

A Review of Studies on EFL Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Approach

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ABSTRACT

Translanguaging has emerged as an adjustment to English as the medium of instruction programs, which challenges the traditional monolingual approach to language teaching. This paper aims to provide insights into the perceptions of EFL teachers and students toward translanguaging as a pedagogical approach through making a systematic review of the findings of five recent empirical studies. The analysis of those secondary sources shows that the majority of EFL teachers and students hold positive attitudes toward translanguaging activities in EMI classrooms. Additionally, most of the teachers reported a need for training on planning and deploying translanguaging practice in the EMI classroom setting. Future research focusing on strategic uses of translanguaging pedagogy and their explicit instructions for EFL teachers and students is recommended as a result of the findings' interpretation.

Keywords:

translanguaging,
bilingualism, English
medium instruction

Introduction

In the field of language teaching and acquisition over the past two decades, translanguaging practice as a pedagogical strategy has attracted great concerns from researchers (Fenton-Smith, Eds., 2017). Translanguaging has emerged as an adjustment to English as the medium of instruction programs for non-native English learners due to the challenges of those programs, such as being perceived as monolingual bias, the hindrance to low English proficient learners (Cenoz & Gorter 2013; García & Li, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2017). Specifically, May (2014) argues that when learners' native language is excluded, low English proficient learners may become reluctant to speak and then lose their motivation, leading to a decline in learners' participation which is an important aspect of language acquisition. Whether these beliefs of experts and academics about the merits of translanguaging in EMI classrooms can be enhanced or not in part depends on the viewpoints of those directly involved in the setting, that is, teachers and learners. Therefore, this paper aims to provide a brief review of recent empirical studies on EFL teachers' and learners' perceptions of translanguaging practice in EMI classrooms. The findings are then discussed to give insights on the issue from the perspectives of teachers and

learners, which are expected to contribute to the literature on this pedagogical approach as well as to the decision-making of stakeholders on language policy for the EMI classroom setting.

Literature review

The concept of translanguaging

Translanguaging began as a pedagogical practice in Welsh-English secondary educational settings with teachers' planned activities for learners to use two languages simultaneously (Williams, 1994, 1996). Since then, translanguaging has generated a plethora of literature that investigates its theoretical and empirical dimensions as “both the complex practices of plurilingual individuals and communities, as well as the pedagogical approaches that use those complex practices” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 3). Numerous definitions of translanguaging and its potential values for bilingual education have been given, challenging the traditional monolingual approach as well as the socially and politically defined boundary of languages (García, 2009; García & Li, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012). Combining the features of translanguaging from the perspectives of different researchers, Mazak (2017) defined translanguaging as a multi-faceted phenomenon involving

(1) a language ideology that sets bilingualism as the norm, (2) a theory of bilingualism that perceives that bilinguals draw from one integrated linguistic repertoire to navigate their bilingual worlds, (3) a pedagogical stance that allows people to learn and teach by drawing from their linguistic and semiotic resources, (4) a set of practices that are drawn from linguistic and semiotic resources of bilinguals, and being (5) transformational as it transforms the traditional notion of languages themselves and their practices along with the lives of bilinguals (2017, pp. 5-6)

Translanguaging as pedagogy and its benefits

Though translanguaging has been examined in both natural and educational contexts, more attention has been put on the educational setting due to the challenges and merits of this practice (Blackledge & Creese, 2010). In the context of a dual language classroom, there are two types of translanguaging to be considered: teacher-directed translanguaging and learner-directed translanguaging (Lewis et al., 2012). While the former refers to pedagogical translanguaging, which uses planned and structured teaching strategies to build on multilingual learners' diverse linguistic practices, the latter refers to self-directed strategies from the learners “when learners self-regulate their learning by using linguistic practices and meaning-making resources that are not explicitly included in the classroom or lesson” (García & Wei, 2014). Together, these two types of translanguaging can facilitate learners' understanding of complex academic content as well as enhance the target language learning.

Empirical evidence has proved that translanguaging can be used as a deliberate strategy to achieve a variety of pedagogical goals, including explaining subject content, eliciting students' oral output, managing classroom discipline, and building teacher-student rapport (García & Wei, 2014; Zhou & Mann, 2021).

