

Bridging the Proficiency Gap: Translanguaging as an Inclusive Pedagogy in Teaching Narrative Texts

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Abstract

This study investigated the effectiveness of translanguaging strategies in improving students' reading comprehension at MTs DDI Amparita. Low literacy levels and monolingual bias in English instruction have contributed to students' difficulties in comprehending narrative texts. This research aimed to determine whether translanguaging could serve as a better pedagogical alternative to code-switching. Employing a quasi-experimental design, the study involved 38 eighth-grade students, divided into an experimental group taught through translanguaging and a control group taught through code-switching. Data were collected using a reading comprehension test administered before and after the treatment. The results revealed that the experimental group achieved a significantly higher mean score (86.78) compared to the control group (61.68). The t-test analysis confirmed a significant difference ($t = 7.349$), exceeding the t-table value of 2.101. Furthermore, the analysis showed a smaller standard deviation in the experimental group, indicating a more even distribution of learning outcomes. It is concluded that translanguaging not only improves comprehension but also promotes inclusivity by reducing the proficiency gap among students. Teachers are suggested to integrate translanguaging systematically to foster a more engaging and equitable learning environment.

Keywords: English Learning; Inclusive Pedagogy; Reading Comprehension; Translanguaging Strategy



1. Introduction

In the current era of globalization, English language proficiency has evolved from a mere advantage into a fundamental necessity for educational and professional success worldwide. Within the scope of English Language Teaching (ELT), reading comprehension stands out as a critical skill (Aksoy, 2021; Trujillo Lema et al., 2025) because it serves as the primary foundation for acquiring knowledge (Lázaro-Ibarrola et al., 2025; Thangarajathi & Menaha, 2020), analyzing information (Fazliddinovich, 2025; Khumaeroh & Mayuni, 2023), and developing critical thinking skills across various disciplines (Kaowiwattanakul, 2021; Rakhmonova, 2024). Reading is not merely a passive activity of recognizing letters and words; rather, it is a complex cognitive process in which readers must simultaneously extract and construct meaning through active engagement with written language (Kondrashova, 2020; Liao et al., 2024; Toste & Lindström, 2023). According to Killingly et al. (2025), Smith et al. (2021, 2023), and Snow (2020), comprehension capability involves identifying main ideas, understanding implicit meanings, and evaluating the text's context, tasks that are often challenging for foreign language learners. Consequently, the inability to comprehend English texts effectively can hinder students' overall academic achievement and limit their access to global information. Therefore, developing effective teaching strategies to enhance reading comprehension remains an urgent priority in the field of English education, particularly in non-native speaking countries like Indonesia.

Despite the critical importance of reading skills, empirical evidence from the Indonesian context reveals that many students continue to struggle with text comprehension. At MTs DDI Amparita, preliminary observations conducted on June 30, 2025, indicated a concerning trend: eighth-grade students showed low interest and poor performance in reading English texts. This lack of engagement is primarily driven by external factors such as the dominance of digital entertainment and monotonous teaching methods that fail to resonate with students' psychological needs (Aribah & Pradita, 2022). Furthermore, local observations revealed that students perceive English reading materials as daunting and uninteresting because conventional teaching methods do not actively scaffold them in using their native linguistic resources (Buginese or Indonesian) to process the information. Instead of a strict prohibition, it is this lack of multilingual facilitation—a common instructional gap in many Indonesian Madrasahs and Islamic boarding schools—that leaves students experiencing cognitive overload when facing complex L2 texts, ultimately alienating them from deep engagement (Liando et al., 2023; Madkur et al., 2022; Nurseha, 2025).

