

Translanguaging in Thai TESOL Master's Programs: A Sociocultural and Ecological Comparison of Practices and Perceptions

Saber Alavi

TESOL Department, Payap University, Chiang Mai 50000, Thailand

(Corresponding author's e-mail: saber_a@payap.ac.th)

Received: 4 September 2025, Revised: 16 October 2025, Accepted: 17 October 2025, Published: 20 October 2025

Abstract

This study investigates translanguaging practices and perceptions in two Thai TESOL master's programs through Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Language Ecology (LE). While translanguaging is globally recognized for enhancing comprehension, participation, and identity affirmation, its role in Thai postgraduate teacher education remains underexplored. Using a comparative case study design, data were gathered via semi-structured email interviews with 10 lecturers and 13 students from two universities with contrasting English Medium Instruction (EMI) policies. Thematic analysis revealed three domains: (1) practical insight (concept clarification, scaffolding, assessment support, peer collaboration), (2) the role of translanguaging (reducing anxiety, boosting confidence, fostering critical thinking, affirming identity), and (3) cultural-contextual factors (policy restrictions, lecturer training, resource availability). Findings show that both programs value translanguaging's cognitive and affective benefits, yet implementation differs. Program A, constrained by strict EMI rules, treats it as informal support, while Program B integrates it as a deliberate pedagogical strategy. Policy flexibility, multilingual pedagogy training, and bilingual resources were identified as key enabling factors. The study highlights the policy–practice gap in Thai higher education and recommends revising EMI policies, investing in professional development, and developing bilingual materials to systematically integrate translanguaging in postgraduate TESOL education.

Keywords: Translanguaging, TESOL, English Medium Instruction (EMI), Sociocultural theory, Language ecology, Multilingual pedagogy

Introduction

Over the last twenty years, translanguaging has become an important global movement in TESOL and bilingual education, recognized for affirming learners' complete linguistic repertoires, supporting equitable learning, and enhancing cognitive engagement (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). Based on the idea that multilingual speakers use their languages flexibly and strategically to create meaning, it has been increasingly embraced in various educational settings, from early education to postgraduate studies (Beiler & Villacañas de Castro, 2025). In English Medium Instruction (EMI) contexts, especially in Asia, it provides a way to balance policy-driven monolingual English objectives with the multilingual realities faced by students and teachers (Rummel, 2021).

In Thailand, where EMI is a key part of higher education policy, translanguaging is increasingly recognized as a valuable pedagogical resource for both language acquisition and understanding disciplinary content (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2024). Research indicates that using Thai and other languages alongside English can improve comprehension, help scaffold academic tasks, and foster identity development among students (Xiao & Lertlit, 2023; Le, 2024). However, institutional ideologies and policy discourses often favor English-only approaches, viewing translanguaging as informal or remedial rather than a deliberate, strategic choice (Mohd Aba sha'ar et al., 2025). This gap between policy and practice has particular significance for TESOL master's programs, which aim to equip future educators

with both theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills.

Although there is global support for translanguaging, limited empirical research explores how it is practiced and perceived in Thai TESOL master's programs. In these advanced teacher-education settings, English often remains the only language of instruction, creating a tension between policy expectations and the multilingual realities of teaching and learning (Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024). While lecturers and students recognize the communicative, cognitive, and emotional advantages of using multiple languages (Xiao & Lertlit, 2023; Le, 2024), strong EMI norms and assessment practices often inhibit such approaches (Mohd Aba sha'ar et al., 2025). This disconnect between policy and practice leaves educators uncertain about the legitimacy, scope, and effective implementation of translanguaging in formal TESOL contexts. Additionally, most studies focused on undergraduate or general EFL settings (Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024; Nuemaihom et al., 2024), with little attention paid to postgraduate teacher education. Without understanding how translanguaging is practiced and perceived by both lecturers and students, there is a risk of inconsistent application, misinterpretation, or its relegation to informal use rather than systematic integration into pedagogy.

Scholars worldwide are increasingly examining translanguaging from sociocultural and ecological viewpoints, emphasizing how social interaction and institutional, ideological, and resource factors influence learning (Haim & Manor, 2025; Li et al., 2025). In contrast, few studies in Thailand explicitly use these approaches to analyze translanguaging practices. Most research tends to focus on pedagogical advantages or attitudes separately (Phetchroj, 2025), often overlooking how broader sociocultural and ecological influences interact to shape classroom discussions.

