



EFL in a Multilingual Nation: Balancing Bahasa Indonesia and English in the Elementary Classroom

Educalingua,
Vol. 3 No. 2, 2025, pp. 135-151
DOI [10.26877/educalingua.v3i2.2888](https://doi.org/10.26877/educalingua.v3i2.2888)

Received October 22, 2025
Revised November 28, 2025
Accepted November 29, 2025

Lorie Mae Coloquit
Language Department, Naga College Foundation
coloquitloriemae21@gmail.com

Umniyatul Makmuroh
English teacher, SD Hj Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang,
Indonesia
umniyyatul@gmail.com

***Corresponding Author's Email:**
coloquitloriemae21@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Indonesia's multilingual landscape poses both opportunities and challenges for English language learning in primary education, where Bahasa Indonesia serves as the main instructional language alongside the introduction of English. Grounded in Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory and Translanguaging Theory, this study explored how fifth-grade students and their teacher at SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang navigate the interplay between Bahasa Indonesia and English in the classroom. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis. Findings revealed that students used Bahasa Indonesia as a cognitive and emotional scaffold to support English comprehension, while English was employed primarily for structured classroom tasks and oral practice. Translanguaging emerged as a natural learning strategy that facilitated meaning-making, confidence, and participation. Students demonstrated positive attitudes toward bilingual instruction, perceiving it as both supportive and empowering. The study concludes that balanced bilingual practices enhance engagement, promote additive bilingualism, and nurture linguistic identity among young learners. The implication highlights the need for EFL teachers and policymakers in Indonesia to embrace multilingual pedagogy that

integrates Bahasa Indonesia strategically to foster inclusive, meaningful, and culturally responsive English learning.

Keywords: additive bilingualism, Bahasa Indonesia, English learning, multilingual classroom, translanguaging

Introduction

Indonesia is a linguistically rich nation, home to more than 700 local languages that coexist with Bahasa Indonesia as the national language and English as a foreign language. This complex linguistic landscape presents unique opportunities and challenges in education, particularly in the teaching of English at the elementary level. English, as a global language, holds significant value in providing Indonesian learners access to global knowledge, communication, and future competitiveness (Gunawan et al., 2025; Kirkpatrick, 2012; Putra & Musigrungsi, 2022). However, the introduction of English to young learners occurs within a multilingual framework where Bahasa Indonesia and local languages play dominant roles in daily communication. The interplay between these languages often shapes learners' attitudes, proficiency, and motivation to learn English (Madkur, 2024; Sutrisno, 2023). As such, teachers in Indonesian primary schools must navigate linguistic diversity while ensuring that English learning supports, rather than suppresses, national and local identities. This study arises from the need to explore how young learners balance these linguistic influences in their English learning experiences.

In Indonesian elementary schools, Bahasa Indonesia functions as the primary language of instruction and a unifying medium among diverse linguistic groups. At the same time, English has been introduced as a foreign language subject, aiming to equip students with global communicative competence from an early age (Burner & Carlsen, 2023; Mouboua et al., 2024). Despite its growing importance, English instruction at this level often competes for cognitive and emotional space with Bahasa Indonesia, which remains central to national identity and academic development (Fitriyah et al., 2025; Ratri et al., 2025). The coexistence of these languages can lead to either reinforcement or interference, depending on how teachers and learners manage their use in the classroom. For young learners, whose cognitive and linguistic development is still in progress, this balance is delicate and requires pedagogical sensitivity. In multilingual classrooms like those in Semarang, teachers face the challenge of introducing English without diminishing students' mastery or appreciation of Bahasa Indonesia (Liando et al., 2023; Nursanti & AndriYanti, 2021). These dynamics underscore the complexity of English teaching within Indonesia's multilingual context.

Previous research in English language education in Indonesia has predominantly focused on pedagogical techniques, motivation, or curriculum implementation, but relatively fewer studies have examined the multilingual realities shaping early English learning. Studies such as those by Cahapay (2021) and Supriyanto et al. (2025) have emphasized the importance of understanding the sociolinguistic context in English education, yet the experiences of elementary students navigating between Bahasa Indonesia and English remain underexplored. The limited attention to this issue leaves a gap in understanding how language

use and attitudes develop simultaneously among young learners. Furthermore, most discussions on multilingual education in Indonesia tend to focus on secondary or tertiary levels, overlooking the foundational stage where language attitudes and identities are first formed (Prastikawati et al., 2025; Hamied, 2023). Recognizing this, an in-depth exploration at the elementary level becomes crucial to understanding how multilingualism influences early English learning. This study therefore situates itself within the broader discourse of multilingual education but with a specific lens on young learners.

