

# Integrating Local Languages in Indonesian EFL Classrooms: A Literature Review on Pedagogical Implications

La Ode Rasmin<sup>\*1</sup>, Samsudin Samsudin<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Muslim Buton, Indonesia

<sup>2</sup> Universitas Teknologi Sumbawa, Indonesia

[laoderasmin@umubuton.ac.id](mailto:laoderasmin@umubuton.ac.id)<sup>1</sup>, [samsudin@uts.ac.id](mailto:samsudin@uts.ac.id)<sup>2</sup>

*\*Corresponding Author: [laoderasmin@umubuton.ac.id](mailto:laoderasmin@umubuton.ac.id)*

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p><b>Keywords:</b> EFL; Local Languages; Multilingual Education; Translanguaging</p> <p><b>Received:</b> 03 Sep 2024  <b>Revised:</b> 21 Oct 2024  <b>Accepted:</b> 28 Oct 2024</p>	<p>Integrating local languages in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching has become a significant area of inquiry within Indonesia's multicultural educational landscape. This literature review explores the role and impact of local languages in supporting English language acquisition among Indonesian students. By examining fundamental studies and theoretical perspectives, this review addresses the challenges and benefits of incorporating local languages in EFL classrooms, including the potential for enhancing students' cultural identity, cognitive development, and linguistic skills. Findings from various studies highlight the pedagogical value of translanguaging and other multilingual approaches that leverage Local languages as a bridge for understanding English. However, the review also underscores obstacles such as lack of teacher training, limited resources, and institutional constraints. This study emphasizes the need for a more inclusive EFL curriculum that respects linguistic diversity and promotes sustainable language practices in Indonesia. Recommendations for future research are provided, focusing on effective strategies for balancing local and global language competencies within EFL pedagogy.</p>

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

English proficiency is increasingly recognized as a valuable asset in the globalized world, with countries worldwide promoting English language education to enhance global communication and economic opportunities (Isma et al., 2023; Nunan, 2003; Warschauer, 2000). Indonesia, a culturally rich and linguistically diverse nation, is no exception. English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education is emphasized as part of Indonesia's national curriculum, aiming to prepare students for international engagement. However, the dominance of English raises concerns about the potential marginalization of Indonesia's local languages, which represent the cultural and historical identities of various ethnic groups across the archipelago (Kuipers, 1998; Zein, 2020; Zentz, 2017). This dilemma creates tension between the pursuit of English proficiency and the preservation of local linguistic heritage.

Indonesia is home to over 700 local languages, many of which are classified as endangered due to diminishing numbers of active speakers (Anderbeck, 2015). These local languages are communication tools and carriers of traditional knowledge, cultural identity, and community values. Scholars argue that excluding Local languages from formal education exacerbates language endangerment, as younger generations may perceive local languages as less valuable than global languages like English (Hornberger, 1998; Watson, 2007). Consequently, there is growing advocacy for incorporating local



languages within Indonesia's education system to support language preservation and strengthen students' cultural ties (Lie, 2017; Lo Bianco, 2010).

Recent studies indicate that local languages can complement EFL classrooms, facilitating students' comprehension and engagement by drawing on familiar linguistic and cultural knowledge (Munandar & Newton, 2021; Zein et al., 2020). This approach, known as translanguaging, allows students to use their entire linguistic repertoire to make sense of and express ideas, enhancing cognitive and language skills. Translanguaging has garnered interest among educators and researchers as a way to address linguistic inequality while optimizing language learning, positioning Local languages as assets rather than obstacles in learning English (Rajendram, 2019).

The theoretical underpinnings of translanguaging suggest that allowing students to switch between languages fluidly can deepen their understanding of linguistic structures and cultural meanings (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2020; Ossa Parra & Proctor, 2021). This fluid use of language aligns with Indonesian students' everyday linguistic practices, particularly in multilingual communities where language mixing is standard. Moreover, integrating Local languages in EFL instruction may promote a sense of inclusion and belonging, reducing students' alienation in English-dominant environments. However, the practical implementation of translanguaging in Indonesia's EFL classrooms remains limited and inconsistent due to various structural and policy constraints.

The Indonesian education system traditionally follows a monolingual approach to EFL instruction, often encouraging English-only environments to accelerate language immersion. However, this approach can be challenging for students, especially those from rural and remote areas, who may lack exposure to English outside the classroom. Educators may alienate students from cultural and linguistic backgrounds by relying exclusively on English, hindering language acquisition and identity formation. Recognizing the potential drawbacks of monolingual EFL models, some educators and policymakers are reconsidering the role of local languages in English education.

