ARGOPURO

Argopuro: Jurnal Multidisiplin Ilmu Bahasa
Vol 14 No 2 Tahun 2026
Online ISSN: 2988-6309

NAVIGATING A MULTILINGUAL ENVIRONMENT: LANGUAGE PRACTICES AMONG INDONESIAN MIGRANT CHILDREN IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

Indonesian migrant children living in Malaysia grow up in a multilingual environment where Indonesian, Malay, and other familiar languages may be used across different situations. This study aims to explore how Indonesian migrant children navigate this multilingual environment through their language practices in everyday interactions and educational settings. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed at two Sanggar Bimbingan in Malaysia. Data were collected through interviews with eight Indonesian migrant children aged 11-14 years, an interview with an English teacher, and classroom observations conducted during KKN activities. The data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns in language choice, the use of familiar linguistics resources, and meaning negotiation. The findings show that Malay plays an important role in the children's everyday communication, while Indonesian and Malay are also used to support understanding during English learning. Differences between Indonesian and Malay vocabulary sometimes require clarification from teachers or peers, but familiar linguistic resources can also help children interpret unfamiliar expressions. The children nevertheless experienced different challenges in English learning, particularly in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction. These findings suggest that children's language practices are closely related to their linguistic environment and the contexts in which communication takes place. Recognizing children's existing linguistic resources may therefore support communication and comprehension in multilingual educational settings.

Keywords: multilingualism; Indonesian migrant children; Sanggar Bimbingan

Abstrak

Anak-anak migran Indonesia yang tinggal di Malaysia tumbuh dalam lingkungan multibahasa, di mana bahasa Indonesia, bahasa Melayu, dan bahasa-bahasa lain yang mereka kuasai dapat digunakan dalam berbagai situasi. Studi ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi bagaimana anak-anak migran Indonesia

Article History
Received: Oktober 2026
Reviewed: Oktober 2026
Published: Oktober 2026
Plagirism Checker: No 235.223.443

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Publish by : Argopuro

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Vol 14 No 2 Tahun 2026
Online ISSN: 2988-6309

menavigasi lingkungan multibahasa tersebut melalui praktik berbahasa mereka dalam interaksi sehari-hari maupun di lingkungan pendidikan. Pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif diterapkan di dua Sanggar Bimbingan di Malaysia. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara dengan delapan anak migran Indonesia berusia 11–14 tahun, wawancara dengan seorang guru bahasa Inggris, serta observasi kelas yang dilakukan selama kegiatan KKN. Data dianalisis secara tematis untuk mengidentifikasi pola pemilihan bahasa, penggunaan sumber daya linguistik yang dikuasai, serta negosiasi makna. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa bahasa Melayu memainkan peran penting dalam komunikasi sehari-hari anak-anak tersebut, sementara bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Melayu juga digunakan untuk membantu pemahaman selama pembelajaran bahasa Inggris. Perbedaan kosakata antara bahasa Indonesia dan bahasa Melayu terkadang memerlukan klarifikasi dari guru atau teman sebaya, namun sumber daya linguistik yang telah dikuasai anak-anak tersebut juga dapat membantu mereka menafsirkan ungkapan yang belum dikenal. Meskipun demikian, anak-anak tersebut menghadapi berbagai tantangan dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, khususnya terkait tata bahasa, kosakata, pelafalan, dan penyusunan kalimat. Temuan ini mengisyaratkan bahwa praktik berbahasa anak-anak sangat erat kaitannya dengan lingkungan linguistik mereka serta konteks tempat komunikasi berlangsung. Oleh karena itu, mengakui sumber daya linguistik yang telah dimiliki anak-anak dapat mendukung komunikasi dan pemahaman dalam lingkungan pendidikan yang bersifat multibahasa.

