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Translanguaging in English Language Teaching: A Review of Pedagogical Applications, Benefits, and Challenges

Translanguaging en la enseñanza del inglés: una revisión de sus aplicaciones pedagógicas, beneficios y desafíos

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching has traditionally reflected monolingual approaches that privilege the exclusive or predominant use of the target language. In contrast, translanguaging recognizes learners' existing linguistic repertoires as resources that can strategically support comprehension, interaction, and language learning. This review analyzes the scientific literature on translanguaging in English language teaching, focusing on its conceptualization, pedagogical applications, documented benefits, and main challenges. The study reviews publications mainly from 2016 to 2026 and draws on sources identified through Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, Cambridge Core, SAGE Journals, MDPI, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, JSTOR, and Dialnet. After applying the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the review retained 41 sources covering students and teachers across different educational levels and organized them through thematic categorization. The analysis shows that translanguaging contributes to content comprehension, vocabulary and grammar learning,

reading, writing, collaborative interaction, and metalinguistic reflection. The literature also reports greater participation, confidence, inclusion, reduced anxiety, and recognition of learners' linguistic identities. At the same time, English-only policies, monolingual ideologies, insufficient teacher preparation, possible overreliance on the first language, and methodological limitations remain important challenges. The review concludes that translanguaging should not replace English instruction; rather, teachers can use it strategically when it responds to specific learning objectives, learner needs, and classroom contexts.

Keywords: translanguaging, English language teaching, linguistic repertoire, multilingual pedagogy, language learning

RESUMEN

La enseñanza del inglés ha reflejado tradicionalmente enfoques monolingües que privilegian el uso exclusivo o predominante de la lengua meta. En contraste, el translanguaging reconoce los repertorios lingüísticos previos de los estudiantes como recursos que pueden apoyar estratégicamente la comprensión, la interacción y el aprendizaje de lenguas. Esta revisión analiza la literatura científica sobre translanguaging en la enseñanza del inglés, con énfasis en su conceptualización, aplicaciones pedagógicas, beneficios reportados y principales desafíos. El estudio revisa publicaciones comprendidas principalmente entre 2016 y 2026 y considera fuentes identificadas en Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, Cambridge Core, SAGE Journals, MDPI, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, JSTOR y Dialnet. Tras aplicar los criterios de inclusión y exclusión, la revisión conservó 41 fuentes que abarcan estudiantes y docentes de distintos niveles educativos y las organizó mediante una categorización temática. Los hallazgos muestran que el translanguaging apoya la comprensión de contenidos, el aprendizaje de vocabulario y gramática, la lectura, la escritura, la interacción colaborativa y la reflexión metalingüística. La literatura también reporta mayor participación, confianza, inclusión, reducción de la ansiedad y reconocimiento de las identidades lingüísticas de los estudiantes. Al mismo tiempo, las políticas de uso exclusivo del inglés en el aula (*English-only*), las ideologías monolingües, la formación docente insuficiente, la posible dependencia excesiva de la primera lengua y las limitaciones metodológicas continúan siendo desafíos relevantes. La revisión concluye que el translanguaging no debe sustituir la enseñanza del inglés; más bien, puede utilizarse estratégicamente cuando responde a objetivos de aprendizaje, necesidades del estudiante y contextos específicos de aula.

Palabras clave: translanguaging, enseñanza del inglés, repertorio lingüístico, pedagogía multilingüe, aprendizaje de lenguas

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INTRODUCTION

For decades, English language teaching has been strongly influenced by monolingual orientations that privilege extensive, and in some contexts exclusive, use of the target language in the classroom. This orientation can be associated with a long-standing belief that greater exposure to English necessarily creates better conditions for language acquisition, whereas recourse to learners' first language may interfere with target-language development. Such assumptions remain visible in contemporary English-only policies and classroom expectations across different EFL and ESL settings, even when teachers themselves recognize the practical value of drawing on students' existing linguistic resources (Yuvayapan, 2019; Zhang & Chan, 2021; Jiang et al., 2022; Tannenbaum et al., 2026). However, multilingual approaches to language education increasingly question the need to maintain strict boundaries between languages and challenge the view that learners' previously acquired linguistic knowledge necessarily constitutes an obstacle to learning English.

The influence of a learner's first language should not be understood exclusively in terms of negative interference. Existing linguistic knowledge can function as a cognitive and communicative resource through which learners interpret unfamiliar information and activate prior knowledge (Zuo & Walsh, 2023), while cross-linguistic comparisons can help establish relationships between languages (Zhang & Chan, 2021). Research conducted in EFL and ESL classrooms has documented the strategic use of students' linguistic repertoires for explaining vocabulary and grammatical structures (Jing & Kitis, 2024), as well as for clarifying instructions, supporting classroom interaction, and managing classroom communication (De Los Reyes, 2018; Yuvayapan, 2019). These practices indicate a shift from viewing learners' other languages primarily as sources of interference toward considering them as potential pedagogical resources. Nevertheless, such a shift does not imply that greater use of the first language automatically leads to better language learning outcomes; instead, its value appears to depend on the purpose, manner, frequency, and context in which multilingual resources are employed.

