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THE PORTRAIT OF TRANSLANGUAGING PROCESS IN EFL CLASSROOM CONTEXT

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Abstract: This study investigates translanguaging practices employed by an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teacher in an Indonesian elementary school classroom. The study aims to identify the types of translanguaging used by the teacher and to examine the pedagogical functions of these practices in supporting students' comprehension, participation, and engagement. A qualitative descriptive research design was adopted, involving classroom observations and a semi-structured interview with one EFL teacher as the primary data sources. The collected data were analyzed thematically to capture recurring patterns of translanguaging use in classroom interaction. The findings suggest that the teacher employed translanguaging through language alternation, insertion, and pronunciation scaffolding to explain vocabulary, give instructions, and model sentence structures. These practices functioned to enhance students' understanding, increase confidence, and maintain classroom engagement. The study indicates that translanguaging serves as a purposeful pedagogical approach in elementary EFL classrooms, allowing teachers to utilize students' full linguistic repertoires as valuable learning resources.

Keywords: classroom practices, EFL, elementary school, multilingual education, translanguaging

INTRODUCTION

English has increasingly been introduced at the elementary level in many EFL contexts, including Indonesia, where English is positioned as a foreign language and offered primarily as a local content subject rather than a compulsory course (Obaidul Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). In response to globalization and perceived future academic and professional demands, many Indonesian schools introduce English in the early grades despite structural limitations such as restricted instructional time and uneven teacher preparation. While early exposure to English is often associated with long-term language development, empirical research cautions that such benefits are highly

contingent on instructional quality, contextual support, and learners' opportunities to access meaning during instruction rather than exposure alone (Espinosa & López, 2007; Wang, 2022).

In Indonesian elementary EFL classrooms, young learners commonly experience difficulties in developing basic linguistic competencies, including vocabulary knowledge, pronunciation, sentence construction, and grammatical awareness (Wang, 2022; Liando et al., 2022). These challenges are intensified by minimal exposure to English outside the classroom, positioning school instruction as learners' primary – and often sole – source of English input. When instructional delivery relies exclusively on English, learners with limited proficiency may struggle to follow explanations, interpret instructions, and participate meaningfully in classroom interaction (Yuvayapan, 2019). As García & Kleyn, (2016), argue, limited access to comprehensible input can restrict learners' ability to process meaning and may lead to disengagement, particularly at the elementary level.

Despite the widespread promotion of English-only approaches as a means of maximizing target language exposure, research increasingly suggests that monolingual instructional policies may not be pedagogically appropriate for young EFL learners. Rigid adherence to English-only instruction can impose excessive cognitive demands on learners who have not yet developed sufficient linguistic resources to interpret input independently (Espinosa & López, 2007). In Indonesian classrooms, Liando et al. (2022) report that English-only practices often result in confusion and passive participation among elementary learners, indicating the need for instructional approaches that provide linguistic mediation and scaffolded access to meaning.

Recent scholarship in applied linguistics has therefore shifted toward asset-based perspectives that recognize learners' existing linguistic repertoires as valuable pedagogical resources. Translanguaging, conceptualized as the dynamic and integrated use of multiple languages for meaning-making, communication, and learning, challenges traditional views that treat languages as separate and bounded systems (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015). Within educational settings, translanguaging enables teachers and learners to draw flexibly on familiar linguistic resources to support comprehension, participation, and engagement, particularly in contexts where exposure to the target language is limited.

Empirical studies across EFL contexts demonstrate that translanguaging supports instructional clarity, reduces learner anxiety, and promotes active classroom interaction (García & Kleyn, 2016; Moafa, 2023; Yuvayapan, 2019). However, much of this research has focused on secondary or tertiary education, while studies at the elementary level – especially within Indonesian EFL classrooms – remain comparatively scarce. Existing Indonesian studies have largely emphasized teacher beliefs or general practices, offering limited analysis of how translanguaging is enacted during specific instructional moments and how it functions pedagogically in real-time classroom interaction (Liando et al., 2022).

