

# Exploring Translanguaging In A Multilingual Classroom: A Parent and Student Perspective

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*Abstract* — This study aimed to address a gap identified by previous research by exploring the perspectives of parents and students regarding the implementation of translanguaging practices in multilingual classroom settings. Using purposive sampling techniques, five Filipino parents whose children are enrolled in a multilingual classroom and five students who have experienced translanguaging in their classroom were interviewed to understand their experience, challenges, and perspectives on the use of translanguaging in the classroom. From the data gathering conducted, it was found that students find the use of translanguaging in the classroom as a means to facilitate learning, create classroom culture, and expand the linguistic abilities of students. While the perceived challenges in the use of translanguaging include difficulty navigating different languages, the presence of comprehension gaps, lack of learning resources to bridge such gaps, and resistance from traditional educators, students recognize that overcoming these challenges is part of the learning process. Generally, all the interviewed parents agree on the positive influence of translanguaging on the learning of their students. These findings highlight that despite the challenges in its implementation, the positive reception of translanguaging in multilingual classrooms by both students and parents made them believe that these can be worked on as these are all part of the learning process.

*Keywords* — *Translanguaging, multilingual classroom, code-switching, mother-tongue, first language, second language*

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## I. Introduction

Language is the most important tool in teaching as it serves as the medium through which ideas and knowledge are communicated. Indubitably, effective communication is essential in the teaching process, and language plays a crucial role in this process.

The Department of Education's Classroom Observation Tool for school year 2021-2022 includes in one of its indicators the "display of proficient use of Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English to facilitate teaching and learning". This is somehow a recognition that the teacher's multilingual proficiency is an asset essential to the achievement of successful classroom learning.

To highlight the importance given by the Department of Education to language used in the classroom, it has enacted many policies in recent years that are pertinent to the current language-in-education policy. Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB MLE) was institutionalized countrywide by DepEd Order No. 74, which was issued in 2009, and required the use of the student's mother tongue (MT) in order to improve learning results from Kindergarten through Grade 3 (DepEd, 2012). The subsequent and official implementation of the institutionalization of Mother-tongue Based Multilingual Education through DepEd Order No. 16, which was released in 2012 mandated the use of mother tongue beginning with the 2012–2013 school year and onwards.

The question of which language is the most effective to use in the classroom remains a widely debated topic. As stated in the research study by Sulaiman, et. al (2020) language teachers have constantly been perplexed about whether to juggle the use of the learner's mother tongue and the target language as long as doing so facilitates the learning of the target language and keeps the community's linguistic identity intact or to preserve the learner's mother tongue while exposing the learner to the least amount of second language to ensure the learner's optimal exposure to the target language.

The linguistic landscape of the Philippines is renowned for its heterogeneity (Casalan, 2022). Casalan further, advances that in a community where students are multilingual or multicultural, teaching MTB-MLE as a subject in the classroom using the mother tongue as the medium of instruction will present difficulties for the learners because the language used may differ from the language practiced naturally outside the school. Thus, this only proves that a translingual classroom should be viewed by teachers as a secure and comfortable linguistic environment that is conducive to language acquisition (Casalan, 2022).

Translanguaging is an emerging concept in education that challenges traditional views on language and bilingualism (Wijesundera et al., 2021). In practice, translanguaging has been established as a pedagogical strategy in language teaching and it refers to the use of one's full linguistic and communicative repertoire, which includes all languages, dialects, and varieties (Sulaiman et al., 2020). According to Mazak (2016), although there has been a considerable amount of research on translanguaging in primary and secondary education, the focus on this phenomenon is more on descriptions of language practices in educational settings.

The study of Sulaiman et al., (2020) found that while translanguaging has shown to benefit the understanding and processing of information on different levels by students, its impact on improving the language proficiency of students remains to be limited.

Finally, this study takes precedence from the study conducted by Casalan (2022) which recommended that the view on the use of translanguaging in classrooms by parents and students must be investigated.

