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Translanguaging Practices: Bridging Filipino-English and Mother Tongue-Based in Early Grade Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

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This study examined teachers' perceptions and classroom practices of translanguaging in early-grade multilingual classrooms. Using a descriptive mixed-methods design, it was conducted in kindergarten to Grade 3 classrooms across Districts 1, 2, 4, and 5 of the Ozamiz City Division, with teachers as respondents. Surveys provided quantitative data to identify general patterns in translanguaging use, while interviews offered qualitative insights into teachers' experiences, challenges, and strategies. Findings revealed that teachers viewed translanguaging as an effective approach to help learners understand lessons, stay engaged, and communicate confidently, while honoring their cultural and linguistic identities. Challenges such as time management, differences in learners' language abilities, limited training, and parental misconceptions were addressed through thoughtful lesson planning, scaffolding, multimodal teaching, collaboration, and parental involvement. The study highlighted that ongoing professional development, school support, and strong home-school partnerships contribute to more effective and meaningful implementation of translanguaging in early-grade classrooms.

Keywords: classroom management, engagement, multilingual education, teachers' perceptions, translanguaging

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Introduction

Translanguaging has emerged as an important pedagogical approach in multilingual classrooms, allowing learners to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire to support comprehension and participation. In environments where Filipino, English, and the Mother Tongue coexist, translanguaging enables learners to negotiate meaning, express ideas, and process academic concepts more effectively. Research has shown that structured multilingual interaction enhances cognitive development, language acquisition, and learner engagement (Beatty et al., 2021; Hamilton et al., 2024). Strategies such as storytelling, bilingual discussions, and scaffolded language use have been found particularly beneficial in early-grade learning where foundational literacy skills are formed.

In the Philippine context, translanguaging aligns with the goals of the Department of Education's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) framework, which promotes the use of learners' first language alongside Filipino and English to ensure equitable access to learning. Studies have shown that teachers and learners respond positively to translanguaging as it improves lesson clarity, encourages participation, and accommodates diverse linguistic backgrounds (Lucas et al., 2024; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Despite these benefits, recent policy changes have introduced instructional challenges. While DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2012 and RA 10533 (2013) mandated the Mother Tongue as the primary medium of instruction in early grades, newer directives now position Filipino and English as the main languages of instruction, limiting the formal role of the Mother Tongue. This shift poses concerns for schools where learners demonstrate higher proficiency in their Mother Tongue than in Filipino or English.

School data from SY 2024–2025 in Sangay Integrated School in the Division of Ozamiz City reflect this disparity, with the majority of Kindergarten to Grade 3 learners showing stronger performance in the Mother Tongue than in Filipino and English. Feedback from teachers within District 5 also indicates that translanguaging continues to support comprehension, participation, and task engagement, yet structured strategies for its effective application under the updated policy remain limited. This highlights a gap in instructional alignment, classroom practice, and teacher preparedness in multilingual settings.

This study therefore investigates how translanguaging can be intentionally integrated into early-grade instruction to enhance comprehension and learner engagement. Approaches such as bilingual classroom materials, guided language-switching, and scaffolded questioning have been shown to support meaning-making and participation (Perfecto, 2020; Macawile, 2022). Strengthening teacher training, classroom strategies, and home-school language continuity may further improve learning outcomes.

The findings of this study aim to provide evidence-based insights that will guide teachers in applying translanguaging effectively in multilingual classrooms under the current instructional policy environment (Karpava, 2025). The results may also inform program development and curriculum implementation, ensuring that learners—regardless of linguistic proficiency—can participate meaningfully, acquire foundational literacy, and experience inclusive instruction (Casalan, 2022; Morallo, 2023).