The school context of this study, SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang provides an exemplary case for exploring multilingual classroom dynamics. Located in a culturally and linguistically diverse city, the school implements English as a foreign language program while maintaining Bahasa Indonesia as the main medium of instruction. Students at this school often speak both Bahasa Indonesia and Javanese in daily life, creating a rich linguistic repertoire that interacts with their English learning experiences (Makmuroh et al., 2024). Such an environment allows for observing how students switch between languages and how teachers manage this multilingual reality in classroom communication. In practice, teachers often face dilemmas about when and how to use Bahasa Indonesia or English to ensure understanding while promoting language exposure (Rostandi et al., 2025). These everyday pedagogical decisions have profound implications for students' language acquisition and attitudes. Therefore, investigating this classroom context provides valuable insights into how multilingualism manifests in actual English teaching practices.

One of the central challenges in EFL classrooms in Indonesia is maintaining a balance between promoting English proficiency and preserving students' proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia. Overemphasis on English could potentially lead to language hierarchy, where English is perceived as superior, risking the marginalization of the national language and cultural values (Adeoye & Prastikawati, 2025; Putrawan, 2022). Conversely, excessive reliance on Bahasa Indonesia may limit students' exposure to authentic English input, thereby slowing their communicative competence development. Finding the right balance requires teachers to adopt contextually appropriate strategies that align with both linguistic and cultural goals. For 5th-grade learners, who are developing their language awareness and cognitive flexibility, this balance significantly affects their engagement and confidence in using English. Understanding how this balance is achieved or challenged in classroom practices is thus crucial. It informs both pedagogical decision-making and policy directions for multilingual education in Indonesia.

The urgency of addressing this issue also stems from Indonesia's evolving education policy landscape, particularly under the current curriculum. This curriculum promotes differentiated and student-centered learning, emphasizing the development of global competence while valuing local identity. Within this framework, English teaching for young learners is expected to foster not only linguistic skills but also cultural sensitivity and multilingual awareness (Jing et al., 2024). However, without careful implementation, the goals of the curriculum risk being undermined by conflicting linguistic priorities. Teachers must, therefore, navigate between promoting English as a global tool and maintaining Bahasa Indonesia as a marker of national unity. The case of elementary students in Semarang highlights the practical realities of this balancing act, making it a timely and policy-relevant

area of inquiry. Examining this interplay helps educators design more inclusive and context-responsive approaches to English teaching.

Furthermore, the early introduction of English in multilingual settings raises critical questions about identity formation and language ideology among children. As young learners interact with multiple languages, they begin to form perceptions about language status, usefulness, and belonging. These perceptions can influence not only their motivation to learn English but also their sense of national and cultural identity (Khulel & Wibowo, 2025; Tekin & Garton, 2022). If English is framed solely as a marker of intelligence or prestige, students may unconsciously devalue their mother tongue or national language. On the other hand, when both languages are presented as complementary, learners can develop a balanced multilingual identity (Patanduk et al., 2024; Xie, 2021). Therefore, English teaching in Indonesian elementary schools should not merely focus on skill development but also on nurturing linguistic harmony. This humanistic dimension adds urgency to understanding how multilingual realities shape English learning experiences at an early age.

Despite the growing body of research on multilingual education in Indonesia, few studies have examined how young learners actively negotiate the coexistence of Bahasa Indonesia and English in authentic classroom interactions. Existing literature tends to focus on pedagogical strategies or policy perspectives, but limited attention has been given to how students themselves navigate multilingual resources during English learning at the elementary level. This study fills this gap by providing classroom-based empirical evidence on how fifth-grade learners use, balance, and interpret multiple languages within real instructional processes. By foregrounding learners' lived multilingual experiences, this study contributes a nuanced perspective that expands current multilingual EFL scholarship, particularly in young learner contexts where language attitudes and identities are still forming.

Given this context and gaps, the present study explores how fifth-grade students at SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang experience the interplay between Bahasa Indonesia and English in their English learning process. It investigates how students and teachers balance these languages in classroom communication and how such practices influence learners' attitudes and participation. This exploration seeks to contribute to the broader discussion on multilingual education by offering empirical insights from the Indonesian EFL context. Moreover, it aims to inform policy and pedagogy on how English can be effectively taught without compromising the national linguistic identity.

Based on these considerations, the study is guided by the following research questions: (1) How do fifth-grade students at SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang navigate the use of Bahasa Indonesia and English in their English learning?, and (2) How do teachers balance Bahasa Indonesia and English in classroom practices to support effective and meaningful EFL learning?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore how fifth-grade students and their teachers at SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang balance the use of Bahasa

Indonesia and English in the elementary English classroom. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of classroom interactions, language use, and participant perspectives in their natural setting (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The case study design, as described by Yin (2018), is appropriate when the research seeks to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. In this study, the phenomenon is the dynamic use of Bahasa Indonesia and English, while the context is the multilingual classroom environment of a private elementary school in Semarang. Through this approach, the researcher was able to capture authentic patterns of language use, classroom discourse, and affective responses among young learners.

