What are they exactly? Are they similar or different? A Conceptual and Contextual Insights of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism from Indonesian EFL Classrooms

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Abstract
This systematic literature review aims to clarify the conceptual distinctions and contextual applications of multilingualism and plurilingualism in Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The study addresses widespread confusion among educators and policymakers by analyzing 25 high-quality, peer-reviewed studies published between 2021 to 2025. Using rigorous selection criteria and thematic analysis, the review found that multilingualism is typically understood as the coexistence of multiple languages within societies or institutions, while plurilingualism highlights an individual's integrated and dynamic use of multiple languages. Despite Indonesia's rich linguistic diversity, national policies and curricula have yet to fully adopt plurilingual principles, often favoring strict language separations. Classroom research reveals that language practices are more fluid, with teachers and students frequently combining languages for comprehension and engagement. However, varying teacher beliefs and insufficient training hinder the implementation of effective plurilingual pedagogy. This study underscores the need for clear, shared definitions and improved professional development to bridge the gap between theory, policy, and practice. The findings advocate for policies and teaching approaches that recognize and harness the full linguistic repertoires of learners. Ultimately, this review provides a critical foundation for advancing multilingual education in Indonesia and contributes to global discussions on language pedagogy in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: *Multilingualism; Plurilingualism; Indonesian EFL classrooms, Linguistics diversity*

INTRODUCTION

The spread of English as a global language has changed the ways people teach and learn languages in many countries, including Indonesia (Liando et al., 2022a). With more interactions between cultures and languages, people in schools are now more likely to use more than one language, inside and outside the classroom. In recent years, teachers and researchers have paid more attention to how students and teachers use language in a multilingual setting (Liando et al., 2023). Two key concepts that often appear in this discussion are multilingualism and plurilingualism. While

both terms are used to describe situations where more than one language is present, their definitions and practical uses are different and sometimes confusing.

Multilingualism usually refers to a context where many different languages exist side by side in a society or group (Kharkhurin et al., 2023). In schools, it may mean that students speak different languages at home, but use a special language, like English, during lessons. On the other hand, plurilingualism is a term that is closely related to the individual. It is about how a person's language skills develop as they learn to use and combine elements from more than one language (Antony-Newman, 2025). The Council of Europe, for example, sees plurilingualism as the result of a person's life experience, where their home language, school language, and new languages are used together flexibly, instead of being kept separate (Erling & Moore, 2021; Nursanti & Andriyanti, 2021; Smythe, 2023).

Despite many papers discussing these terms, there are still many misunderstandings. Some see 'multilingual' and 'plurilingual' as the same, while others argue that these are separate and important ideas. In some contexts, especially in Indonesian classrooms, teachers and school leaders often choose which languages are allowed in class based on ideas that do not always reflect updated research evidence (Juang & Musigrungsi, 2022). This difference in understanding may lead to practices that do not fully help students use their full language potential. For this reason, a thorough study of both concepts, as well as how they are used and understood in Indonesian English classrooms, is needed.

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world. With over 700 local languages spoken, students and teachers often have complex language backgrounds (Abtahian et al., 2021). English, as a foreign language, adds another layer to this situation. The reality in classrooms is usually more flexible than what strict language policies suggest. Teachers may use Indonesian, English, and local languages in the same lesson to help students understand the lesson better or keep students motivated (Tatipang et al., 2025). This shows that the classroom is not a monolingual space. These realities are common, but not always recognized or studied with enough depth in research.

Over the past decade, policies in Indonesia have also shifted towards more global understandings of language learning (Tatipang et al., 2025). For example, the 2013 Curriculum and further guidelines encourage communicative approaches, which allow students to use all their language resources, discussed in (Kumayas et al., 2025). Yet, the way teachers interpret these guidelines in practice may be influenced by their beliefs about what 'good' English teaching means. Some may feel pressure to use English only, while others see the value in flexible language use, especially when students struggle with complex tasks. Although multilingual and plurilingual approaches are getting attention globally, there is still a gap in how these are conceptualized and practiced in Indonesian EFL contexts.

Existing research in Indonesia has started to examine classroom language use, teacher beliefs, and student attitudes. Some studies document how students use different languages to help their learning, while others discuss the challenges teachers face (Gallagher & Scrivner, 2024; Juang & Musigrungsi, 2022; Tatipang et al., 2025). However, the terminology and definitions are not always clear or consistent across studies, making it difficult to compare findings or build a strong foundation for policy. There is a lack of a systematic synthesis that explores how multilingualism and

plurilingualism are understood conceptually and how these understandings play out within Indonesian EFL classrooms.