This study advances translanguaging scholarship in higher education by offering a comparative analysis grounded in the theory of its application in Thai TESOL master's programs. It delivers evidence-based insights for policymakers, curriculum developers, and teacher educators aiming to incorporate translanguaging in ways that are pedagogically effective and sensitive to the local context. In doing so, it responds to the urgent need to

balance EMI policy requirements with Thailand's multilingual educational realities, ultimately improving the training of future English language teachers.

Additionally, the current literature lacks a theory-informed, comparative analysis of how program-level factors, such as curriculum design and EMI policy enforcement, influence translanguaging in Thai TESOL master's programs. This gap in theory-informed, comparative analysis restricts the development of appropriate, context-aware pedagogical guidelines for integrating translanguaging. This study aims to compare the practices and perceptions of translanguaging among lecturers and students in two TESOL master's programs in Northern Thailand. Using the frameworks of Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky) and Language Ecology (Haugen, 1971), the study explores how individual agency, institutional policies, and contextual resources jointly influence translanguaging in postgraduate TESOL settings.

Research questions

1. How is translanguaging practiced in the two Master's programs?
2. How do lecturers' and students' perceptions align or differ?
3. How do sociocultural and ecological factors shape these practices and perceptions?

Literature review

This study is grounded in the theory of translanguaging, which must be distinguished from code-switching. Code-switching often frames languages as separate systems that a speaker alternates between, such as a lecturer using English for a lecture and Thai for classroom logistics (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In contrast, translanguaging conceptualizes a speaker's linguistic knowledge as a single, integrated repertoire from which they draw fluidly to communicate and learn (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Garcia & Wei, 2014). It involves the strategic and dynamic use of a multilingual person's full linguistic skills to create meaning, support learning, and express identity (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021; Beiler & Villacañas de Castro, 2025). A quintessential example in a TESOL classroom would be a student drafting an essay by using Thai to brainstorm and outline complex arguments, incorporating English terminology

and syntactical structures where most effective, and then producing a final draft in academic English. This is not merely switching between languages but a dynamic process of meaning-making (Beiler & Villacañas de Castro, 2025). Therefore, this study investigates these deliberate, theory-based strategies rather than casual language alternation.

Rooted in Vygotsky's work, Sociocultural Theory offers a perspective for understanding translanguaging as a socially mediated practice that facilitates both cognitive and linguistic growth (Li et al., 2025). The idea of mediation emphasizes how tools, including languages, influence thought and learning processes. Translanguaging functions as such a mediational tool, helping learners access and build knowledge using their most meaningful linguistic resources (Ambele, 2022). The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) illustrates how learners can reach higher performance levels when scaffolded with familiar linguistic methods (Le, 2024). SCT also highlights the importance of identity formation, linking directly to how translanguaging allows learners to enact, negotiate, and affirm their multilingual identities within academic contexts (Beiler & Villacañas de Castro, 2025). Although SCT clarifies the micro-level social and cognitive processes behind translanguaging, it does not fully account for macro-level factors like institutional policies, ideologies, and resource availability that influence classroom practices. To address these systemic factors, the following section explores Language Ecology, which complements SCT by focusing on the broader environment in which translanguaging takes place.

Language Ecology, as proposed by Haugen (1971), places language use within the interconnected relations among languages, speakers, and their environments. In this view, translanguaging practices are shaped not only by personal interactions but also by institutional policies, ideological stances, and the distribution of linguistic resources (Haim & Manor, 2025). In higher education, factors such as EMI policy frameworks, institutional attitudes towards Thai and English, and access to multilingual materials can either support or limit translanguaging (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2024; Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024).

By integrating LE with SCT, this research recognizes both the micro-level learning processes and

the macro-level factors influencing translanguaging in TESOL master's programs. This dual approach establishes a foundation for reviewing relevant empirical research and creating the conceptual model guiding this study. The combination of SCT and LE offers a thorough theoretical basis for analyzing translanguaging, but their practical usefulness requires evaluation through existing empirical data. Global TESOL research shows that translanguaging can improve understanding, encourage participation, and foster critical thinking when used intentionally as a teaching strategy (Mendoza et al., 2023). In teacher education, evidence suggests it not only aids language acquisition but also provides pre-service teachers with strategies for managing multilingual classrooms (Li et al., 2025; Beiler & Villacañas de Castro, 2025).

