

English Education Journal

Volume 10, Number 03, May 2022, pp. 138-150

ISSN: 2302-6413 (Print) 2716-3687 (Online)

The Role of L1 in English Language Acquisition Using Translanguaging Pedagogy of Indonesian EFL Students

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Received: March 29, 2022

Reviewed: April 17, 2022

Accepted: May 29, 2022

Abstract

In EFL environments when students' opportunities to use English are limited in the classroom, reducing their use of L1 to increase English fluency is frequently advocated in instruction. Recent research, however, has found that students' partial use of L1 in translanguaging offers a variety of pedagogical benefits. This study looks at how advanced Indonesian high school students use and perceive L1 (Indonesian) in translanguaging during L2 (English) classroom activities. The study attempted to reveal context-sensitive findings about students' use of L1 in translanguaging in the EFL classroom and identify the effectiveness of the use of L1 in English class activities using translanguaging pedagogy by drawing on both quantitative data from a questionnaire answered by 29 third-year junior high school students and qualitative data from classroom observations and in-depth interviews with three students from the same group. The quantitative questionnaire results revealed that, to varied degrees, all of the students used L1 during L2 activities. Data from classroom observations backed up the questionnaire results and indicated speech functions of children' partial L1 use in activities. Furthermore, the interview data revealed students' varied motives for and perceptions of their partial L1 use during such activities, emphasizing a distinct communication layer for translanguaging. Recommendations for pursuing communicative language instruction and translanguaging pedagogy in EFL classrooms are presented at the end of the paper based on the discussion of the findings.

Keywords: bilingualism; EFL; first language; L1; translanguaging.

INTRODUCTION

Letting the students use their first language or mother tongue in English classrooms still becomes a debate among the English Language Teaching practitioners. Some believe that using students' first language to acquire a second or new language will

not maximize language acquisition. So, should teachers allow the students to use their first language in learning English as a foreign language in the classroom? Littlewood and Yu (2011) stated that the debate is about to which degree L1 or first language should have a role in English as foreign language classroom, not about the role of L2 itself. Does minimizing the use of first language in the classroom encourage students' fluency in the target language? In fact, recent studies revealed that partial use of students' first language while acquiring new language in translanguaging shows many advantages.

Many believe that the minimizing the use of L1 will reduce the input of the target language itself and negatively impact the learner. Some also believe the use of the first language could act as a positive resource for the language teacher. Briggs (2001) reported strong evidence that students are more comfortable and prefer teachers who understand their first language (L1). Schweers (1999) showed that 88.7% of Spanish students studying English as a foreign language wanted their mother tongue to be used in the class because it is easier for them to learn the target language. Students wished to spend 39% of the language learning spent with their first language.

Another reason why using L1 should be allowed while acquiring a new language is that mostly the teachers are non-native speakers (Hawks, 2001). Pachler & Field (2001) stated that sometimes these teachers also have not very good English and maintaining the use of English only in the classroom decreases the ability of these teachers to communicate and their ability to teach. It often leads to a reduced performance of the teachers and the estrangement of students from learning. Permitting first language in the classroom, the teachers and researchers report much more positive outcome (Auerbach, 1993). When the students cannot reach the context of target language, it should be clarified by using the students' first language to remove barriers and reduce the tension in the classroom (Pachler & Field, 2001).

Phillipson (1992) stated that it is easier for the non-native teachers to use their mother tongue as they have gone through the process of learning an L2 (which they are now teaching), helps the the acquirement of students' target language according to these teachers' insider perspective. By excluding or minimizing the use of students' known language from the learning process, it was similar to wasting a valuable resource and not necessarily productive. The fact is that there is no evidence whether teaching using only with the target language leads to a better outcome in the learning process and will not guarantee learning in the students (Pachler & Field, 2001). The factors that are important are the quality of the text material, well-trained teachers, and sound methods of the teaching learning process (Phillipson, 1992). Burder (2000) found that increasing the use of L2 will lead to frustrations and likely have a negative impact on the students especially for lower-level students. Some researchers strive to demonstrate the positive outcome of using the first language and have attempted to categorize when the teacher should allow first language in the classroom. A report from (Harbord 1992, p. 351) shows that students should be allowed to express themselves, and it is normal or natural when they sometimes slip back into their mother tongue while learning a new language as it is more comfortable for them. They will also consider what they are

learning with their mother tongue, so when teachers try to impede this process, it will only give a negative consequence.