The choice of a qualitative case study is theoretically aligned with Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, which emphasizes learning through social interaction and mediation within specific cultural contexts. Language learning is viewed as a socially constructed process, making natural classroom observation and discourse analysis particularly relevant. Additionally, the study is informed by Translanguaging Theory (García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Wei, 2015), which supports exploring how learners and teachers draw upon multiple linguistic resources to make meaning. These theoretical perspectives justify the use of qualitative inquiry, as they value rich, contextualized data that reveal how learners negotiate meaning through language practices. Thus, the research design not only fits the research questions but also aligns with the interpretive paradigm that seeks to understand human experiences from participants' perspectives.

Participants

The participants of this study were 48 fifth-grade students (aged 10–11 years old) and one English teacher from SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang, a private Islamic elementary school located in the urban center of Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia. The students came from various linguistic backgrounds, with Bahasa Indonesia as their primary school language and Javanese commonly spoken at home. English is introduced as a foreign language subject twice a week. This linguistic diversity provides a rich environment for examining how multilingualism influences English learning. The teacher selected for this study had over seven years of experience in teaching English to young learners and demonstrated an understanding of both the national curriculum and communicative language teaching principles.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select participants who could provide relevant and diverse insights into multilingual language use in English learning (García & Kleyn, 2016). The inclusion of all students in one class allowed the researcher to observe a naturally occurring classroom community where Bahasa Indonesia and English interplay. To maintain ethical standards, consent was obtained from the school administration, the teacher, and students' parents. Students' identities were anonymized using pseudonyms in the reporting of data. Table 1 below presents the demographic information of the student participants.

Table 1. Demographic Information of Participants

Category	Details
Number of Participants	48 students
Grade Level	5th Grade
Age Range	10–11 years
Gender	23 males, 25 females
Languages Spoken at Home	Javanese (68%), Bahasa Indonesia (32%)
Primary Language of Instruction	Bahasa Indonesia
English Learning Frequency	2 sessions per week
Teacher Experience	7 years (EFL at elementary level)

Data Collection and Instruments

Data were collected through three main instruments: classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. These instruments were selected to provide triangulated evidence of how Bahasa Indonesia and English were balanced in classroom practices. Six classroom sessions (each lasting 70 minutes) were observed over a period of three weeks. The researcher acted as a non-participant observer, using a structured observation sheet to record language choice, teacher-student interaction patterns, and instances of translanguaging. Field notes and audio recordings were made to capture the linguistic flow and contextual nuances of classroom communication. Moreover, individual interviews were conducted with the English teacher and focus group interviews with six randomly selected students representing different linguistic backgrounds. The interviews explored participants' perceptions of using Bahasa Indonesia and English, their language preferences, and how they perceived the balance between the two languages during lessons. In addition, lesson plans, student worksheets, and teacher notes were examined to understand the instructional design and linguistic choices embedded in the teaching materials. The combination of these instruments ensured both depth and breadth of data. Classroom observations provided real-time evidence of language practices, interviews revealed participants' reflections and attitudes, and document analysis offered insight into pedagogical intentions. The triangulation of data sources enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. All data collection procedures adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process followed thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This approach involved six key steps: (1) data familiarization through repeated reading and listening to recordings, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for patterns and themes, (4) reviewing themes for internal coherence, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final report. Classroom observation transcripts, interview data, and documents were coded manually and then organized into thematic categories related to language use patterns, teacher strategies, student responses, and perceptions of multilingualism. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework of translanguaging and sociocultural learning.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, several strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of findings with the teacher to confirm the accuracy of interpretations. Peer debriefing was also carried out with two colleagues specializing in TEYL and multilingual education to enhance analytical rigor. Triangulation across data sources (observation, interview, and document analysis) helped validate recurring patterns and minimize researcher bias (Cresswell & Poth, 2016). The analysis ultimately aimed to uncover how Bahasa Indonesia and English coexist in the classroom and what pedagogical and sociocultural implications emerge from this interplay. The interpretive analysis thus provided a nuanced understanding of multilingual EFL learning in Indonesian elementary education. Furthermore, the study applied four qualitative validity criteria as proposed by Lincoln and Guba. Credibility was established through data triangulation across observations, interviews, and document analysis, as well as member checking with the teacher to ensure accurate interpretation of classroom events. Dependability was supported by maintaining a detailed audit trail of field notes, coding procedures, and analytical decisions, enabling the research process to be reviewed systematically. Confirmability was ensured by documenting reflective memos and minimizing researcher bias through peer debriefing sessions with colleagues specializing in TEYL and multilingual education. Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the school context, participant characteristics, and linguistic environment, allowing readers to judge the applicability of the findings to other multilingual EFL settings. Together, these procedures strengthened the methodological rigor and reliability of the study.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented according to the research questions that guided the investigation. Data were obtained from classroom observations, student interviews, and document analysis, which were triangulated to reveal comprehensive insights into students' language use patterns and perceptions. The first research question focuses on how fifth-grade students navigate the use of Bahasa Indonesia and English in their English learning process. The analysis uncovered distinct patterns in how students switch between languages for comprehension, participation, and expression during classroom activities. The findings also reveal that students' language choices are influenced by their proficiency levels, task complexity, and emotional comfort. Quantitative data derived from classroom observation were complemented by students' reflections during interviews, allowing for both behavioral and perceptual perspectives to be considered.

