

# Multilingualism and Translanguaging: The Impact on Elementary Learners' Reading Skills in the ESL Classroom

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## Abstract

The education sector has experienced a transformation in language pedagogy in recent years, which involved the transition to translanguaging as a powerful tool to use in the ESL classroom to make learning more participatory and effective. Traditional approaches to language learning that uphold the concept of holding one codified language in isolation from other languages are giving way to more inclusive pedagogical practices that embrace translingual learners. This quasi-experimental study explored the extent to which translanguaging affected the reading skills of elementary learners in the ESL classroom. A total of one hundred and seventy-two Grade 6 students were recruited into the study and were subjected to an analysis of the effects of translanguaging on the subsequent reading skills after the interaction occurred. There were statistically significant mean differences between the control and experimental groups. The effective means of translanguaging demonstrate a positive impact of allowing first language in the ESL classroom and that utilising both first language and English, to a certain degree, is effective in enhancing the reading skill of elementary learners in the ESL classroom.

**Keywords:** Language Pedagogy, Translanguaging, Esl Classroom, Reading Skills, Multilingualism

## Introduction

Reading plays an important role in individual development, serving both informational and educational purposes while improving language and vocabulary skills. However, the most recent figures for Malaysia show a steep drop in the literacy rates from 95.71% in 2020 to 92.97% in 2021, the lowest achievement since they were first measured in 2000. Moreover,

as reported recently, Malaysia had plummeted from the 22nd position in the English Proficiency Index in 2018 to 28th in 2021. These data raise questions about the effectiveness of how English language education was delivered and reinforced in Malaysian schools. Why are some elementary school children in Malaysia unable to cope with English reading? Further complicating the picture is Malaysia's multicultural context, where diverse regional languages – from Bahasa Malaysia to Chinese to Tamil – also materialise as languages of learning. English, which is recognised as the second language (L2), is sometimes a third or even a foreign language depending on regions. Students' failure to understand English has caused them problems, which has made them discouraged and lose interest in reading.

In the past, using the first language (L1) in English as a Second Language (ESL) classroom has been seen as an obstacle to students' learning of English (L2). However, recent years have seen a positive shift with the emergence of translanguaging as a valuable tool for both teachers and students in ESL classrooms. This approach challenges conventional beliefs and offers a revised perspective on language learning, emphasising the positive impact of utilising the first language alongside English.

In the field of ESL, reading comprehension is crucial as it facilitates knowledge assimilation, educational progression and personal enjoyment (Klingner et al., 2015). Translanguaging emerges as a promising approach to overcome barriers to reading comprehension. This study investigates the impact of translanguaging on language learning experiences and reading proficiency among elementary students in Malaysia's ESL classrooms. The research aims to answer the following questions:

1. Does translanguaging have a significant effect on the elementary students' reading skills in the ESL classroom?
2. What are the attitudes of ESL students towards the use of translanguaging approach in developing their reading skills?

## **Literature Review**

### *English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction*

ESL instruction facilitates language acquisition for non-native speakers (Hansen-Thomas, 2014). The primary objective of ESL education is to enhance learners' language proficiency across listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. Diverse cultural backgrounds characterise ESL learners with each presenting unique linguistic needs and objectives. ESL classrooms have implemented various pedagogical approaches to address this diversity. These pedagogical strategies have significantly evolved over the years, aiming to empower learners to actively engage with the English language and foster language competence while boosting their confidence in language usage. As a result, ESL education has transformed from a simple instructional approach to an interactive and participatory process that enhances and enriches the learning experience for ESL learners from diverse cultural backgrounds.

In the last three decades, ESL instruction discouraged the use of non-native speakers' first languages in the classroom (Atkinson, 1987; García, 2020). Moreover, there existed a tendency to overlook the bilingual or multilingual backgrounds of ESL learners. The

conventional approach predominantly adhered to a monolingual concept that prioritised the academic performance of English learners, neglecting the significance of their linguistic backgrounds (Kleyn & Gracia, 2019). Nevertheless, both research and pedagogical developments are now advocating for a move away from monolingual practices (Kleyn and Gracia, 2019). Instead, a holistic perspective now acknowledges the value of employing different languages in the second language learning process. Kleyn and Gracia (2019), argue that recognising and valuing learners' linguistic background represents one important step forward in the provision of more effective, inclusive ESL education. Turnbull and Daily-Ocain (2009), point out that learners' first languages can function as significant tools in effective second language acquisition. A study by Burton and Rajendram (2019), found that having first languages used in the ESL classroom can help learners to have more positive attitudes towards becoming proficient at learning a second language. By embracing language diversity and valuing the learners' linguistic backgrounds, learners are more likely to become motivated and confident language learners.

### **ESL in the Malaysian Context**

The centrality of ESL is evident in Malaysia through its formal recognition by the Ministry of Education, where English is the second language emphasised in schools, assigned an equal amount of instructional time as the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. Giving Bahasa Malaysia and English similar status shows that the country values linguistic diversity (Baskaran, 1985).

In Malaysia, although ESL teaching has been emphasised by the education policy, one of the main issues is whether students' mother tongue should be used in ESL teaching. The issue of using students' mother tongues became a hot debate in Malaysia. Some people believe that using students' mother tongue in ESL classrooms is not advisable since they believe that focusing on just English can lead to the same standard of overall language proficiency nationwide and also to make sure that all children can enjoy the same level of learning without being pre-judged based on their mother tongues. Additionally, they believe that using students' mother tongue in ESL classrooms can make students too dependent on teachers and native languages (Yusri et al., 2022).

