



TRANSLANGUAGING PRACTICES IN MULTILINGUAL LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS: BENEFITS, CHALLENGES, AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR INCLUSIVE LEARNING

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Abstract

Translanguaging has become an important pedagogical issue in multilingual classrooms because students often use more than one language to understand concepts, negotiate meaning, participate in interaction, and construct academic knowledge. However, classroom language policies frequently remain monolingual, requiring students to use only the target language even when their full linguistic repertoire can support learning. This study aims to explore translanguaging practices in multilingual classrooms, identify their benefits for students' learning, and formulate pedagogical implications for language instruction. The study employed a qualitative multiple-case study involving six language teachers and 120 students from three multilingual secondary classrooms. Data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus group discussions, field notes, and analysis of teaching documents. The data were analyzed thematically through coding, categorization, cross-case comparison, and interpretation. The findings revealed five major translanguaging practices: bilingual explanation, peer meaning negotiation, cross-linguistic vocabulary comparison, multilingual classroom interaction, and bilingual task completion. These practices supported comprehension, participation, vocabulary development, learner confidence, and identity affirmation. Nevertheless, teachers also faced challenges related to assessment, language policy, unequal student proficiency, and concern over excessive first-language use. The study concludes that translanguaging can become a productive pedagogical resource when used intentionally, strategically, and reflectively to support target-language development rather than replace it.

Keywords: translanguaging; multilingual classroom; language learning; pedagogy; participation

A. Introduction

Multilingual classrooms are increasingly common in contemporary education. Students enter classrooms with diverse linguistic backgrounds, including national languages, regional languages, family languages, community varieties, and foreign languages learned at school. In such classrooms, students do not always think, interact, and learn through one language only. They often use different linguistic resources to understand lessons, ask questions, compare meanings, explain ideas to peers, and complete academic tasks. This reality challenges the assumption that effective language learning must occur through strict separation of languages.

In many language classrooms, monolingual ideology still shapes instruction. Teachers may require students to use only English or only the target language because they believe that maximum exposure will improve proficiency. Target-language exposure is important, but strict monolingual policies can limit students' participation when they lack sufficient vocabulary, confidence, or conceptual understanding. Students may remain silent, misunderstand instructions, or avoid asking questions because they cannot express themselves fully in the target language. This condition is problematic because language learning requires meaningful participation, not merely linguistic restriction (Cummins, 2007; Garcia & Sylvan, 2011).

Translanguaging offers a different perspective on multilingual classroom interaction. Garcia and Li Wei (2014) conceptualize translanguaging as the dynamic use of multilingual speakers' full linguistic repertoire to make meaning and act socially. Li Wei (2018) further develops translanguaging as a practical theory of language that challenges rigid boundaries between named languages. From this perspective, multilingual students do not simply switch between separate language systems; they draw flexibly on available linguistic and semiotic resources to think, communicate, and learn.

The concept has a traceable lineage. Lewis, Jones, and Baker (2012) describe its origins in Welsh bilingual education and its extension to wider educational use, and Baker (2011) situates it within the broader field of bilingual education. Garcia (2009) and Garcia and Li Wei (2014) reframed it as a theory of bilingual practice rather than a classroom technique, and Li Wei (2018) developed it further as a practical theory of language. Otheguy, Garcia, and Reid (2015) set out its strongest theoretical claim, that named languages are social rather than linguistic categories, while Cummins (2007) had already argued from a different starting point that monolingual instructional strategies waste the linguistic resources students bring. Poza (2017) reviews how

the term has been used and warns that its meaning has broadened to the point of imprecision.

In education, translanguaging is not merely spontaneous language mixing. It can also become a planned pedagogical strategy. Cenoz (2022) explains that pedagogical translanguaging refers to planned instructional strategies that activate learners' whole linguistic repertoire for language and content learning. This distinction is important. Spontaneous translanguaging occurs naturally when multilingual students negotiate meaning, while pedagogical translanguaging occurs when teachers intentionally design activities that allow students to use multiple languages for learning purposes.

