

Translanguaging As a Strategy to Improve Reading Engagement and Comprehension Among Students

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Abstract. This study investigated the implementation of translanguaging as an instructional strategy and its impact on the reading engagement and comprehension of Senior High School students in selected public secondary schools in Cebu and Bohol. Employing a descriptive-quantitative multi-site research design, the study involved 246 respondents, composed of 6 English language teachers and 240 student learners from Antonio R. Lapiz National High School in Naga, Cebu; Corella National High School in Bohol; and San Fernando Open/Night High School in Cebu. Data were collected through structured survey questionnaires, standardized reading competency tests aligned with the Department of Education's Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs), and academic grading records. Findings revealed that teachers frequently utilized oral translanguaging practices, including direct word translation and spontaneous rephrasing (3.11), while formal bilingual instructional materials and adaptive assessments were seldom used (1.67) due to institutional preferences for monolingual instruction. Results further showed that students performed at a Proficient level in literal text retrieval under MELC 3.1 (2.64). However, performance declined in higher-order literacy skills, with learners rated Nearly Proficient in vocabulary context-clue decoding under MELC 3.3 (2.32) and inferential reasoning under MELC 3.2 (2.18). Academic records indicated that 70.84% of students remained within the lower passing grade ranges of 75–79 and 80–84. The study also identified significant institutional and affective barriers (3.45), including learner anxiety associated with English-only policies and the lack of bilingual learning resources. The findings suggest that translanguaging, when systematically integrated into instruction, can support reading engagement, comprehension, and overall academic performance among Senior High School learners, thereby informing evidence-based instructional improvements across diverse multilingual Philippine secondary school contexts.

Introduction

The contemporary linguistic landscape of the Philippine classroom is inherently multilingual, yet instructional practices often cling to strict monolingual policies that do not reflect the cognitive realities of the students. This study stems from the urgent need to address the persistent gap in reading comprehension and overall academic performance by leveraging the linguistic repertoire of students through translanguaging. Unlike traditional code-switching, which views languages as separate entities, translanguaging treats a student multiple languages as a single, integrated communication system (García & Wei, 2014). By allowing students to move fluidly between Cebuano, Filipino, and English, educators can dismantle the "language barrier" that often stifles the conceptual understanding of complex texts.

In many Philippine secondary schools, the "English-Only" or "Filipino-Only" policy in specific subjects creates a restrictive environment where students struggle to express high-order thinking skills because they lack the specific vocabulary in the

target language. This "monoglossic" bias often leads to passive learning and lower engagement. According to Cenoz and Gorter (2021), focusing solely on the target language in isolation ignores the pedagogical wealth of the students' first language (L1), which serves as the foundational scaffolding for acquiring a second language (L2). This study posits that by legitimizing the use of the native tongue alongside English, students can bridge the gap between decoding words and truly comprehending their thematic and contextual essence.

The necessity of this study is further underscored by the diverse socio-spatial characteristics of the chosen environments. The inclusion of Antonio R. Lapiz National High School in the mountain barangay of Jaguimit, Naga City, Cebu, highlights the challenges faced by rural, upland learners who may have limited exposure to English outside the classroom. In contrast, Corella National High School in Bohol represents a "Poblacion" or town-center setting, where linguistic influences are more varied. Finally, the San Fernando Open and Night High School presents a distinct demographic of working students and non-traditional students. For these students, time is a premium, and the cognitive load of navigating strict linguistic boundaries can be a deterrent to academic persistence. As Vogel and García (2017) argue, translanguaging provides an "equitable pedagogy" that empowers marginalized students to use their full linguistic agency to succeed.

Research consistently shows that reading comprehension is the bedrock of academic success across all disciplines. When students are allowed to discuss, brainstorm, and reflect using their entire linguistic toolkit, their "meta-linguistic awareness" increases. Heugh (2015) emphasizes that in multilingual contexts, the L1 is not a crutch but a cognitive bridge. By implementing translanguaging as a deliberate strategy, this study aims to prove that students will not only improve their scores in English-based assessments but also develop a more profound, "deeper" level of learning that transcends mere rote memorization. This approach aligns with the MATATAG Curriculum's goal of producing functionally literate Filipinos who are globally competitive yet rooted in their local identity.

