

EXPLORING TRANSLANGUAGING IN EFL CLASSROOM COMMUNICATION: INSIGHTS FROM LECTURERS' EXPERIENCES IN INDONESIA

Helena Badu

Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, Indonesia

E-mail: helenabadu@ung.ac.id

Abstract

This study explores translanguaging practices in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom communication based on the experiences and perspectives of three English Language Education Study Program (ELESP) lecturers from Universitas Negeri Gorontalo in Indonesia. Translanguaging, which involves the strategic use of students' native language alongside the target language, aims to enhance student comprehension in EFL learning. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, the study finds that translanguaging strengthens students' understanding, confidence, and participation, particularly when dealing with complex material. However, challenges arise in balancing the use of English and the native language, as over-reliance on the native language may hinder long-term English fluency. This research contributes to understanding the effects of translanguaging in EFL teaching in Indonesia and provides recommendations for educational practitioners.

Key words: translanguaging, EFL classroom, native language, lecturer experiences, lecturer perspectives, student comprehension

INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging involves the strategic use of various languages in education to harness students' diverse linguistic skills, allowing them to utilize their entire language repertoire during the learning process. This approach is more crucial in multilingual countries like Indonesia, where a numerous of local languages coexists alongside Bahasa Indonesia and English. Indonesia is home to over 700 languages, including Javanese, Sundanese, and Balinese, which play vital roles in daily communication and ethnic identity. Bahasa Indonesia serves as the national lingua franca, fostering unity among different linguistic groups, while English is primarily taught in educational settings and is associated with modernity and global communication.

The practice of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Indonesian context is full of challenges as the students lack EFL exposure out of classrooms. In EFL practice, it is important that both English and the learner's native language are combined in order for learners to comprehend the target language. In this context, the lecture's attitude and practices towards translanguaging concepts are vital in determining its success. Thus, this study intends to find out the lecturers perceive and the practice of translanguaging to

improve students' learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

Despite its potential to address language barriers, translanguaging cannot be viewed in isolation without its downsides. For example, based on the study conducted by Khairunnisa & Lukman (2020), it was established that English teachers had positive attitude towards translanguaging and acknowledged the importance of adhering to local dialects. However, theirs was a study on teachers' perceptions only and not practice or students' experiences of such practice. This gap facilitates the need for studies that link how teachers feel about a certain aspect, in this case, translanguaging, with how it is practiced in their classes. Similarly, Liando et al. (2021) investigated translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms and identified various types and purposes of translanguaging. However, they called for further empirical studies to assess the impact of these practices on students' language proficiency and engagement. While existing literature has explored teacher attitudes and classroom practices, significant gaps remain, particularly concerning the empirical evidence of translanguaging's effects on learning outcomes.

While studies have separately explored teacher perceptions or translanguaging practices, few have linked these perceptions to the actual implementation and their effects on student learning outcomes in the Indonesian EFL context. This study aims to address this critical gap by investigating how lecturers' perceive the role of translanguaging in enhancing language proficiency in EFL students.

This study seeks to bridge these divide by showcasing the impacts of translanguaging on teaching and learning in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Through this research, it aims to highlight how translanguaging can be put into practice and what for in order to improve educational results in a multilingual environment of Indonesia. The scope of this research does not limit itself to the barriers in the implementation of EFL in Indonesian classrooms. By contextualizing the nature of translanguaging along with its effects, this kind of research can advance the knowledge of the field of linguistics. It will inform practice on the effective application of translanguaging in multi-lingual places of learning, practice that is likely to influence education governance. The findings are also likely to provide recommendations for practices to educators and policy owners and suggest the direction of further studies on the practices and effects of translanguaging in multilingual settings.

Theoretical Framework

Keys insight from languaging theory

Translanguaging theory influences EFL bilingual instruction by encouraging the incorporation of as many languages as necessary in the students' engagement and methods of instruction. This method recognizes the inclusion of students' first languages when borrowing meaning from English, or any other second language. García & Wei (2014) are in favor of this approach arguing that translanguaging is a form of teaching that makes use of all languages at a

teachers command and that of the learners. Furthermore, Rasman (2023) also evidences that

translanguaging practices enhance the comprehension of English content by students. It has also been noted that applying translanguaging enhances the student's linguistic ability as well as their overall performance. While many educators recognize the advantages of translanguaging, there are varying opinions on its implementation (Putrawan, 2022).

Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky)

The sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky believes that 'learning is a social process' in its essence. This theory specifically highlights interaction and culture in relation to learning. Translanguaging compels learners to utilize their fullest linguistics resources and enables them to share learning within a community. Vygotsky's focus on the importance of culture when studying learning is consistent with translanguaging since language is intertwined with culture. Furthermore, translanguaging practice can also assist students to function in their ZPD by offering L1 support (García & Wei, 2014).

Translanguaging in Southeast Asia: Indonesian contexts.

The literature on translanguaging practices in Southeast Asia, particularly within Indonesian contexts, highlights the significance of multilingualism in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Putrawan (2022) indicated that there is an observable change in comprehension and participation while using translanguaging as both teachers and students confirmed that it has positive EFL learning outcomes. Similarly, Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020) reported a generally positive outlook among educators regarding the integration of multiple languages in instruction, although some expressed concerns about the potential for L1 to interfere with English language learning. Liando et al. (2022) found that teachers in an Indonesian EFL classroom frequently used local languages alongside English to clarify complex concepts. Moreover, Putrawan (2022) highlighted instances where students engaged in group discussions using a mix of English, Indonesian, and local dialects.

Benefits of Translanguaging

Research based context on how collaborative multilingualism was used by the EMI teacher to deepen students' involvement effectively, can be added. Translanguaging practices and participation actively helped a great deal when the students are encouraged to use their first language and other languages in addition to English. Furthermore, translanguaging allows comprehension of complex subjects easily since students are able to communicate in creative and simpler ways (Titania & Ashadi, 2024).

Challenges in Implementation.

Burton and Rajendram (2020) observed that though even teachers understood the point of translanguaging, they usually returned to the use of English-only approaches because they lacked the confidence in practicing this particular approach. Moreover, Alqahtani (2022)

highlight the challenges and limitations faced by teachers in implementing translanguaging practices due to institutional policies. However Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020) examined the perceptions of the Indonesian teachers towards their students' language practices who pointed out that the majority of the teachers were concerned that the students's mother tongue (L1) interfered with the teaching of English.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen to capture the experiences of lecturers regarding translanguaging practices. Three participants (ELESP lecturers) from Universitas Negeri Gorontalo were chosen in this study. Although the sample size of three lecturers is small, this study aims for an in-depth, exploratory approach to understand individual experiences and perceptions in detail. Future research may expand on these findings with a larger, more representative sample.

In this study, data collection involved two main methods: interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews provide the flexibility to explore both predetermined themes and emergent ideas, allowing for a deeper understanding of lecturers' attitudes and practical experiences. Each interview is expected to last between 30 to 60 minutes. The interview questions will be designed to elicit detailed information about participants' experiences and perceptions regarding translanguaging in their classrooms. The following questions of interview:

1. How do you define translanguaging in the context of your teaching?
2. Can you describe any strategies or activities you use that incorporate translanguaging in your English classroom?
3. What impact have you noticed on students' comprehension and confidence when you incorporate translanguaging strategies?
4. In your experience, how does translanguaging affect students' engagement and participation in the classroom?
5. How do you perceive the role of students' mother tongue in their English language learning? Does it enhance or hinder their English language proficiency, in your opinion?
6. Do you encounter any specific challenges in managing the balance between using English and students' native languages in the classroom?

Apart from interviews, classroom observations were conducted to provide context for the lecturers' reflections and to capture real instances of translanguaging in action. Through these observations, the study aimed to identify specific moments when lecturers used the students' native language to support comprehension, confidence, or engagement. Observing how lecturers balanced the use of English and the native language helped highlight strategies used to gradually increase students' English usage. These observations provided practical

examples that enriched the interview data, offering a direct look at how translanguaging unfolded in real teaching settings.

To ensure accurate data collection, all interviews will be audio-recorded with participants' consent. These recordings will then be transcribed word for word to provide a comprehensive dataset for analysis. To further enhance the accuracy and credibility of the data, member checking will be employed. The transcribed data will subsequently be analyzed using thematic analysis. All participants provided informed consent for their involvement in the study, and measures were taken to ensure the confidentiality and anonymity of the data.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Finding

In this research, six questions were designed to explore various aspects of translanguaging in teaching. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the data collected, allowing for an organized breakdown of responses into key themes. The following are the findings categorized according to each identified theme, presenting insights into the role and impact of translanguaging in the classroom.

