



Translanguaging in EFL Classroom in Indonesia

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Abstract. *This paper examines translanguaging as a pedagogical necessity in multilingual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, with particular attention to the Indonesian context. While English-only policies remain influential, they often conflict with the multilingual realities learners bring into classrooms. Drawing on translanguaging theory and recent empirical studies, this paper argues that multilingual meaning-making is not a deviation from pedagogy but a strategic resource that enhances comprehension, participation, and learning access. Indonesia provides a compelling case due to its layered multilingual ecology, where local languages, Bahasa Indonesia, and English interact dynamically in classroom practices. Special attention is given to genre-based English instruction, illustrating how teachers strategically integrate languages to scaffold conceptual understanding, support learner engagement, and facilitate academic literacy development. By synthesizing theoretical perspectives and Indonesian classroom evidence, this paper highlights limitations in bilingual-based translanguaging models and calls for context-sensitive pedagogical frameworks. Translanguaging is thus positioned as an inclusive and socially responsive approach to multilingual EFL education.*

Keywords: Classroom Interaction; EFL classroom; Genre-Based Teaching; Indonesian Multilingualism; Multilingual Pedagogy; Translanguaging;

1. INTRODUCTION

The expanding influence of English in global education, scholarship, and cross-border communication has reinforced its status as a key academic language. Consequently, many English as a Foreign Language (EFL) programs continue to implement English-only classroom policies, assuming that intensive exposure naturally leads to stronger language mastery. Yet, such monolingual assumptions are increasingly inconsistent with the linguistic realities learners experience. Students enter classrooms with rich language backgrounds shaped by regional languages, the national language, and English. Learning therefore unfolds as a multilingual meaning-making process rather than a single-language endeavor.

An alternative perspective is offered by translanguaging, which views multilingual competence as an interconnected and adaptive resource for learning. Instead of separating languages into rigid systems, translanguaging recognizes that learners fluidly draw from their entire linguistic repertoire to interpret information, interact with others, and construct knowledge (García & Wei, 2018). Within educational settings, this orientation shifts the perception of language mixing from a pedagogical problem to a purposeful instructional strategy.

This perspective is especially relevant in Indonesia. The country's sociolinguistic environment is marked by multiple interacting layers: regional languages embody cultural identity, Bahasa Indonesia functions as the national medium of unity, and English serves international academic and professional aspirations. In such circumstances, EFL classrooms operate at the intersection of global expectations, national language policy, and local cultural expression. Multilingual communication thus becomes a practical response to instructional demands rather than a violation of policy norms.

A typical classroom situation reflects this dynamic. When teaching a reading passage on environmental issues, a teacher may begin explanations in English, switch to Bahasa Indonesia to clarify complex terminology, invite students to relate examples using familiar local expressions, and then guide them back to English for formal responses. Similarly, grammar points that require conceptual precision are often explained in Indonesian, while peer discussions naturally involve flexible language use. These shifts enable students to better grasp abstract ideas, remain engaged in tasks, and connect new material with prior knowledge.

Such language practices are intentional and pedagogically grounded. Research suggests that multilingual classroom communication in Indonesia reflects sociocultural realities where teachers and learners consciously mobilize linguistic resources to facilitate understanding, sustain interaction, and maintain instructional continuity (Siregar, 2020). Translanguaging, therefore, should be understood as situated communicative practice embedded in local educational contexts rather than as random code alternation.

Further empirical work supports this interpretation. Teachers are shown to combine Indonesian and English strategically when delivering instructions, clarifying assignments, and scaffolding challenging material in order to maintain participation and reduce comprehension gaps (Yolandana et al., 2024). These patterns indicate deliberate pedagogical decision-making rather than linguistic insufficiency.

Nevertheless, dominant translanguaging frameworks have largely emerged from bilingual education traditions. As a result, they often fail to capture the complexity of multilingual EFL environments where several local languages interact with a national language and English simultaneously. This theoretical limitation creates distance between established models and classroom realities.

Viewing Indonesia as a dynamic multilingual learning space, this study contends that translanguaging constitutes an inherent feature of multilingual EFL pedagogy. By investigating how multilingual practices organize classroom interaction and facilitate learning access, the paper contributes toward a more inclusive and context-responsive approach to language education.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Translanguaging: Rethinking Language, Learning, and Pedagogy

Traditional views of language in education have long been shaped by monolingual assumptions that treat languages as separate, bounded, and internally stable systems. Within this structural perspective, multilingual speakers are often perceived as switching between distinct linguistic codes. Such a view, however, fails to capture the fluid and dynamic nature of real-world communication in multilingual societies.