This study aimed to look at the translanguaging phenomena in a multilingual classroom from the viewpoints of parents and students. The study, specifically, intended to investigate how translanguaging is applied in the classroom by both teachers and students, as well as how parents and students view it as a language exercise that may aid in learning. The project aimed to further knowledge of the function of translanguaging in fostering language development, cultural awareness, and educational equity in multilingual classrooms by analyzing the experiences and perspectives of parents and students.

*What is translanguaging?* Li (2011) explained the morphemes composing the word translanguaging and he said that it is a combination of three morphemes; the prefix “trans” to imply ‘transcending’ or moving beyond; ‘language’ to imply ‘a tool for communication’, and ‘ing’ to imply that the term is a dynamic act rather than a static system. Li (2017) added that the phrase “translanguaging” was not initially meant to represent a theoretical idea but rather a descriptive term for a particular linguistic activity.

Tabatabaei (2019) quoted Garcia & Kleyn, (2016) who said that Williams, Welsh teacher, originally introduced the word translanguaging in 1994 while researching how to teach bilingual children. In 2009, Garcia theorized that translanguaging is socio cognitive theory that counters traditional ‘monoglossic’ understandings of bilingualism. This view of translanguaging framework contends that the brain of a bilingual person is not composed of two separate language systems, but rather of a holistic repertoire that comprises a variety of communicative tools that can be used readily whenever the need arises either for various audiences or different contexts (Otheguy et al., 2015; Sulaiman, et al., 2020).

Williams (1994, 1996) first coined the word translanguaging to refer to pedagogical practice which supports the development of language skills through the simultaneous use of two languages in classroom activities (Mazaferro, 2018). While Williams was the first to coin the word translanguaging it was Baker (2001) who defined it as a planned and strategic educational technique wherein teachers design learning activities with input and output in two distinct languages. For instance, the reading portion of a class can be in English, while the discussion portion is in another language (Baker, 2001). Reyes (2019) further, exemplified the concept of translanguaging. He said that through translanguaging, learners can switch between two languages. This means that while they read (a receptive activity) they can switch to another language when they write (a productive activity). (Reyes, 2019). Rosenback (2016) added that translanguaging exists when someone who is multilingual freely employs all of [their] languages in a social (often educational) situation. This means that they may ask questions, comprehend, learn, explain, and communicate.

*Language Instruction in the Philippines.* The Philippines, known for its being a multi linguistic and multicultural country, has been reported by Ethnologue (2022) to have 186 distinct languages. Despite the rich linguistic field of the Philippines, for a long time, only English and Filipino are the languages used in the formal education setup of the country. Filipino is the national

language of the Philippines while English was introduced into the Philippines during the US colonial occupation and civil regime in the early 1900s and has now become the second official language (Stanford Medicine, 2019). Filipino, as national language, and English, as a second language, continue to compete in the various domains of Filipino society such as business, government, broadcast media, publications, and education. In fact, the concept of ‘Taglish’ was born out of the assimilation of English words into Filipino words (also known as Tagalog) and is considered a hybrid or slang in commonplaces in the country. (Stanford Medicine, 2019)

The existence of only English and Filipino in the academic sphere has seen many Filipino students continue to struggle in international and regional standard assessments. As stated in the study of Reyes (2018), the traditional education system which includes the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), implemented for more than three decades in the country, has not been successful in developing the Filipinos’ knowledge and skills in the different learning areas including English.

This has signaled legislators to intervene and suggest recognition of the multilingual setup of the country. The benefits from Walter and Dekker's pilot project for Mother Tongue Education (MTE) in 2008 in Lubuagan Philippines has given birth to the issuance of Department Order (DO) No. 74, series of 2009, otherwise known as Institutionalizing Mother-Tongue-Based Education (Casalan, 2022).

