



ENGLISH IN A MULTILINGUAL CLASSROOM: A MINI-ETHNOGRAPHY STUDY AT BPK PLUS PENABUR CIREBON

Amelia Christianti Hutagaol

Institut Prima Bangsa

cameliachristianti@gmail.com

Dwi Nopiyadi

Institut Prima Bangsa

dwinopiyadi@stkipinvada.ac.id

Lili Sururi Asipi

Institut Prima Bangsa

lilipururiasipi@stkipinvada.ac.id

Article History:

Accepted October 2025;

Revised November 2025;

Approved January 2026.

Abstract: This study aims to analyze the use of English in the context of multilingual classrooms at BPK Plus Penabur Cirebon Junior High School. The focus of the study is on student interaction patterns, factors that influence the use of English, and the linguistic dynamics that are formed in the learning process. This study uses a qualitative approach with a mini-ethnographic design. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of reduction, categorization, and interpretation to find patterns of language use in classroom interactions. The results show that the use of English is influenced by students' linguistic backgrounds, social contexts, and teachers' pedagogical strategies. Translanguaging practices emerged as the dominant communication strategy that aided conceptual understanding and increased student participation. These findings are relevant for the development of English language learning strategies in multilingual environments, the formulation of school language policies, and the strengthening of EFL curricula. This study contributes new insights into understanding the practice of English language use at the junior high school level through a mini-ethnographic approach, which has rarely been used in the Indonesian context.

Keywords: English Usage, Multilingual Classroom, Miniethnography, Translanguaging

INTRODUCTION

English plays an important role as an international language in various aspects of life, including education, technology, economics, and diplomacy. In Indonesia, English proficiency is a strategic competency for competing at the global level (Hartono et al., 2023). The government has designated English as a compulsory subject from elementary school to university. However, the learning process often faces challenges, especially in a multilingual context such as Indonesia, which has more than 700 regional languages (Alfarisy, 2021).

This multilingual reality shapes students' language practices both inside and outside the classroom. In educational settings, students frequently alternate between Indonesian, local languages, and English, depending on the situation and interactional needs. Such practices influence how English is learned, used, and negotiated in daily classroom interactions. This condition is evident at BPK Plus Penabur Cirebon Junior High School, an international curriculum school that continues to practice the use of regional languages in informal interactions. This phenomenon confirms that English proficiency is not only determined by formal teaching, but also by social and cultural factors that shape students' language practices (Mailani et al., 2022).

In this context, translanguaging and code-switching emerge as common communication strategies. Students often draw on their full linguistic repertoire to understand learning materials, express ideas, and interact with peers and teachers. Rather than hindering learning, these practices can support comprehension and participation, especially in classrooms where students have varying levels of English proficiency (Ooi & Abdul Aziz, 2021). This study aims to fill the gap in research on the use of English in multilingual junior high school classrooms in Indonesia, where previous studies have focused more on higher education or theoretical discussions without in-depth exploration of everyday interactions. Using a mini-ethnographic approach at BPK Plus Penabur Cirebon Junior High School, this study analyzes student interaction patterns, factors that influence English language use, and communication strategies in multilingual classroom dynamics.

In addition, this study evaluates the influence of school language policies on these practices, with the hope of contributing theoretically to applied linguistics and practically to teachers and policymakers. The results are expected to support the development of more inclusive and effective learning strategies for managing linguistic diversity in the classroom.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach with a mini-ethnography design to explore English language use in a multilingual classroom context. The mini-ethnographic approach was selected because it allows the researcher to observe language practices naturally and contextually within the classroom without extensive intervention (Bayeck, 2023). The research was conducted at Junior High School BPK Plus Penabur Cirebon, a private school implementing an international-oriented curriculum where English is emphasized as a language of instruction. This setting was considered appropriate because of its linguistically diverse student population, which includes speakers of Indonesian and regional languages such as Sundanese and Javanese.

The data collection technique was observation. This was conducted over two days during English lessons in the classroom. The observation focused on verbal interactions between students and teachers, translanguaging practices, and the context of language use. This was followed by interviews. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers and students to explore their perceptions of English language use and multilingual dynamics in the classroom. For documentation, the researcher used lesson plans, school language policies, and daily activities to support data collection.

