

Translanguaging in the Saudi EMI Classroom: When University Instructors Talk

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Received: November 18, 2023

Accepted: December 15, 2023

Online Published: December 18, 2023

doi: 10.5539/elt.v17n1p1

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v17n1p1>

Abstract

The past few decades have witnessed a growing interest in using English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI), especially in higher education. Although the English language has rapidly shifted from being taught as a foreign language to becoming a medium of instruction, empirical research in this area is still limited in the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), especially in Saudi Arabia. Therefore, the present case study explores translanguaging in the EMI classroom. The study used semi-structured interviews to investigate teachers' perceptions and practices regarding translanguaging, the rationale behind such practices, and the pedagogical effect of implementing translanguaging practices. The data was collected from five university professors majoring in medicine, physics, electrical engineering, and computer science using purposive sampling. It was analyzed using thematic qualitative analysis. The findings show that the participants generally have a positive attitude toward translanguaging, as it was triggered by students' limited language proficiency and the contextual and psychological situation of the students in the classroom. The results also indicate that it facilitates content comprehension and aids in raising student engagement and reducing language anxiety. Consequently, adopting translanguaging strategies in EMI classrooms with caution is recommended to provide a wealth of advantages and chances for students' linguistic growth, engagement, and academic success. Professional development programs and assessments of students' needs are necessary to ensure the prudent use of translanguaging in class and improve EMI classrooms.

Keywords: translanguaging, EMI classroom, MENA, teachers' perceptions, tertiary education

1. Introduction

With the growing idea of globalization, the English language has gained great popularity in multilingual societies as a lingua franca for professional purposes. It has become the language of choice for international business, trade, and diplomacy. Its widespread use allows people from different linguistic backgrounds to communicate effectively and efficiently. Due to its status as a global language, English is essential for anyone seeking to thrive in the global economy. Therefore, English proficiency has become a highly sought-after skill in many industries, including technology, finance, and tourism. English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has emerged as an educational movement to weaponize graduates with efficient, professional knowledge and essential competence in specific fields and has been supported in higher education. This has led to an increasing number of universities and institutions offering courses and programs taught in English.

EMI refers to "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the language of most of the population is not English" (Macaro et al., 2018, p. 37). The number of EMI studies has risen in recent years, encompassing higher education institutions across various academic disciplines. Globally speaking, research on EMI has not only shed light on curriculum design (Leong, 2017) and policy making (Lie & Hu, 2014) but also on the implementation of EMI in classrooms (Macaro et al., 2018), teachers' perceptions and practices (Jiang, Zhang, & May, 2016), as well as its potential benefits and difficulties, such as students' limited language proficiency and teachers' lack of pedagogical competence (Yuan & Yang, 2020).

1.1 EMI in the Context of Saudi Arabia

Since earlier times, Saudi Arabia's language policy has been mainly influenced by the Arabic language and Islamic culture. Arabic is the only official language used in the country, and all educational levels must be taught in Arabic to preserve the cultural and religious heritage of the country. However, the policy also allows for the acquisition of knowledge from other languages to promote Arabization, spread knowledge, contribute to Islam, and serve humanity (Ebad, 2014; Al Zumor & Abdesslem, 2023). Saudi Arabia has undergone several changes in its pursuit of internationalization and globalization. As part of the educational reform, teaching English has been mandated in public schools starting in Grade 6 since 2003 (Ebad, 2014), and this has now progressed to Grade 1. Since 2004, there has been an increasing emphasis on incorporating English into the curriculum in higher education and promoting English language proficiency. The government perceives the adoption of EMI as part of the internationalization of higher education in Saudi Arabia, which is necessary for developing local human capital and ensuring sustainable economic growth. English language use in these contexts is intended to enhance students' English skills and prepare them for global opportunities, but it is not pervasive across all disciplines or institutions (Al Zumor & Abdesslem, 2023).

As no unequivocal governmental policy defines the use of English to teach science at universities, the decision has been left to individual universities. State universities mostly use English (or maintain they do) to teach computer science, medicine, and engineering, while private universities mostly adopt EMI in teaching science. Therefore, it can be argued that EMI is a de facto educational practice rather than a de jure policy that sprouted in response to domestic and global pressures and considerations (Al Zumor & Abdesslem, 2023). To bridge the gap between Arabic-medium instruction offered by schools and EMI introduced at universities and to foster high school graduates' poor English so that they can be well-prepared to join science programs, most universities have offered a preparatory year program (PYP) to be passed before joining science programs since 2005. PYP aims to provide students with a foundational understanding of the specialization they intend to pursue. University language centers and educational companies frequently administer it. However, a significant percentage of the programs are in English for General Purposes and vocabulary courses in specialized terminology, and the amount of time allocated to these courses varies amongst universities. As Al Zumor & Abdesslem (2023) stated, PYP programs do not adequately support students' experience learning academic disciplines, despite significant efforts being made to improve students' English language proficiency. The amount of English instruction provided to students for specific academic purposes is inadequate. Additionally, most teachers teach English for General Purposes, even though their training is in teaching English as a foreign language. However, these efforts have not been successful, and English has remained a very foreign language among students.

