Translanguaging and Its Role in Enhancing Comprehension among Fifth-Semester English Literature Students at USU

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of translanguaging in enhancing comprehension among fifth-semester English Literature students in Class B at Universitas Sumatera Utara. The research addresses the difficulties students face when engaging with complex literary and theoretical texts in a foreign language learning environment. The primary purpose of this study is to examine how translanguaging practices, understood as the flexible and purposeful use of multiple linguistic resources, support students' understanding, interpretation, and participation in classroom activities. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the study collected data through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis of students' learning artifacts. The analysis focused on identifying patterns of translanguaging use and examining their impact on students' comprehension processes. The results show that translanguaging plays a significant role in helping students connect their prior linguistic knowledge with academic English, enabling them to grasp abstract concepts and interpret texts more effectively. Students were observed using translanguaging strategically to clarify meanings, negotiate interpretations, and scaffold their peers' understanding. Furthermore, translanguaging reduced language anxiety, minimized gaps in English proficiency, and encouraged a more collaborative and inclusive learning environment. These practices ultimately supported deeper engagement with course materials and enhanced overall comprehension. The findings indicate that translanguaging can serve as an effective pedagogical approach in higher education literature courses, particularly in multilingual contexts such as Indonesia. This study contributes to the discourse on multilingual pedagogy and offers practical insights for educators seeking to integrate translanguaging as a dynamic strategy to strengthen learning outcomes in English Literature programs.

ARTICLE INFO

INTRODUCTION

In the context of higher education, English Literature students are constantly challenged to engage with complex texts such as novels, poetry, critical theories, and academic articles. These texts are not only linguistically demanding but also conceptually abstract, requiring advanced

levels of comprehension, critical analysis, and interpretation. In Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language, students often encounter additional difficulties in accessing and understanding these materials (Panggabean, 2015). Many lecturers adopt English-only policies in the classroom, aiming to immerse students fully in the target language. However, strict monolingual practices often result in limited participation, reduced comprehension, and a widening gap between students with different language proficiencies. This situation highlights the urgency of finding effective pedagogical strategies that can help students navigate linguistic and cognitive challenges while still fostering their academic growth (Puspitasari, 2025).

One such strategy that has gained increasing attention in recent years is translanguaging. Translanguaging is understood not merely as code-switching but as a pedagogical approach that allows learners to flexibly mobilize their full linguistic repertoires in order to make meaning, deepen comprehension, and participate more actively in classroom practices (Yilmaz, 2021). A growing body of research has shown the positive impact of translanguaging in various EFL and multilingual contexts. For instance, translanguaging empowers learners to negotiate meaning and build academic knowledge (Tai & Wong, 2023). Cenoz and Gorter (2020) emphasized that pedagogical translanguaging enhances metalinguistic awareness and supports deeper learning. In Indonesian contexts, Rostandi et al. (2025) reported that translanguaging improved student comprehension and classroom interaction at the university level. Similarly, rigid English-only policies tend to disadvantage students, whereas translanguaging practices create more inclusive and effective learning environments (Menken & Sánchez, 2019).

Other studies in Indonesia also confirm these findings across different educational levels. Lin and Leung (2024) found that translanguaging practices facilitated more meaningful learning spaces for EFL students, while Ticheloven et al. (2021) demonstrated how translanguaging in online learning environments helped multilingual students navigate academic challenges. At the secondary level, Wang (2019) explored students' attitudes towards code-switching and translanguaging, showing that these practices are generally viewed as supportive rather than detrimental to language acquisition. Despite these findings, most previous studies either focused on general EFL classrooms, language teaching in Islamic boarding schools, or broader discussions of bilingual pedagogy. Very few have specifically examined translanguaging in the context of English Literature students, who face distinctive challenges when dealing with highly abstract and textually dense academic materials.

This gap indicates that although the benefits of translanguaging have been widely acknowledged, its role in supporting English Literature students at the tertiary level remains underexplored. Such an investigation is crucial because literature students are expected not only to understand language but also to interpret layered meanings, cultural contexts, and theoretical frameworks that are often inaccessible without linguistic scaffolding. By focusing on fifth-semester English Literature students at Universitas Sumatera Utara, this study seeks to fill this research gap. Therefore, the aim of this study is to examine how translanguaging practices contribute to enhancing students' comprehension of complex literary and theoretical texts, while also exploring the pedagogical implications for teaching English Literature in an Indonesian higher education context.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Translanguaging has emerged as a central construct in multilingual education, particularly in its critique of monolingual assumptions that traditionally underpin language teaching. Wang (2019) defines translanguaging as the process through which multilingual speakers draw on their entire linguistic repertoire in flexible and dynamic ways to construct meaning and communicate effectively. Unlike code-switching, which presupposes the alternation between separate language systems, translanguaging conceptualizes linguistic resources as integrated and interdependent.

