

Intuitive to Strategic Translanguaging: Insights From Vietnamese EFL Classrooms

Del translingüismo intuitivo al estratégico: perspectivas desde aulas de inglés como lengua extranjera en Vietnam

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This article reports a qualitative case study on the translanguaging practices of Vietnamese English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) educators and explores the mechanisms behind individual differences in their practices through an integrative cultural-historical activity theory perspective. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and post-observation interviews with three educators at a public university in Vietnam. The findings highlight diverse functions of translanguaging, including checking comprehension, emphasizing content, and reducing English-speaking anxiety. Rooted in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), this research introduces Proximal Language Scaffolding to highlight a strategic approach to using L1 and L2 for language learning within students' ZPD. This research provides new insights into the nuanced implementation of translanguaging in EFL contexts and offers significant implications for teacher development and educational practices.

Keywords: language learning, professional development, translanguaging, Vygotsky, Zone of Proximal Development

Este artículo presenta un estudio de caso cualitativo sobre las prácticas translingüísticas de docentes vietnamitas de inglés como lengua extranjera y explora sus diferencias individuales desde una perspectiva histórico-cultural integradora. Los datos se recolectaron mediante entrevistas semiestructuradas, observaciones de clase y entrevistas posteriores con tres docentes de una universidad pública vietnamita. Se identificaron diversas funciones del translingüismo, como verificar la comprensión, enfatizar el contenido y reducir la ansiedad al hablar en inglés. Con base en la zona de desarrollo próximo (ZDP) de Vygotsky, se introduce el concepto de *andamiaje lingüístico próximo*, que propone un uso estratégico de la primera y segunda lenguas en el aprendizaje dentro de la ZDP. El estudio ofrece nuevas perspectivas para el desarrollo docente y las prácticas educativas.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje de idiomas, desarrollo profesional, translingüismo, Vygotsky, zona de desarrollo próximo

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Introduction

Translanguaging, a growing phenomenon in higher education worldwide, particularly in non-English-speaking countries, refers to the practice of using multiple languages to teach academic subjects beyond the language itself (Barahona, 2020). Multilingual students leverage their linguistic repertoires to enhance learning in various disciplines, such as engineering, business, or medicine (García & Wei, 2015; Oliver et al., 2021). By integrating multiple languages, translanguaging aims to enhance students' academic and professional skills, as well as their intercultural competence and global awareness (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). However, this approach also presents challenges for educators, including linguistic difficulties, pedagogical adjustments, and identity issues (Oliver et al., 2021). Navigating these complexities is essential for promoting effective learning environments.

In contexts where English is spoken as a foreign language (EFL) and where educators share the first language (L1) with their students, a topic of debate is whether the educators should use only English or also incorporate the students' mother tongue to facilitate comprehension (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Jingxia, 2010). The frequency and quality of teachers' translanguaging between L1 and English contribute to determining the amount of English exposure students have and, depending on their English proficiency, the level of their knowledge comprehension (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). As such, it is vital to explore teachers' translanguaging practices as they can affect the goals and outcomes of language programs.

Previous research has demonstrated how educators employ translanguaging in various contexts, highlighting the pedagogical benefits of using L1 in classrooms (Carroll & Sambolín Morales, 2016). Recent studies have started to explore and/or question the theoretical underpinnings of teachers' translanguaging practices (Anderson, 2024; Cummins, 2021; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2024; Ossa Parra & Proctor, 2021). For instance,

Anderson (2024) examined translanguaging as part of a paradigm shift in English language teaching, arguing that this shift reflects changing understandings of language as a social construct rather than a set of fixed rules. In contrast, MacSwan and Rolstad (2024) provided a critical historical analysis of translanguaging theory, distinguishing between grounded ideologies based on empirical research and ungrounded ideologies influenced by postmodernist deconstructivism. They argued that recent developments in translanguaging theory, which they term "late translanguaging theory," diverge from empirical research and pose challenges to pluralist language ideologies and civil rights advocacy (p. 719). Together, these works contribute to an ongoing debate on the theoretical foundation of translanguaging and its practical implications for multilingual education.

However, there remains a limited understanding of how translanguaging is practiced by educators within specific cultural and educational contexts, such as Vietnam. Additionally, while translanguaging practices are gaining attention, there is a need to explore the potential variations among individual educators and the factors contributing to these differences, particularly through a cultural-historical lens. A cultural-historical perspective allows for a deeper understanding of how educators' practices are shaped by their sociocultural environment, professional experiences, and personal beliefs, offering a comprehensive view of translanguaging as both an individual and collective activity.

To address these gaps, this study investigates two research questions: (a) How do Vietnamese tertiary educators practice translanguaging in their classrooms? and (b) How can individual differences in translanguaging practices be explained through a cultural-historical lens? Although teachers' perceptions are explored to understand the motives behind their pedagogical choices, the core focus of this study is on analyzing their actual translanguaging practices within the classroom.

