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Exploring the use of translanguaging in the EFL Classroom: Students' feelings and attitudes on the role of first language and English-only instruction

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Abstract--This study investigates the perspectives and attitudes of students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom towards the use of their first language (L1) and English-only instruction. The aim is to understand how students perceive translanguaging and the role of their first language in the classroom and whether they believe incorporating it alongside English (L2) enhances their ability to express themselves and understand the content. This research took place in an adult high school in Indianapolis, IN USA. The findings reveal that students generally value the opportunity to use their first language in the classroom, as it helps them feel more comfortable, secure, and able to ask questions and seek clarification. However, there is also a preference among some students for English-only instruction, as they believe it facilitates language learning and immersion. These results suggest that incorporating students' first language in the EFL classroom may have pedagogical benefits, particularly in terms of improving students' confidence and understanding. The findings also highlight the importance of striking a balance between English-only instruction and incorporating students' first language to create an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Based on these findings, more classroom research into translanguaging is needed to unveil the specific strategies and instructional approaches that can effectively be incorporated into the English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom. Future studies could also examine the impact of translanguaging on language learning outcomes and explore the perspectives of teachers and their role in promoting language use. Such research would contribute to the development of evidence-based instructional practices that better meet the needs of diverse EFL learners.

Keywords---English as a Foreign Language, English-Only instruction, immersion, Translanguaging.

1. Introduction

1.1 Translanguaging in my Context and its Importance in the English Language Classroom

Translanguaging as a teaching methodology has captured my interest since the first time I heard of the term in one of my professional development sessions at work. It made me question my teaching and be self-critical, in a way that made me ask: Am I providing my students with all the tools to reach their highest academic potential and is the way I teach hindering them from using all the knowledge they acquired as learners in their first language (L1)? As an adult EFL classroom teacher, I have been trying to create a safe environment for my students to thrive in and express themselves freely in the classroom. May that be in English or in a mix of English and their native language, my students do not shy away from using all of their linguistic repertoire, which in turn builds their self-confidence as English Language Learners (ELL).

In my classroom, we explore and cultivate all that background knowledge that they already possess and bring to the classroom via their native tongue. It goes along with the idea that was brought up in one of my Masters classes, creating a Safe Haven that shelters the learner and incites a feeling that boasts an ease of expression and creativity. This leads to reducing the affective filter that might hinder the learning process, if anxiety levels were too high for a healthy learning environment. This brings to mind, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 2006), as I am taking into perspective the emotional state of my students and how uncomfortable it makes them feel to have to express themselves entirely in English, a language that they are still exploring and learning and have not yet mastered.

In my current job, this is my second year teaching the same students and I have been very intentional about incorporating Translanguaging and applying new techniques I learn along the way in my teaching journey. I have some students that bring to the classroom a variety of languages, some of which I speak, such as Arabic, French and Spanish with limitations to the last one respectively as I just started learning it. Other students do speak languages other than those mentioned earlier, such as Farsi, Swahili and Kinyarwanda amongst many. Surprisingly, thanks to letting my students translanguage in the classroom and teach each other about their native languages, we came to find many similarities between Farsi, Arabic and even Swahili. For instance, a Farsi speaking student asked me about the word "Weight" in English as it is "Wazn" in both Arabic and Farsi, a Swahili speaker shared that it is "wzito", and to our surprise, all these words start with a /w/ sound and show some similarities across languages and cultures. This brings to the fore the notion of interconnectivity between

languages and how one can master a language and hence, has the possibility to use that knowledge to learn another one. It also connects with the idea that translanguaging, as mentioned by [Garcia & Li \(2014\)](#), is allowing the students to use their linguistic repository, including multiple languages, dialects, and modalities, to communicate and make meaning in a given context. In educational settings, translanguaging involves the deliberate and strategic use of a variety of languages in learning and teaching to facilitate comprehension, engagement, and academic success among multilingual students ([Garcia et al., 2017](#)).

The exploration of the relationship between translanguaging and its impact on language learning, academic achievement, intercultural communication, sense of belonging, and cultural pride is critical for creating equitable as well as inclusive learning environments that welcome the linguistic and cultural diversity of multilingual students. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on translanguaging and inform language education practices that support the needs of multilingual learners in diverse contexts, as well as to explore the benefits of implementing translanguaging in the classroom ([Galante, 2020](#); [Wei, 2022](#); [Byrnes, 2020](#)).

1.2 Research objectives, research questions and hypotheses:

This dissertation is set to explore students' attitudes and perceptions towards translanguaging and the use of their mother tongue (L1) in the classroom. It also investigates students' opinion vis-à-vis English only instruction in the classroom. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are:

- 1) How does translanguaging in the classroom impact language learning and intercultural communication among multilingual students?
- 2) Do students feel empowered and culturally proud when they use their first language, or do they think that they should be immersed in English only classrooms?

My principal hypotheses are:

- 1) Students appreciate the use of their mother tongue in the classroom as they might believe that it empowers their learning as they can tap into a wealth of knowledge that they acquired through their L1.
- 2) Students believe that they can excel academically if they translanguage in the English classroom as it will benefit their learning and deepen their understanding of complex notions and material.
- 3) Students feel anxious and uncomfortable in an immersive English only classroom environment.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Translanguaging:

Translanguaging is not just a practical approach to language learning and teaching, but it is also grounded in theoretical frameworks that challenge traditional views of language and language use. Scholars have proposed

various theoretical foundations to grasp the advantages and significance of translanguaging in education.

Li (2018), puts forth a theoretical perspective on translanguaging, suggesting that it is a practical theory that challenges the notion of language as a fixed and bounded system. According to Li, translanguaging recognizes the fluidity and flexibility of language use and promotes a dynamic and inclusive approach to language learning and teaching. It emphasizes that language is not confined to separate compartments but is rather an integrated and interconnected system where different linguistic resources are interwoven. Translanguaging recognizes that individuals possess a linguistic repertoire consisting of multiple languages and encourages them to draw on these resources to make meaning and engage in communication.

García & Li (2014), provide a comprehensive analysis of translanguaging, drawing on examples from diverse educational settings. They argue that translanguaging is a powerful tool for promoting bilingualism and multilingualism and can help bridge the gap between language education and social justice. They highlight that translanguaging challenges the dominance of monolingual ideologies and recognizes the value of all languages spoken in a classroom. This perspective aligns with the belief that language diversity should be celebrated and that all students should have equal access to educational opportunities regardless of their language background.

The theoretical foundations of translanguaging also intersect with sociocultural theories of learning. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, for instance, emphasizes the importance of social interaction and cultural contexts in the process of learning and development. Translanguaging aligns with this perspective by recognizing that language learning is a socially mediated process that occurs through meaningful communication and collaboration. It acknowledges the role of language as a tool for meaning-making and highlights the importance of providing authentic and meaningful contexts for language use in the classroom (García & Kleyn, 2016).

Furthermore, translanguaging is often discussed in relation to identity construction and language ideologies. By embracing translanguaging, individuals can express their identities and navigate between different language practices with ease. Translanguaging challenges monolingual ideologies that marginalize or stigmatize certain languages or language varieties. It promotes the idea that individuals have the right to use their full linguistic repertoire and validates their linguistic and cultural identities (Li & Zhu, 2013).

2.2 Translanguaging in the classroom:

Translanguaging is a growing area of interest in second language education. This section will examine research that explores the concept of translanguaging and its implications for language learning and teaching.

