

Navigating pedagogical choices: Teacher decision-making in remote learning environment

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ABSTRACT

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Decision-making is the fundamental teaching skill that is enacted in practice. This study examines the types of pedagogical decisions teachers make in remote teaching practices and how translanguaging functions as a form of pedagogical decision-making in virtual ELT classrooms. Employing a directed qualitative content analysis design, the study drew on virtual classroom observations of five lecturers from five private universities in West Java, Indonesia. Observation notes and video transcripts were analysed using Scott and Bruce's (1995) five-type decision-making framework — rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous — as the primary analytical lens. Findings revealed that spontaneous decision-making was the most frequently observed type, reflecting the unpredictable nature of remote learning environments, followed by rational and intuitive decisions. Dependent and avoidant decisions occurred with considerably lower frequency. Translanguaging was observed across all participants and mapped onto rational, intuitive, and spontaneous decision types. These findings contribute theoretically to teacher cognition research in digital multilingual contexts and practically to remote ELT teacher preparation.



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1. Introduction

Teaching is fundamentally a process of decision-making, making it an essential competency all educators must develop (Estapa & Davis, 2023; Karimi et al., 2023; Lawson & Jones, 2017). The body of research on pedagogical decision-making reflects two broad and intersecting concerns: the cognitive nature of decision-making itself, and the contextual pressures that shape it, including the emotional, technological, and interactional demands of online instruction (Liu et al., 2024; Truong et al., 2025). On the cognitive side, Kansanen (1995) investigated the decision-making process, which he dubbed "pedagogical thinking", concluding that decision-making involves choosing between options at varying levels of consciousness. Perfecto (2012) extended this view, finding that teachers' decision-making was cognitively taxing and recursive because they had to strike a balance between the demands of the curriculum and the reality of the classroom. Together, these accounts

position decision-making as an inescapable cognitive burden that teachers carry throughout every instructional moment.

Burrige (2018) also investigated the elements that influence instructors' choices and how they interact to either encourage or prevent teachers from reflecting on their methods. He discovered that ontological security and professional habitus had a significant impact on educational decision-making. More recently, Lepp et al. (2021) conducted a study that identified and analysed elements that influenced instructors' decisions regarding their instruction and how the teaching process during remote learning mirrored these decisions. Their research revealed that teachers' instructional decisions were primarily influenced by short-term goals, such as maintaining students' social connections and encouraging their motivation. These challenges were further compounded by the technological demands of remote instruction, which required teachers to continuously adapt their pedagogical reasoning to unfamiliar digital platforms (Forkosh-Baruch et al., 2021). In the Indonesian EFL context specifically, teachers navigating emergency remote teaching reported significant difficulties in maintaining instructional quality amid connectivity issues, limited digital literacy, and reduced student engagement (Nugroho et al., 2021; Hermansyah & Aridah, 2021).

The reviewed studies illuminate that pedagogical decision-making is cognitively complex and shaped by both internal teacher cognition and external environmental aspects. Research on EFL teacher decision-making has also highlighted the contrast between novice and experienced practitioners: while novice teachers tend to rely on taught principles and struggle with real-time instructional adjustments, experienced teachers draw on internalized professional knowledge to make more autonomous and responsive decisions (Asghari et al., 2021). However, two convergent gaps remain underexplored. While studies such as Lepp et al. (2021) and Burrige (2018) have examined what influences teachers' decisions in remote and face-to-face settings respectively, none have systematically categorizing decision types EFL teachers make using an established decision-making typology. In EFL remote classrooms, particularly in multilingual settings like Indonesia, teachers routinely make real-time decisions about language use, e.g. when to switch between Indonesian and English, when to translate, and when to allow students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire. Although translanguaging has been studied as a classroom practice in EFL contexts (Manara, 2007; Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Umam et al., 2023; Tian & Li, 2024), it has rarely been conceptualized as a form of teachers' pedagogical decision-making as an action that reflects teachers' judgment grounded by their cognition in a given instructional situation. This study addresses the gaps by applying Scott and Bruce's (1995) five-type decision-making framework to EFL teachers in their remote instructional settings in post-pandemic Indonesia, and by examining how translanguaging practices represent specific decision types.

This research holds significant theoretical and practical implications, particularly as recent scholarship increasingly positions adaptive teacher agency and translanguaging as central dimensions of multilingual EFL pedagogy in digital context (Xu & Fang, 2024; Truong et al., 2025). Theoretically, it contributes to the understanding of teacher cognition as it operates in digital, multilingual instructional context. Practically, it offers actionable insights for teacher education programs seeking to develop reflective, responsive pedagogical decision-making competencies in pre-service and in-service English teachers navigating remote environments. Therefore, the research questions guiding this study are: "What types of pedagogical decisions, as categorized through Scott and Bruce's (1995) decision-making typology, do EFL teachers make in their remote teaching practices?" and "How does translanguaging function as a form of pedagogical decision-making in teachers' remote EFL classroom practice?"

2. Conceptual framework

This study is grounded in a three-layered conceptual framework that integrates teacher cognition, pedagogical decision-making typology, and translanguaging as a form of instructional choice. The framework positions them in a hierarchical, nested relationship: teacher cognition composes the cognitive foundation for pedagogical decision-making; Scott and Bruce's (1995) typology provides

the analytical structure through which decision-making is examined; and translanguaging functions as a domain-specific manifestation of decision types within multilingual EFL classroom practice.

