

Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool in Asia: Roles, Challenges, Opportunities, and Effective Practices

Nelson F. Padchonga¹, Saleha P. Cosain², Nur Minah A. Hadji Calil³, April Kris M. Betwag⁴, John Rey O. Pelila⁵

^{1, 2, 3, 4, 5} Benguet State University, La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines

Article Info

Article history:

Received May 01, 2025

Revised June 28, 2025

Accepted August 15, 2025

Keywords:

Asia;

Education;

Pedagogy;

Systematic Literature Review;

Translanguaging.

ABSTRACT

Educators in Asian classrooms encounter significant challenges in supporting students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. These challenges are rooted in the need to navigate complex layers of language and culture, as well as deeply ingrained communication customs shaped since early childhood. One promising pedagogical approach is translanguaging, which encourages students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire to enhance learning. However, limited research has explored how translanguaging is implemented in real-world classroom settings across Asia. This study conducted a systematic literature review (SLR) of full-text and peer-reviewed publications from 2021 to 2025, sourced from reputable academic databases including ERIC, ScienceDirect, Sage Open, Taylor & Francis, and ProQuest. A total of 36 journal articles were examined for common themes, perceived benefits, and implementation issues associated with translanguaging procedures. The findings show that translanguaging can increase student engagement, improve comprehension, and validate learners' linguistic identities. However, dominant monolingual ideology, inadequate teacher training, and restrictive institutional regulations impede widespread acceptance. This study finds that translanguaging has a significant potential to promote more inclusive and successful multilingual education in Asian environments. It suggests that teacher education programs and institutional frameworks may incorporate translanguaging into ordinary classroom practice.

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Corresponding Author:

Nelson F. Padchonga,
Benguet State University, La Trinidad, Benguet, Philippines
Email: thenellpadchonga@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

In Asia's linguistically diverse educational landscapes, English Language Teachers (ELTs) face multifaceted challenges, including entrenched language hierarchies, limited institutional support for first languages, and the dominance of English as a global lingua franca. Macaro (2018) notes that English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) contexts often display these issues, as monolingual orientations marginalize learners' native languages and limit their access to content. As a result, translanguaging has emerged as a transformative pedagogical

approach that leverages learners' full linguistic repertoires for meaning-making and knowledge construction. Student-centered learning was promoted by validating linguistic backgrounds and enhancing cognitive and academic engagement (Galante, 2020; García & Kleyn, 2016).

Translanguaging diverges significantly from traditional bilingual-education models that emphasize the alteration and separation of two languages through code-switching (Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021; Przymus, 2024). Those models maintain distinct language boundaries and focus on parallel development in each language. In contrast, translanguaging treats language as a unified communication system, emphasizing fluid, integrated use of all linguistic resources (Cummins, 2019). Translanguaging practices can be categorized into two types: pedagogical and spontaneous. Pedagogical translanguaging is intentionally structured and is guided by educators to support learning objectives. It involves deliberate planning to integrate students' home languages into instruction to scaffold comprehension, develop biliteracy, and promote deeper content learning (Cenoz, 2017; García & Kleyn, 2016). In contrast, spontaneous translanguaging naturally arises in multilingual interactions even without formal instructional design. It reflects how multilingual individuals fluidly switch between languages to communicate effectively in social or in informal educational settings (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Both types serve as evidence of the flexible, real-world language practices of multilingual speakers and drive home the need to recognize and legitimize these practices within formal education (Galante, 2020).

The practical application of translanguaging in multilingual Asian classrooms remains limited despite theoretical promise (Sah & Kubota, 2022; Liu & Fang, 2022). Global research highlights its potential to enhance metalinguistic awareness, literacy development, and student collaboration (Vogel & García, 2017). However, Macaro (2018) and Cummins (2019) say rigid language policies, insufficient teacher training, and scarce institutional support impede its implementation.

