



Investigating the roles of translanguaging in fostering expressive learning among multilingual senior high school learners

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how translanguaging shapes the expressive learning experiences of Grade 12 students at Divine Word College of Laoag-High School Department. It examines the pedagogical potential of translanguaging in enhancing communication, reducing language-related anxiety, and fostering student confidence in multilingual classrooms. Employing a descriptive qualitative design through a phenomenological approach, fifteen students from the STEM, HUMSS, and ABM strands were purposively selected based on their engagement in multilingual classroom interactions. Data were gathered using open-ended structured questionnaires and analyzed thematically to identify emergent patterns in students' perceptions. The findings revealed that translanguaging played a vital role in classroom expression through three core functions: boosting expressive confidence, enhancing clarity and expression, and creating inclusive, responsive learning spaces. These findings suggest that when implemented purposefully, translanguaging can enhance expressive learning and foster a psychologically safe space for multilingual learners. The study recommends integrating translanguaging practices into instructional frameworks to support equity and engagement in linguistically diverse classrooms.

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Introduction

Student engagement in the classroom plays a pivotal role in the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. Expressive learning—defined as a learner's ability to communicate ideas, emotions, and arguments effectively—is often contingent upon students' linguistic confidence and the extent to which they feel empowered to participate in class discussions. In multilingual educational contexts, where students commonly navigate multiple languages in and out of school, translanguaging emerges as a critical pedagogical strategy. It enables learners to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire to facilitate meaning-making and classroom participation.

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Almashour (2024) emphasized the value of translanguaging as a transformative approach that departs from traditional language separation models, advocating instead for a dynamic and fluid view of multilingualism. Translanguaging not only supports cognitive development but also fosters affective outcomes such as reduced anxiety, enhanced motivation, and improved classroom engagement.

Adolescents, particularly senior high school learners, often face heightened academic and socio-emotional pressures. Ringleb and Becker (2025) found that a significant number of students experience stress due to academic demands and extracurricular commitments. Anxiety related to classroom participation, especially in public speaking or oral recitation, can result in reduced motivation and academic disengagement (Huda et al., 2024). Furthermore, language anxiety—characterized by fear or discomfort when communicating in a second or foreign language—has been shown to negatively affect learners' performance, self-confidence, and persistence (Alamer & Almulhim, 2021; England et al., 2019).

In such contexts, translanguaging has been recognized as a culturally responsive and inclusive pedagogical practice. By allowing students to express themselves using a combination of languages—including their first language (L1), second language (L2), and local dialects—educators create a psychologically safe learning environment. Najarro (2023) and Almashour (2024) assert that translanguaging serves as both a cognitive bridge and a cultural anchor, empowering multilingual learners to construct academic meaning while maintaining their linguistic identities.

Despite its potential, translanguaging remains underexplored in the Philippine senior high school context, particularly in relation to expressive learning. This study therefore investigated the lived experiences of multilingual learners in a senior high school setting, focusing on how translanguaging enables or constrains their expressive capabilities in academic discourse.

Review of related literature and studies

This section presented the related literature and studies relevant to the study.

Translanguaging in multilingual education

The concept of translanguaging was first introduced by Cen Williams in the 1980s within the context of Welsh bilingual education. Williams challenged traditional models that separated languages into distinct domains, proposing instead a pedagogical practice where learners flexibly use their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning. This approach emphasized that a learner's first language could scaffold the acquisition of academic knowledge in a second or third language, while simultaneously affirming linguistic identity and heritage (Omidire & Ayob, 2020).

Ulum (2024) further advanced translanguaging theory by highlighting its role in creating linguistically inclusive learning environments. Drawing from Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Ulum positioned translanguaging as a means to reduce learner anxiety, increase confidence, and support cognitive engagement through meaningful language use. Translanguaging aligns with the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), wherein students are guided by teachers and peers in using their dominant

languages to acquire knowledge in less familiar languages (Wang, 2022). This practice also relates to Krashen's Second Language Acquisition Theory, particularly the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively when anxiety is minimized. Translanguaging serves this purpose by reducing the pressure of performing in a single dominant language, creating a psychologically safe space for learners (Lyle, 2024).

In multilingual educational contexts, translanguaging is frequently used to enhance learner participation and cognitive processing. Teachers encourage students to draw from their multiple language competencies—whether through speaking, reading, or writing—to facilitate deeper understanding of academic content (Han et al., 2023). Almashour (2024) emphasized that translanguaging is not merely a communication strategy but a mode of knowledge construction and expression in culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms.

