



TRANSLANGUAGING IN BALANCED LITERACY: A CASE STUDY OF EARLY ELEMENTARY CLASSROOMS

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Abstract. This qualitative case study investigates how translanguaging can be purposefully integrated within a balanced literacy framework in early primary classrooms in multilingual Indonesia. Conducted at a private elementary school in Sukabumi (Grades 1–3) where most students speak Sundanese at home and Indonesian at school, the study triangulates classroom observations (mini-lessons in phonics/phonology, dialogic read-alouds, shared/guided reading, independent reading), semi-structured interviews, and instructional artifacts (lesson plans, phonics progressions, running records, anecdotal notes). Findings show that when translanguaging is designed with clear micro-instructional goals—especially for cross-language phoneme contrasts, pre-teaching academic vocabulary, and brief think-alouds—teachers maintain and even strengthen the “balance” between explicit foundational skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary) and meaning-making practices. Specifically, short, targeted use of the home language followed by immediate re-anchoring to Indonesian, supported by multimodal scaffolds (articulatory gestures, bilingual anchor charts, word cards), was associated with improved grapheme–phoneme accuracy, higher self-correction rates, and increased proportions of inference-based responses referenced to the text. Effects varied by learner profiles and text genre: emergent readers dominant in Sundanese benefited most in phonics and decoding, while bilingual or Indonesian-dominant students showed gains in vocabulary precision and inferencing, particularly with informational texts. The study proposes practical design rules—limit dose (1–2 sentences), re-anchoring to target language, and assessment-informed decisions—to minimize over-translation and align translanguaging with phonics and comprehension goals. The contribution is both conceptual (an operational model for integrating translanguaging into balanced literacy) and practical (observable indicators and routines aligned with the Indonesian curriculum). Limitations include a single-site scope and short duration; future work should examine longitudinal effects, varied home languages, and optimized “dosage” through small-scale design experiments.

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INTRODUCTION

International and national assessments consistently highlight foundational challenges in early literacy in Indonesia. Findings from PISA 2022 (OECD, 2023) and PIRLS 2021 (Mullis et al., 2023) indicate that the proportion of Indonesian students performing below the minimum proficiency level in reading remains very high—exceeding 45 percent—suggesting concerns not only with inferential comprehension but also with unstable foundations in decoding and fluency. Domestically, the National Assessment by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology reinforces this picture: more than one-third of fourth graders have yet to consistently map sounds to letters, do not read with adequate fluency, and struggle with basic inferential questions (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). These conditions pose serious curricular implications, given that the Merdeka Curriculum (phases A and B) requires integrating foundational literacy skills—phonological awareness, phonics, decoding, and fluency—with meaningful authentic reading through read-alouds and discussions of narrative and informational texts, as well as writing practices that are integral to a reading–writing ecosystem (Mendikdasmen, 2022).

At the design level, these requirements align with international empirical evidence emphasizing the importance of explicit, systematic phonics alongside meaning-based learning so that comprehension is not reduced to mere recitation (Bowers, 2020). In classroom

implementation, however, contradictions emerge due to Indonesia's highly multilingual sociolinguistic character: more than 700 local languages are used at home (Suprayetno et al., 2023), while Indonesian is typically the language of instruction in primary school. Many children enter Grade 1 as emergent bilinguals, transferring phonological systems, lexical structures, and cultural schemas from their home language to the national language (Osorio, 2020). This transition is not neutral; it carries both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, dual linguistic repertoires can serve as assets to activate background knowledge, clarify academic vocabulary, and bridge cross-linguistic sound-letter correspondences. On the other hand, differences in phonotactics, grapheme-phoneme mappings, and orthographies across languages can disrupt decoding consistency if not addressed with appropriate pedagogical strategies.

Within this context, many teachers pragmatically use code-switching or spontaneous translanguaging to bridge comprehension gaps (Cahyani et al., 2018), for instance by providing vocabulary equivalents in a home language or reiterating key instructions. Yet these practices are typically undocumented, not institutionalized in lesson planning, and not consistently guided by explicit instructional goals (e.g., a specific phonics target or comprehension strategy) (Robillos, 2023). The absence of a formal pedagogical framework has three implications. First, translanguaging often occurs reactively rather than strategically, making its effects on phonics development and fluency difficult to evaluate and optimize (Robillos, 2023). Second, practices vary widely across teachers and schools—some emphasize letter-sound memorization with minimal meaning-making dialogue, while others are rich in discussion but lack explicit phonics instruction—creating “imbalance” within balanced literacy (Pressley et al., 2017). Third, limited leveled Indonesian/bilingual materials, large class sizes, and assessment cultures that underemphasize formative measures (e.g., running records and structured anecdotal notes) restrict teachers' ability to differentiate instruction and to leverage translanguaging in a planned way (Defianty & Wilson, 2024). Thus, Indonesia's early literacy problem is not merely about “insufficient reading,” but about pedagogical design and enactment that must better align with multilingual realities and evidence-based practices: explicit, sequential phonics; dialogic, meaningful reading; and translanguaging positioned as a goal-oriented pedagogical strategy rather than an on-the-fly linguistic compromise.