Research in Thailand highlights a complex situation. While lecturers generally acknowledge the cognitive, communicative, and affective advantages of translanguaging, they often encounter institutional pressures to uphold an English-only policy (Khojan & Ambele, 2022; Phetchroj, 2025). Students report positive experiences, such as reduced anxiety, better understanding of complex ideas, and a stronger academic identity (Le, 2024; Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024). However, EMI-oriented policies tend to limit translanguaging to informal settings rather than embedding it systematically in teaching practices (Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024; Mohd Aba sha'ar et al., 2025). Studies across ASEAN indicate that institutional ideology, program structure, and lecturer training greatly influence how translanguaging is adopted and utilized (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2024; Nooyod & Ambele, 2024). This body of evidence highlights the importance of a study comparing multiple Thai TESOL master's programs, with analysis grounded in SCT and LE frameworks. This gap is addressed by the conceptual model described below.

This study draws on sociocultural theory (SCT) and language ecology (LE) to frame translanguaging as emerging from three interconnected areas. First, practical insight involves classroom strategies such as scaffolding, feedback cycles, and task design, aligning with SCT's focus on mediation and the zone of proximal development (ZPD). Second, the perceived role of translanguaging describes its academic,

emotional, and identity-related functions for participants, rooted in SCT's emphasis on identity and agency. Third, cultural and contextual factors, including institutional policies, language ideologies, and resources, are analyzed through LE's macro perspective to identify structural constraints and opportunities. These domains interact dynamically: classroom practices (micro) are influenced by institutional norms (meso) and societal ideologies (macro), with learner identities mediating all levels. This integrated approach guides the analysis and defines the scope, particularly in examining how these intersections appear in Thai TESOL programs. Consequently, this study uses the integrated SCT-LE framework to analyze not only how translanguaging practices differ but also how they contribute to the creation of distinct ecological spaces within Thai higher education, a context characterized by its unique negotiation of global English and national linguistic identity. By connecting pedagogical, individual, and systemic views, the framework provides a comprehensive lens for comparing translanguaging across different contexts.

Methodology

This study employs a comparative case study approach to examine translanguaging practices, perceptions, and policy impacts in postgraduate TESOL programs in Thailand. Such a design is ideal for analyzing similarities and differences across cases within their real-world contexts (Charles, 1994), enabling a comprehensive look at classroom practices, lecturer insights, student experiences, and institutional policies. Rooted in Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Linguistic Ecology (LE), this method allows investigation of both micro-level pedagogical approaches and macro-level contextual influences. The study focuses on two distinct TESOL master's programs at two public universities, termed Program A and Program B, exploring how program design, EMI policies, and student demographics influence the use and perception of translanguaging in higher education.

A total of 23 participants took part in the study, including 10 lecturers and 13 postgraduate students from two TESOL master's programs. Each program contributed five lecturers with diverse TESOL backgrounds and different levels of adherence to

English-medium instruction (EMI) policies. Among the students, seven were from Program A and six from Program B, representing a mix of linguistic backgrounds such as Thai, English, and other regional languages. The programs differ in size and profile: Program A enrolls about 25 students, is mainly English-medium with limited L1 use, and mostly consists of Thai learners with a few ASEAN students. Conversely, Program B has around 20 students, allows more L1 use in tutorials under its EMI policy, and has a more diverse demographic, including Thai, ASEAN, and European students. These demographic and policy differences offered a valuable basis for comparison. Participants were recruited through email invitations explaining the research goals, participation details, and confidentiality measures. All participants gave informed consent, agreed to stay anonymous, and asked for a summary of the results.

Data for this study were collected through semi-structured interviews mainly conducted via email, followed by member-checking with the same participants. Email interviews were selected due to practical constraints such as participants' busy schedules, geographical separation, and cost considerations, conditions under which email data collection is a recognized and valid method (Creswell, 2012). The authors acknowledge that this method lacks the non-verbal cues and the ability to capture the authentic classroom atmosphere that in-person interviews or observations would provide. Furthermore, the study does not include classroom observations, which limits the data to reported practices and perceptions rather than in-situ evidence. However, several measures were implemented to address these limitations and maintain the depth and quality of the data: Participants received the full interview guide in advance to allow for reflective and detailed responses; follow-up emails were used to probe for deeper insights and concrete examples, mimicking an iterative interview process; and a rigorous member-checking procedure was conducted, allowing participants to clarify, confirm, or elaborate on their initial statements, thereby enhancing the accuracy and trustworthiness of the self-reported data.

