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Students' Perceptions of Translanguaging in Classroom Interaction at SMPN 1 Binjai

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to investigate students' perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction and to explore the factors influencing those perceptions. This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. The participants were 30 students of class VII-3 at SMPN 1 Binjai. The data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire distributed using Google Forms and semi-structured interviews. The data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consisted of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings showed that most students had positive perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction (25 out of 30 students, 83.3%), while a smaller number showed negative perceptions (5 students, 16.7%). Students generally believed that translanguaging helped them understand the material more easily, increased confidence, and created a more comfortable classroom atmosphere. However, several students felt that mixing Indonesian and English sometimes caused confusion and reduced focus during communication activities. On the other hand, students' perceptions were influenced by three main factors namely competence,

autonomy, and relatedness. Competence became the most dominant factor with 15 participants (50%), followed by relatedness with 11 participants (36.7%), and autonomy with 4 participants (13.3%). These findings indicate that students tended to develop more positive perceptions toward translanguaging when supported in classroom interaction.

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INTRODUCTION

Classroom interaction plays a central role in second language learning, as it provides learners with opportunities to use the target language in meaningful communication and supports the development of language skills over time (Sato & Ballinger, 2016). In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where students have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, interaction becomes even more important. Through classroom interaction, students are able to respond to questions, express ideas, and participate in communicative activities, which are essential processes in language learning.

In many EFL classrooms, however, the use of English is often combined with students' first language as a way to support understanding. This practice is commonly discussed through the concept of translanguaging, which refers to the flexible use of multiple languages in teaching and learning processes (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Translanguaging allows teachers to draw on both English and the students' native language to explain materials, give instructions, and maintain communication during the lesson. Previous studies have shown that translanguaging can help students understand the material more easily, clarify instructions, and support classroom interaction, especially for learners with limited English proficiency (Ningrum et al., 2024; Yang & Foley, 2025).

At the same time, the use of translanguaging also needs to be balanced with the goal of increasing students' exposure to English. In EFL settings, the classroom is expected to provide sufficient opportunities for students to use English actively. When English is used consistently, students are more likely to develop confidence and communicative ability. However, when the first language is used too frequently, students may become more dependent on it and reduce their effort to use English, which can limit their participation in classroom interaction (Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

In relation to this issue, students' perceptions become an important factor

in understanding how classroom practices influence learning. Students' perceptions refer to how they interpret and respond to their learning experiences, including the use of language during classroom interaction. Positive perceptions can encourage active participation, while negative perceptions may lead to hesitation or reduced involvement (Wang & Ai, 2024). This indicates that the way students experience translanguaging may influence how they engage in using English during classroom interaction.

Students' perceptions are important because they influence students' participation and engagement during classroom interaction. Perception refers to how students interpret and respond to their learning experiences, including the use of language in the classroom (Irwanto, 1994, as cited in Rahni, 2024). According to Irwanto, perception can generally be categorized into positive and negative perception. Positive perception appears when students feel comfortable, interested, confident, and supported during learning activities, while negative perception appears when students experience confusion, fear, nervousness, or difficulty understanding the lesson. In the context of translanguaging, students who perceive the use of mixed languages positively may become more active and confident during classroom interaction, whereas students with negative perceptions may feel hesitant or less engaged in using English.

Students' perceptions toward translanguaging are also influenced by several factors related to their learning experiences. Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000), emphasizes the importance of competence, autonomy, and relatedness in shaping students' responses to learning activities. Competence refers to students' feelings of being capable of understanding and participating in classroom interaction. Autonomy relates to students' opportunities to participate actively and express themselves during learning activities. Relatedness refers to students' feelings of connection and support from teachers and classmates. When these needs are fulfilled, students are more likely to develop positive perceptions toward classroom interaction and language use.

Based on preliminary observation conducted in class VII-3 at SMPN 1 Binjai, the teacher frequently combined English and Indonesian when explaining materials, giving instructions, and managing classroom activities. The use of translanguaging appeared to help students understand the lesson more easily. However, several students also tended to rely heavily on Indonesian and produced limited English responses during classroom interaction. Some students showed hesitation and low confidence when asked to speak English, such as reading directly from the textbook or remaining silent when responding to questions. These conditions indicate that translanguaging may influence students' perceptions and participation in different ways.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction at SMPN 1 Binjai and to identify the factors influencing those perceptions. This study focuses on positive and negative perceptions based on perception theory by Irwanto (1994, as cited in Rahni, 2024) and the factors related to competence, autonomy, and relatedness based on Self-Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000). The findings of this study are expected to provide insights for English teachers in managing the

use of translanguaging more effectively to support students' participation, confidence, and engagement in EFL classroom interaction.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to investigate students' perceptions of translanguaging in classroom interaction. The participants were seventh-grade students of SMPN 1 Binjai, specifically class VII-3, consisting of 30 students. This class was selected purposively because the students were actively involved in English learning activities and regularly experienced classroom interaction during English lessons.