2.1. Teacher cognition for pedagogical decision-making

At the broadest level, this study is situated within the teacher cognition paradigm, which holds that teachers' instructional behavior is mediated by their cognitions. Language teaching constitutes a key area within applied linguistics, and a strong connection exists between linguistic theory and language pedagogy (Kramsch, 2015). Decisions regarding the selection of teaching methods, instructional media, and assessment strategies are largely made by teachers, reflecting aspects of teacher cognition. Research on teacher cognition highlights that the mental processes involved in thinking and decision-making are central to instructional practice (Karimi & Asadnia, 2023). Teachers are understood as active and reflective decision-makers whose instructional choices are shaped by intricate, experience-based, and contextually grounded systems of knowledge, beliefs, and thoughts. Even when teachers participate in training or professional development programs designed to shape their classroom behaviour, they often retain personal preferences, beliefs, and established practices that influence their teaching decisions. That pattern reflects the deeply embedded and interaction-driven nature of teacher cognition (Li, 2023), although a more recent study suggest that pedagogical training can gradually reshape teachers' multilingual instructional cognition (Yüzlü & Dikilitas, 2025).

Kansanen (1995) claimed when a teacher makes a decision, it transitions from a descriptive to a normative act at the moment the choice is made. While the decision may be grounded in a systematic and rational thought process, teaching in practice involves continuous decision-making. Teachers are required to consistently take positions and assess their actions throughout the instructional process. Although some decisions may be made unconsciously, they are still based on underlying normative judgments. Kansanen (1995) further argued that pedagogical thinking is such a broad and complex domain and specifically refers to the cognitive processes teachers engage in while carrying out instructional activities. This sociocultural dimension of teacher cognition where instructional decisions emerge from the interplay of knowledge, context, and interaction has been consistently documented in EFL settings (Sun & Zhang, 2021; Chen & Abdullah, 2022; Wang & Fang, 2025). Furthermore, the cognitive demands of teaching are also shaped by affective factors. Teachers' emotions and cognitions interact dynamically to influence their moment-by-moment instructional choices (Shi, 2021).

2.2. Types of decision

Decision-making encompasses a variety of styles, which refer to the habitual patterns individuals adopt when making choices. Scott and Bruce (1995) identify five distinct dimensions of decision-making styles: (1) the *Rational* style, which involves systematic and logical evaluation of alternatives in relation to a specific goal; (2) the *Intuitive* style, which relies on instinct and the subjective sense of what feels appropriate; (3) the *Dependent* style, where individuals seek guidance and support from others before making decisions; (4) the *Avoidant* style, characterised by deferring decisions until the last possible moment; and (5) the *Spontaneous* style, where decisions are made quickly and impulsively.

This study adopts Scott and Bruce's (1995) five-type decision-making framework as the primary analytical lens through which observable teacher behavior is categorized. While Scott and Bruce's (1995) typology was originally developed in organizational and career decision-making contexts, it is applicable across professional domains (Vany Mol et al., 2023). In the context of remote teaching practice, educators' decision-making is reflected in various aspects of instructional practice, such as selecting digital platforms, choosing between synchronous and asynchronous modes of delivery, determining instructional methods, setting classroom rules, and deciding whether to use the first or second language during classroom interaction.

2.3. Decision in using language instruction

Decision-making in the classroom is also evident in teachers' and students' use of first (L1) and second languages (L2), often through translanguaging practices embedded in instructional activities and classroom interactions. Translanguaging constitutes the third layer of the framework, addressing the specific domain in which decision-making becomes most linguistically visible in the context of EFL classroom practice. In practice, teachers may utilize students' home languages to clarify complex ideas or to assess comprehension, thereby enhancing the accessibility of content (Canagarajah, 2011; Sultana & Fang, 2024). Such translanguaging can be strategically planned by educators for example by designing lessons where students engage in discussion using one language and then produce written work in another. In addition to planned strategies, translanguaging may also occur spontaneously, as students naturally switch between languages during the learning process (García et al., 2017; Sobkowiak, 2022). Wei (2022) further argues that translanguaging is not merely a pedagogical accommodation but a political and ideological stance that legitimizes multilingual practice as the norm rather than the exception in language classrooms.

The use of both first (L1) and second (L2) languages in classroom instruction has been examined by Manara (2007), who explored how teachers and students make choices regarding the use of L1 during teaching and learning activities. Her findings revealed that the mother tongue (L1) remained a prominent feature of classroom interaction across various educational settings. Similarly, Umam et al. (2023) confirmed that translanguaging served as a foundational framework for communication in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) distance learning context. In line with these perspectives, Sugiharto (2023) argued that to achieve communicative goals, individuals often use localized forms of English, implying that both teachers and students can fluidly switch between, mix, or translate between L1 (Indonesian) and L2 (English) as a means of facilitating effective communication. More recent studies in the Indonesian EFL context confirm that translanguaging is both widespread and purposeful in university-level instruction, serving functions ranging from comprehension scaffolding to classroom management and student engagement (Liando et al., 2023; Witari & Sukamto, 2023; Hidayati et al., 2024; Yolandana et al., 2024; Saqinah et al., 2025).

Taken together, these three layers form an integrated analytical architecture for this study, illustrated in Figure 1. Teacher cognition constitutes the broadest conceptual layer; the decision-making typology provides the categorical structure; and translanguaging provides the observable, context-specific domain through which those decision types are surfaced and analysed in this study.

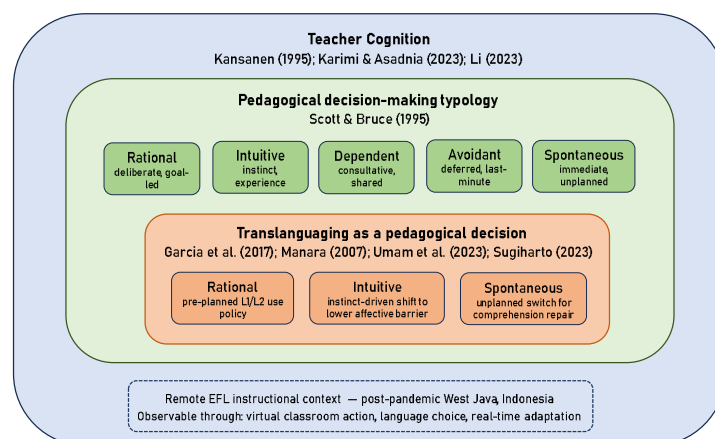


Fig 1. Conceptual framework: teacher cognition, pedagogical decision-making typology, and translanguaging as a domain of instructional decision in remote EFL contexts