Participants received clear, detailed instructions and the complete interview guide, structured around

three key themes: (1) classroom strategies and interaction patterns, (2) identity and engagement in translanguaging, and (3) institutional and policy contexts. To promote detailed responses, open-ended prompts were supported by illustrative examples. After initial responses were collected, follow-up emails were sent to clarify, request specific examples, or explore further insights, mimicking the iterative process of live interviews.

Member-checking was conducted after the initial analysis to verify the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretations. Each session, lasting about 20 minutes and conducted via email or brief follow-up calls, enabled participants to confirm, elaborate, or correct their previous statements. This process was complemented by triangulation, comparing data with findings from similar studies on translanguaging in EMI contexts to strengthen credibility.

Recruiting a diverse sample across age, gender, program, and educational background allowed the study to encompass a wide range of translanguaging practices and perspectives. Although the goal was to achieve gender balance, the actual demographics reflected more female students due to the program's composition. All participants gave informed consent and agreed to remain anonymous, ensuring adherence to ethical standards during data collection.

Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis, chosen for its structured yet flexible method of handling qualitative data. Responses from interviews were read multiple times to become familiar with the content, then coded both inductively, based on participants' accounts—and deductively, guided by Sociocultural Theory and Language Ecology. These initial codes were organized into three main themes:

1. Importance of Practical Insight: clarifying concepts, scaffolding tasks, supporting assessments, fostering peer collaboration, enabling feedback cycles, and utilizing multimodal resources.

2. Role of Translanguaging: reducing anxiety, affirming identity, building academic confidence, increasing participation, encouraging critical thinking, and expanding linguistic repertoire.

3. Cultural and Contextual Factors: policy restrictions, lecturer training backgrounds, resource

availability, institutional ideologies, assessment alignment, and student demographic diversity.

Themes were reviewed and refined for coherence, with illustrative quotations selected from both lecturers and students in each program. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, peer debriefing, and consultation with bilingual collaborators to ensure accurate translation and interpretation.

Results

This study involved 23 participants: 10 lecturers (5 from Program A and five from Program B) and 13 master's students (7 from Program A and six from Program B). The lecturers had diverse TESOL backgrounds, with some already familiar with multilingual pedagogy, while others were less so. The students came from Thai, ASEAN, and European backgrounds, speaking languages such as Thai, English, and regional dialects. Program A enforces a stricter English Medium Instruction (EMI) policy, whereas Program B offers more flexibility for using L1 in tutorials and group activities. The thematic analysis, grounded in Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Language Ecology (LE), revealed three key themes: the Importance of Practical Insight, the Role of Translanguaging, and Cultural and Contextual Factors. Within each theme, comparisons were made between Program A and Program B, as well as between lecturers and students.

Theme 1: Importance of Practical Insight

This theme, which came up in 18 of 23 interviews, is about how translanguaging is used in real teaching and learning.

In both programs, practical insight involves breaking complex content into manageable steps to prevent student confusion. In Program A, translanguaging is primarily used for quick clarifications during theory-intensive lessons, often switching languages only for terms or definitions. Conversely, in Program B, it is more integrated into group work, planning, and assessment preparation. Here, codes such as concept clarification, task scaffolding, assessment support, feedback cycles, peer collaboration, and multimodal resources frequently appear together within the same activity. This

demonstrates that translanguaging is purposefully planned and aligned with EMI objectives, rather than being random.

In Program A, lecturers frequently employed translanguaging as a quick method for clarifying concepts and scaffolding tasks. For instance, they might briefly switch to Thai to explain a technical term before returning to English. This practice was mainly used for students who appeared to have difficulties, and group work in L1 was uncommon. Students appreciated these brief explanations, especially before exams, and valued feedback cycles in both languages to ensure

comprehension. However, they observed that the use of L1 was inconsistent across different courses.

In Program B, lecturers intentionally integrated translanguaging into lesson planning. They employed it to facilitate peer collaboration, support assessments, and incorporate multimodal resources, such as bilingual slides or Thai subtitles during presentations. Students utilized Thai for brainstorming, drafting essays, and organizing group work before switching to English for their final output. They viewed translanguaging as a deliberate educational strategy rather than a quick fix, believing it effectively balanced theoretical learning with practical application.

