

# Translanguaging as a Tool in Classroom Instruction: Perceptions of Senior High School Students

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored translanguaging as a tool in classroom instruction and examined its role in supporting English language learning among Senior High School students. A qualitative phenomenological design was employed. Ten Grade 12 students from Davao del Sur Institute of Languages and Technological College, Inc. in Digos City participated in in-depth interviews, while ten teachers joined a focus group discussion to corroborate the students' responses. Data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, coding, theme development, review, and interpretation. Findings showed that translanguaging helped students understand lessons, clarify difficult concepts, communicate ideas, and participate more confidently in classroom activities. It also supported vocabulary development, collaboration, and reduced learning anxiety.

However, students experienced confusion when switching languages, difficulty translating complex ideas, and possible dependence on the home language. Participants emphasized that translanguaging should be used strategically, with clear guidance and an appropriate balance between familiar languages and English. The study concludes that purposeful translanguaging can promote inclusive and learner-centered instruction while supporting meaningful English language learning experiences

**Keywords:** *translanguaging, classroom instruction, English language learning, multilingual education, senior high school students, phenomenology*

## INTRODUCTION

Multilingual classrooms require teachers and learners to navigate more than one language as they discuss lessons, interpret meaning, and participate in classroom tasks. Translanguaging refers to the purposeful use of learners' available linguistic resources to support understanding and communication. In classroom instruction, it allows students to draw on familiar languages alongside English when they clarify difficult concepts, express ideas, and engage with peers and teachers.

International scholarship has challenged the assumption that effective language learning must always follow a monolingual model. Translanguaging recognizes the linguistic repertoires that learners already use in everyday communication and considers these resources valuable for meaning-making and participation (Wei, 2018). Pedagogical translanguaging may also enable students to connect prior knowledge with new academic content, particularly when teachers use familiar languages strategically to scaffold complex lessons (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; García et al., 2017).

In the Philippine setting, the use of multiple languages is a common classroom reality. Studies have reported that translanguaging can bridge language gaps, improve comprehension, and support participation, but classroom use remains inconsistent because of monolingual expectations, assessment demands, and concerns regarding excessive dependence on the mother tongue (Deniega & Neri, 2024; Gatil, 2021; Macawile & Plata,

2022). These conditions highlight the importance of examining how learners themselves experience translanguaging rather than relying only on teacher-centered or policy-focused perspectives.

This study addressed the limited learner-centered evidence concerning translanguaging among Senior High School students. It explored students' experiences in using translanguaging in the classroom, examined the perceived benefits and challenges of this practice for English language learning, and identified insights that may contribute to more inclusive and effective language-learning practices. The study was guided by a sociocultural view of learning in which language, interaction, and scaffolding support learners as they connect prior knowledge with new concepts.

## Literature Review

### *Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Practice*

Translanguaging provides learners with flexible ways to engage with content and communicate meaning. García et al. (2017) described classroom translanguaging as the use of learners' complete linguistic repertoires to support learning. Cenoz and Gorter (2021) further emphasized that pedagogical translanguaging should be purposeful: teachers can use learners' linguistic resources to improve comprehension while maintaining clear language-development goals. In Philippine classrooms, translanguaging is often practiced informally, demonstrating the need for classroom strategies that recognize multilingual realities while guiding learners toward continued English development (Gatil, 2021).

### *Benefits for Comprehension, Expression, and Participation*

Research has identified several potential benefits of translanguaging. Familiar languages may help learners understand difficult vocabulary, connect prior knowledge with new concepts, and participate more confidently in classroom interaction. Duarte (2020) described translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy that makes academic content more accessible in multilingual learning contexts. Dryden and McMillan (2021) also showed how familiar language use can create an emotional safe space that reduces foreign-language anxiety. In collaborative settings, translanguaging may support communication, peer interaction, and shared understanding (Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe, 2020).

### *Challenges and the Need for Balance*

Translanguaging does not automatically produce better learning outcomes. Learners may experience difficulty selecting words, translating complex ideas, and navigating language shifts. Teachers may also encounter classroom-management challenges when language use lacks clear boundaries. Ticheloven et al. (2021) noted that teachers and learners can experience confusion and language-selection difficulties in multilingual classrooms. Galante (2020) similarly emphasized that translanguaging requires instructional guidance. These concerns make balance essential: familiar languages should support comprehension without reducing opportunities to practice English.

### *Learner-Centered Perspectives in the Philippine Context*

Philippine studies have documented the presence of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms and its role in supporting meaning-making. De Los Reyes and Bagona (2022) reported the use of translanguaging in multilingual science classrooms, while Deniega and Neri (2024) examined language teachers' perspectives in public high schools. Macawile and Plata (2022) explored Senior High School teachers' perspectives on translanguaging as a pedagogical resource. Despite these contributions, students' own experiences remain less visible. A learner-centered inquiry is therefore important for understanding when translanguaging supports English learning and when it may create difficulties.