Addressing this gap, the present study focuses on classroom-based translanguaging practices at the elementary level in Indonesia. Specifically, it examines (1) the types of translanguaging employed by an EFL teacher during instructional interaction and (2) the pedagogical functions these practices serve in supporting learner comprehension, participation, and engagement. By providing fine-grained analysis of teacher discourse in an early EFL context, this study contributes empirical evidence on how translanguaging operates as an instructional resource under conditions of limited

English exposure, thereby extending existing translanguaging research both contextually and pedagogically.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Perspectives on Translanguaging

Translanguaging is widely understood as a dynamic process of meaning-making in which multilingual speakers mobilize their full linguistic repertoire without separating languages into fixed boundaries (García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015). Unlike traditional bilingual models that view languages as distinct entities, translanguaging conceptualizes language practice as fluid, integrated, and shaped by communicative needs. This perspective challenges monolingual ideologies that have long dominated language education, particularly in EFL contexts.

The concept of translanguaging was first introduced by Cen Williams (1994) in the context of Welsh-English bilingual education, where it referred to a pedagogical practice that deliberately alternated the language of input and output. Over time, the concept evolved beyond a classroom strategy into a broader socio-cognitive and sociolinguistic framework. García and Wei (2014) reconceptualized translanguaging as a holistic approach that reflect how multilingual individuals naturally use language in their daily lives. From this viewpoint, multilingual speakers do not switch between separate language systems but instead access a unified linguistic repertoire.

Li Wei (2018) further positions translanguaging as a practical theory of language that emphasizes flexibility, creativity, and agency in communication. This theoretical stance highlights that translanguaging is not merely a response to linguistic deficiency but a resource that enables learners to construct meaning, negotiate understanding, and express identity. In educational settings, translanguaging allows learners to participate more fully by reducing linguistic barriers and validating their existing knowledge.

In EFL contexts, translanguaging has gained increasing attention due to the limited exposure learners typically have to English outside the classroom. García & Kleyn (2016) argue that strict separation of language may restrict learners' access to content and inhibit participation, particularly for students with low proficiency levels. Instead, strategic use of learners' first language (L1) alongside English can function as scaffolding that supports comprehension and gradual language development. Baker (2011) similarly emphasizes that flexible bilingual practices among young learners.

Translanguaging in Classroom Contexts

Empirical research has documented various functions of translanguaging in EFL classrooms. Teachers commonly employ translanguaging to explain vocabulary, clarify complex concepts, give instructions, manage classroom interaction, and build rapport with students (García & Kleyn, 2016; Moafa, 2023). These practices enable learners to access meaning more efficiently and reduce the cognitive load associated with processing unfamiliar language forms.

Several studies have highlighted the positive impact of translanguaging on learners' comprehension and engagement. Yuvayapan (2019) found that EFL teachers' translanguaging practices facilitated students' understanding of lesson content and encouraged participation, particularly among low-proficiency learners. Similarly, Liando et al. (2022) reported that translanguaging practices in Indonesian EFL classrooms helped learners bridge lexical gaps and negotiate meaning during classroom

interaction. These findings suggest that translanguaging serves both instructional and interactional functions in EFL contexts.

Research also indicates that translanguaging plays an important affective role in language learning. García and Kleyn (2016) note that allowing learners to use their L1 can lower anxiety and create a more inclusive classroom environment. This affective support is particularly crucial for young learners, who may experience frustration or disengagement when faced with unfamiliar linguistic input. Romanowski (2018) further argues that recognizing learners' linguistic identities through translanguaging can enhance motivation and foster a sense of belonging.

Previous Studies on Translanguaging in Elementary EFL Settings

Although translanguaging research has expanded considerably in recent years, studies focusing specifically on elementary EFL contexts remain relatively limited. Much of the existing literature has concentrated on secondary and tertiary education, where learners generally process higher levels of linguistic proficiency and greater exposure to the target language (García, Ofelia; Wei, 2014; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Cenoz, 2022). However, young learners in elementary schools demonstrate distinct cognitive, linguistic, and affective characteristics that require different pedagogical considerations, particularly in contexts where English is rarely used beyond the classroom (Baker, 2011; Espinosa & López, 2007).