Translanguaging challenges this bounded-language ideology by conceptualizing language as an integrated and flexible repertoire. Multilingual individuals do not operate through compartmentalized language systems; rather, they draw from their full semiotic resources to construct meaning in context. Language practices are therefore understood as dynamic processes shaped by interaction, identity, and communicative purpose. This perspective reframes language from being a fixed system to being a socially situated practice (García & Wei, 2018).

From this lens, linguistic boundaries are socially constructed rather than cognitively real. What appears as movement between “languages” is better understood as strategic selection from a unified repertoire. Such a view is particularly relevant in multilingual societies where communicative practices routinely transcend named-language categories. Translanguaging thus provides a more accurate theoretical account of how multilingual speakers actually use language in everyday life.

Translanguaging as a Theory of Learning

Beyond reconceptualizing language, translanguaging also reframes how learning occurs in multilingual settings. Learning is not merely the accumulation of target-language forms but a meaning-making process mediated through all available cognitive and linguistic resources. Multilingual learners actively mobilize familiar languages to process new knowledge, interpret complex input, and engage in higher-order thinking.

This view aligns with sociocultural theories that emphasize mediation and interaction as central to learning. Linguistic resources function as cognitive tools that scaffold understanding and support knowledge construction. Allowing learners to access their full repertoires reduces cognitive load, strengthens conceptual grasp, and enables deeper engagement with academic content.

Empirical research further shows that flexible multilingual practices enhance participation and comprehension, especially in contexts where students' proficiency in the target language is still developing. Translanguaging thus operates as a learning mechanism that supports epistemic access rather than a compensatory shortcut .

Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Stance

Translanguaging extends beyond linguistic description and learning theory into pedagogy. It represents a shift from viewing multilingual practices as classroom problems to recognizing them as pedagogical resources. As a pedagogical stance, translanguaging encourages teachers to design instruction that intentionally leverages students' linguistic repertoires to facilitate learning.

This stance challenges English-only norms that equate instructional quality with monolingual discipline. In practice, teachers frequently integrate multiple languages to explain abstract concepts, clarify instructions, manage classroom interaction, and maintain relational engagement. Such practices demonstrate that multilingual resources support both cognitive and interactional dimensions of learning.

From a critical perspective, translanguaging pedagogy also addresses issues of linguistic equity. Monolingual policies often privilege dominant languages while marginalizing learners' identities and lived linguistic experiences. Flexible multilingual practices, by contrast, validate learners' voices and foster inclusive classroom ecologies (Canagarajah, 2011).

Translanguaging in Multilingual EFL Ecologies

While translanguaging theory has been widely discussed in bilingual education, its relevance extends strongly to multilingual EFL contexts. In such environments, English is neither socially dominant nor equally accessible to all learners. Students rely on layered repertoires involving local languages and national lingua francas to interpret English input and participate in learning activities.

Evidence from Indonesian classrooms illustrates that translanguaging functions as an adaptive pedagogical response to multilingual realities. Teachers strategically integrate Indonesian and English to scaffold difficult materials and sustain student engagement, demonstrating that multilingual practices serve instructional purposes rather than reflecting pedagogical deficiency (Siregar, 2020).

Similarly, higher education studies show that lecturers and students perceive translanguaging positively because it supports comprehension, adjusts to proficiency differences, and fosters classroom rapport (Manik et al., 2025). Comparative classroom research further indicates that translanguaging enhances participation, comprehension, and linguistic confidence by recognizing learners' multilingual identities (Yolandana et al., 2024).

These findings reinforce the view that translanguaging is not merely a bilingual phenomenon but a context-responsive pedagogical orientation relevant to EFL environments characterized by linguistic diversity.

From Strategy to Pedagogical Design

Much existing literature frames translanguaging as a set of classroom strategies—code-switching for explanation, translation for clarification, or bilingual scaffolding for comprehension. While valuable, this instrumental view risks underestimating translanguaging's broader pedagogical potential.

A more comprehensive perspective positions translanguaging as a pedagogical design principle. It involves systematic planning of interaction, task structure, language allocation, and assessment practices that align with multilingual realities. Translanguaging pedagogy thus becomes an organizing framework for inclusive and context-sensitive language education rather than a spontaneous classroom tactic (García & Wei, 2018).