Sampling Procedure

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, as this study focused on individuals directly involved in the use of English in the classroom. Participants consisted of two English teachers actively teaching eighth grade, one curriculum staff member responsible for language policy implementation, and 27 eighth grade students who participated in classroom observations. From the group of students, two students were deliberately selected for in-depth interviews based on their active participation and varying levels of English proficiency. This sampling strategy allowed the researcher to obtain rich and relevant data that reflected both teaching practices and students' language experiences in a multilingual environment.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which consists of three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Creswell, 2018). In the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and organized relevant information from observation notes, interview transcripts, and supporting documents, focusing on aspects related to English use, classroom interaction, and translanguaging practices.

Next, the reduced data were presented in a thematic form to highlight recurring patterns, such as students' language choices, interaction strategies, and the role of teachers in managing multilingual classroom dynamics. In the final stage, conclusions were drawn by interpreting the displayed data to answer the research questions and to identify key factors influencing English usage in the multilingual classroom context.

Data Validity

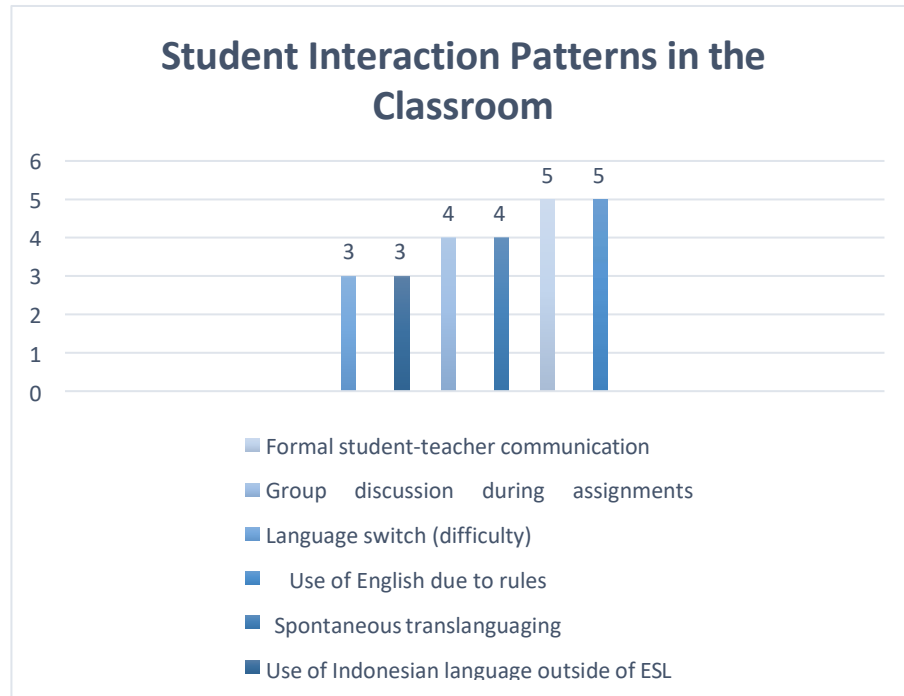
To ensure data validity, triangulation of sources and techniques was applied. This involved cross-checking data obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation to confirm consistency and credibility of the findings (Taherdoost, 2021). Through this process, the researcher aimed to ensure that the findings accurately represented the actual classroom practices and language dynamics.

Overall, this methodological framework enabled a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of how English is used in multilingual classroom interactions, the factors influencing its use, and the role of translanguaging in supporting the learning process. The findings derived from this approach serve as the foundation for further analysis and discussion of multilingual classroom dynamics in the Indonesian educational context.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Patterns of English Use in Classroom Interaction

The data shows that English is most frequently used when teachers give instructions, provide examples, or model language, whereas during group work/conversations between students, the dominant language shifts to one that is more comfortable for them. Critically, this indicates that “language production opportunities” are not yet evenly distributed: more dialogic and student-led interactions are not yet sufficiently structured, so students tend to revert to their first language to maintain smooth communication and social relations within the group. The practical implication is that teachers need to design tasks that require the functional use of English (e.g., roles in groups, mandatory presentations in English) so that English is not only the language of “teacher to student” but also the language of collaboration.



This data shows that language use in the classroom is not only about compliance with linguistic rules, but also adaptive communication strategies to social contexts and learning needs. This phenomenon is in line with previous findings that students in multilingual contexts tend to code-switch to maximize understanding and participation in learning (Ooi & Abdul Aziz, 2021). Analytically, these findings show that language use in the classroom is not only a matter of compliance with rules, but also an adaptive learning strategy. Language switching is done to ensure understanding and smooth interaction. This confirms that the use of languages other than English does not reflect a weakness in language ability, but rather an effort by students to maximize the learning process in a multilingual environment.

