

Teacher's Bilingual Strategies (English – Indonesian) in Teaching Vocabulary in EFL Classroom

Monige

STKIP Hermon Timika

Jl. Poros SP1 Budi Utomo Ujung, Timika-Papua Tengah

Submission Track:

Received: May 3, 2026

Revised: June 28, 2026

Accepted: July 24, 2026

Keywords:

Bilingual strategy, Code-Switching, EFL classroom, teacher language use, vocabulary teaching

*Corresponding Author:

monige2005@gmail.com

Copyright@2026 (author/s)

Abstract: This study examines teacher bilingual strategies (English-Indonesian) in teaching vocabulary in EFL classrooms and their impacts on students' vocabulary acquisition. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research was conducted at Sekolah Dasar Kristen 2 Rantepao (Sekolah Lentera Harapan Toraja), Toraja Utara, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, involving two grade V classes comprising 60 students as participants. Data were collected through video-audio classroom observation across multiple sessions and semi-structured interviews with the teacher and selected students. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2019), encompassing data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal two principal results. First, the teacher employed multiple bilingual strategies-including brainstorming, demonstration, games, and review activities-with code-switching as the primary linguistic mechanism alternating between English and Indonesian. Both inter-sentential and intra-sentential code-switching types were identified across all strategy types. Second, the teacher's bilingual strategies positively impacted students' vocabulary acquisition by enhancing comprehension, increasing active participation, and facilitating productive vocabulary use in classroom interaction. Students consistently preferred the English-first, Indonesian-second instructional sequencing as it supported their understanding of new vocabulary items. The study contributes empirical evidence for the pedagogical value of strategic bilingual use in primary EFL classrooms and offers practical implications for EFL teacher education in multilingual Indonesian contexts.



This is an open access article under the [CC BY-SA](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) license

INTRODUCTION

Bilingual has become an increasingly prominent feature of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms worldwide, particularly in multilingual societies such as Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language rather than a second limiting the extent to which an English-only classroom environment can realistically be maintained (Irnanda & Sarair,2022).

In these settings, teachers commonly employ code-switching — the alternation between two or more languages within a single communicative event — as a pedagogical strategy to support comprehension, manage classroom interaction, and scaffold students' language use (Cahyani et al., 2018; Sert, 2023). While some scholars advocate for English-only instructional policies on the grounds that they maximize target language exposure (Bonyadi et al., 2021; Kani & İğsen, 2022), a growing body of research has demonstrated that the strategic use of the first language (L1) fulfills important pedagogical functions including vocabulary clarification, reduction of learner anxiety, and construction of an inclusive classroom environment (Khair, 2022; McClure & Griffiore, 2019). The debate between English-only and bilingual instruction remains active in applied linguistics, and empirical classroom-based evidence from diverse Indonesian contexts is still needed to inform this debate (Liando et al., 2022).

Vocabulary is widely recognized as a cornerstone of language competence, providing the essential building blocks for listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Alqahtani, 2015; Richards & Renandya, 2002). In EFL contexts, vocabulary acquisition is particularly challenging because learners have limited access to the target language outside the classroom and may lack sufficient exposure to rich linguistic input in everyday life. Research has consistently shown that teachers' bilingual strategies can play a significant role in supporting vocabulary learning, especially in contexts where learners and teachers share a common first language (Keikhaie et al., 2015; Zarghami & Bagheri, 2014). Yet the precise mechanisms through which bilingual instructional strategies support vocabulary acquisition in naturally occurring primary classroom settings remain incompletely understood.

Despite this recognition, relatively few studies have examined the specific bilingual strategies employed by non-native EFL teachers at the primary school level in Indonesia, and the pedagogical impacts of such strategies on vocabulary learning remain underexplored in naturalistic settings (Mislina, 2023). Previous studies have tended to focus on secondary and tertiary educational contexts (Cahyani et al., 2018; Sert, 2023), on teacher perceptions rather than authentic classroom interaction (Khair, 2022; Kani & İğsen, 2022), or on quantitative outcomes without qualitative description of the instructional process (Keikhaie et al., 2015). There is consequently a need for qualitative, observation-based research that documents the full range of bilingual teaching strategies in primary EFL classrooms and traces their impacts on students through triangulated data sources.

This study addresses these gaps by examining teacher bilingual strategies in a naturally occurring primary EFL classroom in Toraja Utara, South Sulawesi, Indonesia, drawing on video-audio classroom observation and semi-structured interview data. The study is guided by two research questions: (1) What bilingual strategies does the teacher employ in the EFL classroom? and (2) What are the impacts of the teacher's bilingual strategies on students' vocabulary learning? By addressing these questions through rich qualitative data collected in an authentic Indonesian EFL setting, this study aims to contribute empirical evidence for the pedagogical value of teacher bilingual strategies and to offer practical insights for EFL educators operating in similar multilingual and multicultural contexts.