The review will draw on a range of sources, including articles and books by prominent scholars in the field, such as [Canagarajah \(2011\)](#), [Creese & Blackledge \(2010\)](#), [García \(2019\)](#), [García & Li \(2014\)](#), [García & Sylvan \(2011\)](#), and [Li \(2018\)](#). In addition, the review will include seminal works by [Krashen \(1981, 1985\)](#), which provide a foundational understanding of second language acquisition and bilingual education, shedding the light on his notion of the affective filter.

One of the cultural aspects of translanguaging in the classroom is that it instills a feeling of belonging and celebration of cultural heritage and pride. According to Zaretta Hammond “all new information must be coupled with existing funds of knowledge in order to be learned.” ([Hammond, 2014](#)). Learners tend to link new content to old information already stored in the brain, assimilating the former to cultural experiences and concepts ([Hammond, 2014](#)). This fortifies the belief that background knowledge acquired through the student’s L1 should be fostered and welcomed to the classroom. Learning is continuous and building knowledge is cumulative, especially in the case of adult learners who already master a number of languages prior to learning English. This also relates to the idea of interconnectivity of languages, as I noticed happening in my classroom. This practice opened the doors for discussion about a variety of cultural aspects that are a vital part of our identities as individuals and learners, leading to collaborative group learning in the classroom and knowledge sharing, defying limitations drawn by cultural and linguistic limitations.

The implementation of translanguaging practices in classrooms has gained significant attention in the area of second language education because of the potential it has in enhancing language learning, academic achievement, and intercultural communication among multilingual students ([Canagarajah, 2011](#); [García, 2019](#)). In my school teaching environment there was a recent effort to inform and educate teachers about this topic as well as bring to the fore the importance of the benefits brought to the classroom through this teaching strategy. Scholars argue that translanguaging can help multilingual learners navigate complex academic texts, increase their engagement in classroom activities, and develop a deeper understanding of content ([Creese & Blackledge, 2010](#); [García & Sylvan, 2011](#)). Students often face an impasse as they struggle to express themselves freely if they are not given the flexibility to use their L1 when discussing complex topics, as shared by my students in the classroom recently. Additionally, translanguaging can promote intercultural communication skills by valuing and legitimizing the linguistic and cultural diversity of students, which is critical for creating inclusive and equitable learning environments ([García, 2019](#)). This is often shown in my classroom in the way students speak passionately about their home countries and language as well as cultural heritage through sharing stories about their customs, food and experiences that they have lived prior to coming to the United States.

While research has shown the potential benefits of translanguaging, there is a need for a more comprehensive understanding of how translanguaging impacts language learning, academic achievement, intercultural communication,

and sense of belonging among multilingual students (Li, 2018). This research seeks to explore the relationship between translanguaging in the classroom and its impact on students' attitudes and opinions regarding language learning, academic achievement, and intercultural communication as it aims to investigate whether translanguaging instills a sense of belonging and cultural pride in the classroom, promoting inclusivity and equity. Similarly, Li (2018), reported that translanguaging practices supported multilingual students' academic performance in an American secondary school. Moreover, this directly relates to García & Sylan (2011), demonstrating that translanguaging facilitated intercultural communication among students in a dual-language program in the United States, which appreciates English as a Second Language (ESL), yet celebrates and welcomes the students' L1.

Further research is needed in this area and as research aims to investigate the relationship between translanguaging and students' sense of belonging and cultural pride and whether they think that it facilitates reaching their academic goals and fluency in the English language. The exploration of the relationship between translanguaging and its impact on language learning, academic achievement, intercultural communication, sense of belonging, and cultural pride is critical for creating inclusive and equitable learning environments that value the linguistic and cultural diversity of multilingual students. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on translanguaging and inform language education practices that support the needs of multilingual learners in diverse contexts, as well as to explore the benefits of implementing translanguaging in the classroom.

One of the key areas of interest in translanguaging research is its application in the classroom. García & Sylan (2011), argue that a monolingual approach to language teaching is no longer adequate in today's multilingual classrooms. Instead, they propose a pedagogy of translanguaging, which involves the active use of multiple languages for learning and teaching. Similarly, Creese & Blackledge (2010), suggest that translanguaging can be used as a pedagogical strategy to support language learning in bilingual classrooms. They argue that by using translanguaging, teachers can create a more inclusive and dynamic learning environment that takes into account the linguistic and cultural diversity of students. translanguaging as a strategy ought to be moderated and controlled. When used in class, it has to be administered carefully as students might heavily rely on their L1 rather than having the urgency to express their thoughts in English instead.

Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that embraces the use of the students' mother tongue in the classroom, has gained recognition for its potential to enhance language learning, academic achievement, and intercultural communication among multilingual students. This approach challenges the traditional monolingual paradigm and promotes the active utilization of students' entire linguistic repertoire to facilitate learning and create inclusive educational environments.

Implementing translanguaging strategies in the classroom requires careful planning and consideration. Translanguaging practices extend beyond oral

communication to reading and writing activities. Students can engage with texts in their native languages, promoting comprehension and literacy development (García & Li, 2014). These practices facilitate the integration of language skills and content knowledge, leading to enhanced learning outcomes. According to Song et al., (2008), teaching and instruction in English only forms a challenge as students have low engagement as well as comprehension. Students are less enthused to finish tasks that they did not fully comprehend. Students display higher anxiety levels when completing tasks individually rather than in groups where they could translanguage and assimilate with their peers (Song et al., 2008).

It is important to note that while translanguaging can be beneficial, it should be balanced with the development of English proficiency as educators should guide students to gradually transition into English, ensuring they are equipped with the necessary language competencies for academic success (García & Sylvan, 2011). This would work as a scaffold supporting students in adopting English as the main language they use academically.

Translanguaging in the classroom offers a promising approach to support language learning, academic achievement, and intercultural communication among multilingual students. By acknowledging and valuing students' diverse linguistic backgrounds, educators can create inclusive learning environments that promote a sense of belonging and leverage the rich resources of multilingualism. Implementing translanguaging strategies with careful planning and appropriate scaffolding can lead to positive educational outcomes and empower students in their language development journey.

2.3 Teachable strategies of translanguaging:

Translanguaging involves the intentional and strategic use of multiple languages to support language learning and communication in the classroom. Canagarajah (2011), explores a specific aspect of translanguaging known as codemeshing, which refers to the deliberate blending of languages in academic writing. He identifies several teachable strategies that can be employed to promote codemeshing and enhance students' language skills and cultural awareness.

Canagarajah (2011), discusses the concept of "code-meshing," which involves intentional language blending in academic writing. This approach helps students develop a deeper understanding of language and its relationship to identity and culture. By teaching codemeshing strategies, educators can empower students to navigate multiple languages and express themselves effectively in various academic contexts. Another teachable strategy is code-switching, which involves shifting between languages within a single conversation or piece of writing. Code-switching can be used to clarify meanings, express emotions, or negotiate identity and social relationships (Canagarajah, 2011). By teaching students how to code-switch effectively,

educators can empower them to navigate different linguistic contexts and develop a deeper understanding of language variation and sociolinguistic norms. Another strategy is borrowing, which involves incorporating words or phrases from one language into another. This can be particularly useful when there are no direct equivalents in the target language or when using certain terms adds cultural richness and nuance to the communication (Canagarajah, 2011). By encouraging students to borrow words or phrases from their native language or other languages they are familiar with, educators can expand their vocabulary and promote cross-cultural understanding.

