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The Bilingual Dilemma: Understanding Chinese University Students' Attitudes Towards Translanguaging in EMI Contexts

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Abstract: Translanguaging as pedagogical practice in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms has become an increasingly prominent area of focus in recent years. It encourages the active and integrated usage of various languages and other resources, as well as the exploitation of students' entire linguistic repertoires and cultural resources in teaching and learning. This study aims to investigate the factors influencing Chinese university students' attitudes toward translanguaging practice in EMI classrooms. A total of 160 students from an international university in Suzhou were invited to participate in an online questionnaire. Quantitative analysis was conducted using SPSS. The results of one-way ANOVA indicated that students with higher proficiency in English and self-efficacy were more inclined to not rely on translanguaging. Furthermore, the findings of linear regression analysis showed that students' foreign language classroom anxiety and teachers' frequency of translanguaging in classes were positively correlated with students' attitudes towards translanguaging. This study focuses on the dilemma of Chinese-English bilingual learners in the all-English classroom environment, emphasizing the importance of educators adapting their pedagogical translanguaging practices to align with students' varying levels of English proficiency and anxiety.

Keywords: Translanguaging pedagogy, EMI classroom, FLCA, Self-efficacy, Bilingualism.

1. Introduction

In light of the global recognition of English as an international lingua franca, English Medium Instruction (EMI) has long been advocated in China's higher education settings, particularly within international schools. EMI refers to using English as the medium of instruction for academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where most people do not speak English as their first language [1]. Such monolingual instruction aims to establish an immersive linguistic environment for students, enabling them to enhance their English proficiency while acquiring subject-specific knowledge. Despite the benefits of EMI, some studies found that students' understanding of the content may be impeded by their limited English proficiency in an English-only teaching environment, thus leading to lower confidence and class participation [2,3]. To optimize the efficacy of EMI, a group of researchers has strongly advocated for the implementation of "translanguaging." Instead of treating languages as

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separate entities, translanguaging encourages learners to functionally integrate their multiple linguistic resources, including their native language, to assist knowledge construction and self-expression [4]. Empirical evidence has revealed that translanguaging can be effectively employed as a pedagogical strategy in Chinese higher education to facilitate content delivery, enhance students' communication fluency, and foster teacher-student interaction [5,6]. Furthermore, recent studies have also examined the attitudes of both teachers and students toward the implementation of translanguaging practices in the classroom [7-9]. However, the current body of research is limited in examining the factors that impact Chinese university students' attitudes toward translanguaging in EMI classrooms and quantifying the magnitude of these influences. To fill in the gap, this study aims to investigate the influence of students' objective second-language proficiency, subjective psychological and emotional factors, and classroom environment on their attitudes towards translanguaging practice in the EMI classroom. The research objects comprised 4 independent variables: student second-language proficiency, student self-efficacy, the frequency of teacher translanguaging, student foreign language classroom anxiety (FLCA), and 1 dependent variable: student attitudes toward translanguaging. More specifically, two research questions were addressed: Firstly, this study seeks to ascertain whether there is any variation in students' attitudes towards translanguaging as a function of their English proficiency and self-efficacy. Secondly, this study sought to ascertain how student attitudes towards translanguaging are predicted by students' FLCA and the frequency of teacher translanguaging.

A quantitative questionnaire was employed in this study to assess students' perspectives on the translanguaging practice of both teachers and students in EMI classrooms. The present study contributes to understanding the learning dilemma of bilingual students behind the prevalent translanguaging practice in Chinese EMI settings. Additionally, it may provide practical implications for educators on maximizing the potential of translanguaging to improve students' academic competence and personal development.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Context and Participants

The study was conducted at Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University (XJTLU), which is a research-led international university. Established in 2006, it currently has nearly 18,000 undergraduate students and serves as the largest Sino-foreign educational institution in China. The institution is endowed with dual degree-granting authority, emanating from both the Chinese Ministry of Education and the University of Liverpool in the United Kingdom. XJTLU stands among China's top-tier universities, admitting predominantly high-caliber students selected through rigorous national college entrance examinations with relatively superior English proficiency. In accordance with the university's regulations for the undergraduate curriculum framework, almost all modules must be taught and assessed in English.

It is pertinent to note that the study was conducted at the beginning of the semester, a period during which first-year students were still in the process of acclimatizing to the format of the course and may not have had a comprehensive understanding of EMI classes. Therefore, the sample of this study consisted of 160 undergraduate (70 males, 89 females, and 1 other) students from 12 colleges ranging from sophomore to senior grades at XJTLU. These students were emergent bilinguals whose first language was Mandarin Chinese.