In addition to cognitive and cultural benefits, integrating Local languages in EFL instruction may enhance students' metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to better understand the structural and functional aspects of different languages (Sifakis, 2023). This heightened awareness can facilitate a more nuanced grasp of English as students draw parallels and contrasts between English and their native languages. For instance, students might better understand English grammar by comparing it with syntactic structures in their languages. Furthermore, the cognitive flexibility fostered through multilingual education can improve problem-solving and critical-thinking skills, benefiting students across academic disciplines.

Using local languages in EFL education also aligns with the goals of Indonesia's Language Preservation Program, which seeks to safeguard the nation's linguistic diversity (Maulidiah et al., 2023; Permana & Rohmah, 2024). By incorporating local languages into the formal curriculum, educators can contribute to revitalizing these languages, empowering students to see the value in their cultural heritage. Studies have shown that students encouraged to use their native languages in academic settings are more likely to develop a strong sense of cultural pride, which can foster resilience in the face of social and linguistic homogenization.

Despite the potential benefits, significant challenges persist in integrating local languages within EFL instruction. Many teachers in Indonesia lack formal training in multilingual teaching strategies, with most teacher education programs focusing solely on monolingual English instruction (Hamied, 2012; Isma et al., 2024; Rasmin et al., 2024; Zein, 2019). Consequently, teachers may feel unequipped to manage a classroom where multiple languages are actively used. Additionally, limited resources, such as textbooks and instructional materials, support translanguaging or multilingual approaches. These limitations necessitate comprehensive teacher training programs and resource development to support the effective implementation of local languages in EFL classrooms.



Another challenge arises from institutional policies prioritizing English-only instruction to ensure compliance with national language standards and assessment criteria. Many schools fear incorporating local languages may detract from students' English proficiency, potentially affecting academic outcomes and standardized test performance (Abrar et al., 2018; Zein et al., 2020). Addressing these concerns requires a shift in educational policies that view local languages as complementary, rather than competitive, to English learning. Such a paradigm shift would necessitate collaboration between policymakers, educators, and communities to develop a balanced curriculum that accommodates local and global language needs.

This literature review aims to analyze existing research on the role of local languages in EFL instruction within the Indonesian context. By examining multilingual approaches' benefits, challenges, and pedagogical implications, this study provides insights into how Indonesia can design an inclusive EFL curriculum that respects and leverages linguistic diversity. In doing so, this review contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable language practices in EFL education, offering recommendations for future research and policy development. Through a critical analysis of current literature, this study ultimately underscores the need for an EFL pedagogy that embraces linguistic inclusivity, allowing students to navigate the complexities of local and global linguistic landscapes.

## 2. METHODS

This study employs a qualitative literature review method to examine the role and implications of local languages in Indonesia's English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education (Greetham, 2021). By analyzing and synthesizing existing research, this literature review aims to understand how local languages are used comprehensively, the benefits and challenges of their inclusion, and the potential implications for EFL pedagogy within the Indonesian educational context. The methodology includes systematic steps for data collection, selection criteria, and analysis to ensure the reliability and relevance of the findings.

In addition to general keywords, terms related to local languages found in Indonesia and teaching practices. The data for this literature review were collected from various academic sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and conference proceedings published in the past two decades. Sources were obtained primarily from reputable databases such as SINTA, JSTOR, Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, and ScienceDirect to ensure academic quality and relevance to the Indonesian EFL context. Keywords used in the search process included "*local languages in EFL*," "*translanguaging in Indonesia*," "*multilingual education in Indonesia*," "*local languages in English teaching*," and "*language diversity in education*."

The literature selection was conducted through a two-stage screening process. The first stage involved reviewing titles and abstracts to identify sources relevant to the research focus, specifically those addressing the integration of Local languages in EFL contexts, translanguaging practices, and multilingual pedagogical strategies in Indonesia. In the second stage, full texts were reviewed, and studies that directly discussed the challenges, benefits, and pedagogical implications of using local languages in EFL were prioritized.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: 1) Studies focused on EFL education in Indonesia with an emphasis on local languages; 2) Literature discussing multilingual teaching approaches, particularly translanguaging; 3) Research published in reputable academic journals, books, or conference proceedings within the last 20 years; 4) Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included to provide a comprehensive analysis of existing findings.

