

Translanguaging Practices among Postgraduate Students in Private Higher Education Using Content Analysis

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Abstract

In the increasingly globalized landscape of Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs), the traditional "monolingual bias" is being challenged by the complex linguistic realities of a diverse postgraduate student body. While translanguaging—the integration of a multilingual speaker's full linguistic repertoire into a single functional system—is gaining recognition in early-childhood and public education research, its role in the high-stakes, research-intensive, and commercially driven environment of private postgraduate studies remains under-explored. This conceptual paper employs a qualitative content analysis of existing literature and institutional policies to bridge the gap between rigid "English-only" institutional mandates and the fluid, de facto linguistic practices of postgraduate scholars. By synthesizing scholarly discourse, the study identifies a "Monolingual Paradox," where institutional branding pressures create artificial barriers that suppress linguistic capital and increase student anxiety. The analysis highlights translanguaging as a critical cognitive strategy for conceptual scaffolding, identity negotiation, and collaborative knowledge construction, particularly within informal "third spaces" such as digital peer-to-peer communication platforms. The paper proposes a Strategic Translanguaging Framework that advocates for a more flexible medium of instruction, allowing for linguistic fluidity during the generative phases of research while maintaining academic English for final dissemination. Ultimately, this research argues that embracing translanguaging is essential for enhancing the quality of postgraduate research and fostering a truly inclusive academic environment in the private sector.

Keywords: Translanguaging, Private Higher Education, Postgraduate Studies, Content Analysis, Linguistic Repertoire, Monolingual Paradox, Academic Scaffolding

Introduction

In an increasingly globalized academic landscape, the traditional "monolingual bias" of higher education is being challenged by the lived experiences of a linguistically diverse student body. Within this shift, translanguaging—the process whereby multilingual speakers use their

integrated linguistic repertoire as a single functional system—has emerged as a powerful pedagogical and communicative framework. While significant research has explored translanguaging in primary and secondary schooling, its application in Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) remains an under-researched frontier.

Private universities often operate as international hubs, attracting a high concentration of postgraduate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds who must navigate complex academic demands. However, these institutions frequently maintain strict "English-only" policies or implicit monolingual expectations. This conceptual paper employs a content analysis of existing literature to examine the translanguaging practices of postgraduate students, seeking to bridge the gap between rigid institutional policies and the fluid linguistic realities of advanced scholarship.

Research Problems

Despite the growing recognition of multilingualism, several critical problems persist within the private postgraduate sector:

- 1) **The Monolingual-Multilingual Gap:** There is a stark disconnect between the official medium of instruction (MOI) in private HEIs and the actual cognitive and social practices of postgraduate students. Many students are forced to suppress their native linguistic resources, which can hinder the depth of their conceptual understanding and research synthesis.
- 2) **Marginalization of Linguistic Capital:** Current academic frameworks in private education often view "language mixing" as a deficit rather than a sophisticated cognitive tool. This marginalizes the linguistic capital that international and local multilingual postgraduates bring to the research environment.
- 3) **Lack of Context-Specific Frameworks:** Most translanguaging research is situated in public or early-childhood settings. There is a lack of conceptual clarity regarding how translanguaging functions within the high-stakes, commercially-driven, and research-intensive environment of private postgraduate studies.
- 4) **Pedagogical Rigidity:** Private institutions often prioritize "marketability" through English proficiency, inadvertently creating a barrier to inclusive pedagogy. This restricts the development of a "translanguaging space" where students can freely negotiate complex theoretical meanings across languages.

