



Pedagogical translanguaging in English classrooms: teachers' and students' experiences in a Thai secondary school

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Abstract

This qualitative study examines how Thai EFL teachers utilize pedagogical translanguaging in multilingual secondary school classrooms, employing both planned and unplanned strategies to support English language learning. Grounded in Cenoz and Gorter's (2021) multilingual pedagogical translanguaging model, the study investigates how teachers integrate students' first languages (L1)—including Standard Thai and Isan—alongside English to scaffold comprehension, foster participation, and manage classroom interaction. Data were collected through classroom observations, video recordings, field notes, and stimulated recall interviews with three teachers and twelve students from three grade levels. Thematic analysis revealed five primary instructional functions of translanguaging: promoting engagement, enhancing understanding, boosting learner confidence, supporting mixed-ability groups, and facilitating classroom management. Students generally responded positively, citing increased clarity and reduced anxiety; however, some higher-proficiency learners preferred immersion approaches. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of translanguaging in EFL contexts, while also pointing to the challenges posed by prevailing English-only ideologies. The study advocates for more inclusive language education policies, enhanced teacher preparation in multilingual pedagogies, and ongoing research on learner experiences across diverse sociolinguistic contexts.

Keywords: Pedagogical translanguaging, Thai EFL classrooms, multilingual education, language policy and practice, student language engagement

Introduction

In recent years, English Language Teaching (ELT) has undergone a significant transformation toward more inclusive, context-responsive approaches that reflect the global and multilingual realities of English use. This pedagogical shift is informed by the Global Englishes (GE) paradigm, which challenges the dominance of native-speaker norms by positioning English as a pluricentric and adaptive language used in diverse sociolinguistic contexts (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Jenkins, 2015). In line with this paradigm, there is growing recognition of the need for teaching methodologies that embrace linguistic diversity and foster multilingual communicative competence.

Among these evolving approaches, translanguaging has gained prominence as a transformative and equity-oriented pedagogy. Translanguaging refers to the dynamic use of multilingual learners' full linguistic repertoires—including their L1 and English—to scaffold learning, promote engagement, and affirm learner identities (Ambele, 2022; García & Li, 2022). Rather than treating languages as discrete and bounded systems, translanguaging offers a fluid framework that positions all languages and semiotic resources as integral to communication and meaning-making (Viegen, 2020).

While translanguaging has been widely studied in bilingual and English Medium Instruction (EMI) settings, particularly in content subjects like science and mathematics (García & Kley, 2016; Vogel & García, 2017), fewer studies have examined how translanguaging is implemented in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classrooms—especially in Southeast Asian contexts where English is not a medium of instruction but a taught subject. In these environments, teachers often face institutional pressure to adopt English-only instruction, despite the linguistic heterogeneity of their students. Moreover, much of the existing research has focused on planned translanguaging strategies initiated by teachers, leaving unplanned or emergent translanguaging practices underexplored (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2024; Sayer, 2013; Tian et al., 2024).

This study aims to fill these gaps by examining how Thai EFL teachers in secondary schools implement both planned and unplanned translanguaging practices to support student learning and engagement. Thailand represents a linguistically rich yet underrepresented context in translanguaging research, with students frequently speaking both Standard Thai and regional varieties, such as Isan. By examining how teachers incorporate these languages alongside English, this study aims to understand how translanguaging is adapted and negotiated within the constraints of national curricula and classroom realities.

The study is grounded in Cenoz and Gorter's (2021) pedagogical translanguaging framework, which emphasizes the strategic and intentional use of students' full linguistic repertoires in classroom instruction. This approach is particularly relevant in EFL contexts, where access to English is often limited to school settings, and where students' L1s remain a critical resource for learning. The study also draws on GE-informed pedagogies to examine how Thai EFL teachers create translanguaging spaces—intentional and unintentional zones of multilingual meaning-making that foster identity, inclusion, and learner autonomy (Li, 2011).

To this end, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do Thai EFL teachers design and implement planned and unplanned translanguaging strategies in multilingual secondary classrooms?
2. How do students perceive and respond to teachers' translanguaging practices, and how do these perceptions vary across proficiency levels and linguistic backgrounds?

Literature Review

Translanguaging in Language Education

The pedagogical evolution of ELT—from structuralist grammar instruction to communicative and inclusive approaches—has opened space for methodologies that reflect learners’ multilingual realities. Translanguaging, initially conceptualized by Williams (1994) and later expanded by García and Wei (2014), marks a departure from traditional models, such as code-switching. Whereas code-switching assumes separate, bounded languages, translanguaging views language use as an integrated repertoire from which multilingual speakers draw fluidly to create meaning (Makoni & Pennycook, 2006; Otheguy et al., 2018).

In education, pedagogical translanguaging is defined as the intentional, structured use of multiple languages to scaffold content and language learning. It emphasizes the role of teachers in designing activities that leverage students’ existing linguistic knowledge while developing their academic English proficiency (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). This perspective aligns with the Focus on Multilingualism framework, which treats multilingualism not as a problem but as a pedagogical resource. In classrooms, it enables the incorporation of multiple semiotic resources—spoken, written, visual—to enhance learners’ access to knowledge (Leonet et al., 2020).

While the deconstructivist view of translanguaging rejects the L1/L2 dichotomy entirely, pedagogical translanguaging frameworks, such as those of Cenoz and Gorter, maintain the practical distinction between languages for instructional purposes. This distinction is beneficial in EFL settings, where teachers must balance the development of English proficiency with the realities of learners’ linguistic and cultural repertoires.