Within this broader multilingual turn, translanguaging has emerged as an influential approach for understanding and organizing the linguistic practices of bi/multilingual learners. Initially associated with the planned alternation of languages for pedagogical purposes, the concept has subsequently developed into a broader understanding of how multilingual speakers mobilize their linguistic and semiotic repertoires for communication, learning, and knowledge construction (Poza, 2017; Li, 2018; Li & Lin, 2019). Within this framework, multilingual speakers are not understood simply as individuals who alternate between completely separate linguistic systems; they strategically draw on available resources to make meaning according to the demands of a particular interaction. This conceptualization distinguishes translanguaging from a narrow understanding of code-switching, while differentiating it from multilingualism as

a broader social or individual condition. Furthermore, the distinction between spontaneous translanguaging and pedagogical translanguaging is particularly relevant to language education, since the latter refers to intentionally designed instructional practices through which two or more languages are incorporated to facilitate linguistic or academic development (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Tannenbaum et al., 2026).

In English language teaching, translanguaging has attracted increasing attention as a pedagogical approach through which learners' existing linguistic resources can contribute to different aspects of classroom learning. Research has explored its use in areas such as comprehension, interaction, vocabulary and grammar instruction, reading, writing, and metalinguistic reflection (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Kim & Weng, 2022). At the same time, its implementation continues to generate debate because of monolingual expectations, concerns about excessive reliance on the first language, and differences across educational contexts (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Tannenbaum et al., 2026).

Despite growing interest in translanguaging, research does not present a completely uniform picture of its pedagogical effectiveness. While many studies report positive outcomes related to classroom access, participation, and learner engagement, conclusions concerning measurable language development remain less conclusive (Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). This variation highlights the need for a critical review that examines the advantages of translanguaging while considering its conceptual boundaries, implementation conditions, and limitations.

Accordingly, this review aims to analyze the scientific literature on translanguaging in English language teaching, with particular attention to its conceptual foundations, pedagogical applications, reported benefits, and implementation challenges.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employed a bibliographic review design with a qualitative and thematic approach. The review focused primarily on publications from 2016 to 2026, a period selected to capture the growing development of pedagogical translanguaging and its application in English language education. Earlier seminal works were considered when necessary to establish the conceptual foundations of translanguaging; however, these publications were used as theoretical references rather than as part of the main empirical corpus.

The literature search was conducted across multiple academic databases and publishing platforms, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Wiley Online Library, Cambridge Core, SAGE Journals, MDPI, Taylor & Francis Online, SpringerLink, JSTOR, and Dialnet, together with selected university repositories. Scopus, Web of Science, and ERIC constituted the principal sources for identifying indexed research, while Google Scholar and publisher databases were used to complement the search and locate full-text versions, book

chapters, and other relevant academic publications. Searches were conducted in English and Spanish using combinations of terms such as translanguaging, pedagogical translanguaging, translinguismo, and translenguaje, together with descriptors including English language teaching, ELT, EFL, ESL, English as a foreign language, English as a second language, classroom, teacher practices, benefits, challenges, and systematic review. Boolean operators were employed to combine the search terms, and filters related to education, linguistics, applied linguistics, and document type were applied when available.

The inclusion criteria comprised peer-reviewed empirical studies employing qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-method designs in ELT, EFL, ESL, and closely related EMI or CLIL contexts; systematic and narrative reviews addressing translanguaging in language education; theoretical and conceptual publications directly related to translanguaging and pedagogical translanguaging; academic book chapters directly connected to English language education; and classroom-based case studies or action research in which translanguaging constituted a central pedagogical or analytical component. Publications written in English or Spanish were considered. In contrast, master's and doctoral theses, conference abstracts and proceedings without a complete peer-reviewed version, non-academic publications, duplicate records, and studies in which translanguaging was only marginally addressed were excluded. Studies focused exclusively on other subject areas or on multilingual education without a sufficiently clear connection to English language teaching were not considered part of the primary evidence, although selected publications were retained as complementary sources when they provided relevant theoretical or pedagogical perspectives.

The selection process was conducted progressively. An initial broad search identified approximately 150 potentially suitable records. These publications were first screened according to their titles and abstracts to determine their connection to translanguaging and English language education. Studies that appeared to meet the scope of the review were subsequently examined in greater detail to verify that translanguaging constituted a central theoretical, pedagogical, or empirical component and that each publication satisfied the established inclusion criteria. Duplicate publications and studies with only a marginal connection to the research objective were excluded during this process. Following the application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, the final corpus consisted of 41 sources, including empirical studies, systematic or narrative reviews, theoretical and conceptual contributions, academic book chapters, and selected complementary studies pertinent to the analysis of translanguaging in English language education.