On the other hand, scholars counter that the use of mother tongue elements in ESL teaching is needed as it can facilitate the process of learning the language, especially for students who are more comfortable with their mother tongue. It is seen as reducing tensions to language learning, raising motivation, and creating a comfortable environment when children can communicate more effectively. (Yusri et al., 2022; Ooi & Aziz, 2022). They argued that students' gap in their language proficiency can be bridged through usage of students' mother tongue in English language class. The debate on the role of mother tongue in ESL teaching in Malaysia reflects the complexities of language policy and multiculturalism in Malaysia's education system. The plural society nature of Malaysia has long influenced decisions on the provision of mother tongue instruction at primary school level and some high schools. The country aims to develop students' English proficiency interests without compromising the learning of their mother tongue languages. This remains an important national discussion.

### Translanguaging

The term "translanguaging" first emerged in Bangor, Wales, and gained prominence in educational settings during the 1980s (Williams, 1994). As articulated by García in 2009, translanguaging refers to the practice adopted by bilingual or multilingual individuals to leverage diverse linguistic characteristics and employ multiple languages for comprehensive and effective communication. Baker (2011) describes translanguaging as a new and critical lens which offers a novel understanding of the dynamic interaction between different languages in meaning-making, as well as putting it into action in lived experience and learning. Additionally, García and Kleyn (2016, p. 14) define translanguaging as 'the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire'.

In educational contexts, pedagogical translanguaging serves as a powerful method for language instruction, emphasising the integration of languages in the learning process. Cenoz (2017), asserts that pedagogical translanguaging involves the use of translanguaging practices within the context of the classroom to accomplish specific pedagogical objectives. This practice can have a significant impact on students' development of meaning-making and communicative competence in bilingual or multilingual classrooms. Viewing translanguaging as using two or more languages to comprehend the meaning of a specific word or phrase reflects the fact that students' multilingual backgrounds make them better language-learners, as students can have a more profound understanding of the language when all elements of their language repertoire are being drawn upon. Teachers who practise pedagogical translanguaging in the classroom, encouraging students to engage in their whole language repertoire, create an environment for learning that is both inviting and supportive of language learning. Flores & Schissel (2014)

found that teachers were optimistic about the possibility of using translanguaging pedagogical practices to 'normalise, legitimise and respect code-switching' and make the ESL classroom feel inclusive, friendly and inviting. Students are encouraged to be more active participants when they feel comfortable using the language in the classroom setting. There is empirical evidence to support these claims where studies conducted by Wang and Li (2022), Riswanto (2022), and Sahib (2019), were all promising in showing that teachers' comfort with supporting translanguaging and code-switching in the ESL class creates potential for increased student engagement.

From the behaviourist's perspective, translanguaging is introduced within the educational setting in order to not only encourage students utilising their linguistic resources in class but also increase their drive and interest in attending their lessons. This motivation is particularly important in the context of reading lessons, where students may perceive them as dull and monotonous. Here, translanguaging serves as a powerful solution to enhance motivation as well as injecting excitement and engagement into reading activities. It aids in developing students' interest by facilitating a clearer comprehension of words, phrases and sentences, making the learning process more meaningful and maximising lesson outcomes, as supported by Duarte (2018). Not only that, translanguaging is also proved to be an effective strategy to not only build students' confidence, motivation and enthusiasm but also increases higher cognitive engagement in the ESL classroom, as shown through many studies conducted by Elashhab (2020), Alasmari et al. (2022), Dougherty (2021), and Rabbidge (2019). By allowing students to utilise their linguistic diversity and their ability to express themselves

more comfortably, teachers can revitalise the learning process and empower students to approach reading with renewed enthusiasm and interest.

### **Translanguaging's Impact on Vocabulary and Reading Competency**

Language competence serves as the foundation of effective language learning, and the field of language education continually seeks innovative approaches to enhance proficiency. Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that encourages the fluid use of multiple languages, has emerged as a crucial strategy to elevate language skills. Duarte (2018), highlights the role of translanguaging as a bridge between students' linguistic resources, facilitating a more profound understanding and engagement with the English language. By integrating their existing language knowledge into the English context, students establish meaningful connections and enhance their overall language competence.

The development of vocabulary and reading competency holds central importance in language learning, aligning with proficiency levels outlined by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2001). Vocabulary and reading skills are closely interconnected in language development. Elashhab (2020), suggests that translanguaging plays a pivotal role in enhancing students' vocabulary and understanding of unfamiliar words as a strong vocabulary foundation serves as the bedrock for reading comprehension. Sahib (2019), also emphasises the direct impact of translanguaging on students' ability to receive and comprehend reading materials. When students encounter new words during reading, a well-developed vocabulary enables them to comprehend and internalise these terms more effectively, unlocking the meaning of texts and making the reading process more accessible and meaningful.

Strategic use of multiple languages allows students to navigate complex reading materials more effectively. According to Dougherty (2021), translanguaging serves as a valuable tool for enriching students' vocabulary and comprehension. It empowers students to leverage their linguistic diversity to grasp the meaning of specific words or phrases, thereby enhancing their reading comprehension skills. This approach effectively dismantles language barriers, making reading materials more accessible and fostering deeper comprehension. Moreover, Sahib (2019), highlights the specific advantages of translanguaging for low-proficiency students in English vocabulary. Such learners often face challenges in vocabulary acquisition due to limited exposure to the language. Translanguaging acts as a bridge, assisting them in overcoming linguistic limitations by establishing a connection between their native language and English. This, in turn, facilitates the transfer of knowledge and comprehension during reading activities. The positive impact of translanguaging on vocabulary learning has broader implications for language learners striving to progress within the CEFR framework. The enhanced vocabulary comprehension facilitated by translanguaging supports language learners in their journey towards becoming proficient readers.

## **Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### ***Theoretical Discussion***

#### ***Reading Theories***

Several reading models have been developed to explain the process of reading, with three primary models gaining prominence: the bottom-up, top-down and interactive models.

