



Between Flexibility and Language Exposure: Translanguaging and Language Immersion Perceptions in University English Classrooms

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Abstract: *In multilingual English classrooms, the use of translanguaging has grown into a pedagogical issue, particularly in balancing comprehension of learners and target language exposure. This study aims to explore lecturers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging and language immersion as pedagogical tools in the English language learning process. A qualitative case study design was employed. Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with lecturers and undergraduate students in the English Education Department of IAIN Parepare, Indonesia, and analyzed thematically. The findings show that both lecturers and students perceive translanguaging and language immersion as complementary instructional practices. Translanguaging was viewed as facilitating comprehension, promoting classroom inclusion, and reducing learners' anxiety by lowering the affective filter, as proposed in Krashen's theory, by allowing the use of Bahasa Indonesia and local languages. In contrast, language immersion was perceived as enhancing students' fluency, confidence, and authentic use of English through sustained exposure and communicative practice. However, participants emphasized that immersion is most effective when implemented flexibly and supported by translanguaging, particularly for learners with diverse proficiency levels. The study highlights the importance of integrating flexibility and language exposure to support English language learning in multilingual higher education contexts.*

Keywords: *English Language Learning, Language Immersion, Multilingual EFL Context, Translanguaging*

INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging and immersion are pivotal pedagogical strategies in multilingual education, particularly in English language learning contexts. Translanguaging involves the dynamic use of multiple languages by bilingual or multilingual speakers within a single conversation or educational setting (García & Wei, 2014), facilitating deeper understanding and meaning-making. Immersion, conversely, entails teaching academic content in a target language, promoting language acquisition through contextual learning (Snow & Genesee, 1989).

In multilingual classrooms, translanguaging serves as a bridge between students' native languages and the target language, enhancing comprehension and participation. It allows learners to leverage their entire linguistic repertoire, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Research indicates that translanguaging can improve academic engagement and English language acquisition by validating students' linguistic identities and promoting cognitive flexibility (Akbar & Taqi, 2020; Almashour, 2024; Chaika, 2023).

Immersion programs, such as those implemented in Canadian French immersion classrooms, have demonstrated success in promoting bilingualism. However, the integration of translanguaging within these programs remains a topic of debate. Some educators advocate for strict separation of languages to maximize immersion benefits, while others support strategic translanguaging to aid comprehension and learning. Ballinger discuss the extent to which translanguaging can be appropriately incorporated into immersion classrooms, highlighting the need for a balanced approach (Ballinger et al., 2017).

Implementing translanguaging and immersion practices in such a setting requires careful consideration related to linguistic backgrounds of students and the sociocultural context. Strategic use of students' first languages can facilitate English acquisition, but it is essential to balance this with sufficient exposure to the target language. Educators must be equipped with appropriate training to effectively integrate these practices, ensuring they enhance rather than hinder language development (Alasmari et al., 2022; Fuster & Bardel, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024; Liando et al., 2023).

The exploration of translanguaging and immersion as pedagogical tools in English education is essential for several key reasons, particularly in multilingual and diverse educational contexts such as addressing multilingual realities in education, improving English language acquisition, fostering cognitive and sociocultural benefits, informing effective pedagogical practices, adapting to local educational contexts, contributing to policy development, addressing equity and accessibility (Fuster, 2024; Leonet & Saragueta, 2024; Tan, 2024; Wei, 2018). However, despite the growing body of research on these approaches, limited studies have examined their combined implementation in specific multilingual contexts such as Indonesia, where sociolinguistic and educational dynamics may differ significantly. Furthermore, existing research tends to focus on either translanguaging or immersion in isolation, leaving a gap in understanding how these strategies interact in real classroom settings. By addressing this gap, the present study aims to contribute to the development of more contextually relevant and inclusive English language teaching practices.

Therefore, this study aims to explore lecturers' and students' perceptions of the use of translanguaging and language immersion in the English language learning process at the English Education Department of IAIN Parepare. Specifically, this article discusses lecturers' and students' views on the pedagogical roles of translanguaging, their perceptions of immersion practices in supporting English proficiency, and how both

approaches are understood in relation to balancing flexibility and exposure in multilingual EFL classrooms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translanguaging is a dynamic and multifaceted approach to language use that emphasizes the fluid movement between languages in communication and learning contexts. It allows individuals, particularly multilingual speakers, to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning and engage in effective communication. This concept emerged in the 1980s, primarily through the work of Cen Williams and his colleagues in Wales, who investigated bilingual education strategies involving Welsh and English. The term "translanguaging" itself was popularized by Colin Baker, translating the Welsh term "trawsieithu" into English (García & Lin, 2016).

