



Understanding the Impact of Translanguaging on EFL Learners' Classroom Immersion from Teachers' Perspectives: A Critical Review of Three Empirical Studies

Oufai Imane Maria¹

University of Algiers 2 (Algeria)

oufai.maria@gmail.com

Aoudar Louiza²

University of Algiers 2 (Algeria)

louizaoudar@gmail.com

Dr.Souadkia Mounya^{3*}

University of Algiers 2 (Algeria)

mounya.souadkia@gmail.com

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Abstract

Despite the increasing recognition of linguistic diversity in multilingual classrooms, the role of translanguaging in supporting classroom immersion for (EFL) learners remains contested. Many EFL contexts continue to uphold English-only ideologies, which can marginalise learners' linguistic resources and hinder inclusive participation. This paper investigates this issue by conducting a critical review of three empirical studies, each of which explores teachers' perspectives on translanguaging and its perceived effects on learners' immersion and engagement in EFL classrooms. The review reveals that when implemented strategically, translanguaging functions as a scaffold that enhances comprehension, lowers learner anxiety, and affirms students' linguistic identities. These factors contribute positively to classroom immersion. The results of these studies provide evidence that some teachers were generally supportive of pedagogical translanguaging, recognising its benefits in increasing participation and clarity, while others were uncertain about translanguaging's role and expressed a preference for English-only instruction. These findings underscore the importance of contextual and institutional factors in shaping translanguaging practices and call for clearer policies and teacher training to ensure balanced, purposeful integration.

Keywords: translanguaging, classroom immersion, EFL learners, teacher perspectives, English-only policy.

Introduction

Translanguaging has emerged as a significant concept in language education, particularly in multilingual and multicultural classrooms where learners rely on diverse linguistic repertoires to make meaning and engage with academic content (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; García & Wei, 2014). In today's increasingly globalised world, English holds the status of a dominant international language, especially in educational and professional spheres (Crystal, 2003). As a result, (EFL) learners are often required to achieve high levels of linguistic competence to succeed academically and socially. However, EFL classrooms traditionally adopt monolingual approaches that prioritise exclusive use of English, often at the expense of learners' home languages (Cummins, 2007; Creese & Blackledge, 2010). In response to this issue, translanguaging is gaining attention as an alternative pedagogical practice that recognises and utilises learners' full linguistic capacities, rather than restricting them (García & Kleyn, 2016; Canagarajah, 2011).

While EFL teaching has witnessed a pedagogical shift from teacher-centred to more learner-centred approaches, the immersion model in many EFL contexts still tends to maintain rigid language boundaries (Johnson & Swain, 1997; Cummins, 1998). In such settings, learners are expected to remain immersed in English, with little to no room for translanguaging or using their first languages (L1s) as part of the learning process. This restriction may hinder learner participation, cognitive engagement, and overall classroom immersion (Duarte, 2016; Cook, 2001).

As García and Wei (2014) argue, translanguaging allows learners to access complex content and develop deeper understanding by fluidly moving between their languages. Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter (2021) emphasise that pedagogical translanguaging can enhance learners' metalinguistic awareness and deepen content comprehension. Therefore, teachers who integrate translanguaging practices may offer more inclusive and effective learning environments that support classroom immersion by validating learners' linguistic identities and fostering greater engagement (Allard, Doyle, & Linville, 2023; Velasco & García, 2014).

The present paper seeks to examine how translanguaging affects classroom immersion from the perspectives of EFL teachers. Since teachers are key mediators of classroom practices, their insights can reveal both the potential and the challenges of using translanguaging as a pedagogical tool (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020; Moafa, 2023). Through a secondary research approach, this study reviews and analyses three empirical investigations that explore how EFL teachers perceive and implement translanguaging, and how these practices influence their learner's ability to immerse themselves in English-language learning. By focusing on teachers' experiences and reflections, this work aims to offer a well-rounded understanding of translanguaging's role in shaping EFL learners' classroom immersion. This topic is of particular relevance because it addresses a persistent tension in language education between maintaining target language immersion and recognising multilingual learners' need for linguistic flexibility (Semiante, 2016; Paulsrud et al., 2017).

1. Understanding Translanguaging

1.1. Definition and Origins

The concept of translanguaging has evolved significantly since its inception. Originating from the Welsh term *trawsieithu*, the term was first introduced by Cen Williams in the 1990s to describe a pedagogical practice in bilingual classrooms where students were encouraged to receive information in one language and respond in another (Baker, 2011; García & Wei, 2014). Rather than viewing languages as separate, autonomous systems, translanguaging posits that multilingual speakers operate within a unified linguistic repertoire, seamlessly integrating elements from various languages to maximise understanding and expression (Canagarajah, 2011; García, 2009).

