Bridging Languages: Impact of Translanguaging on Indonesian ELT through Teachers' and Students' Perspectives

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Abstract. The growing prominence of translanguaging has significantly influenced English Language Teaching (ELT) in classrooms over the past few decades. As a pedagogical tool, translanguaging can support teachers in facilitating ELT. However, its application in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context is often met with skepticism. This research seeks to explore teachers' and students' perspectives on the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool to enhance ELT in Indonesia. Employing a case study approach, the study gathered in-depth insights through Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and interviews with ten students and six teachers from SMPN 1 Buduran and MTsN 2 Sidoarjo. The findings highlight that teachers view translanguaging as a valuable tool for scaffolding concept explanations, boosting student engagement and communication, managing classrooms, supporting learners with lower English proficiency, and creating a more comfortable and supportive learning environment. Similarly, students perceive translanguaging as a helpful strategy to improve their understanding of lesson content, facilitate peer communication, and build confidence in expressing their ideas. The study contributes to the growing body of research on translanguaging by offering empirical evidence from the Indonesian EFL context, underscoring its potential to bridge linguistic gaps and promote more inclusive, effective English language instruction.

Keywords: translanguaging, ELT, teachers' perspectives, students' perspectives

1. INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging, the ability of multilingual speakers to fluidly switch between languages, integrates linguistic and cultural resources in the classroom. Coined by Cen Williams in 1994, this approach has gained recognition as a pedagogical strategy in English Language Teaching (ELT). According to García and Kleyn (2016), translanguaging enables students to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire for learning while crossing language boundaries. It facilitates communication,

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enhances comprehension, and supports bilingual development.

Studies have shown its benefits, such as Carstens (2016), who found that supporting students' first language aids second-language acquisition. However, Canagarajah (2011) noted challenges in implementing translanguaging, especially in EFL contexts. In Indonesia, where English functions as a foreign language, the use of translanguaging remains contentious. Teachers often alternate between English (L2) and Indonesian (L1) to manage diverse linguistic needs. While some support this method for fostering engagement and confidence, others argue that excessive reliance on L1 may hinder L2 acquisition.

Research on translanguaging in EFL contexts highlights varied perspectives. For instance, Rahmawansyah (2019) and Saputra (2020) found that translanguaging enhances communication and promotes inclusivity, while Yuvayapan (2019) identified barriers such as peer and institutional pressure. Moreover, Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020) revealed that Indonesian EFL teachers value translanguaging as a flexible tool to aid student learning. Despite its promise, translanguaging in junior high schools remains underexplored.

This study focuses on teachers' and students' perspectives on translanguaging in ELT at SMPN 1 Buduran and MTsN 2 Sidoarjo. Teachers view translanguaging as a scaffold for explaining concepts, fostering engagement, and managing classrooms, while students appreciate its role in enhancing understanding, communication, and confidence. By bridging linguistic gaps, translanguaging can serve as both a facilitator and a potential hindrance in ELT, depending on its application.

The introduction informed how these research questions were created.

1. What are the teachers' perspectives of translanguaging practices in their English class as a pedagogical tool?
2. What are the students' perspectives of translanguaging practices in their English class as a pedagogical tool?

2. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design to explore translanguaging in English Language Teaching (ELT). The qualitative approach, as defined by Fraenkel and Wallen (2000), examines the nature of relationships with events, conditions, or resources, allowing for open and inductive analysis without deductive frameworks. A case study method was chosen because it enables an in-depth, contextualized examination of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2003), particularly useful for understanding complex pedagogical practices like translanguaging in specific school environments. The study focused on the perspectives of teachers and students regarding translanguaging as either a barrier or a facilitator in ELT. Conducted at SMPN 1 Buduran and MTsN 2 Sidoarjo, two public schools in Indonesia with diverse student populations, the research involved 10 seventh-grade students (5 from each school) and 6 English teachers (3 from each school). The sample size was deemed sufficient for in-depth qualitative exploration in a bounded context, allowing the researcher to generate rich, detailed insights while maintaining manageability for data collection and analysis. In qualitative research, Creswell stated (2007) the intent is not to generalize findings to a population but to develop an in-depth exploration of a central phenomenon. Therefore, the number of participants selected is typically small to allow for this depth of understanding. Seventh-grade

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students were selected because they came from various elementary schools, offering diverse perspectives, while teachers were chosen based on experience and willingness to participate.

The data consisted of voice recordings, transcriptions, and field notes, capturing the perspectives of teachers and students on translanguaging in ELT. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 6 teachers using 11 open-ended questions, following Creswell's (2007) methodology for exploring general to specific perspectives. FGDs were held with 10 students, encouraging open discussions to uncover views on translanguaging. Classroom observations were also conducted in two seventh-grade classes at each school, providing firsthand insights into translanguaging practices. Research instruments, including interview guidelines and FGD field notes, were validated by experts to ensure accuracy and relevance.