Table 1 Practical insight in translanguaging practice

Codes	Quotation Example
Concept clarification + task scaffolding	“Sometimes I switch to Thai for key terms, then continue in English, so they get meaning but also stay in EMI mode.” (A-L2)
Assessment support + feedback cycles	“Before exam, we go through main points in English and Thai, then teacher give comments in English, but we can ask in Thai if not understand.” (B-S4)
Peer collaboration + multimodal resources	“We work in group, explain in Thai first, then present in English with Thai subtitles on slides.” (B-S3)
Concept clarification + multimodal resources	“When I see students lost, I write the word in English and Thai on the board, sometimes with picture from internet.” (A-L3)
Task scaffolding + peer collaboration + assessment support	“We practice essay writing in Thai to plan, then draft in English, and peer check before teacher’s comments.” (B-S1)
Concept clarification + task scaffolding + feedback cycles	“During presentation rehearsal, I allow Thai for planning, then we practice delivery in English, then short feedback in both languages.” (B-L4)

Theme 2: Role of Translanguaging

This theme emerged in 21 interviews, discussing the benefits and sometimes the limits of using more than one language in class.

In both programs, using both languages helps reduce speaking anxiety, boost participation, and foster more critical thinking. However, there are differences: lecturers in Program A often view it as support for weaker students, while those in Program B see it as an equitable pedagogical approach for everyone. The concepts, such as anxiety reduction, identity affirmation, academic confidence, increased participation, critical thinking, and linguistic repertoire development, sometimes appear together in quotes, highlighting how emotional and academic effects are closely intertwined.

For Program A lecturers, translanguaging was primarily viewed as an emotional support tool, helping to ease students’ anxiety about speaking in English and providing a quick confidence boost. The goal was to switch back to English as soon as possible to uphold the EMI policy. Students agreed that it decreased their nervousness, encouraged greater participation, and validated their cultural identities. However, they occasionally felt it was considered a “secret” form of assistance rather than an entirely accepted classroom strategy.

In Program B, lecturers regarded translanguaging as advantageous for all students, not solely for those with lower proficiency. They believed it could boost critical thinking by prompting learners to compare ideas across languages, and it helped develop their linguistic

skills by reinforcing vocabulary in both English and Thai. Students in Program B reported that switching languages boosted their academic confidence and

participation, and also made them feel valued as multilingual individuals.

Table 2 Role of translanguageing in learning

Codes	Quotation Example
Anxiety reduction + identity affirmation	“If I can ask in Thai, I feel less nervous, and I feel my culture still has place in this class.” (A-S2)
Academic confidence + participation increase	“Switching languages make me more sure about my answer and I join more in discussions.” (B-L3)
Critical thinking + linguistic repertoire development	“I compare how ideas sound in Thai and English, so I think deeper and also learn new English words.” (A-S3)
Identity affirmation + academic confidence + critical thinking	“When I translate my example from Thai to English, I feel smart, and also I think how to make it sound academic.” (B-S6)
Anxiety reduction + participation increase	“In English-only class I feel quiet, but if Thai allowed a little, I want to say more.” (A-S5)
Academic confidence + linguistic repertoire development	“By mixing Thai and English, I find the right words faster and remember them for later.” (B-L5)

Table 3 Ecological factors influencing translanguageing

Codes	Quotation Example
Policy restrictions + institutional ideology	“We must keep 80% English in class, so translanguageing is like... unofficial.” (A-L5)
Lecturer training background + resource availability	“I learn translanguageing abroad, but here we don’t have bilingual materials, so I translate myself.” (B-L1)
Assessment alignment + student demographic diversity	“Exam only in English, but we have ASEAN and European students, so Thai help the locals, English for others.” (B-S5)
Policy restrictions + assessment alignment	“Sometimes I want to give quiz in Thai for part, but rules say all English, so I can’t.” (A-L1)
Resource availability + institutional ideology	“We have no Thai-English textbook for TESOL, so if we use Thai, we make our own notes.” (A-S6)
Lecturer training background + student demographic diversity	“Because I teach mix of Thai and foreign students, I know when Thai works and when not.” (B-L2)

Theme 3: Cultural and Contextual Context

This theme was mentioned in 17 interviews, about how policies, training, and resources affect translanguageing.

Program A enforces stricter EMI rules, leading to mostly small-scale and informal translanguageing. In contrast, Program B has a flexible policy, trained lecturers, and a diverse student body, making translanguageing more accepted. Factors such as policy restrictions, institutional ideology, lecturer training

backgrounds, resource availability, assessment practices, and student demographics all contribute to why the same practice appears very different depending on the context.