It is worth mentioning that translanguaging only occurs in bilingual and multilingual contexts, as it involves the flexible use of two or more languages in communication. It cannot take place in monolingual settings, where only one language is used (Crystal, 2003; Cummins, 2000). Crucially, translanguaging also challenges prevailing monoglossic ideologies that often marginalise bilingual practices. By legitimising and embracing these practices, educators can foster more inclusive and linguistically responsive classrooms.

1.2. Translanguaging in the Educational Context

1.2.1. Translanguaging for Teaching

Translanguaging has gained recognition as a transformative pedagogical practice that responds to the diverse linguistic, social, and educational profiles of multilingual learners. García and Wei (2014) advocate for pedagogies that holistically address students' cognitive, social, and creative capacities by drawing on their full linguistic repertoires. Despite institutional resistance to alternative pedagogies, multilingual learners frequently draw on all their languages to navigate academic content, even in environments where the use of non-dominant languages is discouraged (Lin, 2005). According to García and Wei (2014), such translanguaging behavior is not only natural but also essential, as it reflects how bilingual and multilingual individuals think and learn. In classrooms that legitimise translanguaging practices, the permeability of language boundaries becomes an asset rather than a constraint.

1.2.2. Teachers' Attitudes towards Translanguaging

According to Ticheloven et al. (2019), when educators engage with translanguaging theory and participate in reflective practice, they begin to perceive it not as a marker of linguistic confusion but as a valuable cognitive and communicative asset. Supporting this perspective, Velasco and García (2014) reported that educators who witness tangible outcomes such as enhanced student participation, comprehension, and engagement tend to adopt more favourable and open attitudes towards translanguaging. Cummins (2005) further argues that recognising translanguaging as a means of affirming students' identities can reframe it from a mere instructional strategy to a matter of social justice, thereby deepening educators' commitment to its implementation.

Despite these positive insights, other studies highlight persistent reservations among educators. García and Kleyn (2016) observed that teachers often hesitate to fully implement translanguaging practices due to concerns that it might undermine students' acquisition of the dominant or target language, such as English. This apprehension is echoed by Palmer et

al. (2014), who found that even within bilingual education settings, teachers tended to prefer rigid language separation policies.

1.2.3. Translanguaging for Learning

Duarte (2016) asserts that translanguaging serves as a scaffold for meaning-making through interactive dialogue, enabling learners to engage in joint problem-solving of academic tasks. In this context, learners use their full linguistic repertoires to hypothesise, negotiate meaning, express viewpoints, and co-construct knowledge, thereby reinforcing the collaborative dimension of learning. Such interactional use of language highlights the centrality of translanguaging in advancing multilingual learners' overall linguistic competencies.

In addition to its cognitive benefits, translanguaging fosters metalinguistic awareness. Cenoz and Gorter (2011) contend that when students are permitted to draw upon their diverse linguistic resources, they become more reflective about language structure and use, enhancing their understanding of how languages function. Furthermore, García and Wei (2014) highlight the socio-affective advantages of translanguaging, noting that it plays a significant role in cultivating learners' sense of belonging and reinforcing cultural identity.

2. Understanding Immersion

2.1. Definition of Immersion in Language Learning

Language immersion is a pedagogical approach designed to immerse learners in the target language (L2) by ensuring extensive and meaningful exposure within classroom or simulated native-speaking environments. As defined by Johnson and Swain (1997), immersion involves structuring learning contexts where students are consistently engaged with the L2 in communicative and purposeful activities. The central principle of this model is to replicate the natural conditions under which language acquisition typically occurs, thereby reducing reliance on the learners' first language (L1) and enhancing opportunities for authentic language use (Cummins, 1998).

Immersion programs differ in their degree of intensity. Genesee (1987) categorises these variations as full immersion (where instruction is conducted exclusively in the L2) and partial immersion, where both L1 and L2 are employed to differing extents. Regardless of the model adopted, the overarching objective is to encourage implicit learning, enabling learners to acquire linguistic competence in a subconscious, intuitive manner through sustained and contextualised language exposure, as opposed to explicit instruction in grammatical rules (Krashen, 1985).