Grabe and Stoller (2011), assert that these models provide valuable conceptualisations for educators to refine their reading instruction. However, in the evolving landscape of education, there is a growing recognition of the necessity for more inclusive and culturally responsive methodologies, particularly in ESL classrooms.

The bottom-up model, predominant in reading instruction from 1950 to 1965, defines reading as a sequential process centred around decoding individual sounds to comprehend words (Alexander & Fox, 2008). Emphasising the elemental skills of decoding, this model highlights the translation of phonetic and orthographic information into meaningful language understanding. While foundational, it has faced criticism for potential limitations in offering a holistic view of the reading process (Brunfaut, 2008), prompting the emergence of a more comprehensive understanding of reading that demands the integration of higher-order cognitive functions, the top-down model.

The top-down model, prevalent from 1966 to 1975, shifts the focus to the reader's preexisting knowledge and experiences in constructing meaning from a text (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). This model acknowledges the reader's active engagement and connections with background knowledge, experiences, context and the topic at hand. However, reliance on prior knowledge may pose challenges when readers encounter unfamiliar content or entirely new concepts (Ashfaque et al., 2019), leading to potential gaps in comprehension.

To address these gaps, the interactive reading model emerged, proposing a dynamic interplay between bottom-up and top-down processes (Rumelhart, 1980). Within the ESL reading classroom, the concept of translanguaging becomes particularly relevant, aligning with the interactive model and encouraging learners to draw from their linguistic diversity to construct

a more comprehensive understanding of the text (Dong, 2018). It allows for a flexible and inclusive approach, enriching learners' comprehension by utilising all available forms of linguistic knowledge (Grabe & Stoller, 2011). The intersection of reading theories and translanguaging in the ESL classroom is crucial. The bottom-up model with its focus on decoding skills resonates well with the premise that translanguaging thrives by allowing learners' rich linguistic resources to be expanded and recognised. The top-down model with its focus on readers brings learner engagement into alignment with translanguaging where new information is constructed by connecting them to their existing multilingual repertoire. The interactive model strongly echoes translanguaging, it highlights the dynamic interaction of decoding skills through the integration of linguistic diversity.

In conclusion, translanguaging serves as a bridge between traditional reading theories, enabling educators to embrace learners' diverse linguistic backgrounds. This approach facilitates a culturally responsive reading environment that fosters a deeper understanding of texts among elementary learners in the ESL classroom.

### **Second Language Acquisition and Language Transfer**

Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, when examined alongside the concept of second language acquisition and language transfer, offer a rich and interconnected perspective on multilingualism and translanguaging within the ESL classroom. Language transfer, as proposed by Odlin (1989), becomes an important

element in understanding how translanguaging practices can serve as a bridge for positive transfer from the L1 to the L2, leveraging existing linguistic knowledge for improved comprehension.

Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, illustrated through the Dual Iceberg Model, provides insight into how translanguaging impacts both Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). The Dual Iceberg Model (Figure 1) suggests that what appears as two separate icebergs—representing surface features of languages—is, in fact, interconnected below the surface (Cummins, 1979). Translanguaging, when examined as a pedagogical practice, can influence the development of BICS by tapping into learners' diverse linguistic repertoire, creating a bridge between languages. Additionally, it contributes to the enhancement of CALP, the deeper, underlying proficiency required for more cognitively demanding tasks such as literacy.

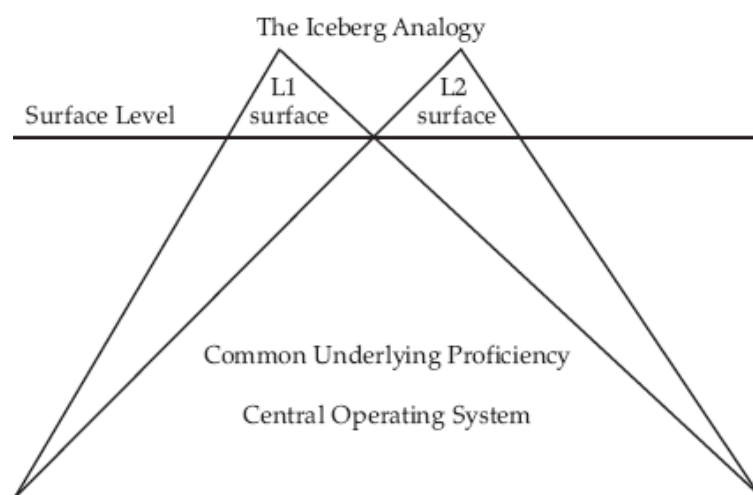


Figure 1. *Cummins' Dual Iceberg Model*

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis subsequently expanded on this idea, proposing that the learner should be in a positive emotional state when learning a second language (Joshith & Raju, 2019), which in practice means that the use of learners' L1 within translanguaging practices is not simply a linguistic strategy, but a pedagogical resource deployed strategically with the goal of potentially overcoming the affective filter and creating an environment conducive to an optimal state of L2 comprehension and acquisition.

This is ultimately aligned with the notion that the learner's emotional state plays a fundamental role in L2 instruction. Yet, translanguaging taught students how to respect the interdependence of languages, it also showed students how to productively use the transfer of knowledge from L1 to L2 that Cummins refer to as Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). The notion that gains in CALP in L1 can positively influence CALP in L2. In short, translanguaging practices can be a dynamic, strategic way of employing this shared underlying proficiency to solidify language skills that are not limited by seeing the multiple languages students bring to the classroom as mutually exclusive.

The integration of Cummins' and Krashen's theories of how language learning unfolds with translanguaging practice in the ESL reading classroom recognises the dynamic and

unpredictable interplay between the linguistic and the affective dimensions of language learning. Translanguaging becomes a positive agent for language transfer while at the same time constructing an affective environment that considers the role of students' emotions in the language-learning process. This dual orientation can facilitate creating a more inclusive and purposeful language learning environment characterised by the fluidity of linguistic knowledge, emotional states and the cognitive processes involved in learning.

