

Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool for Enhancing Intercultural Communication in ESL Learners

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Abstract: This study investigates the role of translanguaging in enhancing intercultural communication among ESL learners when it is applied as a pedagogical tool. Translanguaging allows the learner to explore their linguistic repertoire to generate the meaning in language as it refers to using multiple languages in an environment where the learning process is dynamic. This study helps acknowledge the significance of translanguaging in bridging the gap between language and cultural diversity among ESL learners. The research opts for the quantitative method to design the sampling and analysis of this topic. Learners in ESL classrooms are utilized as the data source by using purposive sampling as a technique to collect information relevant to the field study. The data includes bilingual learners from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds and are examined to provide insight into how translanguaging facilitates intercultural communication in ESL learners. The findings are expected to underscore the importance of incorporating translanguaging in ESL pedagogy, suggesting that its implementation can significantly improve learner outcomes by creating a more inclusive, dynamic, and culturally responsive learning environment. This research suggests adopting translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in classrooms to contribute to communication in an inclusive classroom environment.

Key Words: Translanguaging, ESL Learners, Intercultural Communication, Bilingual, Linguistic Diversity, Language and Identity

Introduction

Today the world has multiple bilinguals as if it is a norm of a society and bilingualism offers a vast exposure to the different languages in their environment, formal language education, or cultural and familial influences. Bilingualism, proficiently using two different languages, offers a unique way through which individuals engage in communication. Bilingualism is a multi-faceted skill that can manifest in different levels of learning proficiencies. Failasofah and Fnu (2018) explain that the basic objective of bilingual education is to improve students' communication skills in their two languages. Their study implies multiple dimensions and kinds of bilingualism along with the features that help people to become bilingual speakers. Those features are the unconscious essentials of the situation in which the bilingual speakers are residing. While living in a bilingual environment it is possible to become a speaker of two languages as they are supposed to be a part of that environment consciously (Ozsen, Caliskan, Onal, Baykal, & Tunaboğlu, 2020). Language has always been of utter importance in every developing field. In Pakistan, bilingualism emerges from every route and carries a linguistic diversity within a kilometer radius. Pakistan, being one of the countries with more than one surviving language, has to adopt English as its official language to communicate on different platforms. English, as a global language, holds the power to address international resources on a worldwide scale. The educational system in Pakistan has elected English as a

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medium of instruction. Students in Pakistan are bilingual and form diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. They face difficulty in learning the English language within the classroom due to their diverse cultural and language background. The study revolves around students from educational institutes where students are using translanguaging strategies in the classroom for better language learning opportunities (Ryan, 2012). Translanguaging within the classroom helps students in learning along with their intercultural interaction. This kind of language contact by using translanguaging strategies can help students develop their intercultural communication among students. Students are learning their provincial languages as their mother tongue along with Urdu as their native language. Translanguaging generally refers to those practices that allow for the transition from one language to another fluidly, dynamically, and flexibly. Translanguaging explores how language interacts as well as its contribution to identity formation, cultural expression, and psychological responses (Gren & Hommerberg, 2022). It helps educators create an inclusive learning environment that leverages intercultural communication among bilingual students. Translanguaging practices mostly occurring in multilingual settings have been an important research matter from early times (Halabi, 2024). Teachers and students participate in a flexible bilingual pedagogy and it also assists in the translanguaging approach within the classroom and improves their skills related to language learning and teaching. This approach allows complementary schools an avenue for the production of social community, and educational goals and values in the light of bilingual pedagogy. It can be assumed that engaging the students in flexible bilingualism can make the boundaries between languages permeable (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Intercultural communication plays a significant role in classroom settings by inheriting language proficiency along with an in-depth understanding of diverse cultural perspectives. For bilingual students, intercultural communication is not only about navigating linguistic variations but also bridging the gaps among student's cultural barriers. Translanguaging supports intercultural communication as a tool for creating successful conversations. Students are occupied with speaking, as well as, seeing languages (Gracia & Kleyn, 2016). Bilingual students can overcome the complexities of communication within cultures through translanguaging strategies and skills.