Previous research has shown that translanguaging can support classroom learning. Creese and Blackledge (2010) demonstrated how translanguaging in bilingual classrooms can support learning, teaching, and identity negotiation. Hornberger and Link (2012) argued that welcoming translanguaging and transnational literacies in multilingual classrooms is necessary for biliteracy development. Velasco and Garcia (2014) showed that translanguaging can support bilingual learners' writing processes, including planning, drafting, and text production. These studies suggest that translanguaging can support both oral and written learning.

Classroom studies across several settings report converging findings. Creese and Blackledge (2010) and Blackledge and Creese (2010) documented flexible bilingual practice in complementary schools, Hornberger and Link (2012) analysed it through the continua of biliteracy, and Canagarajah (2011) identified teachable code-meshing strategies in academic writing. In content classrooms, Probyn (2015) and Charamba (2022) show that translanguaging helps learners bridge everyday and scientific discourse, and Duarte (2019) reports similar benefits in mainstream education. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) and Garcia, Johnson, and Seltzer (2017) describe how a translanguaging classroom can be designed deliberately rather than left to occur by default, and Velasco and Garcia (2014) show its value at the planning and drafting stages of writing. Cenoz (2017, 2022) and Cenoz and Gorter (2021) distinguish pedagogical translanguaging, which is planned, from spontaneous translanguaging, which is the distinction that organises the findings of the present study.

However, translanguaging also raises pedagogical concerns. Teachers may worry that students will overuse their first language and reduce target-language practice. Schools may have policies that prioritize one language of instruction. Assessment systems may not recognize multilingual performance. Teachers may also lack training on how to design translanguaging activities systematically. Ticheloven,

Blom, Leseman, and McMonagle (2021) identify practical and pedagogical challenges in implementing translanguaging, including institutional expectations, teacher uncertainty, and classroom management issues.

In English as a foreign language classrooms, translanguaging is particularly relevant. Students often learn English in contexts where English exposure outside school is limited. They may rely on their first language or local language to understand abstract concepts, clarify vocabulary, and discuss tasks. If teachers prohibit all use of students' existing languages, classroom interaction may become less meaningful. Conversely, if teachers allow unrestricted language use without clear learning goals, students may not develop sufficient English proficiency. The issue is not whether translanguaging should be allowed or prohibited, but how it should be pedagogically managed.

This study explores translanguaging practices in multilingual classrooms. It focuses on what teachers and students actually do, what benefits emerge, what challenges occur, and what pedagogical implications can be drawn for language instruction. The study addresses four research questions: what translanguaging practices occur in multilingual classrooms, what benefits teachers and students perceive, what challenges emerge during implementation, and what pedagogical implications can be formulated for language learning.

B. Method

This study employed a qualitative multiple-case study design. This design was selected because the study aimed to explore translanguaging practices in natural classroom contexts and compare patterns across different multilingual classrooms. The focus was not to test an intervention statistically but to understand how translanguaging was practiced, interpreted, and managed by teachers and students.

The study was conducted in three multilingual secondary classrooms. The classrooms were selected purposively because students used more than one language in daily communication. The linguistic repertoire of students included Indonesian, regional languages, and English as the target language. The study involved six language teachers and 120 students. The teachers had teaching experience ranging from five to sixteen years. The students were in Grade VIII and Grade IX, aged between 13 and 15 years.

Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured teacher interviews, student focus group discussions, field notes, and teaching document analysis. Twelve classroom observations

were conducted, with four observations in each classroom. Each observation lasted approximately 80 minutes. The observations focused on teacher language use, student language choice, peer interaction, explanation patterns, task completion, classroom participation, and moments when more than one language was used to support learning.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the six teachers. The interviews explored teachers' beliefs about multilingual language use, reasons for allowing or limiting translanguaging, instructional strategies, perceived benefits, and implementation challenges. Student focus group discussions were conducted with 24 students selected from the three classrooms. The students represented different levels of English proficiency, classroom participation, and linguistic background. The discussions explored students' experiences of using multiple languages in learning, their confidence, comprehension, peer support, and perceptions of classroom language rules.

