Teachers' Perceptions of Translanguaging in EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

Translanguaging, as a practice, involves the utilization of two or more languages at the same time for communication among bilingual and multilingual individuals. By incorporating translanguaging strategies into teaching pedagogy, teachers can bridge linguistic gaps for Foreign Language learning in the classroom. However, varying perceptions among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers can create barriers that prevent students from fully utilizing translanguaging. To gain a deeper understanding of this issue, the researchers take initiative to investigate the perceptions of Indonesian EFL teachers at a primary school in Palangka Raya, Indonesia. This qualitative research utilized semi-structured interviews to explore four EFL teachers' perspectives on this topic. The findings reveal a generally positive perception of EFL teachers who implement translanguaging strategies such as student-centeredness, collaboration, contextual clues, and two-way translation in their teaching pedagogy. The results of this research hold significance for individuals involved in the education sector, offering valuable information on how to design EFL lessons that utilize translanguaging techniques to cater to the needs of young (EFL) students.

Keywords: EFL Teachers Perceptions, Multilingualism, Translanguaging

INTRODUCTION

The concept of translanguaging has gained prominence in bilingual and multilingual contexts. Translanguaging involves using all of one's linguistic resources without strict boundaries between languages to communicate effectively. Therefore, there is fluidity and integration of

various languages in communication. Meanwhile, in terms of pedagogical strategy, translanguaging is a purposeful alternation of language in spoken and written, receptive and productive modes. It allows learners to tap into their full range of linguistic resources as if it were a single language system rather than separate entities. Accordingly, translanguaging highlights how learners draw from their first language repertories to understand the target language. As a result, translanguaging facilitates the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, and gaining knowledge through the use of two languages. In short, this shows how languages are interconnected. (Canagarajah, 2012; García & Wei, 2014; Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

The interconnected language practice is inseparable with globalization. Globalization has led to an increase in students' mobility as well as global migration that have created more cultural diversity within classrooms (Rajendram, 2019). As such, various levels of education, from primary, secondary and tertiary, have implemented translanguaging as to promote equity and diversity in languages (García & Seltzer, 2016). Consequently, this idea of multilingualism has become indispensable with the growing prevalence education in multilingual countries (Chin, 2021).

Indonesia is a typical example of multilingual country with 719 different languages (Simsons & Fenning, 2017) that are spoken across the whole archipelago. This country has three kinds of language statuses, namely national language (Indonesian Language), regional languages (Javanese, Banjarese, Dayak Ngaju and others), and foreign ones (for example, English). Regarding the language in the context of education in Indonesian state schools, all levels have Indonesian Language as a compulsory subject, and later they have English in secondary level (SMP / SMA). In private Indonesian schools, English is even taught at all levels, including Early childhood, primary, and secondary levels. In connection with the situation of multilingualism, recent studies have reported that this multilingualism has demonstrated a phenomenon of translanguaging practice where students and teachers may use Indonesian or regional languages to convey meaning and facilitate learning English. (Andriyanti, 2019; Sakhiyya & Martin-Anatias, 2020; Setiawan, 2020; Zentz, 2015).

The conduct of translanguaging in English-learning classroom occur as either spontaneous or pedagogical translanguaging (Lin, 2020). Spontaneous translanguaging is known as code-switching. It is made up of spontaneous translation that is not planned by the teacher. On the other hand, pedagogical translanguaging refers to language learning activities that have been planned. Although some view that code-switching is a type of translanguaging, some researchers disagree with it. They argue that code-switching and translanguaging should be in separate terms epistemologically. Code-switching treats language as a transition between systems, rather than language thought holistically in a multilingual perspective as in pedagogical translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

In order to gain a clearer understanding of code-switching and

translanguaging, an example is provided: In an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom, a bilingual student who speaks both English and Bahasa might engage in code-switching by saying, "Rendang is a beef dish rich in herbal flavors indigenous to the Minangkabau region of West Sumatra, *dan rendang merupakan makanan tradisional yang populer di mancanegara*," illustrating code-switching with clear boundaries between languages. In contrast, a pedagogical translanguaging practice might involve students discussing traditional cuisine in their first language (L1) before composing and presenting their discussion result in English. Such kind of practice has been shown to enhance the ability to express, explain, and justify ideas in spoken or written English (Rivera & Mazak, 2017) and reduce anxiety in learning EFL (Cenoz, Santos & Gorter, 2022; Zhou & Mann, 2021).