Data analysis followed Lichtman's (2012) inductive approach, involving transcription, open coding, and the identification of themes. The findings revealed five key benefits of translanguaging from teachers' perspectives: as pedagogical scaffolding for concept explanation, increasing student participation, facilitating communication, managing classrooms, and supporting low-proficiency students. From students' perspectives, translanguaging improved understanding, facilitated communication, and boosted confidence. Triangulation of data sources, incorporating interviews, FGDs, and observations, ensured credibility, as outlined by Curtin and Fossey (2007). Member-checking, described by Merriam (1998), allowed participants to validate the researcher's interpretations, enhancing trustworthiness. This rigorous process underscored the reliability and integrity of the study.

3. RESULT

This section presents the results from interviews, FGDs, and classroom observations. Five main themes emerged from teacher perspectives, and three themes from student perspectives. The analysis reveals how translanguaging was perceived and applied in Indonesian EFL classrooms, particularly in supporting pedagogical practices, enhancing student engagement, and fostering a supportive learning environment.

3.1 Teachers' Perspectives on Translanguaging

The findings from the teacher interviews indicate that translanguaging plays a significant role in the classroom, assisting in various aspects such as concept explanation, student participation, communication, and classroom management. Teachers believe that using both English and Indonesian (or other local languages) helps students engage more effectively with the lesson.

3.1.1 Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Scaffolding for Concept Explanation

The first benefit discussed by teachers was the use of translanguaging to support the explanation of concepts, especially those related to cultural context. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory underscores the importance of scaffolding in learning, where teachers provide support to students within their zone of proximal development (ZPD) to help them understand new concepts. Teachers at MTsN 2 Sidoarjo and SMPN 1 Buduran noted that when students struggled with

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understanding cultural concepts in English, using Indonesian or mixed languages helped to clarify the material.

For instance, Teacher B from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo mentioned, “When the students start to look confused, I think it’s good for teachers to use Indonesian to explain more so they can understand more.” Similarly, Teacher C said, “Translanguaging helps me explain in detail, especially for cultural context like when explaining wayang or traditional arts,” demonstrating how teachers utilized translanguaging to convey complex cultural ideas. These statements align with Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, which posits that knowledge and skills transfer across languages, enhancing overall comprehension.

3.1.2 Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Scaffolding to Increase Student Participation

Another significant point made by teachers is that translanguaging facilitates increased student participation. According to Swain's Output Hypothesis, producing language (even if mixed with another language) can aid in language development. Teachers observed that when students could use both Indonesian and English, they were more likely to engage in classroom discussions. Teacher A from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo observed, “Usually after I persuade them to speak in

English, they will try to answer in English too, although it’s interspersed with Indonesian or Javanese.” Teacher X from SMPN 1 Buduran also noted that students used Indonesian to ask for clarification, which helped them engage in brainstorming sessions. “I use English for persuasion, but they can respond in bilinguals,” Teacher X explained. This aligns with García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging as a tool to increase student engagement and interaction in multilingual classrooms.

3.1.3 Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool for Classroom Management

Translanguaging also emerged as an effective classroom management tool. According to Brown’s (2007) principles of classroom management, teachers must establish clear communication to maintain control and ensure students understand instructions. Teachers from both schools acknowledged using Indonesian or mixed languages when giving instructions to ensure clarity.

Teacher C from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo mentioned, “When I tell the students what I want but they still don’t understand, I will use Indonesian to clarify.” Similarly, Teacher Z from SMPN 1 Buduran shared, “When students are difficult to control, I will use Indonesian to give clearer directions.” This use of translanguaging helps teachers assert control and maintain an effective learning environment, especially when instructions in English alone might lead to confusion.

3.1.4 Translanguaging as a Support for Low English Proficiency Students

Teachers from both schools highlighted that translanguaging is crucial for students at lower levels of English proficiency. According to Krashen’s Input Hypothesis, comprehensible input is essential for language acquisition. Translanguaging provides students with the necessary support by allowing them to use their first language (L1) to understand and process the second language (L2).

Teacher A from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo explained, “Because these children are not yet accustomed, they are still having difficulty with their English.” Similarly, Teacher X from SMPN

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1 Buduran stated, “Bilingualism is necessary because not all students can learn in English.” These insights suggest that translanguaging helps bridge the gap for beginner-level students by making the English content more accessible.

3.1.5 Translanguaging as a Support to Build Class Rapport and a Comfortable Atmosphere

Lastly, teachers noted that translanguaging can be used to foster a positive and relaxed classroom atmosphere. According to Norton’s (2000) concept of identity in language learning, students are more likely to engage in learning when they feel comfortable and connected with their teacher. Teachers at SMPN 1 Buduran shared that using local languages like Javanese helped create a more relaxed and engaging environment.