The instruments used in this study were an open-ended questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. The questionnaire was distributed through Google Forms and served as the main instrument for collecting data. It consisted of questions designed to explore (1) students' perceptions of translanguaging in classroom interaction and (2) the factors influencing those perceptions. In addition, interviews were conducted as a supporting instrument to obtain deeper and more detailed information. The interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing the researcher to ask guiding questions while also giving participants the opportunity to elaborate on their answers.

The data collected from the questionnaire and interviews were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification.

In the data condensation stage, the researcher reviewed, selected, and simplified the data by focusing on relevant information related to students' perceptions and the factors influencing those perceptions. The data were coded and grouped into categories, such as positive and negative perceptions, as well as factors including competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Next, in the data display stage, the categorized data were organized in the form of descriptive explanations and supported by selected quotations from students' responses to highlight their perspectives. Finally, in the conclusion drawing and verification stage, the researcher interpreted the findings based on the research objectives and ensured that the conclusions were consistent with the data obtained.

FINDINGS

The data of this study were taken from 30 students at SMPN 1 Binjai. The first data is students' responses to the open-ended questionnaire, and the second data is the results of the semi-structured interviews. The data are organized based on the two research problems of this study: (1) the types of students' perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction and (2) the factors influencing students' perceptions toward translanguaging.

1. Types of Students' Perceptions toward Translanguaging in Classroom Interaction

Based on Irwanto's theory (1994, as cited in Rahni, 2024), perception can be categorized into positive and negative perceptions. Positive perception

refers to favorable responses such as interest, confidence, enjoyment, and acceptance, while negative perception refers to feelings of fear, confusion, discomfort, or rejection. Based on the questionnaire and interview data, most students showed positive perceptions toward the use of translanguaging in classroom interaction, although several students also expressed negative perceptions in certain situations.

Table: 1 Types of Students' Perceptions

No	Types of Perception	Aspect	Responses	Responden
1	POSITIVE PERCEPTION	Helpfulness / Easier Understanding	<i>"Membantu sekali. Soalnya kalau dicampur, aku jadi lebih paham"</i> ("It really helps because when the languages are mixed, I understand better.")	ER
2	NEGATIVE PERCEPTION	Confusion	<i>"Campuran bahasa inggris dan indonesia menyulitkan sih karena kalau kita campur kita bisa belibet ngomongnya"</i> ("Mixing English and Indonesian is difficult because it makes us confused when speaking.")	SA

1) Positive Perception:

Most participants showed positive perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction. Students generally felt that combining English and Indonesian helped them understand the material more easily and made learning more enjoyable. Several participants reported that translanguaging supported their comprehension and created a more comfortable classroom atmosphere. In addition, some students stated that the use of both languages reduced confusion, especially when teachers explained difficult concepts or clarified instructions. Overall, 25 out of 30 participants (83.3%) reflected positive perceptions toward translanguaging.

2) Negative Perception:

Although positive perceptions were dominant, several students expressed negative perceptions toward translanguaging. These responses mainly indicated that mixing languages sometimes caused confusion and difficulty during communication. Some students also felt that using two

languages reduced their focus and made learning less effective. Based on the data, 5 out of 30 participants (16.7%) reflected negative perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction.

Overall, the findings show that students generally perceived translanguaging positively because it supported comprehension, reduced learning difficulties, and created a more comfortable classroom atmosphere. However, a few students still viewed translanguaging negatively because they felt that mixing languages sometimes caused confusion and reduced focus during English learning activities.

Factors Influencing Students' Perceptions toward Translanguaging in Classroom Interaction

According to Self-Determination Theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000), students' perceptions can be influenced by three main factors, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence refers to students' feelings of being capable of understanding the lesson, answering questions, and participating in classroom activities confidently. Autonomy relates to students' sense of freedom and willingness to participate actively, express opinions, and engage in learning activities without excessive pressure. Meanwhile, relatedness refers to students' feelings of connection, support, and comfort with teachers and classmates during classroom interaction. The questionnaire and interview data showed that students' responses reflected these three factors in different ways.