The selected literature was analyzed through thematic categorization. Information from each source was organized according to four main analytical dimensions: (1) conceptualization of translanguaging, including its relationship with code-switching, multilingualism, and pedagogical translanguaging; (2) pedagogical applications in English language teaching; (3) reported benefits; and (4) challenges and limitations. Within these dimensions, recurrent themes

were identified and compared across the literature, including scaffolding, translation, vocabulary and grammar instruction, activation of prior knowledge, collaborative interaction, reading and writing support, metalinguistic reflection, classroom management, participation, confidence, motivation, inclusion, linguistic identity, English-only policies, monolingual ideologies, teacher preparation, excessive reliance on the first language, linguistic diversity, and assessment. Particular attention was given to both convergent and divergent results in order to provide a critical synthesis of the literature without assuming that translanguaging produces uniform effects across educational contexts.

RESULTS

Conceptualization of Translanguaging

Understanding translanguaging requires moving beyond the idea that bi/multilingual speakers possess two or more completely independent linguistic systems that are activated separately. In translanguaging theory, speakers draw on the linguistic and semiotic resources available in their repertoire to understand information, construct meaning, communicate ideas, and participate in social interaction. Li (2022) further develops this perspective by proposing translanguaging as an analytical lens for examining how individuals construct meaning through integrated linguistic, semiotic, and experiential resources. Thus, the central issue is not simply which named language, English, Spanish, Arabic, Mandarin, or another, is being used at a particular moment, but how the speaker mobilizes available resources to accomplish a communicative or cognitive purpose (Poza, 2017; Li, 2018; Li & Lin, 2019). In this sense, translanguaging offers a way of understanding multilingual communication and, in educational contexts, treats learners' existing linguistic knowledge as part of the learning process, without assuming that it must be excluded.

A simple way to understand this concept is to consider what may occur when a learner encounters new information in English. The learner does not necessarily process that information exclusively through English. Previous knowledge developed through another language may help interpret a new word, establish a conceptual connection, compare grammatical structures, formulate an idea, or verify whether a message has been understood. A student may, for instance, read information in English, relate its meaning to concepts already known through the first language, discuss the idea with a classmate using resources from both languages, and subsequently produce an answer in English. The key issue is not the mechanical alternation between two languages, but how learners use their available linguistic resources to construct meaning and knowledge (Li, 2018; Fang et al., 2022).

Translanguaging recognizes that learning an additional language does not require learners to disregard what they already know linguistically; this previous knowledge may become a resource through which new knowledge is interpreted and developed.

This understanding helps clarify why translanguaging should not be reduced to the simple use of the first language in an English classroom. Allowing a student to translate an isolated word into Spanish, for example, may constitute one multilingual practice, but it does not by itself capture the broader meaning of translanguaging. The concept encompasses the flexible use of linguistic resources together with other meaning-making resources, such as gestures, images, written texts, visual representations, and contextual cues (Li, 2018; Fang et al., 2022). Translanguaging is not limited to moving from one language to another; it involves the broader process through which bi/multilingual individuals integrate the resources available to them to understand, express, negotiate, and construct meaning. Makalela (2019) extends this idea through Ubuntu, emphasizing the interconnectedness of linguistic resources and challenging rigid boundaries between named languages in classroom communication.

This characteristic is fundamental for distinguishing translanguaging from code-switching. Although both may be observable when a speaker uses elements conventionally associated with more than one named language, the theoretical principles underlying them are different. Code-switching traditionally describes alternation between identifiable linguistic codes, such as changing from English to Spanish during an interaction. Translanguaging, in contrast, places greater emphasis on the speaker's integrated communicative repertoire and questions the assumption that multilingual communication must always be interpreted as movement between completely independent linguistic systems (Poza, 2017; Li, 2018). The difference is not simply whether two languages appear in the same conversation. Translanguaging focuses on how speakers combine available resources to accomplish communicative, cognitive, and social purposes. This broader understanding is relevant in education because it shifts attention from controlling language boundaries to understanding what learners are actually doing with their linguistic resources while learning.

Translanguaging should be distinguished from multilingualism. Multilingualism generally describes the presence or use of multiple languages within an individual, community, institution, or society; translanguaging concerns the dynamic manner in which those resources are mobilized in communication and meaning-making. A classroom may be multilingual because its students speak several languages while continuing to operate under a strict English-only policy. The presence of multiple languages does not automatically constitute translanguaging pedagogy. What matters is whether learners' linguistic repertoires are recognized, activated, or deliberately incorporated as resources within the learning process (Li & Lin, 2019; Fang et al., 2022).