THEORETICAL SUPPORT

Bilingualism and Code-Switching in EFL Classroom

Bilingualism, broadly defined as the capacity to use two languages for communicative purposes, manifests in EFL classrooms through a range of linguistic practices, the most prominent of which is code-switching (Baker, 2011). Code-switching refers to the alternation between two or more language varieties within a single conversational context or utterance (Poplack, 1980). Three distinct types have been widely identified: inter-sentential switching, which occurs at sentence or clause boundaries; intra-sentential switching, which occurs within a sentence or phrase; and tag-switching, which involves the insertion of formulaic phrases or discourse markers from one language into an utterance in another (Poplack, 1980). In EFL classrooms, all three types may be employed by teachers for distinct communicative and pedagogical purposes.

The pedagogical functions of teacher code-switching in EFL classrooms have received substantial attention in recent research. Cahyani, de Courcy, and Barnett (2018) identified four primary functions of teacher code-switching in bilingual Indonesian classrooms: curriculum access, socializing, managing procedural matters, and classroom management. Similarly, Sert (2023) found that teacher code-switching in multilingual EFL classrooms served to facilitate comprehension, maintain interactional cohesion, and signal shifts in epistemic stance. Khair (2022) reported that bilingual teachers in Indonesian EFL contexts employed code-switching strategically to clarify complex concepts, provide feedback, and build affective rapport with students. These findings collectively position code-switching not as a pedagogical shortcoming but as a deliberate resource that reflects teachers' bilingual competence and instructional sensitivity (Patmasari & Agussatriana, 2019).

Beyond its communicative functions, teacher code-switching has also been associated with positive motivational outcomes. Kumar et al. (2021) found that code-switching by L2 teachers at the primary level was positively perceived by students, who reported feeling more comfortable and engaged when the teacher used their first language selectively. Debreli (2016) similarly found that non-native EFL teachers' use of the L1 was viewed by students as a facilitating rather than impeding factor in language development, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. These affective dimensions of code-switching are especially salient in primary school settings, where learner confidence and motivation are critical mediators of language acquisition outcomes.

Vocabulary Learning in Bilingual Instructional Contexts

The centrality of vocabulary to language learning is well established. Nation (2001) argues that knowing a word involves multiple dimensions: its form, meaning, and use — a complex knowledge base that develops through repeated meaningful encounters with target items across varied contexts. In bilingual instructional settings, the teacher's strategic use of two languages provides learners with parallel access to vocabulary meanings, enabling them to anchor new lexical items in existing conceptual knowledge (Keikhaie et al., 2015). This conceptual bridging function is particularly salient for primary school learners, who are

simultaneously developing their L1 literacy and beginning to acquire English as a foreign language.

Research on bilingual vocabulary instruction has documented consistent positive effects. Zarghami and Bagheri (2014) found that bilingual exposure significantly enhanced English vocabulary achievement among middle school EFL learners compared to monolingual instruction. Keikhaie et al. (2015) further demonstrated that bilingual learners outperformed monolinguals on L3 vocabulary production tasks, attributing this advantage to the cognitive flexibility developed through managing two language systems. At the classroom interaction level, Patmasari and Agussatriana (2019) documented how EFL teachers' code-switching facilitated both receptive and productive vocabulary acquisition by making the meaning of new words accessible through L1 equivalents while simultaneously modeling their English form and pronunciation.

Teaching Strategies and Bilingual Vocabulary Instruction

Teaching strategy refers to the systematic plan or set of actions a teacher employs to help students achieve specific learning objectives (Wehrli, 2003). In EFL vocabulary instruction, the selection of appropriate teaching strategies is recognized as a critical factor in determining the extent to which learners successfully acquire, retain, and use new lexical items (Alqahtani, 2015; Richards & Renandya, 2002). Wehrli (2003) identifies several core teaching strategies relevant to vocabulary instruction, including brainstorming, demonstration, games, and independent study — all of which create distinct interactional contexts that may support or constrain bilingual language use.

The integration of bilingual practices within specific strategy types creates unique pedagogical affordances. Brainstorming in a bilingual classroom activates students' existing conceptual knowledge in both languages simultaneously, widening the range of associations that can be linked to new vocabulary items. Demonstration strategies allow the teacher to model both English form and Indonesian meaning in a single instructional act, reducing the cognitive demand of lexical processing for beginning learners. Games create low-stakes, high-engagement contexts in which bilingual interaction can be used as scaffolding without the anxiety associated with formal language testing. Review activities provide repeated exposure to vocabulary in bilingual form, supporting the consolidation of lexical memory through distributed practice (Nation, 2001). The present study examines how these strategy types interact with the teacher's bilingual language use in an authentic primary EFL classroom.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative descriptive design (Creswell, 2012) to examine teacher bilingual strategies and their impacts on vocabulary learning in a primary EFL classroom. A qualitative approach was selected because the study aims to describe, interpret, and explain naturally occurring classroom phenomena in their authentic context rather than to measure variables or establish statistical generalizations. Qualitative methodology is particularly well suited to investigations of classroom interaction and bilingual language use,

