



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Translanguaging as a tool to Decolonize English Language Teaching in Pakistan: Opportunities and Challenges**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study aims to highlight Pedagogical Translanguaging as a decolonizing tool for the 2<sup>nd</sup> language English learners in Pakistani academia. Firstly, it explored the opportunities given to students and teachers to exercise translanguaging as a pedagogy in English language teaching (ELT) to promote cultural heterogeneity. Secondly, it uncovered the challenges faced by students and teachers to implement translanguaging as a decolonizing tool to counter imperialistic English language teaching practices. Thirdly, it concluded that translanguaging may prove an effective teaching methodology to make students more confident to use their linguistic repertoire in the 2<sup>nd</sup> language English learning classrooms. Following a quantitative research methodology, the data were collected through a Google Form from the students of public sector universities. Later, the obtained data were analyzed through SPSS to see the descriptive value of the variables. Consequently, this study recommends translanguaging for the promotion of multilingual identities in the global world.

**KEYWORDS** Challenges, Colonization, Decolonization, Opportunities, Translanguaging

**Introduction**

Countries with a history of colonization use the language of their masters as the language medium of instruction in most cases, and Pakistan, being an ex-colony of British, uses English as the language medium of instruction especially in its higher education (Crystal, 2003). Language as a source of colonial ideology has been influencing the learners through different ways since the inception of Pakistan. According to Crystal (2003) after the departure of the British colonizers from the subcontinent, the language of their masters, i.e., English quickly gained the status of the official and 'literary language' in the region. Today English language classrooms explicitly depict the picture of colonial methodological activities such as classroom setting, classroom material, teachers' use of English-only policy etc. In such situation, learners at times suffer from anxiety, and are reluctant to express themselves in the target language. The imposition of an alien language in education and negligence of students' mother tongue results in subtractive bilingualism resulting in inequality in learning which leads the students to capacity deprivation (Mohanty et al., 2009).

Translanguaging is an approach which "...not only creates the possibility that bilingual students could use their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire to make meaning, but also that teachers would "take it up" as a legitimate pedagogical practice" (Garcia & Wei, 2015). Both learners and educators are the main stakeholders of learning process. The success of this process greatly depends on the strong bond between two of them. Translanguaging creates such a conducive bond for learner and educators to make

the learning process successful. The exposure of multilingualism in English language teaching makes the classroom environment more engaging and equitable for both teachers and learners.

Pedagogical translanguaging offers a podium to the learners to promote multilingualism in English language teaching classrooms. It greatly emphasizes the use of learners' entire linguistic repertoire to liberate the official and unofficial hegemony of English language as a colonial project. The hegemonic character of English language results in socio-political and racial discrimination in classrooms. Translanguaging is an effective platform to use both the dominant and dominated languages in the same classroom setting which gives a better understanding of the subject at hand, and it also helps the minority or weak languages to flourish with reference to the dominant one being used for teaching (Caruso, 2018; Garcia & Wei, 2015). As it is a diverse style of methodology, it offers different opportunities to the learners and the teachers. Teachers are the key role player in creating cultural harmony among the learners. Their devised translanguaging activities enable the learners to align themselves with the cultural inclusivity. As a result, learners develop tolerance for other cultural values. At the same time, learners and teachers face some challenges to materialize translanguaging in the classrooms. These challenges such as the English-only policy may hinder the learning process. Therefore, translanguaging helps the learners meet the challenges, and create more confidence among them to participate in the classroom discussion.

A translanguaging pedagogy has the potential to decolonize English language teaching by bringing together languages that have historically been divided, hierarchized, and racialized as a result of colonization (Rajendram, 2022). The responsibility greatly lies on teachers to redesign the teaching activities so that the learners may get benefits of using the entire linguistic repertoire in the classroom. Eventually, the regional languages, which many of them are near extinction, may also be saved and promoted by learners' and teachers' collaboration. In response to above discussion, this study aims to highlight the opportunities for the teachers and the students to use translanguaging as a decolonizing tool in the English language teaching classroom to promote multilingualism. Moreover, it also explores the challenges faced by the teachers and the students to practice translanguaging in the classroom.

