



## **ENGLISH IN THE EFL CLASSROOM: VOICES FROM INDONESIA'S PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS**

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### **abstract**

This study examines pre-service English teachers view the use of English as the main language for teaching in Indonesian EFL classrooms. It uses Krashen's Input Hypothesis and teacher cognition theory to understand how these teachers balance giving students understandable input with using their first language to support learning. The research uses a qualitative method based on phenomenological ideas, collecting data through semi-structured interviews and classroom microteaching observations with six pre-service teachers at UIN Palangka Raya. The results show three main ways of teaching: (1) immersion in English, (2) clarification through code-switching, and (3) reliance on Indonesian to ensure comprehension. These approaches were influenced by the teachers' past learning experiences, how confident they felt in teaching, and the challenges they faced in the classroom. Although using English full-time was seen as helpful for building language skills, using Indonesian strategically became a practical way to meet students' needs and manage the classroom effectively. The study shows how teacher thinking adapts in classrooms where English is the main teaching language and suggests how teacher training programs can help teachers make thoughtful and context-aware choices about how to use language in their teaching.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The use of English as a medium of instruction in English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts has remained a topic of discussion in applied linguistics. Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis emphasizes the role of comprehensible input in second language learning, suggesting that immersing students in English could be an effective method. However, research has also raised concerns that relying solely on English might impede understanding, especially when students' language abilities are not strong yet (Hall and Cook 2012; Macaro 2009; Baehaqi et al. 2025). This creates a situation where English as medium of instruction is both beneficial and challenging, particularly in places like Indonesia, where English is taught as a foreign language and is not commonly used in everyday life.

Studies on English as instruction in Indonesia show that teachers have different views and approaches. Lestari (2022) found that pre-service teachers saw translanguaging as a helpful technique to support learning, even though they understood the risk of less exposure to English. Cahyadi & Fitriyah (2024) noted that teachers often used code-switching as a way to keep students involved, while Suminto & Ena (2024) observed how Indonesian teachers in Thailand used various methods to maintain immersion in English-speaking environments. Giri et al. (2018) identified a gap between what teachers believe about immersion and how they actually teach, and Herdiawan (2023) and Sudana et al. (2023) found that teachers often go back to use Indonesian when students struggle to understand. These findings suggest that teachers are flexible in their language choices, influenced by their teaching beliefs, students' needs, and the overall situation they are in.

Although there has been more focus on EMI in Indonesian classrooms, there is not much research on how pre-service teachers think about and manage language use during their teaching practice. While past studies have looked at teachers' beliefs Pusparini et al. (2021) and translanguaging practices Lestari (2022), few have explored how pre-service teachers change their strategies based on different approaches. As a result, this study aims to examine how pre-service English teachers in Indonesia view the use of English as a teaching medium, with a focus on the factors in their environment that influence their language decisions.

Research on how teachers think highlights that their teaching methods are influenced not just by their formal knowledge of teaching but also by their personal beliefs, past experiences, and the conditions they face in the classroom (Borg 2003; Borg 2015). In situations where instruction is conducted in a language other than the students' first language, teachers' decisions about which language to use involve a balance between their teaching theories and the practical realities of the classroom. Recent research shows that teachers often modify the principles of using English for teaching by using the first language strategically to help students understand better and manage the classroom effectively (Macaro 2018; Galloway and Ruegg 2020). However, most research on English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has mainly focused on current teachers or school policies, leaving little attention to the thinking and teaching decisions of pre-service teachers. This is especially true in places where English is not widely used, like Indonesia. To fill this gap, this study explores how pre-service English teachers understand and apply English in their teaching practices.

## METHOD

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences and views of pre-service English teachers regarding the use of English as the language of instruction. Phenomenology was selected because it enables researchers to understand how individuals experience a particular situation from their own point of view (Creswell and Poth 2016; Moustakas 1994). This method is aligned with research on teacher cognition, which focuses on understanding classroom practices by looking at teachers' internal thought processes and their beliefs about teaching (Borg 2003).