as it enables the capture of the nuanced, context-dependent, and sequentially organized nature of pedagogical code-switching (Cahyani et al., 2018; Liando et al., 2022). The descriptive orientation of the design further enables the systematic documentation of the range, frequency, and function of the teacher's bilingual strategies across multiple classroom sessions.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Sekolah Dasar Kristen 2 Rantepao (Sekolah Lentera Harapan Toraja), located in Toraja Utara, North Toraja Regency, South Sulawesi, Indonesia. The school is a private Christian elementary school operating within a predominantly Torajan cultural and linguistic environment, where students typically enter schooling with active competence in Torajan vernaculars alongside Indonesian as the national language of instruction. Participants were selected through purposive sampling and comprised two Grade V classes: Grade V.1 and Grade V.2, with 30 students per class (total N = 60 students), and their English teacher. Grade V was selected deliberately because it represents an intermediate stage of primary education in which English vocabulary instruction becomes more systematically organized around grammatical categories (adjectives, prepositions, comparatives) and communicative functions, and in which teacher bilingual use plays a particularly prominent role in bridging students' prior conceptual knowledge with target language vocabulary. The teacher participant was an experienced non-native speaker of English who used both English and Indonesian consistently as instructional media across all observed lessons.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary instruments across multiple classroom observation sessions. First, classroom observation was conducted using video-audio recording. The researcher adopted a non-participatory observer role, positioned at the back or front of the classroom to minimize researcher influence while capturing the full range of teacher-student verbal interaction. A total of four observation sessions were conducted across both classrooms, producing video-audio recordings that were subsequently transcribed verbatim. The resulting transcripts formed the primary data corpus, comprising 24 classroom interaction extracts that were subjected to systematic analysis. Second, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the English teacher and two selected student participants following the observation sessions. The interview instrument was designed to elicit reflective and experiential perspectives on the teacher's bilingual practices and their perceived effects on English vocabulary understanding. Interview questions addressed participants' preferences regarding language use in instruction, their perceptions of the effectiveness of English-Indonesian switching, and their experiences of specific lesson types. All interview sessions were audio-recorded with participants' written informed consent.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2019) interactive model of qualitative analysis, which comprises three concurrent and iterative activities. Data condensation involved the systematic selection, focusing, simplification, and abstraction of relevant data from the full corpus of observation transcripts, interview notes, and fieldwork

records. Classroom extracts were identified and categorized according to teaching strategy type (brainstorming, demonstration, games, review) and code-switching type (inter-sentential, intra-sentential, tag-switching). Data display involved the organization and structured presentation of condensed data into analytical categories aligned with the two research questions. Finally, conclusion drawing and verification involved the formulation of interpretive conclusions from the displayed data, which were verified through systematic cross-referencing with raw data sources to ensure internal consistency.

Trustworthiness

To establish the trustworthiness of the findings, four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985, as cited in Creswell, 2012) were applied. Credibility was addressed through data triangulation: classroom observation transcripts, video recordings, and semi-structured interview data were cross-referenced to ensure convergent interpretation. Member checking was also employed, whereby key findings were shared with the teacher participant for confirmation and clarification. Transferability was supported through thick description of the research context, participants, and instructional setting, enabling readers to assess the applicability of findings to comparable EFL contexts. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting all analytical decisions, categorization criteria, and interpretive steps. Confirmability was achieved by grounding all claims directly in the raw data through verbatim classroom extracts and direct interview quotations, maintaining analytical transparency throughout.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents findings organized according to the two research questions. Each finding is supported by representative classroom transcription extracts and interview data, followed by discussion that situates the findings within relevant theoretical and empirical literature. All extracts are reproduced verbatim from classroom transcripts, with Indonesian utterances followed by English translations in square brackets.

RQ 1: Teacher's Bilingual Strategies in the EFL Classroom

Analysis of the classroom observation data revealed that the teacher consistently employed bilingual strategies across all four identified teaching strategy types: brainstorming, demonstration, games, and review-based independent study. Code-switching — systematically alternating between English and Indonesian — served as the central linguistic mechanism through which bilingual instruction was realized. All three code-switching types identified by Poplack (1980) were observed in the data, with inter-sentential switching being the most frequent, followed by intra-sentential switching and tag-switching.

Brainstorming Strategy

In brainstorming activities, the teacher employed bilingual prompts to activate students' prior knowledge and elicit participation before introducing new vocabulary content. The following extract illustrates a characteristic brainstorming interaction at the opening of a lesson:

Extract 1 (Grade V.1, Meeting 2): Teacher: 'What day is today?' Students: 'Monday!!' Teacher: 'What date is today? What date? OK. Angkat tangannya — Rise your hand.' [Raise your hands — Rise your hand.] Students: '12th August 2019.' Teacher: 'Today we will review our materi from the beginning until the end. Kita akan mereview/ mengulang semua materi yang sudah kita pelajari dari awal karena on Wednesday you will get sumatif.' [We are going to review all the material we have studied from the beginning because on Wednesday you will get a summative test.]