This study conducts a systematic literature review to examine translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in Asian multilingual classrooms. The review seeks to understand the current landscape of translanguaging implementation by ELTs, exploring the roles, opportunities, challenges, and effective practices identified in empirical studies. By doing so, it aims to contribute to more inclusive and context-sensitive pedagogical strategies in multilingual education. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What roles does pedagogical translanguaging play in language education across Asian contexts?
2. What opportunities are commonly reported in the implementation of pedagogical translanguaging in Asia?
3. What challenges are frequently encountered in implementing pedagogical translanguaging in Asian educational contexts?
4. What effective practices of pedagogical translanguaging have been identified in existing literature within Asian educational settings?

2. METHOD

The study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as its research design to rigorously investigate the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in Asian classrooms. This method was chosen for its transparency, replicability, and ability to minimize bias through defined inclusion and exclusion criteria (Table 1).

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria for Selecting Journal Articles in the Present Study

Parameter	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Journal Publication Type	Peer-reviewed, full-text, open-access research articles and journals	Non-peer-reviewed, non-research articles; policy reports unavailable in full-text
Time frame	Published between 2021 and 2025	Published before 2021
Description	Focus on translanguaging as a pedagogical tool, including roles, opportunities, challenges, and effective practices	Lacks focus on translanguaging or discuss it outside the pedagogical framework
Demographic Focus	Studies conducted in Asian countries	Studies set outside Asia

The subjects of the review were 36 peer-reviewed journal articles published between 2021 and 2025; all focused on pedagogical translanguaging within the Asian context. Data collection involved comprehensive searches across five major academic databases, such as ERIC, ScienceDirect, SAGE Journals Online, Taylor & Francis Online, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global, using the key phrase “translanguaging as a pedagogical tool.” The initial search yielded 96,966 records, which were filtered through automated criteria (peer-reviewed, full-text, open-access) and manual screening based on relevance to the topic and regional focus, ultimately narrowing the sample to 51 studies. The process was guided by the PRISMA flowchart to ensure clarity in selection. All articles were imported into a systematic review management tool to support coding and traceability. For data analysis, the researchers used thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke’s six-phase framework, combining inductive and deductive coding approaches. This allowed the researchers to both confirm established theories and identify emergent themes across studies from nine Asian countries, ensuring a comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of translanguaging practices.

To enhance transparency and traceability of the review process, a Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart was employed (Figure 1). The process started with the identification of relevant studies through comprehensive searches of academic databases and additional sources. Following the removal of duplicates, titles and abstracts were screened to assess their relevance. Studies passing this initial screening underwent a full-text review guided by predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria to determine their eligibility. Lastly, studies meeting all criteria were included for detailed analysis.