Translanguaging in Thai EFL Classrooms

Despite a strong English-only ideology in Thai education policy (Punthumasen, 2007; Kaur et al., 2016), translanguaging practices are emerging as pragmatic tools among Thai EFL teachers—particularly in regions with high linguistic diversity such as northeastern Thailand, where students speak both Standard Thai and Isan (Ambele, 2022; Alexander & McCargo, 2014). Translanguaging in these contexts helps to scaffold instruction, clarify meaning, and promote learner confidence—functions that are particularly valuable in classrooms with significant gaps in student proficiency and limited access to authentic English input (Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024; Chaisiri, 2022).

However, research on translanguaging in Thai EFL settings remains limited and is often conflated with code-switching. Ambele (2022) and Chaisiri (2022) identified several challenges that limit the visibility and development of pedagogical translanguaging in Thai EFL classrooms. First, there exists a strong policy preference for monolingual English instruction, often misaligned with actual classroom practices, which discourages the integration of Thai or other home languages into the teaching curriculum. Second, teacher education programs often fail to prepare instructors with theoretical and practical training in multilingual pedagogies. Third, and most critically, there is a limited body of research that operationalizes pedagogical translanguaging as a structured teaching approach in Thai EFL contexts.

Importantly, these reasons reflect systemic, institutional, and epistemological constraints, not merely perceptions about whether Thai learners are monolingual or bilingual. This study builds on the work of scholars like Anderson and Lightfoot (2021), Cummins (2021), and Rajendram (2021), who emphasize the cognitive, affective, and social affordances of translanguaging in language learning. It also addresses the need to investigate unplanned or spontaneous translanguaging, which occurs organically during instruction and reveals teachers’ adaptive strategies

in real-time. This study addresses the gaps identified by Ambele (2022) and Chaisiri (2022) by investigating how trained teachers conceptualize and enact pedagogical translanguaging in Thai EFL classrooms. It builds on the multilingual perspective of translanguaging as articulated by Cenoz and Gorter (2021), who argue for a framework that supports the use of multiple named languages in planned instruction without discarding their psychological or social boundaries. This stance differs from the deconstructive orientation proposed by scholars such as García and Li (2014) or Otheguy et al. (2018), who conceptualize language as an integrated system and reject the notion of distinct linguistic codes altogether. While such poststructuralist theories provide valuable critiques of linguistic essentialism, they may not be fully compatible with pedagogical objectives in EFL contexts where named languages remain socio-politically relevant (see Cummins, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017, 2021).

By adopting a multilingual pedagogical lens rather than a purely theoretical or sociolinguistic one, this study provides a structured perspective on translanguaging as a classroom practice. It demonstrates how Thai EFL teachers—often navigating rigid curricular demands and monolingual expectations—negotiate translanguaging strategies to enhance learning, foster inclusivity, and support the linguistic and emotional needs of diverse learners.

Experiences with Pedagogical Translanguaging

The implementation of pedagogical translanguaging in English language classrooms has been found to vary significantly across global contexts, influenced by institutional policies, teacher beliefs, learner identities, and sociolinguistic dynamics. Studies from multilingual educational settings such as Malaysia (Rajendram, 2021), Indonesia (Rasman & Margana, 2022), and the Philippines (Tupas, 2018) have documented both positive experiences and persistent challenges in using translanguaging to support English language teaching and learning. These include enhanced student engagement, improved comprehension of complex content, and a stronger sense of linguistic identity and agency (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Cummins, 2021).

In these contexts, pedagogical translanguaging is often employed purposefully to scaffold academic content, support metalinguistic awareness, and create inclusive classroom environments (Choi et al., 2020; Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Lin, 2017). For instance, Rajendram (2021) highlights how Malaysian pre-service teachers incorporated translanguaging into lesson planning to bridge linguistic and cultural gaps. Similarly, Dryden et al. (2021) reported that Australian teachers in linguistically diverse classrooms utilized students' heritage languages to facilitate concept mastery and foster learner participation.

In Thailand's ELT context, where the dominance of English-only policies continues to shape instructional norms (Kaur et al., 2016; Punthumasen, 2007), teachers' experiences with translanguaging remain underexamined. Despite these policy-level constraints, some educators have begun integrating students' L1 into instruction for both affective and cognitive support (Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024; Chaisiri, 2022). However, many of these practices are informal or untheorized and are often not explicitly identified as pedagogical translanguaging in research or teacher training programs. This gap points to a need for more empirical studies that examine not only whether translanguaging occurs but also how it is conceptualized, experienced, and justified by teachers within the Thai EFL context.

Several Thai-based studies (e.g., Kiatkeeree & Ruangjaroon, 2022; Phongsa et al., 2018) suggest that teachers who draw on Thai in the classroom tend to do so to clarify grammatical concepts, manage classroom behavior, explain vocabulary, and reduce learner anxiety. These strategies align with the multilingual perspective on pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021), where named languages are recognized and strategically used to optimize teaching and learning outcomes. However, these studies also show that many teachers hesitate to

label their practices as “translanguaging” due to either unfamiliarity with the term or fear of violating institutional language norms (Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024).

Moreover, some teachers equate translanguaging with code-switching, which may cause conceptual confusion. As emphasized by Cenoz and Gorter (2017, 2021), pedagogical translanguaging differs from code-switching in its intentionality, structure, and pedagogical goals. Code-switching often occurs spontaneously and without explicit instructional planning, while pedagogical translanguaging involves the deliberate design of lessons that incorporate learners’ full linguistic repertoires to enhance meaning-making, learning efficiency, and learner empowerment.