Teacher X shared, “I use Javanese in informal situations to entertain them. If I only use English, the class becomes stiff, like crickets chirping.” Teacher Y also mentioned, “When students like their teacher, they become more motivated to learn.” This aligns with the idea that translanguaging can build rapport and increase motivation, leading to better student engagement.

3.2. Students’ Perspectives on Translanguaging

Students also expressed positive views on the use of translanguaging in their EFL classrooms. They highlighted how it supported their comprehension, communication, and confidence during lessons.

3.2.1 Translanguaging as a Tool for Better Comprehension

Students from both schools agreed that translanguaging helped them understand English material better. Vygotsky’s Zone of Proximal Development theory suggests that learners can progress through support and guidance from more knowledgeable peers or teachers. For students struggling with vocabulary or complex concepts in English, using Indonesian or Javanese made understanding easier.

Student A from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo shared, “I understand the material better when it’s mixed with Indonesian.” Similarly, Student X from SMPN 1 Buduran mentioned, “It’s necessary because not all students understand English, and many get confused during English classes.” These examples indicate that translanguaging serves as a useful tool for aiding comprehension and reducing confusion.

3.2.2 Translanguaging as a Tool to Facilitate Communication

Students also pointed out that translanguaging made communication easier in class. Canale and Swain’s (1980) communicative competence theory stresses the importance of functional language use in real-life situations. In the EFL classroom, students found that translanguaging helped them express themselves when they lacked the vocabulary to communicate entirely in English.

Student B from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo remarked, “It’s important because we can communicate with friends using Indonesian.” Student Z from SMPN 1 Buduran added, “The teacher understands when we’re having difficulty, but for writing assignments, we have to use English.” These

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responses underscore the role of translanguaging in facilitating communication, especially in a classroom where students may not yet be fluent in English.

3.2.3 Translanguaging as a Support to Increase Students' Confidence

Finally, students noted that translanguaging helped build their confidence, particularly in speaking activities. According to Bourdieu's (1991) theory of social capital, language proficiency is often linked to social power, and students who feel confident in using their language skills are more likely to participate actively in class.

Student B from MTsN 2 Sidoarjo explained, "We're afraid if we're asked to only use English, so we're happy when there's Indonesian and Javanese available." Student Y from SMPN 1 Buduran shared, "Using Indonesian first allows me to think first. If it's directly in English, I find it difficult." This shows how translanguaging boosts students' confidence by allowing them to use their first language as a safety net while they develop their English skills.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study, the researcher concluded that both teachers and students perceive translanguaging as a valuable tool in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Teachers from both SMPN 1 Buduran and MTsN 2 Sidoarjo view translanguaging as an essential pedagogical approach that helps explain difficult concepts, enhance communication, manage the classroom, and support students with low English proficiency. It fosters a positive and supportive classroom environment, bridging language gaps and ensuring more effective learning. Students also find translanguaging beneficial for understanding lessons, communicating with peers, and increasing confidence in using English. They appreciate being able to use their native language alongside English, which allows them to participate actively and seek clarification when needed. This approach helps students feel more comfortable and engaged in their learning process.

These findings align with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes the importance of scaffolding and social interaction in learning, as well as Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, which argues that knowledge transfers across languages. Swain's Output Hypothesis and Canale and Swain's Communicative Competence Theory also support the idea that translanguaging enhances students' ability to engage meaningfully in the classroom, even when their English proficiency is limited. Moreover, Norton's theory of identity in language learning reinforces the notion that students are more motivated and willing to participate when they feel linguistically safe and included.

Considering these findings, several practical recommendations are proposed. First, teacher training programmes should be developed to equip educators with strategies for integrating translanguaging effectively in the classroom. These programmes may include workshops on how to manage bilingual classroom interactions and balance the use of English and students' first languages to achieve learning objectives. Second, teachers should be encouraged to incorporate translanguaging into lesson planning, for example by designing bilingual brainstorming tasks or discussion prompts that allow students to use their full linguistic repertoire before transitioning into English output. Third, schools should promote peer collaboration activities that allow students to use their native language to scaffold understanding, particularly for those with lower

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proficiency. Additionally, the development and use of bilingual learning materials, such as glossaries, dual-language instructions, or culturally responsive texts, should be supported to enhance access and comprehension.

Furthermore, reflective teaching practices should be fostered through teacher journals, peer observation, or video analysis to help educators assess the effectiveness of their translanguaging strategies. Finally, schools should consider adopting flexible language policies that legitimise purposeful translanguaging, particularly in multilingual classrooms, to create inclusive and equitable learning environments.

For future research, it is recommended to expand the scope of inquiry across different educational levels and geographical contexts to better understand the variation in translanguaging practices and their impact. Researchers should also examine the potential drawbacks of translanguaging, such as overreliance on L1 or reduced exposure to English input. Using mixed methods approaches, including student questionnaires, proficiency tests, and longitudinal observations, would provide more comprehensive insights into how translanguaging affects academic outcomes, language development, and classroom interaction dynamics over time.

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