

The Attitude of Low-Proficiency Learners Towards Translanguaging Practices in The EFL Classroom

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Abstract

This study examines the attitudes of low-proficiency learners towards translanguaging practices in an EFL classroom in Indonesia, where exposure to English is mostly limited to formal instruction. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, with data collected through semi-structured interviews involving one teacher and ten low-proficiency learners. The findings indicate that learners generally hold positive attitudes towards translanguaging, as it facilitates understanding of instructional content, reduces anxiety, and creates a more supportive learning environment. The use of both Indonesian and English in an English class has been shown to facilitate comprehension of explanations, support the acquisition of new vocabulary, and enhance learners' confidence in participating in classroom activities. However, enhanced comprehension does not necessarily translate into active participation, as restricted vocabulary and diminished confidence remain significant impediments. Learners' attitudes are predominantly shaped by their linguistic challenges and the pedagogical approaches instructors employ in implementing translanguaging. Translanguaging can be regarded as an inclusive pedagogical approach that fosters both comprehension and emotional engagement, particularly among learners with limited proficiency. It is recommended that further research be conducted in order to explore the role of shadow teachers in supporting translanguaging practices, providing individualized scaffolding, and enhancing learners' participation and confidence in using English more actively.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Low Learners; EFL Classroom

INTRODUCTION

In contexts where English is a foreign language, such as Indonesia, learners have few opportunities to use it outside the classroom. (Mulyono et al., 2024). The language is most often encountered in the classroom setting, as English is rarely used in day-to-day interactions. (Nikmah & Anwar, 2021). Struggling to understand explanations of material, follow instructions, and participate effectively in speaking activities are significant challenges faced by learners with low English proficiency. (Abrar et al., 2024). Zebua (2023) indicates that feelings of anxiety, worry, and embarrassment when making mistakes are prevalent among EFL learners, ultimately resulting in low engagement in oral communication and hindering the development of English language skills.

To address the challenges often encountered by EFL learners, teachers frequently adopt an English-only approach in the classroom. (Chang, 2024). The basic rationale for this strategy is that learning outcomes improve with increased exposure to the English language. The majority of English in the classroom, however, could interfere with rather than facilitate learning for learners with low proficiency levels. Fajarina & Sumanto (2025) noted that difficulty understanding English-language material often causes other problems for learners. In addition to causing anxiety and frustration, this condition also makes learners less involved in class discussions, even though they want to participate.

This situation highlights the need for alternative teaching strategies, such as translanguaging. Translanguaging has emerged as an increasingly recognized pedagogical approach in multilingual classrooms. Translanguaging, according to Wei & García (2022) It is an adaptable concept that draws on learners' whole-language proficiency to produce meaning and promote communication throughout the educational process. With this method, learners learning English as a foreign language can intentionally use both English and their native language to improve comprehension and engage more fully in class interaction. Furthermore, according to Muguruza et al. (2023) and Sultana & Fang (2024) Translanguaging is the strategic use of various language resources to enhance comprehension and meaning-making during the learning process. This pedagogical approach utilizes the learner's native language as a medium to enhance comprehension of the material presented in the target language. Besides facilitating comprehension and active participation, translanguaging can also enhance learners' confidence in classroom communication. As a result, multilingual competence is increasingly considered an important pedagogical resource in foreign language learning contexts. (Jiang & Zhang, 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted a range of pedagogical benefits associated with the use of translanguaging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. For example, research conducted by Sakkir & Al Amir (2024) reports that learners often view translanguaging as a helpful practice that makes learning English more accessible and supports their understanding of lesson materials. The use of two languages during classroom interaction was also found to create a more comfortable learning atmosphere, allowing learners to communicate more effectively with their teacher, increasing their interest in classroom activities, and supporting vocabulary development. Similar observations were reported by Raja et al. (2022), who found that teacher-directed translanguaging generally received positive responses from learners because it helped them follow explanations and classroom instructions more easily. In a related study, Amru Rijamil et al. (2025) also found that using the mother tongue in English classes contributed to a more positive learning environment, as learners tended to feel calmer, happier, and more motivated when language barriers were reduced. This perspective is supported by Hidayati et al. (2024a), which suggests that integrating learners' native languages can strengthen semantic understanding and facilitate a more natural language acquisition process rather than obstruct it. Despite these reported benefits, several studies also point out potential challenges. Research by Miftakh et al. (2025) For instance, it suggests that learners may become overly dependent on Indonesian due to their limited English vocabulary. As a result, although learners often feel more confident asking questions, their participation in classroom interaction may remain relatively limited or passive. Taken together, these findings suggest that while translanguaging can contribute to a more supportive and engaging learning environment, the perspectives and experiences of learners with lower levels of English proficiency, who may face greater difficulties in classroom communication, are still relatively underexplored in the existing literature.