Research Questions

Through a brief review of recent empirical studies in translanguaging, the paper questioned the answers to the following research question:

- What are the perceptions of EFL teachers and students towards translanguaging as a pedagogical approach for EMI classes?

Methods

Design of the Study

This study is a systematic review with secondary data from five related empirical studies in translanguaging. Within a corpus of recent studies, the five studies were selected adhering to the following criteria: being the latest research, focusing on EFL teachers and students of EMI programs, and each study representing a geographic region.

A synopsis of the previous studies

The setting

Secondary data for this review paper are from the following empirical studies: Yuvayapan's work "Translanguaging in EFL classrooms: Teachers' perceptions and practices" (2019), Romanowski's study "Perceptions of Translanguaging among the students and teachers of EMI classrooms in Poland" (2020), Zhou et al.'s research "Towards a sustainable classroom ecology: Translanguaging in English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in a Finance course at an international school of Shanghai" (2021), Liu's research entitled "A study of graduate students' perceptions towards pedagogical translanguaging at an international university in Bangkok" (2021) and Ngo's study "Translanguaging practices in EMI settings from the perspective of students agency: An example from Vietnamese higher education" (2021), which were coded respectively as Study 1, Study 2, Study 3, Study 4 and Study 5. The research settings of those studies are summarized in Table 1 below.

Table 1. Research settings of the five studies

Study	Participants	Education Level	Country
Study 1	50 EFL teachers	Various	Turkey
Study 2	27 EFL teachers & 98 students	Secondary	Poland
Study 3	3 EFL teachers & 40 students	Grade 5 to 8	China
Study 4	147 EFL graduate students	Tertiary	Thailand
Study 5	77 EFL students & 2 lecturers	Tertiary	Vietnam

As can be seen in Table 1, the studies were conducted in various EMI education settings in five

different countries, wherein Study 1 got the largest scale of teacher participants, with 50 teachers of different grades from state and private Turkish schools, and Study 4 had the largest number of student participants with 147 graduate students. In general, the sampling of each study was appropriate for the research goal of getting an overall picture of the EFL teachers' and/or students' perceptions of pedagogical translanguaging.

The instruments for collecting data

Table 2. Instruments for collecting data from the five studies

Study	Quantitative	Qualitative
Study 1	Questionnaire	Classroom observation Semi-structured interview
Study 2	Questionnaire	Classroom observation Interview
Study 3		Classroom observation Field notes Semi-structured group interview
Study 4	Questionnaire	Classroom observation Interview
Study 5		Classroom observation Interview Site documents

Table 2 shows the instruments for collecting data from the five studies in question. All of the studies ensure data triangulation by having a combination of different data sources. On top of that, three of the studies, including Study 1, Study 2, and Study 4, deploy the mixed-method approach with both quantitative and qualitative data, which is believed to mutually support and validate the results of each data source (Rea & Parker, 2005; Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Discussion of the findings of the five studies

The perceptions of EFL teachers and students towards translanguaging as a pedagogical approach for EMI classes

The most prominent finding of Study 1 was that the perceptions of those EFL teachers on translanguaging were not in line with their practices. Despite their favorable attitudes toward translanguaging in some contexts, they did not commonly use this method due to expectations from their institutions, colleagues, and student's parents. Specifically, the majority of EFL teachers encouraged lower English proficiency students' use of Turkish to enhance their participation, while merely a small number of teachers agreed that teachers' use of translanguaging would be helpful for those students. Reasons for the conflict between their perception and practice were institutional and contextual constraints, as clarified in the interviews with ten voluntary teachers. It can be seen from the study that teachers' use of translanguaging was mostly for classroom and student-oriented purposes and rather spontaneously, without a systematic way to increase students' performance. Therefore,

Yuvayapan (2019) called for future research on an evaluation of a professional development program to enhance EFL teachers' knowledge and practices of translanguaging.

In study 2, it is worth noting that the participants are highly competent in English, with a minimum level of B2 and C1 for students and teachers, respectively (according to Common European Reference for Languages). The findings showed that those students held positive views toward classroom translanguaging despite the fact there were not many obstacles for them to comprehend and express their ideas in English. As for the teachers, they also reported an approving attitude to translanguaging's occurrence in their EMI classrooms. However, there were some responses indicating neutral or indifferent viewpoints, which may result from the teachers' insecurity and uncertainty about translanguaging's benefits. Overall, the key achievement of this study was to provide significant insights into the perceptions of translanguaging practice of Polish teachers and students from EMI high school settings.