In summary, this study seeks to contribute to the growing body of research on translanguaging by focusing on its practical application in Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Through an examination of educators' translanguaging practices and the factors influencing individual differences, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how translanguaging operates as an effective pedagogical strategy. By situating these practices within a cultural-historical context, the study not only fills a gap in current literature but also offers practical implications for teacher development, ultimately supporting more effective language teaching and learning in multilingual settings.

Translanguaging in Foreign Language Teaching

Translanguaging is an educational approach where multiple languages are used dynamically to facilitate learning and teaching. In non-English-speaking countries, translanguaging has become increasingly popular (Guo, 2023; T. T. T. Nguyen, 2019). It involves the strategic use of both the first language (L1) and the target language (L2) to support pedagogical functions and enhance students' comprehension (Carroll & Sambolín Morales, 2016; Cenoz & Gorter, 2020).

Translanguaging is a multifaceted practice that goes beyond simple code-switching. It encompasses the flexible and intentional use of a speaker's entire linguistic repertoire to optimize communication and learning (García & Wei, 2015). This approach recognizes the value of bilingual and multilingual speakers' full linguistic capabilities, leveraging them to improve educational outcomes. Translanguaging serves as a practical theory of language, emphasizing the fluid and dynamic use of linguistic resources to create meaning and facilitate cognitive development (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021).

Research has shown that translanguaging serves various pedagogical, affective, and sociocultural functions. For instance, using translanguaging as a

theoretical foundation, Liu et al. (2024) conducted a mixed-methods study involving surveys of 1,008 students and interviews with 34 participants from an English for academic purposes (EAP) course in a Chinese university. The study found that translanguaging practices, as reported by students, enhanced understanding, classroom communication, and motivation for learning. However, challenges were also noted, such as difficulty maintaining an English-only environment and some students' over-reliance on Chinese, suggesting the need for more intentional pedagogical design in EAP settings. Similarly, Wang (2019) explored how translanguaging practices manifested among 201 international college students, aged between 19 and 25, studying Chinese as an additional language. The study showed that most favored a multilingual teaching approach, drawing on their linguistic repertoires to enhance understanding. However, teachers exhibited varying attitudes: While some found it challenging to adapt to a multilingual classroom, others embraced translanguaging as part of their teaching strategies. Classroom observations demonstrated that translanguaging, initiated by both teachers and students, facilitated communication and supported learning within the Confucian educational context.

Despite its benefits, the underlying mechanisms driving teachers' translanguaging practices remain underexplored (Cummins, 2021). Previous research on translanguaging in EFL classrooms has primarily focused on its pedagogical functions and frequency. There is a need for more qualitative and theoretically informed studies that explore teachers' perceptions and practices in specific contexts and disciplines (Barahona, 2020; Jiang et al., 2022). Such studies can provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of translanguaging and its value in EFL classrooms. Addressing these gaps can help educators and policymakers better support the implementation of translanguaging practices in diverse educational settings.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs an integrated theoretical framework drawing on Vygotsky's (1978) cultural-historical theory (CHT) and cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT) (Leontiev, 1978, 1981), which are well-suited to understanding the complexities of language teaching and learning. It should be noted that cultural-historical theories consist of distinct strands, and integrating these strands by drawing on relevant concepts or theoretical tenets is encouraged to address the complexity of real-life research phenomena (Cong-Lem, 2022a, 2022b; Engeström, 1999; Kaptelinin, 2005). These theories were chosen for their emphasis on social interaction, cultural context, and activity as fundamental components of learning processes. CHT focuses on how social and cultural factors shape cognitive development, which aligns with the collaborative and contextually grounded nature of translanguaging in the Vietnamese context. CHAT extends this perspective by viewing language practices as embedded within broader activity systems, such as classroom dynamics, institutional policies, and sociocultural norms (Dang, 2013; M. H. Nguyen & Ngo, 2023).

In the Vietnamese tertiary education context, where language instruction is influenced by both traditional cultural values and contemporary pedagogical shifts, these theories offer a lens to explore how translanguaging is shaped by and shapes these cultural and institutional practices. Specifically, they provide a means to analyze how teachers and students co-construct meaning, navigate multiple languages, and engage in culturally relevant teaching activities. This integrated framework allows for a holistic understanding of how translanguaging operates not only as a pedagogical tool but also within the larger sociocultural and educational activities present in Vietnamese universities.

The current research specifically utilized CHAT's concept of activity and its three levels of analysis—activity, action, and operation—to frame translanguaging as the primary activity under investigation. Second,

Vygotsky's theorization of concept development, which differentiates between everyday and scientific concepts, was used to identify potential causes of individual differences in teachers' translanguaging practices. Together, these frameworks offer complementary perspectives for understanding both the internal mechanisms driving educators' translanguaging decisions and the external, context-specific processes through which they implement these practices in their classrooms.