Code-mixing is another important strategy within translanguaging. It refers to the mixing of languages at the grammatical and syntactic levels, where elements from different languages are combined to form new linguistic expressions (Canagarajah, 2011). Code-mixing can facilitate communication and expression of complex ideas when one language may not have the specific linguistic resources required. By teaching students how to code-mix appropriately, educators can enable them to engage in more sophisticated language use and creative expression. According to Ortega (2019), "it is important to highlight that the idea of using languages for the purpose of meaning making is not a new concept since Indigenous communities around the world have been doing it for millennia. Certain Indigenous communities in the Americas, Australia, central Asia, and Africa have always been using and mixing different languages as a symbolic behavior that have allowed them to communicate for the purposes of trade, self-determination, human connection and cultural identity affirmation".

These teachable strategies of translanguaging, including code-switching, borrowing, and code-mixing, can be integrated into classroom instruction to enhance language learning and promote cultural sensitivity (Canagarajah, 2011). By explicitly teaching these strategies and providing opportunities for practice, educators can help students develop metalinguistic awareness and expand their linguistic repertoires. This not only improves their language proficiency but also nurtures a deeper understanding and appreciation of diverse languages and cultures, especially when there is an intentional effort to encourage multicultural communication amongst students (Garcia & Lin 2017).

Furthermore, incorporating translanguaging strategies in the classroom can foster a sense of inclusivity and equity. By valuing and embracing students' linguistic backgrounds, educators create an environment where students feel acknowledged and respected for their language skills and cultural identities. This promotes a positive learning atmosphere, enhances student engagement, and encourages active participation in the learning process.

Teachable strategies of translanguaging, such as code-switching, borrowing, and code-mixing, offer valuable opportunities for language development and cultural awareness in the classroom. By incorporating these strategies into instruction, educators can empower students to navigate multiple languages effectively, expand their linguistic resources, and develop a greater

understanding of diverse cultures. Through translanguaging, classrooms can become inclusive spaces that celebrate linguistic diversity and promote equitable language learning experiences.

Krashen's work on second language acquisition provides a useful framework for understanding the potential benefits of translanguaging as a strategy in language education. His input hypothesis (1985) suggests that language acquisition occurs through exposure to comprehensible input, or language that is just beyond the learner's current level of understanding. By using translanguaging, educators can provide learners with more comprehensible input, as they are able to draw on their existing knowledge of multiple languages. His Affective Filter Hypothesis is a theory that explains how emotional and affective factors can impact language acquisition (1985). According to this hypothesis, a learner's emotional state can create a 'filter' that either facilitates or impedes language acquisition. When the filter is 'up', the learner's ability to acquire and process language input is hindered. Conversely, when the filter is 'down', the learner is more open to processing and acquiring new language input. He posits that several factors can contribute to the activation of the affective filter such as anxiety, stress, low self-esteem, and boredom (Lin, 2008). These factors can lead to a negative emotional state, which in turn can make it difficult for learners to focus on language input and to engage in the language learning process. The affective filter hypothesis suggests that language acquisition is most successful when the learner is in a relaxed and positive emotional state, where the affective filter is lowered (1985). This comes in agreement with the concept of translanguaging as a teaching strategy as it creates a feeling of inclusion and belonging, hence, promoting an environment that welcomes and allows students to express themselves freely. Krashen argues that language teachers can play a role in creating a positive and conducive learning environment that lowers the affective filter. For example, they can provide learners with opportunities to engage in meaningful and authentic language use, promote a supportive and inclusive classroom culture, and use a variety of interactive and engaging teaching techniques (1988). Krashen also emphasizes the importance of minimizing stress and anxiety in the language learning process and suggests that teachers should avoid pressure and evaluation-based approaches to language learning (1982). Overall, Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis highlights the crucial role that emotions and affective factors play in language acquisition through understanding the emotional needs of their language learners in the classroom.

In conclusion the theoretical foundations of translanguaging highlight its transformative potential in challenging traditional views of language and promoting inclusive and equitable language learning environments. Translanguaging aligns with theories that emphasize the dynamics and the interconnectedness of language, the importance of sociocultural contexts in learning, and the role of language in identity construction. By embracing these theoretical foundations, educators can adopt a more holistic and inclusive approach to language learning and create classrooms that value and celebrate linguistic diversity.

2.4 Challenges and Considerations in Implementing Translanguaging

Implementing translanguaging practices in the classroom presents several challenges and considerations that educators need to address. While translanguaging offers numerous benefits, its successful implementation requires careful thought and planning. The following section discusses some of the key challenges and considerations associated with incorporating translanguaging in educational settings. Language policies and attitudes towards multilingualism can pose challenges to the implementation of translanguaging. In some contexts, there may be a dominant monolingual ideology that discourages using

English only in the classroom excluding the origin language from the teaching context (Norton, 2006). This can create resistance from teachers, students, and parents who may perceive translanguaging as a deviation from the established language norms. Implementing translanguaging effectively requires adequately trained and supported teachers. Educators need to develop their understanding of translanguaging pedagogies and strategies through targeted professional development programs (García et al., 2017). This includes exploring how to create a supportive and inclusive classroom environment that values students' linguistic diversity and provides opportunities for meaningful language use, let alone the fact that not every teacher shares the ability to speak or at least comprehend the L1 of students who translanguage in class.

Incorporating translanguaging in the curriculum and assessment practices can be challenging. Traditional language curricula often focus on separate language skills and may not provide space for translanguaging practices (Cummins, 2000). Developing inclusive and flexible curricular frameworks that embrace translanguaging requires careful alignment with educational standards and assessment practices.

Engaging the community and parents in supporting translanguaging practices is crucial. However, community attitudes, parental expectations, and language ideologies may vary, influencing the acceptance or resistance towards translanguaging in educational settings (García, 2019). Establishing open communication channels and fostering partnerships with parents and community members can help address concerns and gain support for translanguaging initiatives. Relationship building between teachers and parents help create solid grounds for understanding and a tendency to keep an open mind when introducing new ideas and concepts that teachers share with them in their meetings and conferences held at school.

Availability of resources, such as bilingual books, materials, and technology, can impact the implementation of translanguaging. Limited access to resources that support translanguaging practices may pose challenges for teachers in providing meaningful learning experiences (García & Li, 2014). Schools and educational institutions need to invest in appropriate resources to facilitate translanguaging and create an enriching language learning environment, without such support, teachers can not access valuable tools that would scaffold the ELL students in their learning.

Assessing and evaluating students' language proficiency and learning outcomes in translanguaging contexts can be complex. Traditional assessment methods that focus solely on the target language may not capture the full range of students' linguistic abilities (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Exploring alternative assessment approaches that value and recognize students' multilingual skills is important for fair and accurate evaluation. This contributes to promoting equity in the classroom, creating equal opportunities for students to showcase their talents and linguistic abilities without having their very language limitations hinder their learning and excelling in the classroom.

Addressing these challenges and considerations requires a collaborative effort from educators, administrators, as well as policymakers, by recognizing the benefits of translanguaging and working towards creating an inclusive and supportive language learning environment, the potential of translanguaging can be harnessed to enhance students' language development and overall educational experience.