3. Method

3.1. Data collection

This study was situated within the qualitative research paradigm, employing an exploratory qualitative approach. As defined by Stebbins (2019), exploratory qualitative research is a

comprehensive, intentional, and systematically planned process aimed at facilitating the discovery of general patterns that contribute to the description and understanding of particular aspects of social or psychological phenomena. This design was selected due to its alignment with the naturalistic, interpretive aims of the study, which sought to examine teachers' instructional decision-making as it unfolded organically within their virtual classroom sessions.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling, guided by a set of theoretically informed criteria: all participants held a Master's degree in English Education, possessed a minimum of ten years of teaching experience, and utilised Zoom or Google Meet as their primary platforms for remote instruction. Five lecturers from five different private universities in West Java, Indonesia met these criteria and agreed to participate. Consistent with the interpretive and in-depth nature of qualitative inquiry, this sample size allowed for rich, detailed observation of each participant's instructional practice rather than statistical generalisation (Stebbins, 2019). Data collection continued until no substantively new decision-making patterns emerged across sessions, indicating that the data had reached a point of informational sufficiency for this study, a criterion aligned with the notion of theoretical saturation in qualitative inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Despite coming from diverse institutions and academic disciplines, all five participants shared the same professional profile, which supported the coherence and comparability of the dataset.

All data were collected through online means, specifically by observing virtual classroom practices via direct participation in live sessions and reviewing recorded Zoom or Google Meet sessions. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymising participants' identities in all data reporting.

3.2. Data analysis

Data were analysed using directed qualitative content analysis, following the framework outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). Unlike inductive approaches that generate categories entirely from data, directed content analysis begins with an established theoretical framework as the initial coding structure. This approach was selected because Scott and Bruce's (1995) five-type decision-making typology — rational, intuitive, dependent, avoidant, and spontaneous — provided a theoretically grounded and empirically validated lens through which observable teacher behavior could be systematically categorized, while the analysis remained sensitive to contextual variations specific to remote EFL classroom practice in Indonesia.

The analysis proceeded through three stages: (1) Open coding, which entailed breaking down the data into discrete components to identify instances of instructional decision-making without initially imposing decision-type labels; (2) Axial coding, which involved grouping and comparing the identified instances across participants to establish relationships and recurring patterns, with Scott and Bruce's (1995) typology used as the organizing framework; and (3) Selective coding, where patterns were refined and integrated into the core categories reported in the findings.

To illustrate the coding process: when a student presenter was disconnected mid-session due to connectivity issues, the teacher immediately assigned another group to continue. This was first tagged during open coding as "reassigning task due to technical disruption". During axial coding, it was linked to broader category of "managing instructional continuity". In selective coding, it was integrated into the core category of "spontaneous decision-making", as the action was immediate, unplanned, and triggered by an external disruption.

Field notes documented instances where teachers appeared to make instructional decisions, inferred from observable situations. For instance, when a teacher asked a question and received no response, when only a few students were visible in the Zoom meeting, or when internet connectivity issues occurred for either teachers or students. Five distinct decisions type were identified through the analysis of actions and utterances exemplifying each type. Frequency counts of each decision type were calculated per teacher as a complementary descriptive tool to support the qualitative interpretation of patterns across participants, rather than as a quantitative measure.

To establish coding reliability, intercoder agreement was employed. The third author independently coded a randomly selected sample of 20% of the identified decision-making instances using the operational definitions in Table 1, without prior knowledge of the first author's coding decisions. Initial agreement rate of 85% was achieved. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion between the two authors until consensus was reached, the agreed coding scheme was subsequently applied to the full dataset.

Table 1. Operational definitions and data examples for Scott and Bruce's (1995) decision-making types in remote EFL instruction

Decision type	Operational definition	Distinguishing criterion	Example from data
Rational	A deliberate, goal-oriented choice made through conscious evaluation of options prior to or at the start of an instructional event	Pre-planned or structured; teacher has time to consider alternatives before acting	Teacher sharing screen to display the day's agenda; delaying class start by three minutes to allow students to join
Intuitive	A choice guided by professional instinct and experiential pattern-recognition, without explicit deliberation	Draws on accumulated experience; teacher acts on what "feels right" pedagogically	Teacher switching from English to Indonesian mid-explanation to lower affective barrier; adjusting pace based on reading the room
Dependent	A consultative choice in which the teacher actively seeks student input before determining a course of action	Teacher explicitly invites student participation in the decision itself	Teacher asking students whether they prefer group work or individual sharing before proceeding
Avoidant	A choice deferred until situational pressure makes action unavoidable	Teacher delays response; acts only at the last possible moment	Teacher waiting until the end of class to address a missed presentation rather than during the session
Spontaneous	An immediate, unplanned choice triggered by an unexpected classroom event requiring real-time response	Reactive rather than proactive; triggered by an external disruption with no prior deliberation	Teacher immediately assigning other group when a presenter is disconnected mid-session due to connectivity loss

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Rational decision-making

Rational decision-making was observed across all five participating teachers, manifesting as deliberate, goal-oriented choices made through conscious evaluation of instructional options prior to or at the point of action. These decisions were not reactive to unexpected events but reflected pre-planned pedagogical stances and established classroom frameworks. In remote EFL settings, where the absence of physical co-presence demands heightened intentionality in structuring the learning environment, rational decisions functioned as the primary mechanism through which teachers established instructional clarity, managed participation, and maintained accountability.

Teacher C demonstrated rational decision-making at the transition between student-led and teacher-led instruction. Following a group presentation on teaching English through technology, Teacher C made a deliberate choice to build upon rather than replace the students' contribution by first evaluating their work explicitly, then positioning her own input as supplementary elaboration:

Excerpt 1:

Okay, the three presenters have already prepared the material so very well and then presented the material effectively ya... Ehh, can you please show the slide again? Tadi sudah sudah jelas ya, cuman Mrs. C akan menambahkan sedikit-sedikit saja.

