




Research Article

Translanguaging in EMI Courses: A Study at a Tertiary Education

Canh Vo ^{1,*} , Nhung Luu ¹ , and Phuong Le ¹ 

¹ University of Finance-Marketing, Vietnam

* Correspondence: vthcanh@ufm.edu.vn

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Abstract: The current study investigates the insights of both teachers and students regarding translanguaging in EMI courses, and how translanguaging has been implemented in EMI courses. It is a case study, conducted at a university in which EMI courses have been thoroughly taught in a variety of departments. The study employed two research tools: classroom observations and two open-ended interviews with two groups, including students and teachers. The classroom observation was conducted in two separate class settings for the subject of English for Marketing at a university. The interview used to collect teachers and students' insight on their attitudes, experience, and strategies toward translanguaging. The findings indicated that both teachers and students have a positive attitude toward the use of translanguaging in EMI courses. Additionally, they perceived that translanguaging brought several benefits to students: enhancing students' comprehension of content knowledge and language, boosting motivation in the learning process, and reducing anxiety in learning. These benefits led to the creation of more complex ideas and exposure to a wider linguistic repertoire. It has some pedagogical implication for teachers to implement linguistic repertoire to students for better learning performance. Moreover, teachers with the use of translanguaging should created more learning activities to maximize its benefits in EMI courses.

Keywords: translanguaging; EMI courses; insights; Business English

1. Introduction

Translanguaging is commonly used in English Medium Instruction (EMI) courses in Vietnamese education, which has emerged as a critical area of inquiry due to the rapidly increasing adoption of EMI globally, as well as its broad implications for language acquisitions and content mastery (Saldo et al., 2025). Driven by the development of globalization and international competitiveness, EMI has stretched its arm rapidly in non-English -speaking countries, including Vietnam (Zhu & Wang, 2024; Linh, 2022). This growth has been brought a shift from monolingual English-only policies toward more multilingual approaches to maximize students' full linguistic repertoires (Lu et al., 2023; Baker, 2021). The lure of translanguaging lies in its capability to knowledge constructions in language acquisition, academic success by leveraging learners' first language (L1) alongside English (Ngo, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2022).

There is a tension between monolingual ideologies that promote English-only instruction and the practical realities of multilingual classroom education (Sahan et al., 2022; Fang et al., 2023). While some educators advocate for strict English use, others recognize translanguaging's benefits for content learning and student confidence (Rahman et al., 2025; Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024). This causes a controversy, leading the underrated perceptions of translanguaging's benefits on language acquisition, academic performance, and inequitable learning opportunities (Gülle & Bayyurt, 2024).

Translanguaging is perceived as a dynamic approach that draws on learners' entire linguistic repertoires to scaffold content and language learning within sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Cong-Lem, 2025; Linh, 2022). It is also aligned with the sociocultural approach in second language acquisition, focusing on interaction and mediation through multiple semiotic resources (Sabaté-Dalmau & Moncada-Comas, 2023; Gao & Zheng, 2024).

Wei (2018) said that the fundamental aim of language learning is to foster bilingualism

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and multilingualism rather than replace the learner's L1 to become another monolingual. A multilingual individual is not only aware of the political construct underlying named languages, and well-conscious of certain structural feature of these languages, but also capture translanguaging instinct, which well equips them to deal with linguistic differences, inconsistencies, and ambiguities when needed for deployment of strategic gains. As the matter of fact, translanguaging is capable of creating a social space for L2 learners to blend "different dimensions of their personal history, experience, and environment, their attitude, belief, and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into one coordinated and meaningful performance" (Li 2011, p. 1223).

Translanguaging is not regarded as a fixed linguistic structure or an object of description and analysis, but rather as both a practice and process. It represents the dynamic and integrated use of multiple languages and varieties, and more importantly, it constitutes a process of knowledge construction that transcends the boundaries of language itself (Williams, 1994; Baker, 2001). The knowledge construction unfolds through a cyclical interplay of practice-theory-practice (Mao, 1937, cited by Wei, 2018). Over the years, translanguaging has proven to maximize L2 learners' linguistic resources in the process of problem-solving and knowledge construction (Williams, 1994), involving shuttling between the languages brought by the other to co-construct meaning (Canagarajah, 2011).