The literature review has explored a range of research on translanguaging and its implications for language learning and teaching. It has highlighted the potential benefits of translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy, as well as the theoretical foundations of the concept. The review has also drawn on Krashen's work on second language acquisition, which provides a useful framework for understanding the potential benefits of translanguaging in the EFL classroom as it supports learning and creating a diverse linguistic environment. His theory of affective filter supports the hypothesis that: **1.** Students appreciate the use of their mother tongue in the classroom as they might believe that it empowers their learning as they can tap into a wealth of knowledge that they acquired through their L1. **2.** Students believe that they can excel academically if they translanguage in the English classroom as it will benefit their learning and deepen their understanding of complex notions and material. And **3.** Students feel anxious and uncomfortable in an immersive English only classroom environment.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants:

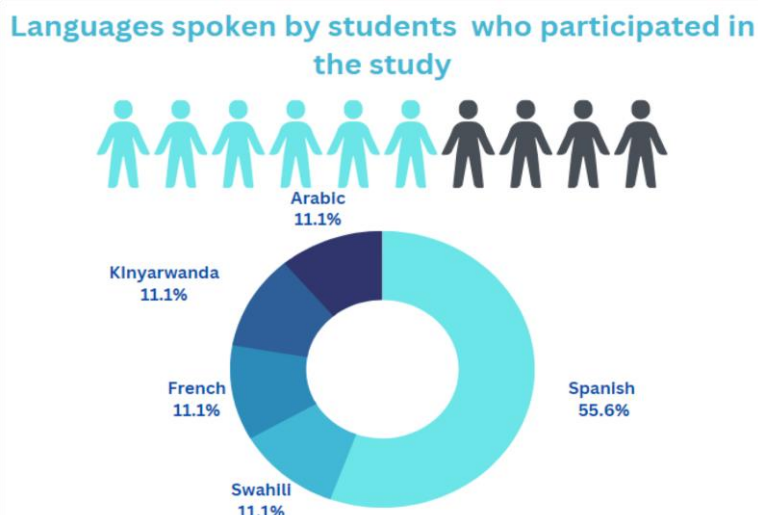


Figure 1: Percentage of languages spoken by students who participated in the study

The participants for this study were selected from my EFL classroom, which consisted of 20 students representing diverse linguistic backgrounds. The inclusion criteria for participant selection were based on their linguistic background and English language proficiency levels. Specifically, participants were chosen based on their proficiency in English as well as their mother tongue being one of the following: Spanish, French, Arabic, Kinyarwanda, or Swahili. This selection aimed to include a range of participants who faced different challenges and opportunities related to using their first language in the EFL classroom.

Demographic information:

Age: The age of the participants ranges between 20 and 75.

Gender: The participants included 2 male students and 18 female students.

Language Background: The participants represented a diverse range of linguistic backgrounds, including Spanish as a first language and various other first languages such as Arabic, French, Swahili and Mandarin speakers.

School and location: The participants are students in an adult high school located in Indianapolis, IN USA.

Socioeconomic status : The participants represent a population of lower middle class students that seek improving their socioeconomic status by improving their English and accessing better opportunities and life conditions.

Selection Criteria:

The selection criteria for participants included:

Students who had been studying English as a second language for a minimum of one year. Students who had varying levels of English language proficiency, ranging from beginners to intermediate and advanced learners. Students who had expressed their willingness to participate in the research study.

3.2 Procedure:

The participants of this study belong to a classroom where translanguaging is allowed and adopted as a teaching strategy. For the period of four weeks, the students were encouraged to use English only as they interact with their classmates, either in personal or class related conversations. The students were mixed and grouped in a way that ensured the linguistic variety where students had to resort to English as a lingua franca as they were instructed to refrain from using their L1. The participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study and provided with a consent form to ensure their voluntary participation. They were assured of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

3.3 Research Design:

In this study a mixed **qualitative** and **quantitative** research design was adopted to explore the experiences and opinions of the participants regarding the use of their L1 in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. As the researcher, I also served as the teacher in the EFL classroom, which allowed for an insider's perspective and close interaction with the participants. This informal observation allowed for collecting data about students' performance and the effects on translanguaging in the classroom. According to [Mackey & Gass \(2015\)](#), qualitative data can be quantified in many ways, representing the latter while embracing the similarities between both. "Quantitative data can provide researchers with a large numerical database, but qualitative data often provide the richer contextualized data important for a fuller understanding", ([Mackey & Gass, 2016](#)).

3.4 Data collection and Instruments:

The data for this study was collected through informal classroom observations carried out by the classroom teacher, as well as a Google Form questionnaire response provided by the participants. The informal classroom observations were conducted in regular class time and included information about students' performance and achievements.

The questionnaire responses were documented for analysis and used to inform this classroom research. The participants' responses were analyzed to identify common patterns, and insights related to their experiences and opinions regarding using their first language in the classroom.

The questionnaire was administered in an electronic form ([Google Form](#) with multiple choice questions + open ended questions), allowing participants to provide detailed and individualized responses. The multiple choice questions helped gather preferences of the students when it comes

to translanguaging and being allowed to use their L1 in the classroom. Meanwhile, the open ended questions collected data about students' opinion and feelings towards using their L1 in the classroom vis-a-vis English only environment. The participants were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, and any clarifications or assistance needed were provided by the researcher. The questionnaire was administered to the participants during regular class time. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from the participants, and they were assured of the confidentiality and voluntary nature of their participation. It was available in both English and the participants' respective first languages through online translation available to them to accommodate their linguistic preferences and limitations.

This research study conducted by the teacher-researcher aimed to gain insights into the experiences and opinions of the participants, consisting of 20 students who spoke Spanish, French, Arabic, Kinyarwanda, or Swahili, regarding the use of their first language in the EFL classroom. The data collected through the open-ended questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common themes and patterns. The study adhered to ethical guidelines to protect the participants' rights and privacy. The limitations of the study should be taken into account when interpreting the findings.

3.5 Ethical Considerations:

Ethical guidelines were followed throughout the research process and informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement in the study. The participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by refraining from collecting their email addresses while submitting the participants' responses nor using their personal information.

3.6 Limitations:

One of the potential limitations of this study is the relatively small sample size. Overall, the participants in this research study represent a diverse group of students with various linguistic backgrounds and proficiency levels in English. Their participation and valuable insights provide a foundation for understanding the experiences and opinions of EFL students related to using their L1 in English language classes.

3.7 Questions asked in the survey:

Table 1: Multiple choice and open-ended questions asked in this survey.