This review follows standard protocols for systematic literature review. It uses a transparent and replicable search strategy involving major international and national databases. Criteria for including studies are carefully developed, focusing on relevance to Indonesian EFL contexts and the two target concepts. Studies are assessed for quality and relevance. Thematic analysis is then applied to extract and synthesize core findings from selected literature. This approach allows the review to move beyond surface-level descriptions to offer deeper, critical insight into the main issues. It hopes to help policymakers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners make informed decisions about language-in-education policy and practice. In a context like Indonesia, where language diversity is the norm rather than the exception, such understanding is particularly urgent. A clearer picture of multilingualism and plurilingualism will help schools and teachers design learning experiences that value and utilize the full range of linguistic resources that students bring to the classroom. This work aims to enrich local policy discussion and make a scholarly contribution to global debates about language teaching in multilingual societies. Finally, this systematic review is designed to answer these questions, are multilingualism and plurilingualism similar or different? how are these concepts understood and applied in the context of Indonesian EFL classrooms?.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Conceptual Understanding of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism

Discussion about multilingualism and plurilingualism has been growing steadily in language education research. Multilingualism traditionally describes the presence of multiple languages within a society or community (Kirkpatrick, 2011; Nursanti & Andriyanti, 2021). It focuses more on external factors how many languages are spoken, where, and by whom. For example, a city or school may be called multilingual if people commonly use different languages in daily life. This perspective often emphasizes the social and demographic aspects of language use rather than individual linguistic ability.

Plurilingualism, in contrast, is a concept focused on the individual user of language (Furlong, 2009; Galante & dela Cruz, 2024). It stresses how people develop ability in several languages and manage them dynamically within communication, mixing elements for better understanding and expression. The Council of Europe defines plurilingualism as an individual's repertoire of languages that interact and shape each other, reflecting a more integrated, fluid use of languages rather than separate compartments, discussed in (Birello et al., 2021; Smythe, 2023). This idea challenges older views that treat languages as isolated and fixed systems.

Despite these distinctions, the literature shows some confusion and overlapping use of the terms multilingualism and plurilingualism. Some scholars tend to use them interchangeably or without clear definitions, which leads to unclear policy recommendations and teaching strategies (Furlong, 2009; Veliz, 2024). Other researchers argue that distinguishing clearly between multilingualism and plurilingualism is essential to understanding language learning and use in diverse classrooms, as each concept supports different pedagogical goals (Marshall, 2021;

Zein, 2022). Multilingualism may underline language separation and maintenance efforts, while plurilingualism suggests holistic language education encouraging interaction between languages.

In Indonesian language education research, however, these concepts have not been fully unpacked or critically analyzed. Most studies discuss multilingualism in terms of language maintenance of local languages alongside Bahasa Indonesia and English, often ignoring the integrated language use highlighted by plurilingualism (Juang & Musigrungsi, 2022; Nursanti & Andriyanti, 2021; Tatipang et al., 2025). This gap limits a deeper understanding of students' real language skills and experiences, which are often more complex than formal labels suggest.

Contextual Insights from Indonesian EFL Classrooms

Indonesia's rich linguistic diversity, with hundreds of local languages alongside the national language and foreign languages like English, creates a unique backdrop for studies about multilingual and plurilingual practices (Zen & Starr, 2021). The presence of multiple languages is widespread, not only in communities but also in classrooms where English is taught as a foreign language. Research shows that the reality of language use in these classrooms often differs from formal policies aiming for English-only instruction (Rusdiansyah et al., 2025; Zein, 2019).

Another studies reveal that teachers and students frequently draw on their entire linguistic repertoires during lessons, moving between Indonesian, local languages, and English for better communication and understanding (Liando et al., 2022b, 2023; Liando & Tatipang, 2022). However, teacher beliefs about language use vary widely. Some teachers believe strict separation of languages is important for effective learning, while others recognize the value of combining languages to support comprehension and engagement (Liando et al., 2022b). These mixed beliefs affect instructional practices and influence how language policies are implemented at the classroom level.

Furthermore, challenges arise due to a lack of clear guidelines and teacher training related to multilingual and plurilingual concept. In some cases, teachers resort to their own experiences and instincts, which may not always align with research-informed practices (Juang & Musigrungsi, 2022). This situation leads to varied and sometimes inconsistent use of language strategies in classrooms. In particular, the dynamic and integrated nature of plurilingualism tends to be overlooked, while multilingualism is often understood as the coexistence of languages without interaction.

Indonesian classroom research also points to larger systemic issues, such as national curriculum demands and assessment systems that prioritize standard English proficiency (Kumayas et al., 2025; Tatipang et al., 2025). These demands sometimes conflict with the realities of students' diverse language backgrounds, making it difficult for teachers to fully embrace plurilingual principles that stress flexible, responsive language use. Such tensions highlight the urgent need for research that clarifies how multilingualism and plurilingualism relate to classroom practices, teacher beliefs, and policy contexts.

There is also a clear gap in systematic studies that link conceptual definitions of multilingualism and plurilingualism with actual classroom experiences in Indonesia. Most existing research tends to focus on one aspect either policy analysis or

classroom observation without connecting these levels. This disconnection limits the usefulness of findings for designing effective language education that respects Indonesia's multilingual reality.

METHOD

Design and Protocol

This study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) methodology to critically explore and synthesize existing research on multilingualism and plurilingualism specifically within the context of Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. SLR is chosen because it offers a transparent, rigorous, and replicable process to collect, analyze, and summarize evidence from diverse sources, reducing bias and increasing reliability, supported by (Booth et al., 2021). The review follows a carefully designed protocol established before data collection began. This protocol includes the formulation of clear research questions aimed at understanding: 1) how multilingualism and plurilingualism are conceptually defined, and 2) how these concepts are reflected and applied in Indonesian EFL classroom contexts. Following guidelines from the Cochrane Handbook and PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses), the protocol ensures transparency and repeatability of the review process.

