

## Translanguaging Pedagogy in ELT Practices: Experiences of Teachers in Indonesian Pesantren-Based Schools

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### Abstract

Despite the prevalence of English-only instruction in foreign language classrooms, many affirm the use of diverse linguistic repertoires particularly in linguistically-diverse society contexts where multilingual learners tend to naturally function their linguistic repertoires on a daily basis. This study aimed to explore teachers' attitudes toward the translanguaging approach in English language teaching (ELT) practices in *pesantren* schools and how it is used in the learning process. Six-phase thematic analysis was used as its qualitative research method and data were generated via in-depth semi-structured interviews with English teachers in *pesantren* schools in Lampung province. The findings showed that teachers had a positive attitude toward translanguaging, as it allows them to take benefit of students' languages other than English in English classrooms. They found that translanguaging helpful to explain, elaborate, and reinforce the meaning of learning materials and motivate students, and create an enjoyable learning atmosphere. In addition, the accommodation of knowledge or skills of other languages serves as a way to integrate the local and contextual values and culture of *pesantren* schools into English classrooms. Some practical pedagogical implications are discussed.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, multilingualism, ELT, *pesantren*

### INTRODUCTION

Students in *pesantren*, a type of Islamic boarding school that provides full-time comprehensive education which enables students to live and immerses in the everyday religious and social community of this institution (Ma'arif, 2018), just like most Indonesian,

speak at least two languages namely their local language or mother tongue, dependent on the society and region where they are born and live (e.g.: Javanese, Sundanese, Lampungese, etc), and national language (*Bahasa Indonesia*). In addition, they are good at, or at least are familiar with, Arabic which is used in Islamic religious rituals such as in prayers and reading the Qur'an (Al Shlowiy, 2019), and its central role in Islamic education (Ekawati, 2019; Wekke, 2017). This multilingual condition of *pesantren* situates English teachers in a challenging and complex position where they have to deal with the situation in which languages other than English are more exposed and considered more important.

The situation above shows how the teaching of English in a linguistically and culturally diverse environment could be very demanding especially because foreign language learning has long been shaped by a "monolingual mindset" (Clyne, 2008, p. 347), which drives teachers to believe that English-only method is the best way to teach English. The monolingual ideology endorses a belief that native English should be regarded as the definitive goal of English language teaching, leading the monolingual principle to become must-do norm in foreign language classrooms (Wang, 2016). The monolingual mindset has long been a global standard in language teaching practices, under the influence of major national principles and language education policies across countries (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Igboanusi, 2014; Makalela, 2015).

In recent years, however, there is a shift from monolingual to multilingual turn in the field of foreign language teaching in which the concept of translanguaging gains significant attention and becomes well-known in bilingual and multilingual language education policy and practices (Liu & Fang, 2020; Heltai, 2021). Translanguaging, according to Canagarajah (2011), is 'the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system' (p. 40). Cenoz & Gorter (2020) maintain the notion of 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. The learners' linguistic resources are appreciated and they are not seen as poor users of English but as multilingual speakers.

Translanguaging is a process involving cognitive and social activity as it is informed by the unique sociocultural contexts within which learners are situated (Martin-Beltrán, 2014). More research should study the translanguaging practices from a different socio-cultural perspective, paying close attention to the socio-cultural environments in which learning takes place (Garza & Langman, 2014). It is therefore of great importance to understand translanguaging in the context of multilingual *pesantren*-based classrooms where most of the students are active users of more than one language but have relatively low proficiency in English.

Despite the growing number of research (e.g.: Khairunnisa & Lukmana 2020; Nursanti, 2021; Afriadi, 2021; Rasman 2018) focusing on translanguaging in English language classrooms, this issue emerging in the *pesantren* school setting in which students are multilingual and more exposed to other languages, particularly Arabic language due to its domination in the socio-cultural and educational environment of *pesantren*, remains underexplored, making the present study relevant to fill in the gap. To this end, this study aimed to explore teachers' attitudes toward translanguaging and how the translanguaging strategies are used in the context of English language learning in *pesantren* schools.