Nevertheless, tension persists between multilingual teaching practices and the monolingual ideologies underpinning language education in Thailand. Teachers who attempt to implement translanguaging often encounter challenges such as a lack of administrative support, the absence of guidelines in the national curriculum, and skepticism from colleagues or parents who equate English-only instruction with higher language proficiency (Fang & Baker, 2018; Kirkpatrick, 2012). Additionally, teacher education programs seldom include training in multilingual pedagogies, leaving many educators without a theoretical or practical foundation for incorporating translanguaging in their classrooms (Chaisiri, 2022).

This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the experiences of EFL teachers in Thai higher education who actively engage in pedagogical translanguaging. It examines how teachers understand the concept, how they integrate it into their teaching practices, and how they navigate institutional and ideological constraints. By adopting Cenoz and Gorter’s (2021) multilingual framework, this research provides a structured lens through which translanguaging practices are not only observed but also critically interpreted in light of broader educational goals and multilingual realities.

Importantly, this study highlights the relevance of pedagogical translanguaging in developing multilingual competencies in Thai learners, particularly in an increasingly globalized education landscape. It aligns with calls from scholars such as Cummins (2021), García and Kleyn (2016), and He and Lin (2021) to reimagine language classrooms as multilingual spaces, where the goal is not the erasure of the L1, but its integration as a resource to enhance learning and identity development. This orientation challenges the lingering dominance of English-only ideologies and supports a shift towards more inclusive and context-sensitive teaching practices.

In sum, the lived experiences of Thai EFL teachers reveal a complex negotiation between policy, pedagogy, and practice. While pedagogical translanguaging holds promise as a transformative approach, its successful implementation requires not only individual teacher agency but also systemic change in policy and teacher education to recognize and value multilingual practices as legitimate and effective.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Cenoz and Gorter’s (2021) Pedagogical Translanguaging Framework, which takes a multilingual perspective on language use in education. Unlike deconstructivist approaches (e.g., García & Wei, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2018), which reject distinctions between named languages, this framework recognizes language boundaries while encouraging the strategic use of learners’ full linguistic repertoires to support academic development. The framework comprises three key dimensions. First, it emphasizes metalinguistic awareness, encouraging students to compare linguistic structures across languages to deepen their understanding of language systems. Second, it promotes the intentional use of all linguistic resources, including learners’ L1 and L2, in both oral and written tasks. Third, it advocates for planned instruction, where translanguaging is embedded in lesson design to meet specific learning goals.

This model is particularly well-suited to the Thai EFL context, where English is taught as a foreign language under policies often influenced by monolingual ideologies (Kirkpatrick, 2012). In such settings, teachers work within clearly defined language boundaries, making the multilingual orientation of Cenoz and Gorter's framework more practical than fluid models of translanguaging. Moreover, this framework clearly distinguishes pedagogical translanguaging from code-switching. While code-switching tends to be spontaneous and unplanned, pedagogical translanguaging is a deliberate instructional strategy designed to enhance learning (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017, 2021). It also differs from simple L1 scaffolding by involving active, purposeful use of both languages in constructing knowledge.

In applying this framework, the study aims to explore how Thai EFL teachers design, implement, and justify translanguaging practices in response to institutional constraints. The framework also provides a structured lens for examining how these practices support language learning within a multilingual, yet policy-restricted, environment.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study approach to explore pedagogical translanguaging in English classrooms. A case study methodology was chosen because it enables an in-depth examination of a specific phenomenon within its natural context, making it ideal for investigating the complexities of translanguaging practices (Yin, 2025). This approach aligns with constructivist epistemology, which prioritizes understanding participants' experiences and perspectives in real-world settings (Tisdell & Merriam, 2025). The study specifically focuses on the dimensions of pedagogical translanguaging, including teachers' strategies and students' responses.

Context

The first author, who is also an English teacher at a public secondary school located in north-eastern Thailand, served as the primary in-field researcher and selected participants from the same institution for this study. The school, situated in a semi-urban area within the Isan region, provides education from lower to upper secondary levels and enrolls students predominantly from Thai-speaking and Isan-speaking households. English is taught as a foreign language within a standardized national curriculum framework, yet there are no specialized English-only policies or classrooms. This linguistic diversity and flexible classroom policy provided a naturally conducive environment for observing translanguaging practices.

The institution was purposefully selected for three key reasons. First, its linguistic and cultural diversity—where Standard Thai, Isan, and English coexist—offered an ideal context to examine how students draw on their full linguistic repertoires. Second, the school's absence of strict English-only language policies allowed teachers to apply translanguaging practices with minimal institutional constraint. Third, as the first author was both a practitioner and an insider within the school community, access to participants, classroom settings, and rich contextual knowledge was readily available, enhancing the depth and authenticity of data collection.

The research was conducted in three classrooms representing different educational levels: (i) Grade 7: A Fundamental English course with 38 students (11 males, 27 females), ages 12–13, focused on foundational English skills including vocabulary, grammar, and speaking; (ii) Grade 10: An English for Communication course with 31 students (7 males, 24 females), ages 15–16, emphasizing interactive language use, national exam preparation, and fluency; and (iii) Grade 12: An advanced English course with 25 students (6 males, 19 females), ages 17–18, covering complex grammar, academic writing, and oral presentation in preparation

for university entrance and vocational pathways. All classrooms were located nearby, which facilitated regular observation by the researchers and supported the consistency of data collection procedures across grade levels.