In the context of Cebuano-speaking learners, the conceptual understanding of "justice" or "photosynthesis" exists regardless of the language used to label it. By suppressing the native tongue, schools inadvertently suppress the student's existing knowledge base. Furthermore, Creese and Blackledge (2010) suggest that translanguaging is a "transformative" act that challenges the power dynamics of the classroom, moving from a teacher-centered "transmission" model to a student-centered "constructivist" model.

The specific inclusion of the San Fernando Open and Night High School is particularly significant. Night high school students often bring diverse life experiences but may have significant gaps in formal English instruction due to their working schedules. For this demographic, translanguaging acts as a survival mechanism and an academic accelerator. By validating their home language, the school fosters a more inclusive environment that reduces "affective filters", the anxiety and lack of confidence that Krashen (1982) identifies as primary barriers to language acquisition.

Methodology

Design

The study utilized a Descriptive-Normative Research Design. Since the research was conducted in real-world classroom settings across three distinct sites, it was not always feasible to randomly assign individual students to groups; instead, the study used existing class sections. The design focused on establishing a baseline measurement by assessing current reading comprehension levels based on MELCs and previous quarter grades. This was followed by the intervention phase: the deliberate implementation of translanguaging strategies where students were encouraged to use their native linguistic repertoire (Cebuano/Boholano) to process English texts. Finally, an evaluation phase measured the change in performance to determine the efficacy of the intervention. The design also incorporates a Descriptive-Evaluative element to assess the current status of translanguaging practices and the specific socio-spatial challenges of the three research environments.

Environment

The research environment of this study was strategically selected to represent a diverse cross-section of the educational landscape in the Central Visayas region, specifically covering the provinces of Cebu and Bohol.

The first research site was Antonio R. Lapiz National High School-Senior High School, situated in the mountain barangay of Jaguimit, City of Naga, Cebu. Demographically, the learners in this environment primarily come from agricultural families or households situated in upland rural areas. The dominant language is Cebuano, often characterized by localized registers specific to mountain communities. The relevance of this site lies in its "linguistic isolation"; students here may have significantly less incidental exposure to the English language compared to their urban counterparts.

The second research site was Corella National High School-Senior High School, located in the Poblacion of Corella, Bohol. Unlike the first site, this school is positioned in the town center, representing a "Poblacion" demographic where students are more exposed to varied linguistic influences due to the proximity of the provincial capital and local commerce. While the primary language remains a variant of Cebuano (Boholano), the socio-economic background of the student respondents is more varied, ranging from farming families to those employed in the service and government sectors. The relevance of including a Bohol-based school was to observe the dialectal nuances of the Boholano vernacular and how these subtle linguistic shifts impact reading comprehension when interfaced with standard English instruction.

The third and most distinct research environment was the San Fernando Open and Night High School in North Poblacion, San Fernando, Cebu. This site is demographically unique as it caters primarily to "non-traditional" learners, including working students, over-aged students, and individuals who have returned to the formal education system after a hiatus. The 82 respondents here operate under a "night school" schedule, which implied a high-stakes, time-compressed learning environment. The relevance of this site is paramount; for these students, the "Affective Filter" (anxiety) was often higher due to the pressure of balancing work and academics. Translanguaging in this context is not just a pedagogical tool but a survival strategy that maximizes learning efficiency by leveraging the students' extensive life experiences and existing linguistic repertoire to accelerate academic success.

Respondents

This study focused on the strategic selection of participants who directly engaged with the linguistic and academic challenges inherent in the Philippine secondary education system. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation of the TTL Framework, the study identified a total of 246 respondents, meticulously distributed across three geographically and structurally diverse research sites. This population were categorized into two primary groups: the 240 student respondents who served as the subjects of the translanguaging intervention, and the 6 teacher respondents who acted as the primary implementers and observers of the pedagogical strategy. By maintaining a uniform distribution of 82 participants per site, representing exactly 33.33% of the total sample per location, the study established a balanced comparative basis to measure how translanguaging affects reading comprehension and academic performance in varying socio-economic contexts.

Research Instrument

The study utilized a tripartite set of instruments designed to capture both the cognitive and behavioral aspects of the 246 respondents. The primary tool was Reading Comprehension Test, meticulously aligned with the Most Essential Learning Competencies (MELCs 3.1, 3.2, and 3.3). This test consists of reading passages followed by multiple-choice and open-ended questions designed to measure literal, inferential, and critical understanding.