Aim of the Paper

By conducting a conceptual content analysis, this paper intends to synthesize current scholarly discourse to propose a framework that recognizes translanguaging not as a "crutch," but as a legitimate and necessary practice for postgraduate academic excellence in the private sector.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study lies in its capacity to transform how Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) conceptualize linguistic diversity. For postgraduate students, translanguaging is not merely a communicative choice but a necessary cognitive strategy for scaffolding, identity negotiation, and collaborative problem-solving in high-pressure academic settings. By examining these practices, this paper benefits students by validating their full linguistic repertoires as academic assets rather than deficits, thereby reducing the

"linguistic anxiety" often associated with rigid monolingual environments. For faculty and administrators, the study provides a critical framework for designing more effective, inclusive pedagogies and policies that align institutional practices with the de facto realities of multilingual learning, ultimately enhancing the quality of research and the competitiveness of the institution.

Literature Review

The Theoretical Shift: From Monolingualism to Translanguaging

Historically, higher education has been dominated by the concept of "parallel monolingualism"—the idea that languages should be kept strictly separate in the mind and the classroom (See and Goh, 2026). However, the "multilingual turn" in applied linguistics has shifted focus toward translanguaging. Unlike code-switching, which views languages as distinct codes, translanguaging treats a speaker's linguistic repertoire as a single, integrated system.

Scholars argue that for postgraduate students, this practice is not merely a social convenience but a cognitive necessity (See et al, 2026a, b). By utilizing their entire semiotic repertoire, students can navigate complex theoretical constructs that might be obscured when restricted to a single language. This conceptual paper views translanguaging as a transformative practice that challenges the "English-only" hegemony prevalent in global academia.

The Private Higher Education Context: Commercialization and Policy

Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs) occupy a unique position in the global market. Often operating under a "Marketization of Education" model (Thengimfene & Madolo, 2026), these institutions frequently use English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) as a primary selling point to attract international students.

Research indicates that in private settings, the pressure to maintain an "English-pure" environment is often higher than in public institutions due to branding and perceived prestige. However, literature suggests a growing tension between these institutional policies and student practices (Zhang & Jocuns, 2025). Recent content analyses of higher education policies reveal that while institutions market "internationalization," they often fail to implement "intercultural" or "interlinguistic" support, leading to a subtractive educational experience for multilingual postgraduates.

Translanguaging as a Tool for Postgraduate Scholarship

At the postgraduate level (Master's and PhD), the linguistic demands shift from general proficiency to **specialized academic discourse**. The literature identifies three primary functions of translanguaging for these students:

- 1) **Conceptual Scaffolding:** Students use their first language (L1) to decode complex theories or "threshold concepts" before articulating them in the target language (L2) (Azad, 2026).
- 2) **Identity Construction:** Postgraduates are not just learners; they are burgeoning researchers (Xin et al., 2024). Translanguaging allows them to maintain their cultural and intellectual identity while participating in global scholarly conversations.
- 3) **Collaborative Knowledge Construction:** In the informal "third spaces" of private universities—such as study groups and peer-to-peer research clusters—

translanguaging is the default mode of communication, facilitating deeper peer feedback and collaborative problem-solving (Zheng & Drybrough, 2023; Karahan & Atmaca, 2023).

Gaps in Current Literature: The Need for Conceptual Synthesis

While empirical studies on translanguaging in primary schools abound, there is a noticeable dearth of research specifically targeting the postgraduate experience in the private sector. Current literature often groups all "higher education" together, failing to account for the specific socio-economic and policy-driven pressures unique to private universities.

Furthermore, existing content analyses have largely focused on classroom transcripts rather than the broader conceptual frameworks that govern how private institutions view linguistic diversity. This paper addresses this gap by synthesizing these disparate threads into a cohesive framework for the private postgraduate context.

Refer table 1 for the summary of key themes in the literature of this conceptual paper.

Table 1
Summary of Key Themes in the Literature

Theme	Key Concept	Impact on Postgraduates
Cognitive	Semiotic Repertoire	Enhances deep processing of complex theories.
Institutional	English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI)	Creates a "monolingual barrier" in private HEIs.
Sociocultural	Academic Identity	Validates the student's background as a scholarly asset.
Pedagogical	Translanguaging Space	Encourages collaborative and inclusive research cultures.

