

## The Practice of Translanguaging and Teachers' Perception on Its Use for Teaching Young Learners at Singaraja Montessori School

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate translanguaging practices and teachers' perceptions of its use for teaching young learners in a bilingual environment. The study was conducted in upper-primary class at Singaraja Montessori School. Employing a qualitative case study, the data were collected through observation and interview to gather information on translanguaging phenomenon in the context of bilingual young learners, especially at Singaraja Montessori School. Thematic analysis was used to find themes from the data. The findings indicate that translanguaging practices are initiated by both teachers and students. Furthermore, teachers hold a positive view toward translanguaging, which can be seen through their emotional responses, beliefs, and actions.

*Keywords:* Bilingual Young Learners, Teachers' Perception, Translanguaging.

### INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging has emerged as a significant pedagogical approach, particularly in today's bilingual and multilingual classrooms. This strategy, which encourages students to flexibly use their entire linguistic repertoire instead of being confined to a single language, is widely recognized for its potential to support learning (García & Wei, 2014). This flexible approach offers several educational advantages: it can facilitate a deeper understanding of complex material by leveraging a student's first language (L1), strengthen connections between home and school, and cultivate a more inclusive and supportive learning environment (Chaika, 2023). However, the effective application of translanguaging in the classroom is highly dependent on teachers' own beliefs and their understanding of its educational value (Khan et al., 2024).

The principles of translanguaging naturally align with the best practices for teaching young learners. As Cameron (2001) notes, language development in young children is both a cognitive and social process, best supported by a fun, interactive, and engaging environment. This is consistent with the Montessori method, which emphasizes experiential learning, exploration, and individual independence. The Montessori philosophy requires teachers to adapt to each child's developmental pace rather than enforcing a rigid curriculum (Montessori, 2016; Hasanah et al., 2024). Within this framework, translanguaging plays a key role by helping to create a relaxed classroom atmosphere, reducing communication pressure, and boosting student confidence (Nagy, 2018). Teachers' views are crucial because they directly influence how translanguaging is put into practice. Lewis et al. (2012) offer a useful framework for observing this by categorizing it into two types: teacher-directed

translanguaging and pupil-directed translanguaging. Understanding these different types of practice can help educators better meet student needs and facilitate more effective communication. While many studies have investigated teachers' perceptions of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy, this research has largely been concentrated in higher education settings, such as high schools and universities. This leaves a significant gap in research regarding how translanguaging is applied and perceived at the elementary school level, especially in the Indonesian context. This is a crucial stage where early language experiences have a lasting impact on a child's academic and social development. Given that teachers at this level are essential in guiding language use, understanding their perspectives is vital. This study aims to fill that gap by examining translanguaging in a specific context: Singaraja Montessori School. Preliminary observations revealed that Singaraja Montessori School is a bilingual institution where students from diverse language backgrounds present a unique challenge that requires teachers to actively bridge language gaps. Unlike many public schools where translanguaging may be limited to specific language classes (Putra & Arifin, 2022), teachers at this school use it as a natural and essential communication tool across all subjects. This makes the school an ideal case for an in-depth investigation.

The research will identify the types of translanguaging practices observed in the classroom and investigate the perceptions of two teachers who teach this age group through in-depth interviews. The data collected from these observations and interviews will be analyzed using a thematic analysis. This method is specifically chosen to systematically identify, analyze, and report the recurring themes and patterns within the teachers' perceptions and practices, providing a rich, in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. By examining this under-explored context, this study seeks to offer new insights that can help educators create more inclusive learning environments where young learners can communicate confidently and achieve academic success.

This research explores the theoretical and practical significance of translanguaging in bilingual classrooms for young learners. Theoretically, it provides new insights into how both teachers and students use translanguaging in real classroom interactions, adding to the existing literature on language development in early education. Practically, the study's findings are expected to help teachers understand how translanguaging can be used as a teaching strategy to support young learners' comprehension and confidence. Furthermore, the research serves as a foundation for future studies on translanguaging, offering a reference for exploring similar topics in different educational settings, such as public schools, and for examining the connection between the Montessori method and translanguaging practices.

