



## Reframing EFL Classrooms: Students' Perspectives on Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Strategy in Indonesian Senior High School

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – Translanguaging has emerged as a powerful pedagogical approach in multilingual EFL classrooms, particularly in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. This study aimed to investigate the perspectives of tenth-grade students at SMA Gajah Mada Bandar Lampung regarding the implementation of translanguaging strategies in their English classes.

**Methodology** – This research employed a qualitative case study design. A purposive sampling technique was used to select 30 students as participants. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and a structured questionnaire. The collected data were analysed thematically to identify patterns in students' responses and classroom practices.

**Findings** – The results revealed that students frequently used their first language (L1) to reduce anxiety and enhance comprehension, particularly when facing difficulties with English (L2). Most students expressed positive attitudes toward translanguaging, noting that integrating L1 alongside L2 helped them engage more actively, better understand instructions, and participate with greater confidence. However, a minority of students were concerned about potential overdependence on L1. Teachers' acknowledgment of L1 use also influenced students' comfort and willingness to participate. These findings indicate that translanguaging can support learners' emotional, cognitive, and linguistic development when applied strategically.

**Novelty** – This study provides fresh insights into the role of translanguaging not only as a tool for facilitating language acquisition but also as a means of reducing classroom anxiety. It highlights the importance of teachers' attitudes in shaping effective and inclusive classroom practices.

**Significance** – The findings are valuable for EFL educators, curriculum developers, and policy-makers who aim to design inclusive, supportive, and culturally responsive language learning environments in multilingual contexts.

**Keywords:** Classroom anxiety; EFL students; Language pedagogy; Multilingual classroom; Student perceptions; Translanguaging practices

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## 1. Introduction

Until the late 1960s, the use of a learner's first language (L1) in acquiring a second language (L2) was largely viewed as a hindrance rather than a support system for language development (Cheng, 2023; Khusna & Aliyah, 2021). However, in today's increasingly multilingual world, traditional understandings of language acquisition are being challenged. Diversity is no longer seen as a barrier but as a potential resource for learning (Tai et al., 2024). This shift in perspective has encouraged educators and researchers to explore how a learner's full linguistic repertoire can be utilized in the classroom. One such approach is translanguaging, a pedagogical strategy that enables students to use all their language resources to construct meaning and support learning (Shuai, 2025; Ulum, 2024).

Translanguaging practices include the use of L1 and L2 interchangeably to aid comprehension, reduce anxiety, and promote deeper engagement in classroom learning (Nguyen & Tran, 2025). For instance, students may read or listen to material in one language and express their understanding in another. This strategy allows learners to scaffold their weaker language through support from their dominant language and is especially effective in multicultural classrooms. As Liando et al. (2023) argue, translanguaging is not only a communicative tool but also a pedagogical method that values students' multilingual and multicultural identities, empowering them as language learners.

Despite the growing of literature supporting translanguaging, many schools remain resistant to its implementation, adhering instead to monolingual teaching approaches (Triastuti et al., 2023). In practice, target-language-only policies persist in many EFL classrooms, even though evidence suggests that such restrictive methods may hinder students' full engagement and comprehension. According to (Puspitasari & Sugirin, 2024), this reluctance may be attributed to institutional norms and a lack of awareness of the cognitive and affective benefits translanguaging offers. This issue is especially relevant in Indonesia, which stated by Witari & Sukanto (2023) many classrooms are linguistically diverse, yet monolingual practices dominate instructional methods.

In the Indonesian context, bilingualism and multilingualism are common, particularly in urban schools where students often speak local languages at home while learning national and foreign languages in school (Dharmawan et al., 2020; Putra & Tustiawati, 2024). However, the study from Kristanti & Pei (2024) on translanguaging has focused on early childhood education in Indonesian & Chinese contexts, Among 70 university students and several lecturers, they found that

translanguaging acts as a bridge between students' linguistic backgrounds and English learning typically beyond Western or early-childhood contexts. Indonesian students, in particular, benefited from translanguaging in higher education settings. This study aims to address that gap by examining Indonesian senior high school students' perspectives on translanguaging in their English classes. Understanding student attitudes is essential, as these perceptions can influence classroom dynamics, language learning outcomes, and the effectiveness of teaching practices.