Translanguaging has become an important strategy in classrooms where multiple languages are spoken, helping learners understand and participate in lessons more effectively. By allowing learners to use all the languages they know—including Filipino, English, and their Mother Tongue—teachers can make learning more meaningful and accessible. Studies have shown that using multiple languages thoughtfully during instruction can improve students' thinking skills and language development (Hamilton et al., 2024). Classroom activities such as songs, interactive exercises, and storytelling have also been found to enhance understanding and retention, particularly in preschool and primary education (Beatty et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, translanguaging supports the goals of the Department of Education's Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy, which encourages the use of learners' first language alongside Filipino and English to promote inclusive learning. Research indicates that both teachers and students respond positively to translanguaging, finding it useful for making lessons easier to follow and more engaging (Lucas et al., 2024). Additionally, using multiple languages in instruction fosters creativity and flexible thinking among learners (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021) and ensures that learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds can participate fully in classroom activities (Werkmann Horvat et al., 2021).

Despite its benefits, implementing translanguaging in classrooms has become challenging under the current legal framework. Previously, the Department of Education’s MTB-MLE policy (DepEd Order No. 16, s. 2012; RA 10533, 2013) mandated that the mother tongue be used as the primary medium of instruction. However, Republic Act No. 12027 (2024) has discontinued this requirement, designating Filipino and English as the main languages of instruction while relegating mother tongues to secondary roles. This shift presents challenges in schools like Sangay Integrated School in Ozamiz City Division where the majority of learners demonstrate higher proficiency in their Mother Tongue than in Filipino and English. Based on data from the 2024–2025 school year, in Kindergarten, 80% of learners are more proficient in MTB compared to 13% in Filipino and 7% in English; in Grade 1, 73% in MTB versus 13% in Filipino and 40% in English; in Grade 2, 67% in MTB versus 13% in Filipino and 33% in English; and in Grade 3, 67% in MTB versus 13% in Filipino and 20% in English. Feedback from teachers at Sangay Integrated School, along with additional input from 25 Kindergarten–Grade 3 teachers from other schools within District 5, indicates that translanguaging continues to enhance learners’ comprehension, participation, and engagement. In addition, systematic strategies for applying translanguaging effectively under the new legal framework remain underexplored.

This study aims to investigate how translanguaging can be intentionally integrated into early-grade classrooms to support comprehension and engagement. By allowing teachers to switch flexibly between the Mother Tongue, Filipino, and English, lessons can be tailored so all learners understand the content (Gatil, 2025). Practical approaches, such as bilingual teaching materials and interactive exercises, help clarify lessons and promote meaningful participation (Perfecto, 2020). Teacher training emphasizing the benefits of translanguaging equips educators to manage multilingual classrooms effectively (Macawile, 2022), while parental involvement in reinforcing the Mother Tongue at home further strengthens learners’ language development. The study is expected to provide a clearer understanding of how translanguaging can be applied effectively in multilingual classrooms under the current legal framework (Karpava, 2025). It aims to offer practical guidance for teachers to enhance comprehension and engagement through strategies such as bilingual materials and interactive lessons (Perfecto et al., 2020). Furthermore, the study may inform policy decisions, providing evidence-based recommendations for supporting early-grade learners in multilingual contexts (Bongcarawan eat al., 2024).

Methods

The study employed a descriptive mixed-methods design to examine teachers’ translanguaging practices in bridging Filipino, English, and Mother Tongue–Based instruction among 143 Kindergarten to Grade 3 teachers in selected districts of the Schools Division of Ozamiz City during School Year 2025–2026. Quantitative data were gathered through a validated survey adapted from Ulum (2024), focusing on the functions, beliefs, and perceived effects of translanguaging, while qualitative data were obtained through researcher-developed semi-structured interviews to capture teachers’ experiences, strategies, challenges, and coping mechanisms. Survey responses were measured using a four-point Likert scale and analyzed through frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations using Microsoft Excel and SPSS, while qualitative responses were analyzed thematically following Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-phase framework. The study was conducted across diverse urban and rural school contexts, with ethical safeguards including informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, secure data storage, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Results and Discussions

Table 1
Summary of Teachers’ Perception on the Use of Translanguaging in Teaching

Dimension	of	Overall Mean	Weighted	Overall Deviation	Standard	Description
Translanguaging						
Functions of Translanguaging		3.70		0.60		Strongly Agree
Teachers’ Belief		3.69		0.61		Strongly Agree
Effects of Translanguaging		3.68		0.61		Strongly Agree
Grand Mean		3.69		0.61		Strongly Agree

As shown in Table 1, teachers strongly agree that translanguaging has positive effects on teaching and learning,

with an overall weighted mean of 3.68. Teachers believe that translanguaging helps improve learners’ understanding, increases classroom participation, and allows smoother movement between languages during instruction. Even the lowest-rated effect still reflects agreement, indicating that teachers consistently see translanguaging as contributing to meaningful learning experiences.