Although research on translanguaging has expanded significantly in the EFL context, the perspectives of learners with low levels of English proficiency remain underexplored. Many previous studies tend to discuss translanguaging as a general classroom strategy or focus on learners who already possess sufficient language competence to participate actively in English-mediated instruction. As a result, the perspectives of learners who struggle the most with the target language remain underrepresented in the literature. This issue is particularly important because learners with limited English proficiency often encounter greater challenges in understanding classroom explanations, following instructions, and expressing their ideas during

learning activities. From an educational perspective, however, all learners should have equal opportunities to access meaningful learning experiences regardless of their academic ability or language proficiency. In line with this perspective, recent discussions on translanguaging highlight the importance of acknowledging learners' full linguistic repertoires in classroom practices. Recognizing learners' multilingual resources can help create more inclusive learning environments where learners with different language abilities can participate more actively in the learning process. (Ibarra Johnson et al., 2017). Therefore, this study aims to examine the attitudes of low-proficiency learners toward translanguaging practices in the EFL classroom and to understand how these practices support their participation and create more inclusive learning opportunities. The research addresses two questions: (1) How do low-proficiency learners perceive translanguaging in the classroom? (2) What factors influence their attitudes, and how do these attitudes affect their engagement in learning English? The findings are expected to provide insights into the use of translanguaging and support teachers in working with low-proficiency learners.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore low-proficiency learners' attitudes toward translanguaging practices in an EFL classroom and to identify factors influencing these attitudes and their engagement in learning. As Seinsiani (2024) stated, qualitative descriptive research aims to analyze data and present findings in detail. Furthermore, Creswell (2013) explain that a qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study focused on understanding participants' perceptions, experiences, and views in depth, rather than measuring variables quantitatively. Qualitative inquiry is widely used in applied linguistics research to investigate classroom practices and learner attitudes, particularly in studies examining language use and meaning-making in EFL contexts.

The research was conducted in a public secondary school in Indonesia. The participants consisted of one English subject teacher and ten learners identified as having low English proficiency. The learners were randomly selected from seven classes taught by the same teacher to ensure a range of learner experiences while maintaining consistency in the instructional context. The identification of low-proficiency learners was based on the teacher's classroom assessment and academic records, a procedure commonly used in qualitative classroom-based research (Reynolds, 2023). Focusing on low-proficiency learners enabled the study to directly address the research questions about learners' attitudes toward translanguaging and the factors shaping these attitudes.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with both the learners and the English teacher. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allow participants to express their perspectives freely while enabling the researcher to explore issues relevant to the research questions in a focused manner. (Louise Barriball K & While, 1994). The learner interviews aimed to explore learners' feelings, experiences, and attitudes toward translanguaging practices in the classroom, as well as how these practices influenced their participation and engagement in English learning. The teacher interview focused on instructional practices, beliefs, and considerations regarding the use of translanguaging in teaching low-proficiency learners, which provided contextual support for interpreting learners' responses.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This method was selected because it allows the researcher to identify recurring patterns and themes across participants' responses in a systematic yet flexible way. (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The analysis process involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, theme development, and interpretation in relation

to the research questions and relevant literature on translanguaging in EFL. (Naeem et al., 2023). To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing information obtained from classroom observations and interview responses. This process helped ensure that multiple sources of evidence supported the data interpretation.

Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the research process. Before the data collection began, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were clearly informed about the study's purpose, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without consequences. To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were used in all research reports, and the data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes. These ethical procedures follow widely accepted standards in recent qualitative educational research, which emphasize participant autonomy, confidentiality, and responsible data handling. (Taquette & Souza, 2022).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Learners' Attitudes toward Translanguaging Practices in the EFL Classroom

The analysis of interview data indicates that low-proficiency learners generally view translanguaging as a helpful practice in the English classroom. Most participants expressed positive attitudes toward the use of both Indonesian and English during instruction. Their responses suggest that translanguaging not only supports their understanding of the lesson but also creates a learning environment where they feel more comfortable participating in classroom activities. Three recurring patterns emerged from the data: emotional responses toward translanguaging, learning comfort and comprehension support, and vocabulary and material understanding.

1. Emotional Responses toward Translanguaging

The majority of low-proficiency learners had positive emotional reactions to the usage of translanguaging in English classrooms, according to the interview data. When the teacher used both Indonesian and English throughout class, the learners expressed sentiments of joy, comfort, and enthusiasm. Many participants reported feeling less pressure when learning in two languages instead of just English.

Student 2: "I am happy when the teacher uses mixed language in class."

Student 3: "I am happy and excited when the teacher uses both Indonesian and English."

Student 4: "I am excited and happy when the teacher mixes the languages."

Student 8: "I feel happy because it is more understandable for me."

Student 9: "I feel happy because I can understand what the teacher talks about."

All of these responses suggest that translanguaging fosters a more pleasant emotional environment in the classroom. Learners reported feeling less nervous and more at ease after the lesson when the teacher periodically used Indonesian to support English explanations.

2. Learning Comfort and Comprehension Support

Learning comfort was a prevalent issue in the interviews, with the majority of participants reporting that understanding Indonesian made it easier for them to understand the teacher's explanations, especially when it came to challenging instructions and foreign terminology.

Student 1: "I feel comfortable because I understand the topic that the teacher is discussing."

Student 5: "Yes, I feel comfortable because I know what the teacher said."

Student 6: "I feel comfortable because I understand the meaning of the new words the teacher explains."

Student 8: "I feel comfortable because the teacher uses two languages."

Student 10: "Yes, I can understand what the teacher talks about in the material."

These findings represent that translanguaging is essential for helping learners understand the material discussed in class. In particular, learners were more comfortable understanding English materials when basic principles were explained in Indonesian or when new terminology was translated.

3. Vocabulary and Material Understanding Support

In addition to providing emotional comfort, the practice of translanguaging also helps learners understand new terms and the material being taught.

Student 1: "It helps me to get the material."

Student 5: "Yes, when I learn about greeting cards."

Student 8: "Yes, I learn vocabulary and tenses."

Student 9: "Yes, it helps me remember the material easily."

These findings suggest that translanguaging during English language learning classes serves as a bridge, helping learners comprehend new concepts and vocabulary.

Overall, these findings show that learners with low proficiency levels typically consider translanguaging a useful teaching strategy. In addition to promoting comprehension of the material, teaching Indonesian and English side by side fosters a more comfortable learning environment when learners interact with English-language resources.

Factors Influencing Learners' Attitudes toward Translanguaging and Their Impact on Learning Participation

The interviews' findings indicate that several important factors shape learners' perceptions of translanguaging in the classroom. These elements result from their individual language-learning experiences, particularly their lack of control over English and the instructional strategies used. Additionally, learners' perceptions of translanguaging appear to affect their level of engagement in class. Three subthemes emerged from the analysis: language-learning challenges, teachers' strategies for translanguaging, and classroom engagement and participation.

1. Language Learning Challenges

The learners' inability to comprehend English was one of the most frequently highlighted factors affecting their attitudes toward translanguaging. Many participants stated that it was often difficult for them to understand classroom explanations when the teacher spoke only English, due to their limited vocabulary.

Student 3: "Yes, sometimes I depend on Indonesian because I lack vocabulary."

Student 4: "Yes, because I am still confused about English."

Student 8: "Yes, sometimes I depend on Indonesian."

Student 10: "I mix languages because I do not know some English words."