Without recalibration at the level of practice—encompassing teacher training, materials curation, and formative assessment mechanisms—the gap between curricular ambitions and student outcomes risks widening (Pritchett & Beatty, 2012). In this frame, balanced literacy offers a promising instructional architecture because it conceptually balances foundational skills (phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, and vocabulary) with authentic literacy activities that emphasize meaning-making, dialogue, and text production (Rasinski & Padak, 2004). These practices are commonly enacted through structured routines—phonics/phonological mini-lessons, dialogic read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading and writing (Casteleyn, 2025)—which, when implemented consistently and supported by formative assessment, can provide a clear learning trajectory from sound-letter recognition to deep comprehension. In many classrooms, however, this “balance” often shifts: phonics mini-lessons proceed without tight grapheme-phoneme progression, read-alouds are insufficiently dialogic and dominated by low-level questions, and guided reading does not always leverage assessment data for differentiated grouping (Burkins & Yates, 2023). As a result, balanced literacy can devolve into a checklist of activities without strong instructional coherence.

Here, translanguaging serves as a pedagogical bridge that, when designed with clear purposes, can strengthen both sides of this “balance.” Theoretically, translanguaging refers to mobilizing students' full linguistic repertoires—home languages, Indonesian, and even foreign languages—for academic and affective purposes, not merely spontaneous code-switching (Rasman, 2018; Cahyani et al., 2018). In early reading instruction, translanguaging can link cross-linguistic phonology (for example, contrasting similar but non-identical vowel sounds, or mapping the same grapheme to different sound values), clarify and enrich academic vocabulary



through equivalents and contextual examples, and activate local cultural schemas so that students have anchors for meaning when encountering new texts (Parra & Proctor, 2023). At the same time, translanguaging can increase participation and confidence among beginning readers by honoring their linguistic identities, reducing cognitive load, and facilitating emotional regulation when facing challenging decoding tasks (Song et al., 2022). A common critique is that translanguaging in the field often remains reactive and untethered to specific instructional goals—such as a daily phonics objective or comprehension indicator—limiting its benefits and potentially blurring sound–letter focus if not guided (Treffers-Daller, 2024). Consequently, integrating translanguaging into balanced literacy requires precise design: teachers must define the pedagogical moments and functions targeted (concept scaffolding, reinforcement of sound–letter relationships, vocabulary enrichment, or affective support), select supportive learning resources (bilingual leveled texts and anchor charts, picture word cards), and use formative assessment evidence (running records, anecdotal notes) to decide when to “turn on” or taper cross-linguistic supports (Somerville-Braun et al., 2025). With such an approach, translanguaging becomes a purposeful strategy that narrows the gap between curricular demands and multilingual classroom realities, while preserving the essence of balanced literacy as a practice that equilibrates foundational skills with rich meaning-making.

Globally, the translanguaging literature in early grades is growing, yet the knowledge base remains uneven and leaves key questions relevant to Indonesia. Much of the influential work originates in North America (Permana & Rohmah, 2024) and Europe (Sutrisno, 2023), with language ecologies, policies, and school resources that differ substantially from Indonesian primary schools. Research foci also tend to center on social content learning (De Felice et al., 2023) or L2/ESL instruction (Hinkel, 2011), so the “balance” dimension of early reading pedagogy—namely the integration of explicit phonics, support for decoding and fluency, and dialogic read-alouds and meaning discussions—has not been a primary analytic arena. Consequently, translanguaging findings are often strong at the level of identity and participation discourse but less precise in articulating pedagogical mechanisms that link cross-linguistic strategies to micro-competencies such as grapheme–phoneme mapping, blending, segmenting, reading accuracy and rate, and growth in academic vocabulary.

In Indonesia, existing research tends to be sporadic and descriptive, often highlighting teacher code-switching as an everyday practice to “facilitate” understanding rather than positioning it as an instructional strategy linked to specific learning goals (Djalante, 2018; Syahputra & Mulyani, 2025; Triwibowo, 2023). Few studies map translanguaging granularly onto the five core balanced literacy routines—phonics/phonological mini-lessons, dialogic read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading and writing—and trace when, for what function, and with what impact these strategies are used. Most reports also have yet to leverage formative assessment evidence (e.g., running records, miscue analysis, structured anecdotal notes) to connect translanguaging decisions with changes in students’ reading behaviors over time. These limitations have methodological and practical consequences: it is difficult to draw plausible causal inferences between translanguaging and improvements in participation, decoding, fluency, or comprehension; and it is challenging to produce operational implementation guidance for classroom teachers.

A deeper critique is the lack of adequate dialogue between translanguaging research and strong evidence for structured phonics instruction. On one hand, translanguaging is advanced as an inclusive approach that recognizes children’s linguistic repertoires (Kirsch & Seele, 2020); on the other, concerns persist that unguided cross-linguistic use may disrupt consistent sound–letter mapping at early stages (Georgiou et al., 2020). Without research designs that precisely connect these domains—for example, micro-analytic discourse analyses in phonics sessions, triangulated with decoding progress data and cross-condition comparisons—debates risk revolving around ideological preferences rather than instructional evidence. There is thus a clear empirical gap regarding goal-integrated translanguaging within a balanced literacy framework in multilingual Indonesian lower-primary classrooms. This gap includes the positioning of translanguaging functions at specific instructional moments, observable and measurable

indicators of success, and contextual factors that shape teacher decisions (school language policies, students' linguistic profiles, availability of bilingual leveled texts, and assessment cultures).