## METHODS

### Research Design

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences, perceptions, and insights of Senior High School students concerning translanguaging as a tool in classroom instruction. The design was appropriate because the study sought detailed accounts of how students used and understood translanguaging in English language learning.

### Research Locale

The study was conducted at Davao del Sur Institute of Languages and Technological College, Inc. (DILTC) in Barangay San Roque, Digos City. The institution served a linguistically diverse population in which Cebuano, Filipino, English, and Japanese were commonly used, making it an appropriate setting for examining multilingual classroom practices.

### Participants and Sampling Technique

The primary participants were ten Grade 12 students who had direct experiences with translanguaging during classroom discussions and group activities. Ten teachers participated in a focus group discussion solely to corroborate the students' responses. Participants were selected purposively based on their relevant classroom experiences. The small sample enabled the collection of detailed narratives suited to phenomenological inquiry.

Table 1. *Participants and sources of qualitative data*

Participant group	n	Data source	Purpose
Grade 12 students	10	Individual in-depth interviews	Primary accounts of experiences, benefits, challenges, and insights
Teachers	10	Focus group discussion	Corroboration and validation of student responses

### Research Instrument

An open-ended interview guide adapted from García and Wei (2014) was used to collect students' accounts of their classroom experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and insights. Probing questions encouraged clarification and elaboration. A separate focus group discussion guide was used with teachers to examine their observations of translanguaging practices, perceived benefits and challenges, and strategies for supporting learners.

### Data Gathering Procedure

Formal permission was secured from the school administration before data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from participants. Individual interviews were conducted using languages in which the students were comfortable expressing their experiences. The teacher focus group discussion was conducted to corroborate the student accounts. With permission, the interviews and discussion were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented by field notes.

### Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed thematically. The process involved familiarization with the transcripts, initial coding, organization of related codes, theme generation, review and refinement of themes, and interpretation of the findings in relation to the research questions. Student narratives served as the primary evidence, while teacher focus group responses were used for corroboration.

### Trustworthiness

Credibility was supported through member checking, probing questions, prolonged engagement during interviews, peer debriefing, and corroboration through the teacher focus group discussion. Transferability was strengthened through detailed descriptions of the locale, participants, and procedures. Dependability was

supported by an audit trail, while confirmability was addressed through reflexive journaling and documentation of coding and theme development.

### **Ethical Consideration**

The study followed the ethical standards of the Davao del Sur State College Research Ethics Committee and the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Participation was voluntary. Participants received clear explanations of the purpose and procedures of the study and retained the right to withdraw or skip questions without penalty. Pseudonyms or participant codes were used, and audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes were stored securely and accessed only by the researcher.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The thematic analysis generated three overarching findings corresponding to the research questions. The students' experiences show that translanguaging functions as an instructional scaffold for comprehension, communication, and participation. The reported benefits and challenges demonstrate that the practice supports English language learning when used carefully but may create confusion or overdependence when applied without structure. The insights emphasize the need for teacher-guided and balanced implementation.

### **Students' Classroom Experiences of Translanguaging**

The first overarching theme was Translanguaging as a Facilitator of Comprehension, Expression, and Active Classroom Engagement. Students described shifting among English, Bisaya, and Filipino when they needed to clarify difficult concepts, express ideas, communicate with classmates and teachers, or participate more confidently in classroom activities. Teachers corroborated that students commonly used familiar languages to address vocabulary and comprehension difficulties during discussions and collaborative tasks.

Table 2. *Students' experiences in using translanguaging in the classroom*

Major theme	Subthemes	Representative student evidence
Enhancing comprehension and clarity	Better understanding of lessons; clarification through translation and elaboration; language adjustment for understanding	"I use it to better understand a topic and for them to understand my point." (P6)
Supporting effective communication and expression	Clearer expression of ideas; peer and teacher communication; accommodation of diverse language abilities	"It helps you express what you want to say and clarify your point." (P5)
Increasing confidence and participation	Confidence through familiar language use; active participation	"It helps boost confidence... it reduces anxiety." (P3)

The results show that students did not view translanguaging as a replacement for English. Instead, they used familiar languages as temporary supports when English-only explanations created difficulty. This pattern is consistent with the view that learners can use their complete linguistic repertoires to connect prior knowledge with new academic content (García et al., 2017; Wei, 2018). It also reflects the sociocultural principle that language can mediate learning through interaction and scaffolding.