Participants

Teacher Participants

Teacher participants were selected based on three key criteria: (1) possession of at least a bachelor's degree in TESOL or a closely related field, (2) a minimum of three years of teaching experience in multilingual Thai classrooms, and (3) demonstrable use of translanguaging practices in their English instruction. These criteria were deemed essential to ensure that the participants had both the academic training and classroom experience necessary for implementing and reflecting on translanguaging pedagogies. The inclusion of a TESOL degree as a requirement ensured that the participants were trained in language acquisition theories and methodologies that support multilingual practices.

Participant recruitment was conducted through informal in-school observation by the first author, followed by direct invitation. The researcher's established rapport with fellow teachers facilitated trust and transparency during the consent process. Detailed information about the study, its objectives, and ethical guidelines was provided. Written informed consent was obtained from each teacher, and their anonymity was maintained throughout the research process.

Teacher A: A Thai female teacher with 29 years of experience teaching lower secondary English. She holds a B.Ed. in English and uses Standard Thai and Isan strategically to support students' comprehension and participation.

Teacher B: A foreign male teacher with 11 years of experience teaching in Thai secondary schools. Fluent in English, Thai, Isan, and three Filipino languages, he uses his multilingual repertoire to enhance classroom inclusivity and communication.

Teacher C: A Thai female teacher with 22 years of experience teaching senior high school. She holds a B.Ed. in English and an M.Ed. in English Language Teaching, with a CEFR proficiency score of C1. She incorporates translanguaging to enhance comprehension and boost learner confidence.

Ethical procedures included preparing and distributing a consent form that outlined the study's goals, the voluntary nature of participation, participants' rights to withdraw at any time, data confidentiality, and the intended use of recordings and interviews for research purposes. Teachers were informed of how their data would be anonymized and were assured that participation would not affect their professional evaluations or standing.

Student Participants

Students were selected from the three classrooms taught by the participating teachers (Grades 7, 10, and 12). One class per grade level was chosen for video-recorded observation, specifically the first section of each grade, due to its consistent student attendance and stable classroom composition.

Twelve students (six males and six females) were then purposively selected from these classes based on the following criteria: (1) academic performance in English—based on their most recent English exam scores; (2) teachers' assessments of students' language proficiency, to ensure representation from high-, medium-, and low-proficiency groups; and (3) visible engagement during observed classes where translanguaging was employed, as reflected in classroom interactions and video recordings.

These criteria were critical to understanding how students across proficiency levels experienced and perceived translanguaging in English learning. Including students with varying academic achievement provided a more nuanced picture of how translanguaging practices supported or hindered learning outcomes.

In line with ethical research protocols, informed consent was obtained from all student participants and their legal guardians, as most students were under the age of 18. Consent forms for parents/guardians clearly explained the purpose of the study, the nature of their child's involvement, and assurances of anonymity and voluntary participation. Students were also verbally briefed and given the opportunity to decline participation without consequence.

Research Instruments

To explore teachers' and students' experiences with pedagogical translanguaging in English classrooms, this study utilized two primary qualitative research instruments: (1) classroom observation with field notes and (2) stimulated recall interviews. These instruments provided complementary insights into pedagogical practices and participant perceptions.

Classroom Observation with Field Notes

Classroom observation, supported by detailed field notes and video recordings, was used to document real-time classroom practices, teacher-student interactions, language use, and the semiotic resources employed. This method enabled the capture of both verbal and non-verbal elements of communication, providing a comprehensive view of pedagogical translanguaging in action.

However, this method had its limitations. First, the presence of the researcher and video equipment may have influenced the natural behavior of teachers and students, a phenomenon known as the observer effect. Participants may have altered their typical classroom conduct due to being observed, which could impact the authenticity of the recorded data. Second, technical issues such as background noise or camera angle occasionally affected the clarity of the recordings, particularly during group interactions. Third, while video recordings allowed for detailed review, some spontaneous linguistic or cultural cues might have been missed or misinterpreted in the absence of audio-visual clarity. Despite these challenges, classroom observation remained an essential tool for identifying translanguaging practices, triangulating findings with interview data, and enriching contextual understanding.

Stimulated Recall Interviews

Stimulated recall interviews were conducted with both teachers and selected students to gain deeper insights into their thoughts and decisions during specific moments of classroom instruction. These interviews involved reviewing segments of the video recordings and inviting participants to reflect on their experiences and the language choices they made.

While stimulated recall offers valuable introspective data, it is subject to several limitations. Chief among them is the reliance on self-reporting, which may introduce recall bias or social desirability bias. Participants may unintentionally misrepresent or reshape their memories to align with perceived expectations. Furthermore, some students, especially those with lower English proficiency or limited reflective experience, found it difficult to articulate their thoughts clearly during the interview sessions. The time lag between classroom events and the interview sessions may also have contributed to memory distortions. Nevertheless, stimulated recall interviews provided a valuable platform for participants to express their perspectives and clarify their language use decisions, thereby enriching the analysis of translanguaging practices.

Data Collection Procedure

The data collection process followed a multi-phase approach. First, ethical approval was secured from the school administration, and the study was explained to three selected English teachers. Informed consent was obtained from both teachers and students, and parental consent was acquired for all student participants under the age of 18.

Next, classroom observations were carried out over four weeks, with video recordings capturing teaching practices and student interactions during regular English lessons in grades 7, 10, and 12. The video data was supplemented by detailed field notes written by the researchers immediately after each session.

After initial classroom observation, stimulated recall interviews were conducted with all three teachers and twelve students. Teachers were shown specific clips where translanguaging occurred and asked to explain their choices, strategies, and the challenges they faced. Similarly, students were prompted to reflect on their engagement, comprehension, and emotional responses during those moments.