Aligned with this empirical gap, this study is designed to yield precise and operational classroom insights. First, it aims to describe in detail how translanguaging emerges and is leveraged within each component of balanced literacy in Grades 1–3—phonics/phonological mini-lessons, dialogic read-alouds, shared reading, guided reading, and independent reading and writing. Descriptions go beyond “whether it occurs,” examining specific instructional moments, targeted functions (concept scaffolding, strengthening sound–letter relations, vocabulary enrichment, affective support), and tools used (bilingual anchor charts, word cards, leveled texts). Second, it analyzes the influence of translanguaging on oral participation, meaning comprehension, and decoding support by linking classroom interaction evidence (e.g., changes in response quality and the types of questions students can answer) with micro-literacy progress indicators such as consistency in grapheme–phoneme mapping, accuracy, reading rate, and integration of academic vocabulary. Third, it identifies contextual factors that shape teachers' decisions to use or withhold translanguaging, including school language policy, students' linguistic profiles, availability of materials and resources, formative assessment culture, and curriculum load and class size. Through these layered objectives, the study aims to bridge the gap between the theoretical principles of balanced literacy and multilingual classroom realities.

The theoretical contribution lies in bringing together two domains that often run in parallel: balanced literacy as an instructional framework demanding equilibrium between foundational skills and meaning-making, and translanguaging as an approach that mobilizes students' linguistic repertoires. By examining translanguaging at micro-instructional moments—especially in structured phonics and dialogic activities—the study seeks to validate or problematize the claim that translanguaging can sustain and even strengthen this balance. Conceptually, the findings have the potential to clarify pedagogical mechanisms that connect cross-linguistic strategies with early literacy indicators, moving the debate from ideological positions toward testable instructional evidence. The practical contribution is direct and measurable. The study targets the development of a model for integrating translanguaging into the daily balanced literacy schedule aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, including sample sequences for mini-lessons, intervention points in dialogic read-alouds, grouping patterns in guided reading, and formats for anecdotal notes that capture the impact trace of strategies. It also proposes observable indicators teachers can use to judge when translanguaging is most effective—for example, improvements in sound–letter accuracy after cross-linguistic equivalents are provided, or shifts from literal to inferential responses in text discussions. Recommendations for developing bilingual/leveled materials and for teacher training are also key outputs, emphasizing purposefulness—that is, translanguaging is used for specific phonics, vocabulary, or comprehension goals, along with criteria for tapering support as students gain independence. Through this combination of theoretical and practical contributions, the study aims to guide educators, curriculum developers, and policymakers in improving early reading literacy in linguistically rich Indonesian lower-primary contexts, while narrowing the gap between curricular design and classroom practice.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative case study design to capture the complexity of translanguaging practices within a balanced literacy framework in a deep, contextualized manner, enabling exploration of processes, interactions, and pedagogical decision-making that surveys or experiments may not easily reveal (Digonta et al., 2024). The single case is a private primary school in Sukabumi Regency, West Java, focusing on lower grades (Grades 1–3) where most students speak Sundanese at home and Indonesian is the medium of instruction. Participants include three classroom teachers (Grades 1, 2, and 3) with varied experience and literacy training, a literacy coordinator/principal, and purposively selected student groups based on linguistic profiles (Sundanese-dominant, balanced Sundanese–Indonesian, Indonesian-



dominant). Data were collected over several weeks to capture instructional rhythm and variation, comprising repeated observations of four balanced literacy components (phonics/phonological mini-lessons, dialogic read-alouds, shared/guided reading, and independent reading) with video/audio recordings and structured field notes; semi-structured interviews with teachers and the coordinator/principal, plus small, child-friendly FGDs with students when ethically appropriate; and artifact analysis (lesson plans, grapheme–phoneme progressions, strategy anchor charts, high-frequency word lists, student journals/worksheets, and formative assessment records). School facilities (library, reading corners, big books/leveled texts), language policy, teacher–student ratios, weekly literacy schedules, and routine assessment practices are documented as institutional context.

Observation and interview instruments were developed a priori from the balanced literacy and translanguaging literature, piloted in one session to ensure category clarity, and refined for consistency and reliability during coding. The observation focus includes coherence of balanced literacy practices (clarity of mini-lesson objectives, explicitness and sequence of phonics, dialogic quality of read-alouds, data-based grouping in guided reading, and evidence of differentiation), indicators of translanguaging functions (concept clarification, sound–letter scaffolding, academic vocabulary enrichment, classroom management/instructional emphasis, affective support, and accompanying multimodalities), and teacher–student questioning/response categories (literal, inferential, evaluative; quality of evidence/argument; strategies such as citing text or making inferences; and shifts in response quality). Standardized field note templates with timestamps and relevant verbatim excerpts support subsequent micro-discourse analysis. Ethical procedures include written informed consent from parents/guardians, child assent in accessible language, anonymization of school and individual identities, secure storage of audiovisual data with restricted access, non-interference with instruction, and scheduling that minimizes disruption.