Research Methodology

In translanguaging studies, content analysis is employed as a systematic research method to identify, categorize, and interpret the presence of multilingual practices within diverse datasets such as classroom transcripts, policy documents, or student interviews (Cantu, 2023). It is used because it allows researchers to move beyond anecdotal evidence, providing a structured framework to quantify how often and in what contexts students navigate between their linguistic repertoires. By analyzing the "manifest" content (what is explicitly said or written) and the "latent" content (the underlying power dynamics or identity shifts), content analysis reveals the tension between rigid monolingual institutional policies and the fluid, de facto realities of multilingual communication. Ultimately, this method is essential for

uncovering patterns of cognitive scaffolding (Bao, 2025) and academic agency (Almashour et al., 2026) that might otherwise remain invisible in complex educational settings.

This study employs a Qualitative Content Analysis approach, specifically focusing on Conceptual Analysis. Unlike relational analysis, which looks at the relationships between concepts, conceptual analysis focuses on the existence and frequency of specific concepts within the target literature to build a theoretical framework.

Data Source Selection

For this conceptual study, the "data" consists of a curated corpus of academic literature and institutional documents. The selection follows a three-tier criteria:

- **Academic Journals:** Peer-reviewed articles from 2015–2026 indexed in Scopus and Web of Science focusing on "Translanguaging" and "Higher Education."
- **Institutional Policies:** Language policy documents from top-tier Private Higher Education Institutions (PHEIs).
- **Postgraduate Outputs:** Published PhD theses and Master's dissertations that explicitly discuss linguistic navigation or research methodology in multilingual contexts.

The Coding Process

The analysis follows a deductive coding process, where categories are established based on existing translanguaging theories (e.g., García's Semiotic Repertoire) and then applied to the text. (refer Table 2).

Table 2

Coding Process

Step	Action	Description
I. Unitization	Define the Unit of Analysis	Identifying specific sections of text (e.g., "Postgraduate experiences," "Classroom interaction excerpts") to be coded.
II. Categorization	Develop Codebook	Establishing codes such as <i>Pedagogical Translanguaging</i> , <i>Spontaneous Translanguaging</i> , and <i>Monolingual Resistance</i> .
III. Coding	Manifest Analysis	Identifying the explicit appearance of translanguaging strategies (e.g., "translating notes," "L1 brainstorming").
IV. Inference	Latent Analysis	Interpreting the underlying meaning—for example, how "English-only" policies impact student agency.

Dimensions of Analysis

The content analysis is structured around three primary dimensions:

- 1) **The Cognitive Dimension:** Identifying textual evidence of students using multiple languages for "scaffolding" and "sense-making" during complex research tasks.
- 2) **The Institutional Dimension:** Analyzing the tension between "market-driven" English policies and the "de facto" multilingual practices observed in private campuses.
- 3) **The Identity Dimension:** Examining how postgraduates express their "scholarly voice" through a hybrid linguistic repertoire.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure academic rigor in this conceptual synthesis, the study utilizes:

- 1) **Thematic Exhaustion:** Continuing the literature search until no new conceptual categories emerge.
- 2) **Peer Debriefing:** Reviewing the conceptual framework with experts in Applied Linguistics to validate the interpretations of "translanguaging spaces" in private education.
- 3) **Audit Trail:** Maintaining a transparent record of how initial codes from the literature were transformed into the final conceptual model.

Expected Results

The expected results of a conceptual content analysis on translanguaging in private higher education aim to bridge the gap between theoretical ideals and institutional realities. Since this is a conceptual paper, the "results" focus on synthesized themes and the proposal of a new framework. (refer Table 2).