Some researchers have focused on the situation in which the first language should be used when learning a new language and should not be used. Mitchell (1988) surveyed the best situation to use students' first language is when grammar was being explained, that is where the teachers felt L1 use was acceptable. It was also considered acceptable to use L1 while the teachers explain the instructions for the activities, disciplining students, and explaining the background information. Another survey conducted by Atkinson (1987) researcher suggested using L1 in the classroom, such as drawing out language, comprehension checking, instruction explanation, also helps students to work together with each other.

There are three advantages of using L1 in the classroom according to Harbord (1992), (i) making communication more accessible, (ii) promoting students-teacher rapport, (iii) assisting the target language learning. Further, Cook (2001) stated the teachers should use their first language for meaning transmission and class organization. Students can also use L1 as scaffolding and help the students engage more with their classmates. The most important thing is that it saved more time and reduced confusion (Harbord, 1992).

The use of L1 is believed to have promoted the role of foreign language in teaching-learning process. Some previous studies suggested for the teachers should use judicious amount of first language in the classroom, Thongwichit (2013). The discreet amount from the L1 use means as a tool to reduce students' anxiety (Aurbach, 1993; Meyer, 2008). Hall and Cook (2010) identified at the beginning of 1990s, practitioners in the education field reconsidered the use of the first language.

According to Kelleher (2013) impeding first language in the classroom is an impossible task. Furthermore, there is no definite evidence that using of target language only will promote the learning process than allowing the students to use their mother tongue. If students' mother tongue has a positive outcome in the learning process, complex grammar and difficult vocabulary will be easier to learn. Cook (2001) found that over 80 percent of modern teachers and instructors use their mother tongue for explaining grammar instructions. In addition, based on the author's experience, it is easier for the students to learn grammar by using some of their mother tongues and use dictionaries for translation, rather than using the target language only. This is also supported by the statement from Celik (2008), who believes that using students' first language while learning English grammar is more efficient. However, to avoid the overuse of the mother tongue in the learning process, teachers also learners need to have clear rules and guidelines. Scheweer (1999) supported the planned use of students' mother tongue to avoid overuse. Auerbach (1993) claimed that using the pupils' first language or mother tongue keeps them relaxed, enables them to build confidence, and prevents them from feeling frightened. This study sought to investigate and answer the following research questions:

1. How do Indonesian junior high school students use their L1 in a English activities class using translanguaging pedagogy?

2. How effective is the use of L1 in a English activities class using translanguaging pedagogy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Nature of Translanguaging

Translanguaging pedagogy is an instructional strategy that merges two or more languages to develop multilingual repertoire, metalinguistic, and language awareness. Cenoz and Gorter (2020) stated that translanguaging pedagogy considered the learners who can use one language and other language depending on the social context. Furthermore, translanguaging pedagogy is a crucial step for the teachers to make students believe that speakers' perspective is not something that bounds the language, but rather a flexible resource for making meaning in different context. In short, translanguaging encourages the students in learning through one language and transfer it to the other. Lewis et al. (2012) stated that translanguaging involves strategy that at least two languages are used in the context of cognitive, social, and affective processes in literacy and learning. Illman and Peitila (2018) stated that translanguaging refers to using the known language and deliberate in another language to make meaning in the target language. Translanguaging focuses on the technique that bilinguals use to make sense of and be understood in their multilingual environments.

Baker (2011) revealed that translanguaging has four potential advantages: to help students' deeper understanding of the subject matter, the development of the weaker language can be promoted the home-school links, and co-operation, and facilitate the students' integration of fluent speakers with early learners. In addition, according to Garcia (2011, p. 147) translanguaging is the ability to choose the most suitable linguistic system from the known language, a strategic ability to apply the learnt strategies, monitoring, evaluating and adjusting learners' performance during the learning process, and planning for the upcoming activities based on the past performance evaluation. Research found that when the teachers try to forbid students' known language in order to test their knowledge content in the target language, it creates inequality situation for the students. Translanguaging can be used as a meaningful learning tool, as example in Saudi EFL classroom where the teacher and the learner share one known language to make meaning of the content. Lopez, Turkan and Guzman-Orth (2017) reported that translanguaging helps to assess students' known knowledge and facilitates the students to figure out their capability as they are not proficient yet in English language.