In summary, the theoretical framework helps to unify the theories, models and concepts to create a reliable learning structure on how multilingualism and translanguaging play intersects with ESL reading instruction. Teachers can create a holistic and meaningful language learning environment that is linguistically rich and promotes a deeper comprehension of reading skills among elementary ESL learners.

### Conceptual Framework

This study explores how translanguaging affects students in the ESL reading classroom. It brings together important reading theories, pedagogical techniques and psychological variables in the complex context of ESL reading classroom. From the theory of reading, namely the bottom-up, top-down and the interactive models proposed by Grabe and Stoller (2011), the complexity of how decoding affects higher-level cognitive functions is studied. This sets the stage for our research objectives (Figure 2). The findings from this study may provide fresh insights into translanguaging, potentially prompting educational policymakers and educators to consider it as a viable teaching and learning approach for enhancing elementary students' reading abilities.

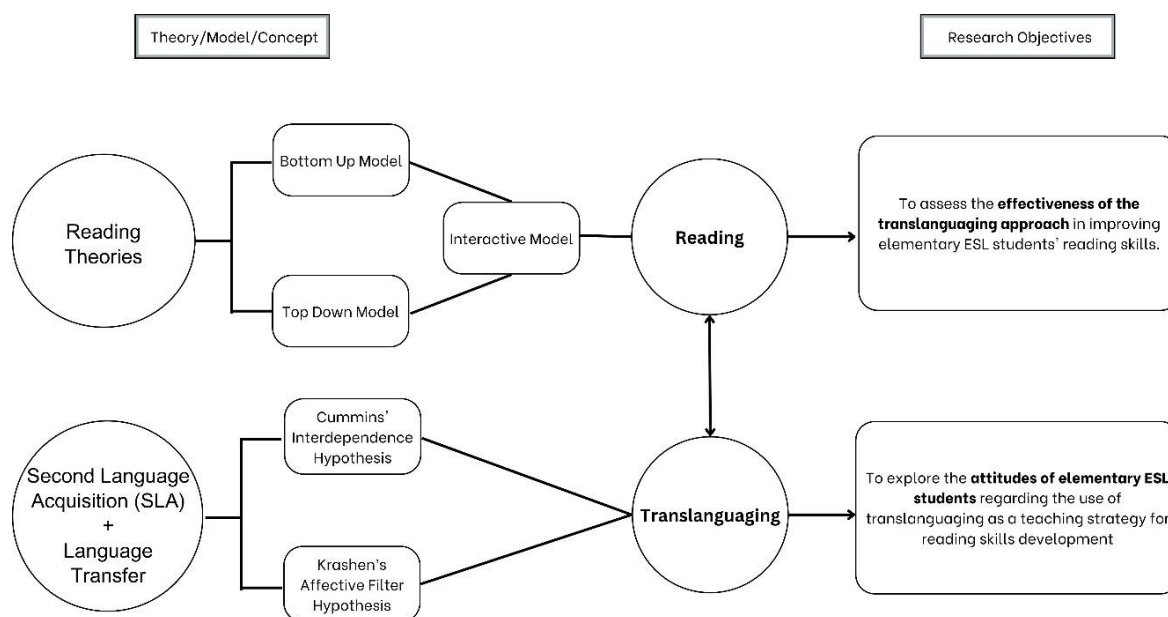


Figure 2. Conceptual Framework of the Research

The first research objective aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the translanguaging approach in enhancing the reading proficiency of elementary ESL learners. Positioned within the interactive reading model, as a cross-linguistic force, the translanguaging influence on sequential decoding processes and higher-order mental operations on reading performance was examined. The effect of this strategy is to be quantified and measured as a pedagogical



approach to enhance reading proficiency. At the same time, the second research objective explores the attitudes of elementary ESL learners concerning the use of translanguaging as a teaching strategy for reading skills development. Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis and Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis have been merged within the conceptual framework, providing a theoretical foundation for the synergistic role of second-language acquisition and language transfer that will guide our quest to understand how translanguaging practices lead to both BICS and CALP, and meet the goal of developing reading skills in the ESL setting.

In summary, this conceptual framework reveals the impact of translanguaging on the reading skills of elementary ESL learners. It lays out the theoretical rationale for the research aims, both of which have strong implications and pedagogical tactics stemming from the juxtaposition of these theoretical constructs.

## **Methodology**

### *Research Design*

A quasi-experimental design was used in this study to evaluate the effect and implication of translanguaging in the ESL reading classroom, containing an experimental group with a treatment of translanguaging and a control group without such a treatment. This research uses a mixed-method approach, which combines qualitative and quantitative data in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the impact of translanguaging on ESL students in relation to their reading proficiency and comprehension. Hence, using data triangulation not only enhances the depth of data but also improves the validity of the enquiring process.

### **Sampling Method**

This study was carried out in two urban national primary schools in Klang, Selangor. The majority of the pupils in both schools were of Chinese ethnicity and their L1 was Chinese. A total of 172 Year 6 pupils were used as the samples for this study. With the use of non-random purposive sampling, the samples were identified according to their levels of their CEFR band scores (Etikan, 2015, p.2). The pupils were purposively chosen to fit the research objectives (Crossman 2015). As the research aimed to investigate the significant effect of translanguaging in an ESL classroom, pupils with similar levels of English proficiency, specifically Band 3 and Band 4 (determined by their latest Pentaksiran Bilik Darjah - PBD results in August 2023), were identified as the study's samples. The 172 pupils were allocated into the control and experimental groups.