In this exchange, the teacher opened with English questions before switching to Indonesian for the procedural instruction, then providing an English gloss immediately after. The bilingual parallel structure — “Angkat tangannya — Rise your hand” — is a clear instance of tag-switching that simultaneously served comprehension (ensuring all students understood the behavioral cue) and modeling (providing the English equivalent for the Indonesian instruction). In the final teacher turn, intra-sentential switching was employed by embedding English content words (“materi,” “sumatif”) within an Indonesian grammatical frame. These English lexical items function as technical vocabulary that students are expected to recognize as part of their academic register. This finding aligns with Cahyani et al.'s (2018) observation that teachers code-switch for curriculum access and procedural management simultaneously, and with Sert's (2023) argument that switching functions to maintain interactional flow while ensuring accessibility.

A further instance of brainstorming with code-switching involved the teacher activating conceptual vocabulary before a new topic:

Extract 2 (Grade V.1, Meeting 1): Teacher: 'Kalian sudah tau, waktu sudah belajar bahasa sifat, diapakah kata sifat itu? Ya Samuel.' [You already know, when we learned adjectives, what is an adjective? Yes, Samuel.] Student Samuel: 'Dilawan kata.' [The opposite word.]

Here the teacher used Indonesian entirely for the brainstorming prompt, recognizing that eliciting students' prior knowledge about a grammatical concept required full L1 support to maximize participation. The student's response, while linguistically imprecise, demonstrated active engagement with the concept. This selective use of Indonesian in meta-linguistic discussion reflects Khair's (2022) finding that bilingual teachers in Indonesia use L1 strategically for conceptual clarification tasks, reserving it for moments when the cognitive demand of processing in English would impede rather than support participation.

Demonstration Strategy

The demonstration strategy was the most frequently observed context for bilingual vocabulary teaching and produced the clearest evidence of the teacher's systematic code-switching pattern. A consistent bilingual call-and-response structure emerged: the teacher would present an English vocabulary item, then elicit the Indonesian equivalent from students, creating a structured vocabulary pairing exercise.

Extract 3 (Grade V.1, Meeting 1): Teacher: 'Adjective. Apa itu adjective? Ya Amel.' [What is adjective? Yes, Amel.] Student Amel: 'Kata sifat.' [Adjective/ descriptive word.]

Extract 4 (Grade V.1, Meeting 2): Teacher: 'Behind, apa Behind?' [Behind, what is Behind?] Student: 'Disebelah, disamping.' [Beside, next to.] Teacher: 'Behind?' Student: 'Dibelakang.' [Behind/ at the back.]

Extract 5 (Grade V.2, Meeting 2): Teacher: 'Between?' Student: 'Diantara.' [Between/ in the middle of.] Teacher: 'Behind, apa Behind?' Student: 'Disebelah, disamping.' Teacher: 'Behind?' Student: 'Dibelakang.'

Extracts 3 to 5 illustrate a systematic vocabulary elicitation sequence in which English target items were consistently presented first, followed by an Indonesian comprehension check. The recurrent correction in Extract 4 and 5 — where the teacher re-elicited “Behind” after an incorrect student response of “disebelah, disamping” (beside/next to) — demonstrates an important feature of the bilingual demonstration strategy: form-meaning verification. The teacher did not simply accept the first L1 translation offered but continued prompting until the accurate Indonesian equivalent was produced. This iterative correction process reflects Patmasari and Agussatriana’s (2019) concept of vocabulary scaffolding through code-switching, in which L1 equivalents serve as semantic anchors for L2 items.

The demonstration strategy was also applied to more complex vocabulary items requiring contextual illustration. The following extract shows the teacher providing bilingual situational context to scaffold vocabulary comprehension:

Extract 6 (Grade V.1, Meeting 1): *Teacher: 'OK! While you are writing, I'm asking permission to use my handphone. Sekarang kita minta izin jika menggunakan handphone didepan kelas. Kenapa saya pake handphone? Karena buku yang saya gunakan pake scan. Ini hanya bisa discan pake aplikasi yang ada di handphone. Scan supaya bisa keluar suaranya. Sekarang saya minta izin, boleh tidak?' [Now we ask permission if using a handphone in front of the class. Why do I use a handphone? Because the book I use needs to be scanned. This can only be scanned with an application on the handphone. Scan so it can produce sound. Now I ask permission, is it okay?] Students: 'BOOLEEHH!!' [YES!!]*

This extract illustrates a more elaborate form of bilingual demonstration in which the teacher modeled polite request language in English (“I am asking permission”) and then provided a full Indonesian explanation of the context. By embedding the English target expression within a meaningful, real-time classroom situation, the teacher transformed an incidental administrative act into a vocabulary teaching opportunity. This practice is consistent with what Cahyani et al. (2018) describe as the “curriculum access” function of code-switching, and with Nation’s (2001) emphasis on the importance of learning vocabulary through meaningful contextual use.

Games Strategy

Game-based activities generated the most dynamic bilingual interaction sequences and produced the longest student utterances observed across the entire data corpus. The teacher’s use of bilingual scaffolding during games served primarily to reduce the cognitive load of sentence production, enabling students to focus their processing resources on the target linguistic structure.