(Teacher C)

This sequencing reflects a pre-planned instructional design decision: to use student-generated content as the foundation for teacher elaboration rather than delivering content independently. In remote classrooms where the transition between student and teacher roles can easily disrupt instructional momentum, this rational management of the handover moment demonstrates conscious attention to lesson flow and the pedagogical value of student contribution.

Teacher D's rational decision-making instance was most visible in the management of classroom participation. Rather than calling on students arbitrarily or allowing the same students to dominate, Teacher D operated a structured turn-taking system that tracked responses and deliberately redistributed participation opportunities:

Excerpt 2:

SE., oke SE saya catet ya. Ayo siapa bonus lagi, juara 3, yang ketiga beruntung. SE berarti ga usah jawab lagi, kasih kesempatan yang lain.

(Teacher D)

The explicit noting of SE's response ("*saya catet ya*"), the incentivization of further participation through a gamified framing ("*juara 3, yang ketiga beruntung*"), and the deliberate exclusion of students who had already contributed ("*ga usah jawab lagi, kasih kesempatan yang lain*") together constitute a multi-layered rational strategy for ensuring equitable and broad participation. This approach reflects what Karimi and Asadnia (2023) describe as internalized instructional cognition in experienced teachers. The cognition is reflected in the teacher's capacity to manage complex participation dynamics through systematic, pre-designed frameworks rather than reactive improvisation.

Teacher E's sample of rational decision-making was anchored in a pre-established attendance policy designed specifically for the remote learning context: students whose accounts appeared active in the meeting but who failed to respond within a designated timeframe were recorded as absent, on the basis that non-response indicated disengagement from the session rather than genuine presence. When a student (YP) failed to respond despite being visible in the meeting interface, Teacher E applied this framework deliberately:

Excerpt 3:

Oke, it's already 5 minutes. Euh, I want to ask YP. YP, are you there?

YP?

(YP didn't respond)

Oke.. berarti saya anggap gak hadir yaa.

(Teacher E)

The brief pause before "*berarti saya anggap gak hadir yaa*" reflects not improvisation but verification. The teacher confirming that the conditions of the policy had been met before applying its consequence. This instance is analytically significant in the remote teaching context because it illustrates how rational decision-making extends beyond curriculum into accountability structures specifically calibrated to the unique challenges of virtual attendance, where physical presence and genuine engagement can no longer be assumed to be equivalent.

Taken together, the rational decisions observed across all five teachers share a common underlying logic: each reflects a deliberate, pre-planned response to a predictable instructional challenge, especially in remote learning setting, executed with conscious reference to an established framework such as lesson agenda, grading policy, participation system, or attendance rule. This pattern is consistent with Scott and Bruce's (1995) characterization of rational decision-making as systematic and goal-oriented, and aligns with Kansanen's (1995) notion of pedagogical thinking as inherently normative. Teachers do not merely describe what is happening but actively choose what should happen next, and in these instances, that choice was made deliberately and in advance.

4.2. Intuitive decision-making

Intuitive decision-making was observed across multiple participants, manifesting as experience-driven, in-the-moment judgments made without explicit deliberation, pre-established rules, or external triggers. Unlike rational decisions which are anchored in advance planning, or spontaneous decisions which are reactive to unexpected disruptions, intuitive decisions are grounded in teachers' accumulated professional experience and their instinctive reading of the classroom situation as it unfolds. In remote EFL settings, reduced availability of visual and physical cues demands a heightened sensitivity to subtle signals of student engagement and comprehension. This makes intuitive decision-making a particularly sophisticated form of teacher cognition that Karimi and Asadnia (2023) associate with the internalized pedagogical knowledge of experienced practitioners.

Teacher D provided the clearest instance of intuitive decision-making in the dataset. Having allocated five minutes for students to read a text and formulate answers, Teacher D made a judgment call to prompt the class forward before the allocated time had expired, with approximately one minute still remaining:

Excerpt 4:

Oke, siapa yang bisa? Oke baca dulu pelan-pelan. Ulang lagi ulang lagi.

(Teacher D)

No external disruption triggered this decision, and no pre-established rule dictated it. Teacher D read the class, sensing either that students had reached sufficient readiness or that the momentum of the session called for forward movement, and acted on that reading from professional instinct. Analytically, what makes this instance significant is that the intuitive decision actively overrode the rational plan: the five-minute structure was a pre-established instructional framework, yet Teacher D's experiential judgment overrode it. This reflects what Kansanen (1995) describes as the normative dimension of pedagogical thinking: the teacher does not merely observe what is happening but makes an active judgment about what should happen next, drawing on a deeply internalized sense of instructional timing that cannot be reduced to rules or procedures.

Furthermore, Teacher E demonstrated an intuitive decision-making during a turn-reading activity in which students were working through a sample complaint letter. While reviewing the text's vocabulary with the class, Teacher E instinctively identified 'prescription' as a potential comprehension barrier and, upon receiving no response to her initial prompt, immediately reframed it through a contextual clue without pausing to deliberate:

Excerpt 5:

Temen-temen ada kata 'prescription', ever heard of that? 'Prescription', apa sih artinya? (nobody answered) Prescription ini relate-nya sama farmasi. Apa ya? What is it?

(Teacher E)

The decision to connect "*prescription*" to the domain of pharmacy by mentioning "*relate-nya sama farmasi*" was not a pre-planned scaffolding step. It was an experience-driven judgment that the silence signaled a comprehension gap rather than disengagement, and that a bridging clue calibrated to students' likely background knowledge would re-open the pathway to participation. This reflects the pattern Li (2023) identifies in experienced language teachers, whose cognition-in-interaction enables them to read interactional breakdowns rapidly and adjust their instructional approach from within the flow of the lesson rather than pausing to deliberate.