### **Data Collection Method**

All of the data were evaluated and the validity and reliability of them were checked by three Bachelor of Education degree holders in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) with over 12 years of experience in teaching. Face validity was assessed to check whether the created items were suitable for the research purpose, to confirm whether the items were appropriate, relevant and adequate in meeting the research objectives by referring to the checklist introduced by Hardesty and Bearden (2004).

### **T-Test**

To assess the impact of translanguaging on students' reading skills, a t-test was employed as a statistical tool. This quantitative method facilitated the comparison of means and standard deviation between the control and experimental groups (Tae, 2015), allowing for the

identification of any statistically significant differences in the reading proficiency of the two groups. The t-test, with its ability to analyse numerical data and determine the significance of observed differences, served as a crucial quantitative component in evaluating the effectiveness of translanguaging.

A multiple-choice comprehension questions test was administered during the while-reading stage of the reading lesson to examine the pupils' understanding of the given reading text. The t-test played a vital role in gathering valuable information about the target sample, allowing for the evaluation of the reading performance of the participants. This assessment provides insights into the effectiveness of the translanguaging approach in developing students' reading skills.

### **Questionnaire**

As noted by Roopa and Rani (2012), a questionnaire is an effective tool for obtaining statistical information. With the aim of collecting quantitative data on participants' learning attitudes, the control and experimental groups responded to the same structured questionnaire. The questionnaire used in this study was adapted from previous studies by Ledwaba (2020), and Öztürk and Çubukçu (2022). The questionnaire, comprised of eleven closed-ended questions in Likert-scale format (choices ranging from 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'), was developed with close relations to the core research questions linked to the research objectives to identify learners' attitudes to the use of the translanguaging approach towards developing reading skills. The questionnaire was then distributed through a Google Form.

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

Creswell and Creswell (2018), highlight that while quantitative data ensures broad coverage and statistical validity, qualitative research contributes depth and contextual understanding. The integration of both approaches enhances the research process, offering a thorough perspective. By employing triangulation, a method advocated by Denzin and Lincoln (2011), it strengthens research validity and reliability through the convergence of findings from multiple data sources.

Complementing the quantitative data, a semi-structured interview was conducted to have in-depth exploration and understanding of students' attitudes towards the use of translanguaging in the ESL classroom. It was adapted from previous research conducted by Champlin (2016). The participants were randomly selected from both the control and experimental groups for this semi-structured interview. Using this qualitative method allowed room for participants to respond to questions and share their experiences about the translanguaging approach in the ESL classrooms in an open-ended manner which, in return, gave more insight into their viewpoint concerning translanguaging. All interviews were audio-recorded to ensure the accuracy of the data-taking and later transcribed for clarified analysis. Creswell's (2012), guidelines were also followed to ensure the quality of the obtained findings.

### **Data Analysis Method T test**

To measure the effect of using translanguaging on students' reading abilities, a paired-sample t-test was conducted to examine if there is a statistically significant difference in some parameter between the same population in two different conditions. The paired-sample t-

test is a method widely used to compare the means and standard deviation of a variable in two groups to assess the effect of a certain intervention.

In the beginning, a t-test on the pre-test was conducted to ensure that the control and experimental groups did not have significant differences in English reading proficiency before the implementation of translanguaging. Then, a t-test on the post-test was carried out to determine the performance of both groups after the use of translanguaging. Finally, paired-samples t-tests were utilised to analyse the effect of the reading comprehension intervention on each group, addressing the first research question:

1. Does translanguaging have a significant effect on the elementary students' reading skills in the ESL classroom?

This analysis provided valuable insights into understanding the immediate impact and effectiveness of translanguaging on the reading skills of elementary ESL learners.

### **Questionnaire**

Quantitative data were gathered through a structured questionnaire which was given to the respondents to find out their attitudes towards the translanguaging approach. Based on Roopa and Rani (2012), a questionnaire is one of the powerful approaches to collect statistical data because of its coverage and statistical reliability. The data were summarised into frequency and percentage. The quantitative data analysis gave insights about students' attitudes towards the use of the translanguaging approach in their reading skills, which answers the second research question:

2. What are the attitudes of ESL students towards the use of the translanguaging approach in developing their reading skills?

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

Last but not least, to get a complete understanding, in conjunction with quantitative data, a semi-structured interview was administered to the selected participants from the control and experimental groups. Accordingly, an inductive thematic analysis based on Maguire and Delahunt (2017), was conducted to explore the students' attitudes towards the use of translanguaging in the ESL classroom. Based on the transcribed interviews, thematic units were derived and arranged according to typical themes and patterns. The open-ended questions prompted students to elaborate on their experiences and attitudes regarding the use of translanguaging in the classroom, thereby addressing the second research question:

3. What are the attitudes of ESL students towards the use of the translanguaging approach in developing their reading skills?

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To conclude, the combination of the both forms of analysis (quantitative and qualitative) has provided a good understanding about the topic of the research and helped to answer the research questions. The quantitative analysis gave numerical information about the students' viewpoints whereas the qualitative analysis provided more in-depth and descriptive information about the experiences and attitudes of the students.

## Findings and Discussion

### Research Question 1: Does translanguaging have a significant effect on the elementary students' reading skills in the ESL classroom?

#### *T-test*

The statistical analysis of pre-test and post-test scores aimed to address the first research question. The results are presented in the tables below.

Table 1

*Results of Pre-test of the Control Group*

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PRE	3.99	86	.711	.077

Table 2

*Results of Pre-test of the Experimental Group*

Paired Samples Statistics					
		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PRE	3.93	86	.748	.081

A t-test was utilised to demonstrate the absence of significant differences between the control and experimental groups in English reading proficiency levels prior to the implementation of the use of translanguaging in teaching. The results of the analysis have shown that the mean scores of the two groups are similar. The pre-test mean score for the control group is 3.99, while the experimental group has a slightly lower mean score in pre-test, that is, 3.93. This allows for the assumption that mean scores in the pre-test showed students of the two groups to be equally proficient in English reading before the implementation of translanguaging.