In addition, some studies have also reported the positive impacts of translanguaging in EFL classroom. First, Cartens (2016) evidenced the impact of translanguaging for the development of African bilinguals' literacy in English. The participants reported the benefits of this pedagogy especially its cognitive gains. It enabled them to scaffold their understanding of the concepts by creating contextual clues, such as finding relevant concepts from one language to other language and making distributions among them. Affective gains such as the collaboration and safe environment were also emphasized by the participants. Then, in the remote locations at six diverse countries, it was revealed that translanguaging caters student-centeredness and supports students to develop at their own pace and capacity (Galante, 2020). Lastly, Hamman (2018) provides evidence of two-way transition and collaboration in a Midwestern dual language classroom where flexible language practices can both bolster and establishes strategic spaces for language use.

Although it has shown positive impacts, some studies have also found translanguaging to be challenging. A study by Garcia and Lin (2016) reported that the lack of clear multilingual policy implies that schools and teachers do not have guidelines on how to support multiple community languages in their classrooms through translanguaging. Additionally, Palmer and Martínez (2013) recorded that teachers feel that interpreting the second or target language into their first language is not practical and is time-consuming given the limited learning time. Overall, it can be said that the relevance of translanguaging practices in the multilingual educational world is the reason why many researchers, as mentioned above, choose translanguaging as the topic of their research.

Despite the growing popularity of translanguaging in the international context, the research on translanguaging is still in its infancy in Indonesia (Zein, 2020). Some studies are still relatively new, such as Khairunnisa and Lukmana (2020), who examined Indonesian primary students' multilingual practices involving English and Sundanese in their EFL classrooms; Rahmawansyah (2019) and Sahib (2019), who explored

the full linguistic repertoires of secondary students using Indonesian and English; and the research conducted on university EFL teachers and students' perspectives on translanguaging practices using Indonesian, local languages, and English in the classroom (Saputra 2020; Santoso 2020; Saputra & Akib 2018; Rerung 2017).

From the studies mentioned, it is unfortunate that little is known about teachers' perceptions of translanguaging, especially at the primary level, where English is an elective subject in many primary schools and is being prepared to become a mandatory subject for third-grade students in primary schools by 2027 (*Permendikbudristek* No. 12/2024). Observing and discussing the process of translanguaging at the primary level is certainly interesting because those young learners are just being exposed to English as a Foreign Language. Ironically, only a few teachers have been informed about or received training regarding translanguaging, even though it is a common practice in multilingual classrooms. In fact, the teachers might even unknowingly practice it in the classroom without having knowledge about it.

Based on the background above, this study aims to explore Indonesian primary school EFL teachers' perceptions of translanguaging and their strategies in conducting translanguaging in the classroom.

METHOD

This research utilized qualitative research methodology as it allows the researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding of the practices and perceptions of translanguaging in the EFL classroom. The participants of this study were four EFL teachers who are working at a private primary school in Palangka Raya. The researchers employed a purposive sampling technique to select the participants, with the criteria being that they practice translanguaging in EFL teaching and are willing to be interviewed. The instrument used in this research was a semi-structured interview, which was designed to gather information on the EFL teachers' practice of translanguaging and their perceptions of translanguaging in the classroom. The collected data was then analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved identifying and exploring various themes within the transcriptions. This approach allowed the researchers to address the research objective and provide explanations for the observed phenomena.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
1. Findings

Based on the interview sessions with the four participants in this study, the findings revealed that all of the participants were in agreement

that they would generally not mind if their students use their L1 in the English classroom. The participants expressed that primarily for discussion among students, the usage of L1, mainly the Indonesian language in this context is acceptable. The participants' responses in the interview session towards this question are as followed:

> Teacher 1: "I'm totally okay If they establish a conversation on a topic in *Bahasa Indonesia* before they work on their English assignment.."

> Teacher 2: I'm fine with it. I think this is important, the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* to help students to understand more the context of a subject. Once they have grasped the information and context, they will find it easier to work on their English tasks by transferring the information they have understood into English…"

> Teacher 3: "I don't see any problem with using regional languages or *Bahasa Indonesia* in an English class. Their primary language will enable them to interact and comprehend information better, but only to some extent. However, in some cases, I encourage the use of full English…"

> Teacher 4: "Of course, it's impossible to ensure that everyone in the class speaks English well, so sometimes I explain the meaning of an English text in Indonesian Language, and students who speak English well help their peers who do not understand certain information by explaining it in Indonesian Language. We help each other and make sure the class is comfortable and does not give pressure to the students…."