Kata Kunci: multilingualisme; anak migran Indonesia; Sanggar Bimbingan

INTRODUCTION

Globalization and the increasing cross-border mobility of the workforce have led to the spread of migrant communities across various regions within each country, including Malaysia. Indonesia is one of the countries with a large number of migrant workers in various regions of Malaysia. As emphasized by Nasirin (2020), Indonesia has migrant workers in Malaysia, as supported by data from BNP2TKI in 2018, there were 283,640 Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) working abroad, with 90,671 of them working in Malaysia. The presence of Indonesian migrant workers is also linked to the presence of children who are growing up and living their social lives in Malaysia. These Indonesian migrant children find themselves in a situation where their Indonesian family and cultural background coexists with the Malaysian social environment. This situation means they live in an environment characterized not only by cultural diversity but also by linguistic diversity.

This multilingual environment means that people are exposed to and use more than one language in their daily lives. Arntzen and Håkansson (2024) found that more than 96% of

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the participants in their study used two or more languages in their daily lives, whether within their families, among friends, or on social media. For Indonesian migrant children living in Malaysia, they interact daily using Indonesian, Malay, English, and regional languages spoken within their families. These languages are not always used simultaneously. Children may use a specific language when communicating with their families, a different one when interacting with peers, and may also adapt their language use when communicating with educators or the surrounding community. Thus, the lives of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia provide an intriguing context for exploring how language is used in various communication situations.

Language in a multilingual environment serves not only as a means of social interaction but also to convey information and foster relationships. According to Rowe and Smith (2025), the use of more than one language serves both academic and social functions, including clarifying information, discussing material, learning vocabulary, playing, and sharing personal experiences. According to Léglise (2022), language practices are determined and constrained by social structures, while simultaneously shaping social meaning, producing social effects, and helping to transform those social structures. Through the use of different languages, children can build relationships with others, convey feelings, express themselves, and adapt to their living environments. The linguistic diversity encountered in daily life can lead children to use more than one language when interacting with others. Such practices may include choosing a specific language, alternating between languages, or shifting from one language to another as needed for communication. Ahmad et al. (2023) view this as an individual's linguistic choice tailored to the context of the conversation, which can be practiced through code-switching and code-mixing. Therefore, the language practices of migrant children need to be understood based on the context of the interactions they experience in their daily lives.

Multilingual language practices may also involve drawing on familiar linguistic resources to understand unfamiliar words and communicate meaning across languages. Children may use expressions that are familiar to them because of their everyday language experiences, rather than deliberately switching between languages in every interaction. This perspective is relevant to Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia, whose familiarity with Indonesian and Malay may vary according to their linguistic backgrounds and daily interactions. Examining these practices can provide insights into how children use the languages available to them when communicating with others and interpreting information.

In the context of education, the Sanggar Bimbingan (SB) serves as an important space for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. The Sanggar Bimbingan is a non-formal educational setting that provides migrant children with opportunities to learn and interact with their peers. According to Niehlah et al. (2023), guidance centers are non-formal educational institutions that serve as a platform for the education of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia who face limitations in accessing formal education. Previous research has shown that non-formal educational institutions play a role in providing access to education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers who face limitations in accessing formal education. In addition to being a place of learning, guidance centers also serve as social spaces where various forms of interaction take place in daily life. In such an environment, language use can emerge naturally through learning activities, interactions among peers, and interactions between children and educators.

Within these educational settings, language practices are relevant not only to everyday communication but also to classroom learning. English lessons, for example, may require

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children to understand English vocabulary through explanations in Indonesian or by connecting unfamiliar words with familiar expressions in Malay. When the words used by educators differ from those commonly used by children, clarification may be necessary to establish shared meaning. Interactions between teachers and students, as well as among peers, therefore provide opportunities to examine how children draw on their existing linguistic resources during the learning process.

Previous research has examined various aspects of the lives of Indonesian migrant children in multilingual environments. One such study, by Musyaffa (2026), focused on the AMI Penang Guidance Center in Malaysia and showed that migrant children interact using Indonesian, Malay, Javanese, and other language variations depending on their social environment. This study indicates that multilingual environments can influence children's communication experiences, including their encounters with unfamiliar languages or their transitions from one language to another. Although previous research has focused on multilingualism, cross-cultural communication, and language use among migrant children, there remains room to explore how children actively navigate multiple languages in their daily interactions. Children's language practices offer a different perspective, particularly regarding how languages are used and how language choices may change according to the situation and conversation partner.

