

Translanguaging Through the Eyes of Linguistics Master's Students

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Abstract

This study explores the academic influences, challenges, and coping strategies of Linguistics Master's students at Universitas Brawijaya in relation to translanguaging practices in the classroom. The participants were five first-semester students with non-English undergraduate backgrounds. Using a qualitative method through interviews, the research investigates how translanguaging affects their academic experiences. The findings show that translanguaging helps students adapt more easily in classroom settings where multiple languages are used, and increases their engagement in the learning process. Furthermore, it serves as a tool to bridge gaps in understanding and supports vocabulary development. However, it also presents challenges, including difficulties in expressing academic ideas clearly in English on their first language, which may hinder English language development. Despite these issues, students developed strategies to manage their language use and improve academic performance. This study concludes that translanguaging serves as both a support system and a barrier in academic settings, highlighting the importance of effective language practices in multilingual classrooms. For the future research can explore the long-term impact of translanguaging on academic performance and identity formation among multilingual learners across different educational levels.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Students Perceptions; Linguistics Contexts

INTRODUCTION

This research explores the concept of translanguaging, an innovative approach to language learning that involves blending multiple languages. In the digital age, the way people learn and use language is rapidly evolving, and translanguaging reflects this shift in educational practices. The integration of various languages in learning settings highlights the nature of modern language education. As noted by Ayyub & Rohmah (2024) stated that flexible multilingual practices are a deliberate strategy to respond to the demands of globalization and accommodate diverse language users. Furthermore, according to Garcia, as cited in Dikilitas et al. (2023) stated translanguaging goes beyond simply switching between languages, it's a more advanced way of communication. It allows individuals to creatively combine languages in speaking, writing, reading, and even nonverbal expression, reflecting the richness of multilingual interactions. Nowadays, schools and universities are starting to accept this new way of thinking about languages. They are using a mix of languages in the classrooms to help students communicate better. Sobkowiak (2022) agrees that translanguaging is very important in how we learn multiple languages. This new way of teaching is becoming more popular in applied linguistics. It shows us how mixing languages helps us learn better. It's also like a dance between language and culture that helps students get better at speaking other languages. It helps us see how language, culture, and teaching are all connected in the study of language learning.

Zheng & Drybrough (2023) highlight how translanguaging is gaining attention for its ability to embrace diversity in people, languages, and cultures in our increasingly connected world. Their research explores how translanguaging as a modern concept, not only adjusts but also thrives in our global society. Adding deeper into this idea, Garcia & Kleifgen as discussed in Dikilitaş et al., (2023) view translanguaging not just as a language tool but as something that helps people become proficient in multiple languages, even in places where only one language is dominant. It's seen as a force that adapts to how people learn languages, needing resources that fit their development stages. This research shows how translanguaging can transform language learning, offering new ways to learn and communicate in our constantly changing world. In the wide world of language study, not many researchers have fully explored about translanguaging. It's like a hidden gem that has not received enough attention. One important study in this field is by Yüzlü & Dikilitas (2022). They only focused on how translanguaging works in education. Instead of just looking at how people learn languages, they looked at how using multiple languages can help students think better, especially for those learning English as a foreign language. This study is a stand out because it acknowledges that there's not enough research on translanguaging and tries to show how it can make a big difference in classrooms. Furthermore, Carstens (2016) states that the global rise in the adoption of translanguaging in education began due to increasing recognition of bilingualism as a strength rather than a limitation. Initially centered on bilingual individuals, the emphasis was on how translanguaging aids learners in utilizing both languages to navigate the diverse linguistic aspects, thereby supporting intricate cognitive tasks. According to Romanowski (2020) said that translanguaging encompasses proficient communication, cognitive engagement, and linguistic expression, encompassing the creation of meanings, the molding experiences, comprehension, and acquiring knowledge through the utilization of two or more languages. It involves the functionally intertwined usage of languages. In short, implementing translanguaging in classroom learning implies that it has many benefits, especially for foreign language learners. Since translanguaging makes it easier for learners to understand and deeply know the context of communication much better.

