



TEACHERS' TRANSLANGUAGING PRACTICES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GRADE 7 AND 9 ENGLISH TEACHERS AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL 1 SEMARANG

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the translanguaging practices of English teachers in Grade 7 and Grade 9 classrooms at Junior High School 1 Semarang. Translanguaging refers to the flexible use of multiple languages in communication and learning. This study investigates how teachers switch between English and Indonesian during instruction to explain lessons, give instructions, manage the class, and provide feedback. Using qualitative methods, including classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, this research compares translanguaging patterns between the two grade levels. Findings show that translanguaging was used more frequently and intensively in Grade 7 classrooms to support basic comprehension and classroom management, whereas in Grade 9 classrooms it was applied more selectively and strategically to explain complex concepts. The comparison highlights how teachers adapt their translanguaging practices to students' English proficiency levels and learning needs. Grade 7 students, with limited English proficiency, require more L1 support, whereas Grade 9 students benefit from selective translanguaging for complex content. This study suggests that translanguaging functions as an adaptive pedagogical strategy in EFL classrooms when applied purposefully.

Keywords: *Comparative Study, English Language Teaching, Grade 7, Grade 9, Translanguaging*

INTRODUCTION

In the context of multilingual education, the use of more than one language in the classroom has become commonplace and inevitable. One teaching practice that is gaining attention is translanguaging. Translanguaging is the flexible use of multiple languages in communication and learning (García & Lin, 2017; Li, 2018). This practice draws on the skills and knowledge that a person has about one or more languages. In English as a foreign language (EFL) classes, translanguaging generally involves the use of the first language (L1) together with the target language (L2) to support learning.



In the context of EFL in Indonesia, translanguaging is often practiced by English teachers, especially at the junior high school level. Many students still struggle with English due to limited vocabulary and a lack of confidence in using the language. As a result, teachers often rely on students' L1 to explain complex concepts, give instructions, manage the classroom, and create a more comfortable learning environment (Helmie et al., 2020). This practice is in line with previous research showing that translanguaging can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy to improve understanding and participation in EFL classrooms (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Rasmin et al., 2024).

Previous research has highlighted the benefits of translanguaging in supporting comprehension, reducing anxiety, and fostering student engagement (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Sembianti et al., 2023; P. Wang, 2022). Studies conducted in various educational settings, including bilingual and multilingual classrooms, indicate that translanguaging allows students to access content knowledge more effectively while gradually developing proficiency in the target language (Tai & Wong, 2023; D. Wang & East, 2024). From a pedagogical perspective, translanguaging is not just about random language switching but rather a purposeful teaching strategy. Li (2018) conceptualizes translanguaging as a practical theory of language, emphasizing its role in meaning-making, identity construction, and classroom interaction. Through translanguaging, teachers are able to bridge the gap between students' existing linguistic knowledge and new target language input.

In the Indonesian context, research on translanguaging in EFL classrooms has begun to emerge. Emilia and Hamied (2022) found that translanguaging in tertiary education serves multiple pedagogical functions, such as clarifying meaning, emphasizing key points, and facilitating classroom interaction. Similarly, Sutrisno (2023) documented how Indonesian EFL teachers use L1 strategically to scaffold learning and maintain classroom discourse. However, most existing studies focus on single-grade contexts or general patterns of language use, with limited comparative analysis across different proficiency levels within the same educational institution.

At the junior high school level, the difference in linguistic knowledge between Grade 7 and Grade 9 students is particularly significant. Grade 7 students are generally still in the early stages of learning English and usually only have basic English skills acquired during elementary school. Their vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are limited and often require more intensive guidance through the use of their mother tongue. In contrast, Grade 9 students have been formally learning English for several years and are more accustomed to using English during classroom activities (Helmie, 2019). This difference in proficiency levels suggests that teachers may apply translanguaging differently according to the needs of students at each grade level.