Students' comments further indicate that language flexibility promoted inclusion. Participants noted that not all students understood English at the same level, making translation and elaboration helpful during classroom discussions. This supports the argument that translanguaging can make content accessible to learners with diverse linguistic resources (Duarte, 2020; Tai, 2022).

### **Perceived Benefits and Challenges for English Language Learning**

The second overarching finding presents both the perceived benefits and the possible downsides of translanguaging. Students reported improved understanding, vocabulary support, easier access to learning tasks, greater confidence, and more active participation. At the same time, they identified confusion during language

switching and difficulty translating complex or abstract ideas. Teachers also raised concerns regarding excessive dependence on familiar languages.

Table 3. *Perceived benefits and challenges of translanguaging for English language learning*

Major theme	Subthemes	Interpretive summary
Enhancing comprehension and language development	Improved understanding of lessons and concepts; vocabulary acquisition and English proficiency	Familiar languages help clarify meanings, connect words with concepts, and support gradual English development.
Facilitating learning engagement and expression	Accessible learning; expression and confidence in participation	Language flexibility helps students communicate ideas, engage in activities, and reduce anxiety.
Experiencing linguistic and cognitive challenges	Confusion and difficulty in language switching; translation of complex ideas	Students may struggle with word selection, grammar, direct equivalents, and organization of ideas across languages.

The benefits identified by participants align with studies showing that translanguaging can strengthen comprehension, emotional safety, and collaborative interaction (Dryden & McMillan, 2021; Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe, 2020). The findings also show why instructional guidance is necessary. Students described difficulty translating some English expressions word for word and explaining complex ideas in Bisaya or Filipino. These challenges are consistent with research emphasizing confusion, language-selection difficulties, and the need for clear classroom strategies (Galante, 2020; Ticheloven et al., 2021).

### Students' Insights for Effective Language Learning

The third overarching theme was Strategic and Structured Translanguaging as a Means to Enhance Inclusive, Effective, and Engaging Language Learning. Students recognized that translanguaging becomes more effective when teachers use it deliberately to support comprehension and when learners continue practicing English. The participants emphasized teacher guidance, inclusive participation, collaboration, and appropriate limits in language use.

Table 4. *Students' insights for the effective use of translanguaging*

Major theme	Subthemes	Implication for classroom instruction
Teacher-guided translanguaging for comprehension and clarity	Support for understanding lessons; explanation of difficult words and concepts through home language	Teachers may use translation, rephrasing, and familiar-language examples as scaffolds for difficult content.
Promoting inclusive participation and collaborative learning	Student expression through language flexibility; collaboration and shared understanding	Classroom activities may allow flexible language use to encourage confident interaction and peer support.
Need for structured and balanced implementation	Guidelines and limitations in language use; activities that optimize familiar languages and English	Translanguaging should support understanding while preserving sustained opportunities to practice English.

These insights position translanguaging as a structured pedagogical strategy rather than an unrestricted shift away from English. Teachers may initially allow students to process difficult ideas through familiar languages and then guide them toward clearer English expression. This balanced approach reflects the principles of pedagogical translanguaging, which emphasize the planned use of learners' languages for learning purposes (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

Taken together, the findings indicate that translanguaging can promote a more inclusive learning environment by validating students' linguistic resources, reducing anxiety, and strengthening communication. Its effectiveness, however, depends on clear expectations, purposeful classroom activities, and sustained opportunities for English-language practice.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes that translanguaging is a meaningful instructional tool for Senior High School students in multilingual classrooms. Students used familiar languages alongside English to understand difficult lessons, clarify meanings, communicate ideas, participate in discussions, and collaborate with peers. The practice also enhanced confidence and reduced language-related anxiety. However, students experienced difficulty switching languages and translating complex ideas, while teachers recognized the risk of excessive dependence on the home language. Translanguaging is therefore most effective when implemented strategically, with teacher guidance, clear instructional goals, and an appropriate balance between familiar-language support and continued English-language development.

## Recommendation

Curriculum developers and policymakers may integrate structured multilingual strategies into learning materials and classroom activities while maintaining clear English-language learning goals.

School administrators may provide professional development activities that strengthen teachers' knowledge of purposeful translanguaging, scaffolding, classroom management, and balanced language use.

Teachers may use learners' home languages strategically to explain difficult concepts, clarify meanings, and encourage participation. Activities may gradually move learners from familiar-language processing toward English expression and practice.

Senior High School students may use translanguaging as a bridge for understanding while remaining actively engaged in strengthening their English vocabulary, confidence, and proficiency.

Future researchers may conduct similar studies in other educational settings, involve larger participant groups, apply mixed-method or quantitative designs, and examine long-term effects on English proficiency, participation, and academic performance.

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