother (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024; Maryansyah et al., 2024). Thirdly, teachers use local languages to explain content, manage activities, and give instructions (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Putrawan, 2022), which supports interaction and cooperation (Nurhayati, 2023; Triastuti et al., 2023). These practices support interaction and

cooperation among students (Nurhayati, 2023; Triastuti et al., 2023) and create a classroom environment where different languages are seen as learning resources. However, the optimal balance between local language support and English learning remains unclear, and excessive use of other languages may reduce exposure to English (Fadila et al., 2024).

Using local languages can increase student engagement. When their languages are valued, students feel more accepted and motivated to participate (Sulis, 2023). They also become more active and confident when allowed to use their own languages together with English (Permana & Rohmah, 2024; Liando et al., 2023). A supportive classroom is created through this inclusive approach, though higher engagement does not always lead to better English proficiency (Nurhayati, 2023). In culturally diverse classrooms, translanguaging is applied more effectively by teachers who share the students' mother tongue (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020).

Local languages also help strengthen students' cultural identity. According to Permana and Rohmah (2024) and Emilia and Hamied (2022), they enable students to appreciate their own culture while learning English. This keeps students' cultural heritage alive in the classroom and creates a learning space that respects their identity while helping them improve their English (Ulum, 2024). However, not all students, especially those in urban areas, see local languages as central to their identity. If local languages are used mainly to support English learning, the aim of challenging language hierarchies may not be fully achieved (Emilia & Hamied, 2022; Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022; Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024).

In terms of language acquisition, local languages help students understand grammar and vocabulary and reduce learning difficulty (Munandar, 2025; Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). For example, teachers often use students' first language to explain tricky grammar points or translate difficult words that could block understanding (Neokleous & Karpava, 2023; Saputra et al., 2023). Using both English and local languages can also support language skills while keeping local languages alive (Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022). This approach values bilingual learning, helps students build a positive multilingual identity, and promotes fairness in classrooms with diverse language backgrounds (Neokleous & Karpava, 2023). However, these goals can sometimes conflict. Focusing on one goal may limit progress on the other, and this issue has not been fully explored in the studies reviewed.

Developing materials and curricula is another challenge. Teachers need textbooks and digital resources that include local languages and culture (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024; Giyatmi, 2020; Nugraheni et al., 2023). Local materials make lessons more interesting (Emilia & Hamied, 2022), but English learning goals must still be considered. Local languages are usually used for practical purposes, and making them equal to English would need bigger curriculum changes (Rasmin & Samsudin, 2024). According to Nyoni et al. (2023), achieving this would require policy changes at the national level to move beyond monolingual approaches. They also state that local languages should be fully included in the curriculum, not just used as temporary aids. Teacher training on how to regulate different languages in the teaching of a foreign language is very important. According to Rasmin and Samsudin (2024) and Permana and Rohmah (2024), many teachers received training in English-only programs, and some hold beliefs that the avoidance to the use of local languages does not support multilingual teaching. According to Sutter et al. (2024), this creates a "value-practice gap," where teachers see the benefits of multilingual approaches but lack the training and support to implement them effectively. According to Liando et al. (2023) and Nugraheni et al. (2023), long-standing practices cannot be changed by workshops alone, and even well-prepared teachers face limits from school rules and testing systems. According to Nurhayati (2023), researchers' support is helpful, but teachers should be partners in generating ideas, not just followers of instructions.

Finally, basic challenges are still faced by schools. According to Rasmin and Samsudin (2024) and Putrawan (2022), clear rules are often missing, and teachers often feel that enough support is not provided to them. According to Fadila et al. (2024), some students are worried that their chances to practice English may be reduced if local languages are used too much. The right balance between using local languages and English is not easy to find and must be carefully adjusted for each classroom, considering students' level, age, and learning situation. According to Mouboua et al. (2024), implementing comprehensive strategies that emphasize multilingual education can help overcome these challenges. These strategies treat linguistic diversity as a valuable resource and provide a structured framework to develop students' proficiency in multiple languages.

Based on the discussion above, it can be seen that local languages are already used in EFL classrooms, but they need to be integrated in a more strategic and purposeful way. According to the findings, policies, teacher training, materials, and research should be aligned to support both English learning and the preservation of culture. While benefits are clear, some tensions and limitations are also revealed and must be addressed for multilingual teaching to work effectively in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Local languages play an important role in Indonesian EFL classrooms, but their use is mostly informal and depends on individual teachers. They are used to explain difficult concepts, give instructions, and help students plan ideas before switching to English. These practices increase understanding, build confidence, and support classroom management. The uneven use of local languages is caused by policies that focus on English, limited teaching materials, and inadequate teacher training. Local languages also improve student engagement, motivation, and participation. They help students connect with their culture and make learning grammar and vocabulary easier. Lessons become more meaningful when culturally relevant materials are used. However, challenges remain, including unclear policies, limited teacher preparation, scarce resources, and worries that using local languages too much may reduce English exposure. To integrate local languages effectively, careful planning is needed, along with policy support, teacher training, and appropriate materials, so that English learning and cultural preservation are balanced.

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