To address these pedagogical challenges, recent trends in applied linguistics have shifted away from strict monolingual instructional approaches toward more inclusive multilingual practices. One such approach gaining prominence is translanguaging, a concept originally rooted in the Welsh term *trawsieithu* (Lewis et al., 2012), which refers to the planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning (Liando

et al., 2022; Nur et al., 2020) Translanguaging is not merely as switching between languages, but as a process where speakers utilize their entire linguistic repertoire as an integrated communication system (García & Lin, 2016; Garcia & Wei, 2014a; Grosjean & Garcia, 2017). However, it is crucial to theoretically justify how this integrated system functions differently across language skills. In productive skills such as speaking and writing, translanguaging operates primarily as an external, communicative act, in which learners fluidly mix languages to negotiate meaning, fill lexical gaps, and express their multilingual identities (Listyowati & Setiyawan, 2025). Conversely, in receptive skills like reading, translanguaging functions fundamentally as an internal, cognitive scaffolding mechanism. When reading English texts, EFL students engage in 'inner translanguaging'—utilising their L1 semantic networks and pre-existing cultural schemas to mentally decode unfamiliar L2 vocabulary and evaluate complex narrative structures (Cenoz et al., 2024; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022). Unlike traditional methods that treat languages as separate entities, translanguaging empowers students to leverage their mother tongue (L1) to scaffold their understanding of the target language (L2) (Canagarajah, 2013; García, 2011). By allowing students to use their familiar language resources, this strategy aims to lower anxiety, facilitate the comprehension of complex concepts, and foster a more interactive and participatory classroom environment. In the context of reading narrative texts, translanguaging allows students to negotiate meaning, discuss plot structures, and internalize moral values more effectively before expressing their understanding in English (Ismailov & Ono, 2021; Memari, 2024).

Numerous studies have explored the efficacy of multilingual strategies in EFL classrooms, providing a solid theoretical basis for this research. Nur et al. (2020) demonstrated that translanguaging strategies significantly enhance reading comprehension by bridging the gap between students' existing knowledge and new linguistic inputs. Similarly, Ocampo (2023) found that translanguaging plays a crucial role in improving students' inferential and evaluative reading skills, enabling them to draw more accurate conclusions and identify main ideas. Furthermore, research by Rahim et al. (2023) highlighted that while translanguaging helps students understand difficult vocabulary and complex concepts, it must be implemented with a balanced approach to avoid over-reliance on the mother tongue. Similarly, Goli (2021) and Kareem & Adams (2024) also noted that this pedagogy allows students to use their full language repertoire, thereby increasing their engagement and reducing the cognitive burden often associated with foreign-language reading tasks. These studies collectively suggest that incorporating students' L1 is not a hindrance but a valuable resource in the language learning process.

However, despite the growing body of literature on translanguaging, there remains a specific research gap regarding its comparative effectiveness with other bilingual strategies, such as code-switching in the context of Indonesian Islamic schools (Madrasah). Unlike regular public schools, Madrasahs present a unique sociolinguistic ecology where students constantly navigate a complex multilingual repertoire that typically includes a local language, Indonesian, English, and Arabic for religious studies.

In this context, English reading materials—especially narrative texts that convey moral values—are cognitively processed through students' deeply ingrained Islamic and local cultural identities (Nurseha, 2025; Rostandi et al., 2025). Therefore, translanguaging in a Madrasah is not merely a tool to alleviate universal cognitive overload, but a crucial socio-cultural bridge that allows students to integrate their religious-linguistic background with foreign language acquisition (Madkur et al., 2022). While code-switching and translanguaging are often used interchangeably, they differ fundamentally in their pedagogical orientation; code-switching is often a teacher-directed separation of languages for specific clarifications, whereas translanguaging is a student-centred integration of linguistic resources (Putrawan, 2022; Witari & Sukanto, 2023). Most previous research has focused on the aal benefits of translanguaging without explicitly comparing its quantitative impact with that of a control group taught via code-switching. Additionally, few studies have examined how translanguaging affects the equity of learning outcomes, specifically whether it can narrow the performance gap (standard deviation) among students with varying proficiency levels (Cenoz et al., 2024; Listyowati & Setiawan, 2025). This study addresses these gaps by providing empirical evidence on the specific impact of translanguaging on narrative text comprehension at MTs DDI Amparita.