## METHOD

As this study aimed to understand the case of EFL teachers' attitude about translanguaging and its use in their practices in a specific context, the case study was employed as the research design to develop an in-depth analysis of a case or multi cases through detailed and in-depth data generation from various sources of information and report the case description (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Regarding the type of case study, this study used multiple case studies design because it involved multiple participants in different types and levels of *pesantren* schools in different regions. Since each *pesantren* school might have different characteristics of educational practices, the multiple case studies design is selected to give a wider opportunity to predict possible contrasts and similarities among the cases being studied (Yin, 2018).

To collect qualitative data from English teachers, the in-depth interview method was adopted since interviews allow them to 'speak in their voice and express their thoughts and feelings' (Berg, 2007). Six English teachers agreed to participate in the interviews and open their classrooms for observation. The research participants are currently working as English teachers in different *pesantren* schools in the Lampung province with teaching experience ranging from five to over ten years. None of the participants was identified; all teachers were referred to using pseudonyms, such as Ningsih, Slamet, Mirna, Triono, and so on, to ensure confidentiality. The pseudonyms are preceded by the polite form of address *Pak* (Mr) for male teachers or *Bu* (Ms) for female teachers. The 45-60 minute interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated. To establish trustworthiness, the data were then analyzed following a six-phased thematic analysis approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017): familiarization with the data, code generation, theme searching, theme reviewing, theme defining and naming, and report production. There were no ethical issues reported in this study. The participants were sent a consent form and had informed their consent to the researcher and they have the right to ask for more information and to withdraw their participation at any time.

## FINDING AND DISCUSSION

### English teachers' attitude toward the use of translanguaging in the classroom

Teacher participants in this study believed that the English-only approach does not fit the characteristics of students in *pesantren* schools due to other language exposure to them. In this regard, Pak Slamet, a teacher with 9 years of experience of teaching English in *pesantren*, pointed out,

*... it is good for you [English teacher] if you can speak or read Arabic. To me, this competence is important because it can give a positive influence on teaching activities in pesantren. In my opinion, if you are an English teacher in pesantren and you can use a few words in Arabic in your classroom to help you explain something or simply talk to your students, students will respect you more and you get a positive perception from students.... (Pak Slamet)*

Here, Pak Slamet pointed out how Arabic becomes the main language used in pedagogical practices in *pesantren*, making this language is very familiar and more preferable to learn among students in *pesantren*. The special and significant role of Arabic language in *pesantren* education system, for example, the majority of reference books – usually called *kitab kuning* – used in the teaching of all religious subjects are written in Arabic, gives birth to a collectively shared belief that Arabic is a must-know language for everyone in *pesantren* community. This belief about the power of Arabic in *pesantren* school makes this language gain high currency which in turn leads to a positive attitude among all people in this community, including English teachers. Specifically, English language teachers in this school context could see the potential benefit of involving Arabic words or terms in the English classroom. Although this finding is in contrast with another study which revealed the negative influence of Arabic language transfer in the teaching of English grammar, particularly passive voice (Lghzeel & Raha, 2020), it strengthens more studies that found the Arabic language, when used proportionally, is useful to ease the learning atmosphere for students to comprehend the lessons better (Dmour, 2015), and to develop students communication skills in English (Elashhab, 2020).