### **Literature Review**

Tupas' (2022) study reflects what English colonizers did with Filipinos in Philippine. He highlighted the fact that the colonial-era native English speaker served as a tool to reinforce the perceived inferiority of Filipinos in their use of the colonial language. Despite the shift in control from Spanish to English colonizers in the Philippines, ingrained racialized ideologies about language, culture, identity, and nation persisted within the same colonial power framework. The contemporary exercise of power in the use, teaching, and learning of English is deeply influenced by the mobilization of race.

Rajendram's (2019) comparative case study, conducted in a Tamil school in Malaysia with fifth-grade ESL learners, revealed the significant role of learners as active policy actors challenging English-only policies. These learners, of South Indian descent, proficient in Tamil, Malay, and English, engaged in translanguaging to resist English-centric practices. Through interviews with learners like Amira and Malini, the study uncovered the linguistic colonization still experienced due to English-only policies, hindering the enjoyment of the hard-won independence of their country. According to

them, they feel like a bird that is kept in cage. This idea gives an insight to teachers for linguistic colonization.

Sun and Zhang's (2022) exploration of translanguaging effects on online peer feedback for the performance of English writing students indicated greater effectiveness in the first round compared to English-only feedback. They also considered features such as motivation, self-efficacy, and translanguaging awareness in understanding the overall impact on learning.

Jiang et al. (2022) investigated, in China the university students' perceptions of translanguaging, revealing that non-English major students were more prone to translanguaging as compared to their English major counterparts. The study highlighted the influence of teachers' and students' attitude on translanguaging which showed a considerable variance in favor of student translanguaging.

Li and García (2022) challenged the misconception that translanguaging solely recognizes students' first languages. They presented an interesting account of bilingual students who lived in London and New York, emphasizing the translanguaging lens as a means to challenge raciolinguistic ideologies and acknowledge students' complete language repertoire for effective learning.

In the context of education systems where English is taught as a second or additional language, Rajendram (2022) proposed a transformative approach. Recognizing that English cannot be isolated from other languages, he suggested disinvesting, reconstituting, and decolonizing language teaching by promoting collaboration among teachers of various languages. This approach aims to implement translanguaging pedagogy critically and consistently across the curriculum. These previous studies help understand the role of English in the past and present.

### **Theoretical framework**

Pedagogical translanguaging as a theoretical framework was used to guide this study. As a decolonizing instrument, translanguaging encourages students' rich linguistic repertoires, and has the power to free language practices that are restricted by formal and informal language regulations, resulting in more equal learning environments (Rajendram, 2022). According to García et al. (2017), translanguaging as critical and decolonial pedagogy for ELT promotes a co-stance, co-design, and co-shift in language use. In our teaching methods, it incorporates learners' life experiences, knowledge systems, and cultural and language repertoires (Rajendram, 2022).

### **Material and Methods**

The researchers employed a quantitative approach to collect the data, using closed ended questions with a Likert scale on a google form. The google form was shared with the sample through emails and social media platforms. Quantitative research generates an objective data which is highly focused, and may explain the problem in an objective way. The questionnaire has three sections such as demographic information, translanguaging as a decolonizing tool, opportunities and challenges. Since this questionnaire is for both teachers and students, demographic information helps identify the gender, participants, qualification and age. These variables are important for the sample size and segments of the population.

## Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of 100 students and 21 teachers from the public sector universities such as Government College University, Lahore, National University of Modern Languages, Lahore campus and the University of the Punjab, Lahore. The sample of the study comprised English language teachers and semester 3 and 4 students who had already spent 1 year of education in the universities. Public sector universities have students belonging to different regions of Pakistan like Sindh, Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Gilgit Baltistan. Therefore, the collected data highlights the perspectives of students from diverse areas to address the research problem.