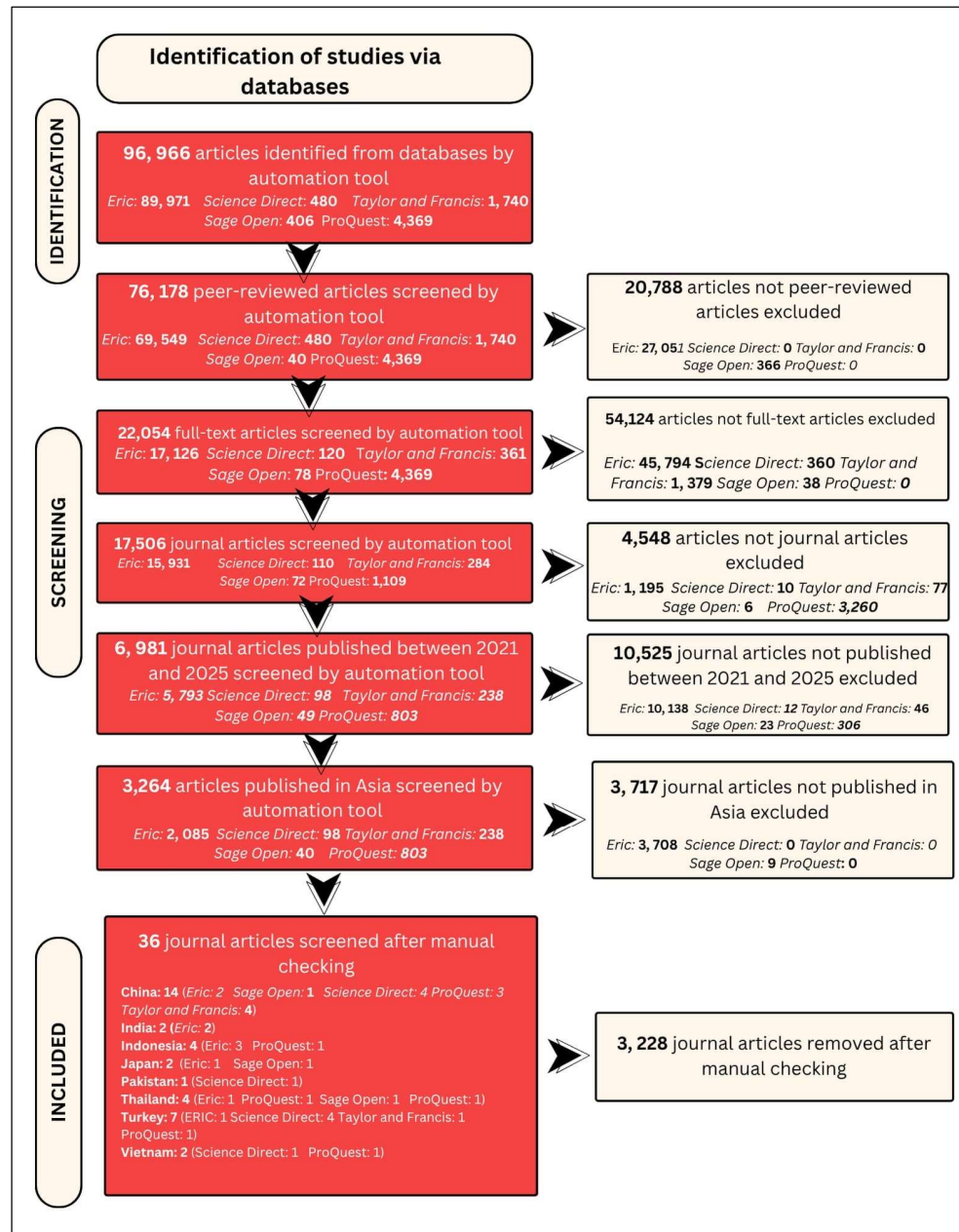


Figure 1. PRISMA flowchart

Initially, a total of 96,966 articles were identified across five major databases: ERIC, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, Sage Open, and ProQuest. Using automation tools, the process began by filtering out non-peer-reviewed content, retaining 76,178 scholarly articles. Further screening based on full-text availability led to the exclusion of over 54,000 entries, with only 22,054 full-text articles remaining. We further refined this pool by format, selecting 17,506 journal articles and discarding others. The inclusion phase applied strict criteria like publication date (only articles from 2021–2025 were kept) and geographic relevance, focusing on studies published in Asia. This method narrowed the selection to 3,264 articles. A final manual screening was conducted, resulting in just 36

journal articles that met all the conditions, including coming from countries such as China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Pakistan, South Korea, Thailand, Turkey, and Vietnam. Each filtering stage was carefully structured, ensuring only the most pertinent and high-quality studies were selected for analysis.

After the researchers screened the generated articles and manually checked their relevance, most of the remaining studies on translanguaging pedagogy were found in Asian countries such as China, Turkey, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, Japan, South Korea, India, and Pakistan. In other words, between 2021 and 2025, these countries were considered pioneers in translanguaging research within the region (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Countries in Asia with Translanguaging as Pedagogical Tools Studies

Furthermore, these screened articles were analyzed using thematic analysis to know the roles, challenges, opportunities, and effective practices. Here, the researchers followed [Braun and Clarke's \(2016\)](#) six-phase framework, which includes (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report.