Research on translanguaging also offers relevant perspectives for understanding multilingual language practices in educational settings. Huang and Chalmers (2023), through a systematic review, examined the implementation and effects of pedagogical translanguaging in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Mendoza et al. (2024) emphasized the importance of understanding translanguaging in relation to its specific social and educational context. These studies provide a basis for examining how learners draw on their linguistic resources during classroom interaction. However, the ways Indonesian migrant children use Indonesian and Malay in everyday communication and English learning at Sanggar Bimbingan require further contextual investigation. In particular, lexical differences between the two languages and the ways children seek clarification or support from teachers and peers deserve closer attention.

Navigating various languages in daily life can be part of children’s experiences in a multilingual environment. Children do not always use the same language in every situation, but can adapt their language based on the context of communication. For example, the language used to communicate with peers differs from that used when communicating with educators. Such language practices demonstrate that language use is a dynamic process closely tied to the social environment in which children interact. Therefore, research on the language practices of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia is essential to understand how they navigate linguistic diversity in their daily lives. The focus of this research lies not only in what languages the children use, but also in how, when, and in what contexts those languages are used.

The present study examines these practices at two Sanggar Bimbingan in Malaysia, namely SB Permai Kulim and SB At-Tanzil in Serdang. Considering both settings allows the study to explore language use across two non-formal educational environments. The analysis focuses on everyday language choices, the use of Indonesian and Malay in educational interactions, and the ways children respond when they encounter unfamiliar vocabulary or explanations during English lessons. Observations of lexical differences and instances of clarification are also considered to understand how meaning is negotiated between children and educators.

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Based on this background, the objective of this study is to explore the language practices of Indonesian migrant children as they navigate a multilingual environment in Malaysia. Specifically, this study examines the language children use in their daily interactions, the contexts in which they use language, and how they switch between languages when communicating with others. It also explores how familiar linguistic resources are used when children encounter unfamiliar vocabulary during English learning and how interactions with teachers and peers contribute to meaning-making and understanding during multilingual communication. This study is expected to provide insight into the language practices of Indonesian migrant children when communicating in multilingual environments and to expand the body of research on the linguistic experiences of migrant children in social and educational contexts in Malaysia.

The theoretical perspectives of multilingual language practices and translanguaging provide a foundation for examining the language practices of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. Huang and Chalmers (2023) highlight the relevance of pedagogical translanguaging in EFL classrooms, while Mendoza et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of understanding translanguaging within its social and educational context. In the present study, these perspectives guide the analysis of children's language choices in everyday interactions, the use of familiar linguistic resources in English learning, lexical differences between Indonesian and Malay, and challenges encountered in learning English. These aspects are examined through student interviews, a teacher interview, and classroom observations at two Sanggar Bimbingan. Figure 1 presents the conceptual framework connecting the theoretical perspectives, the main analytical focuses, and the data sources used in this study.