Although the translanguaging has gained attentions of a cluster of academic researchers, its implementation in EMI courses is still few and far between, especially in Vietnam educational contexts. On that account, this current study attempts to implement translanguaging in EMI classroom to reveal:

- (1) The ways teachers and students apply translanguaging in EMI classroom
- (2) Teachers and student's perceptions on how translanguaging scaffold their English learning and teaching

Considering this, the research questions are the following:

RQ1: How do teachers and students use translanguaging in EMI courses?

RQ2: What are students and teachers' insight in translanguaging in EMI courses?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Defining Translanguaging

Translanguaging serves as a conceptual framework that reconceptualizes traditional understandings of bilingualism and multilingualism. In the study of bilingualism in education, Garcia (2009) defined the concept of translanguaging to describe the ways in which bilingual individuals draw flexibly on their entire linguistic repertoires, rather than being constrained by named language boundaries. It is understood not as distinct, autonomous systems but as elements of a unified repertoire, holding the potential to transform both educational and societal structures (García & Wei, 2014), understood as socially constructed entities rather than as cognitive-linguistic realities (Otheguy et al., 2015), and as the way of being and acting in cultural, and political context.

As the practical theory, translanguaging includes two related concepts: translanguaging space and translanguaging Instinct. According to Li (2011), translanguaging space is a place shaped by and for translanguaging practice, where language users through interaction, bring together social contexts and linguistic resources from different practices in different settings. He also states that "Translanguaging Space is the act of translanguaging that creates a social space for multilinguals to integrate their 'personal history, experience and environment, their attitude, belief and ideology, their cognitive and physical capacity into coordinated and meaningful performance" (p. 1223). Phyak (2023) conceptualizes translanguaging space as a "space of simultaneity," transforming classrooms into critical social environments that value students' multilingual and diverse knowledge systems, while also bridging their experiences from home, community, and school. Tai and Wong (2023) show that translanguaging spaces can be created even within first language classrooms, enabling students to treat linguistic diversity as an asset and to cultivate identities as multicultural citizens.

2.2. Scaffolding in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)

Scaffolding is one of the key dimensions of sociocultural theory and has been widely proposed as a useful metaphor for promoting second language (L2) learning. The process of scaffolding enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task, or achieve a goal that would otherwise be beyond their unassisted efforts. It essentially involves the adult "controlling" those elements of the task that are initially outside the learner's capacity, thereby

allowing the learner to focus on and complete only those aspects that fall within their range of competence (Wood et al., 1976). In classroom contexts, scaffolding refers to the interventions teachers make within students' ZPD to facilitate learning and enhance their current knowledge and skills (Gonulal & Loewen, 2018).

According to Wells (1999), scaffolding is a way that the concept of working within the ZPD is operationalized. In particular, it operationalizes the transition from other-regulation to self-regulation that Vygotsky theorized (van Lier, 2002). Scaffolding lies very much within Vygotskian framework, and Verenikina (2008) suggests that the SCT framework is "at the heart of the concept of scaffolding" (p. 163). The concept of scaffolding has been commonly employed to explain the type of interactions that do pertain to the ZPD. Wood et al. (1976) first used the term scaffolding to describe the support offered by parents when tutoring the language development of their children. They explained that scaffolding serves six main functions: (1) recruitment – getting children interested in tasks, (2) reduction in degrees of freedom – dividing tasks into multiple, smaller tasks, (3) direction maintenance – motivating children to pursue tasks, (4) marking critical features – drawing children's attention to relevant areas of the tasks, (5) frustration control – decreasing children's stress levels during the tasks, and (6) demonstration – modelling the desired outcome (p. 98). Also, this concept has been taken up in the context of classroom interaction to explain the temporary assistance that teachers provide their learners to help them complete a task or develop new understandings, so that they will later be able to complete similar tasks on their own (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005).