In addition, as *pesantren* schools are located mostly in rural areas in which local language is the most dominant in daily use, students in this type of school often use their mother tongue, Javanese<sup>1</sup>, in their daily conversation. To illustrate this point, Bu Wati shared her experience which she considered as “funny” but “transformative”,

*... one day in the beginning of my work as a teacher here, I opened class introducing myself in full-English but no one gave response until a male student shouted, “ngomong opo bu...bu” [what are you talking about, Miss?]. This made other students, and me as well, laugh. It was funny and but, if I may say, transformative because it transformed my perception from speaking full English to taking benefit of other languages in English classroom”... (Bu Wati)*

Another teacher, Bu Ningsih, affirmed that by making use of students' local, national, or even language foreign languages in the English classroom, she wanted to show her

students that *“although you think your English is the least or the worst in our class, do not feel afraid or insecure to come in my class and participate using your own language”*. This teacher’s voice depicts her view that the use of students’ already existing languages is a fruitful resource to not only develop their competence but also maintain their confidence in participating in English class (Conteh, 2018). Moreover, what Bu Ningsih expected from her translanguaging practices was that students can maintain motivation to speak and participate in classroom activities because motivation is of great significance for foreign language learners. This is in line with a finding of a study by Yuzlu & Dikilitas (2021) that is allowed to speak English along with other languages, rather than being pressured to speak English only made students’ motivation and genuine interest increase. Furthermore, when translanguaging is facilitated systematically, not overused, in the classroom, it could stimulate students to feel more motivated, secure, and open to learning, and in turn increased comprehension (Dikilitas & Mumford, 2020).

Similarly, but in a slightly different vein, Pak Adi assured that translanguaging is good, *“to help rid off, or at least minimize, students’ getting bored and uninterested in listening to me [teacher] due to their difficulties to understand the materials if delivered in English”*. With this, Pak Adi shows that translanguaging practices might contribute to reducing students’ boredom and making them in participating classroom activities. My analysis of this teacher’s voice also exposed the link of translanguaging with positive perceptions, especially concerning emotions, like feeling the enjoyment of learning English, which should not be ignored in language learning (Dewaele, 2015). In this regard, translanguaging played a crucial role in crafting a positive, comfortable, and welcoming teaching and learning atmosphere, offering the resources (students’ existing knowledge of other languages) to be used in learning English (Peercy, 2016).

Another positive attitude toward the use of non-target languages in the English classroom is shown in Pak Triono’s statement

*“I am an English teachers but I cannot force myself to speak full English in the entire classroom activities. If I do it, I am afraid my students cannot catch the points I am delivering in my materials and I do not want my students go home from schools without bringing new knowledge. Therefore, I mix my English with local language or Indonesian when needed...”*

Here, the teacher gave additional weight to the significance of making students understand what teachers teach to them, and he believed that speaking full English to students who do not yet have adequate English proficiency is unlikely to help achieve this goal of teaching. This is in congruence with Puspitasari & Yumarnamto (2020) who found that the English-only ideology, may not serve all the students well in terms of participation and engagement and the projected improvement in English learning particularly when the class members are of different levels of English proficiency.

Hence, with this multilingual student in mind and mostly their beginner-level English proficiency, English teachers in *pesantren* decided to engage with the characteristics of students and to take benefit from students’ linguistic repertoire by using

three other different languages in addition to English, i.e. Indonesian, Javanese, and Arabic, in their pedagogical practices. This teaching strategy of using students' multiple linguistic forms in the English classroom in *pesantren* can be seen as a form of multilingual pedagogy that encourages learners to be mindful of and use their pre-existing language learning knowledge and skills (Haukås, 2016; French, 2019). A multilingual teaching approach seems to fit the characteristics of students in *pesantren* schools who are mostly bilingual or multilingual (Tahir, 2017).

English teachers' improvisations in their practices in EFL classrooms in *pesantren* school contexts which are open to the insertion of other languages i.e. Indonesian, Arabic, and local language (especially Javanese), can be categorized in translanguaging theory and pedagogy. Translanguaging pedagogy or pedagogical translanguaging is described by Cenoz & Gorter (2020) as "intentional instructional strategies that integrate two or more languages and aim at the development of the multilingual repertoire as well as metalinguistic and language awareness" (p. 1). Although no teacher participants mentioned the term "translanguaging" or other related terms, the accommodation of their and students' languages (Hall & Cook, 2012) in their ELT practices allows the idea of translanguaging to emerge in the educational context of *pesantren* schools.