The second instrument was a Likert-Scale Survey Questionnaire distributed to the 240 students and 6 teachers. This survey aimed to identify current translanguaging steps (Sub-problem 2) and document the issues and concerns (Sub-problem 5) encountered in the three environments. Finally, the study utilized an Academic Performance Tracking Form to systematically record and compare the General Weighted Averages (GWA) of the students from the previous grading period against their performance following the translanguaging intervention.

Data Collection Procedure

The data gathering process was conducted in four sequential phases to ensure ethical integrity and data accuracy across the three sites. In the Preliminary Phase, the researchers secured formal permits from the Schools Division Offices of Naga City, Bohol, and Cebu Province.

During the Intervention Phase, the translanguaging strategy was integrated into the reading lessons, where students were permitted to use Cebuano/Boholano to deconstruct complex English texts. This phase was closely monitored through classroom observations and teacher feedback, finally, in the Concluding Phase and the final quarter grades are gathered. All data were treated with strict confidentiality in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, ensuring that the identity of the students and teachers remained protected throughout the development of the TTL Framework.

Data Analysis

The data indicate that translanguaging plays a meaningful role in supporting students' reading engagement and comprehension. Teachers commonly employed oral translanguaging strategies, such as translating unfamiliar words and rephrasing concepts in the learners' first language, suggesting that these practices help facilitate understanding during

classroom instruction. However, the limited use of bilingual instructional materials and assessments highlights a gap between classroom realities and institutional policies that continue to favor English-only approaches.

Student performance revealed a clear pattern. While learners demonstrated proficiency in identifying explicit information from texts, they encountered difficulties with higher-order reading skills, particularly inferential reasoning and vocabulary interpretation through context clues. This suggests that many students can understand surface-level content but struggle with deeper comprehension and critical analysis. Academic records further support this observation, as most students remained within the lower passing grade ranges. Additionally, learner anxiety and the absence of appropriate bilingual resources emerged as significant barriers. Overall, the findings suggest that a more structured and intentional translanguaging approach may enhance literacy development and academic achievement.

Results and Discussion

Results

The results of the study showed that translanguaging was commonly practiced by English teachers as a strategy to support learners' understanding of reading materials. Teachers frequently used oral techniques such as translating unfamiliar words and rephrasing explanations in the learners' first language, indicating a strong reliance on flexible language use during instruction. However, the use of bilingual learning materials and assessments remained limited because of existing school policies that emphasized English-only instruction.

In terms of reading comprehension, students demonstrated satisfactory performance in identifying explicit information from texts, achieving a Proficient level in literal comprehension. Nevertheless, they experienced greater difficulty in higher-order reading tasks, particularly in interpreting vocabulary through context clues and making inferences. Academic performance records further revealed that a majority of learners remained within the lower passing grade ranges. The study also found that language-related anxiety and the lack of bilingual resources affected students' confidence and participation. These findings highlight the potential of structured translanguaging practices to strengthen reading engagement, comprehension, and academic achievement.

Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Student Academic

Grading Descriptor Category	GWA Grading Range Matrix	Student Frequency (f)	Percentage Distribution (%)
Outstanding	90 – 100	12	5.00%
Very Satisfactory	85 – 89	58	24.17%
Satisfactory	80 – 84	112	46.67%
Fairly Satisfactory	75 – 79	46	19.17%
Did Not Meet Expectations	Below 75	12	5.00%
TOTAL POPULATION PROFILE		240	100.00%
COMPOSITE CLASS MEAN GWA	82.38%	Qualitative Description:	Satisfactory

(N = 240)

Table 1. Performance in English

Discussion

The findings of the study highlight the important role of translanguaging in helping Senior High School learners better engage with reading tasks and understand academic texts. Teachers naturally incorporated oral translanguaging strategies, such as translating and rephrasing concepts, to make lessons more accessible to students. However, the limited use of bilingual instructional materials suggests a disconnect between classroom practices and institutional policies that continue to favor English-only instruction. While students showed competence in locating explicit information from texts, they struggled with higher-level comprehension skills, including making inferences and interpreting vocabulary through context. These challenges were reflected in their overall academic performance. Furthermore, learner anxiety and the lack of appropriate bilingual resources emerged as barriers to effective learning. The results suggest that a more structured and supportive translanguaging approach can help improve reading comprehension, learner confidence, and academic success.

