

Effective analysis of translanguaging pedagogy for learning English in China

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Abstract: This research investigated the applicability of translanguaging as a teaching strategy in China's K-12 English learning context. Using a qualitative research method of systematic literature review informed by a social constructivist paradigm, data from 15 peer-reviewed articles were analyzed. The findings indicate that translanguaging serves as an effective pedagogical approach in K-12 EFL education. However, potential resistance from teachers and students may arise due to its novelty in the Chinese educational system. Implementing translanguaging can diminish rote learning, create a flexible linguistic environment, and address the identity challenges of bilingual or multilingual learners. The results suggest a paradigm shift in K-12 English education in China, advocating for translanguaging as an enriching instructional strategy.

1. Introduction

With the deepening of globalization, interactions in political, economic and cultural communications among nations have intensified. This solidified English's status as a lingual franca in the current society. Consequently, English instruction has taken center stage in global foundational education. Various pedagogies, including communicative language teaching and task-based language teaching, have been employed to optimize foreign language learning outcomes. Notably, translanguaging has recently emerged as a focal point in second language education, as an increasing number of researchers delve into the application of translanguaging theory in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context.

However, limited attention has been devoted to this approach within the context of K-12 language education in China. This research seeks to critically assess the efficacy of translanguaging as a viable pedagogy for English instruction in China. Specifically, the study will explore the applicability of the translanguaging theory that encourages learners to use their entire linguistic repertoire in Chinese EFL classroom, while considering the prevailing governmental policies and guidelines.

2. Literature review

2.1. Translanguaging as a practical pedagogy in the EFL Context

Translanguaging leverages a learner's dominant language, typically their L1, to foster proficiency in a secondary language. It promotes bilingualism or multilingualism instead of another form of monolingualism centered on L2 [12]. This strategy bolsters dual-language proficiency and

enriches understanding of societal dynamics [3][12]. Classroom practices typically oscillate between teacher-led and student-led translanguaging, though some argue this binary can induce power imbalances [5][12]. Alternative distinctions, like the organic and structured approaches, have arisen to address this [5][20].

Empirical evidence underscores translanguaging's benefits in elevating academic performance and fostering social growth in EFL environments [3][5][8]. It engenders an optimal 'translanguaging space' for effective communication and identity development [4][11]. Rooted in Vygotsky's theory, it expands the bilingual developmental zone. Translanguaging assessments also offer inclusive linguistic evaluations [4].

However, detractors argue it inherits monolingual education's limitations, with its efficacy depending on societal stability [2][9].

2.2. Development and Critique of English Education in China

China initiated its EFL education in the early 1900s, viewing English as an instrument for national modernization [6][19]. In the 20th century's Reform and Opening-up Policy catalyzed a shift from fragmented guidelines to a unified curriculum [6][24]. The consistent goals across educational levels were international communication and personal development [7]. Despite promoting methodologies like CLT (communicative language teaching) and TBLT (Task-based language teaching), critiques highlight their limitations in the Chinese context. Influences of Confucianism, persisting traditional ideologies, and examination-focused teaching methods raise concerns about active student participation and holistic language acquisition [7][22][24][25].

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Additionally, EFL textbooks emphasizing foreign cultures often neglect the intersectionality of domestic and foreign traditions, limiting students' comprehensive cultural understanding [7]. Despite recent educational innovations, challenges persist, and the application of translanguaging in K-12 remains limited [18].

3. Research method

This research aims to evaluate the effectiveness of translanguaging as a practical pedagogy for language learning through a systematic literature review.

3.1. Theoretical framework

Our study is rooted in the translanguaging theory, as highlighted by Garcia and Li [5]. This theory promotes the holistic view of one's linguistic repertoire, blurring the distinction between individual languages. Supplementary frameworks include Scaffolding Awareness, the Sociocultural Theory, and the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach.

3.2. Research Design

In this research, a qualitative approach of systematic literature review will be used as the research method to explore the effectiveness of translanguaging as a practical pedagogy for K-12 education. In order to construct a logical structure for literature review, scholars demonstrate the following standards when choosing the appropriate data [14][15]:

1. Be carried out in the condition of peer-reviewed
2. Comprehensive and logical search methodology
3. Relevance to the topic but for various academic purposes
4. Broad coverage of impact factors to minimize bias
5. Transparent and consistent research processes

From the initial pool, 26 articles met the criteria and were shortlisted for further examination. After a detailed evaluation, 11 articles were excluded due to reasons such as integrating multiple theories, possessing unclear findings and discussions, and not being empirical studies. Consequently, 15 articles were retained for thorough analysis. Then the data of 15 peer-review articles were coded using the inductive method, which requires the researcher to find out and summarize the overlapped themes.