Six pre-service English teachers from UIN Palangka Raya were selected using stratified purposive sampling. The choice to include six participants in this study was based on guidance from prominent phenomenological researchers. Creswell and Poth (2016) suggest that phenomenological studies generally involve between 5 and 25 participants, with smaller groups (around 6 to 10) being sufficient when the research thoroughly explores a specific phenomenon

through detailed data such as interviews and observations. Moustakas (1994) adds that phenomenological research values depth more than breadth, and the number of participants should depend on the researcher's ability to analyze lived experiences in depth, rather than on statistical representation. In this study, six participants were considered sufficient to understand the views of pre-service teachers regarding English use, as data saturation—the point where no new ideas or themes emerged—was reached with this sample. This method ensures a strong research approach while preserving the focused, individual-centered nature of transcendental phenomenology. These participants were divided into three groups based on how they used language in their teaching (Palinkas et al. 2015). This led to the formation of three distinct groups: Full English (FE), Partially English (PE), and Mostly Indonesian (MI).

Data were gathered through classroom microteaching observations and semi-structured interviews. The observations were recorded on video to document real classroom activities, while the interviews were conducted to get the participants' thoughts and reasons for their language choices. The interview questions focused on their beliefs, difficulties, and strategies related to use English in the classroom. Semi-structured interviews were preferred because they offer a balance between structure and openness in exploring participants' perspectives (Cohen, et al., 2017). Observational data were not employed as a formal triangulation strategy but were used to contextualize interview responses and support interpretive coherence. Confirmability was ensured by basing interpretation on participants' own perspectives and maintaining analytic transparency through systematic manual coding. Transferability was enhanced through thorough descriptions of the participants, the instructional settings, and the teaching contexts, enabling readers to assess how applicable the findings might be to other EFL EMI environments (Creswell and Poth 2018; Nowell et al. 2017).

The data analysis followed a phenomenological approach based on transcendental phenomenology (Moustakas 1994). Instead of strictly following every step of traditional phenomenological analysis, the study used an inductive and ongoing coding method to understand how participants experienced instruction and thought about teaching. Throughout the analysis, the researcher remained aware of their own thoughts and assumptions to avoid influencing the findings. Key phrases were found and grouped into meaningful categories, which were then compared across different teaching settings (FE, PE, MI) to examine how teachers viewed language use. In the end, a general summary was created to bring together common themes and differences in how participants approached language in their teaching.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study included six pre-service English teachers from the same institution. They were divided into three group based on the level of English used in their teaching. FE (Full English), PE (Partially English), and MI (Mostly Indonesian). These groupings represented different extents of using English as the medium of instruction and formed the foundation for the analysis. The way the participants were distributed across the groups also showed the variety in their teaching methods. This diversity was regarded as significant for understanding and interpreting the results of the study.

Below is a summary of participant information presented in tabular form:

Table 1. Participant Information

Participant Code	Gender	Year of study	Sampling Category	Data Source	Relevant Experience
P01	Female	7 <sup>th</sup> semester	FE	Observation + Interview	Completed Praktik Mengajar 1 Course
P02	Female	9 <sup>th</sup> semester	PE	Observation + Interview	Completed Praktik Mengajar 1
P03	Female	9 <sup>th</sup> semester	PE	Observation + Interview	Completed Praktik Mengajar 1 Course
P04	Male	7 <sup>th</sup> semester	FE	Observation + Interview	Completed Praktik Mengajar 1 Course
P05	Male	9 <sup>th</sup> semester	MI	Observation + Interview	Completed Praktik Mengajar 1 Course
P06	Female	7 <sup>th</sup> semester	MI	Observation + Interview	Completed Praktik Mengajar 1 Course

During the data collection phase, several challenges were faced, especially in finding participants who met the study's requirements. Although formal approval and a pilot test were completed successfully, some potential participants did not have the necessary observation videos, others refused to take part due to personal reasons, and a few did not fully qualify based on the eligibility criteria. These difficulties delayed the recruitment process. However, by using flexible approaches, a suitable group of participants was ultimately found, enabling the research to continue as intended.

