

TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL TRANSLANGUAGING IN EFL CLASSES FOR ETHNIC MINORITY STUDENTS IN VIETNAM

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Abstract: This study explored teachers' pedagogical translanguaging and the pedagogical functions it serves in English as a foreign language (EFL) classes for ethnic minority students (EMSs). Two teachers from two lower secondary schools in a province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam were observed in six lessons, during which their talk was audio recorded, and the teachers were subsequently interviewed individually. The findings revealed that the teachers employed translanguaging strategically by alternating between Vietnamese, English, and ethnic minority languages (EMLs). Translanguaging was used in various combinations, most commonly between Vietnamese and English, and less frequently between Vietnamese and EMLs, English and EMLs, and among all three languages. It served various interpretive and managerial functions. Interview data also confirmed that translanguaging practices were consciously planned, and one teacher even learned her students' native language to enhance the effectiveness of translanguaging. These findings highlight the practical role of translanguaging in supporting EMSs in multilingual settings.

Key words: Pedagogical translanguaging; pedagogical functions; ethnic minority students

LIÊN NGÔN SỰ PHẠM CỦA GIÁO VIÊN CÁC LỚP HỌC TIẾNG ANH DÀNH CHO HỌC SINH DÂN TỘC THIỂU SỐ Ở VIỆT NAM

Tóm tắt: Nghiên cứu này khám phá việc sử dụng liên ngôn sự phạm của giáo viên và các chức năng sự phạm của nó trong các lớp học tiếng Anh như một ngoại ngữ dành cho học sinh dân tộc thiểu số. Hai giáo viên từ hai trường trung học cơ sở ở một tỉnh thuộc khu vực Tây Nguyên của Việt Nam đã được quan sát trong sáu tiết học, trong đó lời nói của họ được ghi âm và sau đó họ được phỏng vấn riêng. Kết quả cho thấy các giáo viên đã sử dụng liên ngôn sự phạm một cách có chiến lược bằng cách luân phiên giữa tiếng Việt, tiếng Anh và các ngôn ngữ dân tộc thiểu số. Việc thực hành này được thực hiện theo nhiều cách kết hợp khác nhau, phổ biến nhất là giữa tiếng Việt và tiếng Anh; ít phổ biến hơn là giữa tiếng Việt và ngôn ngữ dân tộc thiểu số, giữa tiếng Anh và ngôn ngữ dân tộc thiểu số, và giữa cả ba ngôn ngữ. Liên ngôn sự phạm được sử dụng nhằm phục vụ các chức năng diễn giải và quản lý lớp học. Dữ liệu phỏng vấn cũng xác nhận rằng việc sử dụng liên ngôn sự phạm đã được lên kế hoạch một cách có chủ ý và một giáo viên thậm chí đã học ngôn ngữ mẹ đẻ của học sinh để nâng cao hiệu quả sử dụng liên ngôn. Những phát hiện này nhấn mạnh vai trò thiết thực của liên ngôn sự phạm trong việc hỗ trợ học sinh dân tộc thiểu số trong bối cảnh đa ngôn ngữ.

Từ khóa: Liên ngôn sự phạm; chức năng sự phạm; học sinh dân tộc thiểu số

1. Introduction

While translanguaging is not a new concept, its role has been increasingly recognized in foreign language or second language (L2) education, particularly in multilingual and multicultural contexts. According to Galante (2020), “translanguaging is one of the most popular pedagogical approaches in the current multi/plurilingual turn in applied linguistics” (p.1). Importantly, as Nguyen and Tran (2024) emphasize, translanguaging practices “need to pertain to minority languages and be adapted to social environments of multi-communities in which schools are positioned” (p. 166). This perspective is particularly relevant to the Vietnamese context, where translanguaging involves not just the first language (L1) and L2 but often a third language (L3). This approach holds particular significance in Vietnam, a linguistically diverse country with 54 recognized cohabiting ethnic groups, where ethnic minority students (EMSs) often face unique challenges in accessing quality education due to linguistic and cultural barriers (Bui et al., 2019; Nguyen & Hamid, 2018; Nguyen & Tran, 2024).

Teachers in such classrooms encounter difficulties in delivering lessons that are comprehensible while also complying with curricular demands. In this regard, pedagogical translanguaging offers a promising strategy to bridge linguistic gaps by enabling learners to draw on their native languages as cognitive and communicative scaffolds for acquiring English. Tsokalidou and Skourtou (2020) found that translanguaging allowed minority students greater freedom to switch between languages and increased their self-confidence and self-esteem within the classroom. Furthermore, pedagogical translanguaging has recently gained recognition as an innovative and celebrated approach, often described as a “movement in language education” (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 10).

Despite its potential, the implementation of translanguaging in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in Vietnam remains underexplored, particularly in the context of EMSs. Existing studies have focused mainly on urban or majority Vietnamese settings (e.g., Cong-Lem, 2025; Pham & Vu, 2023), often overlooking the specific needs of linguistically diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. In provinces like those in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, where ethnic minority groups are common, there is an urgent need to investigate how translanguaging practices can enhance English instruction. This study focuses on EFL teachers working with Bahnar and Rengao students, whose native languages are Bahnar and Rengao. While previous research has primarily concentrated on mainstream classrooms, the experiences of EFL teachers working with EMSs in these multilingual regions remain largely unexamined. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing more inclusive and culturally responsive teaching practices that support Vietnam’s broader educational goal.

To explore how EFL teachers implement pedagogical translanguaging in classes for EMSs and what functions of translanguaging these practices serve, this study was conducted with two research questions:

1. How do teachers practice pedagogical translanguaging in EFL classes for EMSs?
2. What pedagogical functions do teachers aim to fulfill through translanguaging in EFL classes for EMSs?