Two studies conducted by Yüzlü & Dikilitas (2022) and Mazak & Herbas Donoso (2015) provide valuable insights into the effective use of translanguaging within different educational contexts. Yüzlü & Dikilitas (2022) focused on the perspectives of EFL learners regarding the integration of translanguaging to support the critical thinking. Their study emphasized how the incorporation of translanguaging in a hybrid EFL course significantly benefited learners by fostering critical thinking skills. The research highlighted the interconnected relationships that contributed to the development of critical thinking among participants. On the other hand, Mazak & Herbas-Donoso (2015) explored the deliberate integration of Spanish into science discussions within a multilingual university setting. They observed that instructors in this environment utilized both Spanish and English to explain complex scientific concepts, showcasing how translanguaging can effectively communicate scientific knowledge in multiple languages. Their findings stress the importance of validating students' language skills to express academic concepts and emphasize the application of linguistic abilities in understanding scientific content.

Both studies truly underline how the effectiveness of translanguaging in enhancing learning outcomes. While Yüzlü & Dikilitas (2022) focused on EFL learners and the promotion of critical thinking, Mazak & Herbas-Donoso (2015) stated and demonstrated how translanguaging facilitate scientific understanding in a multilingual academic environment. Together, these studies provide a comprehensive view of the benefits of translanguaging across various educational settings and subject areas, highlighting its role in supporting diverse learners and fostering deeper comprehension and critical thinking skills.

This study looks at how using different translanguaging can help students who are learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). It found that using multiple languages in the classroom helps these students think more critically. This research is important because not many studies have been done in this area. Now, this study wants to focus on what students in the Master of Linguistics study program at Universitas Brawijaya think about translanguaging. It wants to understand how these students use different languages in their studies and what they think about it. This research will give us a better idea of how translanguaging can be helpful in the higher education.

This study aims to explore how using different languages can help students in advanced education programs at Universitas Brawijaya. In the Master of Linguistics program there, students come from various academic backgrounds including Chinese Literature, Indonesian Education, French Literature, and Japanese Education. The research wants to understand how using multiple languages called translanguaging affects these students' learning. It is not just about the benefits but also the difficulties students face when using translanguaging strategies. The study will also look at how students deal with and succeed in a learning environment that encourages translanguaging. By investigating into the Master of Linguistics study program at Universitas Brawijaya, this research wants to find out the many sides of translanguaging. It will try to answer two main questions: 1) How does translanguaging affect the learning experience of master's students in Linguistics classrooms? And 2) What challenges do master's students face and the strategies do they employ to navigate the implementation of translanguaging practices in the Linguistics classrooms? This exploration aims to give us a better idea of how translanguaging influences learning in the unique setting of the Master of Linguistics study program at Universitas Brawijaya.

METHOD

This research used a qualitative approach, which, according to Hamilton & Finley (2019) in Ayyub & Tyas (2023), focuses on exploring and understanding experiences without relying on numbers or statistical analysis. Data were collected through interviews with five students from the Master of Linguistics study program at Universitas Brawijaya. These participants were chosen because they came from non-English undergraduate backgrounds such as Chinese Literature, Indonesian Education, French Literature, and Japanese Education. The researcher aimed to understand their perspectives on the use of translanguaging, a mix of Indonesian and English commonly used in their classes and how their previous academic experiences influenced their views and adaptation to this teaching method. To gather the data, the researcher asked the participants a set of questions about their experiences and opinions regarding translanguaging in the classroom. After collecting the responses, the data were analyzed by organizing and simplifying the information to make it easier to interpret. This involved reviewing the interview results, field notes, and any supporting documentation, then categorizing and synthesizing the data to identify patterns and draw meaningful conclusions. The goal of this analysis was to better understand how students with non-English academic backgrounds perceive and respond to translanguaging in their graduate studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Researchers investigated into their perspectives concerning translanguaging practices within the linguistic context. The initial findings of the research offer valuable insights into how students respond to, understand, and apply translanguaging in the context of language learning

and linguistics. Analyzing these findings will offer a profound understanding of the aspects of translanguaging among master's students in linguistics and its relevance within the modern linguistic context. The first question:

1. How does translanguaging affect the learning experience of master's students in the Linguistics classrooms?

“Overall, translanguaging-based learning helps students adapt to English, which can be highly beneficial for academic purposes. However, it also presents challenges for students who are not yet familiar with English, as missing the context of a conversation can make it difficult for them to follow.” (Student 1/Bachelor's degree in Indonesian Education)

This answer of S1 shows what Nur et al., (2023) states that emphasizes the multifaceted benefits of translanguaging, revealing cognitive, social, and psychological advantages. From an academic perspective, it improves students' cognition, fosters the understanding, and promotes collaborative dialogue between educators and learners. This aligns with the observation in the student's answer above that translanguaging significantly impacts linguistic learning for master's students, aiding in their adaptation to English and positively influencing academics.

