

# Translanguaging in English Medium Instruction: A Case Study

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**Abstract**—This study investigates translanguaging practices in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms through a qualitative case study involving five English teachers from a public school in Iloilo Province, Philippines. Data was collected via semi-structured interviews to explore teachers' awareness, understanding, attitudes, and implementation of translanguaging. Findings show that teachers generally recognize translanguaging as a valuable strategy to support learners' comprehension, especially of complex or technical content, and to boost confidence and engagement. They use both reactive practices (when learners struggle) and planned practices (intentionally integrated) while balancing first-language use with English exposure. However, challenges include limited lesson time, potential over-reliance on first languages, and a lack of clear policy guidelines. The study concludes that translanguaging can effectively accommodate diverse learner needs in EMI settings, and recommends clear policies, flexible curriculum frameworks, and targeted professional development to support its optimal use.

**Keywords**—English Medium Instructions (EMI), Translanguaging, Teacher's Awareness, Understanding, Attitude.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The global English classroom is increasingly multilingual, presenting both opportunities and challenges for teaching and learning. Internationally, there is an increasing demand in education to utilize the variety of language resources that students bring to the classroom (Turner & Tour, 2024). Similarly, in the Philippine context, there is a very diverse language environment, with English coexisting with Filipino and many regional languages. As a country that has been colonized by different countries, various languages in the Philippines have been shaped by Spanish and English; between the two, it is English that has not only been transplanted firmly into Philippine soil but has also shaped the different aspects of Filipino life, including education (Espino et al., 2021).

The Philippines has a multilingual environment where English, Filipino, and various regional languages coexist. The policies of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) present both opportunities and challenges for language choices in education, particularly through the lens of translanguaging (Espino et al., 2021; Mendoza & Parba, 2018; Deniega

& Neri, 2024). MTB-MLE is formal or informal education that uses both the learner's mother tongue and other languages in the classroom. Students begin their education in their first language, the one they are most familiar with, and build a solid foundation in it before learning other languages (Department of Education, 2012).

Given this linguistic complexity, there is an ongoing debate about how the English language should be used in school and which official language policies learners should adopt in a multilingual environment where the mother tongue is the primary medium for exchanging ideas and communicating. This complex situation involving multiple languages affects discussions about English teaching and decisions about how to use the language in schools. In this regard, the multilingual environment shapes discussions about EMI and language policy. Critics stress the importance of language practices that fit different situations, rather than just using English in a way that works for everyone (Espino et al., 2021).

In response to these challenges, translanguaging serves as a bridge connecting present languages to English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in most

subjects in basic education in the country. Translanguaging is a useful learning strategy for ESL and EFL learners, as it draws on their linguistic repertoires and prior experiences (Graham et al., 2021; Kadel, 2024).

Translanguaging is a hypothesis on language practice. Translanguaging, like any theory applied to practice, provides a principled basis for choosing between opposing interpretations (Wei, 2018), as cited in Marrero-Colón (2021). Translanguaging encompasses both the discourse techniques of bilinguals and instructional techniques that make flexible use of bilingual students' full linguistic repertoire to teach rigorous subjects and promote academic language skills (Marrero-Colón, 2021).

However, language teachers face a dilemma between using learners' mother tongues to aid target-language acquisition while maintaining linguistic identity, or minimizing the use of the mother tongue to maximize exposure to the target language (Akbar & Taqi, 2020). Monolingual bias in assessment often inadequately reflects a learner's true communicative ability by relying on English-only testing formats (Espino et al., 2021). This approach fails to account for the use of multiple languages in real-world contexts. Consequently, advocates emphasize the need for assessment practices that acknowledge translanguaging flows and multilingual competence (Espino et al., 2021).

Furthermore, educators' beliefs about language rights and classroom practices influence the implementation of EMI (Mendoza & Parba, 2018). Shifting towards translanguaging necessitates professional development that views students' languages as resources rather than obstacles (Mendoza & Parba, 2018). Translanguaging creates a connection that bridges the gap between multiple languages, strengthening English as the medium of instruction in several schools across the country. Within EMI discussions, the focus is on access, equity, and the realities of multilingual learners, in which translanguaging emerges as a practical approach to promote inclusive language learning, enhancing the use of learners' diverse linguistic skills rather than

emphasizing a single language (Deniega & Neri, 2024). EMI seeks to enhance English proficiency for higher education and global communication, but raises concerns about excluding learners with limited exposure to academic English (Libradilla, 2024). Thus, translanguaging is suggested as a means to support students in accessing concepts in their stronger languages while improving their English skills (Libradilla, 2024).