Teaching documents were also analyzed. These documents included lesson plans, worksheets, vocabulary lists, bilingual notes, student group work, reflective journals, and classroom task products. Document analysis helped identify whether translanguaging was planned in instructional materials or emerged spontaneously during classroom interaction.

Data analysis followed thematic analysis. First, all observation notes, interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, and teaching documents were read repeatedly. Second, initial codes were generated based on translanguaging practices, functions, benefits, challenges, and teacher strategies. Third, related codes were grouped into categories. Fourth, themes were developed through cross-case comparison across the three classrooms. Fifth, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence with the research questions.

Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. Data triangulation was conducted by comparing classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, and teaching documents. Member checking was conducted with teacher participants to verify the interpretation of classroom episodes. Peer debriefing was used to review coding consistency. Ethical procedures were applied by obtaining school permission, teacher consent, and student assent. Participant identities were anonymized, and the data were used only for academic purposes.

Several procedures protected the quality of the analysis. The observation scheme was developed from published translanguaging frameworks and reviewed by two experts in multilingual education, producing a content validity index of 0.87, and it was trialled in one

lesson outside the data set before use. Classroom talk was audio-recorded and transcribed in full, with each translanguaging episode coded for its function, its initiator, and whether it was planned or spontaneous. Two researchers coded 30% of the transcripts independently, reaching a Cohen's kappa of 0.81 for function and 0.85 for the planned-spontaneous distinction, and disagreements were resolved through discussion. Because the three classrooms differed in their language profiles, cross-case analysis was used to distinguish patterns that recurred across sites from those specific to one classroom. Interview interpretations were returned to all six teachers for member checking, and an audit trail was maintained throughout.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

The findings are presented in four parts. The first part explains translanguaging practices found in multilingual classrooms. The second part presents the benefits of translanguaging for learning. The third part describes challenges in implementation. The fourth part presents pedagogical implications based on the findings.

Translanguaging Practices in Multilingual Classrooms

The analysis identified five dominant translanguaging practices: bilingual explanation, peer meaning negotiation, cross-linguistic vocabulary comparison, multilingual classroom interaction, and bilingual task completion. These practices appeared across the three cases, although teachers differed in how explicitly they planned and regulated them.

Table 1 Translanguaging Practices in Multilingual Classrooms

Translanguaging Practice	Classroom Evidence	Pedagogical Function
Bilingual explanation	Teachers explained key concepts in English and Indonesian or local language	Supporting comprehension
Peer meaning negotiation	Students discussed task meaning using mixed languages	Clarifying instructions and ideas
Cross-linguistic vocabulary comparison	Teachers compared English words with Indonesian or local equivalents	Developing vocabulary awareness
Multilingual classroom interaction	Students used different languages to ask, answer, and confirm understanding	Encouraging participation

Bilingual task completion	Students planned in familiar languages and produced output in English	Supporting target-language production
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Source: Processed from classroom observation and document analysis.

Bilingual explanation occurred when teachers introduced new vocabulary, grammar points, or task instructions in English and then clarified meaning in Indonesian or local language. Teachers did not translate every sentence. Instead, they used bilingual explanation selectively when students showed confusion or when concepts were abstract. This practice helped students understand lesson content without stopping the flow of instruction.

Peer meaning negotiation occurred during pair and group work. Students often discussed task requirements in Indonesian or regional language before producing responses in English. For example, when preparing a short dialogue, students discussed the meaning of expressions in Indonesian, negotiated appropriate vocabulary, and then practiced the dialogue in English. This suggests that students used familiar languages as cognitive tools to prepare target-language output.

Cross-linguistic vocabulary comparison was used to help students understand word meaning, word formation, and false equivalence. Teachers compared English vocabulary with Indonesian and local-language terms to clarify meaning and usage. This practice helped students recognize that translation is not always direct and that words carry contextual meaning.

Multilingual classroom interaction appeared when students asked questions, confirmed understanding, responded to jokes, or clarified instructions using multiple languages. Teachers generally accepted this practice when it supported learning. However, teachers redirected students to English when they were ready to produce target-language responses. Bilingual task completion occurred when students used one language for planning and another language for final output. For example, students brainstormed ideas in Indonesian, organized group notes bilingually, and then delivered a short English presentation.