This research study helps to analyze how translanguaging helps ESL learners develop skills in navigating cultural diversity and the impact of translanguaging on bilingual students to promote intercultural communication. Translanguaging is not only switching between languages but has multi-faceted approaches that transcend traditional linguistic boundaries. It gives liberty to students to respond through their entire linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively while bridging the gap between languages and cultures. The study aims to shed light on how bilingual students employ translanguaging as a mode for effective intercultural communication, identity construction and educational achievements (Norris & Tsedendamba, 2015). By exploring the translanguaging strategies in an ESL classroom, the study subsidizes the development of certain approaches relevant to this pedagogy for learning effectively and systematically within an ESL classroom. Translanguaging strategies enrich how language and culture contact to provide a potential learning environment. Understanding and employing translanguaging strategies can significantly contribute to the improvement of intercultural communication among bilingual students. This is particularly crucial in multicultural educational settings where students appear from different backgrounds of language and culture (Zeng, 2022). Bilingual ESL learners are limited to different facilities till they learn the leading language of their region or country and develop their literacy skills in a language in which they are not proficient enough and are unable to understand completely (Ou, 2020).

Literature Review

Translanguaging a term that is originated in the Welsh bilingual educational system and in the 1980s, it was first mentioned or introduced into the world. Translanguaging is the English translation from the Welsh word described by Cen Williams. At the time it was introduced, it was not envisioned as a theoretical concept as it is generally viewed today. García (2014) states that translanguaging is a "multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage to make sense of their bilingual worlds". While translanguaging is an impartially well-known term within ESL classrooms, so both teachers and researchers are confused regarding what it essentially requires (Almashour, 2023). In teaching a second or foreign language to bilingual students, the continuous shift from the target language is observed enviably. However, the potential of making the usage of linguistic skills as a whole provides the students as well as teachers with

the maximum learning outcome by utilizing multiple languages as a linguistic source in an ESL classroom (Gren & Hommerberg, 2022). Garcia and Li Wei (2014) explain how people arrange multimodal structures in different circumstances and achieve altered communicative and expressive conclusions. Translanguaging theory differentiates the measurements of society through which it tags and observes the use of two languages of the individual from the external perspective, and how the speaker takes and makes use of linguistic features from the internal perspective. (Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid, 2019)

Multiple studies can be mentioned while analyzing a systematic literature review as numerous articles respectively lay different views regarding how translanguaging can be explained in general. Juvonen and Kallkvist (2021) describe translanguaging pedagogy as a mode of describing teaching approaches in both lingual and subjective contexts, where the multilingual resources of the bilingual students are operated and are keenly observed in both curriculum planning and teaching within the classroom environment. Further, some researchers describe translanguaging as a helping tool to create a wide space, which involves making a space within the classroom in which different dimensions related to the background history of a student are brought together. It also enables them to grab the opportunity to be creative and innovative while learning a language by cracking the boundaries between linguistic variations (Wei, 2011). The concept of translanguaging is viewed as the act of using the first language or the act of shifting between languages and it is often overlapped with the code-switching regarding the conceptual explanation (Gren & Hommerberg, 2022). Considering the point of using the first language in the translanguaging approach, the researchers argue in the favor of latter view aiming to draw a prominent distinction between both the terms of translanguaging and code-switching. By exploring the theoretical foundations, practical applications, and challenges associated with these concepts, the research aims to provide insights that inform pedagogical practices, teacher training, and educational policies (Bakers, 2011).

A constructivist theory relevant to communication and culture states the process of communication which is used to share varying concepts to gain specific objectives. Individuals have different objectives to communicate with one another, while culture determines varied methods of communication among individuals. The cultural backgrounds of individuals help them build their understanding and knowledge and deliver their thoughts and goals through communicative skills (Vogel & Garcia, 2017). Furthermore, an intercultural learning approach must be implemented in EFL or ESL classrooms by the teachers while teaching the English language. As English language learners are operating in the form of describers and observers, educators need to assimilate cultural and linguistic learning processes that enable the learners to interact and relate to various cultures developing intercultural communication among bilingual students (Byram & Flaming, 2013). The other framework focuses on “addressing the needs of diverse students”, in which teachers are required to look for the necessities and demands of students to understand their level of communication for teaching the specific curriculum courses. (Corbett, 2003). Students are measured on the different levels of their interests as some of them are keen to learn through cultural references and some are motivated to learn, unlike the negligent students in the classroom. Instructors should propose certain tasks that assist them and their students in developing competence toward intercultural communication (Nunan, 1989). Several components are used by teachers to develop cultural familiarity, cultural awareness, and communicative skills. People from various backgrounds, lingual systems, and cultural values give birth to the concept of intercultural communication. As explained by Karlfried Knapp (1987), different groups create intercultural communication through their interpersonal interactions, and the main difference between these groups arises based on the knowledge shared by their members concerning their linguistic structures from the lingual and cultural systems. The most important objective of intercultural communication is mentioned as a way of transforming the situations of culture and communication from one level to another which results in achieving a comprehensive understanding of interactive intercultural communication (L.Shi, 2015).