Activity, Action, and Operation: Three Analytical Levels in CHAT

According to CHAT, human activities are driven by underlying needs and directed toward objects, which provide purpose and direction (Leontiev, 1978). In the context of translanguaging, educators may adopt translanguaging practices to facilitate student comprehension and engagement. CHAT posits that activities can be analyzed at three analytical levels: the activity level, characterized by motives/objects; the action level, involving short-term goals; and the operation level, shaped by contextual factors, such as methods and conditions. An activity is initiated by a need corresponding to an object (i.e., object-oriented activity) and is carried out through actions aimed at specific goals (Cong-Lem, 2022a; Kaptelinin, 2005; Leontiev, 1978). An activity can encompass multiple actions, each aimed at achieving different aspects of the overall motive/object. These actions are further enabled or constrained by operations—the conditions, tools, and resources available within the context (Leontiev, 1978).

Translanguaging practices, therefore, can be examined through these three levels within the CHAT framework. At the activity level, translanguaging is motivated by the overarching need to enhance student learning, encompassing broader objectives like improving comprehension, fostering multiculturalism, increasing engagement, and achieving better educational outcomes by using multiple languages in instruction (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). This multi-level analysis of

translanguaging provides a holistic understanding of how and why educators employ these practices in their teaching.

Moving to the action level, we see how specific strategies and practices employed by educators come into play. These actions are goal-directed tasks aimed at facilitating the broader activity. For instance, educators may switch between languages to explain complex concepts, perform classroom management, or provide feedback (Duarte, 2019; Tai, 2023). These actions are tailored to meet the immediate needs of students in the learning process, ensuring that the overarching educational goals are met (García, 2017).

Finally, at the operation level, the focus shifts to the conditions and tools that enable or constrain these actions. This includes the availability of resources, institutional policies, and the linguistic backgrounds of both teachers and students. For example, the implementation of translanguaging strategies can be significantly influenced by bilingual texts, supportive school policies, and a classroom environment that values linguistic diversity (Cenoz, 2017). Conversely, a lack of resources or restrictive monolingual policies can hinder these efforts (Sahan & Rose, 2021).

By applying CHAT, we can systematically analyze the layers of translanguaging practices and understand how various contextual factors influence these practices. For instance, in a classroom with resources such as bilingual books and supportive policies, translanguaging practices can thrive, leading to improved student engagement and learning outcomes. Conversely, in environments where such resources are scarce, educators may struggle to implement effective translanguaging strategies, thus impacting the overall educational experience.

Vygotsky's Theorization of Concept Development

While CHAT provides a multi-layered perspective on how translanguaging practices are driven by needs,

goals, and contextual conditions, it is also essential to consider the development of these practices at a conceptual level. Vygotsky's theory on concept development offers a valuable lens to differentiate between intuitive, context-specific actions and systematically developed pedagogical strategies. Understanding this distinction is crucial for assessing how intentional and structured teachers' translanguaging practices are within their educational contexts.

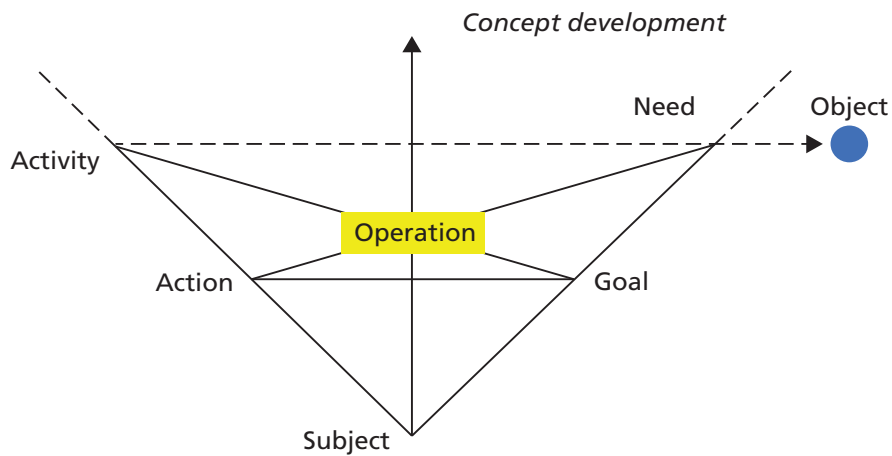
Vygotsky differentiates between everyday concepts (intuitive knowledge) and scientific concepts (formal knowledge). Everyday concepts develop through concrete, practical experiences and are often used unconsciously and intuitively. In contrast, scientific concepts are abstract, logical, and generalizable, requiring formal instruction and conscious learning (Vygotsky, 1987).

In the context of translanguaging, concept development involves understanding whether educators' practices are based on intuitive, context-specific knowledge (everyday concepts) or formal, systematic pedagogical strategies (scientific concepts). This differentiation is crucial for assessing the intentionality and systematicity of teachers' translanguaging practices. For example, do teachers use translanguaging as an ad-hoc response to immediate classroom needs? Or is it part of a well-thought-out pedagogical approach?

An Integrative Cultural-Historical Activity Theory Framework for Investigating Translanguaging

To provide a unifying framework for this study, we integrate concepts from Vygotsky's CHT and CHAT into a dynamic system referred to as the integrative Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (iCHAT) approach (see Figure 1). The key components of this analytical framework include the subject, activity, action, operation, and concept development.