“This has had an impact, instead of making Linguistics classes easier, I personally find it more challenging due to interference from my third language (L3), Japanese. I have studied Japanese for four years, while my English skills have remained stagnant since high school. However, at times, being able to observe the linguistic differences between Japanese, English, and Indonesian has proven helpful.” (Student 2/Bachelor's degree in Japanese Education)

This answer of S2 shows that the use of translanguaging influences the linguistic learning experience of master's students. While it helps to understand the differences between languages, interference from a third language (in this case, Japanese) makes it more difficult. This emphasizes the importance of careful management in implementing translanguaging so as not to disrupt students' linguistic learning process. Aligning with this perspective, Anwar et al., (2019) highlights the positive influence of translanguaging on the overall quality of teaching and learning. When employed thoughtfully, translanguaging can enhance the educational experience, emphasizing the importance of strategic application for optimal results in language acquisition and comprehension.

“I am not sure whether the use of translanguaging in Linguistics classes would have a significant impact, as I assume that master's students are expected to already possess an advanced level of English proficiency.” (Student 3/ Bachelor's degree in French Literature)

This answer of S3 shows that the use of translanguaging in linguistics classes is still relevant even if students have high English language proficiency. Translanguaging enables access to diverse languages to support deeper understanding and enrich discussions of complex linguistic concepts. Maybe this answer does not agree with using translanguaging. It seems Anwar et al., (2019) stated that continuous involvement may negatively impact the quality and language skills of students, as it could be perceived as hindering the enrichment of their foreign language vocabulary.

“For me, the application of translanguaging has had a significant impact on my learning process. Previously, I had never experienced a class conducted entirely in English, so I initially found it challenging to fully understand what the lecturer meant during the lessons. There was a lot of unfamiliar vocabulary when I was in a fully English-taught class. However, over time, I gradually became more accustomed to it, and it became

easier for me to follow and understand the lecturers.” (Student 4/Bachelor’s degree in Chinese Literature)

This answer of S4 shows provided information suggests that the integration of translanguaging positively impacts the learning experience of linguistics master's students. Overcoming the initial difficulty in comprehending English vocabulary, students can employ their native language to grasp concepts before transitioning to English, thereby enhancing understanding in the linguistics classroom. This aligns with Garcia, et al., (2017) findings, emphasizing that translanguaging fosters a sense of acceptance within the classroom process. This acceptance encourages learners to utilize all available resources, including their native language, promoting active and inclusive participation in the learning process.

“For me, using translanguaging is helpful, especially since I already have a basic understanding of English. It allows me to learn new vocabulary and gain new insights. However, there are still times when I come across unfamiliar words, which encourages me to look them up. As a result, I am able to understand the material better moving forward.” (Student 5/Bachelor’s degree in Chinese Literature)

The response from S5 indicates that translanguaging allows students to utilize the language they are more proficient in (in this case, English) to acquire new vocabulary and deepen their understanding. Although unfamiliar words may still arise, the process of looking them up contributes to better comprehension over time. This suggests that translanguaging facilitates vocabulary development and a more meaningful learning experience in linguistics. This aligns with the perspective of Eirene Letarina et al., (2022) who argue that translanguaging not only supports students in acquiring knowledge more effectively but also enhances their potential to become polyglots. By engaging in translanguaging, students benefit from exposure to multiple languages used in the classroom, which promotes vocabulary expansion.

2. “What challenges do master's students face and the strategies do they employ to navigate the implementation of translanguaging practices in the Linguistics classrooms?”

“For me, the main challenge is limited vocabulary, particularly academic or formal terms that are not commonly used in everyday conversation. Additionally, it takes me a bit more time to properly understand and process the questions. To overcome this, I try to read as many scientific articles as possible that are related to the lesson, so that unfamiliar terms can be recognized in advance. Taking notes also helps me greatly in reviewing and reinforcing what the lecturer has explained.” (Student 1/Bachelor’s degree in Indonesian Education)

This answer of S1 shows that in the context of translanguaging in linguistics classes, this student faces the problem of limited vocabulary and requires a longer time to understand the explanation. This student survives by reading scientific articles related to lessons and taking notes on lecture material. This aligns with Sanjaya (2023) assertion that translanguaging presents a challenge for students who, recognizing English as a non-native language, struggle with a deficit in vocabulary for comprehending monolingual English conversations.