2.2. The Benefits of Immersive Environments for EFL Learners

Despite the differing instructional contexts between traditional immersion programs and foreign language education settings, research indicates that immersive environments in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context can yield comparable advantages. Notably, immersion in EFL has been associated with the development of bilingual proficiency and improved academic outcomes (Genesee, 1987). Learners in these settings tend to acquire strong English communication skills while maintaining competence in their first language, resulting in effective bilingualism (Lasagabaster&Doiz, 2016). In addition to linguistic gains, early immersion programs have been linked to a range of cognitive benefits. Cummins (1977, 1978) observed that such programs enhance executive functioning,

cognitive flexibility, and metalinguistic awareness, all of which contribute to more robust problem-solving abilities. These findings are further supported by Baker and Wright (2021), who emphasise the long-term cognitive advantages derived from early and sustained immersion.

2.3. The Impact of English-only Policies on Classroom Immersion

English-only policies (EOP) are often implemented in immersion-based educational settings to maximise learners' exposure to the target language, which is considered fundamental for facilitating implicit language acquisition (Krashen, 1982). By mandating English as the sole medium of communication, these policies compel students to engage consistently with the language, thereby reinforcing linguistic structures such as vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation through repetitive and meaningful use. This immersion can also promote learner motivation by instilling a sense of urgency and necessity: students must utilise English to participate effectively in classroom interactions, thus encouraging greater involvement (Macaro, 2001). Additionally, minimising the use of the first language (L1) helps reduce linguistic interference and accelerates learners' adaptation to the target language environment (Ellis, 2008).

3. Theoretical Frameworks

3.1. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory, as developed by Vygotsky (1978), provides a foundational framework for understanding how language learning occurs through social interaction. In multilingual contexts, language acquisition begins as an interpersonal process, relying on interaction with others before becoming internalised (García & Wei, 2014). Learning is thus viewed as a socially mediated activity shaped by collaborative practices involving peers, teachers, and the broader community (Wink, 2005). Within this framework, translanguaging aligns closely with sociocultural principles, particularly when employed in a planned and strategic way that enhances both cognitive and linguistic development (Baker, 2011).

A central concept of Vygotsky's theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which refers to the gap between what learners can achieve independently and what they can accomplish with appropriate guidance or collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978). In this zone, scaffolding becomes a crucial instructional strategy, allowing teachers and peers to support learners through graduated assistance that is eventually withdrawn as independence is gained. Translanguaging supports scaffolding by enabling learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to access content, express ideas, and co-construct meaning in ways that deepen comprehension (Cummins, 2008).

3.2. Translanguaging Theory

Translanguaging theory, initially developed by García (2009) and later elaborated in collaboration with L. Wei (García & Li Wei, 2014), offers a reconceptualisation of bilingualism that challenges traditional language education paradigms. Rather than viewing bilinguals as managing two distinct linguistic systems, translanguaging posits that multilingual individuals access a unified linguistic repertoire to make meaning, engage in communication, and facilitate learning. This theoretical perspective contests the long-standing ideology of language separation in bilingual education, which has historically promoted isolated language use within instructional settings (Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

In this light, translanguaging serves both as a theory of language, emphasising

language as a fluid, socially situated practice, and as a pedagogical stance that embraces and legitimises learners' complete linguistic repertoires (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). This stance holds particular relevance in multilingual classrooms, where learners' varied language backgrounds are acknowledged as valuable resources for learning rather than as barriers. Translanguaging pedagogy encourages environments in which linguistic boundaries are intentionally blurred, empowering students to utilise all of their linguistic assets to articulate complex ideas, co-construct knowledge, and participate in cognitively demanding tasks (García & Wei, 2014).

3.3. Krashen's Monitor Model

Krashen's Monitor Model (1981), a prominent theory in second language acquisition (SLA), distinguishes between language acquisition and learning, positing that these are fundamentally separate processes. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis asserts that acquisition occurs subconsciously through meaningful, communicative interaction, akin to how children acquire their first language. In contrast, learning is a conscious process involving the formal study of language rules (Lai & Wei, 2019).

A core element of this model is the Input Hypothesis, which posits that language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to comprehensible input, that is, language slightly beyond their current level of understanding ($i+1$). This input must be engaging, understandable, and delivered in a naturalistic context, without the necessity of grammatical sequencing (Krashen, 1985, as cited in Lai & Wei, 2019; McKenzie, 2010).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis further elaborates on individual differences in SLA by suggesting that emotional variables (such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence) serve as a mental filter that either facilitates or impedes language intake. A "low affective filter," associated with high motivation and low anxiety, allows more input to be processed and internalised, whereas a "high filter" can block comprehensible input, hindering acquisition (McKenzie, 2010; Wilson, 2002, as cited in Lai & Wei, 2019). In addition to the Monitor and Natural Order Hypotheses, which complement the framework, the Acquisition-Learning, Input, and Affective Filter hypotheses constitute the central mechanisms through which Krashen explains how language is internalised and the factors that facilitate or obstruct that process.