Despite the growing body of research on translanguaging, there remains a gap in understanding how translanguaging practices differ across grade levels in



Indonesian junior high schools, particularly in terms of frequency, pedagogical functions, and the strategic purposes behind language switching. While previous studies have documented the general benefits of translanguaging in EFL contexts (Mendoza et al., 2024; Yüzlü & Dikilitas, 2022), few have systematically compared how teachers adapt their translanguaging practices to accommodate learners at different stages of language development within the same school setting. This comparative perspective is crucial for developing grade-appropriate pedagogical strategies and informing teacher training programs.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the following research questions:

(1) How do Grade 7 and Grade 9 English teachers use translanguaging in their classrooms? (2) What are the similarities and differences in translanguaging practices between Grade 7 and Grade 9 teachers? The novelty of this research lies in its comparative approach, which provides empirical evidence of how translanguaging practices are adapted to students' proficiency levels in the Indonesian EFL context. By examining two distinct grade levels within the same institution, this study offers insights into the developmental and contextual factors that shape teachers' translanguaging choices, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of translanguaging as a pedagogical resource.

METHODS

This study employed qualitative research methods to explore translanguaging practices in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms at the junior high school level. Qualitative research was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of language use, classroom interaction, and pedagogical practices in their natural context, rather than measuring variables statistically (Cenoz & Gorter, 2023). Through this approach, this study focused on how translanguaging was used by teachers, the purposes of its use, and how these practices varied across different levels of student ability.

This research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Semarang, where English is taught as a foreign language. The participants consisted of two English teachers from two different grade levels, namely Grade 7 and Grade 9. These two levels were chosen to represent different stages of English proficiency. Grade 7 students are generally beginners who have just transitioned from elementary school and have limited English vocabulary and grammar knowledge. Meanwhile, Grade 9 students have undergone several years of English language learning and are already familiar with English classroom activities.

The teachers involved in this study had more than three years of teaching experience at the junior high school level. This experience enabled the researchers to observe how these teachers adapted their translanguaging practices to the linguistic needs of their students.

Data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations were conducted to directly observe the actual



teaching and learning processes, particularly the use of translanguaging during learning activities. The observations focused on the teachers' language choices when Indonesian (L1) and English (L2) were used while explaining the material, giving instructions, managing the class, and interacting with students. To complement the observation data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teachers. These interviews aimed to describe teachers' perceptions, reasons, and considerations in using translanguaging at various grade levels. Open-ended questions were used so that teachers could freely express their views on the benefits, challenges, and strategies related to translanguaging in EFL classrooms.

The data were analyzed using comparative qualitative analysis. First, classroom observation notes and interview transcripts were carefully read to gain a general understanding of the data. Second, examples of translanguaging were identified and categorized based on their pedagogical function, such as explaining vocabulary or grammar, giving instructions, classroom management, and building communication relationships with students. After the grouping process, data from Grades 7 and 9 were compared to identify similarities and differences in translanguaging practices. The analysis focused on how translanguaging was used more frequently in Grade 7 to support basic comprehension, while in Grade 9, it was applied more selectively. This comparative analysis helped explain how teachers adjusted their translanguaging practices according to students' English abilities and learning needs.

To ensure the reliability of the research results, the researcher used data triangulation, which involved comparing data from classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. In addition, the research procedures were explained in detail to make the research process clearer and more transparent, and the results could be applied to the context of EFL learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Translanguaging Practices in Grade 7

Classroom observations and interview data revealed that the Grade 7 teacher used translanguaging extensively throughout the lessons. Indonesian was frequently employed alongside English in nearly all phases of instruction. The teacher switched to Indonesian, particularly when introducing new vocabulary, explaining grammatical structures, and providing detailed instructions for classroom activities.

During vocabulary introduction, the teacher consistently presented new English words followed immediately by Indonesian translations. For example, when teaching descriptive adjectives, the teacher would say, "This is 'beautiful.' Beautiful artinya cantik." This pattern was observed repeatedly across multiple lessons. The teacher explained in the interview that Grade 7 students have limited vocabulary and often feel confused when encountering new words without immediate L1 support.