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| <p>Multiple choice questions:</p> | <p>1- I am familiar with the concept of translanguaging.</p> <p>2- I have used my mother tongue in class before.</p> <p>3- I feel comfortable using my mother tongue in class.</p> <p>4- I believe using my mother tongue in class helps me understand new concepts better.</p> <p>5- I think using my mother tongue in class should be allowed.</p> <p>6- I believe using my mother tongue in class should be encouraged.</p> <p>7- I have been told not to use my mother tongue in class before.</p> <p>8- I found it difficult to understand new concepts when I couldn't use my mother tongue in class.</p> <p>9- I believe not being able to use my mother tongue in class affects my performance negatively.</p> <p>10- I prefer to use my mother tongue when discussing complex concepts.</p> <p>11- I feel more confident when I am allowed to use my mother tongue in class.</p> <p>12- I think using my mother tongue in class helps me express my ideas more clearly.</p> <p>13- I believe translanguaging can benefit language learning.</p> <p>14- I am open to using multiple languages in class.</p> |
|--|---|

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| | <p>15- I think transanguaging can create a more inclusive learning environment.</p> <p>16- I have had positive experiences with transanguaging in the past.</p> <p>17- I think teachers should be trained to use transanguaging effectively.</p> <p>18- I think transanguaging can help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in the classroom.</p> <p>19- I believe using multiple languages in the classroom can be a strength.</p> <p>20- I would like to learn more about how to use transanguaging effectively in the classroom.</p> |
| <p>Open ended questions:</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How does it make you feel when you are allowed to use your first language in class? ● Do you prefer to use English only in class? ● If the teacher says to you: "Speak English only", how does that make you feel? ● Do you think you can express yourself and your ideas better in class if you used English and your first language as well? ● What is your opinion about English only classes and instructions? ● What is your first language? |

4. Results

4.1 Multiple choice questions:

The results section presents the findings of the survey regarding the attitudes of multilingual students towards transanguaging in the classroom. The survey consisted of 20 questions, which were answered using a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 5 indicating strong agreement. Additionally, there were open-ended questions seeking students' opinions on transanguaging that will be discussed in the next section. A total of 20 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students participated in the survey. Prior to sharing the survey with students, the researcher explained and gave examples of transanguaging so that students get familiarized with the term that would be frequently used in the [survey](#).

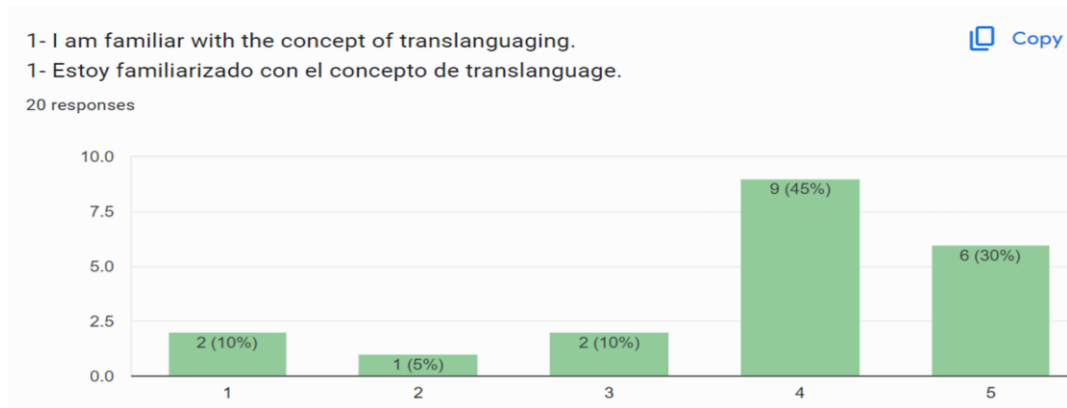


Figure 1: Question 1 Responses

The first research question aimed to assess the students' familiarity with the concept of translanguageing. The results showed that 45% of the students strongly agreed (scored 5) that they were familiar with the concept, while 10% disagreed (scored 1) (Question 1). Regarding their previous use of the mother tongue in the classroom, 45% of the students strongly agreed that they had used it, whereas only 5% strongly disagreed (Question 2).

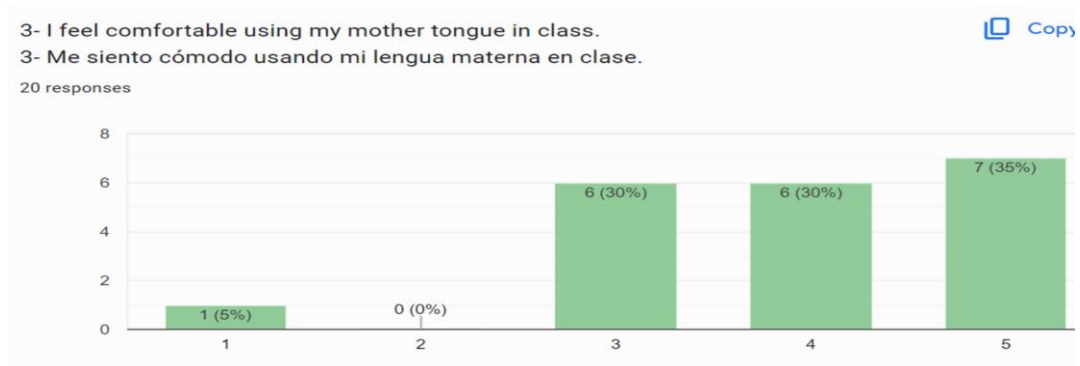


Figure 2: Question 3 Responses

When asked about their comfort level in using their mother tongue in class, 35% of the students strongly agreed that they felt comfortable, while only 5% strongly disagreed (Question 3). Furthermore, 60% of the students strongly agreed that translanguageing can benefit language learning (Question 13), indicating a positive perception of its impact.

The survey also explored students' preferences and beliefs regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. In response to whether using the mother tongue should be allowed (Question 5), 25% of the students strongly agreed, while 20% were neutral. Similarly, 30% strongly agreed that using the mother tongue should be encouraged (Question 6). These findings suggest that a significant proportion of the students valued the use of their first language in the learning process.

Regarding the impact of translanguageing on academic performance, 30% of the students strongly agreed that being unable to use their mother tongue in class affected their performance negatively and usually limited them academically (Question 9). In contrast, only 10% strongly disagreed. Additionally, 30% strongly agreed that using their mother tongue helped them understand new concepts better and broadened their perception about using their mother tongue to understand new concepts (Question 4). These results highlight the perceived value of translanguageing as a supportive tool for learning among the surveyed students.

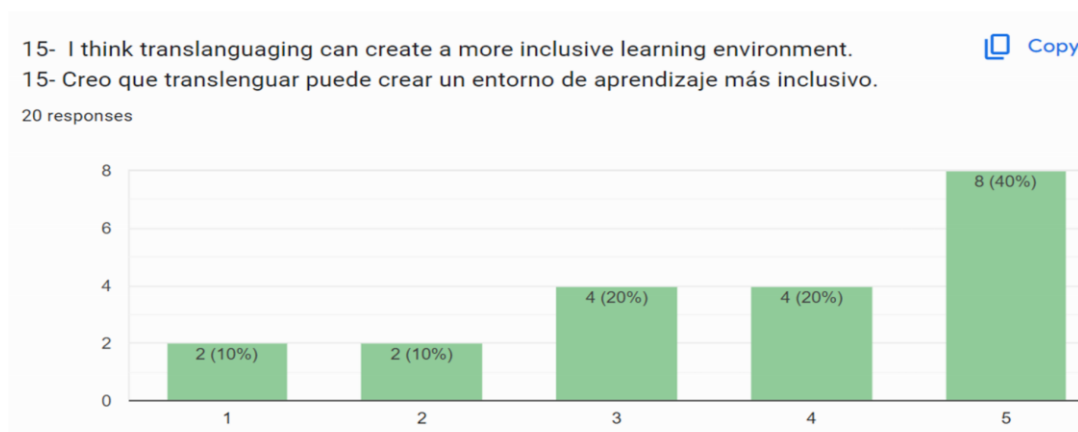


Figure 3: Question 15 Responses

The survey also examined students' opinions on inclusivity and cultural pride. When asked if translanguageing could create a more inclusive learning environment (Question 15), 40% of the students strongly agreed, while 10% strongly disagreed. Moreover, 45% of the students strongly agreed that translanguageing could help bridge cultural and linguistic gaps in the classroom (Question 18). These findings highlight the potential of translanguageing to promote inclusivity and foster a sense of cultural pride among multilingual students.