Furthermore, while translanguaging is occasionally practiced informally by teachers and students, it is rarely acknowledged explicitly as part of instructional strategy. Educators may use both English and local languages to convey complex ideas, yet the value of such practices remains underexplored. Students themselves may revert to L1 for comfort or clarity during learning, particularly when experiencing language anxiety or struggling with comprehension. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate whether students perceive translanguaging as helpful or hindering in their English language development. By highlighting their voices, this study seeks to illuminate the practical and pedagogical implications of translanguaging in Indonesian EFL settings.

The findings of this study are expected to offer valuable insights into how translanguaging affects students' participation, comprehension, and confidence in English classrooms. These insights will contribute not only to local educational practices but also to the broader discourse on multilingual pedagogy, particularly in under-researched Southeast Asian contexts. Ultimately, the research underscores the importance of responsive, inclusive teaching practices that leverage students' linguistic strengths rather than limit them.

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Research Design**

This research adopted a qualitative case study design to explore students' perspectives toward translanguaging strategies used in EFL classrooms. The study employed a combination of questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations as its primary instruments for data collection. While observations allowed for direct examination of how translanguaging occurred in real-time classroom activities, questionnaires and interviews offered reflective insight into students' attitudes and preferences. These triangulated methods ensured a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study, providing both breadth and depth in data collection.

### **2.2. Setting and Participants**

The research was conducted at SMA Gajah Mada Bandar Lampung, specifically in class X1. The school is located at Jl. Sukarno Hatta No.1, Tanjung Senang, Bandar Lampung. The researcher collaborated with an English teacher from the school who is fluent in both Indonesian and English. The teacher's dual-language ability enabled natural integration of translanguaging practices during instruction. A total of 43 tenth-grade students participated in the questionnaire, with five students selected for follow-up interviews. Participants were selected from diverse linguistic and regional backgrounds, offering a varied sample for the study. The number of participants represents approximately 30% of the class X student population. This site was chosen

due to the researcher's prior engagement during the teaching practicum, which revealed a dynamic multilingual classroom environment conducive to studying translanguaging strategies.

### **2.3. Data Collection**

Data collection involved three instruments: a questionnaire, interviews, and classroom observations. The questionnaire was adapted from Moody et al. (2019) and consisted of 29 Likert-type items divided into three thematic sections. The first section examined students' use of translanguaging, the second explored their attitudes toward translanguaging, and the third focused on their actual translanguaging practices in the classroom. This structure enabled a holistic investigation of the students' engagement with translanguaging strategies. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted to provide in-depth insight into students' personal experiences, while classroom observations documented real-time interactions between students and the teacher during English lessons. These multiple sources of data allowed for comprehensive analysis and cross-validation of findings.

### **2.4. Data Analysis**

#### *2.4.1. Questionnaire Analysis*

The questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Although Likert-scale questions allowed for basic quantitative interpretation, the inclusion of open-ended questions added a qualitative dimension. The combination of question types helped identify recurring patterns in students' responses and provided a more nuanced understanding of their perspectives.

