

Intersectionality of Gender and Translanguaging: Implications for Educational Practices

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the challenges of teaching English as a foreign language, focusing on the issue of students' lack of vocabulary acquisition. The research employs a translanguaging approach, defined as the flexible use of multiple languages within the classroom, which helps students leverage their linguistic resources to enhance vocabulary retention and comprehension. The study also explores gender-related differences in English language learning, observing distinct patterns in how male and female students engage with vocabulary and language use. Using a narrative inquiry method, data were collected through interviews with two English teachers at MA Darun Najah. These interviews provided in-depth insights into the teachers' experiences with translanguaging and gender dynamics in their classrooms. Previous research has emphasized the positive effects of translanguaging on multilingual learning outcomes. The aim of this study is to examine how translanguaging can address vocabulary acquisition challenges while promoting a gender-sensitive, inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: *Gender, Translanguaging, Teaching English as a Foreign Language*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English in Indonesia, where English is considered a foreign language, requires appropriate strategies across various educational levels. Students with low English proficiency often struggle to comprehend the material, particularly those with limited vocabulary, which presents challenges in English language learning (Hezam et al., 2022). These issues necessitate that English teachers adopt effective measures to address such difficulties. In the past, the prevailing paradigm in English language teaching was the exclusive use of English during instruction (Liando & Tatipang, 2022). However, this approach has shifted, allowing for the use of the students' native language to help them better comprehend the material. Rather than relying solely on the native language, English can be taught through a blended approach, incorporating both languages, such as through the practice of translanguaging.

This modern approach acknowledges the importance of facilitating students' understanding and engagement by strategically switching between English and their first language, thereby creating a more inclusive and effective learning environment. Translanguaging is described as a pedagogical approach with the potential to liberate individual voices and encourage them to think beyond conventional academic contexts (García, 2009). In line with this, Cenoz and Gorter (2022) stated that translanguaging refers to a pedagogical practice that deliberately switches the language mode of input and output in bilingual classrooms. Moreover Yasar Yuzlu and Dikilitas (2022) argue that Translanguaging refers to a pedagogical practice in bilingual education that intentionally allows for the interchangeable use of input and output languages. It has been described as processing L1 input through activities such as reading and discussion, while producing L2 output through writing, thereby transcending both languages in a critical and creative process. Thus, it can be concluded that the concept of translanguaging is commonly understood as a pedagogical approach that encourages flexibility and creativity in language use, where the input and output languages are intentionally

switched. Teaching that utilizes translanguaging in the context of English as a Foreign Language involves. 1). Enhancing Comprehension, Translanguaging allows students to utilize their first language (L1) to better understand complex concepts in English. By connecting new information with prior knowledge in L1, students can more easily grasp material in the foreign language (Young, 2014); 2. Boosting Motivation and Confidence, Translanguaging helps reduce anxiety related to learning a foreign language. When given the opportunity to use L1, students gain confidence in their ability to learn and use English, thereby increasing their motivation (Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022a); 3. Accelerating English Language Acquisition Translanguaging facilitates quicker comprehension of English concepts. Students can use their first language to explain new ideas and learn new subject matter more effectively (García, 2009). 4 Promoting Social and Cultural Inclusion, Translanguaging creates an inclusive learning environment where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds can collaborate. This reduces social and cultural barriers that may otherwise hinder learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022).

Gender issues in contemporary research remain a compelling area of study, particularly in English language teaching environments that segregate male and female students, such as Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia. Gender issues in English language learning encompass the various ways male and female students experience language acquisition and classroom dynamics. Research indicates that gender can significantly influence participation in language learning environments. Studies have shown that male students often dominate classroom discussions, while female students may be more hesitant to contribute. This disparity can affect their language acquisition and overall confidence in using the language (Erviona & Arsyad, 2022a). Moreover, Males and females may exhibit different communication styles, which can impact their engagement with the English language. For instance, females are often found to employ more collaborative and supportive language, whereas males may use language that is more competitive and assertive (Tannen, 1990). Addressing gender issues in English language learning is crucial for creating equitable educational environments. The previous studies relevant to this research, including those by (Liando et al., 2023; Sakkir et al., 2024; Silalahi & Santoso, 2023). implemented translanguaging in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning. These studies identified three main types of translanguaging: intra-sentential translanguaging, inter-sentential translanguaging, and tag translanguaging. Additionally, translanguaging and trans-semiotizing were also applied in the learning process. The findings from these studies suggest that the use of translanguaging in English learning improves students' understanding of English material. It can also be inferred that translanguaging accelerates students' comprehension of English lessons delivered by teachers. Therefore, translanguaging has a positive impact on EFL learning.