It is important to note that these results were obtained from a single classroom and may not always be generalizable to other contexts. Additionally, classroom observation indicated that some students became overly reliant on their first language, which hindered their English language, which calls for regulating the amount of translanguageing allowed in the classroom so that there wouldn't be an overreliance on the (first language) L1 in the classroom.

The survey results indicated that there was a range of familiarity with the concept of translanguageing among the students. While 45% of the students strongly agreed that they were familiar with the concept, 10% disagreed, suggesting that there might be a need for further education and awareness about translanguageing. Regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom, a significant portion of the students (45%) strongly agreed that they had used it before, indicating that they had already experienced some

level of translanguaging in their language learning journey. This finding suggests that the use of the mother tongue in the classroom is not uncommon among the surveyed students.

In terms of comfort level, 35% of the students strongly agreed that they felt comfortable using their mother tongue in class, while only 5% strongly disagreed. This indicates that a majority of the students had a positive attitude towards using their first language as a means of communication and support in the classroom.

When it comes to the perceived benefits of translanguaging, 60% of the students strongly agreed that it can benefit their language learning. This finding suggests that the majority of the students recognized the great potential and the advantages of using the mother tongue to enhance their understanding and acquisition of the target language.

The survey also explored the students' preferences and beliefs regarding the use of the mother tongue in the classroom. A quarter of the students strongly agreed that using the mother tongue should be allowed, while 20 % were neutral. Similarly, 30 % strongly agreed that using the mother tongue should be encouraged. These results indicate that a significant proportion of the students valued the use of their first language as a tool for learning and communication.

When asked about the impact of translanguaging on academic performance, 30% of the students strongly agreed that being unable to use their mother tongue in class affected their performance negatively and it made them feel frustrated. Conversely, only 10% strongly disagreed. This suggests that a substantial number of students perceived the restriction on using their first language as a hindrance to their academic performance.

On another note, 30 % of the students strongly agreed that using their mother tongue helped them understand new concepts better. This finding further supports the notion that the use of translanguaging can facilitate comprehension and learning among multilingual students.

4.2 Open ended questions:

Open-ended questions were administered to the participants, and their responses shed light on their perspectives regarding language use in the EFL classroom. Question 1 explored how students felt when allowed to use their first language in class. Many students expressed feeling more comfortable, secure, and confident when given the opportunity to use their mother tongue. They believed that using their first language facilitated better understanding and expression of ideas, making communication with others easier. For instance, student 1 answered: " Well, because I don't know English that much and I can 't say some things in English, I say them in Spanish and it's not difficult for me." While student 2 said: " I feel good. When I am using my language because it is made to understand fast ".

In Question 2, students were asked about their preference for using English only in class. The responses were varied, with some students expressing a preference for English-only instruction. They cited benefits such as immersion and improved language skills. Conversely, other students indicated that they did not prefer using English only, as they found it challenging to express certain concepts or ideas without their first language bridging the gap. Some students mentioned that as their English proficiency improved, they might consider using English exclusively in the future. One student answered: "I do want to, but at the same time, because i don't know how to sa y some of them in English and that makes it difficult for me to use English in class." While another said: "I will prefer most of the time English only benefits my learning. However, when it comes to challenge concept or words I would like to use my mother tongue to help me understand before higher le vel thinking."

Question 3 focused on how students felt when instructed by the teacher to "Speak English only." The responses varied, with some students feeling motivated and supported by such instructions, as it helped them concentrate on learning the language. However, others expressed feelings of frustration or discomfort, especially if they were not fully familiar with English, leading to a sense of being lost or having difficulty understanding.

For Question 4, students were asked whether they believed using both English and their first language would enable them to express themselves and their ideas better in class. The majority of students believed that a combination of both languages would indeed facilitate more comprehensive and effective expression of their thoughts. A student answered: "I think, both are necessaries."

Lastly, Question 5 sought to understand students' opinions about English-only classes and instructions. The responses were divided, with some students supporting the idea of English-only classes, asserting that it aids in improving language skills and fostering immersion ([Petersen et al., 2022](#); [Hou et al., 2012](#)). On the other hand, some students expressed reservations or disagreement, stating that they were not ready for English-only classes and preferred a mixture of languages to enhance comprehension. Some participants emphasized that English-only classes might be beneficial for higher-level English learners, but they may not be as helpful for beginners who need to make connections with their first language to aid their learning process.

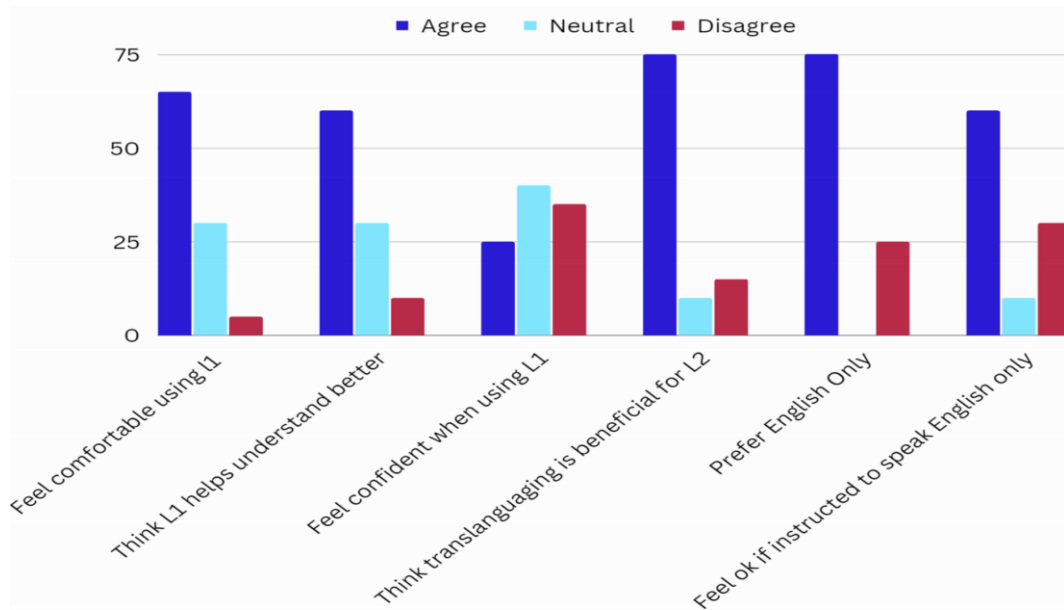


Figure 4: Students attitudes towards using L1 vs English only in the EFL classroom.

These responses highlight the diverse perspectives and experiences of students regarding the use of translanguaging in their learning, showcasing the advantages and challenges of using multiple languages for teaching and learning. The open-ended questions in the survey provided additional insights into the students' feelings and preferences. Many students expressed that using their mother tongue in class made them feel more comfortable, secure, and able to express themselves more clearly. They appreciated the support and scaffolding that their first language provided, particularly when faced with challenging concepts.