Several studies have highlighted the pedagogical value of translanguaging in EFL classrooms. Wang (2022) found that strategic use of learners' first language supported comprehension and facilitated meaning-making, especially in contexts with limited English exposure. Similarly, Moafa (2023) reported that translanguaging enabled teachers to scaffold understanding, manage classroom interaction, and sustain learner engagement. García & Kleyn (2016) further argue that translanguaging creates more inclusive learning environments by reducing anxiety and legitimizing learners' linguistic resources. In the Indonesian context, Liando et al., (2022) revealed that English-only instruction often resulted in confusion among elementary learners, whereas translanguaging practices promoted clearer understanding.

Despite these contributions, existing studies have predominantly emphasized teachers' beliefs, perceptions, or general instructional practices rather than providing detailed analyses of how translanguaging is enacted during specific instructional moments in the classroom. Moreover, limited attention has been given to examining the pedagogical functions of translanguaging at the elementary level, where learners rely heavily on their first language to access meaning and participate in classroom interaction (Yuvayapan, 2019). As a result, there remains a need for empirical studies that document translanguaging as it occurs in authentic classroom discourse and explore how it supports young learners' comprehension and engagement.

Building on these theoretical perspectives and empirical findings, the present study seeks to portray translanguaging practices employed by an EFL teacher in an Indonesian elementary school classroom. By focusing on actual classroom interaction, this study aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of translanguaging as a pedagogical resource in early EFL education and to address gaps in the existing literature concerning elementary-level contexts.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate translanguaging practices in an elementary school EFL classroom. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate as it enables the researcher to capture naturally occurring language practices and to develop an in-depth understanding of how translanguaging is enacted in authentic classroom interaction. Rather than focusing on the measurement of learning outcomes, this study emphasized the systematic description and interpretation of the teacher's language choices and their pedagogical functions. This approach aligns with qualitative research traditions in applied linguistics, which prioritize context-sensitive analysis and meaning-making processes in instructional settings (John W. Creswell, 2014). By examining classroom interaction and teacher reflections, the study sought to reveal patterns of translanguaging use that might not be accessible through quantitative methods alone.

The participant in this study was an English teacher at a public elementary school in Indonesia. The teacher was selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria, including active involvement in teaching English at the elementary level, regular instructional interaction with students using both English and Bahasa Indonesia, and voluntary willingness to participate in the research. The observed classroom consisted of elementary school students with beginner-level English proficiency, for whom English was taught as a local content subject. This context provided a relevant setting for examining translanguaging practices in an early EFL learning environment where students' exposure to English is limited.

Data were collected through non-participant classroom observations and a semi-structured interview. Classroom observations were conducted across six instructional sessions over a four-week period, with each session lasting approximately 70 minutes. This extended observation period allowed the researcher to capture recurring translanguaging practices rather than isolated instances. During the observations, the researcher focused on teacher-student interactions, particularly moments when the teacher alternated between English and Bahasa Indonesia to explain content, manage the class, or respond to students' questions. All classroom interactions were audio-recorded with the teacher's consent and supported by detailed field notes to ensure data accuracy and contextual richness. The coding process followed a hybrid inductive-deductive approach. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data to allow patterns of translanguaging use to emerge, while the interpretation of these patterns was informed by existing translanguaging frameworks in applied linguistics (e.g., García & Wei, 2014; Wei, 2018).

Following the classroom observations, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the teacher to gain deeper insight into the pedagogical reasoning underlying the use of translanguaging during instruction. The interview aimed to explore the teacher's perceptions, motivation, and considerations in employing multiple languages in the EFL classroom. Open-ended questions were utilized to allow the participant to elaborate on personal teaching experiences, instructional decision-making, and reflections on the perceived benefits and challenges of translanguaging practices. This interview format enabled the researcher to capture nuanced perspectives that complemented the observational data. The interview was audio-recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate systematic data analysis.