2.2. Data Collection

The instrument for collecting data is an online questionnaire. The survey link was distributed to students at this university through the assistance of teachers and students. Before formally filling out

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the questionnaire, consent from the participants was accepted, and their personal information was guaranteed to be protected. The questionnaire comprises four sections, which aim to elicit the following information: (1) students' demographic information, including their English proficiency level indicated by college entrance examination scores and self-assessment. (2) The current situation of teachers' and students' translanguaging practice in EMI classes. (3) Students' anxiety levels in foreign language classes. (4) Students' attitudes towards teachers' and their own translanguaging practice in different classroom scenarios. A concise conceptual introduction to translanguaging is provided at the beginning of the questionnaire to ensure that all participants possess a general understanding of the field of study. The Cronbach's Alphas of the whole questionnaire was over 0.8, and the KMO value was 0.892, indicating that the survey items were highly reliable and valid.

It should be noted that this study did not encompass the full range of multimodal and multisensory resources. Rather, the study focused on translanguaging practice in its narrow sense, defined as the application of various linguistic resources. Therefore, the term "translanguaging" in the current questionnaire denotes the utilization of both Chinese and English, including their combination, at both inter and intra-sentential levels.

The first independent variable, students' English proficiency, was measured by their English scores in the college entrance examination and categorized into four levels in the questionnaire (1=Below 90, 2=90-110, 3=111-130, 4=130-150). Similarly, the second independent variable, students' self-efficacy, reflected by their self-rated English level, was divided into three scales in the questionnaire (1=low, 2=intermediate, 3=high). The third independent variable, the frequency of teacher translanguaging, is converted into a numerical scale of one to five (1 = 1% - 20%, 2 = 21% - 40%, 3 = 41% - 60%, 4 = 61% - 80%, 5 = 81% - 100%). The fourth independent variable, students' foreign language classroom anxiety, was operationalized as the extent of agreement or disagreement with the survey statement on a 5-point Likert scale. (1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree). So was the dependent variable, student attitudes toward translanguaging. Each student's FLCA score is calculated as an average score derived from five relevant questions. Similarly, the student's attitude towards translanguaging was quantified as the average score of ten relevant items.

In order to facilitate the process of data analysis, 11 samples that had not participated in the college entrance examination and the sole sample whose score was lower than 90 were excluded from the total number of samples, which now stands at 148.

2.3. Data Analysis

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS, which was also employed for the assessment of reliability and validity. A one-way between-subjects analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to address the first research question: How do students' attitudes to translanguaging vary across English proficiency and self-efficacy? The grouping variable was students' L2 proficiency and self-efficacy. Linear regression analysis was conducted to answer the second question: How are student attitudes toward translanguaging predicted by students' FLCA and the frequency of teacher translanguaging?

3. Results of One-Way ANOVA

Table 1: Variance of attitudes among students with different English proficiency

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	14.119	2	7.060	10.603	<.001
Within Groups	96.543	145	.666		
Total	110.662	147			

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Table 2: Variance of attitudes among students with different self-efficacy

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (p)
Between Groups	10.845	2	5.422	7.877	<.001
Within Groups	99.818	145	.688		
Total	110.662	147			

To investigate the potential variation in students' attitudes towards translanguaging based on their English proficiency, participants were categorized into three groups according to their Gaokao English scores (Group 1: 90-110, Group 2: 111-130, Group 3: 131-150) for conducting a one-way ANOVA test. Descriptive statistics revealed that the mean values from Group 1- Group 3 were 4.05, 3.58, and 3.26 respectively. Similarly, the samples were divided into three groups based on their self-rated English proficiency level (low, intermediate, high) to perform a one-way ANOVA test to examine whether students' attitudes towards translanguaging differ across levels of self-efficacy. The results indicated that the mean values for these three levels from low to high were 4.10, 3.62, and 3.30 respectively. As shown in Table 1 and Table 2, the P-values for students' attitudes to teacher translanguaging are both less than .001, which is less than the set α level, .05, indicating that there are significant variations in students' attitudes towards translanguaging based on their English proficiency and self-efficacy.

According to the means of different groups, it can be observed that students with higher English proficiency and self-efficacy exhibit a more negative attitude towards translanguaging. This could be attributed to the fact that proficient English learners, who already possess strong comprehension and expression skills, perceive reliance on their native language in EMI classes as regressive and contradictory to their goal of enhancing English proficiency. Conversely, students with weaker English abilities rely on their L1 to comprehend complex academic content, leading them to adopt a more positive stance towards translanguaging [10]. Self-efficacy serves as an indicator of learners' self-assessment regarding their ability to understand, master, and utilize a new language. From a psychological perspective, individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy are generally more inclined to challenge themselves through all-English communication rather than relying on Chinese as an auxiliary tool. Moreover, for Chinese students, the examination results play a crucial role in assessing one's English proficiency. This may elucidate why the two sets of averages closely align numerically.