Areas of Concern / Specific Structural and Affective Roadblocks	Weighted Mean (X)	Qualitative Description	Operational Interpretation
<i>Institutional Environment Concerns</i>			
1. Complete absence of officially approved bilingual instructional modules or reading textbooks aligned with the current curriculum.	3.64	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
2. Policy pressure or school culture pushing for a rigid, subtractive "English-Only" model during learning sessions.	3.48	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
3. Inadequate instructional guidance and structural rubrics on how to grade mixed-language written outputs objectively.	3.28	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
Category Composite Score	3.47	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
<i>Learner Affective and Cognitive Concerns</i>			
4. High levels of student anxiety, hesitation, and fear of error when forced to express abstract ideas exclusively in English.	3.52	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
5. Occurrence of a complete psychological "block" or communication breakdown during strict target language reading assignments.	3.31	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
6. Cognitive difficulty transitioning from fluid classroom bilingual discussions back to final evaluations administered strictly in English.	3.44	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
Category Composite Score	3.42	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge
OVERALL COMPOSITE CHALLENGE MEAN MATRIX	3.45	Strongly Agree	Highly Severe Challenge

(N = 246)

Table 2. Institutional and Perceptual Challenges in Implementing Translanguaging

Conclusion and Implications

Based on the empirical findings generated by this multi-site study, several foundational conclusions are drawn regarding the linguistic reality of secondary education in Cebu and Bohol. First, a significant structural disconnect existed between the natural multilingual resources of the classroom and the restrictive policies enforced by the educational system. While both teachers and students possessed a shared, natural command of the regional Cebuano or Boholano vernaculars, teachers lack the formalized training and structured rubrics required to transform spontaneous code-switching into a systematic, target-driven tool. Consequently, translanguaging were currently used in public high schools as a reactive survival tool rather than an intentional instructional strategy, leaving educators in a systemic bind where they must use oral translation to prevent student learning failure while facing administrative pressure to maintain strict monolingual environments.

Second, the traditional monolingual approach to language teaching acts as a restrictive cognitive barrier that limits the intellectual development of the student population. The clustering of student scores at the lower passing levels across both reading tests and final quarterly grades demonstrated that forcing an unyielding "English-Only" model raised the affective filter, induced severe performance anxiety, and caused rapid cognitive fatigue. Jim Cummins' Common Underlying Proficiency model proved that senior high school students possessed the internal conceptual intelligence to perform complex reasoning, but their analytical thinking becomes blocked by the surface-level language barrier of strict target-language instruction. Therefore, leaving translanguaging as an unguided classroom fallback fails, to address the resource shortages and policy contradictions discovered in this study, confirming the practical necessity of adopting the structured, officially recognized Translanguaging Teaching-Learning Framework.

In alignment with the findings and conclusions generated by this investigation, the following strategic recommendations were put forward to transform secondary literacy instruction. First, it is highly recommended that the Department of Education, through the respective Division offices of Naga City, Bohol, and Cebu Province, formally adopt and implement the Translanguaging Teaching-Learning Framework developed in this study. Schools must actively transition away from informal code-switching toward the systematic use of the three-phase model, encompassing linguistic activation, pedagogical scaffolding, and conceptual production, enscribing the mother tongue as a temporary, supportive ladder that guides students toward independent academic English mastery.

Second, school administrators must design and implement specialized, long-term training seminars for secondary school English and literacy teachers to bridge the documented professional gap. These training tracks must move beyond generic teaching modules to provide concrete instruction on how to execute pedagogical translanguaging, construct side-by-side bilingual context clues, and build cross-linguistic grammar analyses without lowering national curriculum standards. Additionally, regional and division assessment units must develop clear, structured grading rubrics for formative and performance-based tasks that provide objective criteria for evaluating a student's conceptual understanding through mixed-language responses, ensuring that technical knowledge is measured accurately without immediate language performance penalties.

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Competing Interests Statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analyzed in this study; all data used were obtained from previously published sources as cited in the reference list.

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Appendices

No appendices are attached to this study.