“For me, the main challenge is the limited vocabulary I have. Sometimes, I understand the meaning of a word, such as from Japanese to Indonesian but struggle to translate it into English. Likewise, I might know the meaning of an English word in Indonesian but face difficulties expressing it in Japanese. As a result, I still need to rely on a dictionary to find the appropriate vocabulary. To overcome this, I work on improving my language skills in the areas I find weakest, particularly in English and Japanese translation, also focus on developing my foreign language literacy so that I can better understand proper sentence structure when translating into Indonesian.” (Student 2/Bachelor’s degree in Japanese Education)

This answer of S2 shows that this student faces challenges in translating words between languages, especially from Japanese to Indonesian/English. To survive, this student improved weak language skills (English and Japanese) as well as foreign language literacy. It shows efforts in applying translanguaging with a focus on developing language skills to overcome vocabulary limitations when switching languages in a Linguistic context. This aligns with Ha et al., (2022) who notes that students view translanguaging as a temporary aid in overcoming the fear of speaking English, highlighting the need for autonomy, interaction, and increased linguistic input to improve fluency. This perspective emphasizes the importance of translanguaging as a strategic tool alongside individual initiative for effective language learning and overcoming language barriers.

“Regarding the challenges faced, I have observed that many students still rely on translanguaging to express their ideas in English. In my opinion, due to the limited presence of native or foreign English speakers in class, the continued use of translanguaging may hinder students’ progress toward mastering English at a more advanced level. Personally, I do not support this approach, as I believe avoiding translanguaging entirely would be more effective for developing strong English proficiency.” (Student 3/Bachelor’s degree in French Literature)

This answer of S3 shows that the use of translanguaging in English classes is considered an obstacle to achieving high proficiency in the language. This student believes that relying on their native language can slow progress in mastering English in depth. This student rejects this method of translanguaging because he believes that a complete focus on the target language is necessary to accelerate progress in language learning. This sentiment aligns with Wlosowicz (2020) who discusses university students' varied opinions on translanguaging. While some find it useful for raising awareness, others perceive it as confusing. Wlosowicz also emphasizes the limited applications of translanguaging in a university context, noting its role in highlighting language similarities, compensating for lexical gaps, and aiding in translation or language teaching.

“For me, the main challenge lies in understanding the vocabulary used in linguistic discussions. Since I have never been in a class conducted entirely in English, I often struggle to speak the language although I know what I want to say in my head, I get confused when trying to express it verbally. To overcome this, I usually review the material after class or read English texts beforehand. These strategies have helped me better understand the material and manage my studies in graduate school.” (Student 4/Bachelor’s degree in Chinese Literature)

This answer of S4 shows that the challenge faced is the difficulty in using English in the context of linguistic learning. Even though she understands the material, She has difficulty conveying her thoughts. To overcome this, she made it a habit to read the material in English before class and repeat the material afterward. This strategy reflects the application of translanguaging by using a combination of language and independent learning methods to understand the material better. Sulistiyarini et al., (2020) supports the efficacy of pre-reading activities by emphasizing their positive impact on improving students' creative thinking skills, particularly in fluency. The alignment between S4's strategy and Sulistiyarini's findings emphasizes the potential benefits of incorporating translanguaging techniques, such as pre-reading in English, in educational settings to enhance language skills and creative thinking.