Initial codes were generated based on recurring patterns in how translanguaging was implemented in educational settings, including teacher perceptions, student engagement, policy implications, and classroom practices. These codes were then grouped and refined into broader themes that captured the shared and distinct experiences across the countries under review. The themes were continually refined to ensure coherence and representativeness, contributing to a more profound understanding of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in diverse Asian contexts. This analytic process ensured that the findings were grounded in the data while also being informed by existing theoretical frameworks and pedagogical discourse on multilingual education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The Role of Pedagogical Translanguaging in Language Education Across Asia

Cognitive and instructional scaffolding. Pedagogical translanguaging plays a vital role in enhancing learning and instructional delivery by providing scaffolds that support comprehension and mastery of academic content, particularly in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) settings (Ulum, 2024). In countries like Turkey and Thailand, translanguaging is strategically used to improve reading comprehension and critical thinking by integrating the students' L1 throughout different stages of instruction (Öztürk & Çubukçu, 2022). Similarly, in China and Japan, it enables meaning-making by allowing students to preview vocabulary, transfer background knowledge, and reflect on content through structured L1 support (Wong & Tian, 2024; Sato, 2023). At the same time, translanguaging transforms pedagogical practices by promoting flexible teaching strategies that respond to students' linguistic needs (Zheng & Qiu, 2023). Teachers in China, Thailand, and Turkey use translanguaging to model multilingual competence, thus fostering dynamic, inclusive classroom environments and reinforcing the legitimacy of diverse language practices in formal education (Wen et al., 2022; Pun & Tai, 2021).

Identity empowerment and affective support. Translanguaging also plays an empowering role by strengthening students' linguistic identities and emotional resilience. In Japan and China, for instance, learners experience increased confidence, a greater willingness to communicate, and reduced anxiety when permitted to use their L1 in classroom interactions (Li & Wang, 2024). Sato (2023) observed that Japanese EFL learners use their L1 to express cultural nuances, resulting in deeper engagement and more authentic classroom communication. This linguistic flexibility nurtures students' sense of agency and belonging, helping them see their bilingual or multilingual identity as an asset rather than a barrier. As learners become more reflective about their language use, they also develop greater autonomy, which contributes to their overall academic self-regulation and emotional development (Thongwicht & Ulla, 2024).

Linguistic inclusivity and social equity. Translanguaging contributes to inclusive and socially just education by challenging linguistic hierarchies and affirming the legitimacy of all language varieties used by students. In many Asian classrooms, especially those in China and Thailand, the dominance of standard or foreign languages often marginalizes speakers of minority or regional dialects (Laycock, 2021). Translanguaging counters this by validating learners' home languages and creating space for more equitable classroom participation (Zhang & Jocuns, 2022). By aligning instructional content with students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds, translanguaging fosters collaborative and humanizing learning environments. As Wei (2023) argues, this pedagogical approach not only supports diversity but also advances social justice by recognizing multilingualism as a right and a resource in education.

Opportunities in Implementing Pedagogical Translanguaging

Enhancing learning and cognitive engagement. Translanguaging offers significant opportunities in education, particularly in enhancing learning and cognitive engagement. By allowing students to draw on their first language (L1), translanguaging supports deeper comprehension of complex materials presented in a second or foreign language (L2). This is especially beneficial for learners with limited proficiency in the target language, as it reduces cognitive load and enables them to build on prior knowledge. As students use both their L1 and L2, they become more autonomous learners and are encouraged to think critically and creatively. Studies have shown that translanguaging fosters student participation and enriches the learning experience by promoting exploration of new vocabulary and concepts (Thongwicht & Ulla, 2024; Zhang & Jocuns, 2022; Bisai & Singh, 2022).

Creating inclusive and emotionally supportive classrooms. Beyond cognitive benefits, translanguaging also plays a crucial role in creating inclusive and emotionally supportive learning environments. It establishes a psychologically safe space that helps reduce anxiety and supports emotional comfort, enabling learners to engage more confidently with academic content (Wei, 2023). This practice also validates students' multilingual and multicultural identities, promoting a sense of belonging and appreciation for linguistic diversity. In culturally diverse classrooms, such as those in many parts of Asia, translanguaging encourages collaborative learning and allows for more culturally responsive teaching. By bridging students' home and school languages, translanguaging not only enhances access to knowledge but also nurtures inclusive and empathetic classroom communities (Bisai & Singh, 2022).