Grammar explanations showed a similar pattern. When teaching simple



present tense, the teacher used Indonesian to explain the concept, structure, and usage before providing English examples. The teacher stated, "Kalau kita mau bilang kegiatan sehari-hari atau kebiasaan, kita pakai simple present tense. Rumusnya adalah subject plus verb one," before writing examples on the board. This extensive use of Indonesian for metalinguistic explanation was consistent across grammar lessons.

In classroom management, translanguaging was used to give instructions, redirect student attention, and maintain discipline. Commands such as "Please open your book" were often followed by "Buka buku kalian" to ensure comprehension. When students appeared confused or off-task, the teacher switched entirely to Indonesian to re-establish control and clarify expectations.

The Grade 7 teacher also used translanguaging to provide encouragement and reduce student anxiety. Positive feedback was frequently delivered in Indonesian, such as "Bagus! Good job!" or "Hebat, jawabanmu benar!" The teacher noted in the interview that Grade 7 students lack confidence in English and need emotional support in their L1 to feel comfortable participating in class.

Translanguaging Practices in Grade 9

In contrast, the Grade 9 teacher used translanguaging more selectively and strategically. English served as the primary medium of instruction, with Indonesian used primarily for clarification of complex concepts, emphasis of important points, and occasional classroom management.

Vocabulary instruction in Grade 9 was predominantly conducted in English. The teacher introduced new words with English definitions, synonyms, or contextual explanations. Indonesian translations were provided only when the teacher sensed widespread confusion or when the vocabulary item was particularly abstract or culturally specific. For instance, when teaching the word "anxious," the teacher first explained in English: "Anxious means worried or nervous about something." Only after observing students' uncertain expressions did the teacher add, "Seperti kalau kalian cemas sebelum ujian."

Grammar explanations followed a similar pattern. The Grade 9 teacher typically explained grammatical concepts in English, using examples and guided practice. Indonesian was used strategically to clarify particularly challenging points or to ensure students understood the nuances of grammatical rules. For example, when explaining the difference between present perfect and simple past, the teacher used Indonesian to highlight the key conceptual distinction after providing English examples.

Classroom management in Grade 9 was conducted primarily in English. Instructions such as "Work in pairs," "Discuss with your partner," and "Write your answers in your notebook" were given in English without translation. Indonesian was used only when students failed to respond appropriately or when the teacher needed to address behavioral issues quickly. The Grade 9 teacher explained



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in the interview that students at this level have sufficient English proficiency to follow most classroom interactions in English. The teacher viewed translanguaging as a tool for deepening understanding rather than basic comprehension support. The teacher stated, "They already understand basic English, so I use Indonesian only when I really need to make sure they grasp difficult concepts or when I want to emphasize something important."

Comparison of Translanguaging Patterns

Comparison of the two classrooms revealed clear differences in the frequency and function of translanguaging. In Grade 7, translanguaging occurred continuously throughout lessons, serving foundational functions such as vocabulary introduction, grammar explanation, instruction-giving, and emotional support. The pattern was one of consistent dual-language use, with Indonesian serving as a necessary scaffold for nearly all aspects of learning.

In Grade 9, translanguaging was intermittent and purpose-driven. English-dominated classroom discourse, and Indonesian appeared primarily at moments requiring clarification, emphasis, or management intervention. The pattern reflected selective code-switching rather than continuous dual-language instruction.

Both teachers, however, shared common pedagogical purposes for translanguaging. Both used L1 to ensure student comprehension, facilitate classroom communication, and create a supportive learning environment. The fundamental difference lay in the intensity and frequency of translanguaging rather than its underlying pedagogical rationale. Table 1 summarizes the key differences and similarities in translanguaging practices between the two grade levels.