Building on this perspective, Ticheloven et al. (2021) frames translanguaging as a practical theory of language that challenges the ideology of "separate languages." From this viewpoint,

multilingual speakers do not compartmentalize languages but mobilize them holistically according to communicative needs. As a pedagogical orientation, translanguaging extends beyond a linguistic description; it becomes an instructional stance that validates learners' identities, promotes epistemic access, and facilitates deeper engagement with academic content. The concept aligns with sociocultural theories of learning, which view language use as situated, mediated, and socially constructed.

The implementation of translanguaging in educational settings has been widely documented in both bilingual and foreign language classrooms. Lin and Leung (2024) emphasizes that translanguaging enables learners to negotiate meaning, construct academic knowledge, and express identity across linguistic boundaries. Similarly, Menken and Sánchez (2019) demonstrate that flexible movement between languages fosters inclusive classroom practices and broadens participation.

In EFL contexts, translanguaging has been shown to support comprehension and engagement, particularly where rigid English-only policies limit access to meaning. Menken and Sánchez (2019) argue that translanguaging creates equitable learning spaces by allowing students to access academic content through their stronger linguistic resources. Ticheloven et al. (2021) describe these spaces as "instructional openings" that expand opportunities for participation. In higher education,

Within Indonesia's EFL landscape, translanguaging has increasingly been examined as a context-sensitive pedagogical resource. Empirical studies indicate that teachers and students employ translanguaging strategically to mediate understanding and classroom interaction. Rostandi et al. (2025) through discourse analysis in a university setting, identified multiple forms and functions of translanguaging, including clarifying abstract concepts, managing classroom dynamics, motivating learners, and supporting students with lower proficiency levels. Their findings underscore its functional role in scaffolding comprehension. Puspitasari and Yumarnamto (2020) reported that teachers integrated English, Indonesian, and local languages through intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag translanguaging, thereby reducing cognitive load and enhancing engagement. Raja et al. (2022) documented mixed student attitudes, noting that teacher-guided translanguaging was generally accepted, whereas peer-initiated use was viewed less favorably. These findings suggest that structured implementation may influence learners' perceptions of legitimacy.

Therefore, international and Indonesian scholarship consistently positions translanguaging as a pedagogical practice that enhances comprehension, promotes learner agency, and supports inclusive participation. Across contexts, translanguaging has been associated with improved academic engagement, strengthened multilingual competence, and reduced affective barriers. Although debates persist regarding the boundaries between guided and unguided implementation, the prevailing evidence indicates that translanguaging offers a contextually responsive approach to EFL instruction. In multilingual settings such as Indonesia, where learners navigate complex linguistic repertoires, translanguaging emerges not as a deviation from pedagogical norms but as an adaptive and pedagogically grounded strategy for meaningful language learning.

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive qualitative design to examine how translanguaging practices enhanced reading comprehension among fifth-semester English Literature students in Class B at Universitas Sumatera Utara. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because it enabled an in-depth exploration of students' experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making processes within their natural classroom context (Creswell, 2012). Rather than measuring outcomes quantitatively, the design facilitated a close analysis of how translanguaging emerged in academic discourse and how it contributed to students' engagement with complex literary and theoretical texts.

The participants comprised 55 fifth-semester English Literature students enrolled in

literature and theory-based courses. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that all participants had substantial exposure to English literary materials and classroom interactions involving both English and Indonesian. The cohort represented varied proficiency levels, allowing the study to capture how translanguaging functioned across a range of linguistic competencies.

Data were collected primarily through document analysis. The corpus included students' written reflections, reading comprehension assignments, and selected instructional materials that reflected translanguaging practices. These documents were chosen because they provided authentic evidence of how students mobilized English and Indonesian resources to construct meaning from literary texts. In addition, course syllabi and lecturers' instructional materials were examined to identify instances in which translanguaging was either intentionally integrated or naturally occurred to support comprehension. This strategy enabled the researchers to obtain rich contextual data without relying on direct classroom observation or interviews, while still maintaining alignment with actual instructional practices.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the procedures outlined in Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analytical stages included data familiarization, systematic coding, theme development, and interpretive synthesis. Emerging themes encompassed types of translanguaging practices, perceived pedagogical benefits, and challenges associated with implementation. These themes were subsequently interpreted in relation to established theoretical frameworks and prior empirical studies discussed in the literature review.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study adhered to the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability proposed in Naturalistic Inquiry. Credibility was strengthened through data triangulation across multiple documentary sources. Transferability was addressed by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the research setting and procedures. Dependability was maintained through systematic documentation of analytic decisions, and confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in textual evidence and established theoretical constructs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis integrated quantitative and qualitative procedures to provide a comprehensive account of how translanguaging contributed to reading comprehension among fifth-semester English Literature students in Class B (n = 53) at Universitas Sumatera Utara. A mixed-approach framework was adopted to capture both measurable patterns of perception and contextually grounded classroom experiences.