## Findings

This section describes the results obtained by following Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological approach, which includes the steps of epoché, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and composite essence. The analysis centers on the views of pre-service English teachers about using English as a medium of instruction and the factors that influenced their teaching practices.

### *Epoché*

At the beginning of the study, the researcher used epoché by setting aside personal assumptions about teaching English only. This approach helped ensure that the interpretation of the data was based on what the participants shared, rather than on the researcher's previous ideas about how language should be used in the classroom.

*Research question 1 How do pre-service English teachers perceive the use of English in Indonesian EFL classrooms?*

*Phenomenological Reduction - "What"*

The analysis identified three main approaches to use language in the classroom.

*Theme 1- Exposure through immersion (FE group)*

Participants in this group made English the main language used during their teaching. They used English consistently in all classroom activities, showing their belief that regular

exposure is important for building students' skills in listening and speaking the target language. One teacher explained, "I always try to speak in English even if students look confused" (P01), indicating that confusion was seen as a normal part of learning rather than a reason to switch to another language. To help students understand better, they used techniques like repeating words, speaking more slowly, using gestures, and displaying visual aids. These methods were meant to keep the information clear while still keeping students immersed in the language. The FE group also believed that less use of English could make it harder for students to adjust, so they tried to use English as much as possible. This approach showed that they saw immersion not just as a teaching method, but also as a way to define their professional role as English teachers, where using English in all classroom activities was a priority.

#### *Theme 2 - Clarification through code-switching (PE group)*

In contrast, the PE group used languages more flexibly. These teachers started lessons in English but changed to Indonesian when they noticed students were having trouble understanding. One teacher said, "Sometimes I explain in Indonesian when students cannot follow" (P02), showing they were aware of students' understanding levels. Another teacher pointed out that using Indonesian for translation or brief explanations was not meant to replace English, but to support it, ensuring that learning goals were still achieved. The PE teachers viewed switching between languages as a teaching decision that balanced language exposure with clarity. For them, using English without ensuring understanding could lead to students losing interest, so they used Indonesian to bring students back into focus before going back to English. This shows that their approach to use English was not fixed, but instead changed depending on what was needed in the classroom.

#### *Theme 3 - Ensuring comprehension through L1 (MI group)*

The participants in the MI program mainly used Indonesian as their primary language for teaching, with English being used only occasionally and usually in a symbolic way, such as for greetings or farewells. One teacher mentioned, "It feels faster to use Indonesian for explanation" (P05), which shows that efficiency was a key reason for choosing Indonesian. These educators see Indonesian as the most effective way to keep lessons running smoothly and ensure students understand the material without any delays. Although they recognized the value of exposing students to English, they felt it was not as important as maintaining classroom discipline and achieving clear understanding quickly. Their approach reflected a practical mindset, where language selection was closely linked to how ready students were and the need to complete lesson goals within a short time frame. By using Indonesian as the default language, they minimized the chance of confusion but also limited the amount of consistent English exposure. This viewpoint illustrates the challenge between focusing on long-term language growth and meeting the immediate needs of the classroom.

Table 2. Pre-Service Teachers' Respons

Participant	Statement	Initial Code	Theme
P01 (FE)	<i>"I always try to speak in English even if students look confused."</i>	English persistence	Exposure through immersion
P02 (PE)	<i>"Sometimes I explain in Indonesian when students cannot follow."</i>	Switching for clarity	Clarification through code-switching