The instruments used in this study included an observation guideline, field note sheets, and an interview protocol. The observation guideline was designed to identify

types of translanguaging practices and their pedagogical functions, while the interview protocol focused on eliciting the teacher's reflections on language use. Data analysis followed a thematic approach. Observation notes and interview transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve data familiarization. Relevant data segments were coded, categorized, and grouped into themes representing types and functions of translanguaging. To enhance the credibility of the findings, data triangulation was applied by comparing observation data with interview responses. Ethical considerations were addressed by obtaining informed consent from the participant and ensuring anonymity throughout the research process.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the qualitative findings, several strategies were employed throughout the research process. Prolonged engagement in the field through multiple classroom observations enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of recurring translanguaging practices rather than relying on isolated instructional events. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing classroom observation data with interview responses in order to confirm the consistency of emerging patterns. In addition, the use of audio recordings and detailed field notes supported accurate representation of classroom interaction and minimized the risk of misinterpretation. During the data analysis process, iterative reading of transcripts allowed the researcher to refine codes and themes systematically. Ethical considerations were carefully addressed by obtaining informed consent from the participant prior to data collection and by ensuring anonymity through the use of pseudonyms. These procedures were implemented to enhance the credibility, dependability, and ethical integrity of the study, in line with qualitative research standards in applied linguistics.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from classroom observations and teacher interviews regarding the implementation of translanguaging in an elementary EFL classroom. The findings indicate that translanguaging was employed as a systematic pedagogical strategy rather than an incidental classroom practice. The analysis reveals that the teacher's translanguaging practices were closely aligned with sociocultural and translanguaging theories, functions to scaffold cognitive, linguistic, and affective aspects of young learners' English learning. Two major themes emerged: (1) translanguaging as pedagogical scaffolding, and (2) pedagogical functions of translanguaging in the EFL classroom.

Translanguaging as Pedagogical Scaffolding in the EFL Classroom

Lexical and Semantic Scaffolding

One prominent translanguaging practice observed in the classroom was the teacher's strategic use of Bahasa Indonesia to explain English vocabulary and meaning. Rather than relying solely on English input, the teacher alternated between English and Indonesian to ensure that students comprehended key lexical items before progressing to subsequent learning activities.

Excerpt 1

"When introducing new vocabulary, I usually explain it first in Indonesian so that they understand. After that, I repeat it in English so that they get used to it."
(Participant)

This practice indicates that translanguaging functional as lexical scaffolding, where students' L1 was used to mediate access to new English input (Gibbons, 2015; Fang, Hu, et al., 2022). From a sociocultural perspective, this aligns with Vygotsky (1978) concepts of scaffolding within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), in which learners require mediated support to internalize new knowledge. Indonesian served as a mediational tool that enabled students to grasp meaning before independently engaging with English vocabulary.

Moreover, this finding resonates with García and Wei's (2014) theoretical view of translanguaging as a meaning-making process that allows learners to mobilize their entire linguistic repertoire. Rather than separating languages rigidly, the teacher integrated both languages to support semantic construction. Similar findings were reported by Fang et al. (2022), who argue that translanguaging facilitates deeper lexical understanding in EFL contexts where learners' exposure to English is limited.

Procedural Scaffolding through Classroom Instructions

Translanguaging was also used to support procedural understanding, particularly during the delivery of classroom instructions were delivered only in English, students often appeared hesitant or confused. By repeating instructions in Bahasa Indonesia, the teacher ensured clarity and helped students understand task expectations more effectively.

Excerpt 2

"Sometimes when I speak English, they get confused. So, I repeated the instructions in Indonesian so they understand immediately." (Participant)

The finding indicates that translanguaging functioned as procedural scaffolding, ensuring that learners clearly understood task requirements. According to sociocultural theory, language serves as a primary tool for regulating activity (Vygotsky, 1978). In this classroom, Indonesian acted as a regulatory tool that helped students internalize procedural knowledge and participate effectively in learning tasks.

This practice supports (Yuvayapan, 2019) findings that translanguaging enhanced instructional clarity and classroom management in EFL settings. By minimizing task confusion, the teacher-maintained lesson flow and reduced potential anxiety, allowing students to focus cognitive resources on learning English rather than decoding English rather than decoding instructions.