This two-tiered data collection—comprising both observational and reflective components—enabled the researchers to capture both the enacted and perceived dimensions of pedagogical translanguaging.

Data Analysis

The data collected from classroom observations, field notes, and stimulated recall interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). This analytical approach was deemed appropriate for the study due to its flexibility and its emphasis on identifying and interpreting patterns across qualitative datasets. Thematic analysis is particularly well-suited for research that explores participants' experiences and perceptions, such as the use of pedagogical translanguaging in English classrooms.

The process began with a thorough familiarization with the data. The researchers repeatedly reviewed all video transcripts, interview scripts, and observation notes to immerse themselves in the content and gain a holistic understanding. This initial phase allowed for the identification of meaningful patterns and potential areas of interest. Following this, initial codes were manually generated from the data by highlighting recurring expressions, language choices, and behaviors related to translanguaging. These codes were then systematically organized into broader thematic categories that reflected commonalities across different classrooms and participant perspectives.

Once preliminary themes were identified, they were carefully reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness. The researchers compared themes across data sources to validate consistency and alignment with the overall focus of the study. Themes were then defined, clearly named, and supported with representative excerpts that illustrated the complexity of participants' experiences. The final stage involved writing up the themes into cohesive findings that captured how translanguaging practices were enacted and experienced by both teachers and students.

To assist in managing and coding the large volume of qualitative data, MAXQDA 2022 software was utilized. This tool facilitated a structured coding process, enabled the visualization of theme co-occurrences, and supported cross-comparison among participant groups. The use of MAXQDA enhanced the efficiency, accuracy, and transparency of the thematic analysis process.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied Schwandt, Lincoln and Guba's (2007) four evaluative criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Each criterion was addressed through deliberate methodological practices that strengthened the quality and reliability of the findings.

Credibility was established through prolonged engagement in the research context, including repeated classroom visits and multiple rounds of interviews with teachers and students. This ongoing interaction allowed the researchers to build rapport and elicit honest, reflective responses. Triangulation of data—using classroom observations, field notes, and interview transcripts—further reinforced the validity of the results by providing multiple perspectives on the same phenomenon.

To enhance transferability, the study provided thick descriptions of the research site, participant demographics, classroom settings, and instructional practices. These detailed contextual accounts enable readers and future researchers to determine whether the findings can be applied to other educational contexts with similar linguistic and cultural dynamics.

Dependability was addressed by maintaining an audit trail throughout the research process. This included comprehensive records of data collection procedures, coding strategies, thematic development, and researcher reflections. Such documentation ensures that the study's methodology is transparent and replicable. Additionally, the researchers engaged in peer debriefing to examine and validate coding decisions and theme interpretations, thereby reducing the potential for subjective bias.

Confirmability was achieved through continual reflexivity, wherein the researchers acknowledged their dual role as both insider-practitioners and academic observers. Reflexive journaling and critical self-questioning were employed to monitor potential biases and maintain objectivity in interpreting participants' responses. By aligning the research process with these trustworthiness criteria, the study ensured that its conclusions were grounded, consistent, and credible.

Findings and Discussion

This section presents the key findings of the study, organized thematically according to the research objectives. It highlights how Thai EFL teachers employed planned and unplanned pedagogical translanguaging strategies in their classrooms and their students' responses. The findings are discussed in relation to current literature and situated within the multilingual pedagogical translanguaging framework proposed by Cenoz and Gorter (2021).

Teachers' Experiences with Pedagogical Translanguaging Practices in English Classrooms

All three participating teachers reported using pedagogical translanguaging to facilitate learning in their classrooms. This involved the strategic and flexible use of students' L1—primarily Thai and Isan—alongside English to support comprehension, classroom interaction, and emotional engagement. The findings confirm that translanguaging practices were both planned (embedded into lesson design) and unplanned (emergent in response to real-time student needs), reflecting the dual nature of instructional adaptation in Thai EFL contexts.

The teachers drew on L1 to explain grammatical concepts, introduce vocabulary, give instructions, manage classroom behavior, and check understanding. These strategies align with the multilingual view of translanguaging, which recognizes the educational value of drawing upon named languages as cognitive and affective resources (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Cummins, 2021). For instance, Teacher A, who taught Grade 7, emphasized that younger learners often lacked the linguistic maturity to grasp English instructions or abstract concepts, making the use of L1 essential for scaffolding. Similarly, Teacher B—an experienced foreign teacher fluent in Thai and Isan—incorporated students' home languages into group discussions and explanations, which facilitated learner participation and strengthened classroom rapport.

Teacher C, who taught Grade 12 students, shared how integrating L1 in complex tasks such as argumentative writing and oral presentations helped reduce anxiety and encouraged students to express their ideas more confidently. Rather than viewing translanguaging as a fallback, she perceived it as a tool for cultivating students' critical thinking and language awareness. This aligns with Anderson and Lightfoot's (2021) assertion that translanguaging enhances learner agency and supports deep-level cognitive engagement.

Notably, while some literature (e.g., García & Otheguy, 2019) critiques the reduction of translanguaging to simple L1 use, viewing it as a step backward into traditional language separation, the teachers in this study enacted translanguaging through flexible and intentional use of both languages for meaning-making. As García and Otheguy (2019) argue, treating translanguaging as merely L1 incorporation risks reinforcing hierarchical views of language competence. In this study, however, translanguaging was conceptualized not as code-switching between bounded systems, but as a pedagogical strategy for affirming learners' full linguistic identities that challenges the compartmentalization of languages. Therefore, this study reframes the use of L1 not as a discrete tool, but as part of an integrated pedagogical repertoire that facilitates learners' access to meaning and participation in the classroom.