Challenges in Implementing Pedagogical Translanguaging

Lack of teacher preparedness. One of the major obstacles to implementing translanguaging is the lack of systematic teacher training. Many novice educators struggle to integrate translanguaging effectively into their teaching, often relying on L1 use out of habit rather than through a strategic, planned approach. Tai (2024) argued that this challenge is compounded by the absence of training in effective translanguaging strategies and by skepticism regarding its compatibility with traditional assessment systems. Saleem et al. (2023) emphasized that to address this issue, there is a critical need for professional development programs that equip teachers with the necessary skills to implement translanguaging consistently and effectively. Similarly, Nguyen et al. (2025) noted that developing a robust translanguaging pedagogy requires time and sustained effort, beginning with positive orientations toward multilingualism in initial teacher education programs.

Monolingual policy bias. Another significant barrier to pedagogical translanguaging in many Asian educational contexts is the dominance of monolingual ideologies, which restrict the use of students' L1 in the classroom (Zhou et al., 2021). Many institutions enforce English-only or target-language-only policies, making it difficult for teachers to adopt flexible, inclusive approaches (Wang, 2022; Thongwicht & Ulla, 2024). This reflects a monoglossic ideology that insists on strict separation between the target

language and students' home languages, often leading teachers to feel hesitant or even guilty when drawing on learners' full linguistic repertoires (Wong & Tian, 2025; Yuzlu & Dikilitaş, 2022). Teachers also face pressure from national EMI policies and high-stakes testing systems, where there is concern that using multiple languages might negatively impact test scores (Zhou et al., 2021; Canagarajah, 2022). These rigid, top-down policies and monolingual assessment regimes make it difficult to adopt translanguaging practices, even when such practices demonstrably enhance student learning (Putra, 2024; Jiang et al., 2024; Wen et al., 2022).

Effective Practices and Strategies for Pedagogical Translanguaging

Structured bilingual scaffolding through pedagogical and digital support. Effective translanguaging pedagogy in Asian classrooms is grounded in structured bilingual scaffolding, where language use is strategically planned to support both comprehension and academic development. Teachers often encourage students to begin tasks using their first language, allowing them to engage more confidently with new content before gradually transitioning to English as the task becomes more complex (Dikilitaş et al., 2023; Sato, 2023). This purposeful switching between languages helps learners navigate abstract concepts more easily and also reduces classroom anxiety. English, in turn, is used to develop academic fluency in formal tasks (Wang, 2022; Torrefranca, 2024).

Digital platforms such as DingTalk, Canvas, and other learning management systems have further enhanced these pedagogical practices by offering bilingual interfaces, enabling personalized feedback, and encouraging student reflection. These tools also create collaborative learning environments where students can use both languages to deepen their understanding, especially in reading and problem-solving activities that require nuanced thinking (Yuzlu & Dikilitaş, 2022; Sun, 2024; Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024).

Translanguaging as a tool for equity, inclusion, and empowerment. Beyond classroom strategies, translanguaging practices also serve as a powerful tool for equity, inclusion, and student empowerment. When students are allowed to use their full linguistic repertoire, including their first language, they feel validated and included in the learning process. This is particularly important in multilingual classrooms and higher education settings, where learners often struggle to express personal, cultural, or emotional ideas in English alone (Tai & Wong, 2022; Antony et al., 2024).

The use of L1 allows them to articulate meanings that are otherwise difficult to convey, strengthening their sense of identity and belonging. In Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) programs, for example, allowing L1 use can make content more accessible and encourage meaningful participation (Sato, 2023; Torrefranca, 2024). Rather than seeing L1 as a barrier, educators who implement translanguaging pedagogy recognize it as a valuable resource that supports both academic progress and personal development.