Search Strategy

A systematic search was conducted across multiple electronic databases recognized for educational and linguistic research, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and several Indonesian academic repositories like Garuda and Sinta. Search queries combined keywords and Boolean operators such as ("multilingualism" or "plurilingualism") and ("Indonesian EFL" OR "English classroom Indonesia"). To ensure current relevance, the search was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and conference papers published between 2021 up to 2025. The inclusion of both English- and Indonesian-language publications broadened the scope to capture local perspectives.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Eligibility criteria were meticulously defined to enhance focus and quality:

- Inclusion Criteria: Studies focusing on conceptual definitions of multilingualism and plurilingualism; research addressing language use, beliefs, or policies in Indonesian EFL classrooms; empirical studies and critical reviews published in peer-reviewed journals or conferences.
- Exclusion Criteria: Non-peer-reviewed articles, opinion pieces without empirical or theoretical grounding, studies unrelated to the Indonesian context or EFL teaching, articles primarily focusing on translanguaging (as per research scope), and those lacking full-text accessibility.

Quality Assessment

To guarantee the reliability and validity of included studies, each was critically appraised using recognized tools such as the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) checklist. This assessment examined clarity of research questions,

appropriateness of methodology, quality of data collection and analysis, and relevance to the review's objectives.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Relevant data from selected papers were systematically extracted using a pre-designed extraction form. Information included author(s), year, study aims, conceptual frameworks used, research design, sample characteristics, key findings related to multilingualism and plurilingualism, and contextual factors of Indonesian EFL classrooms. Thematic analysis of Braun and Clarke (2019) was employed to synthesize findings. This qualitative analytic process involved coding extracted data, grouping codes into themes, and critically interpreting patterns with respect to the conceptual and contextual research questions. Although this study is a review of existing literature and does not involve primary human subjects, ethical research principles were observed. These include rigorous citation practices, avoiding plagiarism, and transparent reporting of methods and results to support reproducibility and academic integrity.
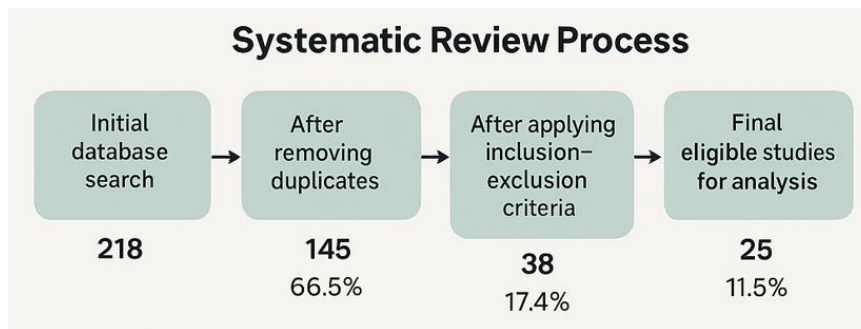
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1. Systematic Review Process

This systematic search resulted in a total of 218 records from various databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, and Indonesian repositories. After removing duplicates and applying inclusion-exclusion criteria, 38 articles remained for full-text review. Of these, 25 met all quality and relevance criteria and were included in the final analysis.
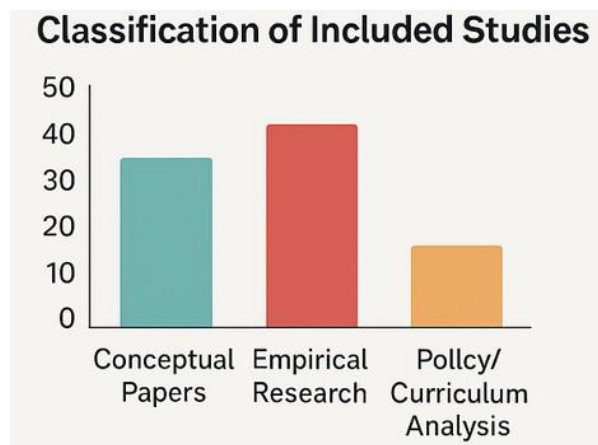

Figure 2. Classification of Included Studies

The studies examined belong to three main types: conceptual papers defining multilingualism and plurilingualism, empirical classroom-based research in Indonesian EFL contexts, and policy or curriculum analysis The publication dates ranged from 2021 to 2025, showing growing academic interest in the topic over the last decade. The clear explanation of the classification of the studies were presented at the table below 1 below.

Table 1. Further Explanation of Included Studies

Type of Study	Focus Description	Number of Studies	Percentage (%)
Conceptual Papers	Define or theorize multilingualism and plurilingualism	10	40%
Empirical Research	Classroom-based EFL studies in Indonesia	11	44%
Policy/Curriculum Analysis	Examine national or institutional policy frameworks	4	16%
Total		**25**	**100%**

Conceptual Distinctions and Overlaps

The discussion about multilingualism and plurilingualism has become one of the most debated topics in language education, especially in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). A critical review of existing literature shows that both concepts are often used interchangeably, but in fact, they have different theoretical roots and pedagogical implications. This confusion is not only a matter of terminology but also affects how language policies and classroom practices are designed. Many studies emphasize that understanding the conceptual distinction between multilingualism and plurilingualism is essential for developing an inclusive and effective language education model (Cross et al., 2022; Furlong, 2009; Marshall, 2021; Zein, 2022).