Reconceptualizing translanguaging as pedagogical design is especially important in multilingual EFL contexts like Indonesia, where layered linguistic repertoires shape classroom interaction. A design-oriented approach allows educators to move beyond policy–practice tensions toward intentional multilingual pedagogy grounded in local realities.

Indonesian EFL Ecology: Why Context Matters

Much of translanguaging scholarship has emerged from bilingual contexts where two languages operate with relatively balanced institutional power. Indonesia, however, represents a different sociolinguistic ecology marked by extensive multilingualism, functional language stratification, and English as a foreign language.

Therefore, translanguaging theory requires contextual grounding to accurately reflect classroom realities. In Indonesian EFL settings, multilingual practices are not peripheral phenomena but central mechanisms shaping instruction, interaction, and learning processes.

Layered Multilingualism in Indonesia

Indonesia's linguistic landscape is characterized by the coexistence of local languages, Bahasa Indonesia as the national lingua franca, and English as an academic foreign language. Learners typically develop layered repertoires: local languages dominate home and community domains, Bahasa Indonesia functions in formal and interethnic communication, and English is primarily used in schooling and academic mobility.

This multilingual layering shapes how students learn English. Rather than functioning as monolingual learners, students mobilize their full linguistic repertoires to process meaning, negotiate understanding, and construct knowledge. Translanguaging thus becomes a natural meaning-making practice rooted in learners' lived linguistic experiences.

Recent Indonesian scholarship reinforces this view. A conceptual–pedagogical review highlights translanguaging as an innovative instructional strategy aligned with Indonesia's multilingual realities, emphasizing that flexible language use supports cognitive processing and inclusive learning environments (Hieng et al., 2025). Similarly, classroom-based evidence demonstrates that integrating Indonesian and English enables learners to access abstract concepts without reducing exposure to the target language (Hieng et al., 2025).

Classroom Interaction Patterns

Indonesian EFL classrooms display interactional patterns where translanguaging operates as a pedagogical resource rather than incidental language mixing.

Instructional Delivery

Teachers frequently combine English and Indonesian when delivering instructions to ensure procedural clarity and student readiness. Example Teacher: “Please form groups of four. Diskusikan teksnya dan siapkan presentasi singkat.” A case study in a junior high school in Bogor shows that such bilingual instruction improves students' task comprehension and minimizes confusion during activity transitions (Wahyuni et al., 2025). Teachers intentionally shift languages to maintain efficiency and instructional flow.

Conceptual Explanation

When introducing difficult grammar or abstract ideas, teachers often clarify using Indonesian. Example Teacher: “This is called passive voice.” “Artinya fokus kalimatnya pada tindakan, bukan pelakunya.” This pattern supports conceptual anchoring while sustaining English exposure. Empirical findings indicate that strategic translanguaging strengthens conceptual understanding without impeding language acquisition (Hieng et al., 2025).

Vocabulary and Meaning Mediation

Academic vocabulary is commonly scaffolded through Indonesian equivalents. Example: “ ‘Impact’ itu berarti dampak-efek yang terjadi karena suatu peristiwa.” Such mediation accelerates semantic processing and supports retention of new lexical items (Hieng et al., 2025).

Peer Meaning Negotiation

Students frequently discuss ideas in Indonesian before presenting in English. Example: Student A: “Bagian ini jelaskan penyebabnya dulu.” Student B: “Oke, nanti aku sampaikan pakai English.” This pattern reflects collaborative meaning construction prior to formal academic production. Comparative classroom research confirms that translanguaging fosters participation and strengthens students’ academic confidence (Yolandana et al., 2024).

Teacher Beliefs and Strategic Use

Teacher cognition research indicates that translanguaging practices are guided by pedagogical intention rather than spontaneous habit. Educators consciously mobilize students’ multilingual repertoires as instructional resources to facilitate learning processes. In Indonesian EFL classrooms-particularly those implementing the genre-based approach-teachers strategically integrate Indonesian and English to achieve specific pedagogical goals (Laksono et al., 2025).

Teachers perceive multilingual strategies as functional tools to ensure comprehension, support learners with limited English proficiency, sustain classroom interaction, and foster interpersonal rapport. These beliefs become visible in how translanguaging is embedded across stages of genre-based instruction.