Figure 1. An iCHAT Framework for Understanding and Analyzing an Activity's Manifestations and Development



The central upward arrow in the framework illustrates *concept formation* as the developmental process where the subject increasingly improves and masters their activity (i.e., translanguaging in this study). For example, this concept formation can occur when a teacher learns a new abstract theoretical concept that further guides their empirical actions in the classroom.

The conceptual framework emphasizes the importance of collecting and analyzing data regarding educators' professional motive/object at the activity level, their goals and actions at the action level, and the means and conditions that influence or inform their translanguaging practices at the operation level (Leontiev, 1978). This multi-level analysis helps uncover the intricate dynamics of translanguaging practices, including their intentionality and systematicity.

This integrated framework provides a comprehensive lens to analyze and understand the individual differences in translanguaging practices among Vietnamese EFL educators. By examining how these educators navigate the complexities of English language instruction in their classrooms, this framework directly addresses the research questions

of this study, contributing to a deeper understanding of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool and of the subjectivity among educators in implementing this pedagogy.

Method

Participants

Participants were three tertiary English language educators at a public university in Vietnam, selected from a total of 25 lecturers in the Faculty of Foreign Languages. Data collection was voluntary, and all eligible lecturers were invited to participate in the study. Those who expressed interest were briefed on the purpose and procedures of the research before providing written consent. The aim was to capture a range of professional experiences and teaching contexts. As a result, the participants, using pseudonyms (Daisy, Grace, and Hallie), were chosen to reflect varying experience levels, with 3, 9.5, and 20 years, respectively (see Table 1).

Data Collection

Data collection extended over 12 weeks, aligning with a university semester. The larger research

Table 1. Summary of Participants' Background Information

Pseudonym	Gender	Professional experience	Courses taught
Daisy	Female	3 years	English Linguistics
Grace	Female	9.5 years	English Linguistics
Hallie	Female	20 years	English for Specific Purposes

project utilized a combination of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, post-observation interviews, reflective journals, and document analysis to gather comprehensive insights into the participants' teaching practices and experiences. However, the data for this paper were mainly drawn from the two rounds of individual interviews, each lasting 60–90 minutes, as these were judged most relevant to the paper's purposes and sufficient to illustrate the key points.

The first interview took place at the start of the semester to gather background information on the participants' qualifications, experiences, and pedagogical beliefs, providing a foundational understanding of their professional journey and educational philosophy. This is significant from a sociocultural perspective, as it helps to explain their responses to challenges and the formation of their teacher identity. The second interview, conducted toward the end of the semester, focused on classroom tensions and emotional experiences throughout the semester. This allowed for an in-depth exploration of specific challenges and strategies employed by the participants, providing insights into their transformative agency and creative teacher identity.

The use of multiple data collection instruments enabled data triangulation, enhancing the trustworthiness and credibility of this study. Before commencing data collection, the author obtained ethics approval from the participants' institutions. The interview audios were transcribed and sent back to the participants for confirmation and any possible corrections.

Data Analysis

The study employed a directed qualitative content analysis (DQC) approach outlined by Hsieh and Shannon (2005). DQC is particularly useful when an existing theory or prior research about a phenomenon is incomplete or needs further description. Additionally, it can aid researchers in validating or extending a theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). This approach was chosen due to the emerging but incomplete body of research and theory regarding individual differences in translanguaging in EFL.

The data analysis unfolded in four key stages. In the first stage, the transcripts underwent a careful line-by-line reading, during which pertinent segments of information were initially coded into preliminary codes. Progressing to the second phase, these initial codes were then systematically organized into more abstract categories. In the third stage, these categories underwent further coding, aligning them with the major components of the conceptual framework discussed earlier. Finally, the analysis distilled significant themes, drawing on meaningful and dynamic relations among these components across levels of analysis (activity, action, and operation). Notably, the data analysis followed an iterative approach, combining both inductive and deductive methods. Table 2 presents an excerpt of coding in this study.

By providing a comprehensive and systematic analysis of the data, this method allows for some understanding of the individual differences in the participants' translanguaging practices and the factors influencing these differences.

Table 2. A Sample Coding of Translanguaging Teaching Into Theoretical Components

Levels of analysis	3rd level code	2nd level code	Preliminary code
Activity	Subject	Background	Highest degree
			Discipline (e.g., English Linguistics, TESOL)
		Professional experiences	Teaching
			Research
Object/Motive		Courses taught	Linguistics
			English for Specific Purposes
		Institutional/curricular requirements	
		Students' L2 competencies	
Action level	Goals		Students' career competitiveness
			Fulfilling the implicit requirement of the faculty of using English as a medium of instruction
			Supporting students' development of English proficiency
			Refraining from using L1 language
Operation level	Tools	Languages	English and Vietnamese
		Visual cues	Students' eye contact and facial expressions
	Methods		Checking students' understanding
			Dynamic switching between L1 and L2 when deemed necessary
	Conditions		Students' L2 proficiency
			Explicit or implicit institutional policies and local professional discourses
			Students' low L2 proficiency
			Colleagues' feedback
			Expectations from the faculty's leaders