The conscious process by which bilingual or multilingual individuals combine languages to communicate effectively includes productive skills (speaking and writing) and receptive skills (reading and listening) to facilitate understanding and knowledge acquisition (García & Wei, 2018). Translanguaging positions language use as a dynamic and unified system rather than as separate, bounded codes, allowing learners to maximize their cognitive and linguistic resources in the learning process.

Research shows translanguaging helps students better understand complex academic content by connecting new information to their existing linguistic knowledge. It promotes clearer communication, enhances student engagement, fosters cross-language skills, and supports confidence in using multiple languages simultaneously. This approach shifts away from monolingual teaching paradigms towards valuing all languages as interrelated and complementary resources (Im, 2023; Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024).

Another study highlight the role of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms as a natural, beneficial practice that reduces language anxiety and affirms cultural identities of students, making classrooms more inclusive and resource-rich learning environments. It is considered a valuable pedagogical strategy to improve learning outcomes for bilingual and multilingual learners by leveraging their full linguistic potential (Ramadhan et al., 2022).

These are several key benefits on translanguaging supported by research include reducing language anxiety among learners, increasing student participation and engagement, and fostering a deeper understanding of academic content by allowing students to access their full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging helps multilingual learners comprehend and communicate complex subject matter more effectively, expanding their language proficiency by connecting their home languages with the target language, such as English (Ulum, 2024).

Furthermore, translanguaging promotes confidence and inclusion by valuing home languages of learners, boosting self-esteem and motivation in the classroom. It supports the development of metalinguistic awareness, enabling

students to better understand language structures and engage in higher-order thinking such as analysis and summarization. Additionally, it helps maintain and develop students' home language skills, reinforcing their cultural and linguistic identities (Efendi & Syafryadin, 2024); Kuncoroningtyas et al., 2025).

In addition, translanguaging can improve teaching quality in multilingual classrooms by fostering positive classroom climates and effective learning environments. It is seen as a natural and valuable pedagogical approach that aligns with students' spontaneous language use and leverages their existing linguistic skills for better academic outcomes. This body of research reinforces translanguaging as a powerful tool in bilingual and multilingual education to enhance both language learning and subject comprehension (Decristan et al., 2024).

While translanguaging emphasizes the flexible use of learners' full linguistic repertoire, immersion focuses on sustained exposure to the target language as the primary medium of instruction. Together, these approaches can be viewed as complementary pedagogical strategies, balancing the use of learners' existing linguistic resources with the development of target language proficiency.

Language Immersion is an approach used in language learning where the target language is applied as the main medium in learning process. In bilingual education, this approach was first developed through immersion program in Canada, where students learnt several subjects in their second language intensively. Unlike an English-only policy, language immersion emphasizes learning through language, not only target language exclusively.

As educational approach where learners are placed in a context where the target language is used as the medium for instruction across subjects, scientific research shows that language immersion significantly enhances second language acquisition by improving listening skills, cultural fluency, and motivation. It also stimulates cognitive benefits such as increased neuroplasticity, greater cognitive flexibility, and enhanced metalinguistic awareness, which refers to a better understanding of how language works in general (Sanders, 2023).

Studies demonstrate that students in immersion programs often perform as well as or better than their non-immersion peers academically, including in reading and math. Immersion learners develop skills in both the target and their first language without long-term negative effects on either. Furthermore, immersion education can lead to faster and more efficient attentional and executive function in children, which are cognitive processes important for learning and problem-solving (Rahmanu & Molnár, 2024).

However, research also notes some challenges, such as initial lags in certain language-specific skills (e.g., spelling and punctuation in the second language) which usually disappear with increased exposure. Additionally, immersion students may not always reach native-like proficiency in speaking

and writing, especially in terms of grammar, vocabulary specificity, and sociolinguistic appropriateness. The success of immersion depends on factors like learner characteristics, the learning environment, and the integration of complementary instructional methods.

Overall, language immersion is supported by extensive research for its positive effects on bilingual proficiency, cognitive development, and academic achievement, particularly when well-implemented with attention to learner needs and balanced instruction (Ballinger et al., 2017; Baca, 2023; Jafarova Ilqar, 2025)

RESEARCH METHOD

This study applied a single case study design to explore lecturers' and students' perceptions of translanguaging and language immersion in EFL classroom. A case study approach was selected to conduct an in-depth examination of pedagogical practices and participant perspectives within a specific multilingual EFL context (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at the English Education Department of IAIN Parepare. Participants consisted of seven English lecturers and 30 undergraduate students from different semesters who had direct experience with translanguaging and immersion practices in their classrooms. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who were considered information-rich and relevant to the research focus. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Interviews were used to capture participants' perceptions and experiences, while observations were conducted to document actual classroom language practices and interactions. The use of multiple data sources enabled data triangulation and strengthened the validity of the findings (Cresswell & Poth, 2016).

Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, involving data familiarization, coding, and theme development. The analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns related to translanguaging, immersion, pedagogical flexibility, and language exposure (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Trustworthiness was enhanced through triangulation and member checking to ensure the credibility of the interpretations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that both lecturers and students perceived translanguaging and language immersion as complementary pedagogical practices rather than competing approaches. Translanguaging was primarily viewed as a strategy to support comprehension, inclusion, and emotional comfort, while immersion was associated with enhanced fluency, confidence, and authentic language use. These perceptions highlight the importance of pedagogical flexibility in multilingual English classrooms.

1. Translanguaging as a tool for comprehension and classroom inclusion

Lecturers and students consistently perceived translanguaging as an effective tool for facilitating comprehension, particularly when dealing with

complex linguistic concepts such as grammar, linguistics, and abstract terminology. Classroom observations indicate that lecturers frequently shifted to Bahasa Indonesia to clarify meaning and ensure student understanding. For instance, one lecturer stated, “*Do you get my point? Okay, I will translate it into Indonesian*” (Lecturer 1, observation).

This practice was further confirmed during the interview, where the same lecturer explained, “*When I ask whether students understand and they remain silent, I translate my explanation into Indonesian. I believe some understand English, but others do not*” (Lecturer 1, interview). Similarly, another lecturer was observed using translanguaging strategies, stating, “*When we take the advantages—ketika kita mengambil keuntungan—pahamkan?*” (Lecturer 2, observation).

From the students’ perspective, translanguaging was also perceived as supportive. One student noted, “*If it is still difficult to understand, the lecturer explains it again in Indonesian*” (Student 12, interview), while another added, “*Lecturers allow us to use Indonesian or local languages during discussions, especially when we cannot express ideas in English*” (Student 20, interview).

These findings suggest that translanguaging functions as a form of pedagogical scaffolding, enabling learners to connect prior linguistic knowledge with new input. This aligns with García and Li Wei’s (2014) conception of translanguaging as a dynamic meaning-making process in which multilingual speakers mobilize their full linguistic repertoires (Mateus, 2014). From a sociocultural perspective, translanguaging mediates learning by providing cognitive support within learners’ Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Rather than hindering English acquisition, translanguaging enabled learners to engage more deeply with content and sustain classroom interaction (Wei & García, 2022).

However, a closer analysis reveals an implicit assumption shared by both lecturers and students that translanguaging was often framed as necessary because students were perceived as lacking sufficient English proficiency. This deficit-oriented view positions the first language as a compensatory tool rather than a legitimate cognitive resource. Contemporary translanguaging scholarship challenges this assumption, arguing that multilingual practices reflect linguistic agility and metalinguistic awareness, not linguistic deficiency (Wei, 2018).

Importantly, the data demonstrate that translanguaging also served an inclusive function. By allowing students to draw on Indonesian and local languages, lecturers validated students’ linguistic identities and encouraged participation from learners who might otherwise remain silent. This supports Lin’s argument that translanguaging disrupts linguistic hierarchies and promotes interactional equity in multilingual classrooms (Lin, 2013).

2. Affective dimensions: translanguaging, anxiety reduction, and participation

The participants regularly recognize translanguaging can reduce anxiety of students and improve their participation in learning process. Classroom observation indicated that students get involved when the the lecturer let them express their opinion by using Bahasa Indonesia. For example, a lecturer said *“You may use Indonesian if you are shy. Do not be shy. Use Indonesian then”* (Lecturer 3, observation)

The action was clarified in the interview when the lecturer mentioned, *“Students get anxiety due to fear of being chosen. But when we give an opportunity to express their feelings by using Indonesian, their participation increased”* (Lecturer 3, interview)

From students’ point of view, translanguaging give them opportunity to reduce anxiety and improve participation. One student stated *“When I was allowed to speak Indonesian, I became less tense and less afraid. This made me more confident in expressing my opinion”* (Student 6, interview), while other student mentioned *“I am more courageous in speaking if I am allowed to use Indonesian, because I am not afraid of making mistakes”* (Student 9, interview)

Students overwhelmingly perceived translanguaging as reducing anxiety and increasing classroom comfort. This perception supports Krashen’s (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that low anxiety and positive emotional states facilitate language acquisition. When students were permitted to express ideas using familiar languages, they reported feeling more confident and willing to participate.

Crucially, students did not perceive translanguaging as a substitute for English learning. Instead, they viewed it as a supportive bridge that enabled them to transition toward English use. This finding complicates monolingual assumptions that first-language use discourages target language production and suggests that emotional safety is a prerequisite for meaningful engagement in English communication.

