

TRANSLANGUAGING IN EFL CONTEXTS: A CRITICAL REVIEW OF THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES

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Abstract

Translanguaging has become a concept of increasing interest in English as a foreign language (EFL) teaching, especially since this approach challenges the traditional boundaries between first language (L1) and target language (L2) in learning. This study aims to critically examine the main theories underlying translanguaging and evaluate its implementation in EFL classroom practice. Using a literature review method, this study analyzes various empirical studies and theoretical writings related to the application of translanguaging in various educational contexts, especially in EFL environments. The results of the study indicate that translanguaging not only supports students' conceptual understanding but also plays a role in building linguistic identity and increasing learning engagement. However, there are challenges such as teachers' lack of understanding of translanguaging and educational policies that still tend to favor a monolingual approach. This study recommends the need for more in-depth teacher training and flexibility in language policies to support effective translanguaging in EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Translanguaging, EFL, language teaching, classroom practice, language theory, multilingual approach.

INTRODUCTION

In the current era of globalization and linguistic diversity, the approach to teaching foreign languages, especially English as a Foreign Language (EFL), increasingly demands a variety of pedagogical strategies that are able to respond to students' needs contextually and culturally. One approach that has emerged and received attention in recent decades is translanguaging (Liu & Fang, 2022). This concept not only offers a new theoretical framework in understanding the dynamics of language in learning, but also promises classroom practices that are more inclusive, participatory, and relevant to the real lives of learners. Translanguaging refers to the process by which learners use their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning, communicate ideas, and develop academic and social identities. This approach challenges the

traditional view that separates languages rigidly, and instead encourages flexible and dynamic language use, including in the context of EFL learning in multilingual countries such as Indonesia. Translanguaging is rooted in socio-constructivist theory that emphasizes that language is not a separate system, but rather part of a whole and interconnected linguistic experience (Yuvayapan, 2019). Therefore, in the EFL context, translanguaging allows learners to access, process, and express information by utilizing all the languages they master, including their mother tongue, regional language, and the foreign language being studied. This approach theoretically enriches the understanding of the role of multilingualism in learning and shifts the teaching paradigm from monolingualism to reflective multilingualism. Through translanguaging, students are not forced to abandon their linguistic identities to learn a foreign language, but are instead empowered to use multiple languages as sources of cognitive and affective strength. Thus, translanguaging can be seen as a pedagogical practice that supports linguistic justice and learner empowerment in heterogeneous learning environments (Ooi & Abdul Aziz, 2021).

On the other hand, the practice of translanguaging in EFL classes still faces quite complex challenges, especially when associated with educational policies that tend to still favor a monolingual approach. In many EFL contexts, teachers are often faced with a dilemma between adhering to official policies that require full use of English in the classroom and the need to use students' first language to ensure conceptual understanding. This situation reflects the tension between hegemonic language ideologies and practical realities on the ground. Teachers who attempt to implement translanguaging are often considered "deviant" from the norm, even though the strategy has been shown to help students understand the material and increase learning participation. Therefore, a critical examination of translanguaging practices is essential to evaluate the extent to which this approach can be effectively integrated in EFL contexts without compromising the goal of communicative and standardized language learning.

Translanguaging also has implications for the formation of student identities and power relations in the classroom. In EFL environments, English is often positioned as a symbol of prestige, progress, and authority, while students' local languages or mother tongues are often considered inferior or less academic. When translanguaging is implemented, the boundaries of language hierarchy begin to shift, opening up space for the recognition and validation of students' previously marginalized linguistic identities. This

process not only has an impact on increasing students' self-confidence but also creates a more democratic and collaborative classroom dynamic (Nguyen, 2022). From a critical perspective, translanguaging can be a tool to deconstruct exclusive pedagogical practices and lead to more inclusive social transformation. However, it is important to remember that translanguaging is not just a technical practice, but a political act that requires awareness, reflection, and commitment from educators. In practice, translanguaging also demands the competence and readiness of teachers to design teaching strategies that can accommodate various forms of students' linguistic practices. This includes the ability to recognize students' language repertoires, select culturally and linguistically relevant materials, and create classrooms that value diversity. Teachers are required to act not only as language instructors but also as facilitators of intercultural dialogue that allows students to integrate their knowledge and experiences in the learning process. This challenge is magnified when considering the limitations of teacher training, the lack of policy support, and the pressures of standards-based evaluation that tend to ignore the complexity of students' learning processes in multilingual contexts (Prilutskaya, 2021). Therefore, there is an urgent need to reconstruct teacher training approaches to be more responsive to linguistic realities in the classroom and to strengthen teachers' capacity to apply translanguaging critically and strategically.