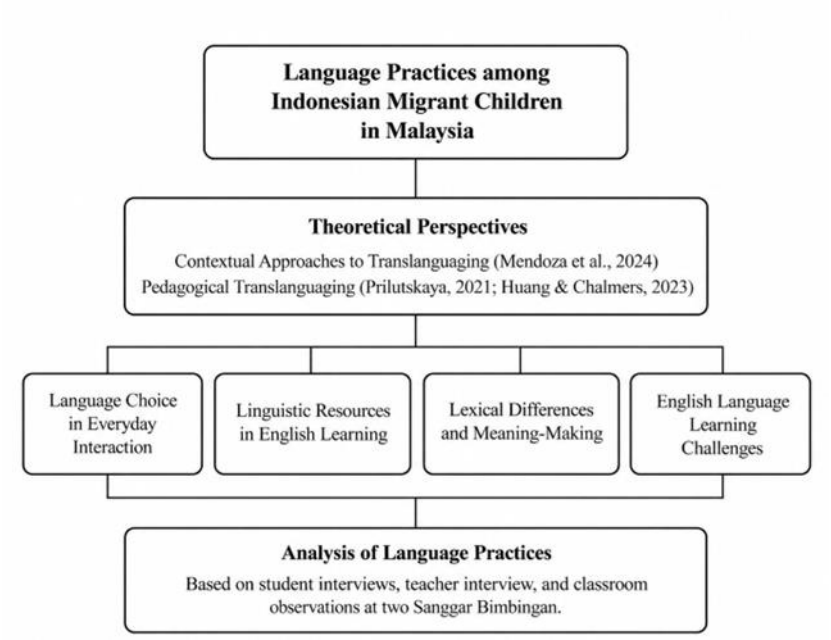


Fig. 1 Conceptual Framework of the Study

RESEARCH METHODS

Research design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the language practices of Indonesian migrant children in a multilingual environment in Malaysia. A

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qualitative descriptive approach was selected because the study aimed to describe children's language use in everyday interactions and educational settings based on the data collected, rather than measure language proficiency or evaluate the effectiveness of teaching methods. Doyle et al. (2020) explain that qualitative descriptive research provides a systematic approach to describing a phenomenon while remaining attentive to the context and characteristics of the data.

The study was conducted at two Sanggar Bimbingan (SB), namely SB Permai Kulim in Kulim and SB At-Tanzil in Serdang, Malaysia. The data consisted of student interview summaries, an interview with an English teacher at SB At-Tanzil, and observation notes collected during the researchers' KKN activities. Eight Indonesian migrant children participated in the student interviews: two from SB Permai Kulim and six from SB At-Tanzil. The interviewed students were between 11 and 14 years old. Student interviews were conducted on two occasions, while the teacher interview provided an additional perspective on the children's language use during English learning. Observations were used to document language practices and interactions in the educational settings.

The data were examined using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns related to the study's focus. The analysis considered children's language choices in everyday interactions, the use of Indonesian and Malay in educational contexts, lexical differences between the two languages, and the ways familiar linguistic resources were used to clarify meaning during English learning. The analysis also considered challenges in English learning when these were supported by the interview summaries or observation notes. In line with Braun and Clarke (2022), thematic analysis provides a structured yet flexible approach to identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative data. The findings were developed by comparing information from student interviews, the teacher interview, and classroom observations, while distinguishing reported experiences from directly observed interactions.

Participants

The participants in this study consisted of eight Indonesian migrant children from two Sanggar Bimbingan in Malaysia: two students from SB Permai Kulim in Kulim and six students from SB At-Tanzil in Serdang. The interviewed students were between 11 and 14 years old. These two settings were selected because they provided contexts for examining children's language practices in multilingual educational environments.

The student participants were included to explore their language use in everyday interactions and educational activities, particularly their use of Indonesian and Malay and their experiences when learning English. In addition to the student participants, an English teacher from SB At-Tanzil was interviewed to provide supplementary information about students' language use and communication during English lessons. The teacher's perspective was considered alongside the student interview summaries and classroom observation notes to provide a broader understanding of the language practices examined in this study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through student interviews, a teacher interview, and classroom observations during the researchers' KKN activities at SB Permai Kulim and SB At-Tanzil in Malaysia. These methods were used to obtain information about the language practices of Indonesian migrant children in everyday interactions and educational settings. Student interviews involved eight children aged 11–14 years, consisting of two students from SB

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Permai Kulim and six students from SB At-Tanzil. The student interviews were conducted on two occasions to gather information about the languages used in their daily interactions, their experiences using Indonesian and Malay, and their experiences learning English. The interviews also explored how students responded when they encountered unfamiliar vocabulary and whether they used familiar words or sought assistance from teachers and peers to understand meaning.

In addition to the student interviews, an English teacher at SB At-Tanzil was interviewed to obtain information about students' language use during English lessons. The interview focused on the languages students commonly used in classroom interactions, the role of Indonesian and Malay in explaining English materials, and the difficulties students encountered when learning English. The teacher's responses provided supplementary information for understanding students' language practices from an instructional perspective. Classroom observations were also conducted during the researchers' KKN activities at the two Sanggar Bimbingan. The observations focused on language use during learning activities and interactions between students and educators. Particular attention was given to instances in which differences between Indonesian and Malay vocabulary required clarification, as well as situations in which familiar linguistic expressions helped students understand the meaning of English vocabulary. Observation notes were used alongside the interview data to examine language practices in their educational context.