The new curriculum mandates the usage of the primary language of instruction (L1) of each learner in all topics, except Filipino and English from kindergarten to third grade. The catch here, however, is that during its first year of implementation, only twelve (12) major languages were recognized as mediums of instruction. It took the Department of Education another year to issue another order recognizing other local languages. Thus, the question remains, are all those languages excluded in said DepEd orders but existing in the Philippines and known to be the primary language of some locals in the country not worthy of being the medium of instruction?

This has opened many issues in the implementation of Mother Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). As advanced by Ponce & Lucas (2011), the program has faced a lot of issues and concerns even up to now and these problems become a challenge to the DepEd personnel, as well as to the stakeholders, for the stakeholders hold different views on program’s implementation and the program itself. The lack of work texts or instructional resources for disciplines taught in the native tongue is one of the biggest problems teachers encounter. This is due to the fact that numerous languages other than Tagalog weren't taught in schools over a period of time (Oyzon & Fullmer, 2014).

Moreover, there were anecdotal reports which suggest that even the teachers themselves are not confident in terms of vocabulary competence in their own L1 resulting in having to settle with limited resources to utilize and subsequent inconsistent and problematic teaching materials. (Casalan, 2022).

Despite the noted numerous difficulties reported by language administrators, educators, and policymakers with regard to linguistic and educational policy in the Philippines, Gallego and Zubiri (2011) still believe in the importance of the implementation of MTBMLE in the Philippines as it offers a sustainable future because it will increase the standard of education in the Philippines and benefit Filipinos in other ways as well.

It is important to note, however, that in the MTB-MLE, English and Filipino subjects continue to be taught in English and Filipino, respectively. This, along the fact that only nineteen (19) from recognized one hundred eighty-six (186) distinct languages considered by Ethnologue (2022) are recognized as major languages and thus used as medium of instruction in K-3, only proves that unless the present MTBMLE policy implements more pedagogically sound decisions not present in BEP, the prospect for the said policy to facilitate better English language teaching and learning (ELTL) seems wanting (Reyes, 2018).

The study by Reyes (2018) argues that despite the current Department of Education's implementation of MTB-MLE, his findings from his study tell that the participants used language practices that seem to be subsumed under translanguaging, either explicitly or implicitly to mediate communicative functions necessary for ESL classrooms.

*Why Translanguage in the Philippine Setting?* The Philippines is rich with culture and diversity in language. The most recent report on the number of languages spoken in the Philippines makes it impossible for all languages to be represented as a medium of instruction in all schools in each of the communities where they are spoken. To illustrate this, a student, for example, speaks and is exposed to different languages. At home, the student may speak the language spoken by his parents, when he goes out to play with his friends he speaks the language used by his friends, who may also come from different linguistic backgrounds. When he goes to school he is exposed to a language identified by the Department of Education as the majority language in that particular community. This is aside from the fact that he needs to be adept at English and Filipino as well.

MTB-MLE, being taught in the school as a subject and employing mother tongue as the primary language of teaching from a monolingual viewpoint will only cause issues for the benefit of the students since the language being utilized may not be the same as the spoken language used naturally outside of the school, especially in a bilingual or ethnic neighborhood considering that the learners are multilingual or multicultural.

The study by Casalan (2022) opined that teaching MTB-MLE with multilingual learners demonstrates translanguaging. This, according to him, is prevalent in the Philippines where the context of language learning is multilingual and multicultural. He further stated that his study is in support of Garcia's (2009) concept of translanguaging which is in line with translanguaging as a sociocognitive theory that counters traditional 'monoglossic' understandings of bilingualism".

In a bilingual Swedish environment, Torpsten (2018) explored and discovered the positive effect of translanguaging on the comprehension of the language of the learners including concepts

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of other languages. In the same vein, De Los Reyes (2018) found a good outcome of translanguaging in multilingual classes. He, further, noted that teachers were able to present their lessons more effectively and efficiently and that students were able to contribute meaningfully to classroom discussions.

Neult (2022) said that by using the strategy of translanguaging, children are still able to study English and communicate about their coursework with their instructors and family at home. Stating further that translanguaging involves employing their original language (L1) with English, while maintaining their identity and culture.