Several research studies of researchers solemnly focused on the conceptual description of translanguaging which showed variations in the approaches of data analysis (Daurte, 2018). Some researchers united translanguaging conception with modified theoretic contexts to analyze the respective verbal or non-verbal data that is collected. The negotiation made by teachers and students was observed by Gracia and Wei (2014) to highlight various facilities that prepare educational funds and communicative opportunities through competence. Canagarajah and Wei (2011) were able to project the categorical methodologies which were the basic step for doing the research on translanguaging. The researcher



claimed as significant to develop different pedagogical practices that are adopted by multilingual students for educational means. The basis of the approach within the focus of the concept brings forward the academic resources from their property to show the importance of educational bilingualism (Pugh, Cabral, & Huang, 2021). Research displayed that translanguaging can be an influential instrument used to express and assign identity, to individuals and create opportunities for students to utilize diverse languages indicating different aspects of identification such as their personal preferences, cultural experience, and societal prestige (Alhejely, 2020). From the perspective of Jordanian identification, the study has concentrated on the importance of language in the articulation and negotiation of national identity accompanied by the affiliation of linguistic usage with communal pyramids like social class and gender marking (Albirini, 2020). Consequently, there are particularly two things that are required to invest in learning a language, learners need a secure sense of identity that helps them to practice new language properly as they are engaged in a continuous learning process. Whereas, learners must have the ability to engage and act in the language-learning process cognitively as well as physically (Alzimami, 2016).

Research Methodology

Design

The methodology designed for this research is qualified to investigate the effectiveness of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in enhancing intercultural communication among bilingual students in ESL learners systematically. The study ensures translanguaging is a phenomenon that occurs naturally and the multilingual students use this phenomenon to engage in social practices (Canagarajah, 2011). Translanguaging denotes the pedagogical practice where bilingual individuals communicate and learn by using their full linguistic repertoire, rather than strictly adhering to one language. The research methodology also emphasizes the planned translanguaging practice conducted by the teacher during the lesson that helps in the development and maintenance of language within the classroom setting. (Gracia & Lin, 2017).

Participants

The study involves participants as bilingual students enrolled in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms in a private university. They are supposed to be diverse in terms of linguistic backgrounds, proficiency levels in English, and cultural experiences. The research is conducted in a private university and revolves around participants who are students in the English language learning classroom but are familiar with at least two of their first languages. The bilingual students participating in the study are subjected to pursue degrees in education, with a focus on ELT or ESL classrooms, applied linguistics, or fields related to language study.

Data Collections

Data relevant to the research study is most probably collected from the classrooms that are taught in the English language. The students with two L1 will participate in the study with their classroom experience regarding translanguaging and intercultural communication. The students, studying in Pakistani universities, are from around the country. Students from Punjab are familiar with Punjabi, students from Balochistan are familiar with Balochi or Siraiki language, the students from KPK are mostly Pashto speakers, and Sindh students are known to the Sindhi language. The students admitted to universities from different Provincial areas have diverse cultural backgrounds. The data collected would consist of responses from these diverse bilingual students in English learning classrooms. The graduate students from diverse backgrounds would share their experiences for the research. The bilingual students will be observed through their demographic information and analyzed through their responses regarding their experiences with learning in ESL (English as a Second language) classroom by translanguaging strategies. The classrooms always consist of students with mixed abilities built up due to immigration or shifting from one place to another which is a great challenge for teachers to overcome. (Khan, 2015)

Data Analysis

Demographic Profiles

The participants for the study are gathered based on certain criteria that help in collecting data relevant to our research. A total of 50 bilingual students participated in the data collection regarding the research