However, it is important to note that some students acknowledged the importance of English-only classes for improving their language skills. They recognized the need to practice and immerse themselves in the target language to enhance their proficiency. Overall, the survey results revealed a diversity of opinions among multilingual students regarding the use of translanguaging in the classroom. Higher-level and more fluent students tended to be opposed to translanguaging, perceiving it as a hindrance to their English language practice. On the other hand, lower-level and less fluent students valued the support and scaffolding provided by their first language. These findings suggest that the effectiveness and appropriateness of translanguaging may vary depending on students' language proficiency levels and individual needs.

These survey results also provide valuable insights into the attitudes and perspectives of multilingual students towards translanguaging in the classroom. They suggest that there is a need for further discussion, research, and teacher training on how to effectively integrate and leverage students' first languages to enhance their language learning experiences and outcomes.

Comfort and Communication: Many students expressed that using their mother tongue in the classroom makes them feel more comfortable and allows them to communicate more effectively. They mentioned that it helps them express complex ideas, clarify misunderstandings, and engage in meaningful discussions with peers and teachers.

Language Support and Clarification: Students highlighted the importance of using their first language as a support tool for understanding difficult concepts, particularly in subjects that require specialized vocabulary or complex terminology. They mentioned that translanguaging helps them bridge gaps in their understanding and facilitates comprehension.

Confidence and Identity : Some students expressed that using their mother tongue in the classroom helps them maintain a sense of cultural and linguistic identity. They appreciate the opportunity to express themselves authentically and connect with their cultural heritage, contributing to a positive learning environment.

Language Practice: Conversely, some students acknowledge the importance of practicing the target language (English) and recognize the need for English-only environments to improve their language skills. They mentioned that while translanguaging has its benefits, it should be balanced with opportunities to use and develop proficiency in the target language.

Inclusion and Diversity: Students emphasized the inclusive nature of translanguaging, where it promotes respect for diversity as well as sharing a part of one's culture with others who also bring theirs to the fore and shed the light on what they hold dear to them. They share parts of their identities in a multicultural classroom which boasts pride and inclusion in something bigger than just a language learning context, making education a cultural experience at its finest.

3.3 Classroom Observations:

The case of Kinyarwanda speakers: Two students that speak Kinyarwanda, started in the lower level as they scored low on their fluency test. They started classes very late and instead of holding them for another year in the lower-level class, I moved them to a higher-level class. I wanted to observe and see how they perform, then decide if they shall remain at that level. They surprisingly performed very well after a period of struggles. Their performance started at 50% and 60%, over the course of a year it jumped to 85% and even 90%. As I do not speak Kinyarwanda nor do any other students in the class, these two students did not translanguage and only used English in the classroom. Yet, in this English-only environment, their progress was phenomenal. The rest of the students who translanguage in class, and who used their L1 such as Spanish, French and Arabic, kept a steady pace and performance with less visible improvement ([Albaqami, 2021](#)).

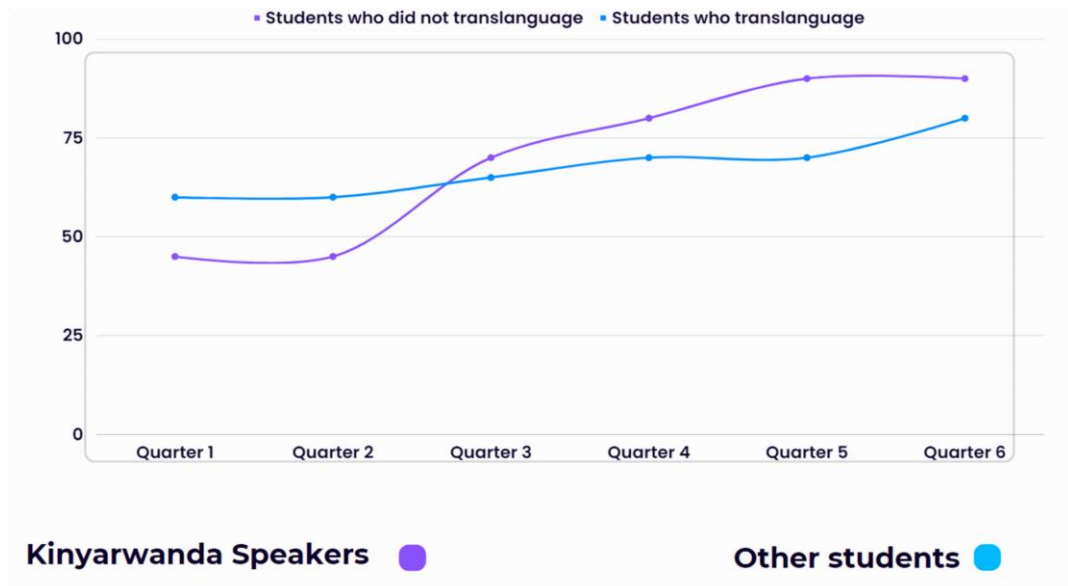


Figure 3: Performance of students who translanguage in class vs the performance of students who do not translanguage in class. (Data taken from informal classroom observations and students' regular in-class performance)

Students who did not translanguage went through 3 phases as they went from 50% to 90%:

Phase 1: Struggle phase: Students struggled in class and their fluency as well as performance remained low.

Phase 2: Improvement phase: As we can see in the graph, the performance of these students improved and represented an ascending line representing their continuous improvement over time.

Phase 3: Steady performance phase: This represents the students reaching a high performing steady level. Students who translanguage in class showed a steady performance throughout the year with less noticeable impactful improvement. Their performance ranged from 60 % to 80 %. They went through the same **3 phases** with less noticeable shifts between them. Further and broader research is needed to confirm that these results could be replicated and more generalized.

5. Discussion

This section presents a comprehensive interpretation of the findings from the research carried out in this dissertation on language use in a multilingual EFL classroom. The study aimed to explore students' perspectives on the use of their first languages (Spanish, French, Arabic, Kinyarwanda, and Swahili) alongside English in the classroom and its implications for their learning experiences. The discussion is organized around the key themes that emerged from the data analysis, including the students' feelings about language use, preferences for language use, the

impact on expression of ideas, and opinions about English-only instruction (Tian & Hennebry, 2016; Griskell et al., 2020).

The results represent mixed feelings about translanguaging and whether the students' L1 should be used in the EFL classroom. My initial hypotheses were, **1.** Students appreciate the use of their mother tongue in the classroom as they might believe that it empowers their learning as they can tap into a wealth of knowledge that they acquired through their L1. **2.** Students believe that they can excel academically if they translanguage in the English classroom as it will benefit their learning and deepen their understanding of complex notions and material. And **3.** Students feel anxious and uncomfortable in an immersive English only classroom environment. The participants' responses were majorly in favor of translanguaging and using their L1 in the classroom as a tool to not only expand on the already acquired knowledge and excel academically, but also as an emblem for inclusion and cultural pride in the EFL classroom. Yet, contradicting my hypothesis, some participants were strongly against using their L1 in the classroom. After a classroom discussion I had with the participants following taking the survey, I was informed that some opposed the use of any other language in the classroom, believing that more exposure to English-only instruction would incentivise deeper learning and would forcibly incite more fluency in speaking and listening skills (Muhammed, 2014; De Larios et al., 1999; Nadia, 2011).