Extract 7 (Grade V.2, Meeting 1): *Teacher: 'Can you say 1 sentence that consists of comparing 2 things. Make a sentence with a comparison of 2 things. Example in bahasa Indonesia: Resa lebih tinggi dari Araya. Ya Juni.' [Example in Indonesian: Resa is taller than Araya.] Student Juni: 'Resa is taller than Araya.' Teacher: 'Good one clap!! Kelas V.2 lebih bersih dari kelas V.1. Ya Gwen!' [Grade V.2 is cleaner than Grade V.1.] Student Gwen: 'Grade V.2 is cleaner than grade V.1.' Teacher: 'Ok Good. Thank you! One clap! Once more... Pak Demma lebih tua dari Pak Kevin. Ya JoJos.' Student JoJos: 'Mr. Demma is older than Mr. Kevin.'*

In this extended game sequence, the teacher provided an Indonesian model sentence before requiring L2 production. Each Indonesian prompt was followed by accurate English production from the nominated student, demonstrating successful interlingual transfer. The

teacher's use of familiar classroom referents — classmates' names, classroom cleanliness comparisons, teachers' ages — as content for the Indonesian prompts further reduced cognitive load by eliminating the need to process unfamiliar semantic content simultaneously with the target grammatical structure. This scaffolding architecture reflects the L1-to-L2 production sequence described by Liando et al. (2022) in their study of translanguaging in Indonesian EFL classrooms.

The games context also produced evidence of student-initiated bilingual interaction, suggesting that the teacher's bilingual strategy had been internalized as a classroom norm:

Extract 8 (Grade V.1, Meeting 1): *Student Albert: 'Expensive... apa itu Expensive?' [Expensive... what is Expensive?] Students: 'Mahaaall!!' [Expensive!!]*

This brief peer exchange — where a student independently used the teacher's characteristic English-question, Indonesian-answer elicitation pattern to query an unknown vocabulary item — is particularly significant. It indicates that students had not only benefited from the teacher's bilingual strategy but had also adopted it as an autonomous vocabulary learning tool. This peer-mediated vocabulary exchange represents a form of cooperative learning within a bilingual framework, consistent with Vygotsky's (as cited in Baker, 2011) concept of learning through social interaction in the zone of proximal development.

Review and Independent Study Strategy

Review-based activities revealed the most multi-functional instances of bilingual code-switching in the dataset, with the teacher simultaneously using language alternation for comprehension checking, error correction, vocabulary consolidation, and spatial vocabulary teaching involving prepositions of location.

Extract 9 (Grade V.2, Meeting 2): *Teacher: 'OK. Vano said that parking lot is in front of the canteen, Right/Wrong? — Benar/Salah?' Students: 'Right.' Teacher: 'Right katanya; Tempat parkir di depannya kantin. Mereka berhadapan? Siapa yang mau perbaiki?' [Right, they say; The parking lot is in front of the canteen. Are they facing each other? Who wants to correct this?] Student Masola: 'Parking lot is in behind the canteen.' Teacher: 'Behind (bukan behin). Good. Benar.' [Behind (not behin). Good. Correct.]*

This extract demonstrates a sophisticated multi-layered bilingual sequence. The teacher first presented the comprehension question bilingually ("Right/Wrong? — Benar/Salah"), a tag-switching pattern that guaranteed universal accessibility. After the students' response, the teacher switched to Indonesian to re-state the incorrect answer in L1 ("Tempat parkir di depannya kantin") and then asked the class to evaluate it ("Mereka berhadapan?"). This Indonesian translation created a shared cognitive reference point from which the class could collectively assess the original English error. After a student provided the correction, the teacher confirmed it in English while simultaneously correcting the student's mispronunciation of "behind" as "behin," demonstrating that language choice in error correction was calibrated by the nature of the correction being made — form-focused correction was delivered in English, while meaning-focused comprehension checks were delivered in Indonesian.

Extract 10 (Grade V.2, Meeting 2): *Teacher: 'Good. Room 5 is beside room 6. Beside ya bukan didepan. Ok the last question; where is the parking lot? Vano? Where is the parking lot? — Parking lot*

nomor berapa?' [Where is the parking lot? – Which number is the parking lot?] Student: 'Nomor 1.'
[Number 1.]

Extract 10 further illustrates the teacher's use of bilingual review to consolidate preposition vocabulary. The switch to Indonesian ("Pparking lot nomor berapa?") served to clarify the specific referential frame of the question, ensuring that the student understood they were being asked to identify a number on a floor plan map, not produce a full locative sentence. This functional precision in code-switching — using L1 only to resolve specific ambiguity while maintaining English for target vocabulary items — reflects the principled, pedagogically driven code-switching described by Cahyani et al. (2018) and distinguishes the teacher's bilingual practice from uncontrolled or arbitrary language alternation.