The most analytically layered instance of intuitive decision-making in the dataset was observed in Teacher A's handling of an unplanned student contribution. During a discussion on second language acquisition, a student began sharing an extended personal anecdote about her boarding school's language immersion policy, a contribution that was not part of the planned lesson agenda. Teacher A's response was to follow the thread rather than redirect it:

Excerpt 6:

Uh huh, uh huh. Oh, okay, full day... I think it's fine... What kind of punishment, actually?
(Teacher A)

Rather than steering the student back to the planned discussion, Teacher A made an instinctive judgment that the contribution was pedagogically generative by offering authentic, experientially grounded content that could enrich the class's engagement with the topic of language learning. This judgment was not guided by a pre-existing policy about how to handle student digressions, nor was it triggered by a disruption requiring immediate remediation. It was a professional instinct, grounded in accumulated experience, about the value of authentic student voice in language learning contexts.

Significantly, Teacher A extended this intuitive reading of the moment into a broader pedagogical move by transforming that student's anecdote into a class-wide reflective prompt:

Excerpt 7:

Yeah, that's so interesting to me. So I've got a question for you. Umm, not only to EL but to everyone here, should we memorize new vocabulary? Ini tidak usah langsung dijawab... Mungkin ini pertanyaan yang perlu direfleksikan sehari, semalam.
(Teacher A)

The question "should we memorize new vocabulary?" was unplanned, arising directly from the content of EL's sharing. Teacher A's decision to pose it not as an immediate discussion prompt but as a slow-burn reflective reflects a nuanced intuitive judgment about the appropriate cognitive depth and processing time the question deserved. This two-layered intuitive move — first following the student's digression, then elevating it into a generative pedagogical question — exemplifies what Perfecto (2012) describes as the recursive, adaptive quality of expert teacher decision-making: the capacity to read an emerging instructional opportunity and respond to it with both sensitivity and pedagogical intentionality.

Taken together, these instances reveal intuitive decision-making as a form of professional expertise that operates beneath the threshold of conscious deliberation. Across all three teachers, intuitive decisions were characterized by an instinctive reading of student states — readiness, confusion, engagement, authentic contribution — and a responsive adjustment that no pre-established framework had prescribed. In the remote teaching context, where the richness of interactional cues is reduced, the presence of intuitive decision-making suggests that experienced EFL teachers carry their pedagogical instincts into digital environments, adapting them to the specific constraints of virtual instruction.

4.3. Spontaneous decision-making

Spontaneous decision-making was among the most frequently observed decision types across participants, reflecting the inherently unpredictable nature of remote instructional environments. Unlike rational or intuitive decisions, spontaneous decisions are reactive, triggered by unexpected events that demand immediate response with no prior deliberation. In remote EFL settings, where technical failures and sudden student disconnections are routine rather than exceptional, the capacity for spontaneous decision-making emerges as a core instructional competency.

Teacher A's spontaneous decision-making surfaced when KH disappeared from the session mid-presentation due to a connectivity failure, requiring an immediate reassignment of the task:

Excerpt 8:

Ah, here. KL is here right. So you, you can continue KL. Sepertinya KH belum kembali ya. Probably she's having connection problem ya. Bagaimana kalau KL membantu? Would you like to take over KL?
(Teacher A)

Rather than waiting for KH to reconnect or leaving the presentation suspended, Teacher A scanned the available participants, identified KL as a suitable replacement, and framed the reassignment as an invitation rather than a directive. The tentative language like "sepertinya", "probably", "bagaimana kalau" signals real-time improvisation under uncertainty, while the interpersonal sensitivity of the phrasing reflects an instinctive awareness that the spontaneous reassignment needed to feel voluntary rather than imposed. This instance illustrates how spontaneous decisions in remote teaching are not merely logistical, and rather carrying relational dimensions that experienced teachers navigate simultaneously under pressure.

Teacher B encountered a different category of spontaneous trigger: a teacher-side technical failure. Mid-lesson, the shared material disappeared from the screen without any deliberate action on Teacher B's part, disrupting the instructional flow entirely:

Excerpt 9:

Kok hilang ya?... Oh ini, oh ya ya ya ya. Ya, haduh maaf... Ketahuan gapteknya saya. Menghilang aja ini untung anak saya bantu... Mungkin di pertemuan berikutnya kita pakai Zoom aja seperti biasa ya. Ini saya cobain Google Meet.

(Teacher B)

Teacher B's spontaneous response unfolded across two registers simultaneously: affective and logistical. The self-deprecating humor — "ketahuan gapteknya saya" — was an instinctive classroom atmosphere management move, defusing the disruption before it generated student anxiety or lost engagement. The platform decision — "mungkin di pertemuan berikutnya kita pakai Zoom aja" — was made on the spot, triggered entirely by this unplanned failure rather than any prior evaluation of platform options. This instance is analytically significant because it locates spontaneous decision-making not only in response to student-side disruptions but to teacher-side technical vulnerabilities, a dimension of remote teaching unpredictability that Diaz Lema et al. (2023) identify as a persistent source of instructional stress in digital learning environments.

Teacher E's spontaneous decision-making arose at the closing stage of a session, when a student unexpectedly reported that a classmate, IT, had been involuntarily disconnected due to poor signal:

Excerpt 10:

Oh, iya. Nanti kasih tahu aja yah tentang tugas kita. Pokoknya ditunggu sampai jam 9. Jadi, kalau yang tadi gak masuk tolong diinfo saja, diinformasikan saja untuk mengumpulkan tugasnya. Maximum at 9, okay?

(Teacher E)

The trigger here was not a technical failure visible to the teacher but an unexpected piece of information delivered mid-closure that reframed the attendance situation entirely. Teacher E's immediate response was a spontaneous policy improvisation shown by constructing a contextually sensitive workaround for IT involuntary absence rather than applying the standard attendance rule rigidly. Unlike Teacher A and Teacher B's spontaneous decisions which were triggered by visible disruptions, Teacher E's was triggered by incoming student information, reflecting a different but equally consequential form of real-time adaptive judgment.