Theme 1: Use of Mother Tongue as a Pedagogical Tool

Translanguaging serves as a bridge for students to understand English materials, especially during complex listening tasks. By allowing students to process difficult content in their native language first, they can better grasp new information. Activities like pre-teaching vocabulary in the students' native language or using dictionary were noted as key strategies.

One participant highlighted this approach by stating, *"Before playing a listening track, I explain key concepts in the students' native language to ensure they understand the basics before switching to English."* This statement reflects the practice of using the native language to set a foundation for English learning. The following classroom exchange illustrates how translanguaging supports student comprehension:

L: "Alright, before we start the listening track, I'd like to go over a few key terms that will help you understand the content better. For example, in TOEFL, you'll often hear the word 'lecture.' Does anyone remember what 'lecture' means?"

S: (Students silent for a while, some students looked up the answers to the questions in a dictionary)...."Kuliah atau ceramah, Mem."

L: "Exactly. So, remember, 'lecture' means a talk or class, often by a professor. Now, another important concept is 'main idea.' It's the central point or focus of the lecture. Why do you think it's important to identify the main idea in TOEFL listening?"

S: "So we can answer questions more accurately?"

L: "Yes, precisely! Identifying the main idea will help you tackle several questions effectively. Now, let's switch to English fully to get you used to listening and thinking in English as you would in the TOEFL exam."

L : "Alright, from here on, let's focus on English. Listen carefully for the main idea and details. Pay attention to the tone of the speaker and any emphasis on certain words, as this can hint at important information. Remember, in the TOEFL, it's common to encounter detailed questions that ask about specific points." (now entirely in English)

S: (*Nods and prepares for listening in English*).

L: "Let's start with the first track. Listen for the main idea first. After listening, we'll discuss what you think the main point was and how you figured it out."

L : "So, what did you pick up as the main idea? And what details helped you identify it?" (after playing the track)

S: "The speaker was explaining a scientific process, maybe photosynthesis?"

L: "Yes, exactly! And which part gave you the clue that it was about photosynthesis? Remember, TOEFL questions often follow this pattern, where details support the main idea."

This dialogue demonstrates how using the mother tongue can facilitate initial comprehension and establish a foundation that enables students to engage more confidently with English-only instruction. Through translanguaging, students are better prepared to process English materials effectively, especially in high-stakes testing environments like TOEFL.

Theme 2: Impact on Student Confidence and Comprehension

Participants emphasized that translanguaging plays a crucial role in enhancing students' comprehension and boosting their confidence in tackling complex material. Allowing students to process difficult information in their native language fosters a sense of comfort and security, making them more open to challenging listening tasks. This confidence grows as students gradually transition to English, building upon their understanding in their mother tongue.

One participant stated, "When I allow them to use their native language, their comprehension improves, and they are more willing to tackle difficult listening activities." This statement is

supported by a classroom interaction illustrating the effectiveness of translanguaging in a listening activity on photosynthesis. It can be seen in the classroom situation below:

L: "Baik, kalian sudah memahami bahwa topik utama dari listening ini yakni tentang photosynthesis atau fotosintesis. Apa kalian ingat, apa proses utama yang terjadi dalam fotosintesis?"

S: "Tumbuhan menyerap cahaya matahari dan mengubahnya menjadi energi, Mem?."

L: "Betul! Jadi, pada dasarnya, fotosintesis adalah proses di mana tumbuhan menggunakan sinar matahari untuk menghasilkan energi. Sekarang, dalam listening TOEFL, kita perlu memahami detailnya juga. Misalnya, apa yang digunakan tumbuhan dalam proses ini? Coba kita dengarkan lagi beberapa bagian dan fokus pada unsur-unsur yang digunakan."

L: "Alright, let's continue in English now. During photosynthesis, plants use several elements. Have you heard the speaker? I mean mention what they are?" (now switching to English)

S: "Yes, Mem. the speaker mentioned water, sunlight, ...eee... carbon dioxide."

L: "You're correct. Those are the main elements. And do you know, what does the plant produce at the end of photosynthesis?"

S: "Oxygen and glucose."

L: "Excellent! So, in listening TOEFL, if you're asked about the products of photosynthesis, you know what to focus on. Now, let's try a TOEFL-style question in English. Remember, you can answer in full sentences to practice."