Findings

In this study, the three EFL educators demonstrated varying degrees of understanding of the practice and how translanguaging was employed in their classroom practices. Daisy, the novice educator, tended to use translanguaging intuitively based on her judgment of the pedagogical situation. In contrast, Grace, a more experienced educator, employed translanguaging more deliberately, aligning it with her motive of preparing her students for the upcoming examination. The most senior participant, Hallie, further exemplified how

her utilization of translanguaging was influenced by her prior theoretical knowledge, indicating a more advanced level of concept development in relation to this practice.

Daisy: Translanguaging Implemented “Not For Any Particular Purpose”

Daisy had been teaching at the local university for three years and can be considered a novice educator compared to the other participants. At the time of data

collection, she was assigned to teach English linguistics to undergraduate students majoring in English language. While no policy required her to use English exclusively in her classroom, she primarily employed English to teach linguistic content to her students, which was confirmed during classroom observations. When commenting on her translanguaging practice, Daisy indicated that she used it to aid her students' comprehension and to reduce her own anxiety about speaking English:

For something that's simple and can be said in English, I either say it because it's easy or because I feel that my students can understand me in English. But for errors that I find a bit complicated and my English speaking ability becomes more and more confusing, and I feel like my message won't get through to the students, then I speak Vietnamese and make sure to emphasize to them not to make the same mistake again. (Interview 2)

Daisy explained that she did not have any specific purpose when alternating between languages and that it was mostly based on her "feeling" and judgment of the content's difficulty level. Her translanguaging appeared to be intuitive and situation-specific, as she mentioned: "I use both languages interchangeably...I don't really have a specific purpose when using them" (Interview 2).

She also drew on visual cues, such as the students' facial expressions, to facilitate her decision on when to switch to the L1. Daisy explained: "When the students look clueless . . . The second thing is that I will use it for the part that I want to emphasize greatly for the student" (Post-Observation Interview 1).

Her decision to rely on Vietnamese also stemmed from her low self-efficacy regarding her English proficiency, as she mentioned: "If I feel that my ability to convey in English is not clear enough, then I will speak in English and then speak in Vietnamese, and when explaining vocabulary, explaining the meaning" (Post-Observation Interview 1).

In summary, Daisy employed translanguaging to underscore important content, aid students' comprehension, and reduce her own English-speaking anxiety. However, Daisy's use of translanguaging seemed to be mostly intuitive rather than based on any established procedure or conscious intentions.

From the perspective of iCHAT, Daisy's practices can be analyzed through the lens of the interaction between her professional experience, her actions, and the operational conditions of her classroom. At the activity level, Daisy's motive was primarily to ensure student comprehension and manage her own anxiety. Her actions, such as switching languages based on perceived student confusion, were directly aimed at achieving this motive. The operation level involved the tools (English and Vietnamese) and conditions (students' facial expressions, her own language proficiency) that influenced her decisions. Daisy's translanguaging was characterized by its intuitive and reactive nature, highlighting her reliance on immediate classroom dynamics rather than systematic planning.

Grace: Translanguaging as a Way of Prioritizing Students' Knowledge Acquisition

As mentioned above, Grace has been teaching for approximately 9.5 years. She elaborated on how she implemented translanguaging in her class:

Usually, on the first day of class, I will speak entirely in English, but then I will notice that the students are looking at me with confusion, and I will start to speak less. I will reduce my use of English to around 70 % and switch to Vietnamese for the difficult parts. To be fair, I will adjust my language use based on the level of the class. For example, if class A is doing well, I will use 80 % English, but if the student in the class is struggling, I will only use 40 % English. (Interview 1)

Grace's adoption of translanguaging was based on her assessment of the classroom students' L2 profi-

ciency level. Her indication of the percentage of L1-L2 ratio in her teaching suggests a more deliberate use of translanguaging in her instruction. Like Daisy, Grace relied on students' facial expressions to guide her use of translanguaging. She further demonstrated her vigilance in employing translanguaging, mentioning that she would adjust her language use "based on the level of the class."

Grace exhibited a clear purpose in using translanguaging and would decline to implement an all-English approach if it did not align with her pedagogical approach. She recalled a situation where she rejected a suggestion from a more senior colleague to increase the use of English in her class:

Even though Mrs. X encouraged me to use more English, I would teach according to my own approach on the first day and then adjust as necessary based on the class's progress. I will use more Vietnamese or English, depending on the situation, and encourage the students to speak up and be confident. Whether or not they make progress [in acquiring content knowledge], I believe that by gradually adjusting my language use, they will understand me better and feel more comfortable speaking in class. (Interview 1)

The quote above suggests a prioritization of teaching objectives/motives in Grace's instruction. Her primary/dominant teaching objective was the students' acquisition of knowledge rather than providing opportunities for them to listen to or practice English. Consequently, she had a conscious and well-defined intention and goal in using translanguaging.