Data analysis is iterative and layered, combining thematic analysis with deductive codes (balanced literacy components; translanguaging functions) and inductive codes emerging from the data to identify patterns of practice and pedagogical rationales; micro-discourse analysis of relevant excerpts (especially phonics mini-lessons and guided reading) to examine scaffolding patterns, timing of language shifts, prompt types, and immediate consequences for decoding (grapheme–phoneme accuracy, blending, reading rate) and comprehension (shifts from literal to inferential responses); and triangulation across observations, interviews, and artifacts, with brief member checking by teachers. Validity is strengthened through source–method triangulation, an audit trail documenting analytic decisions and instrument revisions, and reflexive memos on the researcher’s linguistic/epistemic stance and potential biases. Cross-grade variation (Grades 1–3) serves as internal theoretical replication; generalization is analytic (transferability) supported by thick contextual description. Operational considerations include class size, availability of bilingual/leveled materials, and teacher workload affecting observation intensity; limitations include the single-school scope, limited data-collection duration, and possible Hawthorne effects, mitigated by repeated observations, camera desensitization, and reinforced analysis using multi-source evidence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the key findings of the case study, derived through triangulation of classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and the literacy coordinator, and analysis of instructional artifacts. The findings are organized into three main sub-sections: first, an overview of balanced literacy practices in the classroom; second, emergent translanguaging patterns within instructional interactions; and third, the impact of translanguaging on student engagement and comprehension, alongside enabling and constraining factors for implementation. Any quantitative data reported are the result of coding and frequency analysis of qualitative evidence (for example, percentages of question types and counts of translanguaging incidents) to provide a more comprehensive picture.



Overview of Balanced Literacy Practices in the Classroom

This sub-section provides a comprehensive portrait of how balanced literacy is enacted in daily classroom life, including daily and weekly routines, time allocations for each component (phonics, read-alouds, guided/independent reading), and how teachers use formative assessment to inform instructional decisions. The aim is to situate the subsequent findings within a concrete operational context: what teachers do, how often, and with what assessment evidence. Based on repeated observations over five weeks in three classrooms (Grades 1, 2, and 3) and interviews with three classroom teachers and the literacy coordinator, we mapped daily/weekly routines, time allocations for balanced literacy components, and ongoing patterns of formative assessment. The findings are summarized in [Table 1](#), with illustrative field evidence.

Tabel 1. Overview of Balanced Literacy Routines

Aspect	Description
Daily and weekly routines	All three classes have a daily literacy block of 60–90 minutes in the morning (07:30–09:00), with minor variations across teachers. The typical daily pattern is a brief phonics mini-lesson, followed by a dialogic read-aloud, then guided or independent reading. Weekly, Monday–Thursday focus on strengthening phonics and comprehension of narrative texts, while Friday is used for light informational texts, review of the week’s vocabulary, and reading reflection. Grade 1 maintains more structured, repetitive routines; Grade 2 increases small-group guided reading; Grade 3 allocates more time to independent reading and short written responses.
Time allocation by component	Observed average daily allocations were 12–15 minutes for phonics/phonological mini-lessons, 15–20 minutes for dialogic read-alouds, 20–25 minutes for guided reading (with small-group rotations), and 10–15 minutes for independent reading and/or brief written responses. Grade 1 tended toward the upper bound for phonics (15 minutes) and lower bound for independent reading (10 minutes), while Grade 3 showed the reverse (phonics 10–12 minutes; independent reading 15–20 minutes). This variation aligns with developmental goals: the higher the grade, the greater the emphasis on comprehension and reading autonomy.
Phonics consistency and sequence	In Grade 1, the grapheme–phoneme progression follows a structured sequence (single vowels, high-frequency consonants, open/closed syllables, then common digraphs). Observations noted that 18 of 20 mini-lessons stated specific objectives (e.g., “blend /b/ + /a/ + /ta/ to make bata”). In Grade 2, phonics focused on complex syllable patterns and compound words; Grade 3 used phonics as a “mini-clinic” for difficult spellings and basic morphology (prefixes/suffixes). Grade 2 and 3 teachers occasionally addressed Sundanese–Indonesian vowel contrasts when students mispronounced sounds (e.g., schwa /ə/ vs /ɛ/), as part of targeted translanguaging.
Quality of dialogic read-alouds	All classes conducted read-alouds at least four times per week. Indicators of dialogic reading improved from Week 1 to Week 5: the proportion of inferential questions rose from 28% to 41% (based on coding of 612 teacher questions), while literal questions fell from 60% to 49%. Teachers increasingly used prompts like “How do you know?” and “Where in the text is the clue?” Interviews confirmed that teachers began referencing a classroom “types of questions” anchor chart after an internal training session in Week 2.
Guided reading and grouping	Grades 2 and 3 conducted guided reading 3–4 times per week with 3–4 small groups (4–6 students per group) based on weekly running records. Grade 1 conducted guided reading 2–3 times per week, often paired with shared reading for the earliest readers. Observations showed that 76% of guided reading sessions used leveled texts; in 24% of sessions, teachers used a common class text but modified supports (pre-teaching vocabulary, guiding questions). Each rotation lasted 8–12 minutes; within one block, two groups typically worked directly with the teacher, while others completed independent phonics or vocabulary practice.
Independent reading and responses	Independent reading occurred on 4 out of 5 days, averaging 12–15 minutes, with book choices from the classroom reading corner. In Grade 3, on 2 out of 5 days this was accompanied by brief written responses (drawing + key sentence or idea map). Anecdotal notes indicated increased stamina: in Week 1, 39% of Grade 2 students requested a new book before 5 minutes; by Week 5 this dropped to 18%, which teachers linked to short “book talks” each Monday.