Program A encountered strict policy restrictions and an institutional ideology that prioritized English-only instruction. Lecturers referred to translanguageing as an ‘unofficial’ practice, used only when necessary, and pointed out the absence of bilingual teaching resources. Students identified a disconnect between the

English-only assessments and the actual multilingual learning needs, describing translanguaging as often feeling like “rule-bending.”

In Program B, a more flexible EMI policy enabled the systematic use of translanguaging. Lecturers, often trained in multilingual pedagogy, confidently created their resources despite a scarcity of bilingual materials. The diverse group of Thai, ASEAN, and European students naturally employed translanguaging to bridge cultural differences. While students found the policy supportive and fitting their needs, some mentioned that assessments mainly in English restricted their ability to practice bilingualism fully.

Program A sees translanguaging primarily as a temporary aid to address comprehension issues, used sparingly because of policy restrictions. Conversely, Program B treats it as a legitimate, intentionally planned teaching strategy embedded within the lessons. Both settings reported emotional and academic advantages, including lower anxiety, higher confidence, and stronger critical thinking skills, with these benefits more noticeable and consistent in Program B. The main distinction is policy flexibility and instructor training: when available, translanguaging is employed strategically and valued; in environments where these are absent, it remains an informal, less visible tactic.

Discussion

This study analyzes translanguaging practices and perceptions in two Thai TESOL master’s programs through the combined perspectives of Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Language Ecology (LE). The results indicate that translanguaging is appreciated in both settings but is practiced with varying degrees, intentions, and institutional backing. These variations are closely related to EMI policy flexibility, lecturer training, and resource access. In this section, I explore these patterns using existing research, explain how SCT and LE contribute to understanding them, and consider their implications for TESOL in Thai higher education.

In both programs, translanguaging served as a mediational tool that facilitated meaning-making, scaffolding, and active participation, core principles of SCT (Vygotsky, 1987). In Program A, lecturers’ brief use of L1 for quick clarification aligns with Cenoz and Gorter (2021), who describes this as “micro-

scaffolding,” allowing students to address comprehension gaps without leaving the EMI framework. However, these short, ad-hoc interventions limited their impact on sustained cognitive development. Conversely, Program B’s deliberate incorporation of translanguaging into task design, group work, and assessment preparation reflects planned mediation. This approach has been shown to improve both content mastery and academic discourse skills (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

The difference indicates that although both programs utilize translanguaging for instant support, a systematic and planned approach may provide greater opportunities. These opportunities are for fostering higher-order thinking and disciplinary language skills. This aligns with earlier research in ASEAN EMI settings, showing that structured bilingual teaching more effectively prepares students for academic communication (Boonsuk & Ambele, 2024).

Findings show that translanguaging benefits both emotional and cognitive aspects. Students from both programs reported feeling less anxious and participating more when they were encouraged to use their L1 strategically, supporting studies on its role in easing language-related stress (Mendoza et al., 2023). However, in Program B, these emotional advantages coincided with more frequent mentions of critical thinking and expanding linguistic skills, which SCT explains as resulting from increased opportunities for comparative reasoning across languages. Conversely, Program A’s perspective on translanguaging as a “remedial” tool for less capable students might unintentionally restrict these wider benefits. Treating translanguaging as an equal pedagogical approach, as in Program B, tends to normalize multilingual discourse, promoting greater academic confidence and richer cognitive engagement.

From a Language Ecology (LE) perspective, the stark contrast between the two programs can be theorized as the creation of distinct ecological spaces for multilingualism (Hornberger, 2002). Program A’s strict EMI policies and ‘English-only’ ideology created what can be termed a constrained ecology. In this space, translanguaging existed as a subterranean activity, a form of linguistic resistance that was pragmatically necessary yet institutionally delegitimized. This aligns

with findings in other high-stakes EMI contexts, such as in the Gulf states or East Asia, where monolingual ideologies often force multilingual practices into the margins despite their clear pedagogical utility.

Conversely, Program B's flexible policy and trained lecturers fostered an enabling ecology. Here, translanguaging was not merely tolerated but actively cultivated, transforming the classroom into an 'additive space' where students' full linguistic repertoires were treated as academic assets. This systematic integration is crucial; it moves beyond the micro-level scaffolding noted in SCT to actively reshape the macro-level environment. The distinctiveness of this enabling ecology in the Thai context, however, lies in its specific configuration. Unlike settings with strong heritage language policies (e.g., Catalonia) or post-colonial multilingual nations (e.g., South Africa), the Thai TESOL ecology navigates a unique tension: a national identity centered on the Thai language, coupled with a top-down drive for English-medium internationalization. Therefore, the creation of an enabling ecological space here is not about balancing co-official languages, but about strategically negotiating the place of the national language within a global academic imperative. This specific sociolinguistic positioning makes the role of lecturer agency and institutional policy even more decisive than in contexts with longer histories of official multilingual education.