In more practical classroom terms, translanguaging in Philippine classrooms utilizes learners' entire linguistic repertoire as a unified system for meaning-making (Libradilla, 2024). It involves starting with mother tongues for introducing concepts and gradually integrating English into academic tasks, fostering bilingual or multilingual discourse. This approach aligns with inclusive pedagogy and supports differentiated learning paths, treating multiple languages as integrated resources that enhance participation, reduce anxiety, and validate students' identities, fostering welcoming learning environments that support minority-language communities in schools and help sustain linguistic diversity while achieving academic objectives (Libradilla, 2024).

Ultimately, the act of translanguaging is transformative, creating a social space for multilingual users by integrating their personal history, experience, environment, attitudes, beliefs, and ideologies, as well as their cognitive and physical capabilities, into a coherent and meaningful performance that becomes a lived experience (Macawile & Plata, 2022). Moreover, translanguaging is an approach that leverages students' full linguistic repertoires to enhance understanding of concepts and minimize emotional barriers to English learning (García & Kleifgen, 2020; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Libradilla, 2024). Therefore, this paper aimed to find out the impact of translanguaging by teachers in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms and to determine the extent of the teachers' awareness and understanding of translanguaging in the EMI classrooms, teachers' perceptions of translanguaging in the EMI classrooms, and the extent to which teachers employ translanguaging in the EMI classrooms.

**II. METHODOLOGY**

This study adopted a qualitative research design using a case study approach. A case study is a form of inquiry in which a researcher conducts a thorough assessment of a program, event, activity, process, or individual. Cases are defined by time and activity, and researchers gather thorough information over time using a variety of data-gathering approaches (Creswell, 2023).

The study is based on Jean Piaget's Constructivist Learning Theory (1970), which emphasizes students'

active participation in knowledge construction through interaction, reflection, and meaning-making.

This theoretical framework was utilized to gain a thorough knowledge of how translanguaging influences teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classrooms.

Constructivist Learning Theory promotes translanguaging by recognizing that learners and teachers draw on their entire language repertoires as valuable resources in the learning process.

*Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants*

Participants	Age	Years of Teaching Experience	Medium of Instruction Used in Classroom Discussion
Participant 1	46	14 years	English, Kinaray-a/ Hiligaynon
Participant 2	26	1 year	English, Kinaray-a/ Hiligaynon
Participant 3	25	2 years	English, Kinaray-a/ Hiligaynon
Participant 4	40	8 years	English, Kinaray-a/ Hiligaynon
Participant 5	32	1 year and 6 months	English, Filipino, Kinaray-a/ Hiligaynon

Note: Table 1 shows the demographic profile and background information of teachers from the selected public school in Iloilo Province.

The study included five English teachers from a public school in Iloilo Province. The participants were chosen based on their usage of English as the language of instruction during classroom discussions, making them suitable cases for investigating translanguaging techniques in an EMI environment.

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews performed by the researcher. An interview guide associated with the study's objectives was created and expertly validated to ensure that the questions were clear, relevant, and acceptable. Prior to conducting the interviews, ethical issues were strictly followed. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, the interview duration of 45 minutes to one hour, the voluntary nature of participation, their right to withdraw at any time, the use of audio recording, and the safeguards in place to ensure confidentiality, anonymity, and data privacy. Informed consent was obtained before the interviews commenced.

The interviews were conducted individually, in any language the participants chose, allowing participants to express themselves freely and naturally. The

interviews were recorded with the participants' consent to ensure data accuracy. Probing questions were utilized as needed to clarify or deepen participants' responses. All interviews were recorded verbatim in Hiligaynon and, when needed, translated into English for analysis. To verify the data's integrity and trustworthiness, the transcripts were examined and validated, including cross-checking with audio recordings and participant validation. All data were kept strictly confidential and securely maintained in password-protected folders available only to the researcher.

**III. RESULTS**

The results of the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with five English Medium Instruction (EMI) teachers. Following Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis, this section focuses strictly on the patterns and themes that emerged from the data, supported by participants' accounts.

The findings are organized according to the study's research questions: (1) teachers' awareness and

understanding of translanguaging, (2) teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward translanguaging, and

(3) the extent of translanguaging practices in EMI classrooms.