Ensuring Comprehension of Genre Concepts

Teachers frequently use Indonesian to introduce unfamiliar genre purposes and contextual knowledge before engaging with English texts. Example: Introducing Recount Text Purpose. Teacher (English): “Today we will learn recount texts.” “Recount itu teks yang menceritakan kembali pengalaman masa lalu secara runtut.” Here, Indonesian is used

deliberately to secure conceptual grounding. Teachers believe that without clear understanding of genre purpose, students struggle to analyze or produce texts meaningfully.

Supporting Low-Proficiency Learners

Translanguaging helps reduce cognitive overload when students encounter dense linguistic features. Example Teacher: “This paragraph is called the orientation. Bagian ini memperkenalkan siapa tokohnya, kapan, dan di mana peristiwanya.”

Teachers report that such bilingual scaffolding prevents weaker students from disengaging. Rather than simplifying content, translanguaging maintains conceptual depth while making input accessible.

Maintaining Classroom Interaction

Teachers use flexible language choices to keep collaborative writing active and inclusive. Example Teacher: “Okay, sekarang diskusikan ide ceritanya dulu. After that, write the orientation in English.” Students respond more readily when instructions combine clarity (Indonesian) with task focus (English). Teachers believe that interactional momentum is easier to sustain when learners are not constrained by rigid language boundaries.

Building Interpersonal Rapport

Teachers also use translanguaging to create a supportive classroom climate, especially during feedback and encouragement. Example Teacher: “Your story is good. Alurnya sudah jelas, tinggal grammar-nya diperbaiki sedikit.” The Indonesian segment softens correction and expresses solidarity. Teachers perceive that relational closeness increases student confidence and willingness to participate.

Translanguaging practices are not uniform but adapted to instructional goals. Teachers emphasize that language choice depends on lesson focus. When targeting fluency, English dominates. When targeting conceptual understanding, multilingual scaffolding increases (Laksono et al., 2025). Even in evaluation contexts, teachers apply flexible strategies. Example Teacher: “Write a narrative text about an unforgettable experience. Gunakan struktur orientation, complication, resolution.”

Teachers report that brief Indonesian clarification ensures students understand task requirements without reducing assessment validity. Rather than reflecting pedagogical inconsistency, translanguaging represents teacher expertise in managing multilingual learning environments.

Sociolinguistic Tensions

English holds strong symbolic capital in Indonesia and is widely associated with global mobility, modernity, and academic excellence. Consequently, English-only instruction is often equated with high-quality education. However, students' linguistic identities remain deeply rooted in local languages and Bahasa Indonesia.

Research shows that translanguaging helps reconcile this tension by allowing students to maintain linguistic identity while engaging in English learning (Yolandana et al., 2024). Flexible multilingual practices validate learners' repertoires as educational resources rather than deficiencies.

Many institutions formally promote English-medium instruction. In practice, however, teachers adapt language use to ensure effective learning. Classroom evidence demonstrates that translanguaging functions as a pragmatic response to policy–practice gaps. Teachers navigate institutional expectations while meeting learners' comprehension needs through multilingual mediation (Laksono et al., 2025).

The Indonesian EFL ecology illustrates that translanguaging is structurally embedded in classroom interaction. Layered multilingual repertoires, pedagogically purposeful interaction patterns, and sociolinguistic tensions collectively underscore the need to localize translanguaging theory. Indonesian classrooms provide empirically grounded insights that expand global understandings of multilingual pedagogy beyond traditionally studied bilingual contexts.

4. CONCLUSION

Translanguaging as a pedagogical necessity in multilingual EFL classrooms rather than a marginal teaching technique. In contexts where students constantly move between local languages, Bahasa Indonesia, and English, monolingual policies no longer reflect authentic learning processes. Translanguaging enables learners to draw on their full linguistic resources to construct meaning, engage in interaction, and access academic content more effectively.

Indonesia provides a valuable multilingual setting where global English, national language policy, and local linguistic identities intersect. Its classrooms function as dynamic spaces that reveal how multilingual practices naturally support learning. This context offers important insights for expanding translanguaging theory beyond bilingual settings and toward more complex multilingual realities.

Adopting translanguaging pedagogy also promotes a more inclusive model of language education. It affirms learners' identities, supports lower-proficiency students, and reduces barriers to participation. A context-sensitive translanguaging framework therefore represents a practical and equitable pathway toward more responsive and effective English language teaching.

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