Given this complexity, research on translanguaging in the EFL context becomes very relevant and urgent. A critical review of theoretical perspectives and practices of translanguaging not only helps enrich academic understanding of this concept but also provides practical contributions to the development of more inclusive and effective language teaching strategies (Wang, 2022). By analyzing how translanguaging is understood and implemented in classroom practice, this study is expected to open up new discourses in EFL teaching that are more adaptive to students' needs and realities (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). In addition, this study also aims to identify obstacles and potentials that arise from the implementation of translanguaging, as well as offer recommendations for teachers, policy makers, and language researchers to design a more contextual and humanistic teaching approach. Overall, translanguaging is a paradigm that not only offers an alternative approach to language teaching but also broadens our horizons in understanding the dynamics of learning based on diversity and active student involvement. In the EFL context, where language learning challenges are often related to the linguistic and cultural distance between students and

the target language, translanguaging serves as a bridge that allows for deeper understanding, more inclusive relationships, and more meaningful learning outcomes. This study, with its focus on a critical review of the theoretical and practical aspects of translanguaging classrooms, is expected to make significant contributions to developing EFL pedagogy that is not only linguistically effective but also socially just.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a literature review or library study that aims to critically analyze the theoretical understanding and practice of translanguaging in the context of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This study was conducted by collecting, reviewing, and evaluating various relevant scientific sources, such as academic journals, reference books, and conference articles that discuss the phenomenon of translanguaging from the perspective of linguistic theory, pedagogy, and sociolinguistics. The main focus of this study is to identify the theoretical framework underlying the concept of translanguaging and how the concept is implemented in EFL classroom practices in various social and cultural contexts.

The literature search was conducted systematically with related keywords, such as "translanguaging in EFL", "classroom practices", "theoretical perspectives on translanguaging", and "multilingual pedagogy", in order to obtain up-to-date and relevant sources. After the literature was collected, the researcher conducted a qualitative analysis of the contents of each reference to find thematic patterns related to the understanding of the concept of translanguaging and its impact on the teaching and learning process in the EFL context. This approach allows researchers to explore the dynamics of the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy that supports the development of students' English language competence without negating the existence and function of their mother tongue. The analysis was conducted by considering the diversity of geographical contexts, language policies, and learners' backgrounds, so that the results of this study are not only descriptive but also reflective and critical. With this method, it is hoped that the research can provide theoretical and practical contributions to the development of inclusive English pedagogy based on students' linguistic realities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Overview of Translanguaging Practices in EFL Classrooms

Translanguaging practices in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning have become one of the approaches that have attracted the attention of educators and researchers in recent years. Translanguaging refers to the practice of using learners' entire linguistic repertoire flexibly in the teaching and learning process. In the context of EFL classrooms, this practice allows students to utilize their first language (L1) as a resource in understanding, constructing meaning, and developing English language skills (L2). This approach emerged as a response to the traditional view that often emphasizes a strict separation between the first language and the foreign language in the classroom. However, in translanguaging practices, the boundaries between languages are not considered rigid, but rather as something fluid and interconnected in students' thinking and communication processes (Putrawan, 2022).

In EFL classrooms, translanguaging can appear in various forms, both planned by the teacher and spontaneously by students. For example, teachers can allow students to discuss difficult concepts in their mother tongue before expressing them in English. Students can also be given the freedom to take notes or answer questions in their native language before translating them into English. This practice allows students to focus more on meaning rather than solely on linguistic form, which can ultimately improve their understanding of the learning material. On the other hand, translanguaging can also be used as a tool to create a more inclusive classroom, respect students' diverse linguistic backgrounds, and increase their confidence and participation in the learning process. Teachers play an important role in designing and facilitating translanguaging practices in the classroom. They need to have a strong understanding of students' linguistic backgrounds and be flexible in their teaching approaches. In this context, teachers no longer only act as transmitters of material, but also as facilitators who encourage the use of diverse language strategies to strengthen students' learning processes. In addition, teachers also need to be sensitive to students' social dynamics and linguistic identities, because translanguaging is not only about language use, but is also closely related to students' experiences, identities, and social positions in the classroom. Therefore, the success of translanguaging in EFL classrooms is greatly influenced by teachers' attitudes toward students' languages and their openness to accepting unconventional language practices (Sobkowiak, 2022). Despite its many potential benefits, translanguaging

practices in EFL classrooms also face challenges. One of the main challenges is the assumption that using the first language in a foreign language class can hinder the development of students' English skills. This view generally stems from the monolingual approach that is still dominant in the education system in many countries, including Indonesia (Sutrisno, 2023). In addition, the limited competence of teachers in managing translanguaging effectively is also an obstacle in itself. Not all teachers have adequate training or knowledge on how to use students' languages productively in the learning process. Therefore, teacher training and curriculum development are needed that support a multilingual approach and are more oriented towards students' linguistic realities.