Benefits of Translanguaging Practices

The study identified five major benefits of translanguaging: improved comprehension, increased participation, vocabulary development, confidence building, and identity affirmation. These benefits were reported by both teachers and students and were confirmed through observation of classroom interaction.

Table 2 Benefits of Translanguaging Practices

Benefit	Evidence from Data	Learning Meaning
Improved comprehension	Students understood instructions and concepts more quickly	Translanguaging reduced cognitive barriers
Increased participation	Low-proficiency students became more willing to ask and answer	Translanguaging created entry points for interaction
Vocabulary development	Students compared word meanings across languages	Translanguaging strengthened lexical awareness
Confidence building	Students felt less afraid of making mistakes	Translanguaging reduced speaking anxiety
Identity affirmation	Students felt their home languages were valued	Translanguaging supported inclusive classroom culture

Source: Synthesized from observations, interviews, and focus group discussions.

Improved comprehension was the most frequently observed benefit. Students understood lessons more effectively when teachers allowed clarification through familiar languages. This was especially visible during grammar explanation, reading comprehension, and instruction for complex tasks. Students reported that bilingual explanation helped them avoid misunderstanding.

Increased participation was another major benefit. Students with lower English proficiency were more willing to participate when they could use familiar languages to ask for clarification or discuss ideas with peers. Translanguaging created a bridge between silence and participation. Once students understood the task, they were more willing to attempt English output.

Vocabulary development improved through cross-linguistic comparison. Students became more aware of word meaning, context, and usage. For example, teachers clarified that some English words cannot be translated literally into Indonesian or local languages. This helped students understand vocabulary as meaning-in-context rather than isolated word pairs.

Confidence building appeared during speaking and group work. Students stated that they felt less anxious when teachers allowed them to prepare ideas in a familiar language before speaking English. This preparation helped them organize thoughts and reduced fear of failure. Identity affirmation was reflected in students' positive responses to the use of their home languages because their linguistic background was recognized rather than treated as a problem.

Challenges in Translanguaging Implementation

Although translanguaging provided benefits, teachers also experienced challenges. The main challenges were overuse of familiar languages, assessment uncertainty, classroom language policy, unequal proficiency, and limited teacher training.

Table 3 Challenges in Translanguaging Implementation

Challenge	Classroom Evidence	Teacher Response
Overuse of familiar languages	Some students continued using Indonesian or local language during English production tasks	Teachers set language-use stages
Assessment uncertainty	Teachers were unsure how to assess multilingual processes	Final output was assessed in English
Language policy pressure	Schools expected English use during English lessons	Teachers used translanguaging strategically
Unequal proficiency	Students differed in English and local-language competence	Teachers used flexible grouping
Limited teacher training	Teachers lacked formal guidance on translanguaging pedagogy	Teachers relied on experience and peer discussion

Source: Synthesized from teacher interviews and classroom observations.

Overuse of familiar languages was the most common challenge. Some students became too comfortable using Indonesian or local language and avoided English production. Teachers addressed this by setting stages: students could use familiar languages during brainstorming and clarification, but final oral or written output had to be produced in English.

Assessment uncertainty also emerged. Teachers found it difficult to evaluate multilingual processes because school assessment usually focused on English products. Teachers therefore assessed final English output while recognizing that multilingual discussion supported preparation. This finding indicates that assessment policy has not fully accommodated multilingual learning processes.

Language policy pressure influenced teacher decisions. Some teachers worried that too much translanguaging might be judged as insufficient English teaching. Therefore, they used translanguaging strategically but did not always include it explicitly in lesson plans. Unequal proficiency was another challenge because not all students shared the same local language. Teachers responded by using Indonesian as a common bridge language and allowing students to explain ideas in the language most useful to their group.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that translanguaging should be implemented intentionally, not randomly. Teachers need to design translanguaging practices that support target-language learning while valuing students' linguistic resources.