A further distinction becomes necessary when translanguaging is examined specifically within the classroom. The literature differentiates between spontaneous translanguaging and pedagogical translanguaging. Spontaneous translanguaging emerges naturally during interaction. Students may resort to different linguistic resources when helping a classmate, resolving a misunderstanding, searching for an appropriate expression, or attempting to understand an

unfamiliar concept. Pedagogical translanguageing, however, involves intentional instructional decisions through which teachers create opportunities for learners to mobilize more than one part of their linguistic repertoire in pursuit of a learning objective (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). The distinction is important because pedagogical translanguageing does not mean simply permitting unrestricted use of the first language. It involves making deliberate decisions about when, why, and for what learning purpose multilingual resources should be incorporated.

In practical terms, pedagogical translanguageing may involve asking learners to activate prior knowledge through their first language before engaging with new English content, comparing lexical or grammatical features across languages, discussing a complex idea collaboratively before producing an English response, or strategically using translation to clarify meaning (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). The objective, then, is not to replace English with another language, nor to reduce learners' exposure to the target language indiscriminately.

Different linguistic resources are used strategically as bridges that may facilitate access to English when learners need additional assistance to understand, process, or communicate new knowledge. This distinction is essential because translanguageing should not be interpreted as opposition to target-language learning; its pedagogical premise is that resources already available to learners can, under appropriate conditions, contribute to that learning process.

The concept consequently changes the question traditionally posed about first-language use in English instruction. The focus is no longer exclusively on whether the first language should or should not be permitted; translanguageing encourages educators to examine how linguistic resources are being used, what pedagogical purpose they serve, and whether their use contributes to the intended learning objective. This does not assume that every bi/multilingual practice is beneficial or that increased first-language use necessarily produces better English learning. It provides a basis for examining the strategic and purposeful use of learners' repertoires. To understand how this principle has been implemented in English language classrooms, it is necessary to move from conceptualization to practice. The following section examines the pedagogical applications of translanguageing in English language teaching.

Pedagogical Applications of Translanguageing in ELT

The pedagogical use of translanguageing in English language teaching involves the purposeful incorporation of learners' bi/multilingual resources into classroom activities to facilitate comprehension, interaction, and language development. Teachers make deliberate decisions about when other linguistic resources may facilitate access to meaning and when learners should return to or produce the target language. In this sense, translanguageing functions as an instructional resource that connects what learners already know with the linguistic and conceptual demands of new content (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Kim & Weng, 2022).

One of its most frequent applications is scaffolding comprehension. When learners encounter unfamiliar vocabulary, grammatical structures, instructions, or complex concepts in English, the teacher may strategically draw on the first language to clarify meaning before continuing the activity in English (Yuvayapan, 2019; Jing & Kitis, 2024). This support may include brief explanations, translations of key terms, comparisons between languages, or clarification of task instructions (Zhang & Chan, 2021). De Los Reyes (2018) documented the use of learners' linguistic resources for instructional scaffolding and classroom communication in an ESL context. The pedagogical principle is not to translate everything that is presented in English, but to identify moments in which comprehension difficulties may prevent learners from progressing with the task.

Translanguaging is used to facilitate vocabulary and grammar learning. Teachers may encourage learners to compare words, expressions, grammatical patterns, or sentence structures across languages in order to identify similarities and differences (Zhang & Chan, 2021). For example, students can relate a new English word to a cognate in another language or use multilingual resources to reflect on vocabulary and meaning (Ollerhead, 2018). These practices can transform the first language from a simple translation tool into a resource for metalinguistic reflection. Guo and Feng (2025) identify cross-linguistic explanation and scaffolding among the strategies used in pedagogical translanguaging, allowing learners to connect English with linguistic knowledge they already possess. Prado Pereira (2024) extends this discussion by highlighting the use of cognates and metalinguistic reflection as additional pedagogical possibilities.

Reading comprehension is an important area in which translanguaging can be applied. Learners may read a text in English while using another language to discuss difficult passages, summarize sections, annotate ideas, clarify vocabulary, or activate background knowledge before returning to the English text. Qureshi and Aljanadbah (2022), for instance, examined practices that included first-language glosses, paragraph summaries, and peer discussion during L2 reading. Carroll and Sambolín Morales (2016) documented the use of learners' first language during literature-based activities, where students could discuss and reflect on English texts through flexible use of Spanish and English. Comparable practices have been observed in other contexts, where learners draw on their linguistic repertoires to process information before demonstrating comprehension through English. In this sequence, learners move from initial comprehension toward target-language performance: another language assists the processing of meaning, while English remains central to the final learning objective.