P03 (PE)	<i>"I explain in English first then translate to Indonesian."</i>	Translation scaffolding	Ensuring comprehension through L1
P04 (FE)	<i>"I use gestures and visuals to make my English clearer."</i>	Non-verbal support	Exposure through immersion
P05 (MI)	<i>"It feels faster to use Indonesian for explanation."</i>	Reliance on L1	Ensuring comprehension through L1
P06 (MI)	<i>"I open and close in English, but explain the lesson in Indonesian so students understand."</i>	Balancing language use	Ensuring comprehension through L1

*Research question 2 What factors influence their perspectives on using English as the medium of instruction?*

*Imaginative Variation – “How”*

*Theme 1 - Exposure through immersion (FE group)*

This theme highlights the teachers' strong dedication to use English as the main language for instruction. They believed that continuous exposure to the language would allow students to learn it more naturally. Even when learners seemed confused or confused, the teachers continued to use English, seeing consistency as essential for developing language habits. To help with understanding, they used different techniques like giving context, using gestures, varying their tone, and showing visual aids. These methods supported immersion while still making the language clear and accessible to students.

*Theme 2 - Clarification through code-switching (PE group)*

This theme shows how teachers intentionally used both English and Indonesian to keep students engaged and understanding. They often switched languages when explaining grammar or abstract ideas, as they found it is difficult to explain these concepts only in English. Code-switching was also seen as a way to include all students in the lesson. Frequently, teachers started with English to provide language exposure and then used Indonesian to clarify points, showing that learning and understanding were considered as supporting each other rather than being in conflict.

*Theme 3 - Ensuring comprehension through L1 (MI group)*

This theme focuses on how Indonesian was used practically to ensure that students understood the material, the lesson ran smoothly, and classroom management was effective. Teachers paid close attention to how students responded like through silence, confusion, or lack of involvement and used Indonesian when needed. For them, using the first language was a realistic way to complete lessons and meet the curriculum requirements. The main goal was making sure students grasped what was being taught, even if it meant less time using English. In this view, Indonesian was not seen as replacing English, but as a helpful tool to balance the benefits of immersion with the need for clear understanding.

## *Composite Essence*

When considered together, the results reveal that pre-service teachers view language use as a continuous spectrum rather than a strict separation between using only English or only Indonesian. Some teachers stressed the importance of immersion for language development, others used code-switching to balance language exposure with understanding, and some primarily used Indonesian to ensure clarity and maintain classroom management. These differing approaches suggest that teachers' language choices are flexible and influenced by the specific situations they face, showing a continuous process of adjusting between the goal of increasing English exposure and the practical needs of teaching in Indonesian classrooms.

## **Discussion**

The study showed that pre-service teachers use language in different ways, ranging from fully using English to mixing English and Indonesian and relying mostly on Indonesian. This shows that how teachers use language in the classroom is flexible and changes depending on their beliefs, the needs of their students, and the teaching environment. For instance, some teachers focus on full immersion, while others adjust their approach by switching between languages depending on how well students understand as P02 clearly stated "Sometimes I explain in Indonesian when the students cannot follow".

The group that focused on full immersion in English showed a strong belief in using English consistently. This matches Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, which suggests that language is best learned through comprehensible input. Like Giri et al. (2018), these teachers believed that regular exposure helps build language skills, even if students sometimes looked confused. A sentiment echoed by P01 "I always try to speak in English even if students look confused". They also used gestures and pictures, similar to what Suminto & Ena (2024) found, where Indonesian teachers in Thailand used different ways of communicating to keep students engaged in English learning environments. P04, for example, placed a strong emphasis on non-verbal support, saying, "I use gestures and visuals to make my English clearer", and also limited translation to promote understanding through context, explaining, "I rarely translate because I want them to use context clues". Their main objective, as P01 explained, was for students to "adapt to English naturally", showing a strong belief in the power of subconscious language learning.