“One of the challenges I face is questioning the relevance of my undergraduate background in Chinese Literature. I initially hoped it would help me translate from Chinese to English, but in the end, I realized that much of the learning had to be done independently. My survival strategy has been to develop personal coping mechanisms to stay afloat. Recently, I’ve been feeling burned out, so I try to manage it by going for

walks, eating well, or chatting with friends to lift my mood. These small steps help me regain the motivation I need to complete my master's assignments.” (Student 5/Bachelor's degree in Chinese Literature)

The response from student 5 illustrates her difficulty in understanding the relevance of studying Chinese literature at the undergraduate level, as she initially hoped it would enable her to translate from Chinese into English. Her coping strategies center on self-care to manage fatigue, including taking walks, maintaining a healthy diet, and socializing with friends to regain motivation for completing assignments in her master's program. These mental well-being strategies are crucial in managing academic stress. This aligns with the findings of La Ode Rasmin and Nur (2023), which highlight how translanguaging practices in classroom settings positively influence students' comfort and motivation in English language learning. Both perspectives emphasize the multifaceted nature of language learning, which involves not only academic relevance but also emotional resilience, coping mechanisms, and motivation in facing linguistic challenges.

Discussion

The Impact of Translanguaging on the Experience of Master's Students

The results of this study indicate that translanguaging has a positive impact on students' linguistic learning experiences. Using two or more languages enables students to understand complex concepts in linguistics, especially in the context of English-language lectures. Student 1 stated that translanguaging helped them adapt and understand the material more easily. This finding aligns with Carstens (2016), who stated that translanguaging supports bilingual learners in managing complex cognitive tasks by activating all their language skills. Furthermore, Student 2 and Student 5 stated that translanguaging enabled them to compare structures between languages and enrich their vocabulary and linguistic comprehension. This supports the findings of Romanowski (2020) and Yüzlü & Dikilitaş (2022), which emphasize that translanguaging encourages cognitive engagement and the development of critical thinking, particularly in the context of EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learning.

Interestingly, Student 3, who has a background in French Literature, expressed doubts about the effectiveness of translanguaging in linguistics classes, arguing that master's students should already be proficient in English. This statement reflects the view that translanguaging is only necessary for students with low English proficiency. However, this study confirms that translanguaging remains relevant for advanced learners. As Wei (2018) states, translanguaging is not simply a compensatory strategy, but rather a pedagogical approach that leverages students' entire linguistic repertoire in the learning process. Furthermore, Student 3's views also reflect concerns about the potential negative impact of translanguaging on foreign language vocabulary development. This is reinforced by the findings of Anwar et al. (2019), who stated that excessive use of translanguaging can hinder foreign language proficiency development if not accompanied by explicit efforts to expand mastery of the target language.

Challenges and Coping Strategies in Translanguaging Practices in Master's Students

While the majority of students perceived the benefits of translanguaging, they also faced various challenges. Students 1 and 2 reported that they experienced difficulty understanding context when switching between languages, especially when linguistic terms or concepts did not have direct equivalents in their native language. Students 4 and 5 added that they often struggled to express their ideas orally or in writing in English, even though they had already understood the material. This suggests that passive comprehension is not always accompanied by strong

expressive skills. These findings are consistent with studies by Sobkowiak (2022) and Mazak & Herbas-Donoso (2015), which emphasized that without appropriate pedagogical strategies, translanguaging can lead to linguistic confusion and hinder expressive abilities in the target language. In facing these challenges, students employed various academic and emotional coping strategies. Students 1, 2, and 4 stated that they overcame vocabulary limitations and language transitions by reading more in English, taking notes on important terms during lectures, and practicing expressing ideas in the target language. These strategies demonstrate a high level of linguistic awareness and motivation to develop language skills independently. In addition to academic strategies, students also employ non-academic strategies focused on mental well-being, such as managing stress, managing study time, and maintaining personal health during the study process. This aspect aligns with the views of García et al. (2017), who emphasized the importance of an effective and supportive translanguaging space, not only for academic reinforcement but also for supporting students' emotional well-being. A learning environment that supports translanguaging practices in a balanced manner has the potential to increase students' confidence and comfort in facing academic challenges.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, translanguaging offers significant benefits in language learning but also presents certain challenges. Educators and educational institutions need to carefully consider these issues when implementing translanguaging, as it can support students in managing language transitions and improving their overall well-being within academic environments. Translanguaging serves as an important bridge between diverse linguistic backgrounds, however it may also pose challenges to in-depth understanding and expression in linguistic contexts. This research emphasizes the necessity of a balanced and thoughtful approach to translanguaging, acknowledging both its advantages and potential obstacles in the language acquisition process. By promoting this understanding, educators can create more effective learning environments that support students' language development and mental well-being during their master studies. Then, for the future research can explore the long-term impact of translanguaging on academic performance and identity formation among multilingual learners across different educational levels.

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