In writing activities, translanguaging can be incorporated during planning, idea generation, drafting, peer interaction, and revision. Huang and Chalmers (2023) report practices in which learners use their first language to discuss and plan ideas before producing written work in English. Learners may compare expressions across languages, use bilingual resources to solve

lexical difficulties, or provide peer feedback through more than one language, practices identified in the review by Kim and Weng (2022). This becomes important when linguistic limitations in English restrict learners' ability to demonstrate the conceptual knowledge they already possess. Translanguaging can provide an intermediate space in which learners develop their ideas before reformulating them in the target language, without having to simplify their thoughts because they cannot yet express them fully in English.

Collaborative interaction represents an important area of application. During pair or group work, learners may use different linguistic resources to negotiate meaning, explain instructions to one another, solve problems, or prepare an English response. Peer translanguaging can operate as a form of collaborative scaffolding, particularly when one learner is able to help another understand vocabulary or a concept that remains unclear in English (Rasman, 2018; van Viegen, 2020; Miftakh et al., 2025). Nevertheless, the educational purpose remains important. The teacher should structure the task so that multilingual interaction contributes to participation or subsequent production in English.

Translanguaging appears in classroom management and teacher-student interaction. De Los Reyes (2018) documented the use of learners' linguistic resources for lesson presentation, elicitation, behavior management, and maintaining classroom focus. Yuvayapan (2019) identified the use of the first language for instructions, classroom management, and rapport. Jing and Kitis (2024) described translanguaging in managerial classroom functions, including the organization of activities and the facilitation of routine interaction. These uses differ from more explicitly instructional applications because their primary objective is not always linguistic learning itself, but the creation of conditions that allow teaching and learning to proceed effectively.

An important dimension of translanguaging is the use of multimodal and semiotic resources. Translanguaging is not restricted to spoken movement between languages; it may involve the coordinated use of written language, images, gestures, visual representations, and other semiotic resources in the construction of meaning (Li, 2018; Fang et al., 2022). In classroom contexts, Ollerhead (2018) documented the use of word walls, cognates, bilingual resources, images, and digital tools to assist multilingual learners. Wu and Lin (2019) showed how linguistic resources could operate together with gestures and visual representations to support meaning-making in a CLIL classroom. These practices illustrate how translanguaging can involve more than verbal language by incorporating multiple resources that contribute to comprehension and participation.

These applications indicate that pedagogical translanguaging is better understood as a planned and purposeful instructional process than as random switching between English and another language (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Its use may occur at different stages of a learning task depending on the instructional objective. For example, learners may activate prior knowledge through another language before engaging with new English content,

receive multilingual assistance while processing a complex task, and subsequently produce an oral or written response in English. In practice, the pedagogical value of translanguaging lies not simply in the amount of first-language use, but in the function that such use performs within the learning process. This allows multilingual resources to function as strategic tools within a clearly defined learning sequence.

Reported Benefits of Translanguaging

Several benefits have been associated with translanguaging in English language teaching, particularly in relation to comprehension, participation, affective engagement, metalinguistic awareness, and inclusion. Nevertheless, the consistency of these outcomes varies across studies. Their interpretation requires caution, since many studies rely on qualitative observations, learner perceptions, or relatively small classroom samples. For this reason, these benefits should be understood as context-dependent rather than as universally established effects.

One of the most commonly observed outcomes is improved comprehension. Learners often demonstrate greater access to difficult content when they are able to draw on previously developed linguistic knowledge. Van Viegen (2020) found that multilingual resources facilitated access to curriculum content among learners from refugee backgrounds, while Miftakh et al. (2025) noted that students perceived translanguaging as helpful for understanding explanations and classroom content. Portolés and Martí (2017) showed that translanguaging helped young learners mediate comprehension and co-construct meaning during early English learning. Such patterns indicate that translanguaging may reduce comprehension barriers when learners are still developing sufficient proficiency to process complex information exclusively through English.

Translanguaging has also been associated with increased participation and interaction. Rasman (2018) observed that translanguaging facilitated peer negotiation of meaning and collaborative participation in an Indonesian EFL classroom. Jiang et al. (2022) found generally positive student attitudes toward teachers' translanguaging practices and noted that teacher use of multilingual resources was related to students' own classroom use. These results indicate that translanguaging may create more opportunities for learners to contribute, especially when limited English proficiency would otherwise restrict participation.

The literature reports important affective benefits. Miftakh et al. (2025) found associations between translanguaging and increased confidence, greater participation, and reduced anxiety. Ulum (2024), working with preservice EFL teachers, similarly identified positive perceptions related to confidence, motivation, inclusion, and lower levels of linguistic pressure. This matters because anxiety and fear of making mistakes can strongly limit classroom participation. Translanguaging may provide learners with a greater sense of security when expressing ideas that they are not yet able to formulate entirely in English.