The findings revealed that allowing students to use their first languages in the classroom had a positive impact on their learning experiences. Students expressed feelings of comfort, security, and confidence when they were allowed to use their first languages (Albaqami, 2021). They mentioned that using their first language enabled them to better understand and express themselves, ask questions, and engage in meaningful interactions. This aligns with previous research suggesting that students feel empowered and can articulate their thoughts more effectively when they can utilize their primary language (Cummins, 2000). Regarding language preferences, while some students expressed a preference for using English only in the classroom, others indicated a need to use their first languages, particularly when encountering unfamiliar concepts or words. This highlights the importance of translanguaging practices, where students can smoothly move between languages to support comprehension and language development (García & Li, 2014). It is noteworthy that as students develop more proficiency in English, they may lean towards using it more exclusively as expressed by many participants who are trying to making the leap into a transition from scaffolding their learning with translanguaging to resorting to English only. The study also investigated whether students believed they could express themselves and their ideas better when using both English and their first languages. The majority of students believed that using both languages enhanced their ability to communicate effectively. They perceived that combining English and their first language facilitated better understanding and improved their expression of ideas. This finding aligns with Cummins' (2000) linguistic interdependence theory, which suggests that leveraging students' first languages can enhance their overall language proficiency.

When asked about their opinions on English-only classes and instructions, students presented a mixed response. Some students believed that English-only instruction was beneficial for improving their English language skills and immersing themselves in the language. However, others highlighted the importance of using their first languages in class to aid comprehension and clarify doubts. These divergent opinions reflect the complex nature of language use in multilingual classrooms and the need for flexible and contextually relevant language policies and teaching methodologies adopted by EFL teachers.

The findings have important implications for pedagogy in multilingual EFL classrooms. Teachers should listen to their students' opinions and try to foster a positive learning environment by acknowledging and valuing students' linguistic diversity. Incorporating students' first languages alongside English can promote inclusivity, facilitate comprehension, and foster cross-cultural understanding. Teachers can adopt translanguaging practices, providing scaffolding and support to help students transition between languages as they develop their English proficiency. In return, this would create a rich classroom experience where language meets culture.

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of this study. The research was conducted by a single teacher-researcher, and the sample size was relatively small, consisting of 20 students representing different language backgrounds. Thus, the generalizability of the findings may be limited. Future research should involve larger samples and multiple classrooms to provide a more comprehensive understanding of language use in multilingual EFL contexts.

This study explored the perspectives of students in a multilingual EFL classroom regarding the use of their first languages alongside English. The findings highlight the positive impact of allowing students to use their first languages, including increased comfort, enhanced expression of ideas, and improved comprehension. Incorporating students' first languages in the classroom can contribute to creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment. These findings highlight the importance of recognizing and valuing linguistic diversity in EFL instruction and provide insights for educators seeking to optimize language learning experiences for multilingual learners.

6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of students in a multilingual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom regarding the use of their first languages alongside English. The findings revealed valuable insights into the students' feelings, preferences, and experiences related to language use, highlighting the importance of considering linguistic diversity in the classroom. The results of this study indicated that allowing students to use their first languages in the classroom had positive effects on their learning experiences. Students expressed feelings of comfort, security, and

confidence when utilizing their primary languages, as it enabled them to better understand and express themselves. This finding is consistent with previous research on the benefits of translanguaging and the empowerment it provides to multilingual learners (Cummins, 2000; García & Li, 2014).

Furthermore, students believed that using both English and their first languages enhanced their ability to express their ideas effectively. The integration of their first languages alongside English provided them with additional support in comprehension and communication, ultimately contributing to their overall language proficiency. This aligns with Cummins' linguistic interdependence theory, which emphasizes the positive transfer of skills and knowledge across languages (Cummins, 2000).

While some students expressed a preference for using solely English in the classroom, others value their first languages, particularly in situations involving unfamiliar concepts or words. This highlights the importance of creating a flexible language policy that accommodates the diverse needs and language backgrounds of students. English-only instruction may be beneficial for English language development, but it is equally essential to recognize the advantages of translanguaging practices and the role of students' first languages in supporting their learning processes. Nonetheless, some students expressed the desire to be immersed in an English-only classroom rather than using their L1 to scaffold their learning. Most of those who were consistently in favor of translanguaging without a doubt are the low fluency students in my classes. On the other hand, those who already achieved a higher level of fluency in the English language, favored a classroom where English-only instruction was adopted.

The implications of this study extend to EFL pedagogy and classroom practices. Educators should strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment that values linguistic diversity. Incorporating students' first languages in instructional strategies can foster a sense of belonging, facilitate comprehension, and promote cross-cultural understanding. Translanguaging practices can be employed to provide scaffolding and support as students navigate between languages, thereby fostering their English language development.

In conclusion, this study emphasizes the significance of recognizing and valuing students' linguistic diversity in the multilingual EFL classroom. By incorporating students' first languages and adopting translanguaging practices, educators can create an inclusive learning environment that promotes effective communication, comprehension, and language development. These findings contribute to the existing body of research on multilingual education and offer valuable insights for educators seeking to optimize language learning experiences for multilingual learners.

While this study provides valuable insights into the perspectives of students in a multilingual EFL classroom regarding the use of their first languages, there is still a need for further research to build upon these findings and expand our understanding of language use in such contexts.

Future research could explore the following areas to enhance our knowledge and inform educational practices:

Larger Sample Size: The current study had a limited sample size of 20 students representing various language backgrounds. Conducting research with a larger and more diverse sample would provide a broader perspective on the experiences and preferences of multilingual learners. It would enable researchers to analyze variations within different language groups and investigate potential correlations between language proficiency, cultural background, and attitudes towards language use.

Longitudinal Studies: Longitudinal studies that span an extended period can offer insights into the long-term effects of incorporating students' first languages in the classroom. Tracking students' language development and academic progress over longer periods of time would provide valuable information on how translanguaging practices contribute to their overall language proficiency, literacy skills, and educational outcomes. Such studies can shed light on the sustained benefits of maintaining a balanced approach to language instruction.

Comparative Studies: Comparative studies could compare the outcomes of different language instruction approaches in multilingual EFL classrooms. Comparing classrooms that strictly adhere to English-only policies with those that embrace translanguaging practices would help identify the advantages and disadvantages of each approach. By examining language outcomes, student engagement, and attitudes towards language use, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how different language policies impact students' learning experiences and feelings in language development.

Teacher Perspectives and Practices: Future research could also explore the perspectives and practices of teachers in multilingual EFL classrooms. Investigating teachers' beliefs, knowledge, and instructional strategies regarding language use can provide valuable insights into the factors influencing their decisions on incorporating students' first languages. Understanding teachers' perspectives and experiences can inform the inception of professional development programs and instructional guidelines that support effective multilingual instruction.

Impact on Social and Emotional Well-being: Further research could examine the impact of incorporating students' first languages on their social and emotional well-being. Exploring how language use influences students' sense of identity, belonging, and self-esteem can provide a holistic understanding of the implications of translanguaging practices. Additionally, investigating the role of peer interactions, collaboration, and cultural exchange in multilingual classrooms can shed light on the social dynamics and benefits of linguistic diversity.

It is important to note that while this study has shed light on the perspectives of students in a multilingual EFL classroom, further research

is needed to deepen our understanding of language use in such contexts. By conducting large-scale studies, longitudinal investigations, comparative analyses, and exploring teacher perspectives, researchers can continue to contribute to the field of multilingual education. Additionally, investigating the impact on students' social and emotional well-being will provide a more comprehensive understanding of the implications of incorporating students' first languages in the classroom. Such future research endeavors will help shape educational practices and promote inclusive and effective language instruction for multilingual learners.

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