Translanguaging may be an effective way to connect the concepts of bilingual education and ESL programs in order to support students in enhancing their vocabulary not only in English but also in their original language, according to certain studies and research conducted at various age levels. This distinguishes ESL programs from bilingualism which says that while most of the ESL programs only want students to maximize their use of English, with little of their first language incorporated into the lesson plan. Most bilingual programs allow for students to speak their native language as well as the new language they are learning, which in most cases happens to be English. This means that translanguaging would allow for students in ESL programs to use vocabulary and experiences from their native language to form ideas or sentences.

The question of how this new approach to language learning is different from traditional educational policy in language was approached by Reyes (2018) and he said that the country's traditional education system, which has been in place for more than three decades and includes the Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), has not been effective in enhancing the Filipinos' knowledge and proficiency in all subject areas, including English.

Research in the field of language has given more varied findings but more recent research has shown the importance of the recognition of learners' overall language repertoire. As stated by Ferlazzo (2019), there have been several discussions among classroom teachers on whether English Learners (ELs) should use their mother tongue, often known as "L1," in class during class time. However, more recent studies have demonstrated that utilizing students' L1s might actually aid in English acquisition. They can benefit in their acquisition of grammar and work instructions by utilizing their original language, whether through a translation by a teacher, the student, or another assistant in the classroom. It can also support establishing and maintaining relationships in schools. Neult (2020) commented that when students are allowed to use their first language they can feel the connection between their home language and the language of instruction they have at school.

In conclusion, in the context of the Philippines, a country with over 170 languages spoken among its diverse population (The History of English in the Philippines ,2021), translanguaging could have significant advantages for language learners and language teachers alike (Casalan, 2022).



One of the benefits of translanguaging in the Philippines is that it can provide a more inclusive and welcoming learning environment for language learners (Li, 2018). Ryan (2010) said that By allowing students to use their native language alongside the target language, translanguaging can create a space where learners feel validated and more comfortable expressing themselves in the classroom.

Furthermore, translanguaging can also serve as a valuable resource for language teachers in the Philippines. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2017), creating "breathing spaces" for the minority language is a key component of promoting sustainable translanguaging in school contexts. Włosowicz (2020) added that by acknowledging and validating the use of multiple languages in the classroom, teachers can create a more inclusive environment where students feel comfortable using their native language as well as the target language.

*Parental Involvement in Language Learning.* The importance of language learning in education cannot be overstated. This research study has already cited different research that is dedicated to understanding how language learning and language itself carved its space in the landscape of education in the Philippines. It is in this same vein that parental involvement plays as much an important role in the language learning of students. As Lugo-Neris et al., (2015) puts it, a key factor in language learning success is parental participation. By creating a language-rich environment at home, parents can have a big impact on their kids' language development, according to studies (Lugo-Neris et al., 2015).

Additionally, according to Kalayci and Oz (2018), parental participation has a big impact on how kids grow academically. The results of their research indicates that parents are typically cognizant of the academic and psychological components of school and that they have a favorable attitude toward parental engagement. LaRoque, et al. (2011) said that in order to create a setting that boosts students' academic achievement, parents must collaborate with teachers.

Bartolome, Mamat, and Masnan (2017) defined parental involvement as referring to the amount of participation a parent has when it comes to the schooling of his/her children. This definition of parental involvement is closely synonymous with the definition offered by Ginsburg and Bronstein (1993) who see parental involvement as the active participation of a parent who was committed, considerably interested, and well-informed about their kid's education. Feurstein (2001) added to the literature defining parental involvement by describing it as the interconnection between parents and children both at home and school to make sure that students' educational outcomes are going in a positive way.