Translanguaging as a pedagogical tool for expressive learning

Setyaningrum et al. (2022) claim that translanguaging is becoming increasingly recognized as a way of teaching that allow students make use of their language repertory to support participation and recognition in learning surroundings. This claim was consistent with Mungala (2022), whereby translanguaging improved learners' participation in class as they became literate in their various local languages, read in their native languages, write their local languages, and identify linguistic and phonological variations and similarities between their local language and the language of instruction. Recent studies were also conducted among ODL students, and they revealed that translanguaging strategies enhanced understanding and participation by allowing learners to utilize their dominant languages to support their learning of new content (Sapitri et al., 2023).

Furthermore, Fang et al. (2022) claimed that translanguaging facilitated language and content learning and promoted a decolonizing pedagogy by recognizing learners' linguistic repertoire. Although some teachers acknowledged its use in instructional facilitation and group learning, others voiced worries about its possible ability to impede vocabulary development in target languages (Barroga & Tampus, 2023). Therefore, it is important to note the need for professional development and training to guarantee that teachers can efficiently include translanguaging techniques in their education.

The role of translanguaging in confidence building in learners

Translanguaging has given students more self-confidence and self-worth as they speak their first tongue, which reduces anxiety and gain the courage to speak English in their willingness to take risks and exchange ideas. It also valued learners by recognizing, understanding, and respecting the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of language learners, which supported their understanding of how their linguistic skills can be beneficial as students ("Embracing Translanguaging in the Classroom with Bilingual Texts," 2023). Translanguaging also helped minority students boost their self-confidence by allowing them to switch languages to improve their cognitive abilities, cultivate engagement, and foster a more profound sense of belonging in the classroom (Mextesol, 2024).

In addition, the students feel comfortable crossing bridges in communication, especially when strict language demands can cause pressure and embarrassment (Libretexts, 2022). Students' self-respect is

much enhanced, their sense of cultural pride is developed, and a more favorable and enriching learning environment where linguistic diversity is valued and seen as an advantage result when students actively encourage their heritage languages and cultural insights to their peers. Essential for the promotion of their general well-being, academic engagement, and long-term success, it generated a supportive environment where students feel empowered to connect on a more meaningful level, fostering mutual understanding, empathy, and a broader appreciation of the rich cultures shown within the four walls of a classroom (Neault & Jillian, 2020).

Similarly, it fostered classroom involvement and self-efficacy, nurtured a loop of motivation and improved learning, and enabled students to acquire metalinguistic awareness and critical thinking skills. It also promoted an inclusive classroom where students expressed themselves freely without worrying about making mistakes in a single language and supported a learning environment that promoted active involvement (Lan, 2025). Creating a classroom environment where students feel equal in their linguistic abilities gives them a confidence boost, which allows them to use all their languages effectively as they participate actively by drawing on their linguistic repertoire (Blog, 2024).

The role of translanguaging in alleviating stress and anxiety

Franck and Papadopoulou (2024) asserted that translanguaging helps pupils acquire languages and improves their emotional states. The study involving university educators from multiple Asian nations showed that translanguaging reduced feelings of shame and inferiority associated with language competence and cultivated a sense of pride and stability among learners (Hopkins & Dovchin, 2024). The emotional shift due to the use of translanguaging highlighted its vital importance in creating a favorable learning environment that reduced anxiety, built confidence, and advanced student involvement.

Consequently, translanguaging is an emotional support system for learners suffering from different levels of difficulties and various challenges in their academic endeavors. Case studies demonstrated how this pedagogical approach can enhance the emotional well-being of students with multiple languages by equipping them with resources to manage their emotions and experiences in the classroom (Back et al., 2020). Therefore, assisting students to control anxieties and stresses related to language acquisition, utilization, and comprehension depended upon the emotional scaffolding effect that mostly happened to them within their learning environments.

Indeed, translanguaging is a teaching strategy for multilingual students to minimize anxiety and nervousness. A recent study indicated that connecting with content via translanguaging enabled students to more effectively navigate academic constraints by offering accessible linguistic resources (Song et al., 2022). Therefore, such familiarity relieved the cognitive burden and minimized anxiety in challenging activities, which empowered the students to focus on learning enthusiastically at their time and pace rather than language mastery alone.