RQ 2: Impacts of Teacher's Bilingual Strategies on Students' Vocabulary Learning

The analysis of impacts on students' vocabulary learning was guided by triangulated evidence drawn from two instruments: video-audio classroom observation and semi-structured interviews. An impact was classified as positive when convergent indicators were identified across both data sources, namely: (a) observable behaviors such as accurate Indonesian translation of English vocabulary items, increased verbal participation, sustained engagement with target items, and successful productive use in sentence construction; and (b) corresponding affirmative perceptions reported by the teacher and students in interview data regarding comprehension, comfort, and preference for the bilingual instructional sequence. Conversely, an impact was classified as negative or limiting when counter-indicators emerged, including persistent reliance on L1 despite established comprehension, inability to produce English output independently, extended translation time that reduced instructional pace, or expressed difficulty in processing the bilingual sequence. This dual-criterion framework, applied within Miles, Huberman, and Saldana's (2019) interactive analysis model, ensured that interpretive claims about the direction of impact were grounded in observable classroom behavior and self-reported participant experience rather than in researcher assumption.

Enhanced Vocabulary Comprehension

The most consistently documented impact of the teacher's bilingual strategy across all four strategy types was enhanced student comprehension of English vocabulary items. Throughout the observed sessions, students demonstrated successful vocabulary understanding through accurate Indonesian translation, appropriate contextual use, and productive application in sentence construction. The systematic English-Indonesian pairing in demonstration and review activities in particular created reliable comprehension pathways for each target vocabulary item encountered. Students who were unable to provide correct translations on first elicitation were consistently brought to correct understanding through the teacher's iterative bilingual scaffolding, as documented in Extracts 4 and 5 above.

Interview data strongly corroborated this observation. The teacher reflected: "Iya. 2 Bahasa, meskipun cuma 1 bahasa saya gunakan dampaknya ada yang mengerti dan ada yang tidak mengerti, seperti itu. Kalo saya pake 2 bahasa mereka lebih mengerti meskipun itu harus ambil waktu untuk translate lagi." [Yes. 2 languages. Even if I use only 1 language, the

impact is some understand and some do not. If I use 2 languages they understand better, even though it takes time to translate again.] This reflective statement is important because it demonstrates the teacher's conscious recognition of the comprehension-enhancing function of bilingual instruction, positioning the time cost of translation as an acceptable trade-off for increased student understanding.

Students also expressed clear preferences that illuminated how bilingual instruction supported their vocabulary learning. Student 1 stated: "Mmnn, bahasa inggris dulu, baru bahasa Indonesia. Karena kalo bahasa inggris dulu bisa diterjemahkan ke bahasa Indonesia." [English first then Bahasa Indonesia. Because if English first, it can be translated into Bahasa Indonesia.] Student 2 elaborated: "Menurut saya bahasa inggris dulu baru bahasa Indonesia. Karena kalo misalnya bahasa Indonesia dulu baru bahasa inggris lebih susah saya cerna." [According to me, English first then Bahasa Indonesia. Because if Bahasa Indonesia comes first, then English, it is more difficult for me to process.] These preferences indicate that the teacher's English-first, Indonesian-second ordering was experienced as pedagogically meaningful by students. The English-first sequencing preserved target language primacy while the Indonesian support functioned as a semantic safety net, enabling students to confirm meaning without abandoning English as the instructional frame.

This finding aligns with Zarghami and Bagheri's (2014) study demonstrating the superiority of bilingual over monolingual vocabulary instruction, and resonates with Cummins's (as cited in Baker, 2011) concept of "common underlying proficiency" — the shared conceptual foundation across languages — which enables students to map new English vocabulary onto pre-existing Indonesian conceptual knowledge rather than constructing meaning from zero.

Increased Participation and Vocabulary Production

A second documented impact of the bilingual strategies was increased student participation and productive vocabulary use in classroom interaction. Students who might otherwise remain silent when faced with English-only prompts were consistently observed responding actively when the teacher's bilingual cues provided sufficient comprehension support. This participation effect was most pronounced during game-based activities, where the low-stakes competitive format combined with bilingual scaffolding produced the most extended student language output in the dataset, as demonstrated in Extract 7.

The teacher's interview observation provides important nuance to this finding: "Mereka bisa mengerti tapi tidak bisa bilang. Di dalam kelas waktu mereka pakai hand signal dan bilang 'can I talk?' tapi masih pake bahasa Indonesia." [They can understand but cannot say it. In the classroom when they use hand signal and say 'can I talk?' but still use Indonesian.] This observation documents a characteristic interlanguage state among early EFL learners: receptive competence (understanding English vocabulary when contextualized in bilingual instruction) developing ahead of productive competence (independently generating English output). Significantly, however, the teacher's bilingual strategy had created sufficient classroom comfort for students to signal their desire to participate and attempt English production, even when their output remained L1-dependent. This

willingness to communicate is recognized as an important precondition for vocabulary acquisition (Nation, 2001).

