



# Teaching English to Young Learners: Why Translanguaging?

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**Abstract:** The study aims to explore translanguaging strategies used by English language teachers in teaching English EFL to young learners at primary school level in Indonesia. The participants were two English language teachers and 60 students from the fifth and sixth grade at one of public primary schools, located in Lhokseumawe City, Aceh, Indonesian. The research employed a qualitative case study design. The data was collected based on observation and interviews. The results of the study showed that translanguaging improved learners' comprehension in terms of vocabulary retention for young learners in learning English as a foreign language. The results of the study are further discussed.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging; young learners; English teachers, Primary school

## 1. Introduction

The interest in mastering foreign languages has increased over the past few decades. The need to use English is due to the increasingly developing era of globalization which has an influence not only on the world of education but also on the world of tourism (Candra et al., 2023). Indonesia is home to hundreds of local languages. Therefore, in general, Indonesian people are bilingual. They speak the Indonesian language as national lingua franca, vernacular languages in speech community in non-formal domains. Moreover, English is a foreign language that is learnt in Indonesia from primary level to higher degree level. Consequently, in numerous areas, especially those away from cities, students have limited exposure to English beyond their school environment. Unlike in countries where English is prevalent in media, signs, and everyday conversations, Indonesian students often encounter English solely during their English classes, restricting their chances to practice and use the language effectively outside classroom. Therefore, allowing the students using their entire linguistics repertoires for the Indonesian learners in learning English is crucial to improve learners' comprehension in learning English. incorporating students' linguistic knowledge when learning English can create a more inclusive and engaging learning environments for learners in learning English. Moreover, allowing learners use their native speakers alongside English, it helps bridge gaps in understanding the English as a target language. Students can grasp complex ideas more easily, leading to better retention and deeper learning of the target language. They can retain vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, comprehension skills, and cultural aspects of English. Having said so, this study aims to find explore the following issues:

1. How do English language teachers implement translanguaging strategies to teach English for young learners?

This study aims to provide valuable information for further researcher on the effective strategies adopting translanguaging to teach English for young learners.



## 2. Literature Riview

### 2.1. *Teaching English for young learners*

In the realm of second language acquisition (SLA), “young learners” typically denotes children aged 3 to 12 who are in the initial phases of cognitive, social, and linguistic growth. Educating young learners in a second language necessitates distinct methods and strategies compared to teaching older students or adults, as children are at a unique developmental stage with specific needs, abilities, and learning styles. Young learners typically find it easier to acquire new sounds, rhythms, and vocabulary compared to older learners. Their brains are in a highly plastic stage, enabling them to intuitively learn languages and accurately mimic pronunciation (Cameron, 2002). Young children usually begin learning a second language by focusing on listening and speaking before they are developmentally prepared to read and write in that language. This approach mirrors their first language acquisition process, highlighting the importance of oral skills and listening comprehension. Children acquire language within context, naturally absorbing it through social interactions, routines, and environmental cues. Since they may not fully understand abstract rules yet, they benefit greatly from immersive, real-life situations that help them make sense of the language. Young learners often learn best through visual and kinaesthetic methods, meaning they benefit from activities that involve seeing, touching, and doing. Engaging them in movement, visual aids, or hands (Nabila Prameswari & Nahartini abcde, 2023).

Furthermore, Ghaffari Saravi et al., (2023) states that young students are early adolescent students aged 11-14 formally at elementary school grades 5 and 6, and junior high school level. These teenage students have the ability within themselves to absorb foreign language learning like sponges (Bialystok et al., 2012). Harmer (2001) suggests that these young learners have a limited attention span. Teaching and learning activities must be able to fully engage their attention before they become bored. Foreign language teachers should be able to consider these characteristics in designing learning activities. The learning activities that will be implemented should be able to provide useful and enjoyable learning experiences so that they can attract students' interest in learning (Dörnyei, 2009; Lamb, 2012). Student interest can be influenced by teaching factors and enjoyable student experiences during learning (S. Hidayati et al., 2017; T. Hidayati et al., 2023).

### 2.2. *Translanguaging*

Translanguaging is an approach in multilingual education where individuals use multiple languages interchangeably to communicate, understand, and create meaning. Unlike code-switching, which involves switching between languages, translanguaging blends elements from different languages seamlessly. This practice helps learners connect their languages, utilize all their linguistic resources, and improve their comprehension and expression (Zein, 2021). In English educational settings, translanguaging is a valuable tool. It enables students to use their entire linguistic repertoire, which is particularly beneficial for multilingual learners. By integrating students' native languages with the target language, translanguaging fosters understanding, engagement, and confidence, while also affirming students' identities and linguistic backgrounds (Liando, 2022).