These perceptions align with findings from previous research. Asfa (2025) reported that translanguaging helps learners transition more smoothly between languages and strengthens their academic language development. Padchonga et al. (2024) likewise found that translanguaging supports deeper comprehension and encourages active learner engagement. Hamman-Ortiz et al. (2025) further emphasized that translanguaging enhances meaning-making and interaction in multilingual classroom settings.

On the other hand, some studies suggest that the effects of translanguaging may not always be uniformly positive. Deniega et al. (2024) observed that certain teachers perceived limited impact of translanguaging in connecting classroom lessons to real-life situations. Moraru (2025) also cautioned that positive outcomes may not consistently occur unless translanguaging is supported by clear instructional goals, systematic scaffolding, and intentional lesson design. These findings highlight the importance of thoughtful implementation to maximize the benefits of translanguaging.

Table 2

Test of Significant Difference in the Extent of Teachers’ Perception of Translanguaging When Grouped According to Selected Profile Variables

Profile Variable	Statistical Test Used	Test Value (t / F)	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Age	One-Way ANOVA	1.27	0.281	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Gender	Independent Samples t-test	0.84	0.403	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Highest Educational Attainment	One-Way ANOVA	1.12	0.345	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Years of Service	One-Way ANOVA	1.36	0.259	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant
Grade Level Taught	One-Way ANOVA	0.98	0.417	Fail to Reject Ho	Not Significant

The results in Table 2 reveal that teachers’ perceptions of translanguaging do not significantly differ based on age, gender, highest educational attainment, years of service, or grade level taught ($p > 0.05$). This means that regardless of their background or experience, teachers share a strong and positive view of using multiple languages in the classroom. They recognize the benefits of translanguaging in helping learners better understand lessons, stay engaged, and communicate more effectively.

These findings are supported by previous studies. Huang and Chalmers (2023) reported that teachers consistently see translanguaging as an effective way to support student understanding and active participation in multilingual classrooms. Similarly, Chicherina and Strelkova (2023) found that teachers value translanguaging as a practical tool to scaffold learning and encourage interaction among students. Li (2024) also noted that teachers’ positive attitudes toward translanguaging remain consistent across different demographic and professional groups, showing its wide acceptance and usefulness in everyday teaching.

Challenges Encountered by Teachers in Using Translanguaging

The findings indicate that time constraints, pacing issues, learner confusion, and cognitive overload are among the major challenges encountered by teachers in implementing translanguaging. Although teachers reported a high overall perception of the functions of translanguaging ($M = 3.70$), particularly in clarifying complex concepts and checking learner understanding, the qualitative findings showed that explaining and translating lessons across several languages often required additional instructional time. Teachers reported difficulty

completing lessons within the allotted period and managing frequent language shifts, suggesting a tension between providing sufficient linguistic support and maintaining curriculum pacing. Learner confusion was also observed when switching between languages, particularly when concepts were explained using different linguistic forms. These findings suggest that translanguaging, while beneficial for comprehension, requires deliberate sequencing and careful scaffolding to prevent cognitive overload. This is consistent with Mashala (2025), who identified time constraints as a practical challenge in multilingual instruction, and Ticheloven et al. (2021), who emphasized the importance of careful planning when using multiple languages to support learning without overwhelming learners. Thus, teachers need to strategically determine when and how languages should be used, prioritize essential concepts, and integrate repetition, visual aids, and contextual examples to maximize comprehension while maintaining lesson flow.