Across all three instances, spontaneous decision-making clustered around two primary situational triggers: technical disruptions and unexpected student information. This pattern is consistent with the broader literature on remote teaching, where connectivity failures, platform malfunctions, and sudden student disengagement are identified as the defining sources of instructional unpredictability in virtual environments (Diaz Lema et al., 2023). Importantly, the spontaneous decisions observed here were not arbitrary or careless, but rather each reflecting a rapid but contextually calibrated judgment, suggesting that experienced EFL teachers bring a form of adaptive readiness to remote instruction that allows them to absorb unexpected disruptions without losing instructional coherence.

4.4. Dependent and avoidant decision-making

Dependent and avoidant decision-making were the least frequently observed types across the dataset, consistent with the profile of experienced teachers who generally operate with a high degree of instructional autonomy. Nevertheless, both types surfaced in meaningful and analytically distinct moments. Dependent decisions emerged when teachers deliberately redistributed decision-making authority to students, and avoidant decisions arised when the absence of student response in the remote environment prompted teachers to defer action until situational pressure made it unavoidable.

Dependent decision-making was observed when teachers faced a genuine instructional fork and chose to resolve it through student input rather than unilateral judgment. Teacher A demonstrated this clearly when deciding between two viable activity formats mid-session:

Excerpt 11:

Umm, ini mau group work atau mau langsung saja, guys? Mau gimana? Mau langsung saja kita tonton bareng-bareng kemudian sharing ideas-nya, atau mau group work, mau discussion dulu?
(Teacher A)

Both options were pedagogically legitimate, and Teacher A's repeated restatement of the question "mau gimana?" followed by a full elaboration of both alternatives — signals genuine openness to either outcome rather than steering toward a preferred answer. The decision was effectively suspended until students responded, reflecting what Jelińska and Paradowski (2021) identify as a collaborative orientation toward classroom decision-making, one that is more likely to emerge in instructional environments characterized by trust and open communication between teacher and students.

Teacher B's dependent decision-making instance happened while scheduling make-up classes following two missed sessions with finals approaching:

Excerpt 12:

Maunya hari apa, anda bisanya hari apa?
(Teacher B)

Rather than imposing a schedule unilaterally, Teacher B framed the constraint transparently (missed sessions, limited time, imminent finals) and opened the scheduling decision to student input, even disclosing her own availability as a negotiating starting point rather than a directive. This instance extends the analytical picture of dependent decision-making beyond in-session instructional choices into the administrative dimension of remote teaching, where logistical decisions with direct consequences for student performance are made collaboratively rather than top-down.

Avoidant decision-making was the least frequent type in the dataset, with a single observed instance. Its near-absence among experienced teachers aligns with Sun and Zhang's (2022) finding that expert practitioners tend toward autonomous, internalized instructional cognition, making deferral an exception rather than a default response. The one observed instance occurred in Teacher D's session during a reading activity:

Excerpt 13:

Next, ironic twist. Silahkan baca. Ayo boys. [20 seconds pause, no response] Girls deh siapa aja deh, ayo!
(Teacher D)

Prior to this moment, female students had been consistently dominating participation while male students remained largely silent. Teacher D's prompt "ayo boys" was therefore a deliberate equity move, an attempt to draw male students into participation and rebalance the interactional dynamic. However, rather than nominating a specific male student directly, the prompt addressed the group broadly, effectively deferring the decision of who would respond to the students themselves. When the 20-second silence confirmed that no male student would volunteer, Teacher D did not

immediately intervene with a direct nomination but waited out the pause before finally releasing the floor back to all students including females, acting only when the silence became instructionally untenable. The avoidant pattern here is therefore not passive disengagement but a conscious attempt shaped by pedagogical intent rather than uncertainty. In the remote context, where the absence of visual cues makes it impossible to tell whether silence reflects reluctance or simply inattention, such holding patterns are particularly difficult to sustain, as teachers cannot rely on eye contact or body language to signal expectation and maintain productive pressure on specific students.

The rarity of avoidant decision-making across the dataset is itself a finding. With a combined total of 67 observed decision instances across five experienced teachers, only one avoidant instance was recorded, suggesting that the teachers in this study were broadly disinclined toward deferral even under the challenging and unpredictable conditions of remote EFL instruction. This finding reinforces the broader pattern emerging across subsections 4.1 through 4.3: that experienced EFL teachers in remote settings tend toward action — whether rational, intuitive, or spontaneous — rather than inaction.

4.5. Translanguaging as a domain of pedagogical decision-making

Translanguaging is a phenomenon that is almost unavoidable in situations where bilingual people with the same native language interact, like Indonesian teachers and students during the EFL class. Translanguaging was observed across all five participants, reflecting the reality of bilingual EFL classrooms in Indonesia where the dynamic use of both Indonesian and English is not a pedagogical deviation but an integral feature of instructional practice. Rather than treating translanguaging as a separate linguistic phenomenon, this subsection analyzes it as a domain of pedagogical decision-making where rational, intuitive, and spontaneous decision types become observable through teachers' language choices. This framing is consistent with García et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of translanguaging as a purposeful deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire, and with evidence from Indonesian EFL contexts that positions translanguaging as a meaningful instructional strategy rather than a deficiency (Manara, 2007; Umam et al., 2023; Sugiharto, 2023).

Rational translanguaging was clearly demonstrated by Teacher B, whose bilingual instruction followed a consistent, pre-meditated pattern of translating directives and content from English to Indonesian and back throughout the session:

Excerpt 14:

Okay next please. Siapa lagi? Four more students. Empat lagi yang belum. Ayo yang belum ini, eu, waktunya tinggal, udah jam 1 ya. Saya cuma kasih waktu, hmm, 20 menit lagi ya, 20 menit lagi. I will give you twenty more minutes to tell your daily activity.