Translanguaging can serve as a form of scaffolding, as it provides the linguistic and conceptual support needed to bridge the gap between what pupils already know and what they need to know. Through translanguaging, language is used flexibly to support the acquisition of new curriculum vocabulary, to develop conceptual understanding, and to strengthen pupils' literacy skills (Swanwick, 2016). In practice, translanguaging is employed both to teach content and to establish communication, and it can be directed by teachers as well as initiated by pupils (Pinho Feller, 2022). The dynamic interplay between languages is also recognized as a valuable resource that supports the learning process (Garcia, 2009; Li, 2011).

3. Materials and Methods

This study will be conducted in a Vietnamese higher education institution where EMI programs are implemented across various disciplines. This university offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs delivered both partially and entirely in English. This setting represents a range of academic disciplines (e.g, Business, linguistics, tourism, administrations).

The participants consist of about 92 undergraduate students, at sophomore. These students are from two separate classes, specializing in Business English. All of them are Vietnamese L1 speakers. Table 1 shows students' demographic information.

Table 1. Students' demographic information.

Class	Number of students	School year
DAV1	42	Sophomore
DAV2	50	Sophomore

Additionally, the study includes approximately 2 instructors who teach either English language courses or EMI courses in the departments of tourism, linguistics, and marketing (table 2). These two instructors meet the requirements of Ministry of Education and Training in Vietnam (MOET) for EMI delivery, holding recognized English language qualifications ranging above B2 in CEFR (or equivalent certificates). They are responsible for teaching DAV1 and DAV2 in this current study. To keep them anonymous, their names are coded as T1 (teacher 1) and T2 (teacher 2) as follow:

Table 2. Teachers' demographic information.

Teacher codes	In-charge class	Gender	Years of experience
T1	DAV1	Female	10
T2	DAV2	Male	6

Classroom observations were carried out to collect naturalistic data on actual translanguaging practices. An observation protocol will be developed to record. There are

two main areas observed, including in which situations or contexts most ideals for students and teachers to use translanguaging, and how translanguaging contributes to better comprehension of lessons and helping students more engaged in learning. In relation with students, the collection of data from the moments of explaining difficult concepts or terms, negotiating meaning and seeking clarification was meticulously observed and noted down, while observers focused on giving instructions, clarifying complex content and providing feedback from teachers.

There are three focus group. Of which, four to five students were conducted the interview in each group at their convenience and preference. The interview allowed to have collective reflection and experience sharing in supportive environment. To gain more insights from words and agent's expression, the interview was arranged to have face-to-face conversation. This aimed to explore students' attitude, preference to translanguaging in EMI courses and contexts in which they use this approach.

Two teachers who are responsible for DAV1 and DAV2 in teaching English for marketing was interviewed separately to have their insights on their attitudes to the use of translanguaging in their teaching, and their attitudes to the students' use of translanguaging in classroom. The interview also tried to discover which situations the translanguaging has been most implemented for its usefulness.

4. Results

4.1. Teachers and Students' Implementation of Translanguaging in Classroom

The majority of time was allocated to lecturing and discussion. As the result, most of data collected from these two stages were illustrated in figure 1 as follow:

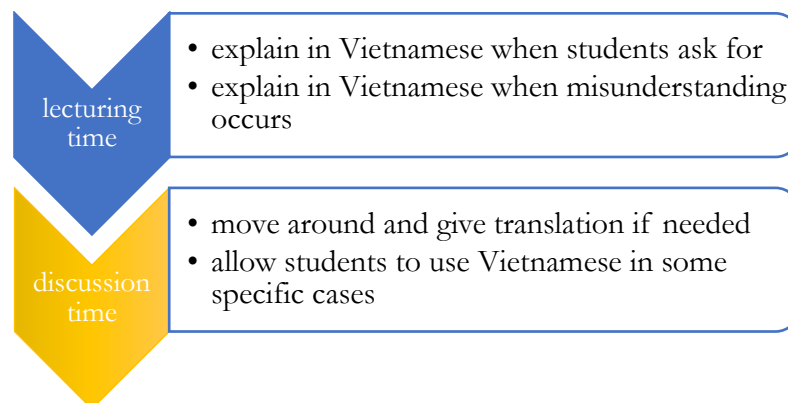


Figure 1. Translanguaging in lecturing time and discussion time.