4. Results of Linear Regression Analysis

4.1. The Linear Relation between Student FLCA and Attitudes toward Translanguaging

Table 3: Results of Linear Regression of students' attitudes toward translanguaging

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.031	.237		8.554	<.001
	FLCA level	.450	.065	.499	6.961	<.001

A linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether students' foreign language classroom anxiety can predict students' attitudes toward translanguaging. Table 3 presents the coefficients of students' attitudes toward translanguaging when FLCA is considered as the independent variable. The results indicate that the P-value is less than .001, significantly lower than 0.05, providing evidence for a substantial impact of FLCA on students' attitudes toward translanguaging. Additionally, with

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B=0.45, it can be inferred from the value of B that there exists a positive correlation between the independent variable and the dependent variable. The final predictive model was: Students' attitude towards translanguaging = 0.45 * Students' FLCA + 2.031.

The findings indicate a positive correlation between foreign language learning anxiety and students' inclination toward translanguaging. This may be explained by the fact that students feel pressure due to language barriers in an English-only teaching environment, and translanguaging allows them to validate their comprehension through their native tongue and alleviate uncertainties during the learning process. More importantly, excessive foreign language anxiety may reduce students' confidence and class participation [11]. It is therefore recommended that teachers adopt a flexible approach to translanguaging, tailored to the specific anxiety levels of their students, with the aim of fostering active engagement in classroom activities, mitigating learning anxieties, and enhancing overall learning outcomes.

4.2. The Linear Relation between the Frequency of Teacher Translanguaging and Student Attitudes toward Translanguaging

Table 4: Results of Linear Regression of students' attitudes toward translanguaging

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig. (p)
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
2	(Constant)	3.292	.176		18.746	<.001
	Frequency of teacher translanguaging	.122	.059	.169	2.076	.040

Similarly, a linear regression analysis was employed to investigate the impact of teachers' frequency of translanguaging on students' attitudes toward translanguaging. Based on the coefficient (Table 4), the p-value=0.04 and the B-value = 0.122, indicating that there is a certain degree of positive correlation between the frequency of teacher translanguaging and students' attitudes toward students' opinions on translanguaging. The final predictive model was: student attitudes toward translanguaging = 0.122 * the frequency of teacher translanguaging + 3.292.

The findings demonstrated that teachers' instructional approaches have the potential to influence students' language attitudes and behaviors [12]. If teachers regularly use translanguaging in the classroom, students may come to perceive this approach as an effective and permissible means of utilizing their linguistic resources in a flexible manner. This inclusive linguistic environment can facilitate greater freedom of expression among students in the classroom, thereby alleviating language anxiety. Furthermore, by switching between the two languages in class, educators can facilitate students' cross-linguistic knowledge connections and enhance students' comprehension of abstract academic concepts.

5. Conclusion

This study commenced with an investigation of the phenomenon of translanguaging, which is commonly observed in EMI classrooms of Chinese universities. This study identified the factors influencing students' attitudes towards translanguaging and explored their predicament as emergent bilinguals in an all-English teaching mode. Utilizing a sample of 160 students at an international university in southeast China, the study reveals that Students' attitudes towards translanguaging significantly vary based on their English proficiency and self-efficacy, exhibiting a negative relationship with both factors. Furthermore, there is a positive correlation between students' attitude

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toward translanguaging and their foreign language classroom anxiety as well as the frequency of teacher translanguaging.

The findings of this study demonstrate that immersive English teaching is not necessarily the best teaching method for EMI classrooms, instead, it can sometimes impose psychological burdens on students and diminish their motivation for learning. It is recommended that educators adopt a flexible approach to translanguaging, tailoring its use according to students' language proficiency and anxiety levels, thereby facilitating a deeper understanding of complex academic content. Especially for those with weaker language skills or higher foreign language anxiety, translanguaging can serve as a viable instructional aid to scaffold them and alleviate their cognitive load. Furthermore, these findings contribute to a shift in policy thinking, encouraging a re-evaluation of language allocation policies and a challenge to the prevailing norms of the native speaker paradigm in current practice.

It should be noted that the study is not without limitations. Firstly, the sample of this study is limited to international students, many of whom have the intention of pursuing overseas education and possess a relatively high level of English proficiency. Consequently, these findings may not be widely generalizable to other typical universities in China. Secondly, this study solely focused on selected factors influencing students' attitudes toward translanguaging in EMI classes. Future research endeavors could further investigate additional factors, such as students' social and cultural backgrounds as well as learning strategies.

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