Furthermore, García and Li Wei (2014) focus on the unification of multilingual repertoires and the performative, agentic aspects of meaning-making, rather than affective classroom dynamics per se. To support this claim, other scholars such as Cummins (2021) and He and Lin (2021) offer relevant insights. They argue that the use of learners' L1 in instruction can reduce affective barriers, validate learners' cultural identities, and enhance motivation, factors which were evident in this study. For example, during classroom observations, all three teachers expressed that translanguaging helped students feel more comfortable participating in discussions, particularly those with lower English proficiency. This was evident in Grade 10 classrooms, where students hesitated to speak in English but responded eagerly when Thai was allowed as a support language. Similarly, Teacher B noted that some students, especially those from Isan-speaking homes, showed greater willingness to contribute when they were permitted to draw on their full linguistic repertoires. The excerpted student interactions (see 5.2) further reveal how translanguaging served pedagogical functions beyond lexical or grammatical clarification. For instance, a Grade 12 student, when asked to summarize an article, began in English but switched to Thai to clarify her argument. Teacher C affirmed the content and encouraged her to rephrase it in English. This sequence illustrates translanguaging as both a cognitive scaffold and a discursive bridge between thought and expression—a finding echoed in prior research (Rajendram, 2021; Saxena, 2009).

Overall, teachers' experiences demonstrate that pedagogical translanguaging in Thai EFL classrooms operates as both a deliberate instructional strategy and a responsive communication practice. Teachers navigated institutional pressures favoring English-only instruction by adopting translanguaging practices pragmatically, often without explicitly labeling them as such. Their reflections suggest a growing recognition of the benefits of leveraging multilingual repertoires in English instruction—an orientation that challenges monolingual ideologies and supports inclusive language teaching.

Students' Perspectives on Translanguaging Practices in English Classrooms

This section examines students' perceptions of pedagogical translanguaging, focusing on their experiences with the use of Standard Thai and Isan alongside English during English language instruction. Drawing from classroom observations and stimulated recall interviews, the data indicate a range of responses, predominantly positive, though some students expressed a preference for English-only instruction. These insights address the research objective concerning

students’ experiences with pedagogical translanguaging and how these practices impacted their engagement, comprehension, and confidence in English learning.

Table 1 below summarizes the comparative use of translanguaging practices by each teacher across grade levels:

Table 1. Comparative use of translanguaging practices by each teacher across grade levels

Teacher	Grade Level	Experience	Planned Translanguaging Practices	Unplanned Translanguaging Practices	Languages Used
Teacher A	Grade 7 (ages 12–13)	29 years	Vocabulary introduction, grammar explanation	Managing confusion, encouraging shy learners	Thai, Isan, English
Teacher B	Grade 10 (ages 15–16)	11 years	Group tasks, content summaries, oral practice	Clarifying instructions, addressing errors	Thai, Isan, English
Teacher C	Grade 12 (ages 17–18)	22 years	Academic writing tasks, metalinguistic discussions	Encouraging complex ideas, responding to student needs	Thai, English

Most students reported that using their L1—identified in this context as either Standard Thai, Isan, or both—helped them feel more comfortable and motivated in English classes. For example, Student S1-B stated: *“My English proficiency is low, and when the teacher told me to speak only in English... I felt nervous and did not have the confidence. Using only English in class made me afraid of making mistakes... and sometimes, it left me confused. But in classrooms where I am allowed to use Standard Thai, my first language, I feel much more comfortable and confident.”* Similarly, Student S4-B noted: *“Being able to mix in Standard Thai with English... it makes me feel more confident when I am trying to form sentences and... it definitely improves my overall learning experience.”*

These comments highlight how translanguaging can reduce anxiety and increase student participation. Moreover, both S1-B and S4-B come from Isan-speaking backgrounds but identify Standard Thai as a primary school language, suggesting multilingual competence rooted in community and schooling practices. The data support the findings of Galante (2020) and Con-teh (2018) that translanguaging enables students to utilize their full linguistic repertoires to support language development, particularly for those with limited English proficiency.

However, not all students favored the use of translanguaging. S4-A, for instance, acknowledged its benefits but stated: *“I personally prefer learning English from teachers who do the whole class in English. I think it helps improve my language skills, especially listening and speaking.”* S1-C also reflected this view, indicating that while using L1 made lessons easier, English-only instruction offered greater exposure to the target language.

These contrasting views suggest that while translanguaging generally supports engagement and comprehension, some learners, especially those with stronger proficiency or higher motivation,

may perceive English immersion as more effective for skill development. This duality highlights the importance of differentiated instruction tailored to learner needs and preferences, aligning with Cenoz and Gorter's (2021) emphasis on context-sensitive multilingual pedagogical planning.

Teachers' Translanguaging Strategies for EFL Instruction

The findings revealed that the Thai EFL teachers in this study employed a range of translanguaging strategies to address both academic and affective dimensions of student learning. These strategies—promoting engagement, enhancing understanding, building confidence, supporting diverse learners, and managing the classroom—are closely aligned with the multilingual pedagogical framework of Cenoz and Gorter (2021), which advocates for the intentional integration of students' full linguistic repertoires in planned instruction. The present findings also reaffirm recent scholarship in multilingual education that highlights translanguaging as a context-responsive, student-centered pedagogy (Cummins, 2021; He & Lin, 2021).