In short, compared to Daisy, Grace demonstrated her capacity to flexibly moderate her alternation between L1 and L2 to better suit the students' needs in a clearer, more conscious, and systematic manner.

Grace's translanguaging practices can be understood through iCHAT by examining her professional experience, classroom actions, and operational conditions. At the activity level, Grace's primary motive was student

comprehension and comfort, balanced with her own pedagogical goals. Her actions involved adjusting the language ratio based on student proficiency and feedback. The operation level included tools (English and Vietnamese) and conditions (students' facial expressions, class performance) that guided her language use. Grace's practices were more systematic and purpose-driven than Daisy's, indicating a higher level of professional development and reflective practice.

Hallie: Purposeful Translanguaging Practice for Improving Students' English Proficiency

The third and most senior participant in this study is Hallie, who has taught for 20 years. She was assigned to teach an English for specific purposes course. In contrast to Daisy, Hallie had a clear understanding of the objective or motive that drove her to use translanguaging. She was able to mention "translanguaging" as the term/concept that informed her teaching practice: "Usually, I use translanguaging. So, for the most part, I use English first throughout the lesson, including for explaining the lesson content and giving students assignment instructions."

An important note here is that the interview with the researcher was conducted in Vietnamese. However, Hallie used the term "translanguaging" in English. This suggests that she was aware of this concept, which had informed her teaching practices. Hallie articulated a clear systematic procedure for how she practiced translanguaging in her class:

When I move on to the next sections of the lesson, be it speaking or listening activities, I would tell my students what the requirements of the assignment are. Then, I look at their faces, their eyes, and other gestures to see if they understand. Second, I might check their language understanding. For instance, I might say, "Now we're going to move on to the speaking part, and we're going to use the language we heard from the listening and reading parts." If I see that some students understand

and others do not, I might explain in English again or in another way if necessary. For example, I might ask them again what the assignment is to see if they understand and to what extent. If they understand, then they will complete the task correctly. If not, then I will explain it again, perhaps in Vietnamese. However, I try to limit the use of Vietnamese as much as possible. (Post-Observation Interview 1)

Hallie's response demonstrates her use of translanguaging as a purposeful and systematic action. It is conscious and strategic in that she opted to simplify her English instruction first and/or explain it alternatively rather than using L1 conveniently. Additionally, her translanguaging practice seems to be systematic and transferable. She emphasized that the same principle applies to translanguaging across her teaching tasks, "be it speaking or listening activities." The important insight from this finding is her scaffolding of language use, where she only reverted to L1 input if it was beyond her students' existing proficiency or understanding capacity, that is, after having simplified her language or explained it differently. This finding is corroborated by observing her classroom teaching, where Hallie mostly used English throughout the lesson.

Like Daisy and Grace, Hallie relied on visual cues such as students' faces, eyes, and gestures to judge the extent to which her students understood her English instruction. However, two aspects distinguish Hallie's translanguaging from Daisy's and Grace's. First, when she noticed the students might not understand her instruction, instead of using Vietnamese to explain, she chose to simplify her English language first ("I might explain in English or in another way if necessary"). Second, she was conscious of the need to limit her use of Vietnamese "as much as possible," aiming to create an English-speaking environment for her students, as she acknowledged during the interview. Hallie's use of translanguaging was driven by her objective of creating an English-speaking environment for her

students, enhancing their competitiveness in securing a job after graduation. In other words, Hallie's motive for translanguaging is distinct from that of Grace and Daisy, as it extends beyond pedagogical functions to prepare students for future employment.

Hallie's translanguaging practices, analyzed through iCHAT, reveal a sophisticated approach to teaching. At the activity level, her motive was to enhance students' English proficiency and prepare them for future employment. Her actions included a structured use of English, with L1 used only when absolutely necessary. The operation level involved tools (English and Vietnamese) and conditions (students' comprehension cues, employment competitiveness) that informed her practices. Hallie's systematic and strategic use of translanguaging, driven by clear objectives and a deep understanding of pedagogical principles, exemplifies advanced professional development and reflective practice.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed varied translanguaging practices among three EFL educators, each demonstrating differing levels of intentionality and understanding. Daisy, a novice educator with three years of experience, appeared to adopt translanguaging intuitively, primarily to aid comprehension and reduce her anxiety about speaking English. Her decisions to switch between L1 and L2 were situational and reactive, driven by perceived student confusion and her own self-efficacy in English proficiency. Unlike Daisy, Grace, with 9.5 years of teaching experience, demonstrated a more conscious approach to translanguaging. She adjusted her use of L1 and L2 based on students' proficiency levels and aimed to support knowledge acquisition for exams. Hallie, the most experienced participant with 20 years of teaching, showed the most advanced conceptual understanding of translanguaging. Her practices were driven by a clear objective to enhance students' English proficiency, scaffolded strategically

within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Hallie used L1 sparingly and only after first simplifying her English instruction, reflecting a sophisticated level of translanguaging that aligns with theoretical knowledge and deliberate pedagogical intent.