## II. Methodology

People hold different worldviews. People want to comprehend the environment in which they live and work. Individuals create subjective interpretations of their experiences, which are then directed at certain things or objects (Creswell, 2008). Crotty (1998) added that meanings are constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting. We are all born into a world of meaning that is placed upon us by our culture. Humans interact with their reality and attempt to make sense of it based on their historical and social viewpoints (Crotty, 1998).

Given all these, the best source of understanding the meaning of a certain concept is the people living within such a concept. The students and their parents are perceived to have experienced translanguaging practices in a multilingual classroom setting. Understanding how translanguaging affects language acquisition requires considering the experiences and viewpoints of parents and students.

The study admits that participants' comprehension and interaction with translanguaging may vary depending on their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This affirms the idea that people coming from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds will give different opinions of the world. The richness and variety of their viewpoints are what is hoped to be captured by this phenomenological understanding of translanguaging in the lens of the parents and the students.

Phenomenology is an approach that focuses on examining phenomena from the viewpoint of individuals who have experienced them in order to capture its essence (Neubauer, et al., 2018). Phenomenology seeks to explain the significance of the experience in terms of what was experienced and how it was experienced, phenomenology seeks to explain the significance of this experience.

It was said that human beings have unique ways to learn from the experience of others. Neubauer, et. al (2018) posits that since humans are one of the few animals who can learn from the experiences of others, it is essential for scholars to learn from the experiences of others. It is a foundational premise of research.

An in-depth examination of a topic, such as an individual, a group of individuals, a society, or an item, is required for research in order to learn more about it or develop a new understanding of it [1]. Understanding other people's experiences is frequently necessary for such in-depth research in order to gain fresh perspectives on a certain phenomenon.

This was the primary consideration for this research choosing a phenomenological study. To have a deeper understanding of translanguaging and its effect on language learning of students, it is better to understand how they experience it in their classroom and how effective they deem it to be.



Since the main goal of this study is to comprehend one important phenomena which is translanguaging in a multilingual classroom, I decided to select individuals using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is under the category of non-probability sampling methods wherein units are chosen because they possess qualities that your sample needs. Simply stated, purposive sampling selects units "on purpose" (Nikolopoulou, 2022). Purposeful sampling is widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases related to the phenomenon of interest (Palinkas, et al., 2015). Alchemer LLC (2023) added that "purposive sampling, also known as judgmental, selective, or subjective sampling, is a form of non-probability sampling in which researchers rely on their own judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in their surveys".

Purposive sampling was used to identify and select 5 Filipino parents of learners whose students are enrolled in a multilingual classroom and 5 students who have experienced translanguaging in their classroom to participate in this study. It was hoped that purposive sampling helped the researcher to select participants who were deemed best to share their experiences to format this research.

For each question, the participants were encouraged to narrate their ideas and perceptions using follow-up questions when necessary. The interview lasted a maximum of one hour.

Interview protocols were observed. To maintain the confidentiality of the participants during the interview, the interviewer saw to it that no other persons not necessary for the interview were allowed. After the interview, transcription was done and presented to the interviewee for comments and reactions.

After transcribing the recorded interview, the researcher read through the transcriptions, determined phrases important to the analysis and derived meaning from the participants' responses. The answers from the participants were grouped under the questions that would fit into the research questions of the study and were used to answer the research questions.

In qualitative research, Lacey and Luff (2009) opined that there is to describe and summarize the mass of words generated by interviews or observational data and this may include seeking relationships between various themes that have been identified, or relating behavior or ideas to biographical characteristics of respondents such as age or gender.

Pope and Mays (2006) added that unlike in quantitative data analysis, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) would aid the analysis of the researcher, in qualitative data analysis, however, a 'quick fix' does not exist. Qualitative research includes interpretative and subjective exercises that will require the researcher to be intimately involved and not aloof from the process (Pope and Mays, 2006).

This study made use of content analysis. Aquilam (2013) said that content analysis is a research method for making replicable and valid references from data to their context, with the

purpose of providing knowledge, new insights, a representation of facts and a practical guide to action. The aim of content analysis is to attain a condensed and broad description of the phenomenon and the outcomes of the analysis are concepts or categories describing the phenomenon.