*Table 2: Thematic Table*

Major Theme	Subtheme	Narrative/ Statement
<b>Teachers' Awareness and Understanding of Translanguaging</b>	Translanguaging as a comprehension support Awareness of the need to balance L1 and English Policy flexibility and lack of explicit guidelines	Teachers described translanguaging as a practical teaching method for learners who struggle to understand lessons provided solely in English. Their comments indicate that they purposefully use Filipino or local dialect (Hiligaynon/Kinaray-a) when teaching abstract topics, providing examples, or clarifying directions, particularly for challenging students. At the same time, they recognize that English should remain the primary language of education; therefore, translanguaging is used judiciously to support comprehension without eliminating English exposure.
<b>Teachers' Attitudes and Perceptions of Translanguaging</b>	Increased learner confidence and engagement Reduced anxiety toward English Recognition of limitations Need for professional development	Teachers often view translanguaging positively because they observe that learners become more confident, participative, and less anxious to talk when they are permitted to use their native language. Several teachers said that multilingual explanations cause students to ask more questions, respond more actively, and absorb things faster. They did, however, note that translanguaging does not totally fix comprehension problems for students with poor reading abilities and stressed the need for seminars, workshops, and clearer direction to improve its classroom implementation.
<b>Extent of Translanguaging Practices in EMI Classrooms</b>	Reactive language switching Planned and strategic use of translanguaging Increased learner participation and expression Challenges in implementation Differentiated use based on learner proficiency	Teachers stated that translanguaging is frequently used during discussions, classroom activities, directions, and assessments, especially when pupils appear confused or unable to participate in English. Their responses demonstrate that language switching occurs both spontaneously and consciously, depending on the learner's needs, course difficulty, and skill level. Teachers also stated that while translanguaging increases involvement and expression, its implementation must be carefully balanced, as excessive use can limit students' English practice.

Note: Table 2 presents the themes and subthemes from participants' responses.

Participants demonstrated a shared understanding of translanguaging as a classroom practice that supports learner comprehension. Teachers reported using Filipino or local dialects when lessons involved abstract, technical, or difficult concepts that learners struggled to understand through English alone. Translanguaging was described as particularly

necessary in lower sections and among struggling readers.

Teachers also indicated awareness of the need to balance the use of learners' first language with continued exposure to English. Several participants expressed concern about using too much Filipino,

noting the importance of returning to English once comprehension was established.

In terms of policy, teachers acknowledged that while English is promoted as the primary medium of instruction, translanguaging is neither explicitly prohibited nor clearly defined in official guidelines. As a result, decisions about language use were largely based on teachers' professional judgment and classroom experience.

Moreover, teachers expressed generally positive attitudes toward translanguaging. Participants reported observing increased learner confidence, engagement, and participation when translanguaging was used during instruction. Learners were described as becoming more responsive and willing to express ideas when allowed to draw on their first language.

Teachers also noted that translanguaging reduced learners' anxiety toward English. Allowing temporary use of the first language was perceived as lessening the fear of making mistakes and helping learners approach English tasks more comfortably.

Despite these positive perceptions, teachers recognized limitations. Translanguaging was reported to be less effective for learners with very low literacy skills, particularly non-readers. Participants also emphasized the need for professional development opportunities, including training, mentoring, and access to instructional resources, to support more systematic use of translanguaging.

Furthermore, teachers reported using translanguaging both reactively and strategically.

Reactive use occurred when learners showed signs of confusion, such as silence, lack of participation, or blank expressions. Planned use involved intentionally incorporating the first language during group work, clarifying key concepts, or providing scaffolded explanations.

Participants consistently reported that translanguaging increased learner participation and expression. Learners provided clearer explanations and more

relevant examples when allowed to use their first language.

However, teachers identified challenges in implementation, including extended lesson time due to bilingual explanations, potential overreliance on the first language, attention span issues, and varying levels of learner proficiency. Translanguaging practices were differentiated across classes, with lower-proficiency groups receiving more first-language support than higher-proficiency groups.

#### **IV. DISCUSSION**

The discussion highlights the significance of teachers' awareness, attitudes, and practices of translanguaging in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms. It further considers contextual factors such as learner proficiency, classroom diversity, and institutional policy, and discusses implications for policy, professional development, and future research.

The first research question explored teachers' awareness and understanding of translanguaging. The analysis revealed that teachers generally perceive translanguaging as a strategy to support learner comprehension, especially when lessons involve complex, abstract, or technical concepts. This aligns with García and Li (2014), who argue that translanguaging facilitates meaning-making by enabling learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoire. In the present study, teachers particularly emphasized the role of translanguaging in supporting lower-proficiency learners, highlighting its function as an essential scaffold in EMI classrooms.