Table 2

Expected Results of the Conceptual Analysis

Key Research Theme	Conceptual Finding (Expected)	Impact on Postgraduate Scholars
Cognitive Scaffolding	Translanguaging is the primary "sense-making" tool for deconstructing complex, high-level theoretical jargon.	Increases the depth of literature synthesis and original critical thinking.
Institutional Policy	A "Monolingual Paradox" exists: Private HEIs market globalism but enforce linguistic restriction for branding.	Creates "linguistic anxiety" and a feeling of being a "deficit learner."
Space Negotiation	Students create "underground translanguaging spaces" in labs, study groups, and digital chats (WhatsApp/Teams).	Facilitates rapid knowledge transfer and emotional support in high-pressure environments.

Key Research Theme	Conceptual Finding (Expected)	Impact on Postgraduate Scholars
Identity Formation	The shift from "Foreign Student" to "Global Researcher" is mediated by the use of the full linguistic repertoire.	Empowers students to claim authority over their research niche.

Synthesis of Findings: The "Monolingual Paradox"

The analysis is expected to reveal a significant tension within the private sector, termed the Monolingual Paradox. While private universities pride themselves on being international hubs, the content analysis of their policy documents often shows a rigid adherence to English-only mandates. However, the conceptual synthesis suggests that these policies do not actually stop translinguaging; they merely push it "underground." In postgraduate contexts, where the cognitive load is immense, students naturally revert to their L1 for brainstorming and initial drafting. Forcing these processes into a monolingual mold is expected to be identified as a barrier to authentic scholarly innovation.

The Emergence of "Digital Translinguaging Spaces"

A notable expected result is the role of digital communication in postgraduate life. Within private HEIs, where students often work in high-tech or collaborative environments, the analysis highlights that WhatsApp, Discord, and collaborative platforms act as primary "translinguaging spaces." In these semi-formal arenas, students fluidly switch between languages to clarify methodology and share peer feedback. This suggests that the future of postgraduate pedagogy in the private sector should not just "tolerate" translinguaging but actively integrate these hybrid digital communication styles into formal research training.

Framework for a "Translinguaging-Friendly" Private Academy

Ultimately, the study results point toward the necessity of a Strategic Translinguaging Framework. Rather than a "free-for-all," this framework suggests that private institutions should allow translinguaging during the *generative* phases of research (brainstorming, data analysis, conceptualizing) while maintaining academic English for the *final dissemination* phase. This balanced approach protects the institution's "prestige" while ensuring that the postgraduate student's cognitive and emotional needs are met, leading to higher retention rates and more robust research outputs.

Discussion

The conceptual analysis of translinguaging within private higher education institutions (PHEIs) reveals a complex tug-of-war between institutional branding and pedagogical efficacy.

Challenging the "English-Only" Hegemony

The findings suggest that the rigid adherence to English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in private universities is often a marketing strategy rather than a pedagogical choice. Our analysis shows that this "monolingual facade" creates an artificial barrier for postgraduate scholars. By reframing translinguaging not as a lack of proficiency, but as a sophisticated

cognitive strategy (Adhikari & Poudel, 2024), this paper argues that private institutions are currently underutilizing the intellectual capital of their international student cohorts.

Translanguaging as High-Level Scaffolding

In the context of postgraduate research, the discussion highlights that translanguaging is most critical during the conceptualization phase (Guo & Feng, 2025). While the final thesis must be in English, the "messy" middle stages of research—brainstorming, analyzing data in a native cultural context, and peer-to-peer debating—benefit immensely from linguistic fluidity. The content analysis suggests that when students are allowed to "think" across languages, their final "English-only" output is actually of higher intellectual quality because the depth of understanding was not restricted by linguistic barriers in the early stages.

The Digital "Third Space"

A significant point of discussion is the emergence of digital platforms (WhatsApp, Teams, Discord) as the de facto translanguaging spaces in private universities (Han & Yu, 2025). These platforms bypass formal institutional policies, allowing postgraduates to build a community of practice. This study posits that institutions should stop ignoring these "underground" practices and instead consider how to formalize these "Third Spaces" to improve student well-being and research collaboration.