These responses indicate that learners' linguistic limitations play a significant role in shaping their attitudes toward translanguaging. For learners with low English proficiency, the use of Indonesian appears to serve as practical support, helping them overcome difficulties in understanding the target language.

2. Teachers' Strategies on Translanguaging

Moreover, the strategies used to incorporate translanguaging into the teaching process affect learners' perceptions. Many respondents noted that teachers frequently use Indonesian to clarify

challenging vocabulary, explain complex concepts, and provide clear instructions for educational tasks.

Student 2: "The teacher uses Indonesian when explaining the material."

Student 6: "Indonesian is used to translate the meaning of English words."

Student 8: "The teacher explains the material and gives instructions in Indonesian."

Student 9: "Indonesian helps when the teacher explains the material."

These responses suggest that learners' understanding of classroom material depends heavily on teachers' strategies for using bilingual instruction. Learners tend to grasp instructional points more quickly when Indonesian is incorporated into key teaching stages, particularly to bridge difficulties encountered with unfamiliar vocabulary.

3. Engagement and Participation in the Classroom

Although translanguaging improved emotional comfort and comprehension, its effect on student engagement seemed unbalanced. Due to their limited vocabulary in English, many learners became unwilling to participate, while others got involved in class.

Student 1: "I can answer a little bit when I know the English word."

Student 2: "I am still not brave enough to answer questions in English."

Student 3: "Not really. I still hesitate to speak."

Student 4: "Yes, sometimes I become more active in class."

Student 5: "Sometimes I ask questions when I understand the explanation."

Student 6: "I still do not feel confident because I do not know many English words."

The above findings show that although translanguaging aids learners' understanding of the subject matter, it does not always lead to increased student participation. Lack of confidence and a limited vocabulary continue to be significant factors affecting learners' participation in English classroom interactions.

All the evidence indicates that learners' perspectives on translanguaging are influenced by both the pedagogical strategies employed in the classroom and their own linguistic challenges. Learners' motivation to participate in English-mediated classroom activities is specifically influenced by these beliefs, which in turn determine the type of student engagement.

Discussion

According to this study's findings, learners with low English proficiency tend to show a positive attitude toward translanguaging in EFL classes. Learners reported that using Indonesian alongside English helped them better understand the subject matter, reduced confusion, and created a more supportive learning environment. These results suggest that translanguaging can be an effective teaching strategy, particularly for learners still developing their language proficiency. This finding aligns with research by Beltran-Palanques et al. (2025) as cited in recent studies by Wang (2022) which highlights that translanguaging supports comprehension and facilitates access to meaning for learners with limited proficiency.

These results also support prior research that found multilingual learners naturally use their full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning and support communication. (Garcia and Li Wei, 2014, as cited by Hidayati et al., 2024b). Translanguaging allows learners to flexibly draw on all available language resources to enhance their cognitive processes rather than treating languages as separate systems. This aligns with a study that argues that integrating learners' first language can strengthen conceptual understanding and support deeper learning. Recent studies have similarly shown that translanguaging enhances comprehension and facilitates access to content by allowing learners to draw on their full linguistic resources. (Kim & Kim, 2024; Uras Eren, 2026). Accordingly, Lewis et al. (2012), as cited by Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas

(2022) the integration of multiple languages helps organize and mediate mental processes in learning. In addition, another study confirms that translanguaging reduces cognitive load by allowing learners to draw on their full linguistic and cognitive resources when processing new information. (Putra et al., 2025). Further study supported by Sun (2024; Zhu & Li, 2025), who suggests that translanguaging practices can improve learners' processing of complex academic content by promoting deeper comprehension and cognitive engagement.

In addition to its cognitive benefits, this study also shows that translanguaging contributes to a more positive emotional learning environment. Learners felt more relaxed and confident when both languages were used during instruction. This finding is consistent with Dewaele's (2021) research, which found that using familiar languages can reduce foreign language anxiety and increase learners' willingness to participate. Similarly, Bigelow (2023) highlights that supportive multilingual practices help learners feel more included and emotionally secure in the classroom. This aligns with Baker's (2011), as cited by Wang (2022) suggestion that using the first language can lower learners' anxiety levels. In EFL contexts, where learners are often afraid of making mistakes, translanguaging can help lower the affective filter and encourage more active participation.