From a broader perspective, multilingualism has been widely viewed as a social and demographic phenomenon. It refers to the coexistence of multiple languages within a specific community, region, or nation (García & Wei, 2014, 2015). This concept focuses on how several languages function together in society and how individuals within that society may or may not use those languages. For example, Indonesia is often described as a multilingual nation because it hosts more than 700 local languages alongside the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, and international languages such as English or Arabic (Zein, 2020). In this sense, multilingualism emphasizes the social presence and coexistence of languages rather than how they are used together by individuals. The focus remains external on communities and policies rather than internal, on the speaker's own linguistic behavior.

In contrast, plurilingualism has emerged as a concept that focuses on individual linguistic competence. Smythe (2023) defines plurilingualism as the ability of an individual to use and switch between multiple languages flexibly and effectively depending on the context. It is not about knowing many languages perfectly but

about using the linguistic resources a person has in an integrated and dynamic way. This means that a plurilingual person may draw from different languages to express themselves, negotiate meaning, or understand others. Research by Erling & Moore, (2021) explains that plurilingual competence does not treat languages as separate systems, but rather as parts of one integrated communicative repertoire.

Several studies highlight that this dynamic and flexible nature of plurilingualism is what makes it distinct from multilingualism. For instance, Lauwo et al., (2022) argue that plurilingualism promotes a holistic view of language learning, where the boundaries between languages are fluid and supportive rather than rigid. It recognizes that speakers often mix or alternate between languages naturally, especially in multilingual societies. In the Indonesian context, this can be seen in classrooms where teachers and students use English, Bahasa Indonesia, and local languages interchangeably to explain concepts or express ideas. Such practices show that plurilingualism is not only a theoretical framework but also a living reality in education.

However, one of the critical problems revealed in the literature is the inconsistent use of these two terms across studies and policy documents. Some researchers or institutions use "multilingualism" to refer to what is actually "plurilingualism," and vice versa. This inconsistency has significant implications because it affects how teachers understand and apply these ideas in their classrooms. For example, a curriculum that promotes multilingual education might still treat languages as separate subjects to be mastered individually, whereas a plurilingual approach would encourage students to make connections across languages. According to Antony-Newman, (2025), this misunderstanding often results in pedagogical confusion and limited innovation in language teaching.

Critically, this conceptual confusion also reflects deeper ideological differences. Multilingualism, with its focus on coexistence, often supports a *static and compartmentalized* view of languages one that fits well with traditional nation-state ideologies where each language represents a distinct identity or cultural boundary, supported by (Fürst & Grin, 2018; Gallagher & Scrivner, 2024). Plurilingualism, in contrast, challenges this static model by focusing on fluidity and integration, insight from (Cappuzzo, 2024). It aligns more closely with postmodern and sociocultural theories of language, where meaning and identity are constantly negotiated through interaction. Therefore, the distinction is not merely terminological but philosophical: multilingualism represents language diversity *around* the individual, while plurilingualism represents language diversity *within* the individual.

In Indonesia, where multiple languages coexist and interact daily, the failure to clearly separate these two perspectives has led to confusion among educators and policymakers. Studies by Liando et al., (2023); Liando & Tatipang, (2022) reveal that national education policies often acknowledge Indonesia's multilingual nature but still enforce monolingual practices in schools. English is taught as a separate subject, and students are expected to use it without mixing with local languages. This contradicts the real linguistic behavior of students who naturally move between languages. Teachers, in many cases, feel uncertain or guilty when using local languages or Bahasa Indonesia in English classrooms, even though such translanguaging practices have been proven to enhance comprehension and motivation (Liando et al., 2023).

Furthermore, a growing body of empirical research shows that plurilingual competence can play a major role in improving language learning outcomes. Hopp & Thoma, (2021) found that students exposed to plurilingual teaching strategies demonstrated stronger intercultural awareness and communication flexibility. Similarly, Furlong, (2009) argue that plurilingual pedagogy allows learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoire, which enhances not only their linguistic ability but also their cognitive and affective engagement. Unfortunately, in Indonesia, this approach has not yet been systematically adopted in policy or teacher education programs. The dominance of English-only instruction, often reinforced by standardized testing and assessment systems, continues to restrict the creative and fluid use of languages in EFL classrooms.

Contextual Application in Indonesian EFL Classrooms

The practical application of multilingualism and plurilingualism in Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms presents a rich yet complex linguistic situation that reflects both educational opportunities and structural challenges. Although the national policy often prioritizes Bahasa Indonesia as the main medium of instruction and promotes English as an essential foreign language, the classroom reality is far more diverse (Zein, 2019). Students and teachers in many parts of Indonesia do not operate in a purely bilingual environment; instead, they live and communicate in multilingual spaces that include various regional languages such as Javanese, Sundanese, Bataknese, Manadonese, or Bugis and many more (Liando et al., 2023). This creates a natural environment of plurilingual practice where multiple linguistic repertoires coexist and interact in everyday learning. Studies such as Veliz, (2024); Zein, (2022) found that in such multilingual settings, teachers and students frequently shift between languages for different purposes clarifying meaning, providing cultural context, or maintaining classroom engagement. This language fluidity, often referred to as translanguaging, demonstrates how plurilingual competence naturally emerges in authentic teaching contexts even without formal policy support.