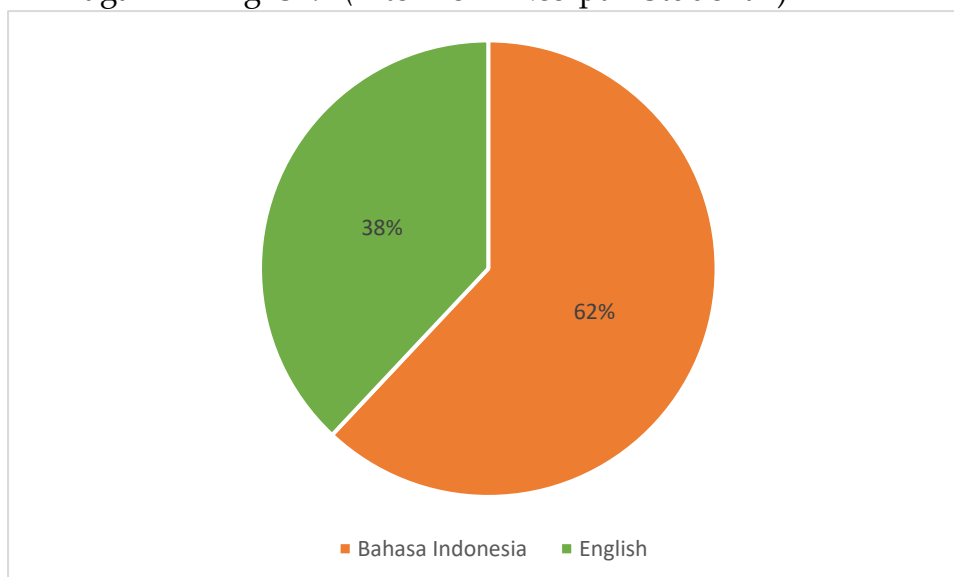
Navigating Bahasa Indonesia and English in Learning Activities

The classroom observations revealed that students used Bahasa Indonesia more frequently (62%) than English (38%) during English lessons. Bahasa Indonesia served as a cognitive and emotional bridge, helping students understand instructions, clarify meanings, and discuss answers with peers. English, on the other hand, was primarily used for structured classroom tasks, such as responding to teacher prompts, reading aloud, and performing dialogues. Figure 1 below illustrates the overall proportion of language use observed across six sessions.

Figure 1. Proportion of Language Use during English Lessons

During teacher-led interactions, English was used consistently for greetings, instructions, and content delivery. However, when comprehension difficulties arose, both the teacher and students naturally shifted to Bahasa Indonesia. Peer-to-peer interactions exhibited an even higher use of Bahasa Indonesia, particularly when students collaborated in groups or clarified vocabulary meanings. This linguistic flexibility indicates that students do not view the two languages as separate systems but as complementary tools that support meaning-making in learning English.

“When the teacher speaks only in English, sometimes I don’t understand. But when it’s explained briefly in Bahasa Indonesia, it becomes easier. After that, I can answer again in English.” (Interview Excerpt 1-Student 7)



This excerpt demonstrates that students perceive Bahasa Indonesia as a supportive medium that enhances comprehension rather than an obstacle to English learning. For many students, the temporary shift to Bahasa Indonesia facilitates confidence and enables them to re-engage with English tasks effectively. The use of both languages thus represents a functional strategy to maintain communication flow and cognitive engagement.

Translanguaging as a Learning Strategy

Analysis of classroom interaction patterns indicated frequent translanguaging practices, where students integrated Bahasa Indonesia and English fluidly within a single utterance. This occurred especially during vocabulary learning, instruction-following, and group discussions. About 70% of observed classroom exchanges involved some form of translanguaging, either initiated by the teacher or students. For instance, students would often repeat English sentences after the teacher but insert Bahasa Indonesia explanations or synonyms to confirm understanding. These translanguaging practices enabled learners to make sense of new concepts using their linguistic resources, aligning

with García and Wei's (2014) perspective that translanguaging promotes deeper cognitive processing in multilingual classrooms.

"When we work in groups, we usually mix languages. Someone speaks in English, then we explain it in Bahasa Indonesia so friends can understand.) Interview Excerpt 2 (Student 12)

This response illustrates how translanguaging functions as a collaborative strategy among peers to ensure mutual understanding and task completion. Rather than signalling confusion, language mixing becomes a tool for social cohesion and academic support (Pintado Gutiérrez, 2021). Students demonstrate awareness that the goal is not exclusive English use but effective communication that allows everyone to participate meaningfully. Such behaviour reflects a natural multilingual competence, where learners use all available linguistic resources to construct meaning.