Formative assessment patterns	All three teachers practiced formative assessment, with varying depth. Running records were conducted weekly on a rotating sample of 4–6 students per day; over five weeks, each Grade 2 and 3 student was recorded at least twice, while Grade 1 at least once (priority for emergent readers). Miscue analysis most frequently noted vowel substitutions and deletion of closed syllables. Anecdotal notes captured responses to inferential prompts and student strategies (text citation, prediction, personal connections). Teacher interviews indicated these data informed adjustments to guided reading group composition, weekly phonics mini-lesson targets, and academic vocabulary lists for pre-teaching before read-alouds.
Use of translanguaging in routines	Translanguaging moments were consistently observed, especially in phonics mini-lessons (clarifying Sundanese–Indonesian sound contrasts), read-aloud pre-teaching of vocabulary (key-term equivalents), and brief conferences during guided reading (instructional emphasis). Of 45 sessions coded, 31 showed functional translanguaging with clear purposes; 14 were spontaneous, generally for classroom management. Teachers reported that providing bilingual equivalents before reading helped students grasp new concepts without derailing decoding focus, provided Indonesian terms were reinforced during reading.
Illustrative field evidence	In a Grade 2 Week 3 session (informational text on weather), the teacher pre-taught three words— “kelembapan” (humidity), “embun” (dew), and “mendung” (overcast)—with Sundanese equivalents. During discussion, the share of inferential responses increased (5 of 9 small-group students explained the humidity–dew relationship by citing a sentence in paragraph 2). In a Grade 1 Week 2 mini-lesson, the teacher modeled CV–CV blending using paired Sundanese–Indonesian examples to emphasize the open /a/ vowel; decoding error rate dropped from 28% to 16% on a repeat drill 10 minutes later (based on an accuracy checklist of 12 target words).
Implementation on challenges	Two main constraints emerged. First, the availability of Indonesian leveled texts is limited, prompting teachers to occasionally adapt their own materials or use class texts not fully level-appropriate. Second, the literacy block was often shortened by school scheduling, especially in Grade 3 ahead of thematic activities, reducing opportunities for a third guided reading rotation. Teachers mitigated this with alternating-day rotations and by moving running records to the start of the literacy block.

Overall, balanced literacy practices in the case school show a consistent daily structure, a reasonably well-sequenced phonics progression, improvements in the quality of dialogic reading, and the use of formative assessment to inform instructional decisions. Translanguaging integration appears most effective when tied to specific objectives (such as contrasting sounds, pre-teaching vocabulary, and clarifying instructions) and followed by deliberate reinforcement of target terms/sounds in Indonesian. These findings lay the groundwork for subsequent analyses of impacts on participation, decoding, and comprehension.

Emergent Translanguaging Patterns

This section maps when, how, and for what purposes translanguaging is used within the flow of instruction. We delineate its pedagogical functions (for example, bridging difficult sound–letter relationships and academic vocabulary), the specific instructional moments within each balanced literacy component (phonics modeling, think-alouds, prompting, individual conferences), and the accompanying multimodal supports (gestures, visual anchors, bilingual word cards, images).

The focus is to present translanguaging as a purpose-driven strategy rather than mere spontaneous code-switching. Based on coding of 45 instructional sessions (15 per class) over five weeks and triangulation with teacher interviews, we identified consistent translanguaging patterns along three dimensions: pedagogical function, specific moments of occurrence within the balanced literacy sequence, and accompanying multimodal modes (see [Table 2](#)). Of the 312 translanguaging incidents recorded, 71% were categorized as functional (with clear instructional purposes), while 29% were spontaneous (generally for classroom management or emphasis of instructions).

Illustrative examples include the following. In Grade 2, Week 3, during guided reading of an informational text on the water cycle, the teacher prepared three-word cards— “uap (steam), menguap (evaporation), embun (condensation)” —with brief Sundanese equivalents. While

reading, when a student said “embun téh cai leutik” (“dew is small water”), the teacher affirmed, “Correct—here the text calls it ‘embun’; look at paragraph two—what are the signs?”

Tabel 2. Dimensions of Translanguaging

Dimension	Description
Pedagogical functions	Five dominant functions emerged. First, bridging difficult sound–letter relationships (34% of incidents): teachers contrasted Sundanese–Indonesian vowel sounds (e.g., schwa /ə/ vs /ε/) or reinforced that the same grapheme can realize different sounds; in Grade 1 this was often paired with brief bilingual drills using minimal word pairs. Second, explaining academic vocabulary (27%): pre-teaching bilingual equivalents for key terms such as “kelembapan” (humidity), “embun” (dew), and “penguapan” (evaporation), followed by consistent use of Indonesian terms throughout reading. Third, activating schema/background knowledge (18%): teachers elicited local experiences (weather, markets, folklore) in brief Sundanese before linking to Indonesian texts; students’ responses tended to become longer and more relevant after this activation. Fourth, illustrating morphology (12%): especially in Grade 3, teachers connected Indonesian affixation (meN-, peN-, -kan, -an) to meaning, sometimes comparing affixed forms with Sundanese synonyms to highlight shifts in word class/semantic relations. Fifth, emotion regulation/participation (9%): greetings, light humor, or rule emphasis in the home language to reduce anxiety during decoding or to refocus group attention.
Specific instructional moments	Translanguaging most frequently appeared at the following instructional points. During phonics modeling (blending/segmenting) in mini-lessons (38% of incidents), teachers modeled syllable blending while emphasizing Sundanese–Indonesian articulation differences, for example holding vowel duration or stressing final consonants in closed syllables. Example, Grade 1 Week 2: the teacher modeled “balon” versus “balon” (Sundanese pronunciation) while marking the /o/ difference; closed-syllable recognition accuracy on a 10-item drill increased from 72% to 84% post-modeling. During think-alouds in read-alouds (26%), teachers used 1–2 Sundanese sentences to explain an inference (“naha panonpoé moal katingali lamun mega kandel?”), then restated in Indonesian while pointing to key sentences in the text; the share of inferential responses increased in sessions featuring these bilingual think-alouds. During prompting in guided reading (24%), translanguaging functioned as a brief “rescue prompt” to direct strategy use (e.g., “coba potong jadi suku kata heula” then repeated in Indonesian, “now read by syllables”), immediately translated back; notes showed a 1.2-second average reduction in self-correction latency among three struggling Grade 2 readers. During individual reading conferences (12%), teachers adjusted language to lower cognitive load and build confidence, especially when correcting a specific error pattern (e.g., omission of final consonants).
Multimodal modes	Translanguaging was almost always supported by nonverbal cues and visual materials. Articulatory gestures (touching lips/jaw to mark vowels, tapping the table to mark syllable counts) were recorded in 58% of incidents, especially during phonics. Visual anchors (bilingual anchor charts with example words, arrows linking sounds to letters, and color-coding for affixes) appeared in all classes after Week 2; teachers referenced them explicitly in 41% of read-aloud and guided reading sessions. Bilingual word cards were used as quick primers before reading in 33% of sessions, averaging 4–6 cards per text; teacher interviews noted this strategy “cut” vocabulary clarification time during reading so discussion flow was less frequently interrupted. Pictures/illustrations connected technical terms to local experiences; for instance, a photo of dew on cassava leaves from the school garden facilitated understanding of “condensation” in a translated text, followed by bilingual labels on the board. This multimodal combination underscores translanguaging as targeted scaffolding: the home language sparks, visuals anchor, and Indonesian consolidates target terms.