This study notably offers comparative insights into how EMI policy alignment influences the use of translanguaging. In Program A, the disconnect between policy and practice led lecturers to use translanguaging discreetly, which might reinforce its perception as informal or non-compliant. Conversely, Program B demonstrated policy-practice alignment, allowing translanguaging to be systematically integrated into lesson planning and assessments. This aligns with Cenoz and Gorter's (2021) claim that translanguaging flourishes when policy explicitly recognizes multilingual contexts. Without such alignment, even educators who support translanguaging may limit its use to avoid institutional censure, thereby restricting its pedagogical potential.

The findings have several implications for TESOL in Thai higher education. First, there is a clear need to prioritize professional development in multilingual

pedagogy. Rather than one-off workshops, this could take the form of a sustained "Thai TESOL Translanguaging Fellowship," where lecturers collaborate to audit their own EMI practices, develop model lesson plans that strategically integrate Thai for concept clarification and critical thinking tasks, and create a shared repository of bilingual glossaries for key TESOL terminology. Without such training, even well-meaning instructors may revert to ad-hoc language switching.

Second, EMI policies should be reformed to move beyond restrictive "English-only" quotas toward flexible guidelines. For instance, a revised policy could adopt a "Multilingual Mode" framework, explicitly sanctioning the use of Thai for specific functions such as brainstorming in small groups, providing peer feedback, drafting written assignments, or explaining complex theoretical concepts (e.g., Vygotsky's ZPD), while maintaining English as the language for final presentations and published research. Such alignment between policy and practice would position L1 use as a pedagogically sound strategy.

Finally, institutional investment in bilingual and multilingual resources is essential. A practical and impactful step would be for universities or the Thai TESOL organization to commission and publish a series of open-access "Bilingual TESOL Concept Guides." These guides could unpack core theories (e.g., Communicative Language Teaching, Critical Pedagogy) side-by-side in English and Thai, providing lecturers and students with a legitimate, shared resource that reduces the need for individual, ad-hoc translation. While this study's findings are based on participant perceptions, they highlight the ecological factors, from policy to resources, that shape practice. Collectively, these measures would foster an environment where translanguaging is systematically supported. Future research incorporating classroom observations is needed to fully capture the dynamics of in-situ translanguaging practices. Ultimately, such steps are crucial to realize translanguaging's potential as a bridge between policy goals and the multilingual realities of Thai TESOL programs.

Conclusion

This study explored how translanguaging is practiced and perceived in two Thai TESOL master's programs, using Sociocultural Theory (SCT) and Language Ecology (LE) as analytical lenses. By examining contexts with different EMI policies, lecturer training backgrounds, and student demographics, the study found that translanguaging is valued in both programs but implemented to varying extents, with different purposes, and with varying levels of institutional support. Program A tended to view translanguaging as a temporary aid for understanding, used sparingly under strict EMI rules. In contrast, Program B integrated it systematically into task design, collaboration, and assessment within a more flexible policy environment. In both settings, students and lecturers recognized its dual role in fostering academic growth and alleviating emotional barriers, though these benefits were more consistently achieved where translanguaging was deliberately legitimized and integrated, rather than improvised.

From an SCT perspective, the findings emphasize translanguaging as a mediational tool that supports learning, enhances identity affirmation, and promotes higher-order thinking when deliberately incorporated into teaching. The LE lens reveals the broader macro-level factors, policy, ideology, and resource distribution, that either facilitate or limit its application. The comparison shows that pedagogical potential alone is not enough without a supportive institutional environment.

This study advances the bridging of the policy–practice gap in Thai EMI settings by providing evidence that flexible policies, specialized lecturer training, and accessible multilingual resources can elevate translanguaging from an informal supportive tool to an official and effective teaching method. Future research might expand on these findings by adding classroom observations to complement self-reported data, exploring other postgraduate contexts, or examining long-term effects on teacher identity and student learning outcomes. Ultimately, recognizing translanguaging as a valid instructional strategy can better align Thai TESOL education with the multilingual realities of classrooms, thereby improving both fairness and academic quality.

Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

In this paper, an AI tool (Google Gemini) was used for language editing and proofreading.