The other group used both English and Indonesian, switching between them. This supports Macaro (2009) idea that using the first language a little can help learning, and it also fits with Vygotsky (1978) theory about supporting students through step-by-step guidance. As Lestari (2022) found, these teachers saw using both languages as a helpful strategy rather than a weakness. Cahyadi & Fitriyah (2024) also reported that pre-service teachers used their first language in a smart way to stay connected with students. Pusparini et al. (2021) noted that how teachers think about language use is often influenced by their past experiences and training, which is also true in this study. The PE group's use of code-switching was not haphazard but carefully planned and adaptable. P02 deliberately switched to Indonesian, particularly when discussing grammar or abstract ideas, as P02 was aware of the mental effort required by the students. P02 also focused on making everyone feels included, stating, "I do not want students to feel left behind". Likewise, P03 employed a structured approach by first explaining concepts in English and then translating them to Indonesian, ensuring that students were still exposed to English while understanding the material. their non verbal communication was also significant. Similar findings were also observed in the study by Samudro et al. (2025) where students mentioned that fast-paced and complex English input in podcasts was hard to follow without

support like repetition or translation. This is consistent with the current study, in which participants from the PE and MI groups highlighted the importance of using Indonesian strategically to help make the input easier to understand and maintain learner engagement. P03 mentioned, “When students look blank, I provide Indonesian”, which shows a keen awareness of how students are responding and a willingness to adjust accordingly.

The MI group focuses on efficiency and clarity using Indonesian. This approach aligns with the practical challenges highlighted by Herdiawan (2023) and Sudana et al. (2023), who noted that relying solely on English can make content difficult to understand and often necessitates translation into the students' first language. Similarly, Ladi & Soma (2023) found that pre-service teachers in the Kampus Mengajar programs commonly used Indonesian to support students who have limited English skills. These observations indicate that the frequent use of the first language in the classroom is often a result of real-world teaching conditions rather than a lack of understanding about the benefits of language exposure. P05 clearly explained his reasoning “It feels faster to use Indonesian for explanation”, and “using English slows the lesson pace”. For P05, classroom management was important “when students seem restless, using Indonesian helps keep them focused”. P06, on the other hand, focused mainly on making sure students understood “Students get confused if I use English too long”, and P06 pointed out the effect on behaviour “They become quiet when they do not understand” P06’s approach was “I open and close in English, but explain the lesson in Indonesian so students understand”. A practical way to meet school requirements while still teaching effectively.

While Krashen’s (1982) Input Hypothesis strongly supports immersion as the main way for language learning, this study shows a more complex and at times conflicting connection between his theory and what happens in classrooms in the Indonesian EFL setting. On one side, the FE group consistently uses English, even when students are confused, which follows Krashen’s main idea that regular exposure to the target language is key for natural learning. They also use gestures, pictures, and repetition, which matches Krashen’s view that input should be understood, not just present in large amounts. Because of this, the FE group can be considered the most loyal to Krashen’s ideas. But there is a significant difference between the PE and MI groups and other approaches. They often use Indonesian, which seems to contradict Krashen’s idea of full immersion. When teachers like P05 say, “It feels faster to use Indonesian for explanation,” or P02 switches to Indonesian because “students cannot follow,” it appears that they are not following Krashen’s approach. However, this does not mean they are rejecting Krashen’s theory. Instead, it shows that using only English can sometimes make the input difficult to understand, which goes against the main idea of Krashen’s theory: that input must be understandable. In these cases, using the first language is not against Krashen’s ideas. It is a practical way to ensure the input is actually comprehensible. So, the PE and MI groups are not abandoning Krashen’s theory; they are trying to make sure his core idea of comprehensible input is met when immersion alone is not enough.

This leads to a significant reassessment: Krashen’s theory is not fundamentally at odds with the use of the first language. His main principle is not that students should only use English, but that they should receive comprehensible input. In high-proficiency or bilingual environments, full immersion might be enough to ensure understanding. However, in low-exposure English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings such as Indonesia, where students lack the background to infer meaning from context, using the first language becomes essential in helping them grasp the input. Therefore, what seems like a contradiction in Krashen’s theory is actually a result of applying it without considering the specific context in which it was originally developed. The teachers in this study, especially those in the PE group, show an instinctive grasp of this idea. They use English to provide exposure, but they also use Indonesian

strategically to make sure the input is understandable. Thereby aligning more closely with Krashen's original intent than those who insist on using only English, even if it hinders comprehension.