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Translanguaging

Teachers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging reflect the complex dynamics in the context of multilingual education. Translanguaging, as a pedagogical approach that allows for the flexible use of multiple languages in teaching and learning activities, has become a major concern in linguistically diverse learning environments. Both teachers and students view this practice from different perspectives influenced by their cultural backgrounds, language experiences, and learning goals (Bolkvadze, 2023).

From the teachers' perspective, translanguaging is often understood as a strategy that helps bridge the gap in students' understanding, especially those who come from a mother tongue background that is different from the language of instruction in school. Teachers see translanguaging as a tool to increase students' engagement in learning because it allows them to access difficult concepts in a more familiar language. This is considered to be able to strengthen students' mastery of the teaching material, because students are not hampered by the limitations of their second or foreign language. Some teachers also consider translanguaging as a form of respect for students' linguistic and cultural identities, which can increase their self-confidence and motivation to learn.

However, not all teachers welcome translanguaging enthusiastically. Some still believe that using more than one language in the classroom can hinder mastery of the target language, especially if the learning objective is to develop competence in a particular language such as English. This concern arises because they feel that consistent use of one language is important to support effective language acquisition (Fallas Escobar, 2019). In addition, the lack of training or clear guidance on how to implement translanguaging

pedagogically is also an obstacle for some teachers to implement it with confidence.

Meanwhile, students' perceptions of translanguaging tend to be more positive, especially for those with multilingual backgrounds. Students feel that translanguaging gives them space to express their ideas and understanding more fully. In situations when they find it difficult to convey something in the language of instruction, they feel helped by being given the opportunity to use the language they are more proficient in. Translanguaging also allows students to link new knowledge to their previous language experiences, making the learning process more meaningful.

Students also appreciate that translanguaging creates a more inclusive classroom atmosphere and does not make them feel inferior because their language skills are not yet perfect. The use of the mother tongue in classroom interactions can foster a sense of security, which ultimately encourages their courage to participate actively. However, there are also some students who feel confused if translanguaging is not used consistently or if teachers and other students use a language they do not understand. This shows that the implementation of translanguaging must be adjusted to the linguistic composition of students in the class and managed well so as not to cause confusion or exclusion.

The Role of Translanguaging in EFL Learning

In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, the translanguaging approach is gaining increasing attention as a potential pedagogical strategy to enhance the effectiveness of language teaching. Translanguaging refers to the practice in which learners dynamically use their entire linguistic repertoire in both their first language (L1) and foreign language (L2) to comprehend, construct meaning, and express themselves. In an EFL environment, where English is not the primary language used in everyday life, translanguaging plays a vital role in bridging linguistic gaps, strengthening conceptual understanding, and creating an inclusive and interactive learning space (Yasar Yuzlu & and Dikalitas, 2022).

Translanguaging in EFL learning not only functions as a comprehension aid, but also as a pedagogical approach that encourages students' cognitive and affective engagement. In many cases, EFL students often face obstacles in understanding learning materials that are fully delivered in the target language. By utilizing translanguaging, teachers can enable students to access content in their native language first, then transfer that understanding into

English. This strategy helps reduce linguistic anxiety and creates a sense of security for students in the learning process, because they are not required to abandon their linguistic identity in order to master a new language.

In addition, translanguaging can also increase students' metalinguistic awareness, which is the ability to reflect on and analyze the structure and function of language. By comparing and contrasting the first language with English, students find it easier to understand the grammatical, syntactic, and lexical aspects of the target language. This process not only enriches language comprehension but also strengthens critical thinking strategies, because students learn to consciously assess differences and similarities between languages.

In practice, translanguaging also helps teachers create a learning environment that is more responsive to the diversity of student backgrounds. Each learner brings a unique linguistic and cultural identity, and translanguaging recognizes and values this diversity. Rather than enforcing strict monolingualism, translanguaging encourages a more flexible approach, where the use of the mother tongue is considered a resource, not a barrier. This creates a more democratic classroom and encourages the active participation of all students, including those who may have limitations in English (Rabbidge, 2019).