Review on the Use of L1 in EFL Classroom

Research done by (Borlongan, Lim & Roxas, 2012) found that the students give positive responses on the use of L1 in the EFL classroom. Furthermore, the researchers believe that L1 promotes the EFL learning and avoids instruction misunderstanding. Although it can prevent the exposure of the target language, the teacher also believes that the use of L1 in the classroom creates a non-threatening learning activity (Cook, 2001). Even the teachers have different opinion on this situation, the use of L1 cannot be omitted from the learning process. With a limit classroom meeting, L1 seems to be the best option

to make an effective learning, presented by the teacher or the students, L1 not only makes the learning process efficient and well-managed, but also can be used to boost interpersonal relation and to access the curriculum (Cahyani, de Courcy, & Barnett, 2016). The use of L1 in the classroom helps students not only on the target language acquisitions, but also for learning language culture, social, historical, and political concept to be better understood by the students. According to Sharma (2006), the use of L1 in the classroom shows positive impacts on the language analysis, classroom management, error feedback, comprehension checking, and grammar presentation in the classroom.

Aoyama (2020) conducted research entitled *Exploring Japanese High School Students' L1 Use in Translanguaging in the Communicative EFL Classroom*. This research was aimed to identify students' use of L1 in translanguaging in the EFL classroom. The sample of this research is 190 third-year high school students and the instruments of the research is qualitative methods that include: classroom observation and in-depth interviews with three students from the same group. The results revealed that all the students partially used L1 during communicative L2 activities. Data from classroom observations supported the questionnaire results and identified five salient speech functions of students' partial L1 use in the activities. In addition, the interview data showed students' nuanced reasons for and perceptions toward their partial L1 use during such activities, highlighting a unique communication layer for translanguaging. The majority acknowledged the frequent partial use of Indonesian during activities, with no one reporting the total exclusion of Indonesian.

RESEARCH METHOD

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach. Creswell (2016: 15) defined qualitative research as a process of different methodological approaches aimed to explore a social or human problem. The researcher analyzed words, presents the informants' views in detail, and conducts the study in a natural setting. In this study, the researcher employed a case study methodology to explore the role of L1 in English Language Acquisition using Translanguaging Pedagogy in the classroom. A case study approach (Duff & Anderson, 2015) is suitable for this research. To gain an insider perspective on the processes that accompany translanguaging for better translanguaging pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 6), the study seeks to gain nuance, ground understanding by a questionnaire, classroom observations, and individual follow-up interviews with students. The data source of this research was the teacher and the students of 9th grade at Junior High School Muhammadiyah 7 Surakarta. The researcher employed a purposive sampling method to select the participants. Purposive sampling is selecting a sample by taking a subject based on the specific purpose. The researcher selected the sample among the population, they were students from *Program Khusus* class consisting of 29 students. Focusing on foreign language education, the school provided a small class with 29 students that provided bilingual classes. In addition, the school provided some programs for the students with authentic language and intercultural learning opportunities, such as study tours abroad and sister school exchange programs in cooperation with several schools in countries where the studied languages

are used. In this study, the researcher used data analysis technique based on Miles and Huberman (1994) cited in Sugiyono (2014: 247-252) involving three steps: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

FINDINGS

In this chapter, the researcher presents the result of case study conducted in SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Surakarta in academic year of 2020/2021. The total of the students are 29 students. There were some difficulties found in the English teaching and learning process for students of *Program Khusus* SMP Muhammadiyah 7 Surakarta. The difficulties were the ability to speak English confidently.

In this section, students' questionnaires, observation, and students' interviews had been adopted to collect the data which were needed for this study. The aim of this part is to examine quantitative and qualitative data which have been collected and highlight the findings of questionnaires, observation, and interviews. The targets of the research are: (1) to analyse how students use L1 while translanguaging is applied in the English class. (2) to identify the effectiveness of the use of L1 in English class activities using translanguaging pedagogy.