On the other hand, the standard deviation scores of pre-test, 0.711 for the control group and 0.748 for the experimental group illustrates the almost similar degree of variability and dispersion of scores. While there was a subtle distinction in the spread of individual scores, the overall pattern suggested that both groups had a comparable level of proficiency and variability before the translanguaging intervention.

Table 3  
Results of the Paired-samples T-test of the Control Group

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
Pair 1	PRE - POST	-1.953	1.062	.114	Lower	Upper				
					-2.181	-1.726	-17.063	85	<.001	

Table 4  
Results of the Paired-samples T-test of the Experimental Group

		Paired Samples Test								
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
Pair 1	PRE - POST	-4.233	1.343	.145	Lower	Upper				
					-4.521	-3.945	-29.223	85	<.001	

After the implementation of translanguaging, a paired-samples t-test was performed to see if translanguaging has an impact on students’ reading comprehension. This addresses the first research question: Does translanguaging have a significant effect on the elementary students’ reading skills in the ESL classroom?

In the paired-samples t-tests, the mean difference between the pre-test and post-test scores was examined. For the control group, the mean difference was 1.953, suggesting an increase in scores from the pre-test to the post-test. Conversely, the experimental group exhibited a higher mean difference of 4.233, indicating a more significant improvement in scores following the translanguaging intervention.

These findings imply the positive effect of translanguaging on elementary students’ reading skills as the experimental group made a big improvement compared to the control group. Hence, the hypothesis of the research that translanguaging has a significant impact on reading skills in ESL classrooms was supported. The positive outcomes echo with Cummins' (1979), Interdependence Hypothesis, emphasising the interconnectedness of languages in bilingual individuals. Reading improvements reflect a facilitation effect that mastery of two languages could serve to enhance language competencies. These results also resonate with previous studies that have supported the cognitive advantage of linguistic diversity on academic achievement.

In conclusion, the statistical analyses, including t-tests and mean differences, provide strong evidence supporting the significant effect of translanguaging on elementary students' reading skills in the ESL classroom. The findings not only address the research question directly but also align with the theoretical frameworks and previous research, reinforcing the potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy for enhancing reading proficiency in ESL contexts.

## Research Question 2: What are the attitudes of ESL students towards the use of translanguaging approach in developing their reading skills?

The findings from both the questionnaire and interviews provide insights into the attitudes of ESL students towards the use of the translanguaging approach in developing their reading skills, which answer the second research question.

### Questionnaire

The findings derived from the questionnaire reveal a generally positive attitude among elementary ESL learners towards the translanguaging approach in developing the students' reading skills, demonstrating a positive reception and openness to the integration of both their first language and English within the ESL classroom. This positive trend has profound implications for pedagogical strategies aimed at enhancing reading abilities, particularly focusing on reading comprehension.

Table 5

*Questionnaire (Comprehension of Text and Lesson).*

Items	Strongly Agree / Agree	Neutral	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
I understand the comprehension text better when the instructor presents important or difficult words both in my first language and English.	95 (55.23 %)	51 (29.65%)	26 (15.12%)
I understand the reading comprehension questions better when it is well-explained in my first language and English.	138 (80.23%)	23 (13.37%)	11 (6.40%)
I understand the lesson better if my first language and English are used in the lessons.	134 (77.91%)	22 (12.79%)	16 (9.30%)

The first notable finding relates to the comprehension of text, revealing that a majority of the respondents (55.23%) strongly agreed or agreed that they comprehended textual content more effectively when instructors present crucial or challenging vocabulary in both their first language and English. This leads to an overwhelming 80.23% of the participants expressing strong agreement or agreement that they understood reading comprehension questions better when explanations were provided in both languages. Minimal neutrality was observed, with only 13.37%, and a mere 6.40% disagreed, underlining the overall positive disposition towards translanguaging in this context.

Learners acknowledged the benefits of presenting challenging vocabulary and comprehension questions in both languages, highlighting the potential of translanguaging as a cognitive scaffold that facilitates a deeper understanding of textual content. The reported positive correlation (77.91% of respondents) between translanguaging and improved lesson comprehension aligns with research emphasising the cognitive advantages of linguistic diversity, suggesting contributions not only to language acquisition but also to overall academic achievement.

This inclination coherently aligns with the theoretical framework of interactive reading, emphasising the importance of forging connections between prior knowledge and new information. The engagement with vocabulary in both languages aligns with interactive theory, as it facilitates an understanding of presented reading comprehension questions. This

approach not only corresponds with the cognitive aspects of comprehension but also aligns with the bottom-up processing theory, enabling students to navigate comprehension more proficiently by unpacking the meaning of individual words and phrases in both languages.

A consequential outcome of the positive trends in vocabulary comprehension is the students' assertion that their understanding of lessons improved when instructors employed both their first language and English, aligning seamlessly with the top-down processing theory. This finding supports the notion that students draw upon their pre-existing knowledge and language proficiency to derive overall meaning from the lesson, with translanguaging acting as an invaluable scaffold for the seamless integration of existing knowledge with new information. This pedagogical strategy aids in overcoming linguistic barriers, fostering a more profound comprehension of lesson content.

Table 6

*Questionnaire (Perceived Benefits of Translanguaging).*

Items	Strongly Agree / Agree	Neutral	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
It benefits me when the instructor uses both my first language and English at the same time during the lessons.	106 (61.63%)	43 (25.00%)	23 (13.37%)
It helps me to improve my English when both my first language and English are used at the same time during the lessons.	102 (59.30 %)	43 (25.00%)	27 (15.70%)

Learners also reported positive attitudes towards translanguaging. A majority noted that the simultaneous use of both languages helped them to become better in English – a crucial outcome in ESL classrooms where language fluency is a primary learning goal. Moreover, 61.63% of participants agreed with the idea that instructors' use of both the students' first language and English helps them suggests an awareness of translanguaging's support in the learning process.