2. Literature review

2.1 Translanguaging

The concept of translanguaging has been defined in various ways, evolving significantly over time. Originating in Wales during the 1980s, translanguaging was first introduced by Cen Williams under the term “trawsieithu.” It referred to the systematic and planned use of two languages in the classroom to promote both learning and bilingualism (García & Wei, 2014; Lewis et al., 2012). On this point, translanguaging is described as “a pedagogical practice where students are asked to alternate languages for the purposes of receptive or productive use” (García & Wei, 2014, p. 20). Canagarajah (2011, p. 401) claims that translanguaging refers to “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system”.

2.2 Translanguaging and Code-switching

Translanguaging and code-switching are both linguistic practices observed in multilingual contexts, but they differ significantly in perspective and application. Code-switching involves alternating between two or more distinct languages within a conversation, maintaining clear language boundaries. This practice is based on a view of language separation (Le, 2022), where languages are treated as discrete and independent systems. In line with this, Seals et al. (2020) refer to traditional code-switching analysis as one that treats languages as definable and separate linguistic systems. This perspective aligns with a monolingual view, in which bilinguals are seen as switching between independent and disconnected linguistic frameworks (Khan et al., 2021).

In contrast, translanguaging adopts a more integrative and fluid approach. Rather than viewing languages as bounded entities, it draws on the flexible use of a multilingual speaker’s entire linguistic repertoire to make meaning. As Otheguy et al. (2015) put it, translanguaging involves “the deployment of a speaker’s full linguistic repertoire without regard for watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named (and usually national and state) languages” (p. 283). This approach reflects a multilingual perspective, which treats language systems as fluid and interconnected rather than fixed and separate (Le, 2022; Khan et al., 2021). It highlights the dynamic, natural, and context-dependent use of language in multilingual communication (Canagarajah, 2011; Wei, 2018).

2.3 Pedagogical translanguaging

Pedagogical translanguaging is described as a teaching method that intentionally and carefully uses students’ multilingual resources in both language and content subjects (Juvonen & Källkvist, 2021). Moreover, it is regarded as a theoretical and practical approach within the context of multilingual education, particularly in schools that aim to promote multilingualism (Cenoz, 2009). According to Driouch (2022), pedagogical translanguaging uses students’ whole linguistic repertoire as prior knowledge to build and support further learning. In addition, Cenoz and Gorter (2021, p.18) emphasize that its aim “is to develop multilingualism in two or more languages in both language and content classes, and this includes the development of the minority language.”

Beyond these descriptions, Cenoz and Gorter (2021) make a distinction between spontaneous translanguaging and pedagogical translanguaging. They explain that “pedagogical translanguaging is a pedagogic theory and practice that refers to instructional strategies which

integrate two or more languages” (p. 18), while “spontaneous translanguaging refers to the reality of bilingual usage in naturally occurring contexts where boundaries between languages are fluid and constantly shifting” (p. 18). This distinction is important for understanding how teachers intentionally employ translanguaging as a pedagogic strategy, rather than viewing it merely as spontaneous language use, particularly with multilingual learners, including EMSs.

For the scope of this research, pedagogical translanguaging is based on Cenoz’s (2017) definition, which describes it as “planned by the teacher inside the classroom and can refer to the use of different languages for input and output or to other planned strategies based on the use of students’ resources from the whole linguistic repertoire” (p. 194). This definition is adopted in the present study because it highlights the teacher’s intentional and systematic use of students’ multilingual resources. It is particularly suitable for this research, in which EFL teachers employ pedagogical translanguaging by switching between Vietnamese, English, and EMLs. This framework ensures greater consistency and coherence in the interpretation of pedagogical translanguaging during data collection and subsequent discussion.

2.4 Previous studies

In relation to how translanguaging is implemented in multilingual EFL contexts, Sahib (2019) conducted a qualitative study in Indonesia and revealed that English, Indonesian, and the local language (Konjo) were used strategically in classrooms to enhance student engagement, improve communication, and assist learners with limited English vocabulary by drawing on their full linguistic repertoires. Similarly, Liando et al. (2023) examined EFL classrooms in a multilingual Indonesian context and found that teachers employed various forms of translanguaging, including intra-sentential, inter-sentential, and tag switching, to serve four instructional purposes, thereby enhancing comprehension and making learning more inclusive and accessible. In contrast, in a different sociolinguistic setting, Zhang and Chan (2021) explored translanguaging among EFL teachers in Xinjiang, where Mandarin and English dominate and Uyghur is marginalized. Their study showed that translanguaging was beneficial but mostly limited to vocabulary and grammar instruction, reflecting constraints on its full pedagogical potential in politically sensitive contexts.

Turning to the range of translanguaging functions, Chen et al. (2024) explored translanguaging in Chinese secondary schools through classroom observations and interviews, identifying six main functions: facilitating understanding through verbatim translation, explaining proper nouns and grammar, reinforcing instruction, checking comprehension, fostering classroom rapport, and providing encouragement or warnings. Moreover, Sapitri et al. (2018) reported three core functions, including knowledge construction, classroom management, and interpersonal relations, in junior high schools, alongside motivations such as promoting discipline and enhancing the classroom atmosphere. In addition, Putri and Rifai (2021) reported that translanguaging helped teachers explain lesson content such as grammar, manage the classroom, convey shared cultural values, and help students understand materials explained in English better.

In the context of Vietnam, Pham and Vu (2023) conducted a convergent mixed-methods study to investigate how EFL secondary school teachers in both public and private sectors in Hanoi viewed translanguaging. The findings revealed that most teachers held positive attitudes toward translanguaging, recognizing its importance in scaffolding students’ learning, particularly

for cognitive purposes such as explaining grammar and vocabulary. In the same vein, Cong-Lem (2025) carried out a qualitative