The student cited the phrase mentioning “cold air,” then drew droplets on a sketch; the number of students giving inferential responses to “why does dew appear in the morning?” rose from 2 of 6 to 5 of 6. In Grade 1, Week 4, modeling CV–CVC blending with Sundanese–Indonesian contrasts, accompanied by syllable-tapping gestures, reduced vowel substitution errors from 5 to 2 per 20 target words for the same three students on a follow-up drill. Not all translanguaging is productive; 19% of spontaneous cases for classroom management were not

linked back to instructional goals, and in two Grade 3 sessions, “over-translation” slowed the flow of text discussion. Teachers then adopted an internal guideline: translanguaging is limited to 1–2 sentences per intervention, always followed by a restatement of the term/strategy in Indonesian and a reference to the anchor chart. After the guideline was implemented (from Week 3), the frequency of spontaneous, non-reinforced incidents dropped by 40%. This pattern underscores that translanguaging is most effective when anchored to clear micro-goals (target sounds, key terms, reading strategies), supported by multimodality, and followed by consolidation in the target language.

Impacts on Student Engagement and Comprehension

This section evaluates the practical implications of translanguaging for students’ learning processes: oral participation, the quality of inferential responses, clarity of sound–letter mapping, and beginning readers’ confidence. We also examine variation in effects by student profile (language background, decoding level) and text type (narrative versus informational), and show how anecdotal notes and running records guided decisions about when to return to the home language for re-teaching. The section concludes by identifying enabling and constraining factors at the levels of school policy, learning resources, and classroom structure that shape the magnitude of impact. To test how far translanguaging integrated within balanced literacy contributes to learning, we analyzed layered indicators of engagement and understanding—from oral participation and inferential response quality to clarity of grapheme–phoneme relationships and beginner confidence—and assessed how effects varied by linguistic profile and text genre. This analysis was supported by a formative assessment cycle (anecdotal notes and running records) that informed when and how translanguaging was applied. Key findings are presented below, followed by the enabling and constraining factors that influence the size of the effects at classroom and school levels.

1. Increases in participation and understanding. Relative to Week 1, oral participation rose substantially by Week 5 across all classes. The average share of students raising hands per read-aloud session increased from 42% to 63% (N sessions = 15 per class). Response quality also shifted, with inferential answers growing from 31% to 46% of valid responses (based on coding of 1,084 student responses). Clarity of sound–letter mapping improved among early readers: grapheme–phoneme accuracy on a 20-word target list rose from 71% to 86% in Grade 1 and from 78% to 88% in Grade 2. Self-correction rates during guided reading improved from 0.42 to 0.67 per 100 words alongside bilingual prompts followed by Indonesian reinforcement. Brief interviews indicated greater confidence: 8 of 10 beginning readers in Grade 1 reported being “more willing to try decoding on my own” after the teacher allowed quick Sundanese clarifications before restating terms in Indonesian.
2. Variation by student profile and text type. Effects differed by linguistic background and decoding ability. Sundanese-dominant students at early decoding stages benefited most during phonics mini-lessons and guided reading prompts, with average vowel-substitution errors dropping by 37%. Indonesian-dominant or balanced bilingual students gained primarily in vocabulary and meaning discussions, showing a 14–18 percentage-point increase in inferential responses. Genre differences also emerged: in narrative texts, translanguaging most strongly enhanced elaboration (average response length increased by 1.3 clauses per response), whereas in informational texts, the largest gains were in terminological accuracy and the ability to cite paragraphs/evidence (a 22% increase in students naming supporting sentences when answering “why/how” questions).
3. The role of formative assessment in decision-making. Anecdotal notes and running records were used to decide when and how to apply translanguaging. For example, in Grade 2, three students with consistent schwa-related miscues were prioritized for re-teaching the grapheme “e” using Sundanese–Indonesian contrasts over two sessions; their accuracy rose from 65% to 84% on a control word list. Teachers also leveraged notes about confusion between “lembap” and “basah” to prepare bilingual cards before the next week’s informational read-aloud; post-reading discussion errors on these terms fell from 41% to 12%. Overall, 68% of

functional translanguaging interventions recorded in Weeks 3–5 was traceable to findings from the previous week’s formative assessments, indicating an active data–instruction cycle.