In alignment with these previous studies, according to Yasar Yuzlu and Dikilitas (2022) reported constructive cognitive, interactive, and affective benefits of translanguaging pedagogy, as it allowed students to draw upon all their linguistic resources for meaning-making and negotiation, fostering a sense of comfort and motivation to use English. Furthermore, Emilia and Hamied (2022) argue that translanguaging practices occurred across all courses and served various functions, including interpretive, managerial, and interactive roles. These practices benefited students cognitively, socially, and psychologically. Most students preferred a mixture of Indonesian and English in class, although a minority showed a tendency to use only English.

Based on the aforementioned studies, it can be concluded that translanguaging in EFL learning not only enhances students' English comprehension but also increases their comfort level in learning. In relation to the preliminary study, the differences in treatment and characteristics between male and female students prompted the researcher to further explore these gender differences. Additionally, the theoretical research conducted by the researcher reveals a lack of studies that analyze translanguaging practices with a focus on gender differences. Thus, this research aims to observe EFL learning by examining the differing attitudes and responses of male and female students, making this a distinguishing feature of the current study. The research question of this study is:

1. How is translanguaging practiced in EFL learning?
2. What are the differences in attitudes and responses between male and female students in EFL learning?

METHODS

This study takes a narrative inquiry approach to explore the experiences of two English teachers at an Islamic boarding school who use translanguaging in both boys' and girls' classes. These teachers work with students in both settings, and the research focuses on how they switch between English, Indonesian, and a local language to support students in this multilingual environment. The narrative inquiry method was chosen because it focuses on human lives, valuing personal experiences as a rich source of knowledge and insight (Clandinin, 2022).

To collect data, the teachers participated in in-depth interviews, where they shared their personal stories about how they integrate multiple languages into their lessons. To facilitate a smooth interaction, each teacher was questioned individually at various periods using their native language, Bahasa Indonesia. The interview was recorded with a recording app. These interviews gave the teachers a chance to reflect on their teaching practices, explaining how they use translanguaging in different gender classes—the male class and the female class—and how they feel it impacts their students. The interviews were then analyzed to identify common themes and insights into the role of translanguaging in their classrooms. By exploring their personal experiences and the challenges they face, this study aims to understand how these teachers manage language use in both the male and the female classes. Throughout the research, ethical standards like confidentiality and informed consent were strictly followed to ensure the privacy of the participants (Traianou & Hammersley, 2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The result of this study is based on the rich narratives collected from teachers reflecting on their experiences with translanguaging and gender differences in educational settings. The data reveal how gender and language practices intersect in classrooms where multiple languages, including English, Bahasa Indonesia, and Javanese, are used. The teachers' narratives demonstrate how translanguaging is not only a tool for enhancing comprehension but also one that is shaped by and shapes gendered classroom dynamics.

The Role of Translanguaging in Promoting Understanding

Both teachers acknowledged the effectiveness of translanguaging in explaining complex concepts and engaging students. Teacher 1 said:

I use translanguaging when teaching complex grammar points or when students ask questions. For example, I might explain a difficult grammatical structure in English, then give examples in Bahasa Indonesia or even in Javanese to ensure everyone understands. This is especially helpful with the male students, who often need more support.

Teacher 2 also shared a similar experience, recounting how they asked students to express their opinions on a topic by using a mix of English and Bahasa Indonesia. Teacher 2 said:

I use translanguaging in explaining the complex material, especially grammatical rules. Sometimes, I ask the students to explain their understanding and let them mix the language, as long as the students understand what are they're talking about.

Gendered Patterns in Translanguaging Practices

One of the most prominent findings from the interviews is the clear distinction between how male and female students engage with translanguaging practices. The teachers consistently observed that female students were more willing to engage with English, even when encountering difficulties. In contrast, male students were more hesitant and often relied on Bahasa Indonesia or even Javanese to navigate classroom tasks. Teacher 2 said:

“Mostly in the male class, I switch the language often. Because when I speak in English in a long sentence, they will respond with “Gabisa Bahasa Inggris.” So that I usually translate the English instructions right after.

Sometimes, I divided the long sentence into several short phrases and asked the students to translate them one by one”.

Engaging male students with English through translanguaging is a significant challenge. The teachers mentioned that male students often defaulted to Indonesian or Javanese during class and were less inclined to use English compared to their female counterparts. This reluctance was attributed to several factors, including their lack of vocabularies, lack of confidence in their English abilities and a preference for the comfort of their native languages. Teacher 2 said:

“The challenge in the male class is most of the male students seem like have a “thick wall” that hinders them whenever I speak more English”.