Phonological and Structural Scaffolding

Another translanguaging practice identified involved the explanation of pronunciation and sentence structures. When students encountered difficult sounds or unfamiliar sentence patterns, the teacher explained them in Bahasa Indonesia before modeling the correct English forms. This practice functioned as phonological and structural scaffolding, allowing learners to grasp abstract linguistic features more clearly through their first language. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies indicating that strategic L1 use can facilitate pronunciation accuracy without limiting exposure to the target language.

Excerpt 3

"If the pronunciation is difficult, I will explain it first in Indonesian, how to move your mouth, how it sounds. Then I will give another example in English." (Participant)

This excerpt demonstrates translanguaging as phonological and structural scaffolding, particularly relevant for young learners who may struggle with abstract phonetic concepts. Explaining articulation through Indonesian enabled learners to conceptualize sound production more clearly before practicing English pronunciation.

The finding aligns with García and Wei's (2018) assertion that translanguaging supports form-focused instruction by making linguistic features more accessible. Rather than reducing English exposure, the teacher's approach enhanced students' readiness to produce accurate English output. Similar patterns were reported in previous studies showing that L1 use facilitate pronunciation accuracy without hindering target language acquisition.

Pedagogical Functions of Translanguaging

Supporting Learner Comprehension

Classroom observations revealed that students demonstrated stronger comprehension after the teacher employed translanguaging. Explanations that incorporated both English and Bahasa Indonesia enabled learners to process instructional content more effectively, particularly when encountering unfamiliar concepts.

Excerpt 4

"When I explain things in English, the children tend to stare blankly. But when I explain things in Indonesian first, they understand immediately." (Participant)

This finding suggests that translanguaging facilitated learners' cognitive access to instructional content by enabling them to process new information through familiar linguistic resources. As noted by Fang et al. (2022), translanguaging supports learners in connecting new linguistic input with existing knowledge, which contributes to deeper comprehension and more effective meaning construction. In the present study, the use of Indonesian functioned as a cognitive bridge that assisted learners in interpreting unfamiliar or abstract concepts in English. This finding is consistent with García and Wei's (2014) view that translanguaging allows learners to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires to support understanding and learning in multilingual classroom contexts.

Enhancing Student Confidence and Participation

Translanguaging also contributed to increased student confidence and classroom participation. Allowing the use of Bahasa Indonesia alongside English reduced learners' anxiety and encouraged them to respond without fear of making linguistic errors.

Excerpt 5

"If they are unsure, they remain silent. But if I give them examples using two languages, they become brave enough to answer." (Participant)

This affective function of translanguaging aligns with Li Wei's (2018), argument that translanguaging legitimizes learners' multilingual identities and supports a more inclusive learning environment. By allowing students to draw on their first language, the teacher reduced learners' hesitation and created a psychologically safe space that encouraged participation and classroom interaction. This finding is consistent with previous studies demonstrating that translanguaging helps lower affective barriers, fosters learner confidence, and promotes sustained engagement in EFL classrooms,

particularly among young learners with limited target language proficiency (García & Kleyn, 2016; Yuvayapan, 2019).

Maintaining Classroom Engagement

Translanguaging was further used to sustain students' attention and engagement throughout the lesson. The strategic insertion of Bahasa Indonesia helped re-focus learners when attention declined and maintained positive classroom interaction. This finding supports Romanowski (2018), who suggests that acknowledging learners' linguistic identities through translanguaging enhances motivation and engagement.

Excerpt 6

"To keep things interesting, I sometimes slip in a little Indonesian. That way they stay engaged." (Participant)

This practice highlights the interpersonal function of translanguaging in classroom interaction (García & Wei, 2014; Kiramba, 2018). García and Wei (2014) emphasize that translanguaging facilitates social interaction and strengthens classroom rapport by enabling more natural and meaningful communication. In the present study, the brief and strategic use of Indonesian supported ongoing interaction, helped sustain students' attention, and contributed to a positive classroom atmosphere. This finding suggests that translanguaging plays an important role not only in supporting comprehension but also in fostering engagement and relational dynamics, particularly among young learners with limited attention spans in EFL contexts.