The collected literature was analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. This approach identified recurring themes, patterns, and contradictions across different studies (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Key themes focused on in this review included the benefits of using local languages in EFL (e.g., cognitive



enhancement, cultural identity reinforcement), challenges in implementing multilingual approaches (e.g., lack of resources, policy restrictions), and strategies proposed for an inclusive EFL curriculum that integrates local languages.

Thematic coding was used to organize findings into categories, such as "Pedagogical Benefits," "Challenges in Policy and Practice," and "Proposed Multilingual Strategies." Each study's conclusions were cross-compared to identify consensus or divergence within the research, allowing for a nuanced analysis of how local languages have been integrated into EFL settings in Indonesia. Relevant case studies and empirical data from fieldwork were noted to provide context for theoretical findings and highlight practical implications.

While this study provides a comprehensive overview of the role of local languages in EFL in Indonesia, it is limited by the scope of available literature. The focus on published academic sources may exclude unpublished research or studies outside traditional educational settings. Additionally, findings may not fully represent the perspectives of rural or underrepresented communities due to limited access to academic publication avenues. Future studies could benefit from empirical data collection in schools or communities to further validate findings.

### 3. FINDINGS

This section presents the main findings of the literature review on the existence and role of local languages in EFL education within the Indonesian context. The findings are organized into three main themes: (1) Pedagogical Benefits of Local Languages in EFL, (2) Challenges in Implementing Local Languages in EFL, and (3) Strategies for an Inclusive EFL Curriculum.

#### 3.1 *Pedagogical Benefits of Local Languages in EFL*

A prominent theme across multiple studies is the pedagogical value of integrating Local languages in EFL classrooms. Research suggests that Local languages support cognitive and linguistic development by providing students with a familiar foundation for understanding complex English structures (Mappiasse & Sihes, 2014; SMRL & BRW, 2021; Zein et al., 2020). Studies highlight that translanguaging practices, which allow students to fluidly alternate between English and their native languages, enhance comprehension and engagement (Emilia & Hamied, 2022b; Liando et al., 2023; Raja et al., 2022; Rasman, 2018). For instance, students can draw parallels between the grammar of their native language and English, facilitating a deeper understanding of English syntax and semantics.

Furthermore, local languages play an essential role in preserving cultural identity, which can positively impact students' motivation and self-confidence. Several studies indicate that students who feel culturally valued are more likely to participate actively in class, ultimately contributing to better English proficiency (Renandya et al., 2018; Yulia, 2013). Including local languages also fosters a sense of pride in students' cultural heritage, reducing their potential alienation in an English-dominated educational setting. This cultural reinforcement is critical in helping students navigate the demands of globalization while retaining a solid connection to their identity.

#### 3.2 *Challenges in Implementing Local Languages in EFL*

Despite the educational benefits, there are significant challenges in integrating local languages into EFL education in Indonesia. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of institutional support and clear policies advocating for multilingual approaches in the classroom. Indonesia's education system predominantly promotes a monolingual approach to English teaching, often encouraging English-only environments to accelerate language acquisition (Lee et al., 2023; Permana & Rohmah, 2024; Walker et al., 2019). This policy emphasizes English as a standalone subject, which can discourage teachers from using local languages in the classroom.



Additionally, limited teacher training in multilingual or translanguaging pedagogy presents a significant barrier. Most teacher education programs in Indonesia focus exclusively on English instruction without addressing strategies for incorporating local languages (Alwasilah, 2013; Marcellino, 2015). Consequently, many teachers feel unprepared to manage a multilingual classroom or may lack confidence in using local languages. This lack of training is compounded by limited teaching materials and resources that support local languages, making it challenging for educators to adopt multilingual approaches even if they recognize the potential benefits.

Resource constraints are another persistent issue. Schools, especially in rural or remote areas, often lack access to bilingual or multilingual teaching materials tailored to local languages. Teachers are less likely to incorporate Local languages effectively without adequate resources, limiting students' exposure to a multilingual education model (Lie, 2017). Furthermore, assessments and standardized tests are typically conducted in English, which can pressure schools to focus on English-only instruction to ensure students perform well academically, further marginalizing local languages.

