

# BILINGUALS' LINGUISTIC REPERTOIRE AND FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION: WHAT DO TEACHERS SAY ABOUT TEACHING EFL THROUGH TRANSLANGUAGING?

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## Abstract

In recent decades, translanguaging has made rapid progress in the field of language instruction. The term "translanguaging" implies that bilinguals have a single linguistic repertoire from which they strategically select linguistic features for effective communication. The current method of language education, which takes a monolingual approach, faces a challenge from the phenomenon known as translanguaging. Therefore, this study aims to describe the perspectives of Indonesian EFL teachers on translanguaging-based EFL instruction for students from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. This is a qualitative study employing interviews to collect data, with eight EFL teachers serving as participants. A content analysis was used to analyze the collected data. This study suggests that EFL teachers have divergent perspectives on translanguaging in EFL classrooms. However, those with negative attitudes toward translanguaging recognize the importance of this pedagogical approach and continue to use L1 in their EFL classrooms, indicating that they still believe in monolingual pedagogy even though they do not fully apply it. Finally, the study's implications and limitations are discussed.

**Keywords:** Linguistic repertoire, Translanguaging, EFL teachers, Perspectives, Language education

## 1. Introduction

In recent years, translanguaging has made significant headway in the field of language instruction in a relatively short amount of time (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017a). First defined by Cen Williams (García & Wei, 2014), the term "translanguaging" refers to an instructional technique where bilingualism is viewed as a resource for learning, rather than a problem that must be handled (Garcia, 2012). Today, what is known as translanguaging poses a challenge to the current method of language education, which takes a monolingual approach (García & Wei, 2014).

The use of learners' first language (L1) has, nevertheless, continued to be utilized in language classes all around the world, which is a fact that is well accepted in the relevant academic literature (Hall & Cook, 2012). Empirical evidence show that learners' L1 is beneficial for helping them improve their foreign language knowledge (Galali & Cinkara, 2017; Hanakova & Metruk, 2017; Putrawan, 2019; Putrawan et al., 2019). In other words, L1 and language teaching are inseparable (Paker & Karağaç, 2015). On the other hand, recent research has shown that teachers have mixed emotions and perspectives towards

translanguaging, which presents a problem for the practice. Translanguaging techniques indeed exist in the real world (Wei & Lin, 2019), however educators hold two distinct perspectives on the practice of translanguaging (Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2018; Wang, 2019). To put it another way, there are some of them who welcome translanguaging with open arms in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, while there are others who do not.

In spite of this, monolingual pedagogy continues to be the dominant mode of instruction in Indonesia (Ariatna, 2016). Thus, teachers need to have the understanding that translanguaging practices, in which the use of different languages is permitted, might encourage EFL learners to utilize their full linguistic potentials (Nagy, 2018). Translanguaging has the potential to bridge the gap between teachers and students, between content and language, as well as between schools and their communities (Escobar, 2019; Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri, 2015).

Since it is currently unclear how Indonesian EFL teachers regard translanguaging practices, this study aims to describe their views on translanguaging-based EFL instruction for students with a wide range of linguistic backgrounds.

## 2. Literature Review

The term "translanguaging" argues that bilinguals have "one linguistic repertoire" from which they strategically choose linguistic features "to communicate successfully" (Garcia, 2012). More concisely, translanguaging is the practice of bilingual people's language use in pedagogical activities that employ bilingualism as resource (Garcia, 2012). It is via the pedagogy of translanguaging that bilingual students gain greater awareness of their metalinguistic selves and of their bilingual identities, as well as the ability to cultivate their own multilingual selves (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017b; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Günther-Van Der Meij et al., 2020).

According to the literature, translanguaging practices in secondary schools where students are predominantly bilingual have a good impact on student performance and help them acquire the content more rapidly, which ultimately results in their linguistic competency (Romanowski, 2019). Teachers are of the opinion that prior language knowledge plays an important part in the learning process. Thus, it is recommended that specific trainings be provided to teachers on how to derive benefit from interactions with their students' native languages (De Angelis, 2011).

Using translanguaging in EFL classes has proven to be a key communication tool (Kampittayakul, 2018). However, when it comes to translanguaging in EFL classrooms, Turkish EFL teachers have mixed opinions about it. Most of them state that the use of L1 assists students with low proficiency, although less than half of them avoid the use of L1 for class activities and explanations of non-content related issues. Although they strongly believe in the value of translanguaging, the policies of their institutions, as well as the expectations of their students' parents and colleagues, make it difficult for them to implement the pedagogical approach (Yuvayapan, 2019). In Norway, language teachers consider multilingualism as a potential asset. They teach L3 in Norwegian and English. They believe that varied linguistic interactions in the classroom assist students learn languages, however this is not the case (Haukås, 2016). It is also reported that translanguaging mimics grammar translation method, which restricts students' ability to learn EFL. However, some argue that teachers and students' L1 can be used in EFL classes under certain conditions and for specific objectives (Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri, 2015).

In Indonesia, it is common in EFL classrooms to use both Indonesian and English to clarify grammatical rules and motivate pupils. Even teachers utilize their native language, e.g., Minang, in order to preserve a close contact with their students (Zainil, 2019). When it comes to good communication between students and teachers, they believe that

translanguaging is an essential tool (Rahmawansyah, 2019) that they see translanguaging as having a good impact on EFL classes (Anwar, 2019).