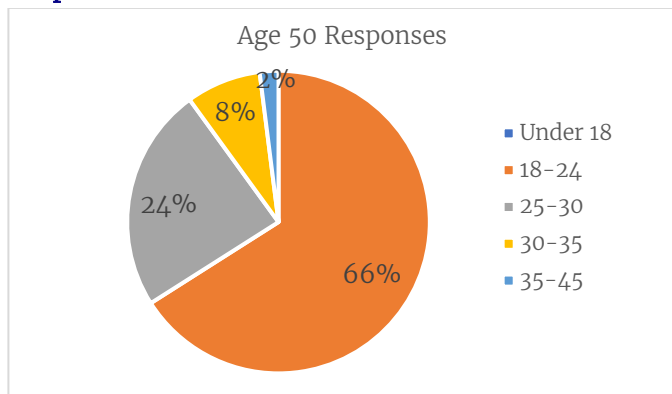
thesis. The participants were students in higher education and were also part of ESL classrooms. They were further classified according to the gender specification where they were displayed with a certain frequency based on their strength during the research participation. The following table shows their frequency distribution according to their gender within the classroom speculation.

Table 1

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	30	60 %
Female	20	40 %

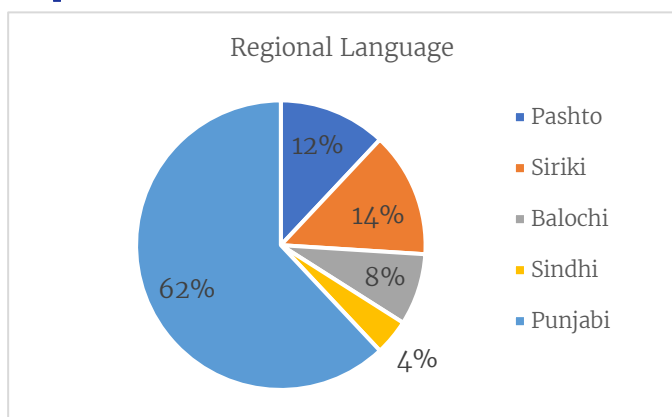
The features of demographic profiles also included the factor of age which identifies whether the participant is capable and relevant for the collection of data regarding translanguaging. Age can also highlight the knowledge of bilingual students who are participating in data collection to display their experience in the relevant field. The option of age ranges from under 18, 18 to 25, 25 to 30, 30 to 35, 35 to 45. The students were not asked their exact age as it sometimes feels uncomfortable and students are reluctant to tell their exact age. So, the research was designed to prioritize the relevance of the data along with the reverence towards the participants' personal information and comfort zone. The following pie chart shows the age of students participating in research as the respondents to the closed-ended questions.

Graph 1



The bilingual students are mostly between the ages factors of 18 to 24 showing the high value considered as 66% while there are many respondents resulting in 24% ranging between the ages of 25 to 30. There are 8% of students with an age limit of 30 to 35 while a minimum of 2% of students can be seen recorded within the age limit of 35 to 45. These outcomes that the respondents are mostly students with fresh knowledge and experience in the relevant field of study. The regional languages in the data show the variations of students within the classroom. The students studying in ESL classrooms are from various regions of Pakistan. Their regional language will help us know their L1 and the culture to which they belong. The following pie chart highlights the regional language of students participating for research purposes.

Graph 2





The classification with the chart displays the students with a regional language Punjabi 62% comprising 31 students, and the students with the regional language as Siraiki and Balochi together resulting in 24% comprising 12 students, while Pashto speakers 12% comprising 6 students and Sindhi student are minimum with the percentage of only 2% within the whole students participating within the research. This demonstration also highlights the importance of L1 in the classroom for giving a better learning experience to the students. It also helps us analyze the regional contribution of diverse students in the classroom to enhance their intercultural communication within the classroom setting.