Consistent with Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, this finding shows that bilinguals are aware of the interdependence of their languages. This improvement in their language skills demonstrates not only the viability of the theoretical framework, but also the real potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in ESL contexts for developing languages holistically.

Furthermore, the benefit to proficiency and comprehension extends to language skills where 59.30% of respondents 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' with the statement that 'using both my first language and English at the same time helps me to improve my English.' This supports the potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy for language proficiency in ESL contexts.

Table 7

*Questionnaire (Students' Attitudes towards Translanguaging).*

Items	Strongly Agree / Agree	Neutral	Disagree / Strongly Disagree
I want to use my first language during the lessons when I feel the need.	120 (69.77%)	28 (16.28%)	24 (13.95%)
I feel free and confident to engage with other learners when I use my first language during class activities.	107 (62.21%)	43 (25.00%)	22 (12.79%)
I enjoyed discussing the reading text in my first language and English with my classmates.	95 (55.23%)	62 (36.05%)	15 (8.72%)
I feel very much motivated when my first language and English were allowed during teaching and learning to discuss the passages we read.	97 (56.40%)	48 (27.91%)	27 (15.70%)
It makes me want to read more when my first language and English were allowed to clarify when I don't understand.	86 (50.00%)	43 (25.00%)	43 (25.00%)

The emphasis on learners' desire to employ their first language when needed articulates a distinct need for linguistic autonomy. A significant 69.77% of participants strongly agreed or agreed that they wished to employ their first language when they felt the need, highlighting the importance of linguistic autonomy and individualised learning approaches. This aligns with contemporary educational theories that advocate for learner-centred approaches, allowing students to leverage their linguistic resources for enhanced understanding.. Positive attitudes towards translanguaging are seen in classroom interactions as well as individual learning experiences. A notable 62.21% of respondents said they would prefer using their first language when doing class activities. It means that translanguaging helps create a positive social environment. This also supports Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis that emotions play a role in language teaching and learning. A positive, supportive learning environment makes it easier for learners to attain their language proficiency goals.

Additionally, one of the most important aspects of the research is the enjoyment that may be obtained from cooperative activities like debating texts that are read aloud in both languages. More than half (55.23%) of the participants said they preferred these kinds of conversations with their peers, suggesting that translanguaging improves student learning on an individual basis as well as fosters a supportive and engaging learning environment in the classroom. The enthusiasm and pleasure that participants expressed while talking about reading materials in both languages show how translanguaging can add to a positive affective dimension of the learning process, affecting students' general involvement and attitude towards learning. The results also highlight the motivational effects of translanguaging in ESL classes. Allowing the usage of both languages encourages people to read more, especially when clarification is needed, according to over half of the participants (56.40%) who either strongly agreed or agreed with this statement. This implies that translanguaging encourages readers to take an active role in their reading and to engage with the text on a deeper level. Learners' reported positive affective engagement lowers the affective filter, which may lead to a more successful language acquisition process.



The complete findings support elementary ESL learners' generally favourable attitudes towards the translanguaging approach. This encouraging response has significant implications for enhancing reading abilities, including comprehension strategies and vocabulary engagement. Learners acknowledge the important influence translanguaging has on language competency and emphasise how it promotes all-encompassing language development in ESL settings. A friendly and inclusive learning environment is facilitated by the observed favourable social dynamics and learners' autonomy to speak their first language when necessary. Furthermore, translanguaging has the capacity to lower emotional barriers and generate a positive affective component that improves overall engagement and attitude towards learning. This is demonstrated by its alignment with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis. The pleasure of working together on projects and the boost in motivation when both languages are used show how important translanguaging is to keeping students' interest in reading and studying alive. To sum up, the results validate the advantages of translanguaging as a cognitive tool as well as a way to establish a welcoming, entertaining, and stimulating language learning environment for ESL students.

### **Semi-Structured Interview**

The interview data provides additional details to the quantitative results obtained from the questionnaire, providing a more comprehensive exploration of participants' attitudes towards the use of translanguaging in developing their reading skills. The predominant theme that emerged is the significant impact of translanguaging on communication, comprehension and overall learning experiences in the ESL classroom.

### **Enhanced Communication and Comprehension through Language Choice in the Classroom**

First of all, looking into the language choice in the classroom makes it clear that the effects go beyond communication and have a significant effect on how well students understand and comprehend. When asked about the language used for teaching and communication in the classroom, the interviewees' answers were contributing. Participants consistently made the comment that use of students' first language by the teacher positively contributed to better understanding. One student said that, "When the teacher uses Chinese to explain something, I think I understand better." Moreover, students described how the use of their first language yielded a clarity in their understanding, "Instructions in Chinese just make things clearer for me. Sometimes when the teacher use English, I need to check again with my friends to confirm the meaning. When the teacher use Chinese, I can focus on the content, I won't struggle with the language." This aligns with Baker's (2011) ideas about the academic basis of translanguaging which helps students understand the lesson better. Participants also said that speaking their first language makes things clearer. With this, they do not have to worry as much about language and can focus on the topic. This backs up the idea that translanguaging is a way to connect familiarity with comprehension, which helps people understand better when the information is presented in English.