## 3. Research Method

This research employs qualitative approach. The study conducted in one of public primary schools in Lhokseumawe City, Aceh Indonesia. The participants are two English language teachers and 60 students from the fifth to sixth grades. The data was obtained based on observation and interview.

#### 4. Results

The results of observation shows that the participants from sixth grade adopting translanguaging to explain the meaning of vocabulary and grammatical rules of English to the learners. Moreover, the participants in the fifth grade apply teaching translanguaging to her learners to improve learners' vocabularies and their meaning. Both participants use strategies by translating directly the meaning of vocabularies from the English language to Indonesian language. During the observation, both participants explain the meaning of the sentences into Indonesian words. First the participants write the vocabularies and examples in the sentences and then write the meaning next to the words. Furthermore, both participants apply strategies on the use of vocabularies into simple sentences and explain the meaning of sentences in Indonesian language.

According to results of the interviews, both participants explain the meaning of vocabularies directly into Indonesian language because they consider their students are beginner. Therefore, using code switching during teaching-learning process can help learners to understand the meaning of vocabularies. Otherwise, Idaryani & Fidyati (2022) they confessed that the teaching process will be challenging. The participants who teach from the fifth grade said that she instructed her students also to use bilingual dictionaries. She asked the students to write their own vocabularies based on the teaching topics learnt in the classroom. Therefore, the learners can be easily to access the vocabularies they wrote to recall the meaning (Zein, 2020). Overall, the following table illustrate the strategies of translanguaging adopted by the participants.

Table 1

Observation Results	Sixth Grade Participants	Fifth Grade Participants
Purpose of Translanguaging	To explain vocabulary meanings and grammatical rules To Improve learners' vocabularies and understanding the meanings	
Translanguaging Strategy	Direct translation of English vocabulary to Indonesian	
Explanation Method	-Writes vocabulary and example sentences - Writes meanings next to the words	
Sentence Meaning Explanation	Translates sentence meaning into Indonesian	
Vocabulary Use	Applies vocabulary in simple sentences and explains meaning in Indonesian	

#### 5. Discussion

For many Indonesian students, their sense of identity is closely tied to their native language(s). By allowing students to use these languages in the classroom, teachers validate students' backgrounds, promoting a more inclusive environment that respects linguistic diversity that facilitate the learners as the beginner in learning English by giving them the opportunity to use of students' linguistic knowledge as a foundation for learning. Otherwise, due to English as a foreign language, adopting translanguaging strategies to beginners prevents the feeling of reluctant of students to engage in an English-only setting due to fears of making mistakes or being insufficient vocabularies of the English as a target language. Therefore, translanguaging method offers learners the flexibility to understand the meaning of vocabulary without language barriers, enabling them to communicate their ideas more confidently and clearly on the teaching topics. Participating in translanguaging involves students switching between languages. It demonstrated to enhance cognitive flexibility and metalinguistic awareness of vocabularies in English sentences. This heightened awareness of language structures and vocabulary between Indonesian and English that can deepen their understanding of both English and their native languages.

By integrating translanguaging, teachers equip students for real-world communication scenarios where they might need to alternate between languages or use mixed language forms, which is typical in multilingual societies as mostly experienced by Indonesian learners. Furthermore, this approach can help teachers clarify complex ideas and ensure better understanding of English to young learners since it is easier for young learners to comprehend the concrete concept rather than abstract one. Indonesian English language teachers should consider adopting translanguaging in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms for young learners that in general have low number of English vocabularies as the beginner because it can greatly enhance student engagement, comprehension, and linguistic confidence. Additionally, harnessing translanguaging to beginner enables students to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire to enhance their understanding and interaction with English. By using their home language(s) alongside English, students can grasp complex concepts more efficiently, easing cognitive demands and fostering deeper learning.

## 6. Conclusion

Adopting translanguaging in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms in Indonesia can offer several benefits. Translanguaging enables students to use their existing linguistic knowledge to grasp new vocabulary and structures in English. Teachers can emphasize the similarities or differences in syntax and vocabulary between English and Indonesian language, facilitating easier acquisition and retention of new language forms. Implementing these strategies can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment, leveraging students' full linguistic repertoire to enhance their English language acquisition.

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