The peer-initiated vocabulary exchange in Extract 8, where a student independently replicated the teacher's bilingual elicitation pattern to query an unknown English word, provides additional evidence that the bilingual strategy had productive impacts beyond simple comprehension. Students had internalized not only the vocabulary items taught but also the bilingual learning strategy itself, applying it autonomously in peer interaction. This metacognitive appropriation of a bilingual vocabulary strategy is consistent with Mislina's (2023) finding that bilingual classroom environments in young learner EFL settings foster the development of independent language learning behaviors. Kumar et al. (2021) similarly found that students in bilingual primary classrooms developed greater confidence in approaching unknown vocabulary, attributing this to the reduced anxiety associated with L1-supported instructional environments.

Beyond comprehension and participation, the teacher's bilingual strategy was associated with positive motivational and affective outcomes that become observable through specific behavioral indicators in the classroom data. Students demonstrated visible engagement during bilingual game-based and demonstration activities, as evidenced by enthusiastic collective responses. (e.g., the choral "BOOLEEHH!!" in Extract 6 and the spontaneous group answer "Mahaaall!!" in Extract 8), willingness to attempt English production when scaffolded by Indonesian prompts (Extract 7), and the autonomous adoption of the teacher's bilingual elicitation pattern in peer interaction (Extract 8). These behavioral indicators of engagement and confidence align with Kumar et al.'s (2021) finding that selective L1 use at the primary level is positively perceived by students and increases comfort with the target language, and with Debreli's (2016) observation that L1 use by non-native EFL teachers functions as a facilitating rather than impeding factor in language development, particularly for lower-proficiency learners. The teacher's interview reflection that students "lebih mengerti" [understand better] when both languages are used together with interviewed students' explicit preference for the English-first, Indonesian-second sequence, further supports the interpretation that bilingual instruction fostered not only cognitive comprehension but also affective willingness to engage with English vocabulary tasks.

At the same time, the data also revealed limitations and potential negative aspects of the bilingual strategy that warrant acknowledgment alongside the positive outcomes. First, the teacher explicitly noted the temporal cost of bilingual instruction: "meskipun itu harus ambil waktu untuk translate lagi" [even though it takes time to translate again], indicating that bilingual scaffolding can slow the instructional pace and reduce the volume of English input available within a given lesson. Second, students' productive output remained predominantly L1-dependent even when receptive understanding had been established, as documented in the teacher's observation that students "bisa mengerti tapi tidak bisa bilang" [can understand but cannot say it]. This receptive-productive asymmetry suggests that while bilingual strategies effectively supported comprehension and lowered the affective filter, they did not in themselves resolve the productive bottleneck that characterizes early EFL

learners. Third, the iterative correction sequences observed in Extract 4 and 5 indicate that L1 translation does not guarantee accurate form-meaning mapping on first encounter, as students initially offered imprecise Indonesian equivalents that required additional teacher scaffolding to refine. Taken together, these observations indicate that the positive impact of bilingual instruction documented in this study are empirically substantial but pedagogically bounded, and that effective use of code-switching in EFL classrooms requires teachers to remain attentive to the trade-off between L1-mediated comprehension support and sustained L2 productive development.

CONCLUSION

This study examined teacher bilingual strategies (English-Indonesian) in a primary EFL classroom at Sekolah Dasar Kristen 2 Rantepao and their impacts on students' vocabulary acquisition. Drawing on video-audio classroom observation of 24 interaction extracts and semi-structured interview data, two principal findings were established that address the study's research questions.

In response to the first research question, the teacher employed four bilingual teaching strategy types — brainstorming, demonstration, games, and review-based independent study — with code-switching as the central linguistic mechanism. All three code-switching types identified by Poplack (1980) were documented: inter-sentential switching was used most frequently for procedural management and vocabulary presentation; intra-sentential switching appeared for embedding English technical vocabulary within Indonesian instructional discourse; and tag-switching served as a bilingual parallel structure for behavioral cues and comprehension checks. The English-first, Indonesian-second ordering was maintained consistently across strategy types, reflecting a deliberate pedagogical orientation that preserved target language primacy while providing L1 comprehension support. Crucially, code-switching was not deployed arbitrarily but was calibrated according to the communicative function of each instructional move: Indonesian was used for conceptual clarification and comprehension checking, while English was maintained for formal vocabulary presentation and form-focused correction.

In response to the second research question, the teacher's bilingual strategies produced three documented positive impacts on vocabulary learning: enhanced comprehension and increased participation with productive vocabulary use, and positive motivational and affective outcomes. The systematic English-Indonesian pairing created comprehension pathways that enabled students to successfully understand, translate, and contextualize target vocabulary. Increased participation was evidenced by students' active engagement in elicitation sequences, their extended production during bilingual game activities, and their autonomous replication of the teacher's bilingual elicitation strategy in peer interaction. Motivational and affective outcomes were observable through behavioral indicators including enthusiastic collective responses during game-based activities, willingness to attempt English production when scaffolded by Indonesian prompts, and students' autonomous adoption of the teacher's bilingual elicitation pattern in peer interaction—finding consistent with Kumar et al. (2021) and Debreli (2016) on the facilitative role of selective L1 use in primary EFL settings. Student interview data confirmed a

consistent preference for English-first, Indonesian-second instructional sequencing, further validating the pedagogical design of the teacher's bilingual strategy. At the same time, the data indicated bounded effects: bilingual instruction incurred a temporal cost in translation, and students' productive English output remained predominantly L1-dependent even when receptive comprehension and affective engagement more readily than it resolves the productive bottleneck of early EFL learning.