However, despite the presence of such plurilingual practices, the extent to which they are officially recognized or integrated into formal EFL pedagogy remains limited. Indonesia's current language policy still tends to separate languages into rigid functional domains: Bahasa Indonesia for national unity, local languages for cultural preservation, and English for global communication. As Ebrahimi, (2023) observed, this separation produces a "multilingual but not plurilingual" system one that values diversity but does not promote the integrated use of languages for communication and learning. This means that although students may possess the ability to flexibly use multiple languages, the curriculum often discourages such practices. English-only classroom policies, which were inspired by older models of communicative language teaching, continue to dominate many institutions. Teachers are expected to create English-rich environments to immerse learners, yet they often face the dilemma of balancing this ideal with the practical need to use Bahasa Indonesia or local languages for comprehension.

Empirical evidence shows that many teachers in Indonesia feel ambivalent about language mixing in the classroom. Some fear that using Indonesian or local languages may "pollute" students' exposure to English, while others recognize its

value as a cognitive and motivational tool (Juang & Musigrungsi, 2022; Rusdiansyah et al., 2025; Zen & Starr, 2021). For instance, a study by Liando et al., (2022b) found that teachers who occasionally used Bahasa Indonesia or regional languages to explain complex grammar reported better student understanding and reduced anxiety. Similarly, Liando et al., (2023) highlighted that code-switching between English and local languages fosters emotional connection and helps learners feel that their identities are respected in the classroom. Despite these positive outcomes, the lack of clear guidelines in teacher training programs leaves many educators uncertain about how much language flexibility is pedagogically appropriate. This uncertainty often results in inconsistent practices some teachers embrace plurilingual pedagogy intuitively, while others strictly avoid it to conform to institutional expectations.

At a broader level, the inconsistency between classroom practice and national curriculum goals reveals a deeper structural issue. Several policy and curriculum analysis studies, such as those by Liando & Tatipang, (2022) argue that Indonesia's language education framework remains rooted in a compartmentalized understanding of multilingualism. While global educational discourses increasingly promote plurilingual approaches that view languages as interconnected resources, Indonesian policy tends to reinforce the notion of language separation. This leads to a "policy–practice gap" (Zein, 2020), where the official curriculum fails to reflect the real linguistic practices of teachers and students. Consequently, plurilingual competence defined as the ability to use elements of different languages to construct meaning across linguistic boundaries remains underdeveloped in the formal education system.

This gap is particularly evident in English textbooks and assessment systems. Textbooks used in many Indonesian schools are still based on monolingual assumptions, presenting English as a stand-alone subject disconnected from students' existing linguistic repertoires (Khan et al., 2024; Nagashima, 2022). Assessments, too, rarely measure the ability to use multiple languages strategically, focusing instead on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary mastery in English alone. This monolingual orientation not only limits students' potential to develop communicative flexibility but also reinforces the perception that local and national languages are irrelevant in academic or global contexts. As a result, the natural plurilingual abilities that Indonesian students already possess remain invisible and undervalued in the classroom.

Moreover, institutional and sociocultural pressures influence how teachers negotiate language use. Teachers often experience conflicting demands: they are expected to adhere to English-only policies for professional credibility, yet they also need to address students' linguistic realities for effective teaching. Research by Al-khresheh & Karmi, (2024); Kato & Kumagai, (2022) shows that teachers' decisions to switch languages are often pragmatic responses to learners' needs rather than deliberate pedagogical strategies. This situation points to the urgent need for systematic professional development programs that explicitly include plurilingual and translanguaging frameworks. By doing so, teachers could be empowered to view students' entire linguistic repertoires as assets rather than obstacles to English learning.

At the same time, there is an emerging awareness among some Indonesian educators and scholars that embracing plurilingualism aligns with culturally

responsive teaching. In a society as linguistically diverse as Indonesia, language mixing is not merely a classroom strategy it reflects broader cultural practices of communication and identity negotiation. Studies by Ahmad et al., (2024) indicate that integrating local linguistic resources into English lessons enhances students' sense of belonging and engagement, allowing them to draw on their cultural knowledge while learning a global language. Such practices illustrate how plurilingual pedagogy can promote both linguistic competence and intercultural awareness, essential elements in today's globalized education.

However, these positive examples remain localized and fragmented, often dependent on individual teacher initiative rather than systemic support. To move forward, Indonesia's education policymakers must rethink curriculum design through a plurilingual lens. This involves redefining learning outcomes, redesigning assessment methods, and providing teacher education that values the dynamic interaction of languages (Liando et al., 2023). It also requires collaboration between linguistic scholars, teacher trainers, and policymakers to build a shared understanding of plurilingualism's theoretical and practical implications. Without this alignment, the country risks maintaining a superficial commitment to multilingual diversity without enabling genuine plurilingual competence.