## METHOD

This research adopts a qualitative approach, specifically a case study method, to explore translanguaging practices and teacher perceptions regarding its use in teaching young learners. The research is conducted at Singaraja Montessori School in Buleleng Regency, which was selected due to its implementation of a bilingual education program utilizing both Indonesian and English. The research focuses on the upper primary class, consisting of 10 students, including 3 foreign students, creating a naturally bilingual environment that underscores the need for strategies like translanguaging to facilitate communication and interaction during lessons. The researcher employed non-participant

classroom observations across five lessons, including Bahasa Indonesia, English, Mathematics, PPKN, and IPAS. Additionally, two teachers from the upper primary class were interviewed, as they are directly involved in guiding students' learning and often encounter situations where students require support in understanding lessons due to language barriers. Through these interviews, the researcher aims to gain deeper insights into how teachers perceive translanguaging in the learning process.

For data collection, the study utilizes two instruments: observation sheets and an interview guide. The observation sheets serve as structured tools that enable the researcher to record behaviors or events during classroom activities. As a non-participant observer, the researcher documented the teaching and learning process without direct involvement. The interview guide focuses on teachers' views regarding the use of students' mother language in class and its impact, aiming to gather information about language usage and the contexts in which translanguaging can support or hinder the learning process. All data collected from observations and interviews will be analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012), to identify emerging themes and patterns related to translanguaging practices and teacher perceptions in the bilingual classroom setting.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### A. Types of Translanguaging

Based on the research question, the purpose of this study was to explore translanguaging practice focused on the types of translanguaging used during the learning process. After the data was collected, it was found that both types of translanguaging, which are teacher-directed translanguaging and pupil-directed translanguaging were used during the classroom activity.

#### 1. Teacher-directed Translanguaging

Based on the observation in the upper-primary class, the teacher uses translanguaging for the classroom activities. Translanguaging was used for asking questions, explaining material, responding to students, clarifying, giving instructions, and closing. In the Rainbow Class, teachers effectively use teacher-directed translanguaging, which involves the intentional use of both English and Indonesian to clarify new concepts and support student comprehension. This practice is seen when teachers explain complex topics to make sure students' understand. For instance, a teacher might use an Indonesian phrase to connect an English concept to a student's existing knowledge, making it more familiar and easier to understand. This isn't just a direct translation, but rather a strategic tool to help students follow step-by-step processes without confusion. The intentional use of translanguaging also extends to prepared materials, such as PowerPoint slides that present key information in both languages, offering visual reinforcement and additional support for students. The deliberate use of translanguaging serves to deepen student understanding and make the learning process more inclusive. By leveraging students' bilingual abilities, teachers transform language switching into a purposeful strategy rather than a random occurrence.

#### 2. Pupil-directed Translanguaging

Based on classroom observations, the research findings show that translanguaging is also a dynamic and student-initiated strategy, a practice referred to as pupil-directed

translanguaging. This spontaneous use of both Indonesian and English by students is not a sign of confusion or a lack of proficiency. This study's findings highlighted pupil-directed translanguaging for discussion, asking, and answering questions. Instead, it is an empowering tool that allows students to actively draw from their entire linguistic repertoire to express ideas and fill gaps in their knowledge. This practice highlights how students prioritize achieving meaningful communication over adhering to a single language, thereby creating a more natural and participatory learning environment.

The study identified several key functions of this student-led translanguaging, both in interactions with the teacher and among peers. When asking or answering questions, students seamlessly switched between languages based on which one was most accessible to them now. For instance, a student might begin a question in one language and finish it in another to get vocabulary support or respond to a question in the language they felt most comfortable using. This practice also extended to peer discussions, where students alternated between languages to collaboratively build shared understanding and clarify concepts. This fluid alternation demonstrates that translanguaging is an inherent part of how students communicate, learn, and negotiate meaning with others.

