

Shifting tongues: Factors shaping bilingual preservice teachers' language use in ELT

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how bilingual preservice teachers navigate language choices when teaching English to emergent bilinguals who share their home language. Eighteen Malay-English bilingual preservice teachers, enrolled in a postgraduate primary teacher education programme, participated by keeping reflective journals during a three-month teaching practicum. The study focuses on the critical dilemma these teachers faced: whether to use English exclusively or incorporate the learners' home language, and to what extent. Qualitative analysis of the reflection journals identified five key factors influencing language choices: teacher identity, learner needs and engagement, learner identity, institutional expectations and reflective practices. The study introduces a continuum of reactive and intentional translanguaging shifts, framing translanguaging as a dynamic and developmental process responsive to classroom contexts. Findings show that while some teachers initially preferred English-only instruction, many adapted their language use to meet learners' needs, often engaging in strategic translanguaging. The extent and purposes of home language use varied across instructional settings, reflecting both personal teaching philosophies and institutional pressures. The study argues that teacher education programmes must move beyond traditional English-only ideologies to prepare future teachers to critically manage translanguaging practices. By empowering teachers to make purposeful, informed language choices, initial teacher education can play a pivotal role in redefining bilingual education for a more inclusive and equitable future.

Keywords: bilingual education; emergent bilinguals; preservice teachers; teacher education; translanguaging