Therefore, the primary objective of this research is to investigate whether the application of translanguaging strategies can significantly improve students' reading comprehension compared to code-switching strategies. This study posits that by maximising students' linguistic repertoire, translanguaging will not only improve average test scores but also create a more inclusive learning environment in which students feel safe to explore meaning (Nur et al., 2020; Öztürk & Çubukçu, 2022). The significance of this study lies in its potential to offer English teachers a practical, evidence-based alternative to the rigid "English-only" policies that often discourage lower-proficiency learners. By validating the use of the mother tongue as a strategic cognitive tool, this research contributes to the broader discourse on decolonising language education and promoting pedagogical equity in multilingual classrooms (Laarous, 2024; Rostandi et al., 2025; Triastuti et al., 2023). Ultimately, this study aims to prove that bridging the proficiency gap through translanguaging is more effective than merely switching codes, offering a robust solution to the low literacy issues faced by students at MTs DDI Amparita

2. Methods

To address the problem of low reading comprehension identified in the introduction, this study employed a quantitative, quasi-experimental design. This approach is similar to the framework used by Goli (2023) in investigating translanguaging effectiveness, specifically replicating the use of intact classes for the non-equivalent groups and administering pre- and post-tests to measure reading

comprehension gains within a natural EFL classroom ecology. Specifically, the researcher utilized a non-equivalent control group design involving a pre-test and a post-test. This design was chosen to compare the effectiveness of two distinct instructional strategies: the Translanguaging Strategy (independent variable) in the experimental group and the Code-Switching Strategy in the control group.

Operationally, the Translanguaging Strategy in this study is defined as a student-centred practice in which learners are explicitly encouraged to flexibly use their entire linguistic repertoire (including Buginese, Indonesian, and English) to discuss, decode, and retell narrative texts collaboratively. Conversely, the Code-Switching Strategy is defined by specific teacher-directed behaviours in which the instructor temporarily alternates between English and Indonesian merely to translate difficult vocabulary or clarify instructions, maintaining a rigid separation of languages without encouraging students' multilingual meaning-making. The dependent variable was students' reading comprehension achievement with narrative texts.

The research was conducted at MTs DDI Amparita, located in Sidenreng Rappang Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The data collection process took place during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 academic year, specifically from July 14 to August 14, 2025. This site was selected based on preliminary observations indicating that students in this madrasah faced significant challenges in comprehending English texts due to limited vocabulary and low reading interest, a common issue in Indonesian EFL contexts (Indriana & Syawal, 2022).

The study population comprised all eighth-grade students at MTs DDI Amparita, totalling 38 students divided into two classes. Due to the small population, a total sampling technique was employed to ensure the data represented the entire cohort of young EFL learners in this setting (Villamor, 2025). The sample consisted of Class VIII A (19 students) in the experimental group and Class VIII B (19 students) in the control group. The homogeneity of their initial English proficiency was empirically established using baseline data from the pre-test, which revealed no significant difference between the experimental group (mean score = 33.31) and the control group (mean score = 32.36) prior to the intervention. Additionally, the school's administrative policy does not stream students based on academic ability, ensuring a natural and equal distribution of proficiency levels across both classes.

The primary instrument used to acquire data was a reading comprehension test focusing on narrative texts, such as "The Legend of Malin Kundang" and "The Lion and the Mouse". To ensure the instrument accurately measured student outcomes, we established content validity through expert judgment rather than a statistical pilot test. Before the intervention, the test materials and reading rubrics were evaluated by academic supervisors and the school's English teacher to ensure strict alignment with the eighth-grade curriculum's learning indicators. The validity of evaluating materials in educational settings is crucial for ensuring accurate measurement of student outcomes (Syawal et al., 2025). Following this principle, the test was administered in two stages: a pre-test to measure baseline ability and a post-test to evaluate the treatment effect. The treatment in the experimental group involved the systematic use

of translanguaging, where the teacher explicitly encouraged students to leverage their L1 to discuss and deconstruct the text (Nguyen & Tran, 2025; Supriadin et al., 2025). This approach allowed students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire as a resource for meaning-making (Garcia & Wei, 2014b). In contrast, the control group used code-switching primarily for translation purposes. Data were analyzed using SPSS, employing descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (paired-samples t-test) at the 0.05 significance level.