## Results and Discussion

In our research, we gathered information from 121 participants, consisting of 64.5% females, 30.6% males, and 5.0% who preferred not to disclose their gender. Regarding qualifications, 47.9% completed 12 years of education, 19.8% completed 14 years, 19.0% completed 16 years, and 13.2% had 18 years of education (MPhil). Participants included 81.8% of students and 18.2% of teachers. The age distribution showed that 57.0% were in the 15-20 age group, 25.6% were in the 21-25 age group, and smaller percentages were in the older age ranges. The data represents a total of 121 participants across all variables. This statistic shows the participants who fall somewhere between the minimum and maximum ages. The heterogeneity in all variables is significant due to their diversity in age, qualification, gender and participants.

**Table 1**  
**Heterogeneity of variable**

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Female	78	64.5	64.5
Male	37	30.6	30.6
Prefer not to say	6	5.0	5.0
Qualification	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
12 years	58	47.9	47.9
14 years	24	19.8	19.8
16 years	23	19.0	19.0
18 years (M-Phil )	16	13.2	13.2
Participants	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Student	99	81.8	81.8
Teacher	22	18.2	18.2
Age of the respondent	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
15-20	69	57.0	57.0
21-25	31	25.6	25.6
26-30	2	1.7	1.7
31-35	3	2.5	2.5
36-40	6	5.0	5.0
41-50	10	8.3	8.3
Total	121	100.0	100.0

The participants expressed a keen acknowledgment of the significance of translanguaging as a decolonizing tool in the English language teaching classroom. Among the respondents, 73% concurred that the incorporation of local languages in the English language teaching classroom contributes to cultural awareness. Regarding cultural tolerance resulting from translanguaging, 63% of participants agreed. Additionally, 50% agreed, and 37% strongly agreed that translanguaging facilitated an enhanced understanding of English language concepts. In the context of cultural relevance, 52% of respondents agreed, and 24% strongly agreed that translanguaging made English language classes more culturally pertinent. A substantial proportion of respondents, comprising 47% in agreement and 29% strongly in agreement, believed that translanguaging heightened their critical thinking skills. Furthermore, 69% agreed that translanguaging could promote language autonomy.

**Table 2**  
**Translanguaging as an advantageous tool**

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
1. Cultural awareness	1.65%	3.31%	22.31%	52.89%	19.83%	100.00%
2. Cultural tolerance	0.83%	9.92%	25.62%	45.45%	18.18%	100.00%
3. Students' understanding	0.00%	2.48%	9.92%	50.41%	37.19%	100.00%
4. Culturally relevance	0.83%	5.79%	17.36%	52.07%	23.97%	100.00%
5. Critical thinking skills	0.00%	7.44%	16.53%	47.11%	28.93%	100.00%
6. Language autonomy	0.83%	3.31%	27.27%	53.72%	14.88%	100.00%

Respondents perceived translanguaging as an advantageous tool for communication in the English language classroom, with 50% in agreement and 36% strongly in agreement. Moreover, 55% agreed, and 27% strongly agreed that translanguaging promoted a more engaging and participatory learning environment in the classroom. Participants, at 46% agreement and 27% strong agreement, reported feeling more confident expressing themselves in English when local languages were encouraged. A majority, encompassing 60% in agreement and 19% strongly in agreement, believed that translanguaging could be effectively incorporated into English language teaching activities. Respondents who deemed translanguaging as empowering in the English learning process constituted 55% in agreement and 35% in strong agreement. Additionally, 55% agreed, and 25% strongly agreed that translanguaging created a relaxed atmosphere for students in the classroom. A considerable majority, at 60% in agreement and 24% strongly in agreement, endorsed translanguaging as an effective approach for promoting a positive attitude towards language diversity. Regarding the connection of languages with English, 59% agreed that translanguaging aided students.

The majority, consisting of 62% of respondents, agreed, and 17% strongly agreed that teachers should undergo training to incorporate local languages effectively into their English language classrooms. As for the role of translanguaging in breaking down socio-economic barriers, 65% agreed.