Translanguaging may contribute to the development of metalinguistic awareness. Ollerhead (2018) documented how learners benefited from comparing linguistic forms and using

cognates and multilingual resources to reflect on vocabulary and meaning. Zhang and Chan (2021) found that cross-linguistic comparison was useful in relation to vocabulary and grammar. This cross-linguistic comparison can help learners notice similarities and differences between languages while developing a clearer understanding of how English relates to their existing linguistic knowledge.

Translanguaging may also contribute to inclusion and the recognition of linguistic identity. Fallas Escobar (2019) showed that translanguaging practices could provide learners with greater freedom of expression and reinforce the recognition of bilingual identities in EFL contexts. Van Viegen (2020) associated multilingual classroom practices with belonging, engagement, and more equitable access to learning. Steinhagen and Said (2021) found that allowing students to draw on Arabic and English in higher education could strengthen linguistic pride and provide a greater sense of empowerment when engaging with academically demanding content. In this context, translanguaging may contribute to linguistic development while helping create learning environments in which students' previous linguistic experiences are treated as legitimate educational resources.

Positive effects on motivation and engagement have been observed. Ortega (2019) found that the use of multilingual resources enabled learners to participate more actively in discussions and engage with meaningful classroom topics. Ulum (2024) identified broadly favorable perceptions of translanguaging among future English teachers. Learners may participate more actively when classroom communication allows them to draw on familiar linguistic resources to express complex ideas and stay engaged in the task.

Despite these advantages, conclusions regarding measurable language-learning outcomes remain less definitive. Qureshi and Aljanadbah (2022), for example, did not find a significant advantage of translanguaging over an English-only condition in L2 reading comprehension. Huang and Chalmers (2023) concluded that the methodological quality of much of the available intervention research limits strong claims about the causal effectiveness of pedagogical translanguaging. These results call for caution when linking positive classroom experiences with long-term English proficiency.

The benefits most consistently observed involve access, participation, confidence, metalinguistic awareness, inclusion, and engagement. Their extent appears to depend on factors such as learner proficiency, instructional goals, teacher decision-making, and the way translanguaging is integrated into classroom practice.

Challenges and Limitations of Translanguaging

Despite the pedagogical potential associated with translanguaging, its implementation in English language teaching is not without difficulties. One of the most persistent challenges is the influence of English-only policies and monolingual ideologies. In many educational contexts, English is still treated as the only legitimate language of instruction, while the use of learners'

other languages may be interpreted as a sign of insufficient proficiency or ineffective teaching. Allard (2017) showed how teachers' translanguaging practices could be constrained by institutional expectations and by the belief that students should rely exclusively on English. Yuvayapan (2019) similarly identified a gap between teachers' relatively positive perceptions of translanguaging and their actual classroom practices, partly because monolingual expectations continued to shape instructional decisions.

A related concern is the possibility of excessive reliance on the first language. Translanguaging is intended to provide strategic assistance, but its effectiveness may be reduced if learners consistently avoid using English whenever they experience difficulty. Ulum (2024) found that a considerable proportion of preservice EFL teachers expressed concern that excessive dependence on the native language could limit learners' engagement with English. Huang and Chalmers (2023) raise a related concern regarding reduced target-language exposure when translanguaging is not carefully managed. The central issue is not simply whether another language should be used, but how much guidance is appropriate and at what point learners should be encouraged to return to the target language.

Teacher preparation represents a significant limitation. Effective pedagogical translanguaging requires more than the spontaneous translation of difficult words or explanations. Teachers need to understand when bi/multilingual assistance is pedagogically justified, how to design activities that connect linguistic repertoires with learning objectives, and how to prevent the first language from becoming a substitute for engagement with English. Tannenbaum et al. (2026) found that most of the teachers in their study had received no formal training in translanguaging, despite incorporating multilingual practices into their instruction. Carroll and van den Hoven (2017) similarly showed that institutional expectations and monolingual ideologies could restrict teachers' use of multilingual resources even when such practices were considered pedagogically useful. Kim and Weng (2022) likewise identified limited teacher knowledge and preparation as recurring obstacles to systematic implementation.

The linguistic composition of the classroom may complicate translanguaging pedagogy. In some contexts, teachers and learners share the same first language, making multilingual interaction relatively straightforward. In more linguistically diverse classrooms, students may possess different home languages that the teacher does not speak. Vaish (2019) showed that linguistic diversity can make the implementation of translanguaging considerably more complex when learners have different levels of proficiency in their home languages or when certain languages occupy higher social status than others. Jonsson (2019) further illustrates this challenge, showing how teachers' limited access to students' linguistic repertoires can constrain opportunities for meaningful cross-linguistic interaction. In such settings, relying heavily on one shared language may unintentionally advantage some students while excluding others.