1. How Students Use First Language (L1) Using Translanguaging Pedagogy

Students are aware of the existence of the mother tongue in the teaching and learning activities in the classroom. Table 4.1 shows that a slight majority of the students (65%) agreed they used L1 to ask clarification in class. In relation to questionnaire items no. 1 - 3, the majority of the students agreed that they used L1 to ask something to the teacher, this implied that although the majority of the teachers believed that English should be used all the time, some are of the opinion that the mother tongue still has some importance to the learning of English specially to avoid misunderstanding. The majority of the students (58%) also agreed the use of L1 with friends is crucial to avoid misunderstanding, they used L1 to deliver difficult ideas/terms. They also agreed and strongly agreed (48%) the use of translanguaging in English class helped them to develop their confidence and English proficiency. In contrast to their teachers' response, the majority of the students (51%) agreed that the mother tongue did not hinder the process of acquiring target language which in relation with questionnaire no. 9 - 11. But the students are aware that the use of L1 in teaching and learning English can reduce their chance to learn English better it is seen on their agreement (48%) to questionnaire no. 13 - 15. Despite the awareness, the students agreed (51%) that the use of the first language (L1) in the classroom, there is an indication of avoiding dependency on the mother tongue. This gave signal that both teachers and students agree on the importance of using English extensively, but it does not mean that the mother tongue should be prohibited in the classroom.

Table 1. *The result of the questionnaire*

<i>Result of questionnaire</i>				
Questions	SA	A	D	SD
I use Indonesian to ask clarification	31%	65,5%	3,4%	-
I use Indonesian to ask the teacher about the materials	37,9%	58,6%	3,4%	-
I give comment using Indonesian to the teacher	37,9%	55,2%	6,9%	-
I discuss the materials using Indonesian with my friends	58,6%	41,4%	-	-
I use Indonesian to understand new concept or new words	41,4%	58,6%	-	-
I use Indonesian when I found difficulties to deliver my ideas	44,8%	51,7%	3,4%	-
I speak Indonesian when I discuss the material in a group	37,9%	55,2%	6,9%	-
Translanguaging helps me to boost my confidence and English proficiency	48,3%	48,3%	3,4%	-
I feel less burden when the teacher using Indonesian	51,7%	41,4%	3,4%	3,4%
I feel more comfortable when the teacher explains the materials in Indonesian	51,7%	41,4%	6,9%	-
The teacher using Indonesian when explaining grammar or structure	27,6%	69%	3,4%	-
Indonesian helps me to express ideas/concept	41,4%	51,7%	6,9%	-
When the teacher uses Indonesian, it reduces the possibility to learn English	17,2%	41,4%	31%	10,3 %
The more we use Indonesian, the more hesitate we speak in English	20,7%	48,3%	17,2%	13,8%
I try my best to speak English	44,8%	34,5%	20,7%	-
The use of Indonesian helps me deliver my idea clearly	41,4%	51,7%	3,4%	3,4%

Note, SA= Strongly Agree, A= Agree, D= Disagree, SD= Strongly Disagree

From the questionnaire, observation, and interview the researcher transcribed the meeting section. Using the transcriptions, the researcher tallied the actual use of L1 (first language) into four categories: as fillers, equivalent, and asking for help, translation and building rapport. First is fillers, fillers were meaningless words, phrases, or sounds, used to indicate a pause or delay. They were being used when someone wants to pause their speaking or when they are thinking of something they are going to say. For example, the utterance of "Mm" indicated as a filled pause or an unlexicalized pause because it showed