Discussion

Pedagogical translanguaging in Asia plays a significant role in language education throughout the region by contributing to learning, empowerment, inclusion, and pedagogical strategies. As a cognitive tool, translanguaging enhances comprehension and mastery of complex subjects, especially in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) setting. By integrating students' first language (L1), it acts as a scaffold for learning, enabling students to better understand and synthesize information. For instance, in Thailand and Turkey, translanguaging serves as a literacy strategy, improving critical thinking and reading comprehension. In Japan and China, translanguaging aids in meaning-making, with structured L1 support allowing students to develop vocabulary and synthesize academic content. This process bridges languages, enhancing cognitive engagement and allowing students to transfer knowledge between languages.

In addition to supporting learning, translanguaging empowers students. By allowing the use of L1, it boosts learners' confidence, reduces anxiety, and increases their willingness to communicate. This fosters a stronger bilingual or multilingual identity, which shifts students' perception of linguistic diversity from a liability to an asset. For instance, in Japan and China, students' use of L1 helps them express cultural nuances, leading to greater comfort in classroom interactions. Furthermore, translanguaging promotes inclusivity by validating all languages, ensuring that marginalized dialects or minority languages do not hinder participation. It aligns with social justice pedagogy by recognizing linguistic diversity as an asset and supporting equitable classroom engagement.

Translanguaging also reshapes pedagogical strategies, providing teachers with the flexibility to meet diverse learner needs. In contexts such as Thailand and China, it allows teachers to model multilingual competence and incorporate multimodal resources, especially in digital and hybrid learning environments. This approach fosters a more dynamic and inclusive learning experience, catering to the needs of multilingual students.

Moreover, the implementation of pedagogical translanguaging presents several key opportunities that enrich both the academic and emotional experiences of students. One of the most notable benefits is enhanced learning experiences. By allowing the use of L1, students experience reduced cognitive load, enabling them to better comprehend complex academic content. This is particularly important for students with lower proficiency in the target language, as it allows them to use their L1 knowledge to interpret second language (L2) texts. As a result, students feel more supported and engaged in the learning process without the fear of failure due to language barriers.

Additionally, translanguaging fosters affective support by creating a psychologically safe environment. The use of L1 reduces student anxiety, enhances their participation, and boosts their confidence, leading to a more engaging and supportive classroom atmosphere. This emotional safety net is particularly important for second language learners, allowing them to build confidence and actively participate in their learning

journey without the fear of making errors. This leads to increased self-esteem and a more positive attitude towards language learning.

Furthermore, translanguaging encourages inclusive methods and practices by validating students' bilingual or multilingual abilities and connecting academic content to their cultural backgrounds. This practice is particularly beneficial in classrooms with diverse populations, such as those in Hong Kong and China. Culturally relevant pedagogy strengthens peer support structures, fosters collaboration, and creates a more inclusive and equitable learning environment. Teachers who view students' linguistic repertoires as assets can design learning experiences that help students engage more meaningfully with academic content, promoting equity and inclusion.

Despite the clear benefits, there are significant challenges in implementing pedagogical translanguaging. One of the primary obstacles is the lack of teacher preparedness. Many teachers, especially novice educators, struggle to integrate translanguaging in a systematic and effective way. Often, teachers use L1 out of habit rather than as part of a deliberate strategy that aligns with students' language proficiency levels. This underscores the need for professional development to ensure that educators are adequately trained in translanguaging practices and can use them effectively in the classroom.

Another challenge is the prevalence of monolingual ideologies embedded within educational systems. Policies that prioritize English-only instruction, especially in EMI settings, limit the scope for L1 use in the classroom. National policies and high-stakes English exams often put pressure on teachers to focus solely on English, making it difficult to adopt translanguaging practices. Teachers may fear professional consequences for deviating from prescribed teaching methods, which creates resistance to the use of translanguaging despite its potential benefits.

In order to maximize the effectiveness of pedagogical translanguaging, several practical strategies have been identified. First, one key strategy is strategic language switching. Teachers can use the students' first language (L1) to explain difficult or abstract concepts and then gradually shift to the second language (L2), such as English, as students become more confident and skilled. This step-by-step approach helps learners understand new content more easily while also improving their ability to use English in academic settings.