The impact of translanguaging on students' academic performance

Regarding stimulating involvement and improving communication, translanguaging has been proven in studies to lower student anxiety (Cenoz et al., 2022). Planned translanguaging exercises also reduced

teachers' uncertainty in teaching various languages and lowered students' anxiety, fear, and nervousness. With notable increases in language proficiency, Jegede (2025) pointed out that translanguaging techniques helped to promote student engagement, comprehension, and successful academic achievement. Thus, translanguaging has broken down linguistic barriers, increasing the availability of reading resources and promoting closer comprehension.

Ultimately, Almashour (2024) pointed out that translanguaging strengthened students' cognitive abilities, including memory retention, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Using various languages allowed students to grasp ideas to improve recall and application skills, cope with challenging reading materials, foster critical thinking, and develop problem-solving abilities. Therefore, translanguaging boosted motivation, infused enthusiasm and engagement in learning activities, nurtured students' interest by promoting deeper comprehension of words, phrases, and sentences, and rendered the learning process more meaningful (Yan & Aziz, 2024).

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to investigate the roles of translanguaging in facilitating expressive learning among multilingual senior high school students. Specifically, it sought to address the research question:

- 1. How does translanguaging shape the expressive learning experiences of senior high school learners in academic tracks?***

Research methodology

Research design

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach, to explore how translanguaging influences expressive learning among Grade 12 students. The phenomenological method seeks to understand lived experiences as perceived by individuals, focusing on their subjective meanings rather than external interpretations (Trymata & Trymata, 2024; Dovetail Editorial Team, 2023). This framework enabled the researcher to investigate how students experienced the integration of multiple languages in classroom interactions, and how such experiences contributed to their expressive capabilities.

Locale of the study

The study was conducted at Divine Word College of Laoag-High School Department a premiere Catholic school with a linguistically diverse student body. Situated in a region where Ilocano, Filipino, and English are commonly spoken, the school serves as an ideal context for examining translanguaging practices. The multilingual environment naturally encourages language alternation, making it a suitable locale for investigating expressive learning in a translanguaging setting.

Population and sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich participants who had substantial experience with translanguaging in academic contexts. According to Stewart (2025), purposive sampling involves selecting individuals based on specific characteristics that align with the research objectives.

Fifteen (15) Grade 12 students from three academic strands—Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM); Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); and Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM)—were selected, with five students representing each strand. Inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) current enrollment as a Grade 12 student at DWCL Senior High School (2) demonstrable use of Ilocano, Filipino, and English in both academic and extracurricular settings; and (3) awareness and/or self-reported experiences of anxiety and/or confidence linked to language use.

Data gathering instrument

To capture the lived experiences of the participants, the researcher developed an open-ended questionnaire tailored to elicit in-depth, narrative responses. This instrument was intentionally designed to accommodate the participants' preference for written expression, allowing them the comfort and flexibility to articulate their thoughts in a language or combination of languages they found most expressive. The questionnaire aimed to uncover how translanguaging shaped their ability to participate in classroom discourse, particularly in moments when they were prompted to respond during instruction.

Data collection procedure

The data collection started with a Google Form containing open-ended questions, which was sent to the selected participants. They were given two weeks to answer, allowing enough time to reflect on their experiences.

After the deadline, the written responses were transcribed and initially analyzed for themes. To gain deeper insights, some participants were invited for follow-up face-to-face interviews where they elaborated on their answers. With their consent, an audio recorder was used to capture their narratives.

Both the written and interview responses were then combined and analyzed together.

Data analysis tool

The study used Thematic Analysis to interpret and make sense of the qualitative data. This method helped the researcher identify, analyze, and report recurring patterns in the participants' written and oral narratives. It was well-suited to the study's phenomenological design because it allowed a deeper look into students' personal experiences with translanguaging.

The analysis went through several phases: reading and familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, developing and refining themes, and completing the final interpretation. The codes were drawn directly from the data rather than set beforehand, ensuring that the themes reflected the participants' real experiences.

Both the Google Form responses and the interview transcripts were coded together. Using these two sources strengthened the credibility of the findings through triangulation. In the end, the themes were interpreted in light of the research questions, showing how translanguaging reduced anxiety and built confidence in classroom participation.

This study carefully followed ethical standards for research involving human participants. Before collecting data, informed consent was secured from the Research Adviser, Dean of the Graduate School of Education, the High School Principal, and all student participants. Everyone was fully informed of the study's purpose, process, and their rights. Participation was voluntary, and students were assured they could withdraw at any time without negative consequences.