Furthermore, translanguaging can strengthen social relationships in the classroom and build solidarity among students. In the process of translanguaging, students help each other translate or explain concepts, which indirectly develops collaborative skills and mutual respect. This is very important in EFL learning which does not only focus on linguistic aspects, but also on building social skills and cross-cultural communication.

However, the application of translanguaging in EFL learning needs to be done with mature pedagogical awareness. Teachers must have a good understanding of when and how this strategy is used effectively. Too much reliance on the mother tongue can hinder the acquisition of the target language if not balanced with sufficient exposure to English. Therefore, translanguaging must be placed in a planned teaching framework, where the use of L1 is directed to support and strengthen the English learning process, not replace it.

Dynamics of Translanguaging Use in EFL Classrooms

The dynamics of translanguaging use in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms is a topic that is increasingly attracting attention in

language education studies because it offers a more flexible and inclusive approach to the foreign language learning process. Translanguaging refers to the practice in which learners use their entire linguistic repertoire including their mother tongue and the foreign language being studied in a dynamic and integrated manner to understand, process, and communicate meaning. In the context of EFL classrooms, this approach breaks down the rigid boundaries between the target language (English) and the students' native language, and facilitates more meaningful and contextual learning (Lin & He, 2017).

In practice, translanguaging occurs in various forms, such as when teachers explain complex grammatical concepts in students' mother tongues to accelerate understanding, or when students discuss in groups by mixing English and their first language to complete tasks. These activities are not merely forms of "mistakes" or "code mixing", but are effective cognitive strategies for building deeper understanding. Students who are allowed to use their first language feel more confident in expressing complex ideas, as they are not restricted by the limited vocabulary of English. This is especially important in EFL classrooms dominated by beginner or intermediate learners, who may feel awkward or pressured when required to use English exclusively (Ali et al., 2023).

However, the dynamics of translanguaging in EFL classrooms are not free from controversies and challenges. Some educators and institutions still adhere to the monolingual paradigm, which believes that using only English in the classroom will encourage more optimal language habituation and acquisition. This approach often views the use of the first language as a distraction or obstacle to the learning process. As a result, translanguaging is often not officially recognized and only occurs as an "unintentional" or "behind the scenes" strategy. On the other hand, proponents of translanguaging emphasize that monolingual policies are not always realistic and can ignore the diversity of students' linguistic backgrounds and their potential to utilize the various language resources they have.

Furthermore, effective implementation of translanguaging in EFL classrooms requires adequate pedagogical competence from teachers. Teachers need to understand when and how to use translanguaging as a strategy that supports the learning process, not just as a communication tool. They must also be able to balance the use of English and students' first language strategically so that the main goal of learning, namely English language proficiency, is still achieved. In this case, teachers need to be sensitive to students' needs and create a classroom environment that values

multilingualism, without losing focus on achieving foreign language competence. In addition, the social and cultural context also influences the dynamics of translanguaging in EFL classrooms. In some countries, the use of a foreign language such as English is seen as a symbol of status and progress, so there is social pressure to maintain monolingual classes. Conversely, in other more multilingual contexts, translanguaging can be accepted as a common practice and even encouraged to build bridges between cultures. This shows that the success of translanguaging implementation depends not only on the pedagogical approach, but also on educational policies, societal attitudes, and perceptions of language identity.

The dynamics of translanguaging also have a positive impact on the development of students' literacy and critical thinking skills. By allowing students to use all their linguistic resources, they are invited to be more active in the learning process, dare to try to express ideas, and construct meaning in a more personal way. This approach also supports the principle of inclusive learning, because it provides space for students from minority language backgrounds to feel valued and involved in the classroom. Ultimately, translanguaging is not only a linguistic strategy, but also a pedagogical approach that recognizes diversity and encourages more holistic student engagement (Wei & Lin, 2019). Considering these aspects, translanguaging in EFL classrooms should not be seen as a practice that deviates from the norms of language learning, but rather as an innovative approach that reflects the complexity and reality of language in today's global world. The main challenge is not whether translanguaging should be allowed or not, but how to design pedagogical strategies that are able to utilize the potential of translanguaging to support effective, inclusive, and relevant English learning for all students.