This study examined translanguaging practices in an Indonesian elementary EFL classroom and revealed that translanguaging functioned as a systematic pedagogical strategy rather than an incidental classroom practice. While the findings align with core principles of translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014), this study extends existing research by demonstrating how translanguaging operates in early EFL contexts characterized by limited English exposure and curriculum-driven constraints. In contrast to studies conducted in secondary, tertiary, or ESL contexts, translanguaging in this setting was predominantly teacher-initiated and instructional in nature, reflecting young learners' reliance on mediated support to access meaning and participate in classroom interaction.

The findings show that translanguaging supported learners' comprehension, confidence, and classroom engagement through lexical, procedural, and phonological scaffolding. These functions highlight how translanguaging served as a mediational tool within learners' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1978), enabling students to process instructional content through familiar linguistic resources. This supports García & Wei, (2014) view of translanguaging as a meaning-making process that allows learners to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires, while also reinforcing empirical findings from previous EFL studies that emphasize the pedagogical value of flexible language use in low-exposure contexts (Yuvayapan, 2019; Liando et al., 2022).

The pedagogical significance of translanguaging in this study is further illuminated when considered in relation to the developmental characteristics of elementary school learners. At the early stages of language learning, young learners are still developing cognitive, linguistic, and metalinguistic awareness, which limits their ability to process abstract linguistic input solely through the target language (Espinosa & López, 2007). In this context, translanguaging functions as a developmentally

appropriate instructional strategy that supports meaning-making without overburdening learners' cognitive resources. By allowing learners to access content through their first language, the teacher created opportunities for gradual internalization of English forms while maintaining learners' engagement and motivation. This finding supports Baker's (2011) argument that flexible bilingual practices are particularly beneficial for young learners, as they align with learners' cognitive readiness and learning needs. Rather than impeding target language development, translanguaging in this study facilitated a scaffolded learning process in which English input was made comprehensible and meaningful through strategic mediation.

In addition, the implementation of translanguaging in this classroom must be understood within the broader constraints of the Indonesian EFL context. As English is positioned as a local content subject at the elementary level, instructional time is often limited and opportunities for exposure to English outside the classroom remain minimal (Obaidul Hamid & Nguyen, 2016). Under such conditions, strict English-only instruction may restrict learners' access to meaning and hinder participation, particularly for students at beginner proficiency levels. The findings of this study demonstrate that translanguaging served as a pedagogical bridge that enabled the teacher to meet curriculum objectives while remaining responsive to learners' linguistic realities. This context-sensitive use of translanguaging highlights how pedagogical practices are shaped by macro-level factors such as language policy, curriculum design, and societal language use. By foregrounding these contextual constraints, this study extends translanguaging research by illustrating how its pedagogical functions are adapted in early EFL settings where English exposure is structurally limited.

Importantly, this study highlights the role of teacher agency in shaping translanguaging practices in an elementary EFL classroom. The teacher's deliberate alternation between English and Bahasa Indonesia was not merely a response to learners' limited proficiency, but a pedagogical decision aimed at balancing curriculum expectations with learners' cognitive and affective needs. These findings nuance existing translanguaging theory by illustrating how pedagogical functions of translanguaging are shaped by contextual constraints specific to EFL environments, where opportunities for target language exposure are largely confined to the classroom. As such, this study contributes context-sensitive insights into the implementation of translanguaging in early EFL education.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the growing body of research on translanguaging by providing classroom-based evidence of how translanguaging operates as an instructional resource in elementary EFL contexts where exposure to English is limited. The findings demonstrate that translanguaging was systematically employed to scaffold learners' comprehension, enhance confidence, and sustain classroom engagement through bilingual explanation, instructional clarification, and pronunciation support.

By documenting translanguaging as it occurs in authentic classroom interaction, this study extends existing research beyond teacher perceptions to reveal the pedagogical functions of translanguaging at the elementary level. These findings underscore that translanguaging should not be viewed as a compensatory practice, but as a purposeful and context-responsive pedagogical approach that enables teachers to

leverage learners' full linguistic repertoires to create more inclusive and comprehensible learning environments for young EFL learners.

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