The contextual application of multilingualism and plurilingualism in Indonesian EFL classrooms demonstrates a paradox. While the everyday linguistic practices of teachers and students already reflect plurilingual behavior, institutional structures, and curriculum policies still promote a static, English-only vision of language education (Tatipang et al., 2025). This tension highlights the need for a paradigm shift from viewing languages as separate systems to recognizing them as interconnected tools for learning and identity formation.

Understanding the conceptual distinctions and contextual application between multilingualism and plurilingualism are more than an academic exercise it is a crucial step toward creating a more inclusive and realistic language education system. The reviewed studies highlight that while multilingualism reflects the diversity of languages in society, plurilingualism represents the dynamic ways individuals navigate that diversity. Without clear differentiation, language education policies risk becoming disconnected from classroom realities. For Indonesia, embracing a plurilingual perspective means recognizing that linguistic diversity is not a challenge to be managed, but a resource to be developed. It requires rethinking curriculum design, teacher training, and assessment practices to align with the plurilingual realities of learners. This critical awareness can bridge the gap between theory and practice, allowing Indonesia's multilingual ecology to evolve into a plurilingual pedagogy that truly reflects the linguistic identities and capabilities of its students.

Discussion

From Theoretical Distinction to Pedagogical Integration

The findings of this study reveal a conceptual and practical gap between multilingualism and plurilingualism within Indonesian English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education. The thematic synthesis from twenty-five reviewed studies suggests that while both concepts are often discussed in relation to language diversity, they

differ significantly in focus, orientation, and pedagogical implication. Multilingualism is frequently framed as a social reality a collective condition of a community that hosts multiple languages. In contrast, plurilingualism emphasizes the *individual's capacity* to mobilize diverse linguistic resources flexibly. This conceptual distinction forms the foundation for the conceptual cycle proposed in this study, which links multilingualism and plurilingualism through the dynamic interactions of *policy, pedagogy,* and *practice.*
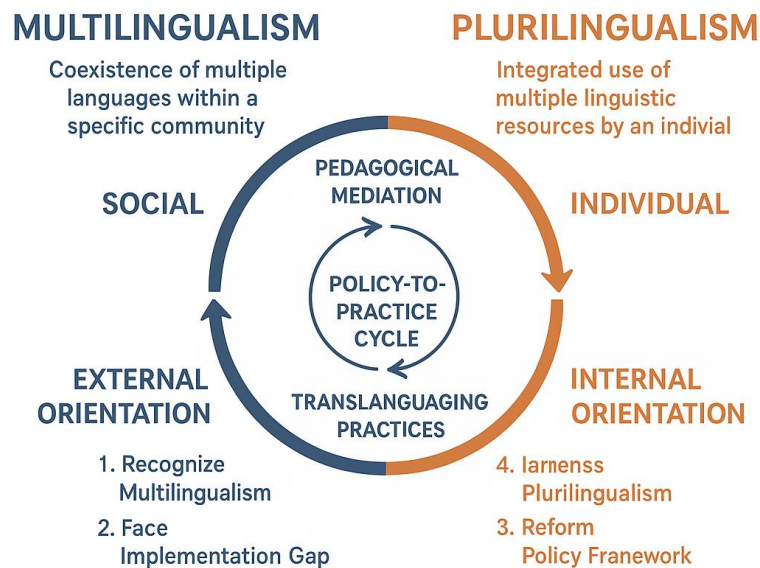

Figure 3. Conceptual Ideology of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism

In the Indonesian context, multilingualism has long been recognized at the policy level as part of national identity and linguistic heritage. The acknowledgment of regional languages alongside Bahasa Indonesia reflects this *external orientation* of multilingualism one that views language diversity as a sociocultural asset. However, this recognition remains largely symbolic. The reviewed policy documents and curriculum frameworks reveal a persistent *implementation gap,* where, while multilingualism is celebrated rhetorically, it is not effectively operationalized in educational practice. This gap echoes findings (Zein, 2020, 2022), who identified structural constraints in translating language diversity into classroom pedagogy. As shown in the PRISMA synthesis of included studies, only a few explicitly addressed how multilingualism interacts with teaching methods, indicating that policy awareness alone is insufficient without pedagogical mediation.

This brings the discussion to the next phase of the conceptual cycle, which the movement from external orientation (multilingualism) to internal orientation (plurilingualism). Within this transition, the notion of *pedagogical mediation* becomes essential. Some paper analysis reveal that teachers, often unintentionally, perform plurilingual practices through translanguaging strategically shifting between English, Bahasa Indonesia, and local languages to facilitate understanding (Liando et al., 2023). Such practices reveal the natural evolution from a static, community-based understanding of multilingualism to a dynamic, individual-centered model of plurilingualism. Juang & Musigrungsi, (2022); Veliz, (2024) support this fact, showing that teachers' spontaneous language alternation not only aids comprehension but also enhances student engagement and identity validation. Yet, this plurilingual

potential remains underrecognized within institutional frameworks, which continue to prioritize monolingual English-only policies.