In addition, classroom interaction and control can complicate the implementation of translanguaging. Translanguaging can expand opportunities for participation, but it does not automatically create more equitable or learner-centered interaction. Rabbidge (2019) found that bi/multilingual practices could coexist with highly teacher-directed classroom structures, meaning that students' use of additional linguistic resources did not necessarily produce greater interactional freedom. Gynne (2019) also documented forms of language policing in multilingual educational settings, including concerns among teachers about losing control when students used languages that the teacher could not understand. The effectiveness of translanguaging depends on the languages used, as well as on how classroom participation is organized and how the teacher guides interaction.

The relationship between translanguaging and assessment presents an additional challenge. In classroom instruction, learners may use their broader linguistic repertoires to facilitate comprehension, organize ideas, or prepare a response, but this does not necessarily imply that assessment should be conducted in another language. When the objective is to evaluate English proficiency, learners are still expected to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through the target language. Kim and Weng (2022) note that difficulties may arise when multilingual resources are used during instruction but assessment practices remain strictly monolingual. These difficulties may become more pronounced when teachers are not given clear guidance on how to distinguish between assistance during learning and actual target-language performance. This creates a need for careful alignment between instructional practices and assessment objectives, so that translanguaging can function as a pedagogical resource without obscuring what is actually being evaluated.

There are also important limitations in the existing research base. A considerable amount of translanguaging research relies on qualitative case studies, classroom observations, interviews, and self-reported perceptions. These approaches provide valuable information about classroom processes and participants' experiences, but they do not always allow researchers to determine whether translanguaging directly causes measurable improvements in English proficiency. Huang and Chalmers (2023) found substantial methodological weaknesses and a high risk of bias in several intervention studies included in their systematic review. Qureshi and Aljanadbah (2022), moreover, did not identify a significant advantage for translanguaging in their comparison of L2 reading comprehension conditions. This limitation points to the need for stronger longitudinal, experimental, and mixed-method research to establish more clearly when translanguaging produces measurable language-learning gains.

A balanced position is warranted: translanguaging should not be rejected simply because it introduces other languages into the English classroom, nor should it be used without clear limits or pedagogical purpose. Probyn (2019) cautions that translanguaging alone is not sufficient to guarantee effective learning, since its effectiveness depends on the quality of classroom

interaction and the way disciplinary knowledge is constructed. Its implementation requires pedagogical judgment, appropriate teacher preparation, sensitivity to learners' linguistic diversity, and clear alignment with instructional objectives. The central issue is not whether translanguageing is inherently beneficial or detrimental, but under what conditions, for which learners, and for which purposes it can contribute effectively to English language teaching. This question provides an important basis for the broader interpretation developed in the following discussion.

DISCUSSION

Translanguageing has gained relevance in English language teaching because it challenges the assumption that effective learning requires a strict separation between the target language and learners' existing linguistic resources. A recurring pattern is that teachers and students use translanguageing to facilitate comprehension, interaction, and access to classroom content, even in contexts where monolingual expectations remain influential. Yuvayapan (2019) illustrates this tension, showing that teachers may hold relatively favorable views toward translanguageing while still limiting its use because of monolingual institutional expectations. A similar tension is visible in Allard (2017), where multilingual practices were shaped by an educational environment that continued to privilege English as the legitimate language of instruction. This positions translanguageing as more than a simple classroom technique, linking it to a broader discussion about how languages are valued and regulated in language education. Hurst and Mona (2017) frame translanguageing as a socially responsive pedagogy that can recognize learners' linguistic identities and broaden access to academic participation.

One of the main contributions of translanguageing lies in its ability to connect new English input with knowledge that learners have already developed through other languages. This is especially important when students encounter linguistic or conceptual demands that exceed their current proficiency in English. Zhang and Chan (2021) documented how cross-linguistic comparisons could facilitate vocabulary and grammar learning, while Ollerhead (2018) showed how multilingual and multimodal resources could contribute to vocabulary development and metalinguistic awareness. Lu et al. (2025) identified explanation, cognitive functions, and metalinguistic understanding among the recurrent uses of translanguageing across EMI and CLIL classrooms. The first language and other known languages do not necessarily function as obstacles to English learning. Dillon et al. (2021) provide a useful example from an EMI higher-education context, where dual-language instruction showed particular potential for intermediate-level students when processing academic content in English. Under appropriate conditions, they may instead provide a cognitive bridge that helps learners interpret, organize, and eventually express new knowledge through English.

Nevertheless, the literature makes clear that translanguageing should not be equated with unrestricted first-language use. Its effectiveness appears to depend largely on purpose and design.

When multilingual resources are used strategically to clarify meaning, activate prior knowledge, organize ideas, or prepare learners for target-language production, they can facilitate the learning process without necessarily replacing English. Huang and Chalmers (2023) emphasize the importance of distinguishing planned pedagogical translanguaging from spontaneous classroom language use, while Kim and Weng (2022) show that translation, bilingual discussion, scaffolding, and multilingual reflection are most meaningful when they are connected to clear instructional objectives. This distinction is central because it shifts the debate away from the simplistic question of whether the L1 should be permitted and toward a more pedagogically relevant question: what function does its use serve in a particular learning sequence?