**Table 3**

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
7. Opportunities for communication	0.00%	4.96%	8.26%	50.41%	36.36%	100.00%
8. Engaging learning environment	0.83%	3.31%	13.22%	55.37%	27.27%	100.00%

9. Students 'confidence	0.83%	9.92%	15.70%	46.28%	27.27%	100.00%
10. English language activities	0.83%	3.31%	16.53%	60.33%	19.01%	100.00%
11. Students 'empowerment	0.00%	1.65%	8.26%	55.37%	34.71%	100.00%
12. Students feel comfortable	0.00%	4.96%	15.70%	54.55%	24.79%	100.00%
13. Positive attitude	0.00%	4.13%	11.57%	60.33%	23.97%	100.00%
14. Promote all languages	1.65%	10.74%	28.10%	45.45%	14.05%	100.00%
15. Teachers' training	1.65%	4.13%	15.70%	61.98%	16.53%	100.00%
16. Socio-economic barriers	1.65%	6.61%	27.27%	47.93%	16.53%	100.00%

The respondents also unveiled challenges associated with employing pedagogical translanguaging in English language teaching. A noteworthy 59% agreed that educational authorities resist the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach. The lack of awareness among students regarding translanguaging posed a significant challenge, with 60% in agreement and 19% strongly in agreement. Among the challenges related to standardized testing in English, 69% agreed. Lack of administrative support was identified as a hindrance by 59% of respondents, with 21% strongly agreeing. Regarding parental support, 51% agreed, and 19% strongly agreed that parents endorsed the use of translanguaging as a teaching method. However, 58% agreed, and 21% strongly agreed that the government promoted English as the medium of instruction in the classroom. Respondents perceived teachers' attitudes as influential, with 62% agreeing and 22% strongly agreeing that teachers' attitudes impacted the successful implementation of pedagogical translanguaging in English language teaching. A considerable 66% agreed that existing educational policies in Pakistan impede the use of pedagogical translanguaging in English language teaching. Regarding teacher training on translanguaging, 61% of respondents agreed.

Table 4

Questions	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Total
17. Educational authorities	1.65%	14.88%	24.79%	47.93%	10.74%	100.00%
18. Lack of awareness	0.83%	4.13%	16.53%	59.50%	19.01%	100.00%
19. Standardized testing	2.48%	6.61%	21.49%	55.37%	14.05%	100.00%
20. Lack of administrative support	0.83%	1.65%	18.18%	58.68%	20.66%	100.00%
21. Support local languages	0.83%	11.57%	17.36%	51.24%	19.01%	100.00%
22. Government policy	0.00%	4.13%	17.36%	57.85%	20.66%	100.00%
23. Teachers' attitude	0.00%	4.13%	11.57%	61.98%	22.31%	100.00%
24. Educational policies	0.83%	5.79%	27.27%	50.41%	15.70%	100.00%
25. English language teachers are offered training	4.13%	9.92%	24.79%	43.80%	17.36%	100.00%

## Discussion

It is evident that pedagogical translanguaging, employed as a decolonizing instrument, plays a pivotal role in promoting an equal learning environment for all students. Learners utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to acquire proficiency in the English language, thereby cultivating cultural awareness and tolerance. This unique role of translanguaging distinguishes it from methodologies such as the English-only policy, which, with its rigid approach, engenders numerous challenges for learners. In English language classrooms, strict language boundaries are enforced, compelling learners to exclusively use English, despite the fact that translanguaging is a prevalent aspect of their daily lives outside the classroom (Rajendram, 2022). As revealed by the analysis,

students exhibit a keen inclination to employ diverse languages for comprehending English language concepts. This innovative pedagogical approach has the potential to create a more relaxed atmosphere, promoting effective communication in the English language classroom and facilitating the gradual alleviation of communication-related anxieties, instilling confidence in learners.

The prime objective of pedagogical strategies is to stimulate critical thinking skills among learners. Imposing an English-only policy, however, poses a threat to the cultivation of critical thinking abilities, as evidenced by the respondents' opinions. They express a preference for the use of multiple languages in classrooms, asserting that this linguistic diversity allows them to critically engage with academic content. The pivotal role of language autonomy in the Pakistani academic landscape emphasizes the potential transformative impact of this approach.