As observed, translanguaging practices were mostly applied in discussion section in which teacher gave specific questions to students. T1 has a preference of chatting and moving discussion, when allowing students to leave their seat to find different partners and group to discuss on given topic.

"When they leave their seats and move around, they are offered multiple chances to discuss with different partners. And that is why they can apply more translanguaging practices" (T1)

On the other hand, T2 permitted students sitting and turning their sides to find their convenient partners. This way was time-saving, yet have no diversity of mates sharing. Although these two approaches have been conducted in ways, they intent to help students exchanges ideas and thoroughly understand topics, helping research observe for details from different situations and settings.

"Students are allowed to use Vietnamese in different situations, not only in discussion." (T2)

Additionally, as teacher instructed on stage on challenging issues or unordinary vocabulary, students were observed to use their phone dictionary to check the meanings, or sometimes they browse ChatGPT and google for searching relevant information to serve their understanding. These practices had different variables but all leading to their passion of fully take in knowledge.

"I allow students to check their phones for word meaning or information checking." (T1)

Lastly, translanguaging practices occurred when students actively asked teachers to translate different terms into Vietnamese, or some challenging issues for their acquisition. To fulfill their wish, teacher firstly tried to use easier way, simpler words to reexplain, then

translating into Vietnamese was carried out if students expressed their confusion on explanation.

"I prioritized English L2 in explaining. But Vietnamese is accepted when students request." (T2)

These observation and explanation coded from teacher interview help us draw the framework of applying stages in translanguaging practices (figure 2).

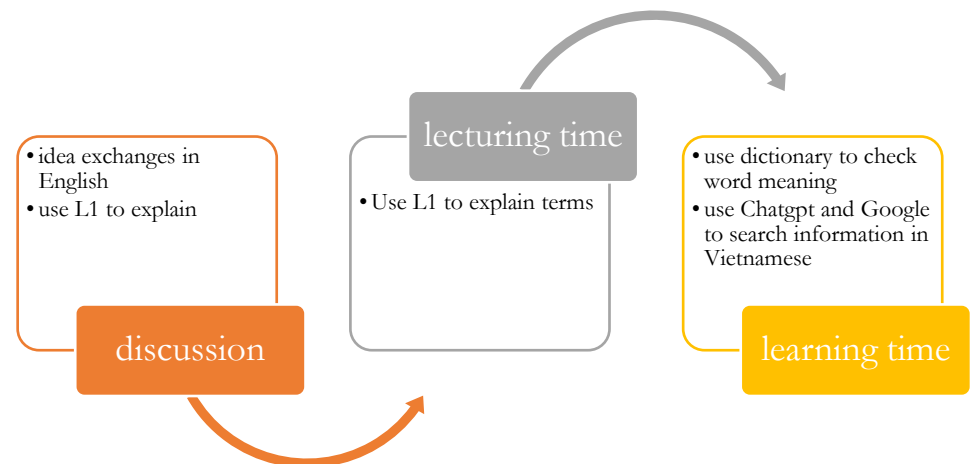


Figure 2. Stages in translanguaging practices.

Students are the agency directly involved in the translanguaging practices. Most of them preferred this strategy in learning English, especially in EMI course. S4 said that *"EMI course mostly contains content knowledge which not only request good English language proficiency, but also real knowledge about subjects. Consequently, if English is used throughout the class session, the limitation of knowledge acquisition is present. This can be solved by translating into Vietnamese in needed. We really valued it"*.

In lecturing time, some other students continued to comment on the use of Vietnamese in EMI courses:

"I can't understand everything in this course in English. some terms are hard. I really want my teacher to use Vietnamese to explain." (S8)

"The content is hard, containing many new terms. We need Vietnamese to really understand what teacher are lecturing." (S4)

Discussion time riches in translanguaging practices. Many students eagerly expressed:

"Sometimes in discussion time, I couldn't fully express my ideas in English. That's why I need Vietnamese to deliver what I want to share with my partners." (S2)

"Discussion time allows me to switch between English and Vietnamese freely. The translation helps me in ideas generation" (S3)

In learning time, the application of translanguaging practices seemed to be more flexible as the combination of verbal and nonverbal communication were utilized. It is observed that students frequently spent time using their phones and web browser to check content meaning or language meaning. While being attentive to teacher's lecture, student could take notes, use Google and ChatGPT to translate terms, content to Vietnamese. This might consolidate their understanding and motivate them more attentively to what is being shared on the stage.