### **3.3 Strategies for an Inclusive EFL Curriculum**

The review identified several proposed strategies that could facilitate a more inclusive EFL curriculum in Indonesia. One widely recommended approach is to adopt translanguaging as a formal pedagogical strategy in EFL classrooms. This approach allows and encourages students to use both English and their native languages fluidly, enhancing their understanding of English while maintaining their cultural identity (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021; Rasmin et al., 2024). Several studies argue that translanguaging can be particularly beneficial in Indonesia, where students often use multiple languages in daily communication, making it a natural fit for their learning process (Emilia & Hamied, 2022b; Liando et al., 2023; Nursanti, 2021).

Researchers advocate for a more flexible language policy that recognizes the complementary role of local languages in English acquisition. Policy recommendations include supporting multilingual education initiatives, particularly in regions with high linguistic diversity. This support could be teacher training programs focused on multilingual teaching techniques, curriculum development incorporating local languages, and developing bilingual teaching resources. The Indonesian government can help schools transition toward a more inclusive, culturally relevant EFL curriculum by creating a supportive policy environment.

Collaborations between educational institutions, local communities, and linguistic experts are essential for successful implementation. Community involvement in developing EFL materials incorporating local languages can ensure cultural accuracy and relevance, while partnerships with linguists can provide insights into language preservation techniques. Additionally, teacher exchange programs or workshops emphasizing the benefits and methods of multilingual instruction can empower educators with practical tools and a supportive network for adopting these approaches.

### **3.4 Impact of Local Languages on Student Outcomes**

Studies indicate that students in multilingual classrooms, where local languages are actively used alongside English, often demonstrate higher engagement and improved academic outcomes (Cummins et al., 2006, 2015; García & Sylvan, 2011). Research points to increased linguistic awareness, where students can compare language structures, aiding their overall language comprehension and cognitive flexibility. Additionally, students in culturally supportive environments show greater motivation and interest in learning, translating to better performance in English.

Educators have observed reduced dropout rates in schools where local languages are incorporated and improved students' academic confidence, especially in rural and remote areas where students have stronger ties to their cultural roots (Alakrash et al., 2021; Hummel, 2013). This positive impact on academic performance and retention rates highlights the importance of culturally responsive teaching strategies in Indonesia's EFL education.



These findings reveal the potential of local languages as valuable resources in EFL education and underline the necessity for educational reform to support multilingual pedagogies. The findings emphasize that a balanced approach, which values global and local languages, can enhance EFL outcomes while contributing to language preservation and cultural continuity in Indonesia.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this literature review indicate that local languages hold substantial pedagogical potential within EFL education in Indonesia, primarily through enhancing cognitive engagement, cultural identity, and language acquisition. However, the effective integration of these languages faces systemic and institutional challenges that must be addressed for a more inclusive EFL curriculum. This discussion explores the implications of these findings in terms of educational policy, teacher preparedness, and the potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool while considering Indonesia's broader cultural and linguistic landscape.

Firstly, the role of local languages in enhancing students' cognitive and linguistic development aligns with theories of bilingual and multilingual education, which suggest that learning in one's native language facilitates comprehension and mastery of additional languages (García & Wei, 2014; Kwon, 2022). In Indonesia, applying this theory to EFL classrooms could support students' understanding of English grammar, syntax, and vocabulary by leveraging the structural similarities and differences with their native languages. Studies have shown that cognitive engagement increases when students can draw from familiar linguistic structures. This factor could significantly benefit Indonesian students who encounter English as a foreign and often challenging language.

Another essential benefit of local languages in EFL education is reinforcing cultural identity (Prastiwi, 2013; Tajeddin & Ghaffaryan, 2020; Zabetipour & Baghi, 2015). As Indonesia is a culturally rich nation, allowing students to use their local languages in EFL classrooms promotes a sense of cultural pride and belonging. This is particularly valuable for students from marginalized linguistic backgrounds who may otherwise feel alienated in an English-only setting. Language is a crucial element of cultural identity (Català, 2015; Hobsbawn, 1996), and by valuing local languages within the classroom, educators can help mitigate the cultural dissonance that may arise when students are immersed in a foreign language environment. Additionally, culturally supported students will likely exhibit increased motivation and confidence in their academic pursuits.

Despite these advantages, the practical challenges of implementing local languages in EFL classrooms are substantial. One of the key barriers is the lack of supportive language policies that encourage the integration of local languages into English education (Widodo, 2016). The current emphasis on English-only instruction in Indonesian education, driven by the perceived need to develop English proficiency rapidly, often overlooks local languages' potential cognitive and emotional benefits. This policy stance creates an environment where English is prioritized to the exclusion of local languages, which may inadvertently contribute to the marginalization of Indonesia's linguistic heritage and identity.