(Teacher B)

In this instance, Teacher B applied translation to her instruction. First, she used L2 (English) with "Four more students" then translated it to L1 (Indonesian) "*Empat lagi yang belum.*" Within the same utterance, she used another translation method but this time she translated L1 into L2, "*Saya cuma kasih waktu 20 menit lagi ya*" then translated it into "I will give you twenty more minutes." This appeared multiple times and quite consistently throughout her classroom practice. The consistency of this pattern suggests a rational decision-making approach to translanguaging — a deliberate, systematic choice to make instructional content accessible to students whose L2 proficiency remained limited. Unlike incidental code-switching, this teacher's translanguaging appeared to be a pre-meditated instructional strategy, consciously aligned with her assessment of her students' comprehension needs.

Intuitive translanguaging was observed in Teacher C's mid-explanation register shift from formal English to informal Indonesian while eliciting student responses:

Excerpt 15:

Oke, jadi sebelum saya... Okay before I, ee, explain, I share with you the idea of teaching reading, I would like to confirm your understanding. What is your understanding about teaching reading?

Kalau bicara tentang teaching reading tuh apa sih sebetulnya? Oke Bu An, apa sih Bu An teaching reading based on your opinion?

(Teacher C)

Instructions in English such as "What is your understanding about teaching reading?" tend to be formal and directive in style. Teacher E switching to "*Kalau bicara tentang teaching reading tuh apa sih sebetulnya?*" performed a less formal and strict style to the utterance and turned the directive nature of the utterance into an invitation for the students to participate in answering the question. This language shift reflects an intuitive decision grounded in the teacher's experiential reading of the classroom atmosphere and her instinctive judgment that a more informal, accessible register would lower the affective barrier to participation. Rather than following a pre-planned language policy, the teacher drew on her pedagogical instincts to prioritise student engagement over strict L2 use. While spontaneous translanguaging instances in form of unplanned language switch triggered by sudden comprehension breakdowns or unexpected interactional demands were observed across sessions, they were typically brief and embedded within larger instructional sequences and interaction, making them difficult to isolate as standalone decision-making events.

From the findings of teachers' language policy within this study, it can be seen that translanguaging practice intersects with pedagogical decision-making in three different aspects. First, teachers decided to include translanguaging approaches in the class by incorporating texts, activities, and materials that allowed students to engage with multiple languages, which reflected a pedagogical stance that values linguistic diversity and encourages students to use their multilingual repertoires. Second, teachers made translanguaging instructional decisions by providing code-switching or code-mixing to encourage students to use their home languages alongside the language of instruction, and integrating multilingual resources into lesson plans. Lastly, teachers made differentiation decisions to support students' varying language proficiency levels. This included providing bilingual or multilingual instructional materials and adapting assessment to accommodate diverse linguistic backgrounds. Taken together, these three dimensions of translanguaging decision-making map directly onto the decision-making typology adopted in this study. Translanguaging practices were not isolated linguistic phenomena, but rather deliberate or instinctive pedagogical decisions, variously reflecting rational, intuitive, and spontaneous decision-making styles depending on the instructional context and the individual teacher's professional judgment.

4.6. Cross-participant synthesis

Table 1 presents the frequency of each decision-making type across all five participants. As shown, the findings indicate that spontaneous decision-making was the most frequently observed type overall (n=27), followed by rational (n=23) and intuitive (n=14), whereas dependent (n=2) and avoidant (n=1) were the least common. This distribution reflects the defining conditions of remote EFL instruction: an environment where technical disruptions, student connectivity failures, and unpredictable interactional dynamics routinely demand immediate, unplanned responses. The predominance of spontaneous decisions is consistent with Diaz Lema et al.'s (2023) finding that the ongoing difficulties of integrating digital tools into instructional practice generate a persistent demand for real time problem solving. Furthermore, the variability in student engagement and the differing rates at which student's progress in virtual classrooms compel teachers to make impromptu adjustments to learning activities and timelines to sustain the momentum and coherence of instruction.

Table 2. Types of decisions made by participants

Teacher	Rational	Intuitive	Dependent	Avoiding	Spontaneous	Total
Teacher A	6	5	1	0	8	20
Teacher B	5	1	1	0	5	12
Teacher C	3	3	0	0	0	6
Teacher D	2	2	0	1	6	11
Teacher E	7	3	0	0	8	18
Total	23	14	2	1	27	67

Rational decision-making emerged as the second most frequent type, suggesting that experienced EFL teachers do not operate purely reactively in remote settings but bring deliberate, pre-planned instructional frameworks into the virtual classroom. These frameworks, including attendance policies, participation systems, and grading accountability structures, provided stability against the unpredictability of the environment. Intuitive decision-making, while less frequent numerically, was analytically significant in its manifestations. It surfaced at moments of highest instructional sensitivity, such as reading student readiness, responding to unexpected contributions, and calibrating language register, reflecting the internalized pedagogical knowledge that Karimi and Asadnia (2023) associate with experienced practitioners. The low frequency of dependent and avoidant decisions aligns with Sun and Zhang's (2022) assertion that experienced teachers demonstrate more autonomous and internalized instructional cognition, drawing on established knowledge systems rather than seeking external input or deferring action. The single avoidant instance across 67 observed decisions, Teacher D's equity-motivated deferral during a reading activity, underscores how exceptional inaction was among this group of experienced educators even under challenging remote conditions.

Individual variation across participants also warrants attention. Teacher E recorded the highest total instance count (n=18) with rational decisions dominating (n=7), suggesting a strongly structured instructional orientation. Teacher C's comparatively small dataset (n=6) reflects a data limitation, as connectivity issues during recording meant only a portion of the observed sessions could be fully transcribed, and should therefore be interpreted with appropriate caution rather than as evidence of fewer decisions being made. Most notably, Teacher C was the only participant with zero spontaneous instances in the transcribed data, which given the data limitation cannot be taken as indicative of their actual decision-making pattern. Across the four teachers with fuller datasets, spontaneous and rational decisions consistently co-occurred as the dominant types, suggesting that remote EFL teaching demands a dual capacity: the ability to plan deliberately and the readiness to abandon that plan at any moment. Together, these patterns point to adaptive expertise, understood as the integration of structured preparation with flexible real-time responsiveness, as the defining cognitive characteristic of effective pedagogical decision-making in remote EFL instruction (Anderson & Taner, 2023).