hesitation, the student tried to think what he was going to say by making a pause using the mentioned utterance. Another example is when the student said “*Ya*” that indicated as a lexicalized filler. Instead of saying “*Yes*” the student used a short word with his first language, without changing the meaning of the content. The second one is equivalent, the equivalent L1 use in this study is divided into word-level, phrase-level, and clause-level. It was a notion that encompasses the concept of resemblance, refers to something that has the same or a comparable impact or meaning when translated. The observed L1 equivalent for example: The researcher observed students’ L1 equivalents include “*Iya [Yes], easy bu.*”, “*Yes, I paham [understand].*” The students tended to use Indonesian when they were unsure about the words in English, it was shown on the student’s face when he was unsure whether the word is correct or not. Some students used Indonesian to emphasize or give more explanation about what they mean “*Mother cooks in the kitchen, di dapur [in the kitchen].*” She emphasized the words in English. The students often used L1 in the English class to ask for help. It means when they needed help from their friends or teacher to express terms, ideas, or phrases they did not know or when they were having difficulties to say something in English. For example, “*Buku apa bahasa Inggrisnya?*” [What’s the English word of book?], “*Ibu itu pakenya is ya?*” [What is the to be of mother?], “*Formulanya itu habis subject apa ya?*” [What is the formula after Subject?], “*Apa tadi pertanyaanya?*” [What is the question?] the students tried to speak in English after they got response from their friends. These L1 questions were frequently followed by responses from other students in the group or from their teacher. The students then returned to English, repeated the assigned word or phrase and continued their conversation. Then, students are likely to have difficulty translating from English to Indonesian or vice versa, since translation is a difficult and complex topic. Antar (2002) divides translation challenges into linguistic (micro-level) and culture’s concerns (macro-level). The use of students’ L1 as a translation, for example the teacher said “*Because Ria celebrates her birthday.*” the students translate it “*Karena Ria merayakan ulang tahunnya.*” Another actual use of L1 is the form of rapport was like jokes or having small talks outside the topic of the materials. Most of the interviewees used their L1 to express themselves when they are having jokes with the teacher, to build a close and harmonious relationship with the people or groups we are “*in sync*” with each other. The close relationship between teacher and students will build a fun and safe learning environment, the feeling of safe can help students engage more in the classroom and take more risks in learning and thinking. This means the learner’s use of L1 is viewed to express themselves. When the teacher asked “*How do you feel?*” The students replied with “*Lapar bu.*”.

2. How Effective is the Use of L1 Using Translanguaging Pedagogy

From the interview, the researcher analyzed the coded interview, the data found as the themes were presented below. The use of L1 using Translanguaging Pedagogy is effective because of; (a) communication strategies, the students use their first language as a communication strategy. In learning English as foreign language, caused by lack of linguistic resources students frequently encounter communication problems with friends or teacher. In this case students use communication strategies to convey what they really

mean related to the target language being learned, communication strategies are also used by the students to overcome problems they faced in the English class. That is why the use of L1 in English classroom activities is effective because it was being used as students' communication strategies, (b) affective factors, affective elements in the process of acquiring target language include various feelings such as motivation, self-confidence, and worries. These negative emotions impair the efficient processing of verbal information, whereas good emotions enhance the process's efficiency. When language learners are motivated, self-confident, and have a low degree of fear, they have few filters and so receive and absorb a great deal of information. On the other side, learners who lack motivation, lack self-confidence, and are anxious have high filters get minimal input, (c) explaining grammatical points, grammar is the subjects in English that should be learnt by the students but most of the interviewers stated that grammar is the most difficult subject that they must learn, so they often asked the teacher to explain it in L1 so they can understand it better. They think the use of target language to explain grammar will make them get more confused. In this regard, the results of the SSIs display those two out of the eight participants stated that they need to use L1 in grammar explanation. They think that they do not understand all the grammatical points in the TL, and sometimes they suggest that their teachers should make linguistic comparisons between the two languages. The participants use compensation strategy while facing difficulties in expressing themselves in the TL, (d) low-proficiency learner engagement, a low-proficient learner, indicated that employing learners' L1 is occasionally advantageous, particularly when using the TL generates uncertainty and ambiguity. The findings of the SSIs support the usage of L1 for low-proficient learners to help them acquire TL. Because of his limited skill in the TL, one of the interviewers remarked that it is beneficial.

DISCUSSION

This study examined how students use their L1 and how effective it is in translanguaging classroom. This case study was aimed to transfer findings to similar teaching contexts by revealing context-sensitive findings. Transferability was achieved by presenting students' voices, attitudes, and classroom practices, which provided "sufficient descriptive data" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298).

The findings of this study emphasize the need of reevaluating students' language use in class communicative activities. Considering the students' dynamic, complex language use in both L1 and L2, the holistic concept of bilingualism as "not monolingualism multiplied by two" (Garcia, 2009, p. 71) extends to and has insightful implications for Indonesian EFL contexts, where the increasing importance of the monolingual approach is observed throughout the Course of Study.

In light of the spontaneous nature of translanguaging (Canagarajah, 2011a), teachers should investigate how students' L1 use via sidetracking contributes to their L2 development, as Spada (2007) advises. L1 sidetracking during communicative L2 activities is generally viewed negatively in English-only classrooms. However, as this study demonstrates, sidetracking was not a result of students' refusal to use L2, but rather a

byproduct of their attempts to use and master L2, serving as a variety of communication and learning methods.