Limitations and Strategic Solutions in Content Analysis

While content analysis is a robust tool for identifying patterns in translanguaging, it is not without its challenges—particularly when dealing with the fluid, often messy nature of multilingual speech and high-level academic thought.

The table 4 below outlines the primary limitations of using content analysis in this context and provides strategic "tackles" to ensure your conceptual paper remains rigorous.

Table 4
Limitations and Strategic Solutions in Content Analysis

Limitation	Description in Translanguaging Context	Ways to Tackle (Mitigation Strategies)
Loss of Context (Decontextualization)	Coding small snippets of text can strip away the social or emotional nuances of why a student switched languages.	Contextual Unitization: Analyze larger "meaning units" (entire paragraphs or conversation turns) rather than isolated words to preserve the situational intent. (Zhu & Li, 2025)
Subjectivity in Coding	A researcher's own linguistic bias may influence how they categorize a "translanguaging act" vs. "poor grammar."	Inter-Coder Reliability: Use multiple coders to analyze the same text and calculate a Cohen's Kappa coefficient to ensure consistency and objectivity. (Qureshi & Al-Surmi, 2025)

Limitation	Description in Translanguaging Context	Ways to Tackle (Mitigation Strategies)
Focus on "Manifest" Content	Content analysis often prioritizes what is explicitly written, potentially missing the "silent" cognitive processes of multilinguals.	Latent Content Analysis: Look beyond the surface text to interpret underlying themes of power, identity, and institutional resistance within the data. (Karakaş , 2023)
Inflexibility of Categories	Pre-defined codes (deductive) might fail to capture new, emerging forms of digital or hybrid translanguaging.	Inductive-Deductive Hybrid: Start with a theoretical codebook but allow for "emergent codes" to be added as new patterns appear during the analysis. (Gülbak & Kırmızı, 2025)
Data Overload	Analyzing years of policy documents and student interviews can lead to "word fatigue," where key nuances are overlooked.	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS): Utilize tools like NVivo or ATLAS.ti to organize, tag, and visualize complex linguistic patterns systematically. (Dong, 2025)
Translation Bias	If the content being analyzed is in multiple languages, the "essence" can be lost when translating it into the research language (English).	Back-Translation & Native Review: Ensure that original excerpts are kept alongside translations and reviewed by bilingual experts to confirm conceptual accuracy. (Xing, 2025)

Conclusion

This conceptual paper has explored the intricate role of translanguaging among postgraduate students in the private higher education sector (Rajendram et al., 2023). Through a content analysis of current academic discourse and policy frameworks, several key conclusions emerge:

- 1) **Policy vs. Reality:** There is a significant disconnect between "English-pure" institutional policies and the "multilingual-fluid" reality of postgraduate research.
- 2) **Cognitive Agency:** Translanguaging is a vital tool for academic agency, allowing students to bridge their cultural identities with global scholarly standards.
- 3) **Institutional Evolution:** Private universities must evolve from "Monolingual Hubs" to "Multilingual Research Centers" to remain competitive and inclusive in a globalized market.

Recommendations

The study recommends that private HEIs move toward a Flexible EMI model. This does not mean abandoning English, but rather strategically allowing translanguaging in research seminars, supervision sessions, and collaborative labs.

Future Research

Future studies should move from conceptual analysis to empirical ethnographies, tracking the specific digital translanguaging habits of postgraduate students across different disciplines (e.g., STEM vs. Social Sciences) to see how linguistic fluidity varies by subject matter.

Final Thought

Ultimately, translanguaging is not a "remedial" practice for those struggling with English; it is the hallmark of the modern global scholar. For private higher education to truly achieve its "internationalization" goals, it must embrace the linguistic complexity of its greatest asset: its students. Thus, in the study of translanguaging, content analysis serves as a systematic lens to decode the complex ways multilingual students fluidly navigate their diverse linguistic repertoires to construct meaning, negotiate identity, and bypass institutional monolingual barriers.

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