Promoting Engagement and Participation

Teachers used translanguaging to boost engagement by allowing students to express themselves in familiar languages before transitioning to English. For instance, in Teacher A's lesson on hobbies, students were encouraged to describe activities first in Thai or Isan before attempting to do so in English. Teacher C enhanced engagement by introducing the vocabulary word “*anxiety*” through body language and the following sentence in Thai:

“ฉันต้องอ่านเรื่องนี้^๑อีก^๒เพื่อให้^๓ฉันสอบผ่าน^๔วิชาภาษาอังกฤษ^๕ในวันพรุ่งนี้^๖,”

translated word-by-word as:

“ฉัน (I), ต้อง (must), อ่าน (read), เรื่องนี้ (this topic), อีก (again), เพื่อให้ (so that), ฉัน (I), สอบผ่าน (pass), วิชาภาษาอังกฤษ (English subject), ในวันพรุ่งนี้ (tomorrow).”

The full meaning: “*I must read this topic again so that I pass my English exam tomorrow.*”

This multimodal strategy, combining speech, gesture, and L1, helped students connect emotionally with the vocabulary and context.

The strategic use of translanguaging to promote engagement and participation supports the idea that language flexibility can increase learner agency and classroom interactivity. Students in this study engaged more confidently when encouraged to use L1—either Standard Thai or Isan—as a starting point for classroom communication. This resonates with the work of García and Lin (2017), who emphasized translanguaging as a means of fostering “translanguaging spaces,” where students can use their entire linguistic repertoires without fear of being penalized. Similarly, Creese and Blackledge (2010) argue that translanguaging allows for the co-construction of meaning, particularly in multilingual classrooms where students bring diverse sociolinguistic resources into the learning environment. Teachers in this study demonstrated sensitivity to these resources by scaffolding student responses and gradually transitioning them into English, affirming the pedagogical value of linguistic hybridity.

Enhancing Understanding and Clarity

Translanguaging also served to clarify meaning and support comprehension. When students struggled with vocabulary or instructions, teachers offered explanations in Standard Thai or Isan. In a Grade 12 lesson on weather reports, Teacher C used the Isan phrase “*Lom Hua Kud*”

to explain “tornado,” likening it to a localized windstorm familiar to students. This helped bridge students’ experiential knowledge with academic content, illustrating García’s (2009) assertion that translanguaging connects school-based learning with lived linguistic realities.

Here, translanguaging was often used to scaffold explanations of complex vocabulary and grammar. Teachers employed L1 to make abstract concepts more accessible—an approach supported by recent research from Anderson and Lightfoot (2021) and Yuvayapan (2019), who found that translanguaging in EFL contexts is particularly effective for vocabulary acquisition and grammar instruction. This finding is consistent with those of Mazak and Carroll (2017), who argued that translanguaging can bridge the gap between students’ existing linguistic knowledge and new content. In the Thai EFL context, where English exposure is often limited to classroom settings, such scaffolding is essential for equitable learning outcomes.

Fostering Confidence and Comfort

All three teachers reported that translanguaging fostered a more inclusive and emotionally safe classroom climate. Teacher B’s repeated reassurance to students—“*Any language is okay*,” and “*Don’t worry about grammar*”—encouraged hesitant learners to share ideas in any language. Teacher C adopted a stepwise approach by having students draft sentences in Thai before translating them into English. This scaffolded structure allowed students to think critically without being restricted by their L2 proficiency, reinforcing Warsame’s (2018) findings on translanguaging as a source of linguistic confidence.

The findings also highlight the role of translanguaging in promoting confidence and comfort, particularly among learners with low to mid-proficiency levels. Teachers’ inclusive stance toward L1 use created affective support systems that reduced anxiety and encouraged participation. These results align with Cummins’ (2021) work on identity investment and academic empowerment, which highlights how the legitimization of students’ home languages contributes to their emotional well-being and motivation. Translanguaging, in this context, is not merely a cognitive aid but a psychosocial strategy that validates student identities and mitigates the “deficit” positioning often imposed on non-English speakers (García & Kleyn, 2016).

Supporting Diverse Learners

Teachers adapted translanguaging strategies to support mixed-ability groups. For example, Teacher A paired students of varying proficiency levels during a vocabulary-based Kahoot game. Observations revealed students using both Standard Thai and English to support peer learning, with occasional switches to Isan for added clarity or humor. Here, translanguaging not only facilitated knowledge construction but also promoted social inclusion. Clarifying linguistic identities is crucial: students in this context may be multilingual, speaking Isan at home and Standard Thai at school, with English as a foreign language. Their L1 is therefore contextually dynamic, influenced by domain and community usage.

When it comes to supporting diverse learners, the use of translanguaging to facilitate peer interaction among students of differing proficiency levels mirrors the findings of Rajendram (2021), who noted that translanguaging promotes collaborative learning and peer scaffolding in multilingual classrooms. This form of reciprocal teaching, observed when students used Thai or Isan to support each other during group activities, reflects the social constructivist premise that learning is inherently dialogic and shaped by interaction (Vygotsky, 1978). By enabling students to draw from shared linguistic resources, teachers positioned them not just as learners but as co-mediators of meaning.

Facilitating Classroom Management

Translanguaging was also employed to maintain order and reestablish focus. Teacher A used Isan to discipline students during disruptions:

“ดีเจียบหรือบเจียบ...ดีเซากวนหมุ่บ,”

translated word-by-word as:

“ดี (will),เจียบ (be quiet) หรือ (or) บเจียบ (not be quiet)... ดี (will) เซา (stop) กวน (disturb) หมุ่ (friends) บ (or not)?”

This means: “*Will you be quiet or not? Will you stop disturbing your friends?*”

The use of local language added cultural resonance and immediate comprehension, showing how translanguaging extends beyond pedagogy to classroom governance.