Participants also demonstrated awareness of the delicate balance required between learners' first language (L1) and English. While translanguaging was viewed as beneficial for comprehension, teachers noted that excessive reliance on L1 might hinder English language development. This awareness aligns with Canagarajah's (2011) findings, which assert that effective translanguaging involves strategic alternation between languages rather than wholesale substitution. The participants' caution indicates a nuanced understanding of translanguaging as both a support mechanism and a pedagogical tool requiring careful calibration.

Policy emerged as a secondary but influential factor in shaping teachers' understanding. While English is officially promoted as the primary medium of instruction in EMI settings, the absence of explicit guidelines on translanguaging left teachers to rely on professional judgment. This ambiguity mirrors observations in other studies (e.g., Creese & Blackledge, 2010) where teachers navigate institutional policies pragmatically, often creating flexible classroom practices to meet learner needs. The findings suggest that teachers possess an informed awareness of translanguaging, but institutional support remains limited.

The second research question examined teachers' attitudes and perceptions. The findings indicate predominantly positive views, with participants reporting increased learner confidence, engagement, and willingness to participate when translanguaging was permitted. This supports Cummins' (2007) assertion that allowing students to use their L1 reduces affective barriers to learning and enhances cognitive engagement.

Teachers observed that translanguaging reduced anxiety about English, enabling learners to approach language tasks more confidently. This finding resonates with Macaro's (2018) research, which suggests that translanguaging can function as a 'confidence buffer,' particularly for learners with limited English proficiency. By legitimizing the use of L1 in the classroom, teachers facilitated an inclusive environment where students could take intellectual risks without fear of making mistakes.

Despite these positive perceptions, participants acknowledged limitations. Translanguaging was reported to be less effective for learners with very low literacy or who were non-readers, suggesting that learners' baseline skills mediate its benefits. Teachers also emphasized the need for professional development, mentoring, and access to resources to implement translanguaging systematically. This aligns with Li (2018), who highlights that teacher preparation and knowledge of bilingual pedagogies are critical for translanguaging to function optimally.

The third research question addressed how translanguaging is enacted in EMI classrooms. The analysis revealed both reactive and planned translanguaging practices. Reactive use occurred when learners displayed confusion or disengagement, reflecting teachers' responsiveness to real-time comprehension challenges. Planned use, on the other hand, involved deliberate incorporation of L1 during group work, scaffolded explanations, and clarification of abstract concepts.

These findings align with the notion of translanguaging as a dynamic, context-sensitive practice (García & Wei, 2014). Teachers in the study demonstrated strategic awareness, adjusting their language practices according to learner proficiency, content complexity, and classroom dynamics. The differentiated use of translanguaging highlights its potential as a flexible pedagogical tool that can accommodate diverse learner needs while maintaining English exposure.

Teachers also reported challenges, including extended lesson time, potential overreliance on L1, attention span issues, and classroom heterogeneity. These challenges reflect concerns raised by Macaro (2018) and Creese & Blackledge (2010), who caution that translanguaging requires careful planning to avoid negative effects on English development or classroom management. Notably, translanguaging was associated with enhanced learner participation and expression, supporting claims that allowing multiple linguistic resources promotes deeper engagement and conceptual understanding.

This study draws on García and Wei's (2014) translanguaging framework, which conceptualizes bilingual learners' linguistic resources as fluid and dynamic. The findings reinforce the framework's emphasis on flexibility, cognitive scaffolding, and learner agency. Teachers' practices of reactive and planned translanguaging demonstrate an intuitive understanding of translanguaging as a tool for both comprehension support and learner empowerment. Furthermore, the study's findings underscore the interplay between teacher agency, learner needs, and

institutional policy, reflecting the socio-educational context emphasized in the theoretical model.

#### IV. IMPLICATIONS

The study highlights the need for clear policy guidelines that recognize translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical strategy. Policies should balance the promotion of English proficiency with the practical benefits of L1 support.

Curriculum frameworks should allow flexibility in language use to accommodate diverse learner needs without compromising EMI goals.

Professional development programs should equip EMI teachers with concrete translanguaging strategies, classroom management techniques, and assessment practices that account for bilingual instruction.

Teachers should adopt a reflective approach to translanguaging, monitoring its effects on learner comprehension, engagement, and English development.

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