3. Results and Discussions

The statistical analysis of data collected from both the experimental and control groups reveals a compelling difference in students' reading comprehension. Initially, the pre-test results indicated that students in both classes shared a similar starting point, with low reading proficiency levels characterized by limited vocabulary and difficulty in grasping the main ideas of narrative texts. The experimental group had a pre-test mean score of 33.31 (**SD = 11.88**). In contrast, the control group had a mean score of 32.36 (**SD = 12.17**), indicating no significant difference between the groups prior to the intervention. However, after the treatments were implemented, a substantial divergence in performance was observed in the post-test results. As shown in Table 1, the experimental group taught using the translanguaging strategy achieved a remarkable mean score of 86.78, placing their performance in the "Very Good" category. In contrast, the control group, which used the code-switching strategy, only achieved a mean score of 61.68, placing them in the "Fair" category. This significant gap highlights that while code-switching offers some assistance, translanguaging provides a far more effective scaffold for literacy development in this context.

Table 1. Comparison of mean score and standard deviation in the post-test

Group	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
Experimental (Translanguaging)	86.78	9.76
Control (Code-Switching)	61.68	13.92

To statistically validate these findings and test the research hypothesis, a paired-samples t-test was conducted to assess the significance of the improvement. The analysis results, as shown in Table 2, indicate that the calculated t-value of 7.349 is significantly greater than the critical t-value of 2.101 at the 0.05 significance level. Because the t-value exceeds the t-table value, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis (H_1) is accepted. While the use of intact, non-equivalent groups precludes claims of absolute causality, this robust statistical evidence strongly suggests that the significant improvement in reading comprehension in the experimental class is highly associated with the translanguaging intervention. Furthermore, the magnitude of the t-value suggests a strong effect size, reinforcing the

argument that maximizing the students' linguistic repertoire is a superior pedagogical approach compared to the more rigid code-switching method used in the control group. These quantitative results provide a solid answer to the research problem regarding the low reading interest and achievement identified in the introduction.

Table 2. T-Test calculation result

Variable	t-test value	t-table value	Remark
Pre-test and Post-test	7.349	2.101	Significant

Analyzing the specific components of reading comprehension, the data indicate that translanguaging had the most profound impact on students' ability to grasp inferential and evaluative meanings. In narrative texts like *The Legend of Malin Kundang*, understanding the moral nuances of 'rebellion' and 'punishment' requires a depth of processing that goes beyond literal translation. To accurately measure these higher-order cognitive processes, the reading comprehension instrument utilized a structured 'Retelling Task' rather than traditional recall questions. By requiring students to reconstruct the narrative in their own words, the task forced them to synthesize the plot, infer character motivations, and extract the underlying moral lessons. Their comprehension was subsequently quantified using a comprehensive assessment rubric focused specifically on "Content Understanding." The experimental group utilized their native language to deconstruct these cultural concepts before mapping them onto English vocabulary. This contrasts sharply with the control group, where students often struggled to move beyond surface-level translation, resulting in lower scores in the rubric domains that evaluate holistic content mastery and narrative reconstruction. This suggests that translanguaging enables higher-order thinking skills even when L2 proficiency is still developing, enabling students to engage with the text's deeper message rather than just decoding individual words.

Beyond the increase in average scores, the analysis of the Standard Deviation (SD) offers a critical insight into the inclusivity of the translanguaging strategy. As shown in Table 1, the experimental group had a lower standard deviation (9.76) than the control group (13.92), indicating a more homogeneous distribution of learning outcomes. A lower standard deviation implies that the learning gains were not limited to high-achieving students but were experienced evenly across the class, effectively narrowing the proficiency gap between students. In the control class, the greater variation suggests that while some students understood the material, others were left behind, maintaining a disparity in comprehension. This finding aligns with Goli (2021), who posited that translanguaging serves as an equitable pedagogy by enabling lower-proficiency students to use their mother tongue to catch up with their peers. Consequently, translanguaging proves to be a more inclusive strategy that democratizes access to meaning, ensuring that no student is alienated from the lesson due to linguistic limitations.