3.4. Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis

Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis represents a significant contribution to theories of second language acquisition (SLA), proposing that conscious attention to linguistic forms in input is a necessary condition for learning. According to Schmidt, learners do not acquire language features unless they actively notice them during communication. This assertion arose from his own language learning experience, where he observed that only the language forms he consciously recognised in Portuguese became part of his interlanguage system (Schmidt, 1990, as cited in Robinson, 2003).

The instructional implications of the Noticing Hypothesis are considerable. It underpins the focus-on-form approach, which integrates attention to grammar within communicative activities (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Teaching techniques such as input enhancement, highlighting specific forms in texts, and metalinguistic feedback are designed to facilitate noticing, thereby enhancing learners' awareness of target structures (Ellis,

2016). These strategies align with the hypothesis's emphasis on the essential role of attention in effective SLA.

4. Overview of the Studies

4.1. Moafa's Study (2023)

The first study entitled "*Unlocking the Potential of Translanguaging: Teachers' Perspectives to Maximize Learner Outcomes*" is study which was carried out by Moafa in 2023 in Saudi Arabia. It sought to investigate teachers' attitudes regarding the use of translanguaging in EFL classrooms and its potential in improving learner outcomes. Through voluntary response sampling, the researchers selected 104 teachers of English from different Saudi Arabian universities with varied ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. The study's findings revealed that despite the strong advocacy for English-only instruction, the majority of EFL instructors have a positive approach towards translanguaging, acknowledging its beneficial role in improving learners' participation and reducing anxiety.

4.2. Khairunnisa and Lukmana's Study (2020)

The second study titled "*Teachers' Attitudes towards Translanguaging in Indonesian EFL Classrooms*" was conducted in 2020 by Khairunnisa and Lukmana in Indonesia. It attempted to examine teachers' attitudes towards translanguaging in Indonesian EFL classrooms. Fifty English language teachers, most of whom were female teachers who work in different elementary schools in Bandung, were randomly selected to be part of this research. Moreover, notable differences in years of teaching experience and teachers' native language enhanced the study's diversity and broadened the scope of the research. the researchers adopted a descriptive quantitative approach through a survey. Data were collected using a questionnaire that included multiple-choice and Likert-scale questions. The questionnaire was administered online using Google Form and was analysed using descriptive statistics to calculate the percentages of responses for each Likert-scale item in the questionnaire.

By the end of this process, and after a thorough analysis of the data, it was finally revealed that Indonesian EFL teachers were flexibly using translanguaging to facilitate students' learning. Moreover, the current study indicated that translanguaging helped students learn English and served as a pedagogical tool for teachers in classroom practices.

4.3. Constantine's Study (2023)

The third study entitled "*Teachers' Perspectives on Translanguaging in EFL Classrooms*" was carried out in 2023 by Marina-Bel Constantine in Sweden. This study aimed to explore how English teachers perceive the concept of translanguaging, how they apply it, and how they argue in favour or against its use in EFL classrooms. The targeted sample in this study included four different EFL teachers at a single Swedish upper secondary school in Stockholm, Sweden. Constantine conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended, pre-set questions. Opting for these types of data collection tools allowed the participants to express their perspectives by providing detailed answers for qualitative analysis. the study revealed a strong preference for the English-only approach in EFL classrooms. According to the study, though uncertain about how to effectively use translanguaging, teachers used spontaneous translanguaging for the purpose of promoting clarity and ensuring understanding.

5. Discussion of Major Findings of the Studies

The three empirical studies reviewed, conducted in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Sweden, offer contrasting yet complementary insights into the role of translanguaging in EFL classrooms. Analysed through theoretical frameworks such as Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Krashen's Input and Affective Filter Hypotheses, and contemporary views on pedagogical translanguaging, the findings illustrate the nuanced interplay between teacher attitudes, contextual realities, and instructional practices. This discussion critically examines these studies in relation to the theoretical background, drawing out convergences, divergences, and implications for the integration of translanguaging within immersive EFL pedagogy.

At the core of all three studies is the recognition that translanguaging serves as a scaffold for learning, although to varying degrees, aligning with Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In both the Saudi and Indonesian contexts, teachers strategically utilised students' L1s to explain abstract grammatical concepts, manage classrooms, and facilitate collaborative tasks (Moafa, 2023; Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020). These practices correspond with the notion of pedagogical translanguaging, a teacher-led, goal-oriented strategy aimed at supporting cognitive processing and enhancing participation (Cenoz, 2017; García & Lin, 2017).