With regards to the examples of EFL translanguaging practice, the participants were willing to tell how they implemented it and their strategies for it.

> Teacher 1: "I often do this every time I explain the meaning of a word. As an example, I used the word "courage" and showed them some pictures that define the word "courage", like pictures of firefighters rescuing people from burning buildings, a soldier saving a civilian in a war zone, and a person standing up to a bully. After that, I ask students the meaning of "courage" and how they apply "courage" in a practical scenario. I allow them to use Indonesian Language. I remember that one student said "*arti courage adalah keberanian, dan kita bisa menunjukkannya dengan berani mengakui kesalahan kita kepada orang lain.*" and the other student said "*keberanian itu ketika saya melawan rasa takut ketinggian dengan memberanikan diri memanjat pohon.*" From my students' responses, I know that they can comprehend and respond accurately when they are given

relevant contexts. presentations. I asked them to work in groups, discuss, and brainstorm ideas in Indonesian. For their final presentation, I requested them to present in English."

Teacher 3: "I work in a lower primary class. So, to give you context, the students listened to a story book that I read, that was *Lyssie the Butterfly*. Then, I asked them to draw a favorite part of the book on the piece of paper… I invited the students to share about that with the person sitting next to them in Indonesian language… After that, I asked them to share what they learned or their favorite parts in English to the whole class."

Teacher 4: "I asked my students to tell a story about their holiday activities to me in their native language, and then they retold the story with the rest of us in the class…They seemed to enjoy sharing their experiences."

However, in relation to the use of the first language (L1) in classroom activities like group presentations or written tasks, some participants have voiced their concern regarding students' tendency to rely on L1 instead of the target language, which is English. The participants have expressed frustration over the dominance of L1 in English classrooms, where the major emphasis should be on the English language. Most of the participants usually forbid their students from using L1 in group presentations or written assignments and instruct them to try to use the English language for such tasks.

Teacher 1: "So basically I wanted my students to do a presentation about a topic in group…Some of them want to present it in *Bahasa Indonesia* but of course, I said "No" to them firmly" … They often just straight away said "Teacher, we can't speak English at all" which is frustrating…"

Teacher 2: "I asked them to describe about a family member, as we learned about Descriptive Text. Very simple … But then, they ask me whether they can write the answers in Bahasa Language… It is very upsetting actually, and I ended up feeling annoyed…"

Teacher 3: "As English teacher, of course I expect them to be able to use English, at least in my class… sometimes I can't help feeling frustrated when I keep on being asked about whether they can use Bahasa Indonesia only…"

The findings from the interview sessions with four teachers reveal a general consensus that using the first language (L1), specifically Indonesian, is acceptable for certain activities in the English classroom, such as student discussions and initial comprehension tasks. Teacher 1 and Teacher 2

emphasized that L1 helps students understand context and prepare for English assignments. Teacher 3 saw no issue with limited L1 use to aid understanding but encouraged full English use at times, while Teacher 4 highlighted that L1 fosters a comfortable learning environment. Examples of translanguaging included using L1 to promote student-centeredness, collaboration, contextual clues, and two-way translation explain vocabulary, allowing discussions in L1 before presenting in English, and facilitating storytelling in both languages. However, concerns were raised about students' over-reliance on L1 during group presentations and written tasks. All teachers expressed frustration with students' reluctance to use English in these contexts, stressing the need to prioritize English for such assignments. The discussion of these findings will be consulted with theory and relevant previous research in the next section.

2. Discussion

This research explores the perceptions and practices of Indonesian EFL teachers regarding translanguaging in the classroom. Translanguaging, as a pedagogical strategy, allows students to utilize their full linguistic repertoire to enhance learning. This discussion will analyze the findings in light of student-centeredness, collaboration, contextual clues, and two-way translation, comparing them with previous research and theoretical perspectives.

a. Student-Centeredness

The present research reveals that Indonesian EFL teachers generally support student-centered approaches facilitated by translanguaging. They acknowledge the value of using students' first language (L1), mainly Indonesian, to help learners understand content and prepare for English assignments. This practice is seen as fostering a comfortable and supportive environment, encouraging students to participate actively in discussions and activities.