Despite the growing interest in and increasing proliferation of EMI in academia, research on EMI in the context of Saudi higher education is still at an adolescent stage (Macaro et al., 2017). However, research indicates that implementing EMI in Saudi Arabian higher education has faced several challenges. According to Alanazi (2021), one of the main obstacles is students' difficulty comprehending material or speaking and writing fluently. This is especially the case for students not used to studying courses in English. Other challenges include teachers' complaints of limited class time, which postulates a problem in delving into content. Ebad (2014) highlighted that these challenges and obstacles to promoting EMI in education systems are due to cultural, communication, and connection gaps between students and instructors in typical classroom settings. Research on the Saudi EMI classroom in tertiary education has addressed the phenomenon and pointed out its challenges by investigating the attitudes of learners and instructors. Different studies reported several practices used by instructors to overcome the challenges of EMI and facilitate classroom teaching and learning. Alanazi (2021) and Ebad (2014) postulated that teachers and students used strategies like translanguaging, simplifying the English language, and multimodality. Translanguaging in Saudi EMI classrooms is still debatable in content-based instruction (Ebad, 2014). While some educators may actively encourage translanguaging, others may adopt a more restrictive approach, emphasizing English-only instruction. On the other hand, Al Zumor and Abdesslem (2023) stated that translanguaging scarcely advances critical thinking, deep learning, or language proficiency in both languages.

1.2 Translanguaging as an Educational Practice

To overcome the difficulties of EMI in teaching content courses, some researchers called for translanguaging in the EMI classroom. The term translanguaging is relatively new, as it was first introduced in 1994 by Cen Williams (García & Wei, 2014). During the late twentieth century, views toward multilingualism changed, and consequently, the concept of translanguaging spread across the globe (Zhou, Li, & Geo, 2021). Translanguaging theory postulates a dynamic and functionally integrative use of languages and language resources for knowledge (re)construction in content learning (Yuan & Yang, 2020). In the field of education, translanguaging has been argued to be a beneficial pedagogical practice for improving language learning. It is "the process by which

bilingual students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices in order to ‘make sense’ of and communicate in multilingual classrooms” (García et al., 2011, p. 389). That is to say, students and teachers use various forms of linguistic resources in different learning and teaching activities to reach the ultimate goal of meaning-making (Zhou et al., 2021). It differs from code-switching as it strategically selects communicative features within a certain linguistic repertoire (García, 2012; García & Wei, 2014; Zhou et al., 2021).

Although translanguaging depends heavily on students’ backgrounds and needs as well as the available resources in the classroom context (Yuan & Yang, 2020), such practice is argued for in the field of education, specifically in EMI classrooms, for its potential advantages. Some of its fundamental benefits include: 1) promoting a better understanding of the subject matter; 2) improving the acquisition of the weaker language; 3) improving home-school relationships; 4) integrating fluent students with beginners (Baker, 2001); 5) developing their metalinguistic abilities (Mazak & Herbas-Donso, 2015; Cohen, 2015) as well as their metalingual identities (Celic & Seltzer, 2011; Cohen, 2015). It is also reported that translanguaging decreases the students’ anxiety toward language learning in the EMI classroom and provides a safe space for EFL learners (Cenoz, 2022; Lang, 2019; Ahn, Shin, & Kang, 2018).

Global research on the concept of translanguaging is relatively recent and still very limited (Caruso, 2018). In tertiary education, the literature on translanguaging in teaching is also new and still limited. Most of the studies have tackled the English language as the lingua franca that is learned beside different first languages, i.e., in China (Zhou et al., 2021; Pun, 2021), Indonesia (Nursanti, 2021), Europe, and America (Caruso, 2018; Galante, 2020). Yuan & Yang’s (2020) case study, contextualized in China, explored using translanguaging in the EMI classroom for teacher education. Their study revealed that translanguaging could be planned or generative, depending heavily on the teaching context. Translanguaging follows three different strategies: the use of academic and daily discourse, verbal and semiotic resources, and, last but not least, using learners’ first language. Likewise, questioning the existence and use of translanguaging in higher education, Caruso (2018) explored the context of Portugal. The fact that scientific texts used in education were published in English and the presence of students with different repertoires impose a language choice on professors. Caruso (2018) reported that the professor allows his students to translanguage during lessons to achieve “collective comprehension of content.” Moreover, the students are given a “structured multilingual final exam” to motivate and improve their multilingual competence. Zhou et al. (2021) conducted a mixed-method study on an EMI course implemented in an international school in China to explore the students’ translanguaging practices and their attitudes toward it. The drawn conclusion reported a positive attitude towards translanguaging. According to the study, translanguaging is usually motivated by “ease of communication,” resulting in enhanced content learning.