The qualitative interpretation of these results supports the theory that reading is a process of constructing meaning through active interaction with the text. Snow (2024)

emphasises that comprehension requires the simultaneous extraction and construction of meaning, a process facilitated in this study by allowing students to negotiate meaning in their first language. Unlike the control group, where code-switching was often teacher-centred and limited to translation, the experimental group used translanguaging to engage in deep discussions about moral values and plot structures. This supports the findings of Nur et al. (2020), who argued that translanguaging enhances teacher-student interaction and creates a safe space for students to express ideas without the fear of grammatical errors. By bridging their existing cultural and linguistic knowledge with the new English text, students were able to move beyond literal comprehension to more complex inferential and evaluative understanding. Thus, translanguaging serves not just as scaffolding but also as a cognitive bridge that enhances the depth of reading comprehension.

Furthermore, classroom observations during the treatment revealed a distinct difference in the learning atmosphere between the two groups. In the experimental class, the permission to translanguage significantly lowered the students' affective filter, reducing the anxiety commonly associated with foreign language learning. Students who were typically reticent in the control setting were observed initiating discussions and asking questions in the experimental setting, often starting a sentence in Indonesian and finishing it in English. This psychological safety created a 'communicative zone' in which the focus shifted from linguistic correctness to meaning-making, thereby fostering a more positive, encouraging attitude toward reading. This observation confirms that acknowledging students' L1 validates their identity and boosts their confidence, a prerequisite for successful language acquisition.

From a pedagogical perspective, the study highlights a shift from teacher-centred to student-centred interaction patterns. In the code-switching group, the teacher predominantly switched to explain difficult concepts, keeping students in a passive recipient role. Conversely, in the translanguaging group, the students themselves were the agents of language alternation, actively deciding when and how to use their linguistic resources to solve comprehension problems. This agency not only empowered the students but also transformed the act of reading from a solitary struggle into a collaborative decoding process, as evidenced by the lively and productive peer interactions observed during the study. This aligns with the modern constructivist view that learning happens most effectively when students are active participants in constructing their own understanding.

However, it is important to address the concern raised by Rahim et al. (2023) about the potential over-reliance on the mother tongue, which could hinder the acquisition of the target language. In this study, although a few students initially hesitated to switch back to English, the structured nature of the lesson plans ensured that the first language served as a stepping stone rather than a destination. The data show that despite heavy L1 use during the process, the final output in the English post-

test was significantly higher, indicating that the strategy ultimately supported English proficiency. This contradicts the fear that L1 use negatively impacts L2 learning; instead, it reinforces the finding that translanguaging builds the confidence students need to eventually produce the target language. Therefore, the results of this study convincingly demonstrate that when implemented systematically, translanguaging overcomes the limitations of code-switching and effectively addresses the chronic issue of low reading comprehension in Indonesian madrasahs.

4. Conclusion

This study confirms that the translanguaging strategy significantly outperforms code-switching in improving students' reading comprehension, as evidenced by the rigorous statistical rejection of the null hypothesis. Beyond mere score improvement, a novel finding emerges: this pedagogy fosters educational equity by narrowing the proficiency gap between high- and low-achieving students, thereby creating a more inclusive learning environment. Translanguaging acts as a vital cognitive bridge rather than a barrier to English proficiency. In practice, it is recommended that English teachers systematically integrate students' mother tongue to scaffold complex narrative texts, ensuring a balanced approach that supports meaning-making while maintaining development in the target language. Future researchers are encouraged to extend this investigation to productive skills such as writing and speaking to further validate the holistic benefits of multilingual pedagogies in foreign-language context

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