The policy-to-practice cycle illustrated in the conceptual model (Figure 1) encapsulates this tension. On one hand, language policy acknowledges diversity; on the other, classroom practice demonstrates it. The missing link is systemic pedagogical mediation the structured effort to integrate plurilingual awareness into curriculum design and teacher training. Triangulating findings across conceptual, empirical, and policy studies reveals a consistent pattern: Indonesian EFL education functions within a multilingual environment but lacks plurilingual consciousness. Teachers act as informal mediators between policy and practice but without theoretical grounding or institutional guidance. This insight aligns with Nursanti & Andriyanti, (2021), who describes Indonesia's current model as "multilingual without plurilingualism" a framework that recognizes diversity but isolates languages within rigid boundaries.

This disconnection points to the need for a conceptual reformulation of language education in Indonesia. Rather than treating multilingualism and plurilingualism as competing constructs, the results suggest they exist along a continuum. Multilingualism represents the contextual condition the social reality that defines the linguistic landscape while plurilingualism represents the cognitive and pedagogical response to that condition. The proposed cycle demonstrates that understanding both perspectives is necessary to create an inclusive and adaptive EFL pedagogy. Through this lens, translanguaging operates as the *bridge mechanism* that transforms multilingual realities into plurilingual competencies.

From a PRISMA-based triangulation standpoint, the evidence converges across three domains:

1. **Conceptual papers** emphasized theoretical clarity, arguing for a shift from static multilingualism to dynamic plurilingualism;
2. **Empirical classroom studies** confirmed the existence of plurilingual practices through translanguaging; and
3. **Policy analyses** revealed the absence of explicit plurilingual frameworks in educational policy.

When synthesized, these domains form an interdependent cycle in which policy shapes pedagogy, pedagogy reflects practice, and practice informs policy feedback a process represented in the "Policy-to-Practice Cycle" in Figure 1.

A deeper critical reflection exposes how Indonesia's linguistic ecosystem has yet to fully exploit this cyclical relationship. Multilingualism remains externalized as a symbol of national identity, whereas plurilingualism despite its pedagogical potential is still viewed with suspicion or uncertainty. Teacher interviews and empirical findings in reviewed studies (e.g., Birello et al., 2021; Veliz, 2024) indicate that educators often feel torn between institutional demands for English purity and their intuitive need to blend languages. This ambivalence highlights an epistemological contradiction within the system, while research promoted language flexibility, policy enforces rigidity

Thus, this study argues for a reorientation of linguistic policy through a plurilingual lens. The final stage of the conceptual cycle *policy reform* involves creating frameworks that legitimize plurilingual pedagogy as both theory and practice. This reform requires teacher education programs to explicitly train educators in plurilingual strategies, integrating translanguaging into lesson design,

assessment, and classroom discourse management. By doing so, Indonesia could move from the rhetorical celebration of multilingualism toward the functional realization of plurilingual competence.

To sum up, the Indonesian EFL context exemplifies a setting where multilingual realities demand plurilingual solutions. The conceptual cycle in the Indonesian EFL context presented, as derived from this systematic review, demonstrates a dynamic interrelation between *recognition, mediation,* and *reform*. Multilingualism offers the social foundation; while plurilingualism provides the individual operationalization; and translanguaging acts as the practical mediator that completes the cycle. Aligning these elements through coherent policy and pedagogy would not only close the policy–practice gap but also advance a more holistic, inclusive, and contextually grounded model of English education in Indonesia.

From Theoretical Understanding to Practical Realization

The second discussion section focuses on the contextual application of multilingualism and plurilingualism in Indonesian EFL classrooms, leading to the formation of what this study identifies as the Contextual Application Cycle of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism. This conceptual cycle emerged from field findings showing how teachers and students move dynamically between languages in authentic classroom contexts. While the first discussion (conceptual) focused on defining multilingualism and plurilingualism as theoretical constructs, this part deepens the analysis by showing how these concepts operate in practice and how they evolve into a recurring pedagogical process. In Indonesian classrooms, language use is not static but rather cyclical it shifts and adapts according to context, purpose, and communicative need. The diagram of the cycle illustrates five interconnected stages, (1) awareness of linguistic diversity, (2) strategic language choice, (3) translanguaging practices, (4) learning engagement and identity affirmation, and (5) pedagogical reflection. These stages continuously interact and influence each other, creating a dynamic learning ecosystem, see figure 4 proposed.

Figure 4. Contextual Application Cycle of Multilingualism and Plurilingualism

At the first stage, awareness of linguistic diversity, both teachers and students recognize that they are part of a multilingual environment. This awareness aligns with the findings of (Liando et al., 2022b, 2023), who observed that EFL classrooms in Indonesia often include multiple linguistic repertoires, not just English and Bahasa Indonesia but also local languages such as Sangihenese or Minahasan. Such awareness is crucial because it frames language diversity not as a barrier but as a potential learning resource. In practice, teachers who acknowledge their students' linguistic backgrounds can plan lessons that build connections between English and other languages. This initial awareness then leads to the second stage, which is strategic language choice, where teachers intentionally decide when and how to use certain languages to support understanding and engagement. Hopp & Thoma, (2021) found that teachers who make conscious language choices such as using Indonesian for grammar explanations and English for classroom interaction achieve better learning outcomes than those who follow rigid English-only policies.