Table 4 Pedagogical Implications of Translanguaging Practices

Pedagogical Principle	Classroom Application	Expected Outcome
Purposeful language use	Define when and why multiple languages may be used	Preventing uncontrolled language use
Bridging to target language	Use familiar languages for planning, then produce English output	Supporting target-language development
Cross-linguistic awareness	Compare vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns	Developing metalinguistic awareness
Inclusive participation	Allow multilingual discussion during complex tasks	Increasing student engagement
Reflective assessment	Assess final output and learning process	Recognizing translanguaging as learning support

Source: Developed from research findings.

These implications indicate that translanguaging should not be treated as the opposite of target-language learning. Instead, it should be used as a scaffold that helps students move toward stronger academic and communicative competence in the target language.

2. Discussion

The findings show that translanguaging practices were already present in multilingual classrooms, even when they were not formally written in lesson plans. Teachers and students used multiple languages to explain concepts, negotiate meaning, compare vocabulary, manage interaction, and complete learning tasks. This confirms Li Wei's (2018) view that translanguaging reflects the dynamic and flexible use of linguistic resources in meaning-making. It also supports Garcia and Li Wei's (2014) argument that multilingual speakers draw on a unitary linguistic repertoire rather than operating through strictly separated language systems.

The use of cross-linguistic vocabulary comparison strengthened metalinguistic awareness. Students learned that meanings do not always transfer directly across languages. They became more aware of

word choice, context, register, and usage. This supports research by Velasco and Garcia (2014), who found that translanguaging can support bilingual learners' writing by helping them plan and develop ideas across languages. It also supports Otheguy, Garcia, and Reid's (2015) argument that translanguaging helps deconstruct rigid boundaries among named languages.

Increased participation was one of the strongest benefits. Translanguaging created entry points for students who were not confident enough to participate only in English. This is pedagogically important because classroom silence does not necessarily indicate lack of knowledge; it may indicate limited linguistic resources in the target language. When students were allowed to use familiar languages strategically, they could ask questions, contribute ideas, and gradually move toward English production. This finding is aligned with Hornberger and Link's (2012) biliteracy lens and with Seltzer's (2019) critical translanguinal approach.

The findings also show that translanguaging supported student identity. Students felt that their home languages and regional languages were recognized as legitimate resources. This matters because language policies that ignore students' linguistic identities can create exclusion. Translanguaging pedagogy can help build inclusive classrooms where linguistic diversity is treated as a resource rather than a deficiency (Gorter & Cenoz, 2017; Rajendram, 2023). In this sense, translanguaging is both a pedagogical and an equity-oriented practice.

However, the challenges indicate that translanguaging requires careful management. Teachers were concerned about overuse of familiar languages. This concern is valid. If translanguaging is not structured, students may avoid target-language practice. Therefore, teachers need to design clear language-use stages. For example, students may brainstorm in any language, prepare bilingual notes, and then produce final oral or written output in English. This staged approach allows translanguaging to support rather than replace target-language development (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Garcia, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017).

Assessment remains a major issue. Most school assessment systems evaluate final products in one target language. They rarely recognize multilingual processes that support learning. This creates a gap between classroom reality and assessment policy. Teachers need rubrics that recognize process, participation, comprehension, and final target-language output. However, assessment must remain clear so that students understand expectations. Gorter and Cenoz (2017)

similarly argue that multilingual assessment remains underdeveloped in language education policy.

The issue of unequal linguistic repertoire also deserves attention. In multilingual classrooms, students may not share the same home language. Translanguaging should not privilege one local language while excluding others. Teachers need flexible strategies, such as using a common school language for clarification, allowing group-based language choices, and encouraging students to explain meanings across languages. Inclusivity requires sensitivity to the actual linguistic composition of the classroom (Ticheloven et al., 2021; Poza, 2017).

The study confirms that translanguaging is not simply code-switching. Code-switching is often described as alternation between languages, while translanguaging emphasizes the integrated use of linguistic resources for meaning-making, identity, and learning. In classroom practice, this means teachers should focus less on policing boundaries between languages and more on designing meaningful language use that supports learning (Lewis, Jones, & Baker, 2012; Jaspers, 2018).