Factors Influencing Students' Language Choice

Further analysis identified three major factors influencing students' choice between Bahasa Indonesia and English: task difficulty, confidence level, and teacher language use. When tasks involved simple vocabulary or familiar contexts, students tended to use English spontaneously. However, as task complexity increased such as describing pictures or forming original sentences, students shifted more frequently to Bahasa Indonesia. Observation data indicated that students used Bahasa Indonesia in 75% of cases involving grammar explanation or content discussion, compared to only 25% during structured oral practice.

"(If the task is easy, I try to use English. But if it's difficult or confusing, I automatically use Bahasa Indonesia first.)" Interview Excerpt 3 (Student 21)

This pattern shows that language choice is both cognitive and affective. Students use Bahasa Indonesia to lower anxiety and clarify meaning before returning to English for production. Teacher language use also played a significant role in shaping student behavior; when teachers modeled translanguaging naturally, students felt more comfortable switching languages purposefully rather than fearfully. The overall finding suggests that students' navigation between Bahasa Indonesia and English reflects strategic multilingualism, where both languages function symbiotically in learning rather than competitively.

Table 2. Summary of Findings for Research Question 1

Aspect Observed		Dominant Language	Percentage (%)	Function of Language Use
Teacher's instruction	classroom	English	60%	Greeting, content delivery, questioning
Students' interaction	peer	Bahasa Indonesia	65%	Clarification, discussion,

Vocabulary practice and repetition	English	70%	vocabulary explanation
Grammar and content explanation	Bahasa Indonesia	75%	Pronunciation and memorization
Overall translanguaging use	Mixed (BI + Eng)	70%	Concept clarification and comprehension
			Meaning-making and collaborative learning

Table 1 has highlighted that fifth-grade students at SD Hj. Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang actively navigate Bahasa Indonesia and English in a complementary manner. They engage in translanguaging as a means of learning, using Bahasa Indonesia for comprehension and English for expression. This balanced and purposeful use of two languages demonstrates an emergent multilingual competence aligned with additive bilingualism Dorambari (2021) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, where learning is mediated through social and linguistic tools. The students' ability to switch languages contextually reflects a developing metalinguistic awareness that supports both language learning and identity formation.

Students' Attitudes and Engagement Toward Learning English in a Multilingual Context

Before delving into the data analysis, it is important to note that the second research question sought to explore how fifth-grade students perceive and engage in English learning when Bahasa Indonesia and English are used complementarily. This focus aimed to understand the emotional and motivational dimensions of EFL learning in a multilingual environment. The data were derived from student questionnaires and follow-up interviews, which revealed patterns of enthusiasm, confidence, and perceived relevance of English to students' everyday lives. Generally, the findings indicate that students' positive engagement increased when teachers incorporated Bahasa Indonesia as a bridge for understanding English content and tasks.

The questionnaire results show that a majority of students exhibited a positive attitude toward English learning, with 75% agreeing that English lessons were fun and meaningful, while only 10% expressed difficulties or disinterest. A visual summary of the data is presented in Figure 2 below, highlighting the distribution of responses regarding students' enjoyment, confidence, and perceived usefulness of English learning activities.

Table 3. Students' Attitudes Toward English Learning

Attitude Aspect	Positive (%)	Neutral (%)	Negative (%)
Enjoyment of English lessons	75	15	10
Confidence in using English	68	22	10
Perceived usefulness of English	82	13	5

The data above suggest that students' positive disposition toward English was strongly influenced by the learning atmosphere and teachers' bilingual approach. Many students reported feeling less anxious and more confident when Bahasa Indonesia was used as a scaffold for vocabulary explanation and classroom instructions. This reflects that the balanced language use helped reduce the affective filter, enabling more spontaneous participation in classroom discourse.

"When the teacher explains in both English and Bahasa Indonesia, I can understand better and feel brave to speak. If only English, I'm afraid of making mistakes."
Interview Excerpt 3 (Student 4)

The excerpt above illustrates that students view bilingual instruction not as a crutch but as an empowering pedagogical strategy. It validates Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis, suggesting that emotional comfort facilitates language acquisition. In the multilingual classroom, the ability to shift between languages provided students with a sense of security and ownership of learning. Students reported that translanguaging moments such as translating new words or using Bahasa Indonesia for clarification made lessons more approachable and less intimidating.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that students associated English learning with social and cultural aspirations. They perceived English as a language that connects them with the wider world while simultaneously affirming pride in their Indonesian identity. Interestingly, 60% of students stated that learning English made them proud because it showed that they could use an international language while being Indonesian. This sense of balanced identity aligns with the notion of additive bilingualism (Cummins, 2000), where learners' home language supports rather than competes with second language acquisition.