The collected data consisted of interview summaries and observation notes. The interview summaries were prepared from the available interview records and recollections rather than complete verbatim transcripts. Therefore, the analysis focused on the content and recurring patterns in the recorded responses and observations. Information from the different sources was compared to identify areas of convergence and difference while maintaining a distinction between participants' reported experiences and language practices directly observed during learning activities.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns related to the language practices of Indonesian migrant children in multilingual educational settings. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe thematic analysis as a flexible approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within qualitative data. In this study, the analysis focused on student interview summaries, the English teacher's interview summary, and classroom observation notes collected at SB Permai Kulim and SB At-Tanzil.

The analysis began with reviewing the available interview summaries and observation notes to develop an understanding of the information relevant to the research objectives. The data were then organized according to their sources and content. Relevant information was identified and grouped into initial categories, including language use in everyday interactions, the use of Indonesian and Malay during English learning, lexical differences between the two languages, and challenges encountered by students when learning English.

These initial categories were examined to identify recurring patterns and relationships across the available data. Particular attention was given to how students described their language choices, how the teacher explained students' language use during English lessons, and how classroom observations illustrated interactions involving unfamiliar vocabulary and clarification of meaning. The emerging patterns were subsequently organized into broader analytical themes corresponding to the research objectives.

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The analysis also involved comparing information from student interviews, the teacher interview, and classroom observations to identify similarities and differences between reported experiences and observed interactions. For example, students' reported use of Malay in daily communication could be considered alongside observation notes documenting the use of Indonesian and Malay during classroom activities. Similarly, instances involving lexical differences, such as *tamu* and *tetamu* or *penghapus* and *pemadam*, were examined in relation to their documented contexts to understand how language differences could influence meaning-making.

Throughout the analysis, care was taken to distinguish information explicitly reported by participants from interpretations developed by the researchers. Because the available interview data consisted of summaries rather than complete verbatim transcripts, the analysis focused on the recorded content and documented observations rather than detailed linguistic analysis of participants' exact utterances. The resulting themes were used to explain how Indonesian migrant children navigated multilingual interactions in everyday life and educational settings at the two Sanggar Bimbingan.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. Permission to conduct research activities was obtained from the management of the respective Sanggar Bimbingan. The study involved children aged 11–14 years, and the data were collected through student interviews, a teacher interview, and classroom observations during the researchers' KKN activities. To protect the privacy of the participants, identifying information was handled carefully. Pseudonyms were used when referring to individual students in the presentation of the findings, and personal information unrelated to the research objectives was excluded. The interview summaries and observation notes were used for academic purposes and interpreted with attention to the context in which the information was collected. The findings were presented in a way that distinguished participants' reported experiences from the researchers' interpretations. Although permission was obtained from the Sanggar Bimbingan management, separate parental or guardian consent was not obtained as part of the research process. Therefore, the research procedures and findings are reported transparently, without claiming that parental consent or formal ethical approval was obtained.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings reveal several patterns in the language practices of Indonesian migrant children at SB Permai Kulim and SB At-Tanzil in Malaysia. Based on the available student interview summaries, the English teacher's interview, and classroom observation notes, four themes were identified: Malay as a dominant language in everyday interaction, the use of familiar linguistic resources in English learning, lexical differences and meaning negotiation, and challenges encountered in learning English. These themes illustrate how children's language choices are connected to their everyday linguistic environments and educational experiences.

