

To What Extent Should Translanguaging Be Encouraged in English-Medium Instruction Classrooms

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Recent research has focused on the importance of translanguaging in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms in multilingual settings and higher education. According to Chicherina and Strelkova's (2023) research roughly 85% of both tutors and students view translanguaging as a productive tool to enhance communication in EMI classrooms. This editorial paper will first examine how translanguaging should be encouraged in EMI classrooms and indicate the benefits and challenges of encouraging translanguaging in these classrooms.

Benefits of Translanguaging in EMI Classrooms

Several studies have indicated the importance of translanguaging in EMI classrooms which gives reasons for it to be promoted. Romanowski (2020) conducted a study on the ideology of both students and teachers in Polish EMI classrooms and it was seen that translanguaging effectively enhanced student's accessibility to academic content that seemed difficult. It was observed by the teachers that students who studied with their local language alongside English developed better engagement and understanding. Similarly, Goodman and Tastanbek (2021) also affirmed that translanguaging in multilingual classrooms enhances the student's comprehension ability, mostly in the context where English is not the leading language.

Translanguaging develops the multilingual capacity of students and builds their competence for job opportunities globally, enabling them to improve their English proficiency and native language. This prepares the students for various international opportunities in the workforce. Goodman and Tastanbek's (2020) study employed qualitative methods, including interviews with eight English language teachers from Kazakhstan, to explore transitioning from a monolingual to a multilingual pedagogy. While their findings show that promoting multilingualism through translanguaging equips students with linguistic flexibility, which makes them fit in international professional contexts, it's generalizability is limited due to the sample size used and the cultural context. In addition, Kaipnazarova (2020) highlighted the role of translanguaging in improving the native and English language of the students by building their confidence in the labor market globally. This affirms a wider view that the use of translanguaging not only builds up language skills but also improves their knowledge of cultural diversity (Wei, 2018).

Translanguaging supports an inclusive learning environment that encourages students with different cultural identities. Chicherina and Strelkova's (2023) study evaluated the ideology of translanguaging through surveys and semi-structured interviews with teachers and students in EMI classrooms. Their data revealed that translanguaging encourages cultural inclusion and improves the confidence of the students in showing their cultural identities. Furthermore, Romanowski (2020),

carried out a mixed-method study where data was collected from teachers and students in Polish EMI classrooms through questionnaires and interviews. This study indicated that when students are allowed to use their local languages with English it gives the students a sense of belonging and enables full participation in classroom activities which was improved by the implementation of translanguaging as reported in the study by 70% of teachers. By so doing, cultural exchange is supported.

Translanguaging helps to give a breakdown of difficult academic content for better understanding by allowing the students to use their native languages as cognitive aids for learning new concepts in English. Research has shown that greater engagement and understanding of complex academic material occurs among students who use translanguaging in EMI classrooms (Romanowski, 2020). In addition, Zheng and Drybrough (2023) highlighted that "translanguaging during academic activities increased cognitive engagement, especially in the difficult task that involves writing and problem-solving" (p. 9).

Translanguaging has cognitive benefits and promotes collaborative learning. Zheng and Drybrough (2023) indicated how Chinese students employed their native language alongside English for brainstorming, organizing thoughts, and clarifying academic concepts, demonstrating the cognitive benefits of translanguaging in both spoken and written communication. Encouraging students' native language alongside English gives room for collaborative work leading to a broader understanding of the topic. Goodman and Tastanbek (2021) highlighted the role of translanguaging in encouraging group tasks in classrooms, creating an atmosphere for shared knowledge, and enhancing collaborative learning.

Challenges and Criticisms of Translanguaging

Translanguaging also encounters challenges in EMI classrooms, where English is valued despite its benefits. There has been a common concern regarding the negative influence on the English proficiency of the students resulting from much emphasis on their native language. According to Chicherina and Strelkova (2023), some teachers fear that translanguaging has a way of preventing students from fully participating in English, particularly in situations where English proficiency is seen as essential for academic achievement. Similarly, Goodman and Tastanbek (2021) argued that over-emphasis on the student's first language can bring a setback in the development of the English language of the students, especially in EMI classrooms where the primary aim is to prepare students to meet academic and professional standards globally.

The barrier involved in adopting translanguaging in EMI classrooms with different language backgrounds is another major concern. Kaipnazarova (2020) emphasized that in schools where there is a large range of local languages, teachers tend to struggle to carry all students along and ac

commodate their language diversities. Furthermore, Chicherina and Strelkova (2023) emphasized that the wide range of languages in an environment leads to the teacher's inability to effectively engage all students which is a result of teachers not being multilingual.

This barrier resulting from adopting translanguaging in EMI classrooms can be lowered by organizing professional development training on translanguaging strategies for teachers to discover how to implement them in their schools and classrooms (Snell, 2017). This can also be a medium of mentorship where experienced multilingual teachers mentor English instructors to enable them to know other languages and improve their interaction in the classroom with the students. In addition, multilingual resources should be provided, like textbooks to enable teachers to have access to them and improve their language skills (Snell, 2017).

Hence, if translanguaging is not implemented appropriately it could lead to language hierarchies. Romanowski (2020) highlighted that in some EMI classrooms, students tend to perceive their native languages to be of less value over time as English remains the dominant medium of instruction. According to Pennycook (2017), EMI fosters the promotion of an implicit hierarchy when local languages are not encouraged in the classroom; rather, English is prioritized above other languages. The challenges faced with translanguaging in EMI classrooms where English language is seen as the most appropriate way of communication can be dealt with by having a more flexible policy on the use of English language, and students are allowed to use Google Translation or mobile applications to understand difficult words that affect their lesson (Tien, 2023). However, there should be an awareness of the benefits of the use of English language to encourage the students to be interested in it. In addition, the EMI schools can incorporate a reward system strategy to motivate the students to build their English language skills.

This paper highlighted a variety of studies that support the use of translanguaging in EMI classrooms. However, its context focuses on higher education with minimal attention to adult learning or secondary education settings where the use of translanguaging might differ significantly. Furthermore, it emphasizes cited studies published in English and within specific institutional and geographic contexts, such as Kazakhstan, Poland, and the UK, which limits applicability across various educational systems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper has highlighted some of the benefits and challenges of translanguaging in EMI classrooms. It highlights the need for proper implementation of translanguaging despite the benefits, and emphasizes the improvement of student's academic English performance; a strategized method can promote translanguaging as an effective tool in learning. For example, Goodman and Tastanbek

(2020) support an approach that incorporates translanguaging into teacher education in order to equip teachers with the right skills to deal with language differences, and ensure translanguaging supports rather than hinders English language development.

It is argued that translanguaging is an effective learning tool in EMI classrooms and in multilingual contexts. Translanguaging improves communication skills, encourages cultural identities, enhances academic understanding, and promotes collaborative learning. However, it comes with challenges in student's English language proficiency development, and difficulties in implementation. Translanguaging should be encouraged in EMI classrooms, and I argue that it must be strategized properly to ensure it supports English proficiency development. Furthermore, a well-planned and structured method should be employed to assist teachers utilize the benefits of translanguaging while addressing its challenges.

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