"I want to be able to speak English like my teacher, but I also like to explain things in Indonesian. It feels like both are important." Interview Excerpt 4 (Student 8)

The statement above signifies how young learners in multilingual environments develop dual linguistic identities, appreciating both the national and international linguistic spheres. This finding supports García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging space, where learners dynamically combine linguistic resources to construct meaning and identity. Students viewed English not as a foreign intrusion but as a complement to their linguistic repertoire or a tool to communicate beyond borders while maintaining cultural rootedness.

Additionally, classroom observations confirmed that students' engagement levels increased during interactive bilingual activities, such as storytelling, bilingual games, and group discussions using mixed languages. The integration of Bahasa Indonesia encouraged participation among shy or low-proficiency learners, who felt more comfortable expressing partial English responses supported by Indonesian phrases. This phenomenon echoes Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, where scaffolding

through the first language facilitates the learner's progression toward independent second-language use.

"When the teacher lets us answer in both languages, I can say more things. Then I learn how to say them in English next time." Interview Excerpt 5(Student 23) (Interview)

This excerpt further emphasizes that code-mixed communication fosters cognitive and linguistic growth. Students leveraged their existing knowledge of Bahasa Indonesia to explore English expressions actively. As a result, participation rates and communicative confidence improved across the semester, indicating a strong pedagogical rationale for maintaining balanced bilingual instruction at the elementary level.

In conclusion, the findings for Research Question 2 reveal that students' attitudes toward English learning are largely positive and intrinsically linked to the use of Bahasa Indonesia as a supportive linguistic tool. The bilingual classroom setting not only enhanced comprehension but also cultivated motivation, engagement, and linguistic pride. These findings reinforce the view that multilingual education at the primary level can simultaneously foster English proficiency and national language identity, ultimately creating a balanced foundation for intercultural communication competence.

Discussion

The findings of this study provide rich insights into how multilingual practices shape English language learning among Indonesian elementary students. Overall, the integration of Bahasa Indonesia and English within the classroom created a supportive environment where students could develop comprehension and confidence simultaneously. This supports previous arguments by García and Wei's (2014) that translanguaging serves as a bridge between linguistic repertoires, enabling learners to use all available language resources to construct meaning. For fifth graders in a linguistically diverse context like Indonesia, using Bahasa Indonesia not only facilitated comprehension but also built a sense of linguistic belonging and cultural identity within the learning process (Oshchepkova et al., 2023; Sutrisno, 2023).

The first research question revealed that teachers used Bahasa Indonesia strategically to scaffold English learning through translation, clarification, and cultural mediation. This pattern resonates Sociocultural Theory, which highlights that learning occurs within a social context through mediated interactions. Teachers' bilingual mediation acted as a cognitive scaffold, allowing students to move from their zone of actual development (Bahasa Indonesia) toward their zone of proximal development (English). In this light, Bahasa Indonesia did not hinder English acquisition; rather, it became a cultural and cognitive tool that supported young learners' gradual mastery of a foreign language (Adeoye & Prastikawati, 2025; Irham, 2023). These findings also affirm Cummins (2005) Interdependence Hypothesis, which argues that proficiency in one language can facilitate the acquisition of another. Students in this study demonstrated how literacy skills and conceptual understanding developed in Bahasa

Indonesia helped them comprehend English vocabulary and grammatical structures more effectively. When teachers built on learners' existing linguistic knowledge, transfer of skills became more evident, particularly in reading comprehension and vocabulary retention. Thus, the findings counter the misconception that the use of the national language might impede English learning; instead, it underscores the pedagogical potential of bilingual reinforcement in early language education.

In relation to classroom dynamics, the use of Bahasa Indonesia also appeared to lower students' affective filter, leading to increased participation and reduced anxiety. This aligns with Yulan & Yuewu (2020) Affective Filter Hypothesis, which emphasizes the role of emotional variables such as motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety in language acquisition. The fifth graders in this study felt more comfortable expressing themselves when the teacher validated their use of Bahasa Indonesia as part of learning English. Consequently, this bilingual space nurtured an inclusive and psychologically safe classroom climate, essential for cultivating oral communication skills in young learners.

Moreover, the positive student attitudes reflected in the second research question illustrate that additive bilingualism (Cummins, 2000) can be achieved in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Students did not view English as a replacement for Bahasa Indonesia but as an additional linguistic asset. This finding is pedagogically significant because it challenges the subtractive approach that often dominates foreign language education, where English is privileged over local or national languages (Khulel, 2021). Instead, the data highlight how balanced bilingual practices promote harmony between global communication competence and local cultural pride an educational balance that aligns with Indonesia's multilingual ethos and national identity policy. The results also contribute to the growing body of research on translanguaging pedagogy in Asian multilingual contexts (Putrawan, 2022; Rostandi et al., 2025), confirming that flexible language use enhances comprehension and engagement. In particular, students' comments about feeling "brave to speak" or "able to explain more" when using both languages demonstrate that translanguaging fosters agency and learner autonomy. This agency is critical in young learner contexts, where linguistic experimentation and interaction are central to skill development. The bilingual instructional approach at SD Hj Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang thus mirrors what (Madkur, 2024) terms a translanguaging spacing a dynamic learning environment where languages coexist, interact, and evolve.