"When I don't know any word meaning, I use my phone to check their meaning in Vietnamese immediately" (S10)

"I often search more information which is related to the content lesson on Google or ChatGPT. This is really helpful because it helps me not stop from catching up with the lesson." (S7)

4.2. Students and Teachers' Attitudes to Translanguaging

Collected from the interview, teachers and students expressed their positive insights with the use of translanguaging practices in EMI courses.

Both teachers do not show any judgment to the use of translanguaging. This is because translanguaging is able to bring many benefits to the students understanding of the lesson content. T1 said *"I set up the rules of using Vietnamese in my course at the initial stage as I see the benefits of using it. Students sometimes struggled with word meaning or difficult terms, causing the ineffectiveness of imparting content knowledge. As a result, they are allowed to use Vietnamese to express themselves with me or partner in these cases"*. There is a slight difference between T1 and T2. T2 has positive insight in the use of translanguaging between L1 and L2, but he preferred students using L2- English

because he perceived English as medium instruction in this course, so English is a must to be utilized in the process of content and language acquisition. Yet, he accepted Vietnamese in the case of scaffolding students understanding. He said *“I prioritize English to be used all the time. But when student requested to be explained in Vietnamese or used Vietnamese to give ideas, this is also happily accepted”*.

Moreover, the two teachers confirmed the lure of translanguaging in terms of motivating students to learn and search further on content lesson.

“My students seem to be motivated to learn and discuss on topic in Vietnamese. In translanguaging classroom environment, they share more and discuss more. That is really good.” (T1)

“Students actively share, search information in both English and Vietnamese. This might be the availability of using Vietnamese which helps them relax and reduce anxiety in speaking.” (T1)

From student perspectives, most of them liked using both L1 and L2 in their learning in EMI. They satisfied with using Vietnamese to fully express their ideas without any language barrier.

“I feel very comfortable in EMI course with the support of Vietnamese usage. There are many terms and content I find them hard to understand in full 100% English. With Vietnamese, the problem is easily solved” (S9)

“Without Vietnamese, it will be a disaster. I cannot understand what teacher explain in full 100% English.” (S5)

“I don’t use Vietnamese much, but in some situations, I cannot express myself in English. Vietnamese is a perfect choice.” (S4)

Moreover, have been allowed to use Vietnamese in learning EMI, students felt more motivated and anxiety-reduced to learn.

“I feel released and motivated to learn EMI because when I have trouble in understanding in English, I am allowed to use my phone to check word meaning, or search content in Vietnamese.” (S1)

“Really happy to use both Vietnamese and English when learning. I no longer felt pressure in using English all the time” (S6)

Figure 3 shows positive insights with the use of translanguaging practices in EMI courses according to teachers and students.

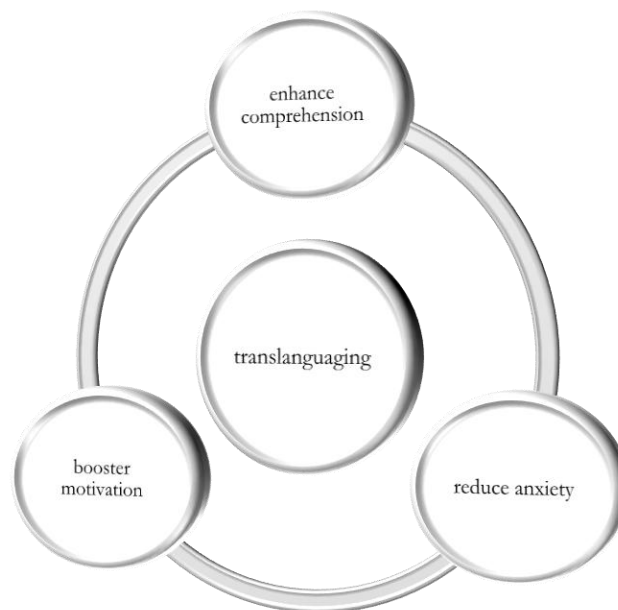


Figure 3. Benefits of translanguaging.