The English-only policy not only restricts learners and teachers to think solely in English but also jeopardizes their cultural identities, exposing them to a singular, unfamiliar culture. The promotion of teachers achieving proficiency in "native-like" and "standard English" is explicitly endorsed through a variety of policies and programs (Rajendram, 2022). This monolithic approach may lead to a waning interest in the English language. Learners perceive translanguaging as an opportunity to enhance the process of English language acquisition, offering a positive perspective on the significance of all languages. Additionally, the phenomenon of language death, exacerbated by the English-only policy, highlights the significance of translanguaging as a platform to preserve and elevate local languages alongside English.

Socio-economic factors, particularly the correlation between job opportunities and English proficiency in Pakistan, compel students to prioritize English language acquisition. Most of the students face issues in understanding lectures delivered in English, but still, they prefer to learn in the English language to compete for the job market (Shamim, 2011; Mansoor, 2003). Moreover, this mandatory strategy deprives learners of empowerment, resulting in adverse social, economic, and psychological effects. Translanguaging, positioned as a remedy, establishes an equitable classroom environment where various languages coexist simultaneously. Realizing this coexistence necessitates comprehensive teacher training, enabling educators to collaboratively design English teaching activities incorporating multiple languages.

Respondents attribute the pervasive promotion of English as a medium of instruction in Pakistan to teachers, parents, educational authorities, and government policies. Primarily, a markedly distinct language is selected as the medium of instruction, particularly at the tertiary level. As a result, students are compelled to make compromises in their learning, adversely impacting the quality of education at the tertiary level (Mansoor, 2005). The respondents view this situation as a formidable challenge to the implementation of translanguaging. Simultaneously, learners' lack of awareness regarding the benefits of translanguaging impedes the learning process. Critical dialogues among key stakeholders have the potential to reshape this situation, nurturing a more inclusive and effective educational landscape.

## **Conclusion**

This study explicates the efficacy of translanguaging as a decolonizing instrument in the domain of English language instruction. This practice not only affords valuable opportunities for learners but also engenders a transformative impact on educators, both of whom constitute primary beneficiaries within the pedagogical milieu.

The engagement of learners with diverse cultures via the utilization of multiple languages serves to enhance their comprehension of socio-economic and cultural intricacies. Consequently, this engenders the cultivation of a societal milieu devoid of discrimination grounded in linguistic hierarchy. Rather, translanguaging assumes the layer of nurturing linguistic equality. The attainment of success in this endeavor is contingent upon the seamless integration of translanguaging with the imperatives of contemporary society, aspiring towards the establishment of a cosmopolitan milieu. Consequently, the imperative of the present moment lies in the provisioning of adequate training for educators and the cultivation of awareness among learners.

Notwithstanding the impediments encountered by educators and learners throughout the instructional process, the adoption of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach serves to empower learners in promoting linguistic diversity. The incorporation of multilingualism within the English language instruction context preserves the engagement of learners in the learning trajectory. This facet of translanguaging as a decolonizing tool serves as a catalyst for learners, motivating their active and enthusiastic participation in classroom discourse, thereby ameliorating apprehensions that may impede the learning experience.

The employment of criticality serves as a conduit for the exploration of novel avenues within the learning paradigm. Pedagogical translanguaging acts as a catalyst in nurturing the critical thinking capabilities of learners by exposing them to diverse linguistic frameworks. The utilization of varied strategies in disparate languages for the analysis of complex problems serves to augment perceptual acuity, thereby facilitating the derivation of cogent solutions. The efficacy of pedagogical translanguaging as a decolonizing instrument is contingent upon its authentic and conscientious implementation.

### **Recommendations**

This study suggests the use of pedagogical translanguaging as a decolonizing tool in Pakistani academia. This strategy will not only promote all languages simultaneously, but the students also feel a sense of self. All stakeholders such as Higher Education of Pakistan (HEC), universities administrators, teachers and students must be on board to replace the English-only policy with translanguaging so that all languages can co-exist with one another. The co-existence of all languages will promote the concept of multilingual identity of the speakers which may create the global harmony in the world.



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