Benefits and Challenges of Translanguaging in EFL Context

The application of translanguaging in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has become an approach that is gaining increasing attention in the world of language education. Translanguaging refers to the practice of using students' entire linguistic repertoire including their mother tongue and target language as resources for understanding, interpreting, and constructing meaning in the learning process. In the EFL context, translanguaging presents significant benefits, but also poses challenges that need to be carefully considered by educators and educational institutions (Kucukali, 2021).

One of the main benefits of implementing translanguaging in EFL learning is improving students' understanding of the learning material (Robillos, 2023). By allowing the use of their mother tongue in the learning process, students can bridge difficult concepts in English through meaning in a more familiar language. This not only helps in improving their understanding of English structures but also strengthens the connection between previous learning experiences and new knowledge acquired. When students are free to use their full linguistic abilities, they tend to be more active in participating, feel more confident, and are less afraid of making mistakes.

In addition, translanguaging allows for a more inclusive and democratic learning environment. In conventional EFL classes, English is often positioned as the only legitimate language, placing students who are not yet fluent in a subordinate position. Translanguaging instead values students' linguistic diversity, placing the mother tongue as a valuable asset in the learning process. This contributes to increased learning motivation and student engagement, because their linguistic identities are not marginalized but integrated into learning (Alvarez & Darío, 2020).

The application of translanguaging can also accelerate students' literacy development in English. Through strategies such as reading texts in English and discussing them in the mother tongue, or writing an initial draft in the mother tongue before translating into English, students gain a deeper understanding of the structure and meaning of the text. This process supports cognitive and linguistic learning, because students do not just memorize language structures, but actually construct meaning through active engagement with texts and language (Rasmin et al., 2024).

However, behind these benefits, there are a number of challenges that need to be faced in the implementation of translanguaging. One of the biggest challenges is resistance from teachers, especially those who have long been accustomed to a monolingual approach to language teaching. Many teachers still consider the use of the mother tongue as a hindrance to target language acquisition, rather than an effective aid. This view is often reinforced by institutional policies that set an "English-only policy" as the standard in EFL teaching, thus limiting teachers' room to implement translanguaging.

In addition, another challenge lies in the need for professional training for teachers. To implement translanguaging effectively, teachers need to have a deep understanding of its principles, as well as the ability to design learning activities that support the use of two or more languages strategically. Without

adequate training, translanguaging risks becoming a disorganized practice, which can actually hinder the achievement of English learning goals.

Controversy also arises regarding the extent to which translanguaging can be implemented without reducing students' exposure to the target language. Some argue that too much use of the mother tongue can hinder English acquisition because students are not sufficiently exposed to linguistic input in the target language. Therefore, a balance needs to be carefully maintained so that translanguaging becomes a tool, not a substitute, in EFL learning.

Another challenge is the linguistic heterogeneity in the classroom. In many EFL contexts, especially in countries with high ethnolinguistic diversity, students may come from different mother tongue backgrounds. In such situations, the implementation of translanguaging becomes more complex because teachers cannot effectively facilitate the use of all students' languages. Therefore, flexible and creative strategies are needed so that all students can still benefit from this approach.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion on translanguaging in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) shows that this approach offers great potential in improving the effectiveness of foreign language learning. Theoretically, translanguaging challenges the traditional view that separates languages rigidly, and instead recognizes that bilingual or multilingual speakers operate their entire linguistic repertoire flexibly to construct meaning. This approach strengthens the sociocultural and constructivist theories in language learning, where the use of the first language (L1) is not considered a barrier, but rather as a cognitive and social resource that supports conceptual understanding and development of the target language (L2).

In EFL classroom practice, the results of the literature review show that translanguaging provides a more inclusive and supportive space for learners. Teachers who apply translanguaging strategies are able to bridge the linguistic gap and increase student participation, especially those who are less confident in using English. The strategic use of the mother tongue helps students understand complex materials, explain abstract concepts, and express ideas more precisely. However, the implementation of translanguaging requires pedagogical awareness and teacher competence in designing balanced classroom activities, so that the use of the first language does not dominate and still supports the goal of foreign language acquisition.

Overall, the literature review confirms that translanguaging is a relevant and useful approach in the context of EFL teaching, both in theory and practice. However, its success is highly dependent on the institutional context, teachers' and students' attitudes towards the use of the mother tongue, and the prevailing language policies. Therefore, there is a need for teacher training and educational policies that support this approach wisely and strategically. Further studies are suggested to explore translanguaging practices in various cultural contexts and educational levels to enrich the understanding and development of EFL learning models that are more responsive to the needs of multilingual students.

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