The observed students demonstrated their capacity to support their linguistic resources inside their language system by utilizing various speech functions, which exhibits translanguaging practice Garcia and Klein (2016) refer to. The students' translanguaging practice exemplified their dynamic multilingual communication, which was driven by the classroom discourse in which L1 was communicated. This was further justified by the follow-up interview data showing that their partial L1 use in translanguaging played strategic roles for efficient communication, helped them expressing their ideas while they were afraid due to lack of resources, demotivation, or anxiety factors, helped them to understand better about difficult materials like grammar point, also helped the teacher to engage students who had difficulties to follow teacher's instruction in English activities. The observed strategic practices such as using L1 equivalents and seeking assistance in L1 during translanguaging contribute to students' L2 learning by providing opportunities for them to inquire about L2 words or phrases and have their questions answered by peers or the teacher.

Partial L1 usage, on the other hand, is not always due to lack of linguistic resources in the target language or English. Classroom observations and interviews demonstrated that students also utilized L1 to explain difficult L2 words and phrases to their peers. This demonstrates the students' awareness of their audience and their capacity to consider the linguistic resources of their listeners, demonstrating their high degree of communicative competence to make sure that the audience or listeners understood what they were talking about. It also indicated that students were motivated in learning L2 vocabulary and phrases. The teacher also triggered the students using L1 to build rapport in the classroom, this way students would feel a close relationship with the teacher, the researcher observed that students engaged more to the activities because they felt less burden to speak in English.

As the data analysis showed, the students' L1 use was triggered by various factors pertaining to their L2 learning context. The partial L1 use, such as Indonesian fillers inserted in longer English utterances was induced by affective factors, where the students felt embarrassed dominantly using English with peers who shared the same L1 in the classroom. As the interview data revealed, L1 fillers used among peers of the same L1 were used to lower the affective factors generated by the students' learning context. This indicates the students' effort and motivation to keep L2 communication going while mitigating such affective factors. Also, group dynamics played a role in encouraging their partial L1 use. The students' voices revealed that their linguistic choice of using L1 fillers was influenced by their peers' performance, and one student's L1 fillers led other students to use them more.

Through observation of students' performance and identification of obstacles impeding students from obtaining the performance they seek, it is vital to construct and deliver suitable scaffolds to students. For instance, deliberate, explicit, and continuous education in fillers, backchanneling devices, and expressions to request assistance in L2 may help reduce students' affective variables and increase their comfort level when

utilizing such communication methods in L2. It is critical to address students' affective factors in order to improve the classroom atmosphere.

Allowing students as much time as they need to take risks while practicing L2 would help students' L2 development, depending on the purpose of the activities and their performance. Providing appropriate scaffolding for students prior to activities, such as what Ellis (2006) refers to as "strategic preparation" (p. 24) in terms of language or content focus while employing the language repertoire available to them, would be another way to enhance students' L2 learning experiences. These proposals are context-sensitive adaptations, expansions, and elaborations of Willis's (1996) assertion, "Do not prohibit mother-tongue use; rather, promote attempts to use the target language" (p. 130), from a translanguaging perspective. It is critical to consider students' attitudes toward their use of L1. While the students acknowledged the value of their partial L1 as communication and learning strategies, their complex and conflicted attitudes toward L1 use in class were also revealed. The interview data indicated that students' use of L1 does not indicate an unwillingness to use L2, but rather a desire to use L2 more frequently.

CONCLUSION

For the first question the quantitative questionnaire result indicated that all the students partially used L1 during English classroom activities. The data from the observation supported the questionnaire results and identified students' partial L1 use for various purposes in the English classroom activities. This is an entirely predictable finding, given that translanguaging occurs spontaneously in English classrooms and cannot be stopped through English-only laws. The classroom observation revealed that students used partial L1 in English classroom activities as (a) fillers, (b) equivalents, (c) asking for help, (d) translation, and (e) building rapport.

Along with the discussion above, the second findings revealed that the use of L1 in English activities class using translanguaging pedagogy is effective because L1 acted as: (a) communication strategies, (b) affective factors, (c) explaining grammatical points, (d) low-proficiency learner engagement.

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