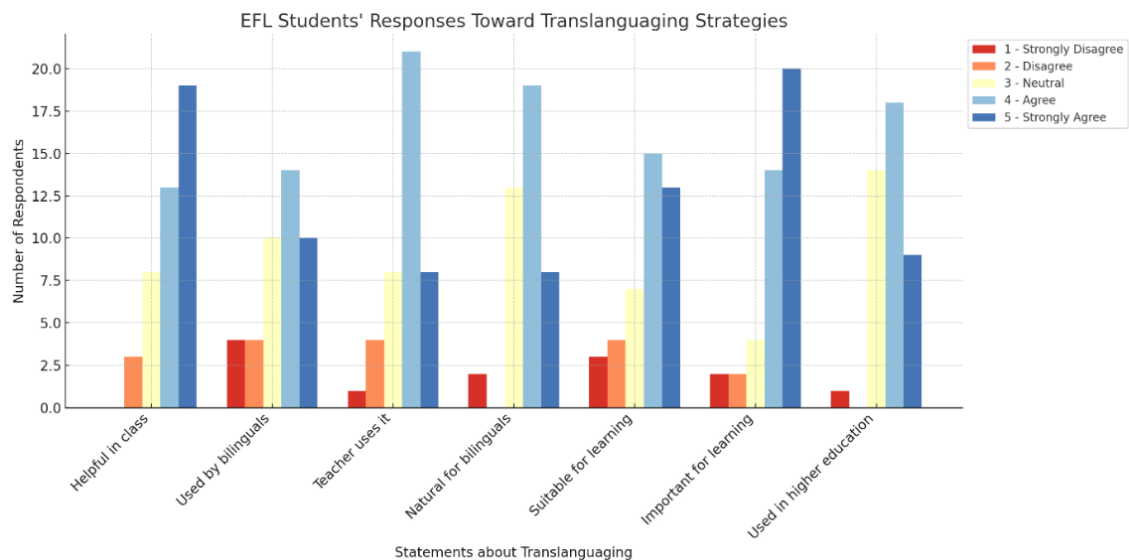
#### *2.4.2. Interview Analysis*

Interviews were transcribed and analysed thematically to capture the depth of students' views on translanguaging. In this study, the interview questions were guided by student responses in the questionnaires. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English before being coded for emerging themes. The analysis followed three stages: transcription and translation, data categorisation, and alignment with observation and questionnaire findings. This approach ensured that the analysis remained consistent with the qualitative nature of the research.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Results**

The responses from 43 participants were processed and analyzed using a Likert scale format in order to obtain a clearer picture of students' perceptions of translanguaging strategies. The Likert scale was employed to capture not only the frequency of students' attitudes but also the intensity of their agreement or disagreement. The results, presented in the chart below, provide a comprehensive overview of how students value the role of translanguaging in reducing learning anxiety, improving comprehension, and fostering classroom engagement.



**Figure 1.** EFL Students Responses Toward Translanguaging Strategies

### **3.1.1. Translanguaging as Support in the Learning Process**

The statement “Helpful in class” indicates that most students responded positively to translanguaging as a learning strategy. Thirteen students agreed and nineteen strongly agreed, while only a few disagreed or were neutral. This suggests that the majority of students feel that translanguaging helps them understand classroom material. This strategy likely facilitates comprehension of complex concepts by linking them to their first language. As such, translanguaging is seen as an effective learning aid in bilingual learning environments. These findings support the idea that flexible use of two languages can accelerate students’ cognitive and linguistic processing.

### **3.1.2. Translanguaging as a Natural Practice Among Bilinguals**

For the statements “Used by bilinguals” and “Natural for bilinguals”, the response trends also point to positive acceptance. Between 14 and 19 students agreed or strongly agreed that translanguaging is a common and natural practice among bilingual individuals. Only a small number of students disagreed, showing that translanguaging is viewed as a normal part of linguistic behavior. This reflects student awareness that switching between languages is not a weakness but a legitimate communication strategy. Acceptance of this practice also suggests that students do not feel linguistically insecure when using two languages simultaneously. In other words, translanguaging has become a part of their everyday sociolinguistic practice.