## **B. Teachers' Perceptions toward Translanguaging**

The interview findings show that teachers at Singaraja Montessori School have positive perceptions towards translanguaging that related to their emotional responses, beliefs, and actions. The study found that teachers' perceptions of translanguaging were deeply intertwined with their emotional experiences in the classroom. Teachers at Singaraja Montessori School expressed feelings of comfort, relief, confidence, and optimism stemming from the use of this strategy. They noted that translanguaging helps students feel more at ease and confident, which in turn alleviated their own worries as educators about students struggling to understand or participate. Teachers highly praised the practice, describing it as "very good" because it showed students were comfortable enough to use all the languages they knew, leading to a more active and pleasant classroom atmosphere. This emotional satisfaction underscores that translanguaging is seen not just as a method but as a tool that genuinely improves their teaching experience.

Teachers' beliefs about translanguaging were shaped by multiple factors beyond their personal experiences. They saw translanguaging as a practical and respectful strategy that effectively bridges students' home and school languages, a necessity in a bilingual school context with diverse student backgrounds. Their convictions were heavily influenced by the Montessori curriculum, which emphasizes following the child's individual development and avoiding force. As a result, teachers view their role as facilitators who must adapt to students' linguistic needs rather than imposing a single language. They believe that students varied linguistic resources are not a problem to be fixed but an asset to be activated, positioning translanguaging as a key tool for inclusive and responsive teaching that prioritizes understanding over linguistic correctness.

The teachers' positive perceptions and beliefs were consistently translated into their daily classroom actions. Translanguaging was not a theoretical concept but a central and actively implemented teaching strategy. Based on interviews and observations, teachers regularly used both Indonesian and English to deliver lessons and explain difficult terms,

making content accessible to all students. This proactive use of multiple languages was seen as a standard practice at the school, not something extraordinary. By integrating translanguaging into their teaching and even their lesson materials, the teachers demonstrated a firm commitment to making instruction flexible and supportive. This confirmed that they didn't just passively accept translanguaging but actively encouraged and utilized it to meet their students' diverse needs.

### *Discussion*

The findings regarding both translanguaging practices and teacher perception highlight a strong synergy between students' natural communication strategies and their teachers' pedagogical approaches, especially in the context of a bilingual school. This study challenges the traditional view that using multiple languages in the classroom is a sign of confusion or weakness. Instead, it confirms that translanguaging is an intelligent cognitive strategy students use to process information and participate effectively. This synergy is created by the teachers' adaptive mindset, which, supported by the school's curriculum, allows them to facilitate rather than restrict their students' linguistic repertoires. The teachers' perceptions of students' language choices were found to be a crucial factor in translanguaging practice. This study found that teachers have positive perceptions toward translanguaging. Some previous studies also found that teachers have positive perceptions towards translanguaging as a helpful teaching strategy (Andleeb et al., 2024; Khojan, 2022; Batool et al., 2022; Yuvayapan, 2019).

Classroom observations in this study validate that the teacher used translanguaging to explain complex terms, and students employed it for discussions and collaborative meaning-making. In this sense, translanguaging acts as a bridge, enabling students to connect new knowledge with existing concepts in their mother tongue, thereby increasing participation. This is supported by some previous studies that highlight the positive impact of translanguaging (Mahayanti et al., 2024; Fahmadia, 2025; Riswanto, 2022; Harris, 2021). This directly affirms that students' linguistic abilities are an asset that should be leveraged, not ignored.

### **CONCLUSION**

Translanguaging is not merely a natural response by students to communicate, but an effective cognitive strategy they use to deepen understanding, boost confidence, and participate actively. Similarly, teachers consider translanguaging an essential pedagogical tool, driven by the belief that language flexibility is key to adapting to students' diverse needs. Teachers' positive beliefs and actions towards translanguaging create a highly inclusive and productive learning environment that empowers students and validates their full linguistic repertoires.

While these findings offer valuable insights, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which was confined to a case study at a single school. Therefore, future research could expand upon these findings through a larger-scale investigation across multiple schools or by conducting a longitudinal study to observe the long-term impact of translanguaging on students' academic performance.

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