L : "Jangan khawatir kalau kalian masih kesulitan menjawab. Kita latihan terus supaya terbiasa." (switching briefly to Indonesian)

L : "Here's the question: 'What elements do plants use in photosynthesis, and what are the end products of this process?' Try to answer in complete sentences." (returning to English)

S: "Plants use sunlight, carbon dioxide, and water in photosynthesis. The end products are oxygen and glucose."

L: "Perfect answer! You've included both the elements and the products. TOEFL listening often focuses on these kinds of specific details, so practice will make it easier. Great job, everyone!"

This dialogue illustrates how translanguaging supports comprehension and confidence by allowing students to first grasp complex concepts in their native language and then smoothly transition to English, preparing them for real-world TOEFL tasks.

Theme 3: Effect on Student Engagement and Participation

Engagement and participation were consistently improved when translanguaging strategies were employed. Students who might be silent or disengaged in an all-English environment became more active participants when allowed to use their native language. This approach also fostered richer discussions and collaborative learning.

One participant observed, *"I noticed students participate more in discussions when they are allowed to first express their ideas in their mother tongue before switching to English."* This observation was further supported by classroom interactions, such as the following example:

L: "Okay, you already understand that the main topic of this listening is photosynthesis. Do you remember what the main process that occurs in photosynthesis is?"

S: "Plants absorb sunlight and convert it into energy, Mem?"

L: "That's right! So, basically, photosynthesis is the process in which plants use sunlight to produce energy. Now, in TOEFL listening, we need to understand the details too. For example, what do plants use in this process? Let's listen to a few more parts and focus on the elements used."

Lecturer then switches to English:

L: "Alright, let's continue in English now. During photosynthesis, plants use several elements. Have you heard the speaker? I mean mention what they are?" (now switching to English)

S: "Yes, Mem. the speaker mentioned water, sunlight, ...eee... carbon dioxide."

L: "You're correct. Those are the main elements. And do you know, what does the plant produce at the end of photosynthesis?"

S: "Oxygen and glucose."

The observed transition from using the native language (Indonesian) to English directly showcases how students' participation and engagement increased when allowed to first express themselves in a familiar language. The observation highlights that this approach helps students comprehend the material more fully, which in turn leads to greater participation and confidence when switching to English. Therefore, it is consistent with the theme of how translanguaging impacts student engagement and participation.

Theme 4: Challenges in Balancing Languages

While translanguaging offers many advantages, participants highlighted the challenge of maintaining a balance between using English and relying on students' native language. There is a concern that over-reliance on the native language could impede students' long-term English fluency. One key challenge discussed was ensuring that students do not become too dependent on their native language, as this could limit their English practice. While the native language supports comprehension and confidence, excessive use can hinder the development of English proficiency. The solution lies in gradually reducing native language use and encouraging students to engage more in English.

One participant noted, *“One of the challenges is ensuring that students don’t rely too much on their native language and continue to practice using English as much as possible.”* This statement reflects a broader concern about the potential negative effects of overusing the native language during lessons. The lecturer emphasized the importance of helping students gradually shift to using English while ensuring that they remain confident in their understanding of the material.

Another participant added, *“Students become more comfortable using English when they first express themselves in their native language, but it’s crucial to encourage them to transition to English as much as possible to build fluency.”* This highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between native language use for comprehension and the long-term goal of increasing English proficiency.

In a classroom setting, the lecturer implements this strategy by transitioning from the native language to English. For example, after discussing photosynthesis in Indonesian, the lecturer encourages students to explain the process in English, with minimal use of their native language. The lecturer explained:

L: "Alright, we’ve discussed photosynthesis in Indonesian. Now, let’s try to explain it in English. Please describe the process using as much English as possible. If you get stuck, it’s okay to use Indonesian, but try to keep it to a minimum, understand?"

S: "Okay. Photosynthesis is... a process where plants use... sunlight, carbon dioxide, and... air?"

L: "Good start! But remember, plants don't just use 'air'—they use something specific in the air. Can you find the English term for it?"

S: "Oh, I mean... carbon dioxide?"

L: "Yes, exactly! Carbon dioxide. And what does the plant produce at the end of the process?"

S: "It... ee... produces oxygen and glucose."

L: "Great job! See, you could do that almost entirely in English. Now, let's add a bit more detail. What role does sunlight play in this process?"

S : (pauses) "Sunlight is... sumber energi?"

L: "Good try! But let's say 'source of energy' instead of 'sumber energi.' Can you say that in a full English sentence?"