Another important challenge concerns overdependence on the home language, diverse linguistic backgrounds, limited teacher preparation, assessment difficulties, and inadequate instructional resources. Although teachers strongly perceived translanguaging as beneficial to learner comprehension and confidence ($M = 3.68\text{--}3.70$), some reported that excessive reliance on the Mother Tongue could limit learners' opportunities to develop Filipino and English vocabulary and expressive abilities. The presence of learners with different linguistic backgrounds further complicated instruction because not all learners necessarily understood the Mother Tongue being used in class. Teachers also identified limited formal training as a barrier, indicating that positive attitudes toward translanguaging alone are insufficient for effective implementation. Assessment presented another concern because teachers sometimes found it difficult to distinguish language proficiency from actual content mastery when evaluating learners. In addition, the scarcity of bilingual, multilingual, and culturally relevant instructional materials required teachers to translate, improvise, or develop their own resources. These findings support Deniega et al. (2024), who cautioned that excessive dependence on the native language may restrict target-language development, while Romadhona et al. (2025) emphasized the need for differentiated support in linguistically diverse classrooms. Similarly, Chaika (2023) highlighted the importance of teacher preparation, while Asfa (2025) stressed the need for assessment approaches that distinguish language ability from content knowledge. The findings therefore suggest that effective translanguaging requires continuous professional development, differentiated instruction, multilingual assessment strategies, and adequate instructional resources.

The findings further demonstrate that institutional policies, classroom management, stakeholder perceptions, and language complexity influence the sustainability of translanguaging practices. Teachers reported difficulties arising from restrictive or inconsistent language policies, limited administrative support, increased classroom noise during multilingual discussions, misconceptions among parents and community members, and challenges in accurately translating concepts without changing their intended meaning. Despite these constraints, teachers demonstrated considerable adaptability through instructional planning, purposeful language use, visual and multimodal strategies, learner scaffolding, material adaptation, collaboration with colleagues, professional development, classroom management routines, emotional regulation, and parent engagement. These coping mechanisms indicate that teachers are not passive recipients of policy but actively negotiate and adapt translanguaging practices to meet learners' needs. The findings are consistent with Cenoz and Gorter (2021), who emphasized the importance of institutional flexibility in supporting multilingual pedagogies, while Decristan et al. (2024) highlighted the need for structured classroom environments when managing multilingual interaction. Huang and Chalmers (2023) likewise emphasized deliberate linguistic planning to maintain clarity and meaning, while Liu and Lin (2025) and Zhong and Lin (2025) underscored the value of professional collaboration and capacity building. In addition, Sharma et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of stakeholder engagement in gaining support for innovative instructional practices. Overall, the findings suggest that translanguaging can be effectively sustained when teachers are provided with institutional support, professional learning opportunities, appropriate resources, flexible language policies, effective classroom management strategies, and meaningful collaboration with parents and colleagues.

Conclusions

In conclusion, translanguaging is affirmed as a highly effective pedagogical approach in early-grade classrooms, fostering learners' comprehension, confidence, and active participation while valuing their linguistic and cultural identities. Its success depends not only on teachers' strategic planning, scaffolding, and use of visual and multimodal supports but also on professional collaboration and parental engagement, which together create

an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Despite challenges such as time constraints, diverse language abilities, and limited resources, teachers' adaptive strategies demonstrate that translanguaging can be implemented effectively, highlighting its potential to enhance both teaching practices and learner outcomes in multilingual classrooms.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended that learners actively use their home language alongside Filipino and English to strengthen comprehension, confidence, and participation; teachers employ carefully planned translanguaging strategies supported by scaffolding, visual aids, hands-on activities, reflection, collaboration, and continuous professional development; parents reinforce multilingual language use at home and maintain communication with teachers; schools provide multilingual resources, manageable class sizes, and flexible, language-inclusive learning environments; stakeholders support teacher mentoring, professional development, and sharing of resources and best practices; the Schools Division strengthen continuous training, school collaboration, and professional learning communities for multilingual pedagogy; policymakers incorporate practical translanguaging strategies into curriculum guidelines and teacher-training programs to promote flexible and inclusive language practices; and future researchers investigate the long-term effects of translanguaging on learners' academic performance, language proficiency, engagement, and its applicability across different grade levels and educational contexts.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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