CRedit author statement

Saber Alavi: Conceptualization, Methodology, Data curation, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing (Original Draft, Writing) Review & Editing, Visualization, Supervision, Project administration.

References

- Ambele, E. A. (2022). Supporting English teaching in Thailand by accepting translanguaging: Views from Thai university teachers. *Issues in Educational Research*, 32(3), 871-886.
- Ambele, E. A., & Nuemaihom, A. (2024). Translanguaging for English language education: Uncovering Thai EFL students' insights. *Journal of Language Teaching & Research*, 15(5), 1445-1454.
- Beiler, I. R., & Villacañas de Castro, L. S. (2025). Translanguaging and culturally sustaining pedagogies: A mutually dependent relationship?. *Foreign Language Annals*, 58(1), 159-181.
- Boonsuk, Y., & Ambele, E. A. (2024). Translanguaging stance and practices of multilingual undergraduates: case of EMI-driven universities in Thailand and Malaysia. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 45(1), 1-15.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2021). *Pedagogical translanguaging*. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press.
- Charles, R. (1994). Introduction to qualitative comparative analysis. *The comparative political economy of the welfare state*, 299-319.
- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational research*. Boston, USA: Pearson.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2015). *Translanguaging, bilingualism, and bilingual education* (pp. 223-240). In Wright, W. E., Boun, S., & García, O.

- (Eds.). The handbook of bilingual and multilingual education. John Wiley & Sons.
- Haim, O., & Manor, R. (2025). Exploring translanguaging in academic discourse through an ecological analytic lens. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 28(4), 449-464.
- Haugen, E. (1971). The ecology of language. *Linguistic Reporter*, 13(1), 19-26.
- Khojan, S., & Ambele, E. A. (2022). *Teachers' Perceptions and Practices of Translanguaging in Thai EFL Classroom* (Doctoral dissertation). Thailand: Mahasarakham University.
- Le, D. (2024). Translanguaging with purpose: An exploratory study on student translanguaging practices and perceptions in the Thai ELT context. *PASAA Journal*, 69, 413-444.
- Li, H., Pan, L., Seargeant, P., & Block, D. (2025). Exploring preservice teachers' translanguaging practices and perceptions in teacher training: A global Englishes perspective. *TESOL Quarterly*, 59(1), 103-135.
- Mendoza, A., Hamman-Ortiz, L., Tian, Z., Rajendram, S., Tai, K. W., Ho, W. Y. J., & Sah, P. K. (2023). Sustaining critical approaches to translanguaging in education: A contextual framework. *TESOL Quarterly*, 58(2), 664-692.
- Mohd Aba sha'ar, M. Y., Boonsuk, Y., & Imam, A. (2025). 'I asked in Thai, but my teacher replied in English': does translanguaging matter in Thai higher education English language teaching?. *Asian Englishes*, 27(2), 518-538.
- Nooyod, A., & Ambele, E. A. (2024). Translanguaging pedagogy for meaning making through classroom interactional competence in Thai EMI context. *NIDA Journal of Language and Communication*, 29(45), 81-92.
- Nuemaihom, A., Chutopama, N., & Putklang, T. (2024). Translanguaging Practices and Perception of Tertiary Lecturers and Learners in Thailand: A Case Study at Buriram Rajabhat University. *World Journal of English Language*, 14(6), 357-357.
- Phetchroj, Y. (2025). *Toward Translanguaging: An Exploratory Study of University English Language Teachers' Perceptions and Practice of Translanguaging in English Language Classrooms in Thailand* (Doctoral dissertation). USA: Indiana University of Pennsylvania.
- Rummel, R. (2021). The translanguaging classroom: Leveraging student bilingualism for learning. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 21(1), 60-62.
- Thongwichit, N., & Ulla, M. B. (2024). Translanguaging pedagogy in Thailand's English medium of instruction classrooms: Teachers' perspectives and practices. *TESL-EJ*, 24(4), n4.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1987). *The genetic roots of thought and speech* (pp. 101-120). In Rieber, R. W., & Carton, A. S. (Eds.). *The collected works of L. S. Vygotsky, Vol. 1: Problems of general psychology*. Plenum Press. (Original work published 1934).
- Xiao, S., & Lertlit, S. (2023). Teachers' and students' perceptions towards the use of translanguaging in English language classrooms in Thailand. *Journal of Multidisciplinary in Social Sciences*, 19(2), 52-64.