1.3 Translanguaging in the Context of Saudi Arabia

Hopkyns & Elyas (2022) discussed translanguaging practices as linked to language policy and planning in the region. According to them, the education system is still dominated by monolingual ideology. Linguistic boundaries between Arabic and English are to be maintained in the classroom. Therefore, English courses in schools are taught in English only, while other courses are taught in Arabic only. When students reach the university level, some genres (i.e., medicine, computer science, engineering, and sciences) are legitimized to be taught using English only, creating a challenge for the students. As a result, higher education instructors are driven to look for mitigation.

In the context of Middle East and North Africa (MENA), research on translanguaging is relatively new. The studies conducted in the context of MENA explored the viewpoints of students or school teachers. For instance, in the United Arab Emirates, Hopkyns, Zoghbor, & Hassall (2021) investigated university students’ attitudes and practices concerning translanguaging. On the other hand, Kennetz et al. (2020) studied elementary teachers’ identities and willingness to translanguage in EMI classrooms. Their main findings revealed an unexpected pragmatic willingness and enthusiasm among participants to use their first language (L1) in English classrooms. The researchers also discovered evidence of a developing bilingual professional identity that distinguishes participants from their monolingual peers.

Pedagogical translanguaging as a phenomenon in tertiary education has recently caught the attention of researchers in Saudi Arabia. Elashhab (2020) investigated its impact on learners’ language development. Employing several qualitative and quantitative instruments, she attempted to describe Saudi medical students’ translanguaging strategies and how they improved their communication in English. The study reveals that students with lower English proficiency use more translanguaging strategies, primarily for simple tasks and activities. Intermediate-level students use L1 to clarify grammatical rules and group discussions, while advanced-level students use Arabic less. Translanguaging creates a dynamic learning environment for EFL

students, enhancing language awareness, cognitive development, and content comprehension. Effective multilingual instruction aims to develop students' language awareness and input/output variations. Moreover, Almayez (2022) investigated English language teachers' attitudes towards pedagogical translanguaging and their reflected practices. A hundred and one teachers from a Saudi university responded to the questionnaires for the study. Findings reported a discrepancy between attitudes and practices, highlighting constraints hindering adoption. Furthermore, Alwaznah (2022) investigates the use of translation theory in postgraduate translation and interpreting training in Arabic-speaking countries. It further examines whether Arab instructors use EMI or translanguaging. A mixed method was used, including a questionnaire distributed to 60 instructors and interviews with three professors. The study found that most participants use translation theory for practical courses, as it provides a solid foundation for problem-solving and decision-making. However, they also exercise translanguaging, as the specific terminology in these theories may not be easily understood in English alone. The paper provides a baseline for using translation theory in EMI higher education in selected Arab countries, potentially impacting bilingual instruction.

Although these studies have pointed out translanguaging as a powerful tool in EMI classrooms, there is still a scarcity of research on translanguaging implementation from the viewpoint of teachers, especially in the specific context of Saudi EMI classrooms (Almayez, 2022). Such exploration is essential as a starting point for further research on translanguaging in the EMI classroom and how it could be positively exploited. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, the present study is one of the few studies to focus on translanguaging practices in EMI classes in Saudi Arabia from the viewpoint of teachers.

Considering such a research gap, this study explores Saudi university instructors' perceptions and implementation of translanguaging in EMI classrooms. It seeks to answer the following questions:

- (1) How do Saudi university instructors implement translanguaging in the EMI classroom?
- (2) What are the reasons behind their practices?
- (3) What are the pedagogical benefits of such practices?
- (4) How do they perceive translanguaging in the EMI classroom?

2. Method

The present study adopts a qualitative case-study approach. A case study approach is used to study a certain phenomenon in a certain context (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The participants of the study are five university professors (4 males and 1 female) selected through purposive sampling, in which participants are recruited because they have the characteristics that serve the purpose of the study (Thomas, 2017), i.e., teaching an EMI course for at least one year and using translanguaging in the classroom with the students. They are majoring in physics, medicine, electrical engineering, and computer science. The participants belong to three Saudi universities. Only one of the universities has a clear and strict language policy for using English in instructing the targeted courses. The participants in this study have teaching experience at their universities ranging from 1 to 22 years. They are all Saudi instructors born and partially educated in Saudi Arabia and have spent some time studying abroad (from 1 to 7 years). Their first language is Arabic, and they have a good command of English as their second language (L2). As for the students, they are undergraduate students, their L1 is Arabic, and their proficiency in English ranges from beginner to lower advanced students. All the professors teach content courses in their fields (e.g., logic design, physics, surgery, and information systems). They teach students at different levels. The main language of education is English. It is used in course material (i.e., books, handouts, presentations) and examinations. However, in course delivery and classroom discussion, the main language is academic English, with several translanguaging practices into everyday English and the student's first language.

Before collecting the data through semi-structured interviews, consent was obtained, and the participants' confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntariness were guaranteed through written consent. The semi-structured interview was deliberately chosen as an effective way to elicit and document the participants' feelings, beliefs, attitudes, and values about their own experiences (Edwards & Holland, 2013). The instructors responded to the questions in the interview with a specific focus on translanguaging to investigate the teachers' perceptions of translanguaging, its triggers, their practices, and the roles and functions of translanguaging in EMI courses.