This finding resonates with previous studies that highlight the importance of student-centeredness in language learning (Galante, 2020). For instance, Galante (2020) emphasized that translanguaging can create inclusive and supportive learning environments by allowing students to learn at their own pace and capacity, which enhances their language proficiency.

b. Collaboration

Collaboration among students was another highlighted benefit of translanguaging practices in the study. Teachers reported that students often help each other by translating concepts and supporting peers who struggle with English. This collaborative aspect is essential for creating a supportive classroom community where students feel comfortable practicing their language skills without fear of making mistakes.

This collaborative environment aligns with previous research that

suggests translanguaging supports peer learning and collaboration (Hamman, 2018). Hamman (2018) found that flexible language practices, such as translanguaging, establish strategic spaces for language use that promote collaboration among students.

c. Contextual Clues

The teachers who were the participants in the research used translanguaging to provide contextual clues, which helped students understand new vocabulary and concepts. For example, one teacher explained the meaning of "courage" in Indonesian contextually before students discussed examples in English. This approach allows students to connect new concepts with their existing knowledge, thereby enhancing comprehension and retention.

This finding is consistent with the theoretical underpinning of translanguaging, which posits that language learning is more effective when it is situated in meaningful contexts (Canagarajah, 2012; García & Wei, 2014). Providing contextual clues through translanguaging helps students make sense of abstract concepts and apply them in different contexts.

d. Two-Way Translation

The research also highlighted two-way translation practices where students engage in translating between Indonesian and English to aid their understanding. This reciprocal translation helps students develop their bilingual skills and deepen their understanding of both languages.

This finding supports previous research that advocates for translanguaging as a tool for two-way translation (Rivera & Mazak, 2017). Rivera and Mazak (2017) found that translanguaging practices, such as two-way translation, enable students to express, explain, and justify their ideas effectively in both spoken and written English.

e. Teachers' Perception

The teachers' perception of translanguaging in the research was generally positive, emphasizing its benefits in facilitating learning and creating an inclusive classroom environment. However, some concerns were raised about students' over-reliance on Indonesian in English-focused tasks, such as group presentations and written assignments. Teachers expressed frustration when students preferred using Indonesian instead of English, which they perceived as hindering English language development. The frustration articulated by the teachers regarding students' reluctance to use English in more structured activities reflects a broader concern in EFL pedagogy about ensuring that students move beyond comfort zones and actively engage in using the target language.

This perception aligns with previous studies that have identified challenges associated with translanguaging, such as students' dependency on L1 and teachers' concerns about maintaining a balance between

languages (García & Lin, 2016; Palmer & Martínez, 2013).

Overall, the findings of this research are consistent with previous research that has demonstrated the benefits of translanguaging in supporting student-centered learning, collaboration, contextual clues, and two-way translation (Galante, 2020; Hamman, 2018; Rivera & Mazak, 2017). However, practical challenges, as identified in this research and others, suggest the need for clearer policies and guidelines to support teachers in implementing translanguaging effectively.

CONCLUSION

The present research has investigated teachers' perceptions towards the use of their students' L1 in teaching English in the primary school, contributing valuable insights into the field of translanguaging. The findings reveal that teachers generally perceive their students' L1 as a beneficial tool for facilitating understanding and fostering peer discussions when teaching English. It demonstrates that while translanguaging can effectively support student-centeredness, collaboration, contextual clues, and two-way translation in the EFL classroom. However, significant concerns were also expressed regarding the potential overreliance on L1, particularly in formal classroom activities such as presentations and written tasks. This tension underscores a critical pedagogical challenge: balancing the use of L1 as a scaffolding tool while ensuring adequate immersion in the target language to develop English proficiency. The frustration voiced by teachers over students' reluctance to use English in structured tasks reflects a broader concern in EFL pedagogy about encouraging students to move beyond their comfort zones and actively engage with the target language. While translanguaging practices are beneficial for initial comprehension and support, there is a clear need for strategies that progressively build students' confidence and ability to communicate in English, especially in contexts where language proficiency is assessed. For suggestion, future research should focus on developing practical strategies and guidelines for implementing translanguaging in diverse educational contexts to maximize its benefits while mitigating potential challenges in multilingual educational settings.

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