### **Conceptual Contributions to Teacher Cognition and EMI Research**

Beyond confirming existing theories, this study makes several important contributions to research on teacher cognition and English-medium instruction (EMI). First, the findings indicate that pre-service teachers' understanding of language use is not a fixed set of beliefs, but rather a process that changes depending on the situation. This process is shaped by the ongoing interaction between their teaching ideals and the actual challenges they face in the classroom. Recent studies on EMI teacher development show that effective teaching in English-medium settings requires continuous adaptation and reflection, as teachers work to balance their beliefs, teaching methods, and the constraints imposed by their institution (Wang, Yuan, and Costa 2025). This supports and builds upon Borg's (2003) idea of teacher cognition by emphasizing its dynamic and responsive nature within EMI contexts, especially among pre-service teachers who are still developing their professional identities.

Second, the study views EMI practices as existing on a continuous scale rather than as a simple choice between using only English or relying on the students' first language for instruction. Previous research on EMI teaching has shown that teachers adjust their methods based on language and subject-related challenges, employing various strategies to balance teaching content with language skills (Richards and Pun 2022). This study adds value to EMI research by presenting a more detailed framework—through the perspectives of foreign English, plurilingual, and multilingual orientations—that captures how teachers make decisions over time regarding language exposure, understanding, and classroom control in English as a foreign language setting.

Finally, the findings offer a new way of understanding Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis in environments where English is not widely used. Instead of opposing the idea of immersion, the study shows that using the first language strategically can help keep the input understandable, especially when using only English in teaching is not effective. Recent research on English-medium instruction (EMI) highlights that making content easier to understand and keeping students involved often needs flexible approaches to language teaching, especially when teachers' skills and students' preparedness differ (Huang 2024)). This indicates that in EMI contexts, teachers' thinking is less influenced by strict following of theoretical frameworks and more driven by practical approaches aimed at maintaining valuable learning experiences, placing this study within ongoing discussions about the effectiveness and flexibility of EMI teaching methods.

In general, the results support Borg (2003) concept of teacher cognition, demonstrating that the teaching methods of pre-service teachers are influenced by both their theoretical beliefs and the specific circumstances they face. Although Krashen's idea of comprehensible input remains a key principle, this study shows that its implementation in Indonesian classrooms often involves balancing it with practical needs. In this way, the study contributes to existing research by placing the language choices of pre-service teachers within a broader context, illustrating the flexible and responsive nature of teaching practices in the classroom.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that how pre-service teachers use English in classrooms focused on English-medium instruction is influenced by the ongoing interaction between their teaching beliefs, students' needs, and the actual conditions of the classroom. The findings reveal

that EMI practices in Indonesian English as a Foreign Language settings exist along a spectrum rather than following a rigid English-only approach, showing how teachers continuously adapt to the specific situations in their classrooms.

The results also show that teachers' thinking about language use is flexible and sensitive to their environment, evolving through the balance between educational theories and real-world challenges. For teacher training programs, this emphasizes the need to equip future teachers with both theoretical understanding of EMI and opportunities to engage in thoughtful reflection and make decisions based on the specific context they will face. At the policy level, the implementation of EMI should recognize the variety of classroom situations and provide teachers with the flexibility needed to ensure that greater exposure to English supports, rather than hinders, student understanding and effective teaching.

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## DECLARATION OF AI AND AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

The author utilized AI-assisted tools to help improve the language and to better explain the methodological procedures during the revision of the manuscript. However, no AI tools were used for coding the data, analyzing it, interpreting the results, or developing themes. All decisions related to analysis and interpretation were made by the author, who is fully responsible for the content and the academic integrity of this manuscript.

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