Another important approach is creating flexible language zones in the classroom. This means allowing students to move between L1 and L2 as needed during learning tasks. For example, students might think or draft ideas in their L1, like Mandarin, Nepali, or Bahasa Indonesia, and then translate or refine them in English. Teachers can guide this process by planning lessons that use both languages with a clear purpose, making sure that switching languages helps learning rather than causing confusion.

Furthermore, teachers should support equity and inclusion by recognizing and using students' home languages as learning tools. When students are encouraged to use both L1 and L2, they often feel more confident, respected, and engaged. Translanguaging allows students to express cultural ideas or emotions that may not translate easily into English, which can lead to deeper understanding and stronger identity development.

This is especially useful in subjects with complex ideas, like science or philosophy, where using both languages helps make difficult content clearer and more meaningful.

In the same way, the use of digital platforms such as DingTalk, LMS, and Canvas has also been shown to support translanguaging in the classroom. These tools allow students to access lessons, grammar help, and teacher feedback in both L1 and L2. As a result, students can reflect more deeply on their learning, collaborate more effectively in group work, and improve their reading and writing skills in both languages. This kind of bilingual support not only boosts participation but also reduces stress and helps students succeed in more complex academic tasks.

4. CONCLUSION

Pedagogical translanguaging plays a key role in enhancing language education across Asia as it promotes deeper learning and increases confidence and greater inclusivity, leading to more equitable and effective language education across diverse Asia contexts. The purpose of this study was to systematically review how pedagogical translanguaging is implemented in Asian multilingual classrooms, particularly in terms of its roles, opportunities, challenges, and effective practices. The study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of how translanguaging contributes to inclusive and context-sensitive language education across Asia. It enables students to engage more effectively with content, creating a more inclusive environment that values their diverse linguistic backgrounds. By encouraging educators to adapt their methods to meet the varied needs of students, translanguaging promotes a more equitable learning experience. It also boosts comprehension, reduces anxiety, and strengthens cultural connections, enriching the overall learning process. It highlights the potential for educational systems to create more just and responsive learning environments by embracing students' full linguistic repertoires. The opportunities presented are not mere additions but crucial components of effective pedagogy. Reduced cognitive loads, enhanced scaffolding, and improved affective support create a thriving learning environment for all students regardless of L2 proficiency. Thus, the positive impact on academic achievement and emotional well-being justifies the effort required in implementation. However, challenges such as limited teacher training and restrictive language policies persist, underscoring the urgent need for systemic changes in teacher education and language policy reform. Addressing these requires proactive investment in professional development, resource citation, and policy change to fully realize translanguaging's transformative potential. Ultimately, the study highlights that with strategies like strategic language switching, integrating digital tools, and strong institutional support, translanguaging can be effectively integrated into classrooms, creating a more inclusive and responsive learning environment.

To enhance translanguaging's effectiveness, researchers recommend designing and adapting resources for underrepresented regions, such as Southeast and South Asia, where these practices are less documented. Future research should evaluate the impact of teacher education programs in preparing educators to implement translanguaging strategies in multilingual classrooms. Policy reforms supporting multilingual teaching are essential to

align educational practices with the linguistic realities of students. Furthermore, longitudinal, classroom-based studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of translanguaging on student engagement, comprehension, and academic success.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, heartfelt gratitude and praise go to God Almighty for His unwavering blessings, which guided us throughout our research journey and ensured its successful completion. We also extend our deepest thanks to Mr. John Rey Pelila for his invaluable guidance, patience, and support during the course of this study; his expertise and encouragement have been instrumental in shaping our work. To our dedicated group members, your commitment, teamwork, and thoughtful contributions were essential at every stage of the research. Each of you played a vital role in refining our perspectives, improving our methods, and driving the success of this project. Your cooperation made this experience both meaningful and fulfilling. Finally, we wish to express our sincere appreciation to our families. Your constant encouragement and support sustained us through the long hours of research and writing. Your belief in our abilities served as a powerful source of motivation, and we are truly grateful for your inspiration

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