Table 1. Comparison of Translanguaging Practices Between Grade 7 and Grade 9

Aspect	Grade 7	Grade 9
Frequency of use	Continuous throughout lessons	Selective and intermittent
Primary function	Basic comprehension support and scaffolding	Clarification of complex concepts
Vocabulary instruction	L1 translation is always provided immediately	L1 is used only when needed or for abstract terms
Grammar explanation	Extensive L1 metalinguistic explanation	Primarily in L2, L1 for difficult points
Classroom management	Dual language (L1+L2) for all instructions	Primarily L2, L1 as backup when needed
Emotional support	Frequent L1 encouragement and praise	Less frequent, more balanced L1/L2



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Overall teaching approach	Continuous dual-language instruction	Strategic code-switching with L2 dominance
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Translanguaging as Adaptive Pedagogy

The findings of this study demonstrate that translanguaging functions as an adaptive pedagogical strategy that teachers adjust according to students' English proficiency levels and learning needs. The intensive use of translanguaging in Grade 7 reflects the teacher's response to students' limited linguistic resources and the need to build foundational knowledge. This aligns with García and Lin's (2017) conceptualization of translanguaging as a resource for scaffolding learning, particularly for emergent bilinguals who are still developing their target language competence.

The Grade 7 teacher's extensive use of Indonesian for vocabulary and grammar instruction supports. Cummins (2021) argument that L1 can serve as a cognitive tool that facilitates understanding of L2 content. By providing immediate translations and metalinguistic explanations in Indonesian, the teacher enabled students to access content that would otherwise remain incomprehensible. This practice is particularly important in the EFL context, where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom and cannot rely on incidental learning to fill gaps in understanding.

The selective use of translanguaging in Grade 9, by contrast, reflects a strategic approach consistent with Li's (2018) notion of translanguaging as purposeful meaning-making. The Grade 9 teacher's primary reliance on English for instruction, with Indonesian used for clarification and emphasis, demonstrates an awareness of students' developing L2 competence and a pedagogical commitment to maximizing English exposure. This selective approach aligns with research suggesting that as learners' proficiency increases, teachers should gradually reduce L1 support to promote greater L2 use and development (D. Wang & East, 2024).

Pedagogical Functions of Translanguaging

Both teachers used translanguaging to serve similar pedagogical functions, despite differences in frequency and intensity. These functions include facilitating comprehension, managing classroom interaction, and providing socio-emotional support. These findings corroborate previous research on the multifunctional nature of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms (Fadila et al., 2024; Yasyinta et al., 2024).

The use of translanguaging for comprehension support was evident at both grade levels, though manifested differently. In Grade 7, comprehension support was foundational and continuous, reflecting students' need for constant linguistic scaffolding. In Grade 9, comprehension support was targeted and strategic, addressing specific points of difficulty. This difference illustrates how the same pedagogical function can be realized through different patterns of language use depending on learners' proficiency levels.



Classroom management through translanguaging also varied between grades. The Grade 7 teacher's consistent use of Indonesian for instructions and behavior management reflects an understanding that students may not reliably comprehend English commands. The Grade 9 teacher's primarily English-based management, with occasional Indonesian intervention, demonstrates confidence in students' receptive abilities while maintaining L1 as a backup resource for ensuring compliance.

The socio-emotional function of translanguaging was particularly salient in Grade 7, where the teacher frequently used Indonesian to encourage, praise, and reassure students. This finding supports research highlighting translanguaging's role in creating inclusive and supportive learning environments (Sembianti et al., 2023; Veliz, 2021). By offering praise and encouragement in students' L1, the teacher acknowledged their linguistic identities and reduced affective barriers to participation.

Implications for Language Ideology and Policy

These findings also have implications for understanding language ideologies in Indonesian EFL classrooms. The teachers' translanguaging practices reflect a practical, student-centered approach that prioritizes learning outcomes over monolingual ideologies. Both teachers viewed Indonesian not as interference but as a pedagogical resource that, when used appropriately, enhances rather than hinders English learning. This perspective aligns with recent scholarship challenging monolingual bias in language education and advocating for translanguaging as legitimate pedagogical practice (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Mendoza et al., 2024).