The strategic use of local languages for classroom management further illustrates the multifunctionality of translanguaging. In a culturally contextualized education system like Thailand's, where Isan and Thai coexist as vernacular and institutional languages, respectively, teachers' choice of code for discipline and rapport reflects socio-pragmatic awareness. As noted by Dryden et al. (2021), effective translanguaging pedagogy encompasses not only instructional language use but also relational dynamics, such as maintaining discipline, demonstrating empathy, and fostering teacher-student bonds. Teachers in this study used Isan in moments of emotional or behavioral intervention, indicating that translanguaging supports not only academic but also social-emotional management within the classroom.

Importantly, the translanguaging strategies observed in this study challenge the prevailing monolingual ideologies that still underpin much of Thailand's ELT policy (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2024; Kaur et al., 2016). Despite national curricula emphasizing English-only instruction, teachers pragmatically used Thai and Isan to meet their students' immediate learning needs. This highlights the pedagogical divergence between policy and practice—a theme echoed in the work of Ambele (2022) and Fang and Baker (2018), who argue that translanguaging often emerges as a practical response to contextual realities, even in systems where it is unofficial or unsupported.

Overall, the findings validate translanguaging as a pedagogical approach that is not only viable but necessary in EFL contexts marked by linguistic diversity, limited exposure to English, and rigid curricular norms. They also call for broader institutional recognition of translanguaging as a legitimate instructional strategy, with implications for curriculum design, teacher education, and language policy reform. As the results suggest, translanguaging provides Thai EFL teachers with a flexible, responsive, and culturally grounded toolkit for navigating the complexities of language instruction in multilingual settings.

Conclusion

This study examined how Thai EFL teachers in secondary school classrooms incorporate pedagogical translanguaging into their instructional repertoire. Drawing on classroom observations and interviews, the findings demonstrate that translanguaging—when used intentionally—supports learners' comprehension, reduces affective barriers, and creates more inclusive classroom environments. Teachers employed a range of planned and unplanned strategies that integrated students' L1, including both Standard Thai and Isan, alongside English. These strategies served multiple pedagogical functions, including clarifying complex concepts, scaffolding vocabulary acquisition, boosting student engagement, and supporting classroom management.

From the students' perspective, translanguaging was generally viewed as a helpful and affirming practice, especially among those with lower proficiency levels. However, some high-proficiency learners expressed a preference for English-only instruction, suggesting that translanguaging may not be universally perceived as beneficial. These mixed perspectives highlight the importance of differentiated approaches tailored to learners' needs, as well as the need to balance exposure to English with the use of familiar languages for support.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature on translanguaging by offering empirical insights from a non-Anglophone, underrepresented EFL context. While much existing research focuses on bilingual or EMI settings, this study demonstrates that translanguaging can be a productive pedagogical strategy even in environments where English is taught as a foreign language and institutional ideologies often favor monolingual norms.

Implications for Research, Practice, and Policy

The findings of this study offer important implications for teacher education, classroom practice, and language policy reform. First, in terms of teacher education, the results underscore the necessity of integrating translanguaging pedagogy into both pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. Many of the participating teachers in this study relied on intuitive or experience-based use of L1 without formal theoretical grounding in multilingual pedagogies. This suggests a need for targeted professional development that introduces educators to the principles, strategies, and benefits of translanguaging within structured language instruction. Training should also address misconceptions about translanguaging, such as the belief that it detracts from English proficiency, and instead promote it as a valid, research-informed instructional approach.

From a pedagogical standpoint, the study reinforces the value of flexible, student-centered instruction that leverages learners' full linguistic repertoires. Teachers are encouraged to move beyond rigid English-only approaches and design learning activities that purposefully incorporate students' L1, particularly Standard Thai and Isan, as scaffolding tools. Such practices not only enhance comprehension and participation but also create inclusive spaces where learners' identities are affirmed. At the same time, the study suggests that teachers must remain responsive to student differences. While many students benefited from translanguaging, others, especially those with higher English proficiency, preferred immersion approaches. Thus, pedagogical decisions should be guided by learners' needs, language backgrounds, and proficiency levels.

At the policy level, this study advocates for a reevaluation of monolingual language education policies prevalent in many Thai schools. Despite the sociolinguistic diversity of Thai classrooms, current curricula often reflect English-only ideologies that marginalize the role of students' L1 in the learning process. Educational policymakers should recognize translanguaging as a legitimate, evidence-based practice that enhances learning outcomes and aligns with global movements toward inclusive, context-sensitive language teaching. This includes revising language policies to explicitly permit the use of students' L1 in English instruction, offering institutional support for multilingual approaches, and ensuring alignment between policy, curriculum, and classroom realities.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights, it is not without limitations. The findings are based on a limited number of classrooms within a single institution in northeastern Thailand, which may limit their generalizability. Additionally, while the study included students across different proficiency levels, it did not examine how age, gender, or socio-economic background may

influence students' engagement with translanguaging. Finally, as with most qualitative studies, the analysis is interpretive and may reflect the researcher's positionality as both practitioner and observer.

Future research can further explore translanguaging in multilingual EFL settings. Future studies could investigate how translanguaging evolves across academic levels or over time, particularly regarding language development and learner identity formation. Additionally, researchers might examine translanguaging practices in classrooms with greater linguistic diversity, such as those involving minority or migrant languages, or in digital learning environments where multimodal communication presents new opportunities for multilingual interaction. Such inquiries would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the pedagogical potential of translanguaging across diverse educational landscapes.

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