Quantitative data were derived from a structured questionnaire employing a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument measured students' perceptions of translanguaging across five dimensions: comprehension enhancement, confidence development, classroom participation, anxiety reduction, and perceived limitations. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to calculate frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations for each item. These results provided an overall profile of students' attitudinal tendencies toward translanguaging in literature courses.

Qualitative data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with ten purposively selected participants, and document analysis of students' reflective journals. Observational data focused on patterns of language alternation between English and Indonesian during discussions and collaborative tasks. Interview data elicited students' perspectives on how translanguaging influenced their understanding and engagement, while reflective journals offered insight into affective dimensions such as confidence and anxiety. The qualitative corpus was analyzed using thematic analysis following the procedures proposed by Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology, encompassing data familiarization, initial coding, theme identification, thematic review, and interpretive synthesis.

Finally, quantitative findings were triangulated with qualitative insights to ensure interpretive depth and analytical coherence. The quantitative results indicated that students

generally expressed highly positive attitudes toward translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in their literature courses. Table 1 presents the distribution of responses and mean scores across the five principal questionnaire statements.

Table 1. The Distribution of Responses and Mean Scores across The Five Key Statements

No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
1.	Translanguaging helps me understand complex texts	1	2	5	25	20	4.16
2.	Translanguaging increases my classroom participation	0	3	6	24	20	4.15
3.	I feel more confident expressing opinions using translanguaging	2	4	7	21	19	4.00
4.	Using both English and Indonesian reduces my anxiety in class	1	3	8	22	19	4.02
5.	Translanguaging hinders my English immersion	10	15	13	10	5	2.36

The quantitative findings indicate consistently positive perceptions of translanguaging among the participants. Mean scores for the positively framed constructs ranged from 4.00 to 4.16, suggesting that most students agreed or strongly agreed that translanguaging contributed to their learning. In contrast, the negatively framed statement—"translanguaging hinders my English immersion"—recorded a substantially lower mean score of 2.36. This pattern demonstrates that students did not perceive translanguaging as detrimental to their English development.

Descriptive statistics further revealed that 85% of respondents agreed that translanguaging enhanced their comprehension of literary texts, while 78% reported increased participation and confidence in classroom discussions. The average standard deviation across items was 0.84, indicating a moderate degree of consistency in responses and suggesting relatively stable attitudinal patterns among the cohort.

These results align with prior scholarship emphasizing the pedagogical value of translanguaging in multilingual EFL contexts. As articulated in (Raja et al., 2022), translanguaging enables learners to draw upon their full linguistic repertoires to construct meaning. Similarly, Puspitasari and Yumarnamto (2020) argue that multilingual meaning-making should not be constrained by monolingual norms. Within the Indonesian higher education context, Wang (2019) likewise reported that translanguaging supports comprehension and classroom inclusion. The present findings reinforce these claims, positioning translanguaging as both a cognitive scaffold and an affective bridge in English Literature classrooms.

From a pedagogical perspective, translanguaging appears to facilitate critical and interpretive literacy. Students engage not only in lexical translation but also in the negotiation of ideas across linguistic and cultural frameworks. Such practices deepen textual interpretation and academic engagement. Nonetheless, the findings also suggest the need for pedagogical balance. Excessive reliance on the first language (L1), if left unstructured, may reduce sustained exposure to English. Consequently, instructors should design activities that incorporate bilingual scaffolding during comprehension phases while prioritizing English production in analytical discussions and final academic outputs.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings confirm that translanguaging provides substantial cognitive and affective benefits in multilingual English Literature classrooms. Consistent with prior scholarship, the study demonstrates that translanguaging enhances comprehension, fosters inclusive participation, and bridges proficiency gaps among students. For literature students in particular, translanguaging operates as a cognitive scaffold that supports the interpretation of abstract theoretical constructs and complex textual features, enabling learners to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires in

meaning-making processes. The increased classroom participation observed in this study further indicates that translanguaging contributes to affective engagement by creating supportive learning environments in which students feel more confident expressing ideas. Pedagogically, these findings imply that translanguaging can be strategically integrated into literature instruction through structured bilingual discussions, guided reading tasks, and scaffolded transitions from Indonesian-mediated comprehension to English academic articulation.

Nevertheless, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The research was conducted within a single cohort at one institution, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other educational contexts. In addition, the reliance on self-reported perceptions and classroom-based data may not fully capture long-term effects on English proficiency development. The findings also indicate the potential risk of excessive dependence on the first language if translanguaging practices are not carefully structured. Future research could incorporate longitudinal designs or comparative studies across institutions to examine sustained impacts on academic literacy and language development. It is therefore recommended that educators implement translanguaging in a balanced and intentional manner—using bilingual scaffolding to facilitate comprehension while maintaining clear expectations for English output in analytical and evaluative tasks.

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