### **3.1.3. Teacher’s Role and Translanguaging’s Relevance in Learning**

The statement “Teacher uses it” reveals that teachers also implement translanguaging in their instruction. A majority of students (21 respondents) agreed that their teachers use both languages when teaching, suggesting that this strategy is applied pedagogically, not just by students. Furthermore, the statements “Suitable for learning” and “Important for learning” indicate that students view translanguaging not only as a habit but as an essential strategy for academic success. Nineteen students

agreed and thirteen strongly agreed that translanguaging is important in their learning process. This means translanguaging is seen as aiding understanding, especially in the context of complex foreign language learning. Teachers who recognize the value of translanguaging can design more inclusive instruction that aligns with students' linguistic needs.

#### **3.1.4. Perceptions of Translanguaging in Higher Education**

For the statement "Used in higher education", the majority of students expressed very positive responses. Twenty students strongly agreed and fourteen agreed that translanguaging is used or relevant in higher education. This is a noteworthy finding, as it shows students believe translanguaging is not only helpful in lower or secondary levels but also at the academic level. This perception may reflect students' expectations that higher education institutions should also be more flexible and open to diverse language use in academic contexts. It can also be interpreted as a form of legitimizing translanguaging as a long-term educational approach. Overall, students' perceptions suggest that translanguaging holds strategic and social value across all levels of education.

To complement the quantitative findings gathered through the questionnaire, a series of interviews were conducted with selected participants to gain deeper insight into students' personal experiences and emotional responses related to translanguaging practices. While the questionnaire results indicated a generally positive attitude towards the use of translanguaging in the EFL classroom, the interview responses provided more nuanced explanations behind these perceptions. The qualitative data served to validate and enrich the statistical trends, offering contextual details about why students tend to rely on their first language and how they interpret their teachers' responses to such practices. Together, both sets of data revealed a consistent narrative: translanguaging is not only perceived as beneficial in navigating comprehension difficulties but is also seen as a supportive element in reducing anxiety and fostering confidence. This triangulation of data helps strengthen the overall conclusion of the study by showing alignment between students' reported attitudes and their lived experiences in the classroom setting.

The interviews conducted with a representative group of five students from a total of 48 participants revealed several consistent themes that align closely with the quantitative findings of the questionnaire. In the first question, students expressed the need to use their first language (L1) due to difficulties in expressing themselves fluently in English, fear of making mistakes, or lack of confidence. Statements such as "*Terkadang aku tidak bisa mengekspresikan diri dalam bahasa Inggris*" and "*Aku tidak percaya diri jika berbicara Bahasa Inggris di kelas*" suggest that translanguaging functions as a coping mechanism to overcome linguistic limitations. The majority of students agreed that translanguaging is a natural and helpful practice in EFL classrooms.

In the second part of the interview, students were asked how they felt when using L1 in English lessons. The responses varied, but most of them expressed comfort and acceptance, particularly when the teacher allowed it or responded supportively. For example, one student noted, "*Tidak masalah jika tidak lancar, asalkan gurunya mengerti.*" However, others indicated a desire to rely less on L1 by improving their



English proficiency. Students acknowledged that although translanguaging is helpful, using the target language remains an important goal. This reflects an awareness of the pedagogical balance between L1 support and L2 acquisition.

When asked whether they benefit from using L1 during English classes, most students answered affirmatively. Responses such as *“Jika aku bisa Bahasa Inggris karena mengetahui artinya”* and *“Jadi lebih cepat belajarnya jika tahu artinya”* indicate that translanguaging plays a key role in facilitating comprehension and retention of new content. One student did express doubt, pointing out that meanings in English and Indonesian do not always align, suggesting a need for cautious application of translanguaging. Nonetheless, the overall findings strongly align with Figure 7, where most participants agreed that translanguaging is helpful for learning and bridging meaning between languages.

Finally, regarding how teachers respond to students' use of L1, students generally observed that teachers were flexible and often reinforced understanding by repeating instructions in English. One student shared, *“Mr sering mengulangi kalimat dengan Bahasa Inggris,”* highlighting the teacher's role in maintaining exposure to L2 while still acknowledging the students' need for L1. This balance shows that translanguaging was not only tolerated but intentionally applied as a strategy to reduce anxiety and support learning. These qualitative findings reinforce the quantitative data and suggest that both students and teachers perceive translanguaging positively, supporting its integration as a legitimate instructional tool in EFL classrooms.