However, the teachers' approaches also reveal an implicit language hierarchy, with English positioned as the target language and Indonesian as a support mechanism. This reflects what Veliz (2021) describes as the persistence of monolingual norms, where multilingual practices are tolerated as scaffolds to be eventually removed rather than valued as ends in themselves. The Grade 9 teacher's stated goal of maximizing English use and minimizing Indonesian reflects this underlying ideology, suggesting that translanguaging is viewed as a temporary pedagogical strategy rather than a permanent feature of bilingual competence.

Answering the Research Questions

This study directly answers the research questions regarding how Grade 7 and Grade 9 teachers use translanguaging practices and the similarities and differences in their approaches. The results show that both teachers use translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy to support student understanding, explain lesson content, and manage classroom interactions. However, the intensity and purpose of translanguaging differ at each grade level.

Translanguaging in Grade 7 is used more intensively to provide basic support, build student confidence, and ensure comprehension of foundational content. The continuous dual-language approach reflects the linguistic realities of beginner-level learners who require extensive L1 scaffolding. In Grade 9,



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translanguaging is applied more selectively to explain complex concepts, emphasize key points, and address specific comprehension difficulties. This selective approach reflects students' greater L2 proficiency and the teacher's pedagogical judgment about appropriate levels of English exposure.

The similarities between the two teachers lie in their shared pedagogical purposes: both use translanguaging to facilitate comprehension, support classroom communication, and create inclusive learning environments. The differences lie in the frequency, intensity, and specific contexts of translanguaging use, which are shaped by students' proficiency levels and learning needs. These findings indicate that translanguaging practices are dynamic and responsive to learner characteristics rather than fixed instructional routines.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how English teachers in Grades 7 and 9 at SMP Negeri 1 Semarang use translanguaging in their classrooms and identified similarities and differences in their practices. The findings show that translanguaging plays an active role in supporting English teaching and learning in both grade levels. However, the way translanguaging is applied varies depending on students' English proficiency and learning needs.

In Grade 7, translanguaging is used more frequently and intensively. Teachers combine Indonesian and English to explain vocabulary and grammar, give instructions, manage classroom interactions, and reduce student anxiety. This shows that the English language skills of Grade 7 students are still at a beginner level and they require the support of their mother tongue to understand the material and participate in class activities. Translanguaging in this context serves as a scaffolding strategy that helps students build basic knowledge and develop confidence in English.

In contrast, translanguaging in Grade 9 is used more selectively and strategically. English serves as the dominant medium of instruction, while Indonesian is used to explain complex concepts, reinforce understanding, and ensure that students fully comprehend the material. This selective use indicates that Grade 9 students have a higher level of English proficiency and are better able to follow classroom interactions in English. Therefore, translanguaging functions as a supporting tool rather than the main teaching medium.

Despite these differences, both teachers use translanguaging for similar pedagogical purposes, specifically to aid comprehension and support effective classroom communication. These findings suggest that translanguaging is a flexible teaching strategy that can be adapted to students' proficiency levels and teaching contexts.

Overall, this study confirms that translanguaging is not a random practice, but a purposeful learning strategy that helps connect students' language abilities with their learning needs. By adapting translanguaging practices appropriately, teachers can create a more supportive and effective learning



environment for English learners in multilingual classrooms.

This study has limitations that should be acknowledged. The research focused on only two teachers and two grade levels within a single institution, which limits the generalizability of findings. Future research should examine translanguaging practices across multiple schools and contexts to develop a more comprehensive understanding of how these practices vary. Additionally, this study focused primarily on teacher practices without examining student perspectives or learning outcomes. Future studies could investigate how students perceive and respond to translanguaging, and whether different translanguaging approaches correlate with measurable differences in language learning outcomes.

For practical implications, this study suggests that teacher training programs should include explicit instruction on translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy, helping teachers understand when and how to use L1 strategically to support L2 learning. Professional development should emphasize the importance of adapting translanguaging practices to learners' proficiency levels rather than following rigid language separation policies. Furthermore, curriculum designers and policy makers should recognize translanguaging as a legitimate and valuable resource in EFL classrooms rather than viewing it as a deviation from best practices.

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