4. Enabling factors. Three factors facilitated positive impact: school support for purposeful home-language use formalized in the internal guideline “1–2 sentences, return to Indonesian,” which reduced over-translation and clarified objectives; availability of bilingual/leveled materials (though limited), enabling pre-teaching of vocabulary and level-appropriate text selection, with classrooms most consistent in leveled-text use showing gains of 12–18 words per minute among developing readers; and brief internal training on dialogic reading and miscue analysis in Week 2, associated with increases in teachers’ inferential questioning (from 28% to 41%) and more specific strategy prompts.
5. Constraining factors. Several constraints dampened effects: rigid “one language” rules in some school activities made teachers hesitant to use translanguaging outside the literacy block, reducing continuity of support; limited big books and early-level Indonesian/regional texts forced time-consuming teacher adaptation and sometimes weakened text–level fit; large class sizes (32–34 students in Grades 2–3) reduced the number of guided reading rotations per day so that, on average, only two groups received direct support and a third was deferred; and time lost to thematic and school events curtailed opportunities for individual conferences, with 27% of planned conferences in Week 4 not completed.

In sum, translanguaging framed by formative assessment and supported by materials and school policy contributed to gains in participation, inferential quality, clarity of grapheme–phoneme relationships, and beginning readers’ confidence. However, the magnitude of impact was mediated by students’ linguistic profiles and decoding levels, text type, classroom structural conditions, and resource availability. Planned, purpose-driven integration—rather than spontaneous use—emerged as the key differentiator between productive translanguaging and neutral or even counterproductive instances.

The findings of this study indicate that purposefully designed translanguaging—especially at micro-instructional points focused on phonics, academic vocabulary, and think-alouds—can preserve and even strengthen the ideal balance in balanced literacy: on one side, explicit, sequential instruction in foundational skills; on the other, dialogic meaning-making. Conceptually, this aligns with balanced literacy as an instructional ecology that integrates skill learning (phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, fluency, vocabulary) with authentic literacy practices such as read-alouds and text-based discussions (Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). At the same time, translanguaging is understood not as mere spontaneous code-switching, but as the mobilization of learners’ linguistic repertoires for targeted academic and affective purposes (García, 2009). In this study, when teachers briefly leveraged Sundanese–Indonesian contrasts to stabilize vulnerable sounds and then immediately re-anchored to the Indonesian target sound/term, we observed gains on micro-indicators such as grapheme–phoneme accuracy and self-correction rate without disrupting instructional flow. In short, translanguaging functioned as scaffolding that kept the “balance” from tilting toward either extreme—drill-like phonics without meaning or meaning-focused discussion without decoding foundations (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Pressley, 2006).

Relative to prior research, these results both corroborate and extend existing evidence. The elementary translanguaging literature frequently highlights participation, identity, and access to concepts, but often stops at affective or social indicators (García & Wei, 2014). Our study confirms increases in participation and student confidence, and it also surfaces “hard traces” at the instructional level: reduced vowel-substitution errors, higher grapheme–phoneme mapping accuracy, and a greater share of inferential responses explicitly referenced to textual evidence. These findings help close the gap between ideological arguments for translanguaging and the practical demands of balanced literacy, which emphasize explicit instruction and the use of formative data (Clay, 2000; Paris & Paris, 2017). Amid the “science of reading” debate underscoring the urgency of structured, systematic phonics (Castles et al., 2018), our results do not dispute the importance of phonics; rather, they show that brief, purpose-driven cross-linguistic supports can reinforce phonics—provided they are followed by immediate re-

anchoring to the target sound/term and linked to clear visual representations (anchor charts). Tensions reported in some studies—that translanguaging may disrupt consistent sound–letter mapping—appear to arise when its use is spontaneous, lengthy, and unmoored from micro-goals (Hanford, 2018; Seidenberg, 2017). When we bounded translanguaging within an “instructional dose” (1–2 sentences followed by re-anchoring), its benefits were consistent and measurable.

The design implications are concrete. In phonics mini-lessons, cross-linguistic micro-contrasts for vulnerable sounds (e.g., schwa versus /ε/) were effective when paired with articulatory gestures and minimal word pairs, then “switched off” immediately after reasserting the Indonesian target sound—an on–off scaffolding principle consistent with effective early literacy supports (Gibbons, 2002) and recommendations for explicit, cumulative phonics (Ehri, 2005). In dialogic reading, bilingual think-alouds served as bridges to inference when tied directly to text evidence—for example, pointing to causal cue sentences—so discussions did not drift off-text (Barrentine, 1996; Beck & McKeown, 2001). In guided reading, data-based grouping enabled selective use of translanguaging to target homogeneous error patterns (e.g., final-consonant omission) rather than applying it uniformly, aligning with literature emphasizing assessment-informed responsiveness (Clay, 2000; Fountas & Pinnell, 2017). Operationally, three design rules proved pivotal: limit the duration of bilingual interventions, re-anchor immediately to the target term/sound, and document effects in a small-group log to drive the next improvement cycle.