### 3.2. Discussion

The findings of this study align closely with the concept of pedagogical translanguaging as defined by Cenoz & Gorter (2020), which frames translanguaging as a deliberate instructional approach that enables learners to utilize their full linguistic repertoire in the classroom. Students in the current study reported that using their first language (L1) helped them better understand complex English content, particularly when new vocabulary or grammar concepts were introduced. Rather than seeing this language mixing as a form of linguistic interference, they experienced it as a scaffold that supported deeper learning and comprehension. This echoes Cenoz & Gorter (2022) assertion that pedagogical translanguaging fosters metalinguistic awareness and improves access to content without diminishing the target language. Teachers' intentional use of both Indonesian and English during instruction mirrors this theory in practice, showing how translanguaging can be structured purposefully to support academic goals.

In addition to comprehension, students viewed translanguaging as a familiar and helpful strategy in classroom communication—an insight that supports recent research by Fuster & Bardel (2024), who highlight lexical transfer and the cognitive benefits of drawing on multilingual resources. Several students described how connecting new English words to known Indonesian equivalents helped them remember and understand the meaning more easily. This observation aligns with Fuster and Bardel's view that learners can strategically activate cross-linguistic knowledge to make sense of new information. Translanguaging, in this sense, becomes a tool not just for survival in the classroom but for active knowledge-building, especially when teachers create space for bilingual expression. Therefore, the use of translanguaging in this context serves as both a pedagogical and cognitive support system.

Moreover, the emotional comfort provided by translanguaging practices was another prominent theme in the interview data. Students reported feeling less anxious and more confident when they were allowed to use L1 in moments of difficulty, particularly when teachers responded supportively. This finding reflects Cenoz and Gorter's (2022) emphasis on the affective dimensions of pedagogical translanguaging, where inclusive language practices can affirm students' identities and reduce classroom stress. The combination of teacher modeling and peer acceptance in using both languages appears to create a low-anxiety learning environment, which is essential for language acquisition. In classrooms where bilingualism is the norm, such as in many Indonesian schools, translanguaging supports not only academic understanding but also emotional well-being.

Despite the benefits, several students also expressed a desire to rely less on their L1 and improve their English fluency over time. This dual perspective aligns with Cenoz and Gorter's (2022) argument that pedagogical translanguaging is a temporary support mechanism, not a permanent crutch. It allows students to engage more deeply with English content while they build confidence and competence in the second language. Likewise, Fuster and Bardel (2024) stress that translanguaging, when structured intentionally, does not inhibit long-term L2 development but rather enhances it through strategic cross-linguistic transfer. These theoretical insights help explain the balanced attitudes reflected in the student responses: while they appreciate the role of translanguaging in facilitating learning, they also aspire toward greater English proficiency and autonomy.

#### **4. Conclusions**

This study contributes to the growing body of knowledge on translanguaging by offering a nuanced understanding of how EFL students perceive and engage with this strategy in an Indonesian high school context. The research highlights translanguaging not merely as a linguistic tool, but as a supportive pedagogical practice that promotes learner comfort, confidence, and active participation in English language classrooms. One of the most significant contributions of this study is the identification of translanguaging's potential to mitigate language anxiety, a factor often overlooked in traditional language instruction. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the crucial role of teacher attitudes and institutional norms in shaping students' willingness to engage in translanguaging practices. By presenting these insights, the research underscores the value of inclusive and flexible language pedagogies that reflect the real linguistic experiences of learners. These findings advocate for a shift in EFL teaching approaches—one that legitimizes students' linguistic resources as assets for learning rather than obstacles to overcome.

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## Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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