Additionally, participants also reported greater ease when they can communicate in their mother tongue when working in pairs, explained by one participant, "Discussing things in Chinese with my classmates feels natural. It helps me share my ideas more freely, and we can understand each other better, especially when there is limited time for discussion." In addition to the evidence of a greater ease of expression, participants' responses provided support for this notion of nurturing an environment where there is more

active engagement and reciprocal understanding. Responses such as these are clear evidence for translanguaging's role in establishing environment for effective group work practice

Conversely, the strong preference that students voiced for hearing a story first in the home language before hearing it in English, marks a strategic approach to support greater comprehension. These participants described storytelling as a bridge between their home language and the target language, "When I hear the story in Chinese first, it's like we know what to expect. It makes me understand the English version easier because we already have a picture in our minds." Another participant also said that, "When the story was explained in Chinese first, I roughly know what it is about. Then, I will be able to grasp the details in the English version later." Translanguaging aims to make the best of the linguistic and cultural knowledge that learners have by building on it before moving into the target language. Baker (2011) stated that the goal of translanguaging is to support a learner's understanding of the lesson you are intending to teach. The participants' statements about having a clearer understanding and being able to grasp details in the English version later support the hypothesis that translanguaging can serve as a bridge between familiarity and comprehension.

### **Translanguaging as a Tool to Enhance Language Learning Experiences**

When students' attitudes towards using English or their native language were observed, we can learn a lot about their mental and emotional states. One example of this is the feelings of anxiety or fear observed in the respondent when they need to speak in English, "Speaking English makes me nervous. I am scared that I might say something wrong. So, the use of Chinese enables me to speak my mind effectively," Here, it shows how hard it could be for language learners to interact in a language that they do not speak naturally. It is believed that speaking one's native language when learning a second language can bring a feeling of ease and self-assurance.

Moreover, the fear of judgement is a dominant concern among students, as indicated by the reflection of one student, "I worry that if I make a mistake, everyone will notice. Then, everyone will laugh at me. So, sometimes when I'm lazy, I just shrug when the teacher asks me a question." The fear of making mistakes and the associated anxiety suggest the vulnerability experienced by students when expressing themselves in a language where their English proficiency is still developing. These emotional challenges emphasise the need for a supportive and inclusive language-learning environment, aligning with the positive role of translanguaging in reducing anxieties and promoting a positive learning experience.

The negative emotions associated with challenges in language comprehension are further exemplified by a student reporting, "When I don't understand something in English, I get frustrated because I want to keep up with the class, but sometimes it feels like I'm falling behind." This frustration suggests the emotional toll experienced when faced with difficulties in understanding the language, emphasising the need for targeted support and interventions to address language comprehension challenges.

The insights gained from students' attitudes towards speaking English or their native language highlight the emotional and cognitive challenges encountered by language learners. It was evident that anxiety, fear and vulnerability occurred when speaking English. The

acknowledgement that using the students' native language provides a sense of comfort and confidence, emphasising the potential benefits of translanguaging in language learning, aligning with past studies and theoretical frameworks that emphasise the cognitive advantages of linguistic diversity and the creation of inclusive learning environments.

The collective data derived from both the questionnaire and interview data reveals the students' positive attitudes towards the use of translanguaging within the ESL classroom. This supports the potential of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy that transcends linguistic barriers and contributes significantly to the improvement of reading skills. The findings highlight the role of translanguaging not only in addressing language-related challenges but also in cultivating a positive and supportive learning environment. Through the strategic integration of translanguaging, educators can establish inclusive environments that empower students to navigate linguistic complexities, fostering an atmosphere conducive to enhanced reading proficiency and overall academic success.

The findings from students' attitudes towards speaking English or their native language provide valuable insights into the emotional and cognitive challenges faced by language learners. One significant theme that emerges from the data is the anxiety and fear associated with speaking English. The statement, "Speaking English makes me nervous. I am scared that I might say something wrong. So, the use of Chinese enables me to speak my mind effectively," highlights the linguistic challenges inherent in attempting to communicate in a non-native language. This suggests that students may find comfort and confidence in expressing themselves more effectively in their native language.

Moreover, the fear of judgement is a dominant concern among students, as indicated by the reflection of one student, "I worry that if I make a mistake, everyone will notice. Then, everyone will laugh at me. So, sometimes when I'm lazy, I just shrug when the teacher asks me a question." This fear shows the vulnerability experienced by students when expressing themselves in a language where their English proficiency is still developing. It emphasises the importance of fostering a supportive and inclusive language-learning environment to reduce such anxieties and promote a positive learning experience.

The negative emotions associated with challenges in language comprehension are further exemplified by a student reporting, "When I don't understand something in English, I get frustrated because I want to keep up with the class, but sometimes it feels like I'm falling behind." This frustration suggests the emotional toll experienced when faced with difficulties in understanding the language, emphasising the need for targeted support and interventions to address language comprehension challenges.

In conclusion, the insights gained from students' attitudes towards speaking English or their native language highlight the emotional and cognitive challenges encountered by language learners. It was evident that anxiety, fear and vulnerability occurred when speaking English. The acknowledgement that using the students' native language, provides a sense of comfort and confidence, emphasising the potential benefits of translanguaging in language learning. By embracing translanguaging, educators can create inclusive environments that allow students to navigate linguistic challenges more effectively, fostering a positive and supportive atmosphere.

## Conclusion

The comprehensive findings of this study support the integration of translanguaging in ESL classrooms. The positive correlation between translanguaging and enhanced reading comprehension, as evidenced by quantitative and qualitative data, highlights its potential as a transformative pedagogical strategy. Students' positive attitudes, coupled with increased motivation and enjoyment in learning, suggest the need to embrace translanguaging for a more inclusive, supportive and effective language learning environment.

As educators, policymakers and practitioners navigate the evolving landscape of language education, the findings advocate for a reconsideration of traditional language teaching approaches. Translanguaging emerges not merely as a cognitive tool but as a means to create an environment that fosters enthusiasm, autonomy and engagement among learners. This study encourages educators to give translanguaging a chance, accept its potential and proactively integrate it into language teaching practices, thereby enriching the overall language learning experience for ESL students.

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