The instrument was adapted from Yuan & Yang (2020), who investigated translanguaging practices in an EMI teacher education course and used García & Wei (2014) as its framework. Only two questions concerning students' anxiety and their L2 development as related to translanguaging were added to meet the objectives of the study. These questions were: 'What do you think about switching languages when teaching? How does it influence the classroom environment?' 'Do you see the use of L1 in EMI classes as interference or help in

language development? How?'. The instrument was first validated through content validity and face validity by two specialized professors in the field to ensure that the interview protocol was acceptable. Based on their suggestions, necessary modifications were made, and the number of questions was limited, so the interview would not take as long as the instructors'. After that, the instrument was piloted by three EMI instructors to ensure its clarity and reliability and achieve data saturation. The data from the pilot study showed that the interview questions were clear and appropriate for the aim of the study. Then, the actual data collection process started with individual interviews conducted in English and audio-recorded. The number of participants is limited to five, as the collected data reached a point of saturation where no additional new information was revealed.

For the sake of anonymity, the respondents are given labels (i.e., participant 1, participant 2, ... and so on) before data analysis. A total of 110-minute recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. It is an analysis process that "characterizes the collection of generic qualitative analytical moves that are applied to establish patterns in the data" (Dornyei, 2007, p. 245). Following the qualitative thematic analysis, core themes were conceptualized, compared, and validated based on the prominent themes in the domain. Such themes and codes were defined and cross-checked with one of the specialists in the field. The resulting themes were further interpreted and elaborated on within the conceptual framework of translanguaging (García & Wei, 2014; Li, 2018). Interrater reliability was calculated and found to be 90% similar in most themes.

3. Results

The results of the current study were presented in terms of themes. The reported themes were mainly classified into four categories. These categories include the reasons behind translanguaging in EMI classrooms, strategies, pedagogical benefits, and professors' perceptions of translanguaging.

3.1 Teachers' Translanguaging Practices

Regarding the first question of the present study about the instructor's implementation of translanguaging in the EMI classroom, one prominent theme is considered, i.e., strategies of implementing translanguaging, which are the ways instructors use in EMI classes. Four main subthemes were revealed from the interviews. They include integrating English with students' L1, academic English with a simplified form of English, planned translanguaging, and unplanned translanguaging.

As for the first subtheme, English is the language of textbooks, presentations, and examinations. It is also the main language of lecturing. The incidents where translanguaging occurs are confined to class discussions and, sometimes, while lecturing when the professor believes it is necessary to translanguaging because the students do not fully understand a concept. According to Participant P1, "I use English to explain the concepts, the definitions, the mathematical laws, and problem-solving. However, when it comes to the discussion, I would shift into Arabic." Participant P2 remarked, "The teaching material is all in English, and translanguaging is involved in interactive discussions. So, the primary language in the classroom is English. I use it in lecturing as well as it is the language of the video clips. Like when explaining the videos, sometimes I do some translanguaging. When explaining the medical term 'transplantation,' I use the term transfer and transfer of organs like a simplified language, and in Arabic we use 'زرعة'"

Participant P3 also commented, "using the Arabic language to clarify the concept or to give a real-life example, but I usually go back to English as the main language."

He explains the idea by giving an example that happened in one of his recent classes, saying, "I was explaining to the students the differentiation between two classifications of collision. In physics, there are elastic collisions and inelastic collisions. In an inelastic collision, after a collision happens, the two colliding objects are deformed. So, I was explaining to the students what happens if these two objects were tangled or coupled together. So, I felt that they did not get the idea of deformation. So, I already switched to Arabic and told them that:

لو حصل تشويه في جسمين بحيث أنه الجسمين بعد التصادم تداخل مع بعض أو ارتبطا مع بعض حصل لهم تغيير في الشكل مو شرط أنه يكون deformation تغيير في الشكل كامل إنما يكون تغيير في الجسمين قبل التصادم وبعد التصادم أصبحوا جسم واحد بغض النظر عن ماهية الـ اللي حاصل."

These translanguaging practices are sometimes planned, but most of the time, they are driven by the contextual needs in the classroom. All of the participants showed that they considered the students' English level while planning their lessons and lectures. This is evident in the parts where they move from academic English to the simplified everyday form of English. Participant P2 assured that "definitely, I take their level of proficiency [into

account] when I plan my lectures. I try to make the terms as clear and easy as possible. That is why sometimes I move from academic English into a simplified form of English.” Participant P3 and Participant P4 also explained this and pointed out that they also prepared the Arabic translation of some terms and sometimes real-life examples in Arabic. The response of Participant P3 regarding this was, “Absolutely, I take the students’ level into consideration while planning... Sometimes, I use the translation for some concepts.” According to Participant P4, “When I prepare my lecture, I prepare it in English, but, at the same time, I know that some parts would be impossible for the students to understand if explained only in English because they have so many details. So, I prepare some stuff and examples in Arabic to help them understand.” Participant P2 admitted that he deliberately prepares the translation of some terms into Arabic because he thinks that students need to know them as they will deal with patients who are native speakers of Arabic.

