

Translanguaging Pedagogy in Multilingual Indonesian ELT Classrooms

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Learning English does not have to be a foreigner! This opening statement is questioning the current practice of ELT in Indonesian classroom context. For many decades, English Language Teaching (ELT) in Indonesia has been glorified and dominated by a monolingual mindset: English must be taught in English. However, in a nation with more than 700 local languages, this perspective is often in disharmony with classroom realities. Indonesian ELT classrooms are facing with a big dilemma and paradox in teaching English alongside local languages and Bahasa Indonesia. If ELT is to be effective and sustainable, it must embrace translanguaging pedagogy—an approach that incorporates multilingualism.

ELT and Indonesian Multilingual Landscape

Indonesia is a portrait of multilingual nation! To protect and maintain hundreds of living local languages and Indonesian language, there are three dimensions of language policy called "adegium": prioritizing Bahasa Indonesia, preserving regional languages, and mastering foreign languages. So, the teaching of English as Foreign Language co-exists with Indonesia Language as an official language and various local languages. The great challenge and complexity of ELT is that learners possess diverse language backgrounds.



In Java, Bahasa Indonesia is a second language after Javanese or Sundanese. In eastern provinces, students often acquire Bahasa Indonesia at school while speaking their local languages or dialects at home. This situation indicates diverse linguistic repertoires that can be naturally functioned by learners in classrooms. In such multilingual contexts, applying English-only instruction or monolingual mindset is very demanding and can cause barriers for learners (Clyne, 2008). Moreover, A growing body of research shows that rigid monolingual ELT impedes student engagement and reduces confidence (Probyn, 2015). Students who struggle to grasp complex concepts in English-only settings often are passive. At its risk, English becomes very dominant while students' local languages are endangered!



Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Paradigm Shift

Seeing the complexity of ELT in multilingual setting, there has been a shift of teaching foreign language paradigm from monolingual approach in the recent years. It is enacted through promoting translanguaging pedagogy (Madkur, et.al. 2022). Translanguaging embraces the notion of multilingual speakers' competence and diverse languages as an repertoire of integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011). More specifically, Cenoz & Gorter (2020) propose pedagogical translanguaging as instructional strategies that accommodate the integration of two or more languages to develop the multilingual repertoire and consider learners as multilingual who can use English and other languages depending on the social context. By this strategy, the learners' linguistic resources can be utilized for learning English in local context.

Translanguaging involves a cognitive process and social activity as it is informed by the unique sociocultural contexts within which learners are situated (Martin-Beltrán, 2014). In Indonesian context, ELT can promote learners' local culture and identity. Rather than compartmentalizing English, Bahasa Indonesia, and local languages, translanguaging views them as fluid resources that can be flexibly used for comprehension, expression, and collaboration. In practice, translanguaging in Indonesian classrooms might mean students discussing a reading passage in Indonesian language or local ones before drafting responses in English, or teachers clarifying grammar rules in Bahasa Indonesia before assigning English practice tasks. Far from "watering down" English learning, this approach strengthens comprehension and helps students build bridges between languages.

Translanguaging Pedagogy Models

How to put translanguaging pedagogy into Indonesian ELT classroom practice? Actually, there are various alternative models of translanguaging that can be applied. Yet, pedagogical and dynamic TL models are highlighted here. Pedagogical translanguaging model emphasize the use of strategy and learning task for comprehension, scaffolding, and output. For example, students first discuss a reading passage in Indonesian, then collaboratively reconstruct the main ideas in English. It is beneficial for enhancing students' comprehension while gradually moving toward English production.

Dynamic translanguaging model, on the other hand, treats language boundaries as fluid repertoires to switch between Indonesian, local languages, and English. For instance, in group projects, students may brainstorm in Bahasa Indonesia or mother tongues, then switch to English when presenting findings. It is useful for creating authentic communication and lowering anxiety in using English.

Technology as a Bridge

Digital tools have further expanded the possibilities for translanguaging pedagogy. Subtitled videos, translation apps, and bilingual digital storytelling platforms allow students to use both English and local languages seamlessly. In pilot projects in NTT, students recorded folktales in Manggarai, then collaboratively translated them into English for classroom presentations. The process not only built English vocabulary but also preserved oral traditions in digital formats—an outcome impossible in rigid monolingual approaches. Such practices show how translanguaging aligns naturally with students' everyday multilingual practices. On social media, Indonesian youths switch between English slang, Bahasa Indonesia, and local expressions without hesitation. ELT pedagogy that mirrors this fluidity is more authentic and relevant to learners' lived experiences.

Teacher Training and Policy Support

Despite its promise, translanguaging pedagogy faces challenges. Many teachers remain exam-oriented policies that prioritize English-only approaches. Fear of downgrading English proficiency discourages experimentation. Teacher education programs often provide little training on handling multilingual classrooms, reinforcing a deficit view of local languages (Menken & García, 2010). Additionally, teacher professional development must reframe multilingualism as a resource. Training should equip teachers with strategies for scaffolding English learning through local languages, designing bilingual tasks, and creating inclusive classroom norms. Policymakers, too, should reconsider rigid "English-only" curricula. Instead, they should institutionalize translanguaging approaches within national standards, ensuring that multilingual realities are embraced rather than suppressed.