Translanguaging as a Strategy for Comprehension and Participation

Translanguaging has emerged as the most frequently used communication strategy among students. Students often re-explain material presented in English using Indonesian or their local language to their classmates. This practice occurs particularly when students encounter difficult or abstract concepts, such as explanations of grammar or text meaning.

From a learning perspective, translanguaging serves as a bridge to understanding. By utilizing the language they are more proficient in, students can gradually construct meaning before returning to English. This strategy also increases student participation because they feel more

confident and are not afraid of making mistakes. Therefore, translanguaging cannot be viewed as an obstacle, but rather as a pedagogical strategy that supports more effective English language learning.

The Role of Teachers in Guiding Language Dynamics

Teachers play an important role in managing language use in multilingual classrooms. In practice, teachers do not prohibit the use of Indonesian or regional languages altogether, but use them sparingly to clarify instructions or bridge students' understanding. After that, teachers gradually guide students to return to using English.

This approach shows that teachers act as facilitators who regulate the balance of language use. Teachers do not only focus on the target language, but also consider the needs and linguistic backgrounds of students. The practical implication is that teachers need to have pedagogical awareness in determining when the use of other languages is necessary and when students should be encouraged to use English more actively.

Academic Contributions of Research Findings

Academically, this study makes an important contribution to the study of English language learning in a multilingual context, particularly at the junior high school level. The findings show that the use of multiple languages in the classroom is an adaptive strategy that supports the learning process, rather than an indicator of poor English language skills. In addition, this study confirms that translanguaging has significant cognitive and pedagogical functions in improving student understanding and participation.

This study also highlights the important role of teachers and school language policies in creating inclusive learning. By understanding the linguistic realities of students, English language learning can be designed in a more contextual and relevant manner. These findings are expected to serve as a reference for teachers, researchers, and policymakers in developing English language learning strategies that are appropriate for the multilingual conditions in Indonesia.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the use of English in multilingual classrooms cannot be separated from the social and linguistic backgrounds of students. The practice of using Indonesian and regional languages through code-switching and translanguaging strategies has been proven not to be an obstacle, but rather a means of supporting learning that

helps students understand the material, increases participation, and builds confidence in using English. These findings indicate that the English learning process is adaptive and contextual, influenced by students' communication needs and the dynamics of classroom interaction. The role of teachers is very important in managing these dynamics through a flexible and focused approach, namely by utilizing students' first language as a bridge to understanding without neglecting the objectives of English language learning.

Based on these findings, this study recommends that language policies at the school level should not strictly enforce the use of English, but rather provide pedagogical space for controlled and purposeful translanguaging practices. Schools can formulate language use guidelines that place Indonesian and regional languages as supporting learning resources, especially at the concept comprehension stage. In addition, the development of EFL curricula needs to be adapted to the reality of multilingual classrooms by integrating learning strategies that are responsive to students' linguistic diversity, such as group discussions based on shared understanding and language scaffolding. Thus, English language learning can take place in a more inclusive, effective, and relevant manner to the educational context in Indonesia, especially at the junior high school level.

REFERENCE

- Alfarisy, F. (2021). Kebijakan Pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris Di Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Profesi Pendidikan*, 6(3), 303–313.
- Bayeck, R. Y. (2023). Is Microethnography an Ethnographic Case Study? and/or a mini-ethnographic case study? An analysis of the literature. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 22, 1–6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/16094069231172074>
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods research (Dörnyei). In *Introducing English Language*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315707181-60>
- Hartono, W. J., Sari, M. N., Rasmita, Devi, P., & Uktolseja, L. J. (2023). Multilingualism in the English Classroom: a Literature Review on Strategies and Benefits. *Jurnal Review Pendidikan Dan Pengajaran*, 6(4), 2732–2741. <https://journal.universitaspahlawan.ac.id/index.php/jrpp/article/view/22137>
- Mailani, O., Nuraeni, I., Syakila, S. A., & Lazuardi, J. (2022). Bahasa Sebagai Alat Komunikasi Dalam Kehidupan Manusia. *Kampret Journal*, 1(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.35335/kampret.v1i1.8>

- Ooi, W. Z., & Abdul Aziz, A. (2021). Translanguaging Pedagogy in the ESL Classroom: A Systematic Review. *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, 10(3). <https://doi.org/10.6007/ijarped/v10-i3/10816>
- Taherdoost, H. (2021). Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Collection Technique for Academic and Business Research Projects Hamed Taherdoost. Data Collection Methods and Tools for Research; A Step-by-Step Guide to Choose Data Coll. *International Journal of Academic Research in Management (IJARM)*, 2021(1), 10–38. <https://hal.science/hal-03741847>