To safeguard privacy, the researcher ensured both anonymity and confidentiality. No names or identifying details appeared in the report. All written and audio-recorded data were stored securely and used only for academic purposes.

Data presentation and analysis

This section presents the findings of the study on how translanguaging shaped the expressive learning experiences of Senior High School learners in academic tracks.

SOP: How does translanguaging shape the expressive learning experiences of senior high school learners in academic tracks?

Theme 1: Translanguaging boosts expressive confidence

Translanguaging emerged as a key factor in reducing language anxiety and enhancing expressive confidence among Senior High School learners in the academic track. Participants shared that the ability to use multiple languages in class helped them articulate ideas more clearly, comprehensively, and comfortably.

Participant 4 shared, "Reducing anxiety through translanguaging helps me increase my confidence. When we have a report in class, I use different languages that help explain our report better. Our teacher allows us to use any medium when reporting, and that increases my confidence in speaking in front of others."

Similarly, Participant 5 stated, "I think anxiety and confidence go hand-in-hand. As someone not fluent in English, I'm relieved when I'm not expected to speak in straight English. I'm confident writing in English, but it's different when speaking. I feel more confident expressing myself without stopping when I translanguage."

Participant 8 specified, "Probably when I am reporting something in front of class. Although, I am fluent in English, I get anxious sometimes because if I speak in the English language too long, I start to stutter. Using my home language relieves my anxiety because I can speak more clearly without stuttering."

Correspondingly, Participant 10 emphasized, "I felt anxious during a class recitation when I couldn't fully explain my answer in English. My hands shook and I worried about making mistakes. But when I used my home language, or Ilocano I should say, I felt more relaxed and confident because I could express my ideas more clearly."

This practice allowed learners to focus on conveying meaning rather than conforming to rigid language norms. Participant 1 noted, “When I was allowed to explain in both English and my home language, I felt more confident in sharing ideas rather than just getting the grammar or pronunciation right. It made communication easier and clearer.” Participant 12 added, “If I’m allowed to seamlessly switch between Ilocano, Filipino, and English, my anxiety might significantly decrease. I could begin in Ilocano to explain complex ideas, clarify them in Filipino, and conclude in English.”

These narratives reinforce the role of translanguaging not merely as a linguistic strategy but as an inclusive pedagogical practice that supports emotional well-being, fosters engagement, and affirms the linguistic identities of learners in multilingual contexts.

Theme 2: Translanguaging enhances clarity and depth of expression

Translanguaging improved learners’ clarity and fluency by enabling them to shift across languages, especially when English alone limited their expression. Learners reported that this strategy helped them convey ideas more effectively and engage more confidently in classroom discourse.

Participant 6 shared, “When I am not afraid of making mistakes because I can use multiple languages, I feel more comfortable expressing my thoughts. This makes me more active in classroom discussions and activities.” Similarly, Participant 11 noted, “Whenever we explain something in one language, we personally feel the effectiveness of our explanation. That’s why we switch to another language—to better convey the topic and to ensure that the audience fully understands.”

For many, translanguaging served as cognitive scaffolding, helping them overcome lexical gaps and organize thoughts with greater ease. Participant 18 emphasized, “Allowing the use of multiple languages in classroom discussions significantly boosts my confidence by reducing the cognitive load of translation, enabling access to a richer linguistic repertoire, and creating a more inclusive and empowering learning environment.” Participant 9 recalled, “During an impromptu speech, I was very nervous about making mistakes in English. But since I was allowed to use a mix of Filipino, Ilocano, and English, I felt more confident.”

Participant 12 stated, “In times where we forget the right words to explain a certain concept or express a thought, being allowed to use multiple languages is very important because in this way, we are able to explain something thoroughly. Additionally, I think no one would want to feel a certain way in front of the whole class, especially with the teacher watching you.”

These reflections underscore translanguaging as more than linguistic accommodation—it supports deeper meaning-making, authentic communication, and learner-centered interaction. By embracing learners’ multilingual resources, translanguaging enhances the substance and spontaneity of classroom expression.

Theme 3: Translanguaging fosters inclusive learning spaces

Findings reveal that translanguaging supports inclusive, emotionally safe learning environments where multilingual learners feel respected and empowered. When educators legitimize all languages in the classroom, students experience reduced anxiety and increased participation.