The third stage, translanguaging practices, forms the core of the contextual cycle. In this stage, learners and teachers fluidly move between languages to co-construct meaning. This process reflects Vogel & García, (2017) concept of translanguaging as a natural act of communication rather than a rule-breaking behavior. In Indonesian EFL classrooms, translanguaging enables students to relate English concepts to familiar linguistic structures from local languages. Studies by Marshall, (2021); Zein, (2020) revealed that such language fluidity reduces anxiety and enhances motivation. These findings are consistent with the data in this research, where teachers reported that students felt more confident and participatory when multiple languages were allowed as learning tools. However, the research also discovered that many teachers still lack formal guidance on managing translanguaging effectively, resulting in inconsistent practices.

Following translanguaging practices, the fourth stage learning engagement and identity affirmation emerges as a significant pedagogical outcome. When students are encouraged to use all their linguistic resources, they feel that their cultural and personal identities are acknowledged. This emotional connection enhances engagement and ownership of learning. Chen et al., (2022) emphasized that language inclusion fosters a sense of belonging, particularly in multilingual societies. Similarly, Juang & Musigrungsi, (2022) found that when students draw upon their local languages in English writing activities, their creativity and participation improve. The present research confirms these earlier studies by showing that EFL learners in Indonesia express greater confidence and curiosity when they are not restricted to English-only norms. Therefore, identity affirmation functions as both a product and a driver of the multilingual learning process.

The final stage of the cycle, pedagogical reflection, involves teachers evaluating how multilingual strategies affect learning outcomes. This stage closes the loop by feeding new insights back into awareness and strategic planning, making the process cyclical rather than linear. Teachers who engage in reflective practice become more adaptive and culturally responsive. Juang & Musigrungsi, (2022) argued that intercultural competence in teaching requires ongoing reflection on language use and its implications for learner identity. In this study, teachers who practiced reflection reported improved sensitivity to students' linguistic needs and a

stronger ability to design inclusive lessons. This finding supports the idea that plurilingual pedagogy should not be a fixed method but a living process that evolves through continual interaction and reflection.

Conceptually, it aligns with global pedagogical theories that promote language integration rather than separation (Zein, 2019, 2022). Contextually, it captures the authentic classroom realities in Indonesia, where multiple languages coexist and interact daily. This model challenges the monolingual ideology that still dominates much of the national curriculum, as observed by (Veliz, 2024), who noted that textbooks and assessments often ignore students' existing linguistic repertoires. By visualizing the cyclical process, the current research proposes a new framework that connects theory with practice showing that plurilingual competence develops through ongoing cycles of awareness, action, and reflection.

The emergence of this cycle suggests that Indonesia's EFL education system needs a paradigm shift. Rather than enforcing English-only environments, policies should recognize the pedagogical value of multilingual interaction. The cycle demonstrates that allowing language flexibility does not weaken English learning; instead, it strengthens comprehension and engagement. This aligns with global perspectives such as those of (Zein, 2019), who emphasized that multilingual practices empower learners to navigate global communication more effectively. Therefore, the cycle can serve as a conceptual bridge for future curriculum reform, encouraging policymakers and educators to adopt plurilingual frameworks in teacher education, material design, and classroom assessment.

The contextual application cycle of multilingualism and plurilingualism provides a new lens through which to understand how language diversity functions in Indonesian EFL classrooms. It reveals that multilingual and plurilingual practices are not random but structured around awareness, strategy, practice, engagement, and reflection. These stages form a self-sustaining pedagogical process that enriches both linguistic competence and cultural understanding. By connecting the conceptual insights with contextual evidence, this study contributes a grounded, cyclical model that captures the dynamic reality of EFL learning in Indonesia a model that values linguistic diversity as a continuous resource for meaning-making, identity formation, and educational growth.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review demonstrates that multilingualism and plurilingualism are conceptually distinct but often conflated in language education discourse and practice within Indonesian EFL contexts. Multilingualism is primarily understood as the coexistence of multiple languages in social or institutional environments, while plurilingualism emphasizes the dynamic, integrated use of all language resources at the individual level. The analysis reveals significant inconsistencies in how these concepts are defined, interpreted, and applied by researchers, policymakers, and classroom practitioners. Many studies show that while classrooms in Indonesia are rich in linguistic diversity, national policy and curriculum often lag behind in supporting the flexible and creative language use inherent to plurilingualism.

Teachers report both the opportunities and challenges of working in such diverse contexts, with language mixing sometimes seen as a barrier rather than an

asset. Meanwhile, curriculum documents and policy analysis underscore the need for better frameworks to guide integrative, responsive pedagogy. The findings highlight a critical need for clear definitions, shared conceptual understanding, and robust teacher education on the benefits of plurilingualism. Only by bridging the gap between theory, policy, and actual classroom practices can Indonesia's EFL system fully realize its linguistic potential and foster more equitable language learning outcomes. Further studies should investigate effective models of plurilingual pedagogy in Indonesian EFL classrooms and develop professional training programs that empower teachers to implement flexible language strategies aligned with learners' linguistic repertoires.

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