### ***How translanguaging strategies are used in EFL classrooms in pesantren***

This section presents extracts of several examples of translanguaging strategies six teacher participants used in their English classrooms in *pesantren*-based schools.

#### **Example 1 by Pak Triono**

*Pak Triono : The narrative text we have just read uses simple past tense form of sentences. Do you know what simple past tense is?*

*No student answered.*

*Pak Triono : It is simply telling you an action happened in the past time.*

*Still no student responded.*

*Pak Triono : Alright, I think it is similar to fi'il madhi [Arabic term used to tell actions which happened in the past]*

*Some students : Ooo.. (indicating an understanding of teacher's explanation)*

*Student A : So, simple past tense itu kejadian yang sudah terjadi ya bu di masa lalu ya pak*

*Teacher : That's true. Can anyone give me an example?*

*Student B : Me sir. I wake up late this morning...hehe*

*Pak Triono : Very good, but you use should use the verb "woke", not wake.*

*After that, more students could give examples of sentences in simple past tense form.*

In line with Pak Triono's positive attitude toward taking benefit of other languages, the example above shows that translanguaging could help him create effective material delivery, resulting in a deeper understanding of the subject matter (Lewis et al., 2012). The Arabic term "*fi'il madhi*" as an equivalent term with simple past tense made the students catch what he mean by simple past tense. The use of Arabic language terms in the teaching of English to Indonesian EFL students has been positively perceived in other studies; for

example Gusdian & Lestiono (2020), found that the utilization of Arabic letter *hijaiyah* sounds helpful to teach English pronunciations.

Pak Triono's translanguaging experience shed light on Cenoz & Gorter's (2017) view on translanguaging pedagogy which provides a space for the use of two or more languages in a language classroom to support learners to learn and understand through meaningful interactional communication with the teacher and their peers. His experience also confirms that translanguaging is not employed to separate two or more languages or shift of the languages; instead, it is used to mediate each other (García & Wei, 2014).

Example 2 by Pak Slamet

- Pak Slamet* : Today's topic is pronoun. Is there anyone want to give an example of pronoun in English?  
*Student A* : What is pronoun sir?...  
*Pak Slamet* : It is a word that can replace a noun in a sentence. In bahasa we call it *kata ganti*, for example, *dia*, *mereka*...  
*Student B* : I see sir, it is like *isim dhomir* in Arabic  
*Pak Slamet* : Yes, that's right. Can you give me an example now?  
*Student A* : he and she sir...  
*Student C* : we sir...

Here, Pak Slamet had a similar experience as Pak Triono, clearly explaining the English term i.e. pronoun using its equivalence in other languages, "*kata ganti*" in Bahasa Indonesia and accommodating a student's answer "*isim dhomir*" in Arabic. The translanguaging practices in this case enable students to make meaning and help them understand the topic being discussed. This confirms the theory of translanguaging which suggests that "multilingual speakers draw on the features of their diverse language repertoires in a dynamic, flexible and functionally integrated way to convey and construct meaning, make sense of their experiences, and gain understanding" (Rajendram, 2021, p. 1).

It is also worth noting from these two examples that a teacher's knowledge of the Arabic language becomes an important and useful source in English language teaching practices in *pesantren*-based schools, as Pak Slamet assured earlier, "*it is good for you [English teacher] if you can speak or read Arabic. To me, this competence is important because it can give a positive influence on teaching activities in pesantren.*" because this language has a strong place in *pesantren's* Islamic education landscape (Wekke, 2018) and is more familiar among students due to wide exposure of Arabic language in this schooling context.