S: "Sunlight is the source of energy for photosynthesis."

L: "Perfect! Keep practicing like this, and soon you'll be able to explain everything without switching back to Indonesian."

This example illustrates how the lecturer acknowledges the benefits of using the native language but sets clear expectations for increasing English use. When a student relies on Indonesian for specific terms, the lecturer gently prompts them to rephrase in English, providing support when necessary. This approach encourages students to think and speak more in English, gradually reducing their reliance on their native language and helping them build their language skills without causing frustration. The lecturer's strategy helps ensure that students don't become overly dependent on their native language, while still making use of it to enhance understanding. Over time, students become more comfortable expressing complex concepts in English, improving both comprehension and fluency.

Discussion

This research explored translanguaging practices in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, addressing its impacts on comprehension, confidence, engagement, and challenges in balancing native language and English use. The findings align with the literature on translanguaging in the Southeast Asian, particularly Indonesian context. The thematic

analysis identified four main themes: the use of the mother tongue as a pedagogical tool, the impact on student confidence and comprehension, its effect on engagement and participation, and challenges in balancing language use.

Translanguaging serves as an essential pedagogical tool in EFL classrooms, particularly when dealing with complex listening tasks. The use of the students' native language helps clarify difficult concepts, as noted in the participants' statements, where pre-teaching vocabulary and explaining key concepts in the mother tongue before switching to English facilitated learning. These findings are supported by Liando et al. (2022), who found that Indonesian EFL teachers frequently used local languages alongside English to clarify complex concepts.

In the context of Southeast Asia, particularly in Indonesia, Putrawan (2022) noted that the use of multiple languages in classrooms had observable effects on improving student comprehension. The use of the mother tongue acts as a bridge, helping students process new information before translating that knowledge into English comprehension and production. This aligns with the study's finding that using dictionaries and allowing discussions in the native language enhances comprehension.

Furthermore, the findings highlight that translanguaging enhances students' comprehension and confidence. Students gain a better grasp of the material when they are allowed to process complex information in their native language before moving to English. This gradual exposure to English helps them build confidence in using the language without feeling overwhelmed. This outcome is consistent with the research conducted by Titania & Ashadi (2024), which demonstrates that collaborative multilingualism deepens students' involvement and participation when they are encouraged to use their native language alongside English.

The study also found that student engagement and participation increased when translanguaging strategies were used. Students who might have remained silent in an all-English environment became more active participants when allowed to express ideas in their native language. This is particularly important in EFL classrooms where students may feel intimidated by English-only instruction. Students feel more confident and engaged when they can use their native language to understand English materials, as demonstrated by Titania & Ashadi (2024). This approach helps to create an inclusive learning environment where students feel their linguistic identity is acknowledged and valued.

In this study, participants noted that activities like using dictionaries and allowing native language discussions fostered richer discussions and more active participation in class. These findings align with Putrawan (2022), who reported that students frequently engage in group discussions using a mix of English, Indonesian, and local dialects, leading to more meaningful interactions in the classroom.

While translanguaging has numerous benefits, balancing the use of English and the native language presents challenges. Participants noted concerns about students becoming overly reliant on their mother tongue, which could potentially slow down their long-term English fluency. This mirrors concerns raised by Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020), who observed that while translanguaging aids comprehension, there are apprehensions about L1 interference in English learning.

CONCLUSION

The findings from this research highlight the significant role of translanguaging in enhancing students' comprehension, confidence, engagement, and participation in English language learning. By allowing the use of the mother tongue as a pedagogical tool, students are better equipped to process complex materials in listening tasks, which facilitates a smoother transition to English. This practice not only fosters greater confidence by enabling students to organize their thoughts in their native language before expressing them in English, but also encourages more active participation, especially among students who might feel hesitant in an English-only environment. However, a challenge identified is the difficulty in balancing the use of English and students' native languages. While translanguaging aids understanding, there is a risk of over-reliance on the mother tongue, which could hinder long-term English fluency. Teachers must carefully navigate these challenges to maximize the benefits of translanguaging without compromising students' progress in English proficiency. Nonetheless, the study has limitations, including its limited generalizability beyond Indonesia, as cultural and educational contexts may influence translanguaging practices differently. Additionally, the reliance on lecturers' subjective experiences may not fully capture the perspectives of students or other educators, thus limiting the overall scope of the findings.

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