The learners' positive attitudes in this study can also be explained through the theory of reasoned action by Fishbein and Ajzen, as cited in Niyokwanza et al. (2024). This theory suggests that individuals' beliefs about the expected outcomes of a behavior influence their attitudes and responses. In this case, learners believed that translanguaging made learning easier and reduced difficulties, which led to positive emotional responses and greater participation. This interpretation is supported by recent findings from Hiver et al. (2024), who emphasize learners' beliefs and emotions in shaping engagement and motivation in language learning. In addition, similar findings have been reported in recent studies, highlighting that affective factors significantly influence learners' participation and motivation. (Lou et al., 2022).

However, these findings also suggest that translanguaging alone may not be sufficient to fully address learners' challenges, particularly in developing independent speaking skills. Some learners remained reluctant to use English due to limited vocabulary and low confidence, which continue to be major barriers in EFL contexts. Efendi (2024). This is consistent with Kwihangana (2021) findings, which reported that although translanguaging supports communication and understanding, it may also limit learners' language development when overused without sufficient target-language practice. Similarly, recent research indicates that while translanguaging enhances interaction and meaning-making, learners still require structured guidance to avoid over-reliance on their first language and to develop productive skills effectively. (Zhang & Jocuns, 2022). Therefore, further instructional support is necessary. In this context, the presence of a teaching assistant or shadow teacher can provide more individualized scaffolding, helping learners clarify difficult vocabulary, reinforce understanding, and gradually build confidence to use English more independently.

Overall, these findings highlight the pedagogical significance of translanguaging beyond a mere temporary support strategy. Instead, it can be seen as an inclusive approach that ensures learners have access to meaningful learning. This perspective is supported by Wei (2018) who emphasize that translanguaging should be integrated as a planned and systematic practice in multilingual classrooms. However, for this approach to be fully effective, teachers need to provide clear guidance and structured opportunities for learners to increase their use of English gradually. In this way, learners can not only understand the lesson content but also progressively

develop their confidence and ability to communicate in English in an inclusive classroom setting.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the attitudes of low-proficiency learners toward the implementation of translanguaging in an EFL classroom context and its implications for learning engagement. Field data revealed that translanguaging (English-Indonesian) was highly beneficial for learners' cognitive processes. The ability to refer to their native language facilitated overcoming linguistic barriers, such as difficulties with vocabulary and grammatical logic. Significantly, these findings also highlight the affective dimension, in which translanguaging creates a comfortable learning atmosphere and minimizes psychological pressure when interacting with the target language. The study also found that learners' attitudes toward translanguaging are strongly influenced by their language-learning challenges, particularly limited English vocabulary and difficulties understanding English-only explanations. For these learners, the strategic use of the first language serves as an important support, helping bridge gaps in understanding. When learners comprehended the lesson through translanguaging, they tended to feel more comfortable and, in some cases, more willing to engage in classroom activities. However, the findings also suggest that translanguaging alone may not fully overcome learners' hesitation to participate in English communication, as confidence and vocabulary limitations remain significant factors influencing participation.

Overall, this study highlights the pedagogical value of translanguaging in supporting learners with limited English proficiency in EFL contexts. By allowing learners to draw on their full linguistic resources, translanguaging can help create a more inclusive learning environment that accommodates diverse language abilities. In addition, the findings suggest that the use of translanguaging may be further strengthened through additional instructional support, such as teacher or shadow teacher guidance, to assist learners who require more individualized scaffolding during the learning process. Future research may involve a larger number of participants or a range of educational levels to gain broader insights into learners' attitudes toward translanguaging practices. Comparative studies between learners with different levels of English proficiency may also help reveal how language competence influences perceptions of translanguaging in the classroom. In addition, further research could explore teachers' perspectives and instructional strategies for implementing translanguaging to understand better how this approach can be applied effectively in EFL settings. Finally, future studies may examine the role of additional support systems, such as shadow teachers, in assisting low-proficiency learners and promoting more inclusive language-learning environments.

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