Teacher preparedness is another primary concern. Most EFL teachers in Indonesia are trained primarily in monolingual English teaching methods and may lack the skills to incorporate local languages into their classrooms effectively. This gap in training can make teachers hesitant or uncertain about the use of local languages, even when they recognize the potential benefits. Developing teacher training programs that focus on multilingual pedagogies, such as translanguaging, could be instrumental in equipping educators with the tools and confidence to use local languages as a bridge to English learning. Such programs could also address teachers' concerns about meeting English proficiency goals while maintaining linguistic inclusivity.



As highlighted in the findings, translanguaging offers a promising solution by allowing fluid language use, where students can alternate between English and their native language as needed (Emilia & Hamied, 2022a; Rasman, 2018). This approach aligns well with Indonesia's inherently multilingual context, where daily communication often involves language mixing. Translanguaging not only aids comprehension but also reduces the cognitive load on students learning complex English structures. By adopting this approach, educators can create a learning environment that is more responsive to the linguistic realities of Indonesian students, fostering both cognitive and emotional engagement.

Furthermore, the review suggests incorporating local languages into EFL could contribute to language preservation efforts. In an era where many of Indonesia's local languages are endangered, their inclusion in educational settings reinforces their value, potentially encouraging students to use and sustain these languages within their communities (Huszka et al., 2024). This intersection between language preservation and EFL teaching highlights the broader social responsibility of educational institutions to support Indonesia's linguistic diversity. Schools could collaborate with local communities to develop culturally relevant learning materials that aid English acquisition, honour, and preserve Local knowledge.

Another significant aspect of this discussion is the potential impact of an inclusive EFL curriculum on students' academic outcomes. By incorporating local languages, EFL programs can reduce dropout rates and improve student engagement, especially in rural and remote areas where local languages are integral to everyday life. When students see their language and culture represented in the curriculum, they are more likely to feel connected to their education, fostering a positive attitude toward learning. Improved engagement and reduced alienation can lead to better retention rates and academic performance, benefiting students and the education system.

However, there are risks associated with misinterpreting or poorly implementing local languages in EFL education. For instance, if teachers or policymakers view local languages merely as tools for facilitating English learning rather than valuing them as independent linguistic systems, there is a risk of further marginalization. Therefore, EFL curriculum development needs to adopt a holistic perspective that respects Local languages as valuable in their own right. This approach can prevent the instrumentalization of local languages solely for English acquisition and ensure they are treated with the respect they deserve.

In conclusion, including local languages in Indonesia's EFL education presents significant opportunities and challenges. While Local languages can enhance cognitive development, cultural identity, and academic outcomes, these benefits can only be fully realized if institutional and policy-level support is provided. Educational policymakers and institutions must recognize the role of local languages as valuable resources within EFL instruction, promoting a balanced approach that respects both linguistic diversity and the importance of English proficiency. Future research and policy reforms focused on teacher training, resource development, and community involvement could further facilitate the integration of Local languages in EFL education, ensuring that Indonesia's educational system reflects its rich cultural and linguistic heritage.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This literature review highlights the significant role of local languages in enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education within the Indonesian context. The findings indicate that integrating local languages can improve students' cognitive development, foster cultural identity, and facilitate more effective language learning. By leveraging students' native languages, educators can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment, enhancing their English proficiency.

Despite the potential benefits, integrating Local languages in EFL education faces several challenges, including the lack of supportive policies, insufficient teacher training, and limited access to



bilingual resources. Current educational practices often prioritize English to the detriment of local languages, marginalizing Indonesia's linguistic heritage. Therefore, a shift towards recognizing the value of multilingualism in the curriculum is crucial for creating an inclusive educational framework.

In conclusion, addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts from policymakers, educators, and communities. By fostering an environment that values English and local languages, Indonesia can promote a more holistic approach to language education that respects its rich linguistic diversity. Future initiatives should focus on developing relevant policies, enhancing teacher training, and encouraging community involvement to ensure Local languages and English thrive in the educational landscape.

To enhance the integration of local languages in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in Indonesia, it is essential to develop supportive educational policies that recognize and promote multilingualism, provide targeted teacher training in multilingual pedagogies, and create bilingual teaching resources that reflect local cultures. Engaging local communities in curriculum development will ensure cultural relevance, while ongoing research and flexible assessment systems can further facilitate this integration. Ultimately, prioritizing local language preservation and English proficiency can lead to a more inclusive and effective educational framework.

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