Teacher 2 used the term "thick wall" to describe the male students' unwillingness to communicate. Whenever English was used more extensively in the classroom, they would just stay quiet or say “Gabisa Bahasa Inggris.” This metaphor reflected the students' resistance to using English and their strong preference for Bahasa Indonesia or Javanese. Despite repeated encouragement, the male students were less willing to push themselves out of their linguistic comfort zones, often relying on translanguaging to avoid practicing English. In contrast to male students, female students were described as more proactive in their use of translanguaging to enhance their understanding of classroom content. The teachers observed that female students were more likely to ask questions in Bahasa Indonesia or Javanese, but still made efforts to engage with English. Teacher 1 said:

“Female students tend to respond more actively to English and are more willing to use it even when they encounter difficulties. They use translanguaging as a tool to better engage with the material, often asking for clarifications in Indonesian but still attempting to use English”.

Teacher 1 noted that female students tended to be more engaged and performed better in assignments, which was attributed to their more balanced use of translanguaging. By integrating both languages fluidly, female students were able to clarify complex content while maintaining exposure to English, leading to better academic outcomes and greater confidence in their language abilities.

Discussion

Classroom talk denotes the communication and linguistic interactions that occur between teachers and students within the educational setting. It encompasses the various forms of language exchange, including verbal and non-verbal communication, utilized for instructional purposes, questioning, discussions, and feedback within the learning process. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), classroom talk occurs in environments where English is not commonly spoken outside the classroom. In these settings, both teachers and students predominantly use languages other than English in their daily lives. As a result, the influence of their native or local languages naturally permeates the classroom interactions. This means that when they engage in teaching and learning activities, they often rely on or incorporate their first language or other familiar languages alongside English. This dynamic not only shapes the way they communicate during lessons but also affects their overall approach to learning and using English within the classroom. The blend of languages becomes an inherent part of the learning environment, reflecting the linguistic diversity that both teachers and students bring with them into the educational space (Afriadi, 2021).

The use of translanguaging has become a topic of significant debate within the context of English language teaching, as it challenges traditional monolingual approaches by encouraging the integration of both languages in the learning process. Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas (2022) contribute to this discussion by presenting translanguaging as a purposeful pedagogical strategy that allows for the interchangeable use of input and output languages. This approach not only facilitates comprehension by processing L1 input through activities like reading and discussion but also promotes L2 production through writing. Such flexibility fosters a critical and creative engagement with language, positioning translanguaging as a transformative method in bilingual education that transcends conventional language boundaries. As a result, its role in English language teaching continues to spark conversation about the balance between linguistic flexibility and structured language instruction. Translanguaging, which refers to the practice of switching between languages or using multiple languages simultaneously

within the learning process, raises important questions among educators and language scholars (Kwihangana, 2021). While translanguaging is often regarded as beneficial, particularly in multilingual environments, it can also present significant challenges. Advocates of translanguaging emphasize its advantages, such as allowing students to draw upon their full linguistic resources to deepen understanding and enhance learning. This practice can foster a more inclusive and supportive classroom environment, especially for students who feel more comfortable expressing complex ideas in their native language. However, despite these benefits, translanguaging can also be quite demanding for both teachers and students. For educators, managing multiple languages in a single classroom requires a high level of linguistic flexibility and the ability to facilitate learning without letting one language dominate too much. For students, constantly switching between languages may lead to confusion or make it harder to fully immerse themselves in English, particularly when the goal is to achieve fluency. Thus, while translanguaging holds great potential, its effective implementation requires careful consideration and balance to ensure it supports rather than hinders language development (Raja et al., 2022). In line with the findings and supported by Erviona & Arsyad (2022), female students show a greater willingness to engage with English, using translanguaging to bolster their understanding while continuing to focus on English. They are more likely to actively participate and seek clarification when facing difficult material. Teachers noted that this balanced approach between the two languages leads to more successful learning outcomes for female students. Consequently, incorporating strategies like peer teaching and individualized support can further improve translanguaging practices, meeting the distinct needs of both male and female students in EFL environments.

CONCLUSION

This study explores how translanguaging is practiced in EFL classrooms and examines the differences in attitudes and responses between male and female students. The findings indicate that both male and female students benefit from translanguaging, but their engagement varies significantly. Male students are generally more hesitant to use English, frequently reverting to Bahasa Indonesia or Javanese, particularly when faced with difficult tasks. This reliance on native languages suggests a need for more support and gradual increases in English use to help them build confidence and improve language skills. In contrast, female students were found to engage more actively with English, using translanguaging as a tool to enhance their understanding without abandoning English entirely. They tend to be more willing to participate and ask questions, even when challenged by the material. Teachers observed that female students' balanced use of both languages led to better learning outcomes. Based on these findings, strategies such as peer teaching and tailored support can help maximize the effectiveness of translanguaging and address the distinct needs of male and female students in EFL settings.

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