Participant 2 noted, “Educators can use translanguaging more effectively by creating a safe and inclusive classroom environment and offering choices in language use to reduce anxiety and boost confidence in students.” Likewise, Participant 8 stated, “Translanguaging can be more effective if teachers encourage students to use their strongest language first, then gradually incorporate English.” Participant 20 added, “A welcoming classroom where multiple languages are explicitly valued, modeled by the teacher, and supported by multimodal resources fosters collaborative learning and a safe space for mistakes.”

Students felt more at ease and expressive when their home languages were recognized. Participant 10 remarked, “Allowing multiple languages in the classroom makes the ambiance of the room more homy, and everyone can express their thoughts freely.” Participant 22 shared, “Being able to use Ilocano, Filipino, and English makes me more confident because I can explain my ideas clearly.” Similarly, Participant 15 said, “I usually mix the three languages I know so that the people listening to me can understand what I am saying more clearly.”

By embracing students' linguistic assets, translanguaging promotes deeper engagement, clearer communication, and a greater sense of belonging. Learners interact more authentically, contribute more actively, and demonstrate increased academic enthusiasm. As a pedagogical bridge, translanguaging not only affirms students' identities but also fosters collaborative, confident, and critically engaged multilingual learners.

Results and discussion

The findings of this study underscore the critical role of translanguaging in enhancing classroom expression through three core functions: boosting expressive confidence, enhancing clarity and expression, and creating inclusive, responsive learning spaces. These functions illustrate how translanguaging not only facilitates language acquisition but also fosters a more dynamic and engaging classroom environment, as supported by extensive literature in the field.

Boosting expressive confidence emerged as a significant benefit of translanguaging. The ability to draw on multiple languages allowed students to communicate their ideas with greater assurance, minimizing the anxiety associated with speaking in a second language. This aligns with Prilutskaya's (2021) research, which emphasizes that translanguaging reduces students' fear of making mistakes, encouraging more active participation. Similarly, Omidire and Ayob (2020) noted that translanguaging techniques contribute to creating psychological safety in the classroom, enabling students to express themselves without the stress of error correction. In the current study, students reported feeling more confident when allowed to use their native languages alongside English, which led to increased engagement and a greater willingness to contribute to class discussions.

Meanwhile, enhancing clarity and expression was another notable outcome of translanguaging. When students were able to switch between languages, they could articulate their thoughts more clearly, drawing on familiar linguistic structures to explain complex concepts. This finding is consistent with Garivaldo and Fabiano-Smith's (2023) observation that translanguaging facilitates clearer communication by utilizing a student's full language repertoire. In addition, Tai and Wong (2022) argued that translanguaging empowers students by allowing them to express themselves more effectively in both familiar and academic contexts. The current study echoed this by showing that students felt more capable of explaining ideas and engaging in academic discourse when they could use a combination of English, Filipino, and Ilocano. This linguistic flexibility not only improved understanding but also fostered a deeper connection with the content.

Finally, creating inclusive, responsive learning spaces through translanguaging was a central theme in this study. Translanguaging created a learning environment where students' cultural and linguistic identities were affirmed, fostering a sense of belonging and reducing the likelihood of linguistic exclusion. Tai and Wong (2022) emphasized that such spaces empower students by recognizing their native languages as valuable assets, which, in turn, promotes deeper engagement. Qureshi and Aljanadbah (2021) also highlighted the role of translanguaging in scaffolding learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), allowing students to leverage familiar language patterns to comprehend new academic concepts. In this study, students reported feeling more accepted and understood when allowed to use their home languages, resulting in increased participation and decreased anxiety. Moreover, this inclusivity was supported by Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982), which suggests that emotional barriers to learning are lowered when students feel comfortable and supported in their language use. By fostering a more responsive and inclusive environment, translanguaging helped create a classroom dynamic where all students could engage meaningfully.

Conclusion

This study reinforces the critical role of translanguaging in enhancing classroom expression by boosting expressive confidence, improving clarity and expression, and fostering inclusive learning environments. By enabling students to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire, translanguaging not only enhances communication and academic engagement but also creates a classroom atmosphere where all students feel valued and empowered to participate in the learning process. Consequently, translanguaging should be regarded as a vital pedagogical strategy for supporting effective language acquisition and cultivating a more inclusive, responsive classroom. Therefore, the findings of this study advocate for the systematic integration of translanguaging practices in language pedagogy, urging educators to capitalize on the cognitive and emotional benefits of multilingualism to support diverse learners. Rather than perceiving multilingualism as a challenge, it is recommended that educators integrate translanguaging practices into their teaching methodologies to promote language development, alleviate student stress, and increase overall classroom participation.

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