Malay as a Dominant Language in Everyday Interaction

The interview summaries from SB Permai Kulim indicate that Malay plays an important role in the children's everyday communication, including interactions with family

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members, friends, and Indonesian educators. Sherli and Zahra, both of whom were born in Malaysia, reported using a mixture of Indonesian and Malay at home and with friends, although Malay was described as the more dominant language. They also tended to use Malay when communicating with Indonesian volunteers, even though they could generally understand Indonesian explanations. The summaries further indicate that the children's familiarity with Indonesian varied. Sherli sometimes needed additional time to process Indonesian words or recall their Indonesian equivalents, whereas Zahra appeared more familiar with Indonesian vocabulary and could help Sherli by providing Malay equivalents for unfamiliar expressions. These differences suggest that growing up in a Malay-speaking environment may be associated with different levels of familiarity with Indonesian, even among children attending the same learning center. The interview summary concerning Akbar at SB At-Tanzil also indicates that Malay was commonly used at home and with friends. Although he could understand Indonesian, he generally preferred speaking Malay in everyday interactions. The English teacher's account supported this pattern, describing Malay as common in students' spontaneous communication and classroom interactions. These findings suggest that language choice is closely connected to the linguistic environment in which children interact. The frequent use of Malay does not necessarily mean that the children cannot understand Indonesian. Instead, their responses indicate that understanding a language and using it spontaneously may involve different levels of familiarity. Lanza (1997) emphasizes the importance of considering conversational context when examining language choice in bilingual children's interactions. From this perspective, the children's use of Malay can be understood in relation to their everyday communication patterns rather than as evidence of an inability to use Indonesian.

The Use of Familiar Linguistic Resources in English Learning

The findings also indicate that Malay and Indonesian serve as familiar linguistic resources when children learn English. The student interview summaries from SB Permai Kulim show that Sherli and Zahra sometimes relied on Malay to understand English vocabulary and classroom explanations. When they encountered unfamiliar information, they commonly asked the teacher for clarification or sought help from their peers. At SB At-Tanzil, Akbar's interview summary similarly indicates that Indonesian explanations helped him understand English learning materials, although he sometimes used Malay when asking questions or seeking clarification. The English teacher also explained that English was introduced during lessons, while Indonesian was used to explain material and support students' understanding. Students could draw on familiar languages when they encountered unfamiliar English vocabulary or had difficulty understanding an explanation. These findings demonstrate that children's language practices during English lessons involve more than the use of English alone. Indonesian and Malay may function as supporting resources that help students connect unfamiliar material with words and expressions they already recognize. Huang and Chalmers (2023) discuss pedagogical translanguaging as an approach to language teaching and learning in EFL classrooms. Their review provides a relevant perspective for considering how the use of familiar languages may support classroom comprehension. However, the present findings should not be interpreted as evidence that every instance of using Malay or Indonesian constitutes translanguaging. The available data show that children sometimes draw on familiar linguistic resources to understand material, ask questions, and communicate with others. Whether a particular interaction represents translanguaging depends on the context and the way the languages are used. Mendoza et al. (2024) similarly emphasize the importance of understanding translanguaging in relation to its specific social and educational context.

Lexical Differences and Meaning Negotiation

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Another finding concerns lexical differences between Indonesian and Malay. Although the two languages share many similarities, some words differ in form or familiarity, which may affect how children interpret explanations during classroom activities. The interview summaries from SB Permai Kulim provide an example involving the English word *guest*, the Indonesian word *tamu*, and the Malay equivalent *tetamu*. When the English vocabulary was explained using the Indonesian word *tamu*, the Malay equivalent *tetamu* could help clarify the intended meaning for children who were more familiar with Malay. The summaries also indicate that peer interaction played a role in clarifying unfamiliar expressions. Zahra could help Sherli by providing a Malay equivalent when Sherli needed additional time to process an Indonesian word. This example illustrates how children may draw on their different levels of familiarity with Indonesian and Malay to support one another's understanding. A related pattern emerged in classroom observations involving the Indonesian word *penghapus* and the Malay word *pemadam*. In the observed interaction, a child asked about the meaning of *penghapus* because the familiar Malay term was *pemadam*. Another observation involved the word *kereta*, which can refer to a car in Malay, whereas an Indonesian educator initially associated the term with a train. These observations illustrate how similar linguistic backgrounds do not always guarantee identical interpretations of vocabulary. Such instances demonstrate the importance of context and clarification in multilingual communication. Familiarity with one linguistic form may help a child understand an unfamiliar expression, but differences in word meaning or usage can also create temporary misunderstandings. García and Li Wei (2014) discuss translanguaging as a perspective for understanding how multilingual speakers draw on their linguistic resources to construct meaning. In the present study, this perspective helps explain the potential role of familiar expressions and peer assistance in resolving lexical uncertainty. Nevertheless, the examples are best interpreted as documented instances of clarification and meaning negotiation, rather than evidence that all children experience the same difficulties.