On the other hand, the participants highlighted that most of the incidents are brought up depending on the situation in the classroom. They accidentally use translanguaging when they notice that students struggle to comprehend the exact meaning of a piece of information or a concept. According to Participant P1, “I do not consider this in lesson planning because I do all my notes and everything in English. But, in the lecture, I would have to switch into Arabic when I notice that the students are struggling to understand something to save time and engage the students. For example, when I come across a definition which is concise and precise, I use words that are not typically used, like when I come to the term ‘associative,’ I would say:

"تراه يدخل بال (associative) هنا وتقدر تستخدمه بالطريقة هذي أو الطريقة هذي"

[It goes under “associative” here, and you can use it this way or that way.]

Participant P2 explained that such incidents of accidental translanguaging happen as he tries to go along with the students in the discussions. He confirmed that “normally, this switching and translanguaging is initiated by the students. It is not me who initiated it. It is usually started and guided by the students.”

The main translanguaging strategy highlighted is integrating academic discourse with everyday discourse to help the students comprehend content. Moreover, L1 is used as a semiotic resource to promote knowledge attainment. The instructors could deliberately plan these translanguaging practices. However, it is often incidental and spontaneous, depending heavily on the contextual circumstances inside the classroom. Such findings coincide with Yuan & Yang (2020), Caruso (2018), and Zhou et al. (2021). Moreover, they align with García & Wei’s (2014) proposition of translanguaging as an explicit affirmation of the bilingual’s linguistic practices. It demonstrates the complex and dynamic relationship between the bilinguals’ linguistic systems, from which they select depending on interactional, topical, and contextual elements.

3.2 Reasons for Translanguaging

Two main themes were highlighted when considering the reasons behind translanguaging practices. The first is linguistic ability, which is related to the student’s linguistic ability. The second is contextual needs, which refers to the surrounding circumstances within the classroom. One main subtheme under “linguistic abilities” is the student’s limited L2 proficiency. All the professors have a consensus that it is their main drive to use translanguaging in the classroom. The students enrolled in EMI classrooms are not well-equipped with the necessary academic English language to understand the language of science. This is evident in Participant P1’s words in the following quote: “The main reason is breaking down the language barrier for the students, helping them to understand faster rather than thinking how to understand because students are not prepared very well.” Participant P1 was not the only one to draw upon this fact. Participant P2 also agreed with him, as his statement shows, “If you give a term that the students do not know about, you have to explain it in English and Arabic sometimes because of the proficiency of the students and their lack of English vocabulary.”

Such a typical picture of the student’s proficiency level creates concerns about the student’s ability to understand the content the professors try to deliver. Therefore, the professors resort to translanguaging depending on their assessment of contextual needs. Three main subthemes contribute to this main theme. The first subtheme is to simplify the idea and remove confusion, or to ensure that all students understand the content in the correct way without leaving anyone at a disadvantage. This is exemplified in Participant P1’s response: “I would shift into Arabic because some of the students would get the information faster when it is in Arabic. This shift to Arabic is only for the benefit of students.” Participant P4 pointed that out, saying, “I use Arabic because I need to make sure that they got the information correctly, and they have it in the book written in English.”

Participant P2 also explained that, saying, “The communication is not always leveled. I mean, sometimes, the meaning of the vocabulary that we say is not always understood by the students the way we want or the way it should be.”

He explained by mentioning a specific example from his own experience, saying, “For example, when it comes to the term ‘transplantation.’ The students would confuse it a lot... You need to explain what you mean—is it the donor? Is it the organ itself? Is it the process of transferring an organ from one body to another? Then you have to explain it in Arabic as well.”

The other two subthemes related to contextual needs and motivating translanguaging are breaking boredom in the classroom and grabbing students’ attention. The responses of Participant P2 and Participant P4 revealed that translanguaging is genuinely motivated by their assessment of the situation during the lecture. Participant P2 said, “Definitely, the psychological aspects, like the students getting bored or losing their interest in the lecture, matter because their proficiency in English does not help them to understand what I am trying to convey.”

Participant P4 commented, “If I do not shift into Arabic, I would be surprised at the middle of the class that they are not on the same page.”