Findings

Translanguaging as a pedagogical tool can either be observed or noticed from the outcomes of the learning process within the classroom premises. The students have their thoughts about the use of translanguaging and intercultural communication in an ESL classroom. The responses are collected from the bilingual students regarding their thoughts on translanguaging and intercultural communication occurring within the classroom. The data is analyzed by the research software to observe the results of the questionnaire answered by ESL learners. The SPSS software is used to analyze the data statistically to make interpretations from the mean and standard deviations gained from the questionnaire. Statistics in another way is a mathematical procedure to interpret required information from gathered data, especially for using a group of samples from a representative population (Upton & Cook, 2014). The questionnaire has the options based on the Lickert Scale. There are variations of 5 points on the scale with adjacent options different from each other less radically. These options include strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The Likert scale analysis depends on the items' response which in turn depends on the construct of the research instrument (Likert, 1932). As translanguaging appreciates the uses of learners' own linguistic repertoire, learners find it convenient and comfortable to learn in an environment where they can understand the concept of the topic taught to them in a particular classroom setting. So, in the classroom where translanguaging is used, ESL learners enhance their intercultural communication to elevate the problems in their learning process. Then, the following table highlights the reactions of learners regarding translanguaging and the role of intercultural communication within the classroom.

Table 2

Translanguaging along with Intercultural communication in ESL classroom

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	S.D
Translanguaging positively influences the student's ICC.	20.0 %	68.0 %	6.0 %	6.0 %	0.0 %	4.02	0.71400
Students find it easier to express complex ideas using more than one language in an ESL classroom.	22.0 %	66.0 %	6.0 %	4.0 %	2.0 %	4.02	0.79514
Translanguaging increases the interest of students in learning about other cultures.	24.0 %	60.0 %	12.0 %	0.0 %	4.0 %	4.00	0.85714
The Intercultural communication skills of students improve as a result of translanguaging within classroom settings	14.0 %	66.0 %	14.0 %	2.0 %	4.0 %	3.84	0.84177
Students believe translanguaging promotes cultural understanding among ESL learners.	20.0 %	62.0 %	12.0 %	2.0 %	4.0 %	3.92	0.87691

In the above table, we can analyze that students find that intercultural communication within their classroom activities helps them know the culture and language of another. It helps them vast their linguistic repertoire. Language learners appreciate the use of translanguaging to initiate intercultural communication among each other. When learning in classrooms where English is taught as a second language, students are hesitant to participate in classroom activities and cannot understand the concept of the topic that is taught to them efficiently. The use of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool makes the student feel comfortable in the classroom environment and students feel the acceptance of their attitudes towards the diverse cultural and language background of one another. The ESL learners learn the English language effectively and get familiar with the variation in cultures and language choices within the classroom. The students gain knowledge and can lead their conversation with their own updated linguistic repertoire (Piller & Pavlenko, 2001). When ESL learners are permitted to use multiple languages within an ESL classroom, they understand the linguistic and cultural variations within them. It helps them communicate with each other to provide a better and more efficient learning process within the ESL classroom.

Translanguaging, allowed in ESL classrooms, results in a positive impact on the learning process of bilingual learners. It makes peers learn better in the classroom without having any confusion or hurdles regarding the concept taught to them during the lecture. The use of language that is familiar to students or using examples from the cultures and language variation among students can develop the interest of students in the particular lectures (Shi, 2010). The learning process of the target language becomes effective with the implementation of translanguaging strategies in the classroom. Their variation in the languages and cultures develop interest in classroom learning where they enhance their intercultural communication skills proficiently. Their discussions and tasks within the classroom can make them comfortable with their peers. Intercultural communication is useful in developing their interest in cultural diversity among students and in enhancing their knowledge about the target language by using their L1. (Lantolf & Palvenko, 2000)

Table 3
Bilingual students and effective learning within ESL classroom

Factors	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean	S.D
Bilingual students think that translanguaging promotes mutual understanding among Bilingual students in ESL classrooms.	18.0 %	58.0 %	18.0 %	2.0 %	4.0 %	3.84	0.88893
Students are more comfortable participating in class discussions when translanguaging is allowed.	24.0 %	56.0 %	16.0 %	4.0 %	0.0 %	4.00	0.75593
Translanguaging helps bilingual students learn English vocabulary more effectively.	24.0 %	52.0 %	18.0 %	2.0 %	4.0 %	3.90	0.93131
Students prefer ESL classroom activities that involve translanguaging.	14.0 %	66.0 %	12.0 %	4.0 %	4.0 %	3.82	0.87342
Translanguaging improves the ability of students to adapt to different communication styles.	20.0 %	68.0 %	4.0 %	4.0 %	4.0 %	3.96	0.87970