At the same time, our results clarify boundaries of productive use. Translanguaging incidents that were spontaneous, not followed by Indonesian reinforcement, and not linked to micro-instructional goals tended to slow lesson flow and did not contribute to decoding or inference indicators—reinforcing cautions that translanguaging can become a distraction if unguided (MacSwan, 2017), particularly in early reading phases when consistent grapheme–phoneme mapping is crucial (Ehri, 2005; Share, 1995). Consequently, translanguaging should be embedded within an assessment-informed ecosystem: its use is decided via anecdotal notes and running records, its function is specific (sound, morpheme, key vocabulary), its duration is brief, its multimodality is explicit (articulatory cues, anchor charts), and it consistently returns to the target language.

Local contextual considerations sharpen interpretation. Unlike many studies from North America and Europe, the Sundanese–Indonesian pairing features relatively close linguistic distance (transparent orthographies) yet salient phonological contrasts with instructional significance. In such an ecology, translanguaging appears economical: it imposes low cognitive cost while offering meaningful contrasts that sharpen phonics and vocabulary (Cárdenas-Hagan, 2020). Generalization to other contexts should be analytic, contingent on language distance, school language policy, the availability of bilingual/leveled materials, and formative assessment capacity.

Overall, this study contributes conceptually and practically. Conceptually, it offers an operational framework to synergize translanguaging with balanced literacy through three pillars: explicit micro-goals, multimodality as anchor, and formative data–driven decisions. Practically, it identifies “hard” impact indicators (grapheme–phoneme accuracy, self-correction rate) alongside “soft” indicators (participation, confidence), moving translanguaging discourse from ideological preference toward testable, replicable instructional design. Future research should examine durability of effects longitudinally and across home languages, evaluate bilingual phonics packages aligned with the Merdeka Curriculum, and conduct small-scale design experiments—varying prompt sequences, intervention length, or reinforcement intensity—to map the optimal range of translanguaging as enabling scaffolding rather than a permanent crutch in early reading instruction (Castles et al., 2018; Duke & Cartwright, 2021).

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

This study shows that intentionally designed, micro–goal-driven translanguaging can strengthen key components of balanced literacy in lower primary classrooms in multilingual contexts. In particular, brief and targeted cross-linguistic supports—such as Sundanese–



Indonesian sound contrasts during phonics mini-lessons, bilingual pre-teaching of academic vocabulary before read-alouds, and selective prompts during guided reading—correlate with improvements in grapheme–phoneme mapping accuracy, a higher proportion of inferential responses referenced to the text, and gains in oral participation and beginning readers’ confidence. In other words, translanguaging functions as scaffolding that preserves the “balance” of balanced literacy: sharpening explicit phonics without sacrificing depth of meaning-making, and enriching dialogic discussion without weakening foundational skill discipline. The study’s contributions are twofold. Conceptually, it offers a practical model for integrating translanguaging into balanced literacy in local contexts, complete with observable indicators—explicit micro-goals (sounds, morphemes, key terms), brief intervention duration, immediate re-anchoring to the target term/sound, and consistent reference to multimodal anchors (gestures, anchor charts, bilingual cards). Empirically, it presents evidence of impact on “hard” indicators (grapheme–phoneme accuracy, self-correction rate) alongside “soft” indicators (participation, confidence), moving the translanguaging discourse from ideological preference toward testable, replicable instructional design.

Practical implications can be operationalized in a micro daily schedule: 10–15 minutes of structured phonics with measured home-language bridges on vulnerable sounds; 15–20 minutes of dialogic read-alouds targeting academic vocabulary and prompting inferential questions tied to textual evidence; and 20–25 minutes of differentiated guided reading with bilingual prompts tailored to each group’s error patterns and always followed by reinforcement in Indonesian. A simple formative assessment cycle—rotating running records, structured anecdotal notes, and small-group logs—should serve as the backbone for decisions about when to switch translanguaging scaffolds on or off. At the policy and professional development levels, three recommendations stand out. First, supply bilingual instructional materials and Indonesian leveled texts (and regional-language texts where available) to enable vocabulary pre-teaching and level-appropriate text selection. Second, provide teacher training on translanguaging strategies aligned with phonics and comprehension goals—including the “switch-on/switch-off” scaffolding principle, concise bilingual think-aloud design, and the use of formative data for grouping. Third, strengthen simple, embedded formative assessment routines so translanguaging is always evidence-led and its impact is monitored over time.

We acknowledge limitations: the sample was limited to one school with three classes, the observation period was relatively short, and longer-term quantitative outcomes such as words-per-minute fluency growth and standardized comprehension were not evaluated. Findings should therefore be transferred analytically, considering variation in home-language profiles, school language policies, and resource availability in other settings. Future research should include longitudinal studies to assess impacts on decoding, fluency, and comprehension across semesters and school years; design experiments to evaluate contextually grounded bilingual phonics packages (for example, grapheme–phoneme sequences with Sundanese–Indonesian micro-contrasts) and to vary intervention duration and prompt sequencing to identify optimal “dosage”; and cross-regional comparisons across different home languages to clarify when translanguaging is most cognitively economical and how policy and resource ecologies mediate its effectiveness. With this agenda, translanguaging can continue to be positioned as enabling scaffolding—rather than a mere linguistic compromise—in efforts to strengthen early literacy in multilingual primary schools.

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