The other focus of the present study is the rationale behind translanguaging in the EMI classroom. The results show that translanguaging emerges for several reasons. The main reason is the student’s level of proficiency, which results in translanguaging to enhance meaning-making and ensure knowledge attainment. The teachers’ focus on the target of meaning-making aligns with García & Wei (2014), who postulated that bilingual teachers are building on complex resources to ensure meaning-making and promote students’ entire repertoire by using several complex linguistic practices and pedagogical strategies. Moreover, translanguaging is motivated by the contextual and psychological conditions of the students inside the classroom. Such aspects as seeking ease of communication, breaking classroom monotony, and grabbing the students’ attention are sufficient reasons for instructors to initiate a translanguaging practice. These findings align with Zhou et al. (2021), who highlighted that translanguaging is motivated by ease of communication and contextual resources. Muguruza, Cenoz, & Gorter (2020) explained that students with low levels of English proficiency can face difficulties in both comprehension and production. However, the study also showed that using flexible language policies (such as incorporating translanguaging pedagogies) can help mitigate these difficulties while still providing students with exposure to English.

3.3 Translanguaging Pedagogical Benefits

Regarding the third research question about the teaching benefits of such practice, one main theme surfaced: creating a positive classroom environment. It refers to setting a climate that helps students learn and grow. Three key subthemes were observed. The first is that translanguaging is a tool to speed up the teaching process, clear up confusion, and enhance content learning. Participant P1 mentioned a specific example: “When I notice the students are confused, the switch will solve the problem in ten seconds. For example, when we are solving a problem that is related to proofs, I would say that it could be solved using the distributive property or associative property. When the students looked confused, I would continue explaining:

نوزع الضرب على الجمع

The students immediately say, ‘Aha! It is clear now,’ and we move on to the next point.” Participant P2 commented, “To translanguage is always a help. Whatever works for the students to understand the lecture is always a help. The content remains a priority.”

The second subtheme is that translanguaging is a tool to reduce students’ anxiety in the classroom. All the participants agree that translanguaging is helpful, especially for junior students. Participant P2 commented, “If you are very strict with English-only teaching... They might prefer not to ask questions, especially at junior levels in medical schools, because the English language is a challenge for them.” Participant P1 also explained that “because they are not forced to speak in a certain way or specific language, whether this language is English or Standard Arabic. So, the problem for them is smaller, and, therefore, their anxiety will be smaller, of course.”

The third subtheme is crucial for raising students’ engagement in the classroom. All the participants agree that translanguaging is a beneficial tool to increase the interactivity between the professor and the students in the classroom. Participant P4 admitted that she purposefully shifted to Arabic to encourage the students to ask questions and engage in discussions. Participant P2 stressed the importance of interactivity in the classroom. According to Participant P2, “The level of interactivity of the students with the lecturer remains a priority... We noticed that with junior students. It is a plus for the lecturer to switch to Arabic because this raises the level of their interactivity in class and also allows some way of better communication with the lecturer.”

Regarding the pedagogical benefits and function of translanguaging in EMI classrooms, the findings clearly illustrate the role of translanguaging in involving all students in class and encouraging them to engage in discussions and raise questions. It follows that translanguaging is an indispensable tool to facilitate

meaning-making and enhance knowledge acquisition while maintaining students' engagement and reducing anxiety. These findings concurred with the findings of many studies (Caruso, 2018; Ahn et al., 2018; Lang, 2019; Cenoz, 2022; Nursanti, 2021; Elashhab, 2020) pointing out the role of translanguaging in raising students' engagement in the class, reducing their anxiety toward learning the English language, and promoting the process of meaning-making to reach an ultimate and deeper comprehension of content. Moreover, Alwaznah (2022) stated that translanguaging is sometimes necessary to explain some terms as they are difficult to understand through an explanation in English alone. According to Zhou et al. (2021) and Pun (2021), it is among the affordances of translanguaging that it develops students' metacognitive skills, allowing them to interact fluently in a confident and safe atmosphere while enhancing knowledge acquisition. Muguruza, Cenoz, & Gorter (2020) reported that the consistent use of a flexible language policy by the teacher and materials in EMI courses, based on the use of pedagogical translanguaging, allowed students to follow the content of the course with lower levels of anxiety.

3.4 Instructors' Overall Attitude towards Translanguaging

However, concerning their general view of the role of translanguaging in improving the students' L2, the participants' responses varied. One of the participants remarked that such variation in viewpoints toward the beneficiary role of translanguaging on the part of improving language proficiency is field-specific. Some fields need both languages, and therefore, translanguaging helps both sides. Others see that translanguaging, if not controlled and minimized, would eventually be detrimental to the students' L2 proficiency. They argue that it is a fact that English is the language of science and postgraduate studies. It is also required for academic tasks, graduation projects, and professional purposes. Therefore, students must improve their English proficiency.

Based on such justification, three main themes were observed. The first theme was a positive attitude, i.e., the positive perspective of L2 instructors regarding the use of translanguaging in the EFL classroom. The main subtheme is that it is assisting the students linguistically. Participant P2, who specializes in medicine, sees the direct relationship between translanguaging and students' L2 attainment. According to him, translanguaging works as a facilitator for students' L2 acquisition. Participant P2 commented, "From my personal point of view, we [instructors] have to include the two languages as we are graduating as doctors who are going to treat patients and have to communicate directly with them. That is why translanguaging is a plus [linguistically for the students]."