4.7. Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that pedagogical decision-making in remote EFL instruction is neither uniform nor reducible to a single cognitive style, but operates across a spectrum of deliberate, instinctive, and reactive responses to the demands of virtual teaching environments. The dominance of spontaneous decision-making across participants (n=27) directly reflects the structural unpredictability of remote instruction where connectivity failures, sudden student disengagement, and platform malfunctions routinely disrupt planned instructional sequences and demand immediate, unscripted responses (Cai & Zheng, 2022). This pattern extends and contextualizes Lepp et al.'s (2021) finding that teachers' decisions during remote instruction are primarily shaped by short-term, situationally driven goals, and aligns with Kansanen's (1995) characterization of pedagogical thinking as inherently normative. Rational decision-making was also notably prevalent (n=23). This suggests that experienced EFL teachers maintain deliberate instructional frameworks such as participation systems, attendance policies, and lesson agendas as cognitive anchors in the volatile remote environment. The near-absence of dependent and avoidant decisions, consistent with Sun and Zhang's (2022) account of experienced teachers' autonomous instructional cognition, reinforces the picture of a teaching group that responds to remote complexity with action rather than deferral.

Translanguaging emerged across all participants not as a peripheral linguistic habit but as a primary site of pedagogical decision-making that manifests across all three dominant decision types, consistent with recent scholarship positioning translanguaging as a pedagogically intentional and interaction-sensitive instructional practice in multilingual EFL classrooms (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Zakharova & Lasagabaster, 2026). Rational translanguaging, as observed in Teacher B's systematic bilingual instruction, reflected a pre-meditated language policy consciously calibrated to students' proficiency levels, consistent with Krashen's (1982) argument that comprehensible input

calibrated to learners' current competence is the condition most conducive to acquisition. Intuitive translanguaging, as demonstrated by Teacher C's mid-explanation register shift, reflected an experience-driven reading of the affective and interactional state of the class, aligning with García et al.'s (2017) conceptualization of translanguaging as a dynamic, purposeful deployment of multilingual resources and with more recent studies highlighting teachers' strategic language flexibility in EFL interaction (Jiang et al., 2024; Saqinah et al., 2025). That translanguaging decisions were distributed across rational, intuitive, and spontaneous types indicates that language choice in multilingual EFL remote classrooms is not a fixed policy but a context-sensitive pedagogical judgment, a pattern similarly identified in recent translanguaging research across Asian EFL context (Xu & Fang, 2024; Chen et al., 2024). Anderson (2024) characterizes this repositioning of translanguaging as a paradigm shift for ELT that demands teachers develop not just linguistic flexibility but conscious pedagogical judgment about when and how multilingual resources serve learning. Theoretically, this study contributes to the teacher cognition paradigm by demonstrating that decision-making typologies originally developed in general educational contexts are productively applicable to language teaching settings, and that translanguaging functions as a domain through which those decision types become empirically observable in multilingual classrooms.

These findings carry concrete implications for EFL teacher education and professional development, particularly in contexts where remote and hybrid instruction have become permanent rather than emergency features of the educational landscape. First, teacher preparation programmes should explicitly address adaptive decision-making as a trainable competency. Scenario-based training in responses to virtual disruptions, connectivity failures, and student non-response has been shown to meaningfully develop teachers' instructional responsiveness (Xiang et al. 2022). Second, translanguaging should be reframed in teacher education not merely as a linguistic accommodation strategy but as a form of pedagogical decision-making that requires teachers to develop conscious awareness of when rational, intuitive, or spontaneous language choices best serve their students' comprehension and engagement needs. Third, given the rarity of dependent decision-making among experienced teachers in this study, professional development might productively explore when and how to deliberately involve students in instructional decisions as a strategy for fostering agency and motivation in remote learning environments. Together, these implications point toward a model of remote EFL teacher preparation grounded not in technical platform proficiency alone but in the cultivation of reflective, responsive, and linguistically aware pedagogical judgment.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this investigation into pedagogical decision-making in English language remote learning contexts reveal that teachers consistently made decisions throughout the learning process to manage the classroom, transition between instructional activities, and assess student understanding in response to the dynamic challenges of online teaching. The findings demonstrate that remote EFL teaching demands a dual cognitive capacity. First, deliberate structural planning and spontaneous real-time adaptation and second, translanguaging functions not as a peripheral linguistic habit but as a primary domain through which pedagogical decision types become observable in multilingual classrooms. Theoretically, this contributes to the teacher cognition paradigm by establishing the applicability of decision-making typologies to language teaching contexts and by repositioning translanguaging as a form of instructional decision-making rather than a compensatory language practice. Practically, it points toward a model of remote EFL teacher preparation that cultivates reflective, responsive, and linguistically aware pedagogical judgment alongside technical platform proficiency.

This study is not without limitations. The findings are based on observations of five lecturers from private universities in West Java, Indonesia, which limits the transferability of the findings to other institutional, cultural, or linguistic contexts. The absence of teacher interviews represents a methodological constraint of accessing teachers' internal reasoning. Additionally, since teachers were aware of being observed, their instructional behavior and decision-making may have been somewhat influenced by that awareness, potentially affecting the naturalness of the data. Finally, as each teacher was observed in a limited number of sessions, the decision-making patterns identified may not fully

represent the breadth of each teacher's typical instructional practice across a full semester. Future research should address these limitations through larger and more diverse participant pools, longitudinal designs tracking decision-making development over time, and mixed-methods approaches that combine observation with teacher interviews or stimulated recall protocols. Finally, future studies could examine how institutional support structures and digital infrastructure influence the types of decisions teachers make in remote settings.

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