3.3. Data collection

Within the selected articles (n=15), the majority (n=13) employed purely qualitative methods. These methods encompassed case studies, interviews, class observation, and material analysis. Conversely, Only researchers from two projects used a mixed approach of both qualitative and quantitative methods. Specifically, Aoyama (2020) and Yuvayapan (2019) incorporated questionnaires and

surveys along with qualitative methods to reflect high school students' attitudes and the purpose of the pedagogy respectively.

4. Results

The analysis of the 15 articles (refer to Appendix 1.) unveiled three predominant themes regarding translanguaging:

1. Translanguaging pedagogy could help improve academic achievement by using scaffolding strategies.
2. Translanguaging pedagogy could promote the construction of linguistic identity and power redistribution.
3. Potential resistance might happen during the implementation of translanguaging pedagogy.

4.1. Improve academic achievement by translanguaging scaffolding

Data underscores the efficacy of translanguaging pedagogy as a scaffolding tool in EFL outcomes. In EFL classroom utilizing translanguaging, two distinct scaffolding forms are evident: teacher-provided and student-initiated.

4.1.1 Teacher-Initiated Scaffolding

Teachers employ varied translanguaging strategies in EFL classroom. One involves alternating between languages to facilitate activity engagement. Creese and Blackledge (2010), Rabbidge (2019) and Yuvayapan (2019) emphasize translanguaging's role in creating a conducive learning environment. For instance, Rabbidge (2019) highlighted a teacher using Korean (L1) to guide English counting activities using the Initiate-Response-Feedback (IRF) model under the CLIL framework, echoing findings from Cen William's 1994 research in Wales school. Similar interaction patterns were observed by Creese and Blackledge (2010) and Yuvayapan (2019), with the latter revealing 58% of the teachers used the target language for clarity, and 73% supported L1 use for enhanced class participation.

Another strategy is incorporating translation within translanguaging pedagogy to clarify new concepts, a technique prevalent in nine of the fifteen reviewed studies (Allard, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Ke & Lin, 2017; Rabbidge, 2019; Sanders-Smith & Da vila, 2017; Vaish, 2018; Yuvayapan, 2019). Such a method, as endorsed by educators from Taiwan, Singapore, and the United Kingdom, promotes content internalization while averting rigid rote memorization (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Ke & Lin, 2017; Rabbidge, 2019; Sanders-Smith & Da vila, 2017; Vaish, 2018).

4.1.2 Student-to-Student Scaffolding

Translanguaging pedagogy bolsters peer support. Kampittayakul (2018) and Poza (2018, 2019) found that students with translanguaging awareness assist peers with lower L2 proficiency. In contrast to Hungwe's study (2019)

on monolingual strategies, Poza (2019) observed stronger social bonds and improved academic performance among bilingual strategy users. Hungwe (2019) argued that strict monolingual norms can inhibit comprehensive linguistic and cultural development.

Outside the classroom, students with translanguaging awareness have more effective, post-class interactions, fostering better relationships. Furthermore, Poza (2018) reported enhanced student communication in open spaces when employing their full linguistic repertoire. However, Li emphasized the necessity of a supportive environment for successful translanguaging in second language learning, underpinned by educators' commitment to the approach [11].

4.2. Social Advantages of Translanguaging Space

Li highlighted the social benefits of translanguaging, suggested its ability to foster a positive learning environment in EFL classrooms [11]. This environment, termed “translanguaging space” enables participants to utilize their full linguistic repertoire [11].

4.2.1 Power re-distribution

Seven articles have reported shifts in power dynamics in EFL education due to translanguaging (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Kampittayakul, 2018; Ke & Lin, 2017; Poza, 2019; Sanders-Smith & Da vila, 2017; Vaish & Subhan, 2014). Chinese teachers noted that perceiving languages with equality can foster more equitable student-teacher relationships (Ke & Lin, 2017).

Observations also indicated that teachers employing translanguaging were more prone to renegotiating classroom power dynamics bilingually (Sanders-Smith & Da vila, 2017). Furthermore, four articles mentioned that students felt more empowered in classroom that incorporated translanguaging, resulting in increased autonomy and willingness to challenge authority, thus enhancing their language skills (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Poza, 2019; Vaish & Subhan, 2014). This empowerment also shifted students from passive learners to active participants (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017).