On the other hand, the second main theme was negative attitude, which refers to the opponent's viewpoint of using translanguaging in EMI classrooms. The main subtheme was that translanguaging is a hindrance to L2 attainment. Participant P1, a professor in electrical engineering, doubted the benefit the students would accomplish at the L2 level. He noted, "On the part of the language, I am not sure that this is beneficial to the classroom overall, but it is a temporary fix for a permanent problem. We are not solving anything by this [translanguaging], but we will have to move on teaching the course." He thinks that translanguaging is like "a bandage" that does not fix anything.

The third theme that surfaced in the analysis is the limited use of translanguaging, i.e., the use of translanguaging is supported within the classroom, but to a certain extent. One main subtheme is that translanguaging is effective if controlled. Participant P3 and Participant P4, professors in physics and computer science, respectively, appreciate the role of translanguaging. However, from their point of view, this practice should be limited and controlled to avoid a negative impact on the students' L2 because they might depend on it. Participant P3 said, "If you keep [translanguaging] to a minimum level, it will be helpful for them. As freshmen students, absolutely, but it should not take a long time because otherwise, they will take it as an excuse for not understanding or not performing tasks."

Despite its aforementioned and vital role in the EMI classroom, the participants' responses toward its role in students' L2 attainment varied. While some participants expressed their concerns about the drawbacks of this strategy, others appreciated the controlled use of L1 in the EMI classroom to help enhance L2 attainment. Such varied responses coincide with those of Zhou et al. (2021), who reported some reservations about accepting translanguaging as a formal linguistic practice that is widely accepted and used. Moreover, the relationship between the two languages as one functioning to learn the other contradicts Al Zumor and Abdesslem (2023), who stated that translanguaging hardly promotes language learning. However, such a relationship agrees with Cohen (2015) and Baker (2001), who advocate the importance of using L1 in L2 classrooms to serve as "a cognitive and metacognitive tool, as a strategic organizer, and as a scaffold for language development" (p. 333). Therefore, it is suggested to use translanguaging in a controlled and minimized way to avoid any drawbacks. Such findings disagree to a certain extent with Hopkyns & Elyas (2022), who advocate legitimizing

translanguaging as a practice in educational domains as it is commonplace. They called for a vital policy change toward endorsing translingual identities across domains to bolster genuine language identities.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study contributed to the field by showing a deeper view of what happened inside EMI classrooms from instructors’ perspectives and a thorough analysis of the point of view of university professors in Saudi Arabia. It focuses on the viewpoint of Saudi professors toward translanguaging concerning four main aspects: its drive, its pedagogical benefits, the teachers’ practices, and their overall perceptions towards it. The findings are summarized in the following Figure (1):