The data were analyzed with the use of themes that were conceptualized using the guide questions. To facilitate understanding, the researcher used vignettes to discuss the views of the participants. In the data that were gathered, codes or numbers that signify particular participants, page and line numbers were used systematically. In the coded sheet that was used, the first number represented the participant number, the second was the page number, and the last number or numbers specified the lines where the cited transcription started and ended.

### **III. Results and Discussion**

From the interview with the students, it was found out that the created themes on the use of translanguaging in the classroom are that translanguaging facilitates learning and expression, translanguaging creates an inclusive classroom culture, and expands students' linguistic abilities.

The perceived benefits of translanguaging inside the classroom according to the students gathered are the themes, translanguaging facilitates learning and expression, translanguaging creates an inclusive classroom culture, and translanguaging expands students' linguistic abilities. This means that flexibility of using multiple languages is beneficial for comprehension, engagement, and practical language development.

The perceived challenges in the use of translanguaging inside a multilingual classroom are presented in the themes related to students navigating diverse languages, comprehension gaps arising, lack of learning resources to answer learning gaps, and resistance from traditional educators. While these challenges are presented by students they also recognize that overcoming difficulties is part of the expected learning process.

Generally, all the interviewed parents agree on the positive influence of translanguaging on the learning of their students. Parents' perception on the use of translanguaging inside the classroom gathered the themes which were identified based from the interview are positive influence and strong support.

There were four themes identified on the perception on the use of translanguaging to students coming from different linguistic backgrounds. These are translanguaging enhances student comprehension and participation, translanguaging fosters inclusive and engaging learning, translanguaging presents some language navigation difficulties, and translanguaging requires patience and persistence.

There are three themes identified from the interview with students on the experiences of students in a translanguaging classroom. These themes are translanguaging classes that promote freedom of expression, foster deeper understanding, and build connection and inclusivity.

#### *Discussion*

Given the challenges identified, it is recommended that educators receive targeted professional development to enhance their skills in effectively implementing translanguaging strategies. This includes guidance on managing diverse languages in the classroom, addressing comprehension gaps, and integrating appropriate learning resources.

The integration of translanguaging-friendly resources and materials into the curriculum can aid in mitigating comprehension challenges and fostering a more inclusive learning environment. This could involve the creation of multilingual teaching materials and resources that cater to the linguistic diversity of the students.

Schools should actively involve parents and the broader community in understanding the benefits of translanguaging. This can be achieved through workshops, informational sessions, and collaborative initiatives to create a supportive and informed community around multilingual education.

Moreover, establishing peer support programs among students from different linguistic backgrounds can enhance the inclusivity of translanguaging classrooms. This approach encourages students to support each other in overcoming language challenges and promotes a sense of community within the diverse linguistic landscape.

Finally, future researchers may conduct studies on strategic interventions and support systems that could help in a more efficient use of translanguaging in classrooms. It is also recommended that other areas not explored in this research may be given light by future research.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

It is evident from the findings of this research that the use of translanguaging in the classroom has significant implications for both students and parents. The identified themes highlight the positive impact of translanguaging, such as facilitating learning and expression, creating an inclusive classroom culture, and expanding students' linguistic abilities. Additionally, the study sheds light on the perceived challenges, including navigating diverse languages, comprehension gaps, lack of learning resources, and resistance from traditional educators.

Despite the challenges, students express a recognition that overcoming difficulties is part of the expected learning process, emphasizing the importance of adaptability in a multilingual educational environment. Furthermore, parents universally agree on the positive influence of

translanguaging on their children's learning experiences, emphasizing positive influence and strong support as prominent themes.

The varied perspectives from students of different linguistic backgrounds reveal that while translanguaging enhances comprehension and participation, fosters inclusive and engaging learning, and promotes freedom of expression, there are also challenges that require patience and persistence in navigating language complexities.

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