Therefore, the findings show that translanguaging was most frequently implemented during discussion activities, where both teachers and students flexibly alternated between English and Vietnamese to enhance understanding, idea generation, and participation. Overall, both teachers and students expressed positive attitudes toward translanguaging in EMI courses, highlighting its role in improving comprehension, reducing anxiety, increasing motivation, and supporting deeper content learning.

5. Discussion

Translanguaging is perceived to help students better understanding the lesson content in EMI courses. This is so relevant to previous studies on the same area. In the study of Langkau and Sulaiman (2025) and Mbirimi-Hungwe (2022), translanguaging allows students to apply their languages to generate the complexity of concepts, benefiting in improving their retention of subject materials in language, science, and business. Moreover, when translanguaging between L1 and L2, students are observed to enhance awareness of language structures, leading to more thorough learning and cognitive engagement (Parra & Proctor, 2021; Langkau, & Sulaiman, 2025). As students exchange their ideas with the switching between L1 and L2, they obviously have full power to control what they want to share, supporting them to recognize and apply the variety of languages in different shades or nuances.

Translanguaging can boost motivation in learning English in EMI courses. It creates a very inclusive learning environment in which students are allowed to use L1 in some cases to promote their learning. In such environments, students feel plausible to engage in, cooperate, and express complex ideas, leading full comprehension and classroom engagement (Li et al., 2025; Wong & Tian, 2025). In this current study, it was found that students would be more motivated in participating in activities since they had no pressure on using all L2 in their sharing. In the case of languages or ideas absence, they switch to Vietnamese to express themselves, bringing more benefits to the sharing and content absorption.

In this current study, translanguaging can help students reduce their anxiety in learning EMI courses. With the scaffolding of Vietnamese, students were more comfortable to express their ideas with no concerns about how to expose full L2. This clearly reduces their anxiety, helping them more engaged in class content. This is relevant with some previous studies, in which students instructed with translanguaging strategies witnessed a significant decrease in speaking anxiety (Tai, 2025; Sah & Li, 2024).

All in all, translanguaging is perceived to be worth trying in teaching and learning due to its vast benefits. The proven benefits of enhancing students' comprehension, boosting motivation, and reducing anxiety in EMI courses demonstrate the value of applying translanguaging in the English classroom. However, to maximize the ultimate lure of translanguaging, teachers are suggested to have more preparations for activities, and appropriate controls to minimize the students' reliance on their native language.

6. Conclusions

The current study presented some benefits of using translanguaging in EMI classroom from the participation of teachers and students. They both confirmed its positiveness in comprehension enhancement, motivation boosting, and anxiety reduction. The flexible swapping between L1 and L2 could assist students in understanding new concepts and terms in EMI courses through the process of meaning negotiation, discussion, and ideas exchanging. Through the discussion, or stimulous feedback, students are more engaged in learning, less anxious about their learning. It, hence, motivated students to more actively participate in learning.

Translanguaging has a crucial pedagogical implication. In teaching, with translanguaging teacher allows students to fully implement linguistic repertoire to grasp ideas, engage in discussion, and extend knowledge. It also serves as a resource to lower anxiety, boost motivation, and encourage students to generate complex ideas or content, leading to develop target language. Teachers are supposed to design variety of tasks that use multiple languages while maintaining learning goals. This approach can be able to enhance comprehension and content learning while raising strong awareness of language such as vocabulary, grammar, and discourse across languages. As a good teacher, doing more action research, and implementing more translanguaging practices can get closer to the proposed benefits in EMI courses.

Translanguaging seems not to be much considered in testing and assessments. There remains a gap between learning space and performance space. As a result, translanguaging should be incorporated into formative assessment across different stages, including planning, drafting, and collaborative writing.

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