The findings of this study support previous research on the value of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach with various functions, including aiding comprehension, reducing speaking anxiety, classroom management, student engagement, and enhancing classroom atmosphere (Fang & Liu, 2020; Liu et al., 2024; Wang, 2019). However, this study also extends previous findings by demonstrating how individual educators implement translanguaging to varying extents, with more or less structured, reactive, or proactive approaches. Hallie's sophisticated and strategic use of translanguaging, guided by her theoretical understanding, aligns with Yang's (2018) findings on the significance of theoretical knowledge in shaping teachers' practices. Similarly, Liu et al.'s (2020) study reinforces the importance of grounding translanguaging practices in theoretical knowledge. Their findings reveal that collaboration with a researcher not only prompted changes in a Chinese teacher's beliefs but also facilitated a shift from intuitive or reactive approaches to more intentional and informed translanguaging strategies.

Framing Translanguaging Through the iCHAT Lens

Conceptual Development Underlying Educators' Translanguaging Mastery

Vygotsky (1987) differentiates between everyday concepts (intuitive knowledge) and scientific concepts (formal knowledge). Everyday concepts emerge through concrete, practical experiences and are often applied unconsciously and intuitively, while scientific concepts are abstract, logical, and require conscious learning through formal instruction (Vygotsky, 1987). The findings of this study suggest that translanguaging practice

among educators can be understood as a process of concept development, where individual differences in their practices are influenced by the extent to which they have developed conceptually. In this sense, translanguaging practices that are more strategic, structured, and proactive reflect higher levels of conceptual development, while more intuitive, reactive approaches may indicate a reliance on everyday concepts.

In the context of translanguaging, concept development helps distinguish whether educators' practices are grounded in intuitive, context-specific knowledge or systematic, pedagogically informed strategies. For example, Hallie's use of translanguaging aligns with scientific concepts, reflecting a well-developed understanding and intentional, structured practice. Her deliberate alignment of L1 and L2 use with her pedagogical goals within the ZPD suggests a conscious effort to scaffold learning effectively, leading to potentially more consistent student progress. In contrast, Daisy's situational and intuitive approach, rooted in everyday concepts, lacks systematic planning and structure. This reactive use of translanguaging may result in less predictable student outcomes, as it is not consistently aligned with broader pedagogical intentions or supported by theoretical knowledge.

Grace's translanguaging practice falls between these two extremes. She shows some strategic intention but may not fully employ the systematic planning seen in Hallie's approach. These variations highlight how concept development can serve as a mechanism for understanding the different levels of translanguaging mastery among educators, with those who have developed a deeper theoretical understanding exhibiting more deliberate and pedagogically grounded practices.

Structuring Analysis Through Activity, Action, and Operation

Employing the analytical levels of activity, action, and operation has been crucial for understanding the complexities of educators' translanguaging practices.

Each level provided a distinct perspective on teachers' motives, strategies, and the contextual factors shaping their language use.

At the activity level, the study explored the overarching motives behind translanguaging, from improving comprehension and managing speaking anxiety to enhancing English proficiency. For example, Hallie's goal of fostering an immersive English-speaking environment reflected a broader, long-term pedagogical vision. This level of analysis provided insight into how translanguaging fits within teachers' larger instructional aims.

The action level revealed how these motives were enacted through specific, goal-directed classroom practices. Grace demonstrated a strategic approach to balancing L1 and L2, adjusting her language use based on students' proficiency and needs. This analysis captured how teachers' translanguaging practices were consciously aligned with their immediate teaching objectives.

At the operation level, the study examined the conditions, tools, and constraints affecting translanguaging practices, including resources, classroom dynamics, and teachers' language proficiency. Daisy's intuitive reliance on visual cues and her use of L1 to manage anxiety highlighted how external factors directly influenced decisions. This level sheds light on how contextual conditions can either facilitate or limit translanguaging strategies.

Together, these analytical levels provided a comprehensive framework that linked teachers' broader pedagogical goals to their practical classroom actions and operational contexts. This approach offered a nuanced understanding of how theoretical knowledge, beliefs, and situational factors shape translanguaging. The study advocates for this layered analysis, as it allows educators and researchers to better understand the motives, strategies, and constraints involved, leading to more informed and reflective translanguaging practices that align with diverse classroom needs.

Proposing the Concept of "Proximal Language Scaffolding"

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the ZPD is central to understanding effective teaching and learning, which refers to the developmental space where learners can perform tasks with the support and guidance of a more knowledgeable other, though they are not yet capable of accomplishing these tasks independently (Vygotsky, 1978, 1987). This concept represents the space for optimal learning, where learners are challenged slightly beyond their current capabilities while being supported through tailored guidance and collaboration. The goal within the ZPD is to gradually transfer learning responsibility from the teacher to the student, fostering increased competence and independence over time. By working within this zone, educators can scaffold learning in a way that bridges the gap between what learners can do alone and what they can achieve with assistance.