Another significant implication relates to curriculum and teacher education. The findings suggest that Indonesian EFL teachers should be encouraged to integrate bilingual teaching methods more explicitly within the newest curriculum, which promotes flexibility and contextual learning. Teacher training programs can equip educators with strategies for intentional translanguaging such as bilingual questioning, peer translation tasks, and reflective language comparison activities (Supriyanto et al., 2025). This will ensure that the use of Bahasa Indonesia is not accidental but pedagogically deliberate, supporting both linguistic clarity and identity formation among young learners. From a broader sociolinguistic perspective, this study reinforces the idea that multilingual education is a form of linguistic justice in nations like Indonesia, where multiple languages coexist. Allowing children to learn English without suppressing their national language promotes equity, inclusion, and respect for linguistic diversity. As Ashraf et al. (2021) notes, educational success in multilingual

societies depends on expanding rather than restricting learners' language practices. In this study, students' pride in being bilingual demonstrates that language policy and classroom practice can align harmoniously to nurture both local and global literacies.

Finally, the results underscore the urgency of reconceptualizing EFL teaching in Indonesia's primary schools within a multilingual paradigm. Rather than perceiving Bahasa Indonesia as a competing language, it should be embraced as an integral part of English learning pedagogy. The balanced linguistic environment created at SD Hj Isriati Baiturahman 1 Semarang exemplifies a sustainable and culturally responsive approach that can inform national policy and teacher education frameworks. Moving forward, future studies might extend this research by exploring how multilingual strategies influence specific language skills such as speaking fluency or reading comprehension over longer instructional periods.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study underscores that bilingual instruction integrating Bahasa Indonesia and English is a pedagogically effective and culturally responsive approach for young learners in Indonesia. It affirms that maintaining the use of Bahasa Indonesia alongside English supports cognitive development, inclusivity, and sustained language learning motivation. The findings imply that English teachers should adopt translanguaging practices to make learning more accessible and meaningful, especially at the primary level where learners are still developing linguistic and conceptual foundations. Teacher education programs must therefore prepare future educators to view multilingualism as a strength and to employ flexible language strategies in classroom interaction. Moreover, policymakers should institutionalize multilingual pedagogy within the national curriculum to ensure alignment with Indonesia's linguistic diversity and educational equity goals. By doing so, schools can nurture learners who are not only proficient in English but also confident in their linguistic identity and equipped to participate in a globalized world.

References

- Adeoye, M. A., & Prastikawati, E. F. (2025). The importance of auditory learning in efl teaching: a theoretical perspective. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Research and Review*, 8(2), 326–340. <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijerr.v8i2.92063>
- Ashraf, M. A., Turner, D. A., & Laar, R. A. (2021). Multilingual language practices in education in pakistan: the conflict between policy and practice. *Sage Open*, 11(1), 21582440211004140. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211004140>
- Burner, T., & Carlsen, C. (2023). Teachers' multilingual beliefs and practices in English classrooms: A scoping review. *Review of Education*, 11(2), e3407. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3407>
- Cahapay, M. (2021). Kirkpatrick model: its limitations as used in higher education evaluation. *International Journal of Assessment Tools in Education*, 8(1), 135–144. <https://doi.org/10.21449/ijate.856143>

- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Cummins, J. (2005). *Teaching for Cross-Language Transfer in Dual Language Education: Possibilities and Pitfalls*.
- Dorambari, D. (2021). Countering subtractive bilingualism with additive bilingualism in the albanian language. *Prizren Social Science Journal*, 5(1), 79–85. <https://doi.org/10.32936/pssj.v5i1.198>
- Fitriyah, N., Hidayat, D. N., & Husna, N. (2025). Teaching english in pesantren: the dynamics of code-switching in multilingual classrooms. *Tamaddun*, 24(1), 216–228.
- García, O., & Kleyn, T. (2016). *Translanguaging with Multilingual Students: Learning from Classroom Moments*.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2015). Translanguaging, bilingualism, and bilingual education. *The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education*, 223–240.
- Gunawan, W., Kurniawan, E., & Hakim, M. A. (2025). Navigating inconsistencies: The challenges of implementing multilingual education policy in rural Indonesia. *Social Sciences & Humanities Open*, 11, 101601.
- Hamied, F. A. (2023). English language teacher education amid policy changes in multilingual Indonesia. In *Local Research and Glocal Perspectives in English Language Teaching: Teaching in Changing Times* (pp. 433–446). Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore.
- Irham. (2023). Important but not desired: students' perception towards English (es) in multilingual settings. *Asian Englishes*, 25(3), 435–451.
- Jiang, L., Gu, M. M., & Fang, F. (2024). Multimodal or multilingual? Native English teachers' engagement with translanguaging in Hong Kong TESOL classrooms. *Applied Linguistics Review*, 15(4), 1299–1319.
- Khulel, B. (2021). Teaching english for young learners in rural area: teachers' challenges. *Lingua*, 17(2), 115–130. <https://doi.org/10.34005/lingua.v17i2.1558>
- Kirkpatrick, A. (2012). English in ASEAN: Implications for regional multilingualism. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 33(4), 331–344. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2012.661433>
- Liando, N. V. F., Dallyono, R., Tatipang, D. P., & Lengkoan, F. (2023). Among english, indonesian and local language: translanguaging practices in an indonesian efl classroom. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 13(1), 204–216. <https://doi.org/10.17509/ijal.v13i1.58270>
- Madkur A. (2024). Multilingual realities and english teacher construction in indonesian pesantren: a narrative inquiry. *Anglophile Journal*, 4(2), 91–102. <https://doi.org/10.51278/anglophile.v4i2.1044>
- Makmuroh, U., Abimbowo, Y. O., & Agoro, S. (2024). Performance-based assessment in assessing the students' evaluating skill: how is the implementation in english learning? *Educalingua*, 2(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.26877/educalingua.v2i1.394>
- Moses Adeleke Adeoye & Entika Fani Prastikawati. (2025). The importance of auditory learning in efl teaching: a theoretical perspective. *Indonesian Journal of Educational Research and Review*, 8(2), 326–340. <https://doi.org/10.23887/ijerr.v8i2.92063>