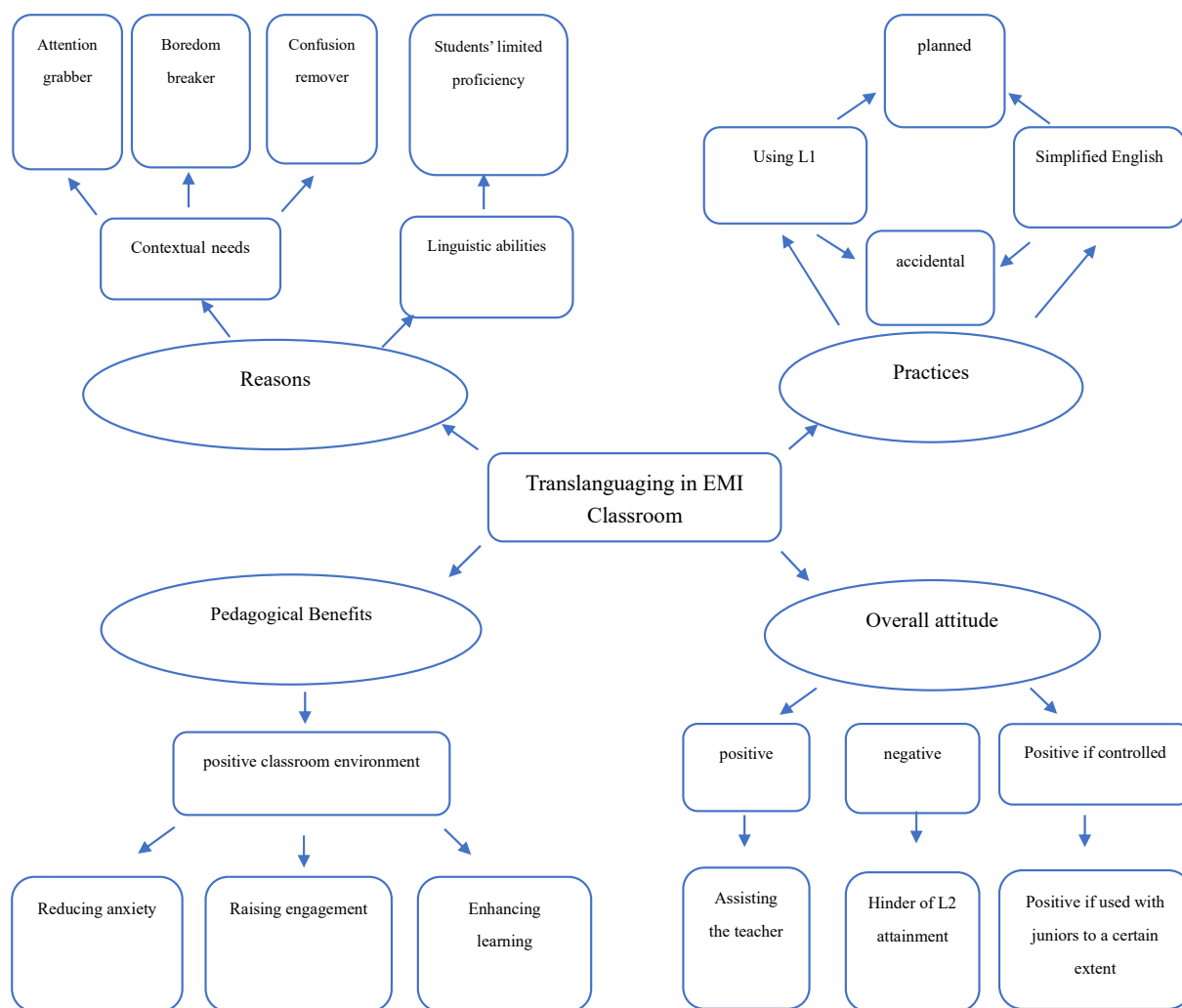


Figure 1. Translanguaging in the EMI classroom

Considering the results and discussion above, in EMI classrooms in tertiary education in Saudi Arabia, translanguaging is mainly triggered by students’ limited proficiency level in English and the instructors’ concerns about appropriate content delivery. It is also triggered by contextual and psychological status in the classroom, e.g., class monotony. Translanguaging is exemplified in the planned and accidental use of simplified everyday English and students’ L1. Pedagogically speaking, it enhances academic success and facilitates comprehension by exploiting or utilizing the students’ full linguistic repertoire. Moreover, it provides ease of communication, fosters the process of meaning-making, raises students’ engagement, and reduces students’ language anxiety. However, the findings show variation in participants’ responses concerning the role of translanguaging in facilitating L2 attainment. Such variation is field-specific. Therefore, it could be recommended that policymakers consider translanguaging as an accepted pedagogical practice and consult content instructors when designing program policies. University instructors are further advised to consider their students’ needs and level of proficiency when using translanguaging. Teachers should value their pupils’ linguistic resources and promote

language negotiation and strategic code-switching. The employment of translanguaging in the EMI classroom is advised with caution to help narrow the gap of communication between the instructor and the students without affecting the students' motivation and attainment in L2. Therefore, programs for professional development should be made available to help teachers utilize translanguaging successfully. Embracing translanguaging in EMI classrooms can create inclusive and effective learning environments that promote bilingualism and academic success.

Regarding limitations, the present study is a case study of Saudi EFL university instructors teaching EMI classes. It sheds light on a specific phenomenon in the EMI classroom: translanguaging. It uses semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. Therefore, further research is recommended using observation as a supportive instrument to obtain rich data and draw in-depth conclusions about the teachers' actual practices in the classroom. More studies are needed to investigate translanguaging practices in EMI classes in Saudi Arabia among teachers and students in secondary international schools. Moreover, it is suggested that the viewpoints of university students on a micro level towards translanguaging be considered in future research. Other countries in MENA are highly recommended to be investigated to compare their results with those of the present study. Finally, the present study highlights the benefits of translanguaging in EMI tertiary classrooms. Further research is needed to explore its long-term impact on language development, academic achievement, and the integration of students' linguistic repertoire.

5. Declarations

5.1 Competing Interests

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

5.2 Consent

The author confirms that informed consent was obtained from all participants for the study.

5.3 Conflict of Interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank the university professors who voluntarily and willingly devoted some of their precious time to participate in this study.

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Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Questions

The following are the interview questions:

- (1) In general, an appendix is appropriate for materials that are relatively brief and that are easily presented in print Can you give a general introduction about your professional backgrounds and experience?
- (2) What is your teaching philosophy as a teacher educator? Can you give some examples?
- (3) How do you often plan for your teacher education courses in terms of the teaching materials and tasks?
- (4) Normally, how do you interact with your students in your classrooms?
- (5) What is the medium of instruction in your classrooms? Do you switch languages when you teach students from diverse linguistic backgrounds?
- (6) What is your university's policy on the medium of instruction? Does this policy have any influence on your teaching?
- (7) According to what you have mentioned, you frequently use (depends on the course of the conversation), how does that help your teaching and students' learning?
- (8) According to this discussion, you usually introduce different academic terms and then use simpler languages to explain them. Why do you do this?
- (9) From your point of view, do you see the use of L1 in EMI classes as interference or a help in terms of language development? How?

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