Building on this concept, we propose the notion of "Proximal Language Scaffolding" (PLS) within the context of translanguaging. Unlike general scaffolding, which applies broadly across learning contexts, PLS is uniquely tailored to bilingual or multilingual classrooms. This concept emphasizes the strategic and intentional use of both L1 and L2 to support students' learning within their ZPD. Learning is most effective when it occurs just beyond the learner's current capability, with targeted support to bridge this gap. By focusing on language learning specifically, PLS helps educators navigate the dynamic process of providing tailored language support and appropriate challenges, ultimately fostering language development and comprehension.

The findings from our study demonstrate that effective translanguaging practices, as observed in Hallie's case, are not merely spontaneous but strategically designed to scaffold students' understanding and language development. Hallie's deliberate use of L1 and L2, based on her students' immediate needs and proficiency levels, exemplifies PLS. For instance, she

used L1 selectively—only after attempting to simplify her English instruction—ensuring that students were consistently challenged within their ZPD while receiving necessary linguistic support. This intentionality was also present in Daisy and Grace’s practices, though to varying degrees, underscoring the adaptability and responsiveness that are central to PLS.

While PLS provides moment-to-moment support that responds to students’ immediate needs, it is also important to emphasize that PLS argues for a systematic and structured approach to maximize L2 input. This approach aligns with the goal of increasing language proficiency and content understanding. Unlike ad-hoc scaffolding that may lack direction, PLS is strategically designed to progressively enhance learners’ exposure to and engagement with the target language over time. To effectively implement PLS, educators might design curriculum sequences that transition from more L1 support to increased L2 use, ensuring that each stage of learning scaffolds toward greater independence and mastery of both language and content.

This means that while PLS is responsive and adaptable to learners’ needs, it should be embedded within a broader instructional framework that systematically increases L2 input. Whether the aim is to improve language skills or deepen content knowledge, PLS advocates for strategic, tailored support and a structured plan to build language competency and content mastery over time. This dual focus fosters linguistic development and ensures learners can effectively use L2 across various contexts, achieving both language and content-related goals.

By integrating PLS into pedagogical strategies, educators can enhance the effectiveness of translanguaging in EFL classrooms, leading to improved student engagement and learning outcomes. This approach not only supports students in their current learning tasks but also prepares them for more complex language use, fostering long-term language development and academic success.

Implications for Relevant Stakeholders

The findings of this study suggest several implications for educators, school administrators, policymakers, and researchers. Firstly, the varied translanguaging practices observed among educators, such as Hallie’s strategic approach and Daisy’s intuitive style, highlight the need for professional development programs that address both intentional and adaptive language use in the classroom (Gorter & Arocena, 2020; Holdway & Hitchcock, 2018). Training should aim to develop skills in PLS, enabling teachers to effectively balance the use of L1 and L2 to support students’ learning within their ZPD. This involves equipping teachers with strategies to assess student needs accurately and implement strategic language switching, as demonstrated in Hallie’s sophisticated use of translanguaging. Crucially, such training must emphasize the need for a structured and well-planned approach to gradually and strategically increase L2 input within the ZPD. By progressively enhancing students’ exposure to L2 through intentional scaffolding and targeted support, educators can scaffold both language development and content mastery. This planned progression ensures that students are continuously challenged and supported at the optimal level for learning, gradually building their independence and proficiency in L2.

For school administrators, the study’s findings indicate that creating supportive environments for translanguaging is essential. This includes implementing policies that encourage bilingual education and providing necessary resources, such as bilingual texts and professional development opportunities. The positive impact of supportive school policies on teachers’ practices was evident in Hallie’s case, where resources and policies empowered her to innovate and refine her translanguaging strategies (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Menken & Sánchez, 2019). Administrators should prioritize resource allocation to support diverse linguistic needs and foster a school culture that values linguistic

diversity and teacher agency in developing effective language practices.

In terms of future research, longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how translanguaging strategies evolve and their sustained impact on student learning. Given that the current study primarily focused on educators' practices, incorporating student feedback in future research would offer a more holistic understanding of the effectiveness of translanguaging, enhancing the practical relevance of the findings.

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore individual differences in translanguaging practices among Vietnamese EFL educators, utilizing an iCHAT framework to analyze these practices. The findings revealed diverse functions of translanguaging, including checking comprehension, emphasizing content, and reducing English-speaking anxiety, highlighting the role of professional motives and contextual factors. This research introduces the concept of PLS, emphasizing the strategic use of L1 and L2 within learners' ZPD to optimize their learning. This concept extends the current understanding of translanguaging, providing a nuanced perspective on its role in educational practices.

Despite the valuable insights, this study acknowledges limitations such as the small sample size and the specific context of Vietnamese higher education. Future research should explore translanguaging practices in different contexts and with larger, more diverse samples to validate and expand upon these findings. Overall, this study contributes to the theoretical and practical understanding of translanguaging in EFL settings, offering important implications for educators and policymakers aiming to enhance language learning outcomes.

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