- Mouboua, P. D., Atobatele, F. A., & Akintayo, O. T. (2024). Multilingual education and social equity: A comparative study of integration policies in multicultural societies. *GSC Advanced Research and Reviews*, 19(2), 032-042.
- Nursanti, E., & AndriYanti, E. (2021). Language identities of multilingual college english learners in indonesia. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 316-337. <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911403>
- Oshchepkova, E. S., Kartushina, N. A., & Razmakhnina, K. O. (2023). Bilingualism and development of literacy in children: a systematic review. *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*, 16(1), 3-25. <https://doi.org/10.11621/pir.2023.0101>
- Patanduk, S. T., Sirande, N., Sampelolo, R., Panggua, S., & Siumarlata, V. (2023, September). Challenge in teaching English for young learners: A pre-service teachers perspective. In *Online Conference of Education Research International (OCERI 2023)* (pp. 635-641). Atlantis Press.
- Pintado Gutiérrez, L. (2021). Translation in language teaching, pedagogical translation, and code-switching: Restructuring the boundaries. *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(2), 219-239. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2018.1534260>
- Prastikawati, E. F., Adeoye, M. A., Curle, S., & Riwayatiningsih, R. (2025). Beyond the classroom: investigating learning and motivation among efl undergraduate students in indonesia. *Indonesian Journal on Learning and Advanced Education (IJOLAE)*, 341-360. <https://doi.org/10.23917/ijolae.v7i2.8579>
- Putra, J. R., & Musigrungsi, S. (2022). Indonesian efl teachers' beliefs about incorporating cultural aspects in their multilingual and multicultural efl classrooms. *3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies*, 28(1), 75-89. <https://doi.org/10.17576/3L-2022-2801-06>
- Putrawan, G. E. (2022). Translanguaging practices in efl classrooms: evidence from indonesia. *CaLLs (Journal of Culture, Arts, Literature, and Linguistics)*, 8(1), 69. <https://doi.org/10.30872/calls.v8i1.7973>
- Ratri, D. P., Rachmajanti, S., Anugerahwati, M., Laksmi, E. D., & Gozali, A. (2025). Fostering cultural competence: Developing an English syllabus for young learners in the Indonesian EFL context with emphasis on local culture to maintain students' identity. *Cogent Education*, 12(1), 2440177. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2024.2440177>
- Rostandi, U. D., Rohandy, F., & Wasik, A. (2025). Translanguaging practices among English, Indonesian, and Arabic: Enhancing a holistic approach to tafsir in an Indonesian interpretation classroom. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*.
- Supriyanto, La Hadisi, Pairin, Dirman, & Raehang. (2025). Facing the challenges of globalization: transforming madrasah education from bilingual to international classrooms. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8(1), 17-30. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i1.125>
- Supriyanto, La Hadisi, Pairin, Dirman, & Raehang. (2025). Facing the challenges of globalization: transforming madrasah education from bilingual to international classrooms. *Nazhruna: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam*, 8(1), 17-30. <https://doi.org/10.31538/nzh.v8i1.125>

- Sutrisno, D. B. (2023). Translanguaging practices within indonesian efl classrooms: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.
- Tekin, S., & Garton, S. (2022). *L1 in The Primary English Classroom*.
- Xie, R. (2021). The effectiveness of total physical response (TPR) on teaching English to young learners. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 12(2).
- Yin, R. K. (2018). *Case study research and applications* (Vol. 6). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Yulan, L., & Yuewu, L. (2020). *The Enlightenment of Affective Filter Hypothesis and Risk-Taking on English*.