The application of translanguaging not only enhances language learning but also bolsters social interactions. Poza (2018) found that students from different ethnic backgrounds used translanguaging to navigate cultural differences, creating a bridge between their native and host cultures. Aoyama's research (2020) mirrored this, showing Japanese students employing bilingual strategies during discussions about English culture, thereby enhancing their communicative skills and interactions compared to monolingual environment.

4.2.2 Identity

Translanguaging pedagogy aids in the dialectical construction of identity, especially for students less

proficient in their secondary language. Such students often feel alienated, identifying as "in-betweeners" without a firm foothold in either language community [16]. To counter this, studies within the EFL context, including those by García-Mateus and Palmer (2017), Poza (2019) and Vaish and Subhan (2014), have embraced translanguaging as an effective pedagogical tool. Integrating linguistic diversity into lesson plans has been shown to boost spontaneous student translanguaging, with most initiatives emerging from the students themselves, thus improving educational outcomes (Vaish and Subhan, 2014).

Furthermore, by recognizing and nurturing bilingual identities, educators can foster a cohesive self-understanding in learners. This was evident in García-Mateus and Palmer's (2017) study, where Spanish EFL students in California displayed a nuanced appreciation of their bilingualism, blending their native culture with insights from the host culture.

4.3. Limitations of Translanguaging

There are also some negative effects of using translanguaging as well. These shortcomings could then be considered from two aspects according to the researchers, one is the potential resistance from students and their parents' cognition, the other one is the self-doubt about the expertise of teachers.

4.3.1 Doubts from students' cognition

Interview-based research has highlighted student reservations about using their native language English learning, linking it to perceived inadequacy in their language skills (Vaish, 2019). This, in turn, can impact their self-efficacy (Ke & Lin, 2017). In contexts with a dominant language, bilingual strategy users might be viewed as lesser by native speakers (Poza, 2018).

Another potential resistance is seen in students' and parents' apprehensions about the pedagogy. Incorporating both languages in instruction has led to fears of insufficient English exposure (Allard, 2017; Rabbidge, 2019). Students occasionally interpret the use of their native language as indicative of a curriculum gap or teacher inadequacy (Rabbidge, 2019). This presents a dilemma: they recognize the value of maximal target language use but are aware of the complexities involved in transitioning (Aoyama, 2020).

4.4. Sceptical about teachers' expertise

While learners hold a suspicious view of their teachers' expertise, teachers themselves might also have negative mentality when practicing translanguaging theory (Vaish, 2018; Vaish, 2019; Yuvayapan, 2019). Due to limited training, teachers might struggle to apportion time effectively between languages and might lose sight of primary teaching objectives (Vaish, 2019; Vaish, 2018)

Concerns extend beyond time allocation. Some experienced teachers, accustomed to traditional pedagogies, are hesitant to incorporate the native language

(L1) in an EFL classroom. Yuvayapan (2019), highlighted that some teachers feared the use of L1 might offer students a convenient short-cut, potentially diminishing their drive to practice and master the foreign language .

5. Discussion

Research on translanguaging in the EFL context identifies three primary directions: academic performance, social awareness and identity, and potential resistance.

The rise of translanguaging in CLIL pedagogy underlines languages as intertwined mediums rather than isolated subjects [23]. In China where rote learning is prevalent, translanguaging offers an integrated view of languages that promotes supportive, meaningful conversation for students to comprehend both foreign language and disciplinary content [26]. Despite China's strict K-12 system, tertiary education has benefited from translanguaging, aiding bilingual learning [1].

Translanguaging promotes social awareness and identity. As per sociocultural theory, language learning is societal [17]. Separate multi-language learning can cause non-English native students linguistic or cultural identity crises [23]. In China, using translanguaging pedagogy has facilitated a deeper understanding of Western theories, meanwhile balancing the mother tongue and English use with a social recognition [18].

However, translanguaging faces resistance. Some educators believe it is ineffective for teachers to organize an efficient language class and contrasting with certain students' needs [16] , a dilemma partially addressed in a

resent research, in which researchers pint out the need and effectiveness of language teacher training [13]. Furthermore, although it might not be a salient issue in China as all students will share the same mother tongue of Mandarin, translanguaging awareness might alienate learners who have different ethnic backgrounds in an international learning context [21]. Collaborations between educators and researchers may standardize translanguaging in the EFL landscape [10].

6. Conclusion

The examination of translanguaging pedagogy reveals its benefits and challenges in the EFL context. Predominantly, translanguaging offers more advantages than disadvantages in promoting second language learning. Consequently, English teachers in China can delve into this western-originated pedagogy, tailoring it to China's distinct language learning environment.