This table displays the mutual understanding among the students in a classroom and it helps students in their learning process which takes place under the translanguaging strategies. The students feel more comfortable participating in classroom activities when translanguaging strategies are used within the ESL



classroom. Translanguaging and intercultural communication are beneficial when used during a lesson. The analyzed results support the notion of the research study by sharing the opinions and thoughts of students regarding the use of translanguaging as a pedagogical tool in the enhancement of intercultural communication among ESL learners. Many students have given positive responses on improvement in their choice of words and enhancement of vocabulary from the translanguaging strategies used during the learning practices within ESL learning classrooms. The students find it beneficial to use translanguaging in the classroom to have a better learning experience as well as enhance intercultural communication among bilingual students. (Butler & Hakuta, [2008](#)).

Discussion

This research study revolves around translanguaging strategies enhancing intercultural communication in ESL learners. The data is gathered from the bilingual students and the experienced teachers of ESL classrooms. The data collection occurred in the form of questionnaires and interviews conducted by the participants of ESL classrooms. The students were asked questions regarding their experience with translanguaging as a pedagogical tool within their classroom activities and the attitude of ESL learners towards intercultural communication using translanguaging while learning English as a second language within the classroom settings in the educational institutes (Samar & Pathan, [2023](#)). The results were analyzed by taking out the mean, percentage, frequency, and standard deviation of the data. It helps us know how many students favor using translanguaging strategies in ESL classrooms and if it helps improve their communication skills regardless of their diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. While analyzing the opinions of bilingual learners, it can be concluded that students feel comfortable and confident during classroom activities when translanguaging is allowed and the learning process is also enhanced with intercultural communication. Beach and Bloome ([2019](#)) explored various studies that highlight different aspects of translanguaging from the perspective where language is observed as an ongoing and evolving action for social interactions and processes. Translanguaging is viewed as an academic phenomenon that shapes and is structured by the actions and emotions of individuals living in a society. They show how translanguaging nurtures and cares for the intellectual, social, and emotional development of students. Bilingual students get to know their classmates by developing intercultural communication in the classroom environment (Hussain & Khan, [2021](#)). It gives liberty to teachers and students to employ their first language knowledge and communicate with their own linguistic repertoire within the classroom environment. The ESL learners understand the concept delivered during the lecture and are more easily able to comprehend it during the assigned tasks within the ESL classroom. Bilingual learners can express their thoughts and ideas in classroom discussions when they are allowed to use multiple choices of languages. It also benefits the students by improving their multilingual vocabulary and the choices of words they use during the conversation (Ou, [2020](#)). Their classroom participation also facilitates learning the target language more precisely and more effectively. Multilingual learners use their entire linguistic resources in developing and producing the meaning of a language. There are no linguistic theories that support the use of language because the mind cannot be sectioned into languages by naming them differently (Atta & Naqvi, [2022](#)). During the language learning process, learners think beyond language use and practices. By keeping this in view, translanguaging can be considered as a pedagogical source to assemble their linguistic and cultural diversity through intercultural communication. (McDermott, [2022](#)) The language and culture also help them get a wide range of knowledge from the diversity which helps them understand and learn their L2 more effectively. Due to the effective learning and providence of a better engaging environment for students, we take help from translanguaging and intercultural communication to familiarize an ease level in their understanding and language learning. (Deardorff, [2004](#)).

Conclusions

The study on the development of intercultural communication by using translanguaging as a pedagogical tool highlights the display of effective learning and better understanding in ESL classroom settings. Translanguaging, as a pedagogical tool, encourages students to share their cultural perspectives and narratives to enrich the classroom environment with a tapestry of diverse experiences and language learning perceptions. Intercultural communication exchanges the knowledge of culture and language from

each other which cultivates identification and cross-cultural awareness, important conversational skills in the current interconnected world. Translanguaging also represents the powerful academic approach that builds linguistic and cultural boundaries. It also fosters an inclusive and effective learning environment enriched with cultural and linguistic diversity for bilingual students in ESL classrooms. In the future, the research should integrate the research outcomes as language proficiency, academic performance, and communicative competence of bilingual students. With the increasing use of technology in education, future research could explore the role of digital tools in supporting translanguaging strategies within a classroom setting. The research regarding the technology includes exploring how online platforms, language learning apps, and digital communication tools can facilitate translanguaging and enhance intercultural communication among bilingual students.



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