Table: 2 Factors Influencing Students' Perceptions

No	Factors Influencing Perception Category	Aspect	Students' Responses	Responden
1	COMPETENCE	Difficulty Understanding	<i>"Kalau full Inggris, jujur otak saya langsung hang"</i> ("If it is full English, honestly my mind immediately freezes.")	IF
2	AUTONOMY	Active Participation	<i>"Ya seru aja kek merasa jadi orang luar negeri"</i> ("It feels fun, like being a foreigner.")	NP

No	Factors Influencing Perception Category	Aspect	Students' Responses	Responden
3	RELATEDNESS	Teacher's Explanation	<i>"Biasanya guru bakal ngulang lagi pelan-pelan atau menerjemahkan kata-kata yang susah ke bahasa Indonesia"</i> ("Usually the teacher repeats slowly or translates difficult words into Indonesian.")	ER

Competence influenced students' perceptions toward translanguaging in classroom interaction. Students tended to develop positive perceptions when they felt capable of understanding the lesson and following communication. Several students reported that the use of English supported their vocabulary development and comprehension. However, some students experienced confusion when English was used fully, indicating that limited proficiency could reduce confidence and make interaction more difficult. This shows that competence played an important role in shaping students' perceptions.

Autonomy also influenced students' perceptions, particularly in relation to participation and willingness to use English. Some students reported that using English felt enjoyable and helped them improve their language ability. Others stated that, despite feeling nervous, they still tried to participate in classroom activities. These findings indicate that opportunities to express ideas and engage actively encouraged more positive perceptions and increased students' confidence.

Relatedness was another important factor influencing students' perceptions. Supportive interaction with teachers helped students feel comfortable and more confident during learning. Students reported that teachers' strategies, such as explaining slowly and translating difficult words, made the lesson easier to understand. These findings suggest that positive classroom relationships contributed to more favorable perceptions of translanguaging.

Overall, the findings indicated that students' perceptions toward translanguaging were strongly influenced by competence, autonomy, and relatedness during classroom interaction. When students felt capable, supported, and actively involved in classroom activities, they tended to develop positive perceptions toward translanguaging. However, when students experienced fear, lack of confidence, or difficulty understanding English, they were more likely to develop negative or mixed perceptions during the learning process.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that translanguaging plays a significant

role in shaping students' classroom experiences in EFL contexts. Most students demonstrated positive perceptions, suggesting that the use of both English and Indonesian helped them understand the lesson more easily, reduced anxiety, and created a more comfortable learning environment. This shows that translanguaging functions not only as a linguistic practice but also as a supportive strategy that facilitates students' engagement in classroom interaction.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings are in line with Irwanto's concept of perception (1994, as cited in Rahni, 2024), which explains that positive perceptions emerge when individuals experience comfort, interest, and confidence. In this study, students' positive responses reflect how translanguaging allowed them to participate without excessive pressure, especially when teachers provided clarification and repeated explanations. This suggests that the use of multiple languages helps connect students' prior knowledge with new learning.

These findings also support previous studies which show that translanguaging enhances comprehension, increases participation, and reduces students' anxiety in EFL classrooms (Sari & Syafryadin, 2024; Sakkir et al., 2024; Kuncoroningtyas et al., 2025). Students in this study similarly reported that combining English and Indonesian helped them follow classroom interaction more effectively and encouraged them to participate more actively. However, the findings also indicate that translanguaging may create challenges for some students, particularly when language mixing leads to confusion or reduced focus. This suggests that the effectiveness of translanguaging depends on how it is implemented in the classroom.

Furthermore, the findings reveal that students' perceptions are influenced by competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as proposed in Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who felt capable of understanding the lesson (competence) tended to develop more positive perceptions, while those with limited vocabulary or low confidence experienced more difficulties. Students who were given opportunities to participate actively (autonomy) showed greater willingness to engage in classroom interaction. In addition, supportive teacher behavior and peer interaction (relatedness) helped students feel more comfortable and confident during learning activities.

These findings emphasize that the effectiveness of translanguaging is closely related to classroom conditions and students' psychological needs. Translanguaging can support learning when students feel capable, involved, and supported, but it may be less effective when students experience confusion or lack confidence in using English. Therefore, teachers need to use translanguaging strategically by balancing the use of English and the first language to support both comprehension and active language use.

Overall, the findings confirm that translanguaging has both cognitive and affective implications in classroom interaction. It supports students' understanding and participation while also influencing their confidence and comfort in using English. At the same time, the findings indicate that careful implementation is needed to ensure that translanguaging does not reduce students' exposure to English or limit their opportunities to practice the target language.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that most students showed positive perceptions toward the use of translanguaging in classroom interaction, with 83.3% expressing positive responses and 16.7% showing negative perceptions. The combination of English and Indonesian was perceived to support students' understanding, increase their confidence, and create a more comfortable learning environment. On the other hand, the findings also indicate that students' perceptions were influenced by three main factors, namely competence, autonomy, and relatedness. Competence appeared as the most dominant factor (50%), followed by relatedness (36.7%) and autonomy (13.3%). Students tended to develop more positive perceptions when they felt capable of understanding the lesson, actively involved in learning activities, and supported by teachers and peers during classroom interaction.

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