However, it should also be highlighted here that limitations still be exists in this research. It primarily focuses on the K-12 general English education, overlooking factors like varied language skills and the social-economic conditions. Nonetheless, this study is not without limitations. It primarily focuses on the K-12 general English education, overlooking factors such as varied language skills or socioeconomic conditions. Future research should dissect translanguaging's effectiveness more intricately, ensuring its optimal application in the EFL classroom.

Appendix 1.

Data number	Authors	Year	Title	Journal	Vol (issue):	Key words	Methods
[1]	I-Chung Ke & Shumin Lin	2017	Translanguaging approach to TESOL in Taiwan	English Teaching & Learning	41(1)	translanguaging; identity; multilingualism	qualitative observation
[2]	Michael Rabbidge	2019	The Effects of translanguaging on participation in EFL classrooms	The Journal of Asia TEFL	16(4)	translanguaging, first language use, pedagogic discourse, EFL, IRF (potential CLIL)	qualitative observation and interview
[3]	Stephanie C. Sanders-Smith & Liv T. Davila	2019	Progressive practice and translanguaging: Supporting multilingualism in a Hong Kong preschool	Bilingual Research Journal	42(3)	translanguaging; peer interaction; pedagogy; early childhood	qualitative: case study
[4]	Viniti Vaish	2019	Challenges and directions in implementing translanguaging pedagogy for low achieving students	Classroom Discourse	10(4)	Translanguaging; Singapore; challenges; reading skills; super-diversity	qualitative: observation and interview
[5]	Aoyama Ryosuke	2020	Exploring Japanese high school Students' L1 use in translanguaging in the communicative EFL classroom	The Electronic Journal for English as a Second Language	23(4)		qualitative: classroom observations //quantitative: survey

[6]	Elaine C. Allard	2017	Re-examining teacher translanguaging: An ecological perspective	Bilingual Research Journal	40(2)	ESL; translanguaging; CLIL	qualitative: Ethnography (interview, transcript, observation...)
[7]	Angela Creese & Adrian Blackledge	2010	Translanguaging in the bilingual classroom: A pedagogy for learning and teaching?	The Modern Language Journal	94(1)	translanguaging; IRF; bilingual label quest	qualitative: observation; interview; record
[8]	Vimbai Hungwe	2019	Using a translanguaging approach in teaching paraphrasing to enhance reading comprehension in first-year students	Reading & Writing	10	Paraphrasing; translanguaging; reading comprehension; multilingualism; multilingual education	qualitative: students' writing excerpts
[9]	Viniti Vaish	2018	Translanguaging pedagogy for simultaneous biliterates struggling to read in English	International Journal of Multilingualism	16(3)	Translanguaging; pedagogy; reading comprehension; interaction; emergent biliterates; metalinguistic awareness; IRF	qualitative: records, interview, notes
[10]	Fatma Yuvayapan	2019	Translanguaging in EFL classrooms: Teachers' perceptions and practices	Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies	15(2)	English language teaching; bilingualism; translanguaging	qualitative: observation of students in classroom quantitative: questionnaire for teachers
[11]	Viniti Vaish & Aidil Subhan	2014	Translanguaging in a reading class	International Journal of Multilingualism	12(3)	bilingual approach; Singapore; translanguaging; code-switching	quantitative in nature though in interpreting the transcripts we take a qualitative approach.
[12]	Luis E. Poza	2019	"Where the true power resides": Student translanguaging and supportive teacher dispositions	Bilingual Research Journal	42(4)		qualitative: ethnographic context analysis/ observation/
[13]	Suzanne García-Mateus & Deborah Palmer	2017	Translanguaging pedagogies for positive identities in two-way dual language bilingual education	Journal of Language, Identity & Education	16(4)	Bilingualism; identities; identity construction; pedagogies; teacher education; translanguaging;	qualitative: case study, transcript analysis, class observation

						two-way bilingual education	
[14]	Tassanee Kampittayakul	2018	The role of translanguaging in improving Thai learners' interactional competence in dyadic English as a foreign language tutorial session	PASAA	56	Translanguaging, Interactional Competence, SETT framework, Thai learners, EFL, one-on-one tutorials	qualitative: voice-recorded, teacher-student interactions were transcribed into word-based
[15]	Luis E. Poza	2018	"Los Dos Son Mi Idioma": Translanguaging, identity, and social relationships among bilingual youth	Journal of Language, Identity & Education	18(2)	Bilingual education; bilingualism; identity; translanguaging	Qualitative: ethnographic observation and field notes of classroom and recreational spaces

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