3. Language immersion as exposure, challenge, and fluency development

Language immersion was primarily associated with increased fluency, confidence, and authentic language use. Both lecturers and students perceived immersion as essential for internalizing English through sustained exposure and practice. For instance, a lecturer mentioned in learning process *“English, please! Try to speak English all day long!”* (Lecturer 4, observation)

The practice then confirmed in the interview by the lecturer, *“Students need to get use to speak English to activate their skills”*(Lecturer 4, interview). Other lecturer added that *“The more often you use English, the easier it will be for your brain to process information and the more confident you will be”* (Lecturer 5, interview).

From students' perspectives, immersion allows them to practice their English skills. One student stated *"I think immersion is great for practicing speaking and thinking skills in English. It can be challenging and nerve-racking at first, but over time, you get used to it"* (Student 17, interview). Another student mentioned that *"I think immersion learning is effective because it forces us to get used to thinking and speaking directly in English, like a native speaker"* (Student 19, interview)

Immersion-oriented activities encouraged learners to think in English, recall vocabulary, and produce spontaneous speech as key components of communicative competence. These perceptions align with theories of second language acquisition that emphasize the role of input and output. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis underscores the importance of comprehensible exposure, while Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis highlights the role of pushed output in developing fluency and accuracy. Immersion practices in this study appeared to facilitate both processes, particularly when conducted in collaborative and supportive classroom environments.

Nevertheless, students also reported stress and cognitive overload when immersion was implemented rigidly or without sufficient support. This finding echoes Macaro's critique of strict English-only policies, which may suppress participation and increase anxiety, especially among lower-proficiency learners (Macaro, 2009). The data suggest that immersion is most effective when applied gradually, aligned with learners' proficiency levels, and supplemented by strategic translanguaging.

4. Translanguaging and immersion as a pedagogical continuum

A central insight of this study is that participants perceived translanguaging and immersion as complementary rather than competing strategies. As mentioned by a lecturer *"Both, translanguaging and immersion support each other"* (Lecturer 4, interview). On the other hand, a student stated *"Both are good to use, the important thing is both make you more skilled at speaking English"* (Students 17, interview).

Translanguaging was associated with understanding and inclusion, while immersion was linked to language use and confidence. This perception reflects a pragmatic, experience-based pedagogy rather than an explicitly theoretical stance. From a theoretical perspective, this relationship can be conceptualized as a pedagogical continuum rather than a binary opposition. Translanguaging strengthens schema activation, conceptual processing, and emotional safety, while immersion promotes communicative output and fluency development. Learners move fluidly along this continuum depending on task demands, proficiency levels, and affective conditions.

This finding supports García and Lin's (2017) argument that effective multilingual pedagogy integrates translanguaging for comprehension with immersion for production (García & Lin, 2017). It also challenges simplistic categorizations that reduce translanguaging to "input" and immersion to "output," overlooking their overlapping pedagogical functions.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the roles of translanguaging and language immersion in multilingual English classrooms and found that both lecturers and students perceived these approaches as complementary rather than competing pedagogical strategies. Translanguaging was primarily associated with facilitating comprehension, reducing anxiety, and promoting classroom inclusion, while immersion was linked to increased fluency, confidence, and authentic language use. These findings highlight the importance of pedagogical flexibility, where teachers dynamically adjust language practices to support both understanding and language development.

From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the growing body of research on translanguaging by reinforcing its role not only as a communicative strategy but also as a pedagogical resource that supports cognitive, affective, and sociocultural dimensions of learning. By conceptualizing translanguaging and immersion as a pedagogical continuum rather than a binary opposition, this study extends current discussions in multilingual education and aligns with frameworks proposed by Ofelia García and Angel Lin (García & Lin, 2017). The findings suggest that effective English language teaching in multilingual contexts requires an integration of learners' full linguistic repertoires with structured exposure to the target language.

Practically, the findings offer important implications for EFL lecturers, curriculum designers, and teacher educators, particularly in multilingual contexts such as Indonesia. Rather than enforcing rigid English-only policies, educators are encouraged to adopt flexible and responsive language practices that strategically incorporate translanguaging to support comprehension and emotional engagement, while also implementing immersion to develop fluency and communicative competence. This balanced approach can create more inclusive and effective learning environments that recognize students' linguistic diversity as an asset rather than a limitation.

However, this study is not without limitations. It was conducted within a single institutional context with a relatively limited number of participants, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. In addition, as a qualitative study, the results are based on participants' perceptions and observed classroom practices, which may not fully capture long-term learning outcomes or measurable proficiency gains.

Future research could expand this study by involving multiple institutions and more diverse participant groups to enhance generalizability. Further studies may also employ mixed-method or experimental designs to examine the long-term impact of integrating translanguaging and immersion on students' language proficiency, academic achievement, and affective development. Additionally, investigating how these pedagogical strategies are implemented across different proficiency levels and educational settings would provide deeper insights into their effectiveness and adaptability.

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