Comparison with Previous Studies

The concerns reported by the teachers in this study are shared in the literature. Jaspers (2018) argues that translanguaging has been credited with transformative effects it cannot deliver on its own, and Ticheloven, Blom, Leseman, and McMonagle (2021) document the practical challenges teachers face, including managing languages they do not speak themselves. Rajendram (2023) frames the issue as one of affordances and constraints rather than of principle, and Seltzer (2019) shows what a critical translanguaging approach requires of the teacher in an English classroom. Assessment remains the least resolved question: Gorter and Cenoz (2017) point out that multilingual assessment policy has not kept pace with multilingual pedagogy, which is why the teachers in this study allowed translanguaging while learning but reverted to monolingual criteria when marking.

Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications

Theoretically, the clearest finding is the gap between spontaneous and pedagogical translanguaging. Translanguaging occurred constantly in all three classrooms, but it was almost always reactive: teachers switched when comprehension broke down rather than planning in advance where the students' full linguistic repertoire could do work that English alone could not. The consequence is that translanguaging functioned as a repair strategy rather than as a

pedagogy. This distinction matters because the benefits claimed in the literature, particularly for conceptual understanding and identity affirmation, depend on deliberate design, whereas the risks most often raised, particularly overreliance on the first language, follow from unplanned use.

Pedagogically, three implications follow. First, teacher education should give teachers concrete planning tools: which stage of a lesson invites the home language, for what purpose, and how the class returns to English afterwards. Teachers in this study were willing but had no framework for deciding. Second, assessment policy has to be addressed alongside pedagogy. Allowing translanguaging while learning and forbidding it while testing sends learners a contradictory message and was the main source of teacher uncertainty in this study. Third, translanguaging should not be treated as a substitute for adequate English input. The classrooms in which it worked best were those in which it opened up content that the students then went on to express in English.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Several limitations qualify these findings. First, the study covered three classrooms and six teachers in one region, and multilingual classrooms differ greatly in their language profiles, so the patterns reported here should not be generalised. Second, observation inevitably influences classroom language use, and teachers may have translanguaged more or less than usual while being recorded. Third, the study documented practice and teacher beliefs but did not measure learning outcomes, so it cannot show whether the episodes observed supported comprehension as the teachers believed. Fourth, students' own perspectives were gathered only indirectly. Future research could add measures of content and language learning, elicit students' views on when they want their home language available, compare planned with spontaneous translanguaging under controlled conditions, and examine how assessment policy shapes what teachers permit in the classroom.

D. Conclusion

This study explored translanguaging practices in multilingual classrooms and identified their benefits and pedagogical implications for language learning. The findings showed that teachers and students used five dominant translanguaging practices: bilingual explanation, peer meaning negotiation, cross-linguistic vocabulary comparison, multilingual classroom interaction, and bilingual task completion. These practices supported comprehension, participation, vocabulary

development, confidence, and identity affirmation. Translanguaging helped students understand complex tasks, discuss ideas with peers, prepare English output, and connect new knowledge with their existing linguistic resources. However, teachers faced challenges related to overuse of familiar languages, assessment uncertainty, monolingual language policy, unequal student proficiency, and limited teacher training. The study concludes that translanguaging should be used as a purposeful pedagogical scaffold rather than an uncontrolled classroom habit. Teachers need to design clear stages for multilingual meaning-making and target-language production. Schools should support flexible language policies, teacher training, and assessment models that recognize multilingual learning processes. Future research should examine translanguaging across subject areas, compare different school levels, investigate student achievement outcomes, and develop practical translanguaging-based teaching modules for multilingual classrooms.

Declaration of AI-Assisted Technologies

In preparing this manuscript, the authors used AI-assisted tools only to improve English language quality, grammar, readability, sentence clarity, and academic expression. The AI tools were not used to generate research data, conduct data analysis, produce findings, or draw conclusions. All conceptual arguments, data interpretation, methodological decisions, and scholarly conclusions remain the full responsibility of the authors. The authors carefully reviewed, edited, and verified all AI-assisted outputs to ensure the accuracy, integrity, and originality of the final manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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