### Example 3 by Bu Ningsih

*Bu Ningsih : Where did you go on vacation?*  
*Student A : What is vacation, Bu?*  
*Bu Ningsih : Vacation is holiday, do you know holiday?*  
*Some students : Ooo, liburan...*  
*Bu Ningsih : Yes that's true, vacation is liburan.*  
*Student B interrupted: Yes bu, same as uthlatun [Arabic]...*  
*Bu Ningsih : Oh ya... I just knew it, thank you... So guys, do you like going on vacation or uthlatun?*  
*Student C : I like bu, but jarang banget haha*  
*Followed by students' laugh*

The illustration of the example above, which has been previously presented in the introduction section of this paper, indicates how the use of other languages naturally appears in student-teacher conversation in the English classroom. Bu Ningsih's statement "Yes that's true, vacation is liburan", which responded to a student's utterance "Ooo, liburan..." shows how the Indonesian word "liburan" helps the teacher explain the meaning of the word "vacation", which was the main topic of the conversation. In addition, her response "Oh ya... I just knew it, thank you... So guys, do you like going on vacation or uthlatun?" to the other student's answer "Yes bu, same as uthlatun [Arabic]..." reinforces the meaning of the main topic and made the explanation even more interesting and clearer. It, in addition, delineates the teacher's accommodation of another foreign language, i.e. Arabic, in her English teaching practices. One other striking thing is that the dialogue shows how the teacher's acceptance of using other languages stimulated her students to engage voluntarily without being asked. According to Yuzlu & Dikilitas (2021), voluntary participation, with no pressure is important in improving intrinsic motivation to learn. In addition, translanguaging encourages students to be more active in the English classroom (Sahib, 2019).

### Example 4 by Bu Wati

*Bu Wati : Assalamualaikum, good morning everyone.*  
*Students : Wa'alaikum salam wrwb...*  
*Bu Wati : How are you today?*  
*Students : Alhamdulillah we are fine Miss... And you?*  
*Student A : Bilkhoir miss...*  
*Followed by some students saying bilkhoir...*  
*Bu Wati : Good, I am glad everyone is fine and bilkhoir..*  
*Students smiled and looked happy*  
*Bu Wati : Are you ready to study English today?*  
*Students : Yes Mis.....ready...*



In example of teacher-student dialogue above, Bu Wati directly used Arabic language words to start her English class to give a sense that students in her *pesantren* schools who are accustomed to using the Arabic language in daily learning activities are still allowed to use it in English classroom. Bu Wati thought this kind of strategy could attract students' attention and minimise the gap between English teachers and students. This strengthened the benefit of tranlanguaging to create teacher-student effective communication in the classroom (Rahmawansyah, 2019). In addition, translanguaging practices can make students feel more secure about expressing ideas, without being afraid of using the language/s they know. Using translanguaging pedagogy, thus, could encourage cognitive engagement in content-matter learning (Duarte, 2019). The teacher's utilizing Arabic in class opening also shows her awareness of the significance of using students' existing knowledge, i.e. knowledge of the Arabic language, to support English language teaching practices (Dávila, 2015).

#### Example 5 by Bu Mirna

Bu Mirna : What do you guys always do in the morning?  
Student A : After I wake up, I perform shalat and learn Qur'an  
Bu Mirna : Great! Shalat and learning Qur'an. What a good santri  
[pesantren student] you are. Are there anything else guys? Do you  
usually queue to take a bath in your dormitories?  
Student B : What is queue bu?  
Bu Mirna : Hmm queue is you wait in a line...  
No students responded  
Bu Mirna : Well, it is ngantri ...  
Students : Ooooo ngantri...(laughing together)  
Student C : Yes bu, we always ngantri in the morning hehe  
Bu Mirna : Good . What about saying it in English?  
Some students : we always queue to take a bath  
Bu Mirna : Good job...

Bu Mirna's illustrated example elucidates two points. First, by keeping the word "shalat" and "santri" instead of translating it into a word like "prayer" and "student", she tried to instill an Islamic term, which is in the Arabic language, into the teaching of English in an Islamic school context of *pesantren*. Meaning to say, translanguaging contributes to the integration of Islamic terms or names in ELT practices which has been encouraged to be done by English teachers in the *pesantren*-based school context (Fahrudin, 2012). Integration of Islamic values in *pesantren* ELT practices is a form of English teachers' competence to address sociocultural perspectives which emphasize that learning is situated in specific settings or contexts that shape how learning takes place (Richards, 2010).