Challenges Encountered in English Learning

Although the children reported positive experiences with English learning, the interview summaries also identified several challenges. At SB Permai Kulim, Sherli and Zahra expressed interest in learning English and described interactive activities, such as games and conversation practice, as enjoyable. However, both summaries indicated difficulties related to grammar and understanding. Vocabulary was generally described as easier to remember when the material was presented clearly. At SB At-Tanzil, Akbar's interview summary identified pronunciation, vocabulary selection, and sentence construction as areas of difficulty. He sometimes asked the teacher questions in Malay when he did not know an English word. The teacher's interview also identified pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar or sentence construction as challenges experienced by students during English lessons. The teacher responded by providing examples and explanations to support understanding. The findings suggest that the challenges encountered by the children were not limited to unfamiliar English vocabulary. They also involved producing English, selecting appropriate words, and constructing sentences. Familiarity with Malay or Indonesian could help students understand explanations, but it did not necessarily remove all difficulties in English learning. The available summaries also indicate variation among students: Sherli considered English relatively manageable while still experiencing difficulties with grammar and comprehension, whereas Akbar reported particular challenges with pronunciation and sentence construction. These differences highlight the importance of examining children's learning experiences individually rather than assuming that all multilingual learners face identical challenges. Huang and Chalmers (2023) provide a useful broader perspective on the role of multilingual resources in EFL

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classrooms. In the context of the present study, familiar languages appeared to offer a means of seeking clarification and supporting comprehension, while English production continued to present challenges for some students. The findings therefore suggest that teachers need to consider both students' existing linguistic resources and their specific learning needs when providing explanations and opportunities for English practice. Overall, the findings show that language practices at the two Sanggar Bimbingan are shaped by the children's everyday linguistic environments, their familiarity with Indonesian and Malay, and the demands of English learning. Malay was prominent in the available accounts of everyday interaction, while Indonesian and Malay also served as resources for understanding classroom material. Lexical differences sometimes required clarification, and students continued to experience challenges in producing English. These patterns demonstrate the value of examining multilingual language practices in their specific social and educational contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the language practices of Indonesian migrant children at SB Permai Kulim and SB At-Tanzil in Malaysia. The findings indicate that Malay plays an important role in the children's everyday interactions, while Indonesian and Malay are also used as linguistic resources to support understanding during English learning. Although the children could generally understand Indonesian explanations, some Indonesian words were less familiar to them than their Malay equivalents. These differences sometimes required clarification through peer assistance or explanations from teachers. The findings also show that familiar linguistic resources can help children interpret unfamiliar vocabulary and participate in classroom interactions. The examples involving *guest*, *tamu*, and *tetamu*, as well as *penghapus* and *pemadam*, illustrate how lexical differences between Indonesian and Malay may influence meaning-making. Nevertheless, using familiar languages does not eliminate all challenges in English learning. The available interview summaries indicate that students continued to experience difficulties with aspects such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence construction, although the specific challenges varied among individuals.

Overall, this study highlights the importance of understanding multilingual language practices in relation to children's everyday linguistic environments and educational experiences. The findings suggest that educators at Sanggar Bimbingan may benefit from recognizing students' existing linguistic resources and using familiar expressions to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary when appropriate. Such practices may help support comprehension and classroom participation while providing opportunities for students to develop their English skills. This study is limited by the number of interview participants, the focus on two Sanggar Bimbingan, and the use of interview summaries reconstructed from notes and recollections rather than complete verbatim transcripts. Therefore, the findings should be interpreted within the specific contexts examined and should not be generalized to all Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. Future research could involve a wider range of participants, more systematic classroom observations, and complete interview transcripts to investigate multilingual language practices in greater depth.

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