In these contexts, translanguaging was not only tolerated but embraced as an effective mechanism for inclusion and empowerment. By drawing on learners' full linguistic repertoires, educators affirmed students' identities while enabling access to complex academic content. This approach resonates with García and Wei's (2014) dynamic bilingualism and Canagarajah's (2011) advocacy for translanguaging as identity work. Thus, translanguaging emerges as both a cognitive and affective resource within sociocultural learning environments.

In contrast, the Swedish study (Constantine, 2023) presented translanguaging as largely spontaneous and unstructured, highlighting a disconnect between theoretical advocacy and pedagogical practice. Swedish teachers appeared uncertain about how to integrate translanguaging effectively, often conflating spontaneous translanguaging with intentional, pedagogically grounded strategies (Wei, 2011). This lack of clarity stems, in part, from the absence of explicit policy support and the persistence of monolingual ideologies rooted in traditional immersion models (Gatenby, 1965; Lado, 1957).

The studies consistently highlighted the emotional dimensions of translanguaging, particularly its role in reducing learner anxiety, a key concern in Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis. Teachers in Saudi Arabia and Indonesia frequently reported the use of L1 as a means of building learner confidence, fostering engagement, and creating psychologically safe classroom environments (Moafa, 2023; Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020). These findings substantiate the theoretical view that translanguaging lowers affective barriers and supports affective immersion (Gregersen & MacIntyre, 2014; García & Wei, 2014).

Conversely, Swedish teachers' reluctance to employ L1 even when students struggled emotionally may have compromised this affective dimension. Their preference for English-only instruction arguably prioritised language exposure at the expense of learner preference. Thus, echoing Cummins' (2000) warning that inflexible immersion models risk marginalising less proficient learners. This reinforces the argument that translanguaging, when thoughtfully implemented, can serve as a bridge to immersion rather than a barrier to it (Cook, 2001; Lasagabaster&Doiz, 2016).

In synthesising the findings from the three empirical studies, it becomes evident that translanguaging, when applied in a balanced, strategic, and pedagogically informed manner, serves as a powerful tool to enhance both cognitive and emotional dimensions of language learning in EFL classrooms. The reviewed evidence substantiates theoretical perspectives that view translanguaging not as a threat to immersion but as an enabling practice that supports comprehension, learner engagement, and identity affirmation (García& Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2011).

However, the success of translanguaging practices depends greatly on contextual variables, including institutional policies, teacher training, and prevailing cultural attitudes towards multilingualism. The studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Sweden demonstrate that while flexibility and responsiveness to learner needs are essential, unstructured or excessive use of L1 may hinder opportunities for learners to notice and internalise L2 forms; an insight aligned with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis. Thus, a pedagogically grounded and context-sensitive approach is necessary to maximise the benefits of translanguaging while avoiding potential drawbacks.

Teachers' willingness and preparedness to integrate students' full linguistic repertoires play a decisive role in the effectiveness of translanguaging. Clear pedagogical frameworks, coupled with ongoing professional development, are critical in equipping educators to implement translanguaging purposefully and confidently (Cenoz&Gorter, 2020). Rather than adhering to rigid English-only ideologies or adopting unregulated L1 use, evidence advocates for a nuanced, balanced approach that aligns with both learner needs and theoretical insights.

Therefore, in addressing the research problem, the synthesis affirms that translanguaging (when used judiciously and supported by appropriate educational structures) can significantly enrich EFL learning environments. It promotes not only linguistic development but also emotional security, classroom inclusivity and immersion, ultimately contributing to more effective and equitable language education.

Conclusion

This research paper set out to explore the impact of translanguaging on EFL learners' classroom immersion, specifically from teachers' perspectives, through a critical review of three empirical studies conducted in Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, and Sweden. The central problem addressed in this study was the tension between the need for English-only immersion practices and the growing recognition of translanguaging as a supportive

pedagogical strategy in multilingual classrooms. The findings from the three selected studies converge on the recognition of translanguaging as a pedagogically and emotionally supportive practice. In the Saudi and Indonesian contexts, teachers employed translanguaging strategically to scaffold learning, reduce anxiety, and increase engagement, thereby facilitating immersion rather than hindering it. These practices aligned with theoretical concepts such as Vygotsky's (ZPD) and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, showing how the flexible use of learners' full linguistic repertoires supported both comprehension and confidence. Conversely, the Swedish study presented a more cautious stance. While teachers, recognising some benefits of spontaneous translanguaging, they largely adhered to EOP due to institutional norms and lack of clarity on how to implement translanguaging effectively. Altogether, the reviewed studies affirm that translanguaging, when employed judiciously and contextually, enhances classroom immersion by promoting both linguistic development and affective support. However, its success depends on teacher preparedness, institutional flexibility, and a shift from rigid monolingual ideologies.

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