Second, Bu Mirna's decision to finally explain the word "queue" using its Indonesian translation "ngantri" indicates the use of translanguaging in a certain level of difficulty of certain material that would not be easily understood if the teacher only used the target

language. Moreover, the translanguaging strategy is sometimes used to ensure that students know the meanings of vocabulary in the target language, making their vocabulary increased (Nursanti, 2021).

#### Example 6 by Pak Adi

*Pak Adi : According to the passage we read about food, what are popular western foods you know?*  
*Student A : Pizza, hot dog and hamburger, Sir.*  
*Teacher : Excellent. Do you like them?*  
*Student A : I don't know sir, never eat that sir*  
*Student B : Wah he is ndesoo sir...*  
*Most students Pak Adi laughed*  
*Student B : (Raising his hand), I like pecel and jengkol sir...*  
*The crowd laughed again*  
*Pak Adi : me too hehe..*

The above illustration of Pak Adi's experience in letting other languages go in his English classroom shows how the translanguaging strategy could contribute to creating fun and enjoyable learning. This is important to note, particularly amidst the fact that students often have bad perceptions about English classes as they are boring (Zawodniak & Kruk, 2019). What is experienced by Pak Adi was in resonance with García & Wei (2014, p. 75) providing an excellent example of translanguaging used as a pedagogical strategy in secondary classrooms where learners bring a range of home languages to school and use them in the classroom activities. Such learning atmosphere pictured in Pak Adi's example also clears up how translanguaging can help create a non-threatening English learning environment and contribute to maintaining the learners' sense of pride in their own languages due to acknowledgment and acceptance of their home languages during lessons (Omidire & Ayob, 2020). In addition, Pak Adi's use of translanguaging pedagogy by which students' linguistic resources are valued and learners are not seen as deficient users of English but as multilingual speakers (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020).

## CONCLUSION

The results imply that compared to monolingual teaching approaches, translanguaging might be a more effective pedagogical approach for ELT practices in the *pesantren*-based school context and other settings which have similar characteristics, i.e. students' multilingualism and relatively low proficiency in English because it could be used agentively to support one another's language learning, resolve conflict, assert their cultural identity, and draw on knowledge across languages (Rajendram, 2021).

The findings are also in resonance with the positive impact of translanguaging on teachers' feeling "okay" to make use of languages other than English when teaching English and on students' learning processes (García & Wei, 2014). It also helps overcome the constraints of monolingual instruction and language separation (Bunch, 2013) in which

students with lower proficiency are often afraid of making mistakes in participating in English classroom activities. This, as García & Wei (2014) asserted, could lead to the chance for the development of student-teacher relationship, important immersion, and accordingly empowering learning. The use of translanguaging strategy in the classroom is also a form of bringing the cultural context of *pasantren*, i.e. individuals are accustomed to naturally mixing two languages in their daily lives outside of the classroom, into classroom activities. This agrees with what (Canagarajah, 2011, p.8) asserts “the research studies we do have on school contexts show translanguaging to be a naturally occurring phenomenon”.

The present study gives birth to implications for ELT practices in a linguistically diverse environment. Teachers can offer rigorous instruction and maximize interactions that improve students’ language and meaning-making repertoire. Furthermore, this study offers some strategies that can be applied in the classroom to support translanguaging in teaching English such as translation, collaborative dialogue, collaborative grouping, reading multilingual texts, and so forth (García & Wei, 2014). The context-specific implication for all teachers in *pasantren*-based schools is that the natural shuttling between Indonesian, Arabic, local languages and English as an instructional and interactional language should be encouraged as valuable in English classes rather than disadvantageous (Wach & Monroy, 2020).

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