An important distinction emerges between pedagogical and affective benefits and measurable gains in language proficiency. Many classroom studies report greater participation, confidence, engagement, comprehension, or reduced anxiety when learners are able to draw on their broader linguistic repertoires. Miftakh et al. (2025), for instance, identified positive student perceptions related to comprehension, confidence, participation, and lower anxiety. Ulum (2024) found broadly favorable attitudes among preservice EFL teachers, particularly regarding inclusion, motivation, and emotional well-being. These outcomes are pedagogically important because learners who understand classroom content and feel more able to participate may have better conditions for learning. Nevertheless, such benefits should not automatically be interpreted as indicators of greater language proficiency.

Positive pedagogical and affective outcomes are commonly observed, but long-term gains in English proficiency remain less conclusive. This does not diminish the pedagogical value of translanguaging; its contribution appears more clearly in access to learning, participation, and classroom engagement than in consistently measurable proficiency gains (Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022; Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

The effectiveness of translanguaging varies according to learner proficiency, age, educational level, linguistic background, teacher beliefs, institutional policies, and classroom composition. Vaish (2019) demonstrates that linguistic diversity may complicate implementation when students do not share the same home language or when the teacher cannot access all of the linguistic resources present in the classroom. Caruso (2018) found that multilingual practices could facilitate academic content processing while generating resistance or uncertainty among learners, illustrating how their effectiveness may depend on both linguistic and attitudinal factors. Rabbidge (2019), meanwhile, shows that translanguaging does not automatically transform classroom interaction; multilingual practices can still occur within highly teacher-controlled structures. Consequently, the mere presence of more than one language in the classroom should not be regarded as an indication of effective translanguaging pedagogy. The organization of the activity and its instructional purpose remain decisive.

Teacher preparation remains an important factor in the effective use of translanguaging. Tannenbaum et al. (2026) found that a large proportion of teachers had received no formal preparation in translanguaging, despite using multilingual practices in their classrooms. This highlights the need for teachers to make informed decisions about when and how learners' linguistic resources can be incorporated in relation to specific learning objectives.

Translanguaging is best understood not as an alternative to English instruction, but as a strategic resource within it. Its effectiveness depends on purposeful use linked to clear learning objectives, without assuming that the first language is always detrimental or that any multilingual practice is automatically beneficial (Kim & Weng, 2022; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Prada (2019) shows that translanguaging may influence how learners understand and value their own linguistic practices, indicating that its implications extend beyond immediate classroom performance to learners' attitudes toward language and identity. This shifts the debate from whether other languages should be excluded to how they can contribute to learning without displacing the central role of English.

On this basis, the most defensible position is neither strictly monolingual nor unrestrictedly multilingual. English remains the principal target of instruction, while learners' other linguistic resources can be used selectively to facilitate understanding, engagement, and progression toward more complex English performance (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Tannenbaum et al., 2026). Translanguaging can be considered a flexible pedagogical resource rather than a replacement for target-language instruction.

CONCLUSION

This review presents translanguaging as a pedagogical approach that allows learners to use the languages they already know as resources for learning English. It enables learners to draw on prior linguistic knowledge when this facilitates access to meaning, interaction, and participation in classroom tasks (Kim & Weng, 2022; Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

Its pedagogical value depends largely on how and why these language resources are incorporated into instruction. Planned use, teacher preparation, and professional judgment are important for ensuring that translanguaging responds to specific learning objectives rather than becoming an automatic response to difficulty (Zhang & Chan, 2021; Tannenbaum et al., 2026).

A central implication of the review is that the opposition between English-only instruction and unrestricted use of the first language is too simplistic. A more balanced position recognizes English as the principal target of instruction while allowing learners' other linguistic resources to be incorporated selectively when they respond to specific pedagogical needs. In this way, linguistic diversity can be understood not as a barrier to be suppressed, but as a resource that can be pedagogically managed.

At the same time, the effectiveness of translanguaging should not be generalized across contexts, and caution is required when considering sustained gains in English proficiency (Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022; Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Future research should employ stronger longitudinal and comparative designs, with particular attention to measurable language development, teacher preparation, assessment, and contextual variation.

Ultimately, the contribution of translanguaging to English language teaching lies in shifting the question from whether learners' other languages should be excluded to how they can be used responsibly and purposefully in the learning process. Teachers should remain open to pedagogical practices that respond to learners' needs while drawing on research, professional judgment, and classroom experience. Translanguaging thus encourages a more flexible and reflective approach to language instruction while maintaining English development as the central pedagogical objective.

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