These findings carry significant practical implications for EFL teacher education in Indonesia and comparable multilingual contexts. Teacher educators should move beyond deficit framings of L1 use in EFL classrooms and instead equip pre-service and in-service teachers with principled frameworks for strategic code-switching that maximize pedagogical benefits while maintaining appropriate target language exposure. The present study also demonstrates the value of naturalistic, observation-based qualitative research in documenting the granular mechanisms of bilingual vocabulary instruction. A limitation of this study is its focus on a single teacher and school context, which constrains the transferability of findings. Future research should examine the long-term retention effects of bilingual vocabulary strategies, investigate teacher bilingual practices across multiple school levels, and explore whether the English-first, Indonesian-second preference documented here is consistent across diverse regional EFL contexts in Indonesia.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to the principal, teacher, and students of Sekolah Dasar Kristen 2 Rantepao (Sekolah Lentera Harapan Toraja), Toraja Utara, South Sulawesi, for their generous cooperation and participation in this research. Special thanks are also due to the thesis supervisors, Baso Jabu and Kisman Salija, for their invaluable guidance during the original research from which this article is developed.

REFERENCES

- Alqahtani, M. (2015). The importance of vocabulary in language learning and how to be taught. *International Journal of Teaching and Education*, III(3), 21–34.
- Baker, C. (2011). *Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism* (5th ed.). Multilingual Matters.
- Bonyadi, A., Farahani, S., & Azimi, H. (2021). English-only instruction in EFL contexts: Teachers' beliefs and classroom practices. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*, 10(2), 55–64.
- Cahyani, H., de Courcy, M., & Barnett, J. (2018). Teachers' code-switching in bilingual classrooms: Exploring pedagogical and sociocultural functions. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21(4), 465–479. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1189509>
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (4th ed.). Pearson Education.

- Debreli, E. (2016). Perceptions of non-native EFL teachers on L1 use in L2 classrooms: Implications for language program development. *English Language Teaching*, 9(3), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v9n3p1>
- Irnanda, S., & Sarair, S. (2022). Learning L3 English early: A danger to L1 Indonesian. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research*, 9(1), 34–48.
- Kani, Z. G., & İğsen, H. (2022). Bilingual English teachers' perspectives on English-only policies in an EFL setting. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 17(1), 127–141. <https://doi.org/10.29329/epasr.2022.426.7>
- Keikhaie, Y., Khoshkhoonejad, A., Mansoorzadeh, N., & Panahandeh, E. (2015). Bilingualism and vocabulary learning: A comparison between Baluchi and Persian EFL learners. *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(3), 183–189.
- Khair, I. (2022). Realities and impacts of teaching approach and method in bilingual classroom in Indonesia. *Journal of Linguistics and Education*, 12(1), 1–15.
- Kumar, T., Nukapangu, V., & Hassan, A. (2021). Effectiveness of code-switching in language classroom in India at primary level: A case of L2 teachers' perspectives. *Journal of Education and Instruction*, 11(4), 379–385.
- Liando, N. V. F., Tatipang, D. P., & Lengkoan, F. (2022). A study of translanguaging practices in an EFL classroom in Indonesian context: A multilingual concept. *Research and Innovation in Language Learning*, 5(2), 167–185. <https://doi.org/10.33603/rill.v5i2.6986>
- McClure, J. E., & Griffore, J. (2019). Code-switching as a pedagogical tool: A systematic review of the literature. *Language Teaching Research*, 23(6), 734–750. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168819875799>
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
- Mislina, M. (2023). The making of proficient young EFL learners in a bilingual speaking class: Challenges and strategies. *Erudita: Journal of English Language Teaching*, 3(2), 178–190. <https://doi.org/10.28918/erudita.v3i2.2150>
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Patmasari, A., & Agussatriana, A. (2019). Function of code switching performed by the EFL teachers in classroom interaction. *ELS Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 2(3), 465–476. <https://doi.org/10.34050/els-jish.v2i3.7955>
- Poplack, S. (1980). Sometimes I'll start a sentence in Spanish y termino en español: Toward a typology of code-switching. *Linguistics*, 18(7–8), 581–618.
- Richards, J. C., & Renandya, W. A. (2002). *Methodology in language teaching: An anthology of current practice*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sert, O. (2023). Revisiting code-switching in multilingual EFL classrooms: Insights from conversation analysis. *Journal of Language and Intercultural Communication*, 23(2), 155–171.
- Wehrli, G. (2003). Teaching strategies. *Journal of Teaching and Learning*, 1(1), 12–20.

Zarghami, S., & Bagheri, M. S. (2014). The impact of bilingualism on English vocabulary learning among middle school students. *Journal of Studies in Learning and Teaching English*, 3(1), 55–72.