### **3. Research Method**

This study made use of interviews as a means of data collection, according to the principles of qualitative research throughout the process (Miles et al., 2014). Eight EFL teachers from high schools in Bandar Lampung participated. Before conducting the interviews, the participants were provided with a clear explanation of the purpose of the study, along with assurances that their anonymity would be maintained at all times. They have been teaching EFL for a minimum of three years and a maximum of thirty two years, with the average amount of experience being 19 years. The data that were collected were analysed using a content analysis (Assarroudi et al., 2018; Dinçer, 2018). This method of analysis refers to the subjective interpretation of the content of text data that is accomplished through the methodical categorization process of coding and the identification of themes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005).

### **4. Results and Discussion**

During the interviews, the EFL teachers were questioned on their beliefs concerning the advantages of L1 to instruct students in their classrooms. The vast majority of them are under the impression that involving L1 in EFL classrooms is not productive, while the rest of them are of the opposite opinion. On the other hand, the vast majority of them claim that they teach English to students using both Indonesian and English, whereas only a very tiny percentage of them claim that they just use English. On the one hand, they do not believe that L1 is advantageous, but on the other hand, the majority of them employ two languages, Indonesian and English. These two pieces of evidence appear to parallel one another and lend weight to the earlier findings, which state EFL teachers have mixed opinions about translanguaging (Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2018), however, they are open to utilizing translanguaging approaches inside the classroom setting (Wang, 2019).

The results of the interviews, on the other hand, indicate that teachers do allow their students to use L1 in their EFL classrooms, as can be seen in the excerpts below (translation).

I resort to using Indonesian if I feel the need to elaborate on a notion or concept that could be misunderstood (Teacher 1).

To ensure that my students have a complete understanding of my instructions or recommendations, I restate them in Indonesian (Teacher 5).

In addition, they recommend that L1 be avoided in EFL lessons and that the amount of time spent speaking L1 be factored in. The following are excerpts from their comments (translated) to questions about their thoughts on the utilization of L1 in their EFL lessons.

My belief is that we should always speak English in English classes. If students use their L1, they can't speak English well. Students have been learning English since elementary school, but they can't speak fluently since they've never practiced (Teacher 7).

As an English teacher, we must use English so our students can listen, talk, read, and write in the language. A teacher should inspire them. Either knowingly or not, they'll copy it. It's to help them internalize English and use it inside and outside of classes. If they utilize L1, they'll be hesitant to use English (Teacher 8).

The usage of L1 is critical, however the percentage should be reduced in accordance with students' levels (Teacher 2).

As long as English is being used, it's okay to have students speak in their native language in an EFL classroom. The two languages provide a wealth of information for students (Teacher 3).

Students with lower levels of English proficiency may feel more comfortable participating in class discussions when Indonesian and English are used together (Teacher 4).

Students in English classes require L1 in order to follow along with discussions on various topics (Teacher 6).

It appears that some participants in the study have a negative view of translanguaging practices that involve the use of L1 in EFL classrooms, while others accept them. That is to say, they hold two opposing perspectives on the value of translanguaging, which is at odds with previous finding that teachers believe this pedagogical approach enhances EFL classroom instruction and student achievement (Anwar et al., 2019).

According to Zein's research however, some EFL teachers support translanguaging pedagogy while others support monolingual approaches. Those who are opposed to translanguaging, on the other hand, clearly see the value of incorporating L1 into EFL lessons (Zein, 2018). As previously found, teachers' attitudes toward language choice in language classrooms are ambivalent (Wang, 2019), in line with previous finding that teachers' attitudes toward translanguaging practices are inconsistent, with two opposing feelings (Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2018).

This recent finding also suggests that they believe that EFL teaching and learning process should result in native-like proficiency, which is still impacted by what is commonly referred to as the monolingual bias (Margana & Rasman, 2021; Rasman, 2018; Wagner, 2018). Since multilingualism and human communication have recently become more complicated (Kramsch & Hua, 2016), having native-like proficiency is not only pointless but also impossible to achieve (Rasman, 2018).

## 5. Conclusion

Teachers who participated in this study appear to have contrasting perspectives on translanguaging as pedagogy in their EFL classrooms. However, those who have the negative perceptions towards translanguaging also see that this pedagogical approach is important and they still make use of L1 in their EFL classrooms, implying that they still have belief about the monolingual pedagogy although they do not fully apply the monolingual approach.

Based on the current finding, it is clear that it is critical to recognize translanguaging as an effective tool for multiple pedagogical practices in multilingual contexts (Carstens, 2016), such as Indonesia. Through the incorporation of the L1 into various settings in which language instruction is provided, teachers should receive specialized training on how to effectively employ multilingual pedagogical strategies and practices for educational purposes (Gkaintartzi et al., 2019). They need to have the same mentality that using multiple languages by means of translanguaging practices is acceptable in order to encourage students to use all of their linguistic potential (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2018; Nagy, 2018).

Having said that, this study does have some restrictions to it. Because of the insufficient number of participants and the lack of additional data in this setting, the empirical

evidence that was presented in this study is not considered to be actual practices of translanguaging in the classrooms. However, this finding has at the very least shed light on the perspective of translanguaging held by EFL teachers in the Indonesian EFL contexts. As a result, in order to acquire a deeper comprehension of this phenomenon, it is essential to conduct additional research employing more sophisticated research designs in language classroom settings with participation from a greater number of teachers and students.

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