The findings of Study 3 indicated that the majority of young Chinese students hold positive attitudes toward translanguaging as a pedagogy practice, while a small number of students would rather perceive it as a linguistic practice. The study also revealed the motivation behind students' use of translanguaging as follows: the ease of communication, the facility of contextual resources and the strategic manipulation of linguistic repertoire at their disposal.

Results of quantitative and qualitative data were utilized to address two goals of Study 4; that is, to investigate the perceptions of Thai graduate students regarding different factors impacting the use of translanguaging and to investigate how graduate students perceive translanguaging as a primary method in language practice. The findings of quantitative data confirmed six influential factors to students' use of translanguaging as follow: social and parental support; the proficiency of target language; the difficulty of content; the willingness to use L1; the encouragement of the teacher; and metalinguistic awareness. The qualitative results indicated that translanguaging was helpful for emergent bilingual students in second language learning, and there are requirements for more pedagogical adaptations while adopting translanguaging into the classroom. To sum up, the study indicated that the necessity for learners to translanguage should be considered in the language policy decisions of stakeholders and instructors. The study also emphasized the need for a transformational process from an emergent bilingual to a true bilingual in this context. It was suggested from the study that for the emergent bilingual, the first language was used for comprehension and meaning-making. Meanwhile, for true or high proficiency bilingual, translanguaging aided in the development of critical thinking and critical consciousness in students, as well as in the formation of bicultural identities to counter monolingualism in the traditional classroom.

Regarding Study 5, the data was collected within a semester from two modules of an EMI program in International Studies. These modules were delivered by two separate lecturers holding different beliefs about language policy, with one favoring English only in students' presentations for assessment and the other allowing students to combine both English and Vietnamese, the first language of both lecturers and students. The findings showed that students still employed some kinds of hidden translanguaging practice in the module with English only

for presentations. However, the students' learning space was limited, and their meaning-making was impeded when it came to complicated concepts or topics. Meanwhile, in the module where students were free to shuttle between Vietnamese and English during their presentations or discussion with classmates, the meaning-making process proceeded naturally, and students were more active "to participate", "to elaborate ideas", and "to raise questions", the three important functions of translanguaging suggested by García and Li (2014, p. 103). In sum, the study contributes to the advocacy of translanguaging practice in EMI classrooms from the perspective of students. Regarding the limitation of the study, Ngo (2021) acknowledged a lack of focus on teachers' perspectives of classroom translanguaging in EMI classes, as well as a need for analysis of training for teachers in dealing with these bilingual practices.

Conclusion & Recommendations

The paper reviews five recent studies on how EFL teachers and students perceived translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in EMI classroom settings. It can be concluded from the results and findings of those studies that, in general, EFL teachers and students perceive translanguaging as an effective tool for enhancing students' participation and comprehension of the subject contents. However, due to the principle of a monolingual approach in EMI classrooms, EFL teachers and students reported limited utilization of translanguaging. Some participants even showed a conservative view against the inclusion of other languages in the EMI educational setting.

It is also noticeable that in the existing studies, EFL teachers and students tend to use translanguaging in an unplanned, spontaneous way to deal with emerging situations in the classrooms due to their uncertainty of its benefits as well as a lack of conceptual framework on how to plan translanguaging practices in the classroom. Those gaps from previous studies, together with a lack of empirical studies in the Vietnamese context, are the inspirations for future empirical research on instructions for pedagogical translanguaging.

To sum up, although those EFL teachers and students showed positive perceptions toward using translanguaging as a pedagogical approach in EMI classroom settings, they still quite hesitated to employ this practice in class due to the monolingual policy of EMI programs. Consequently, it is recommended that stakeholders and administrators of EMI programs should make an adaptation to the language policy of those programs with a more open attitude to the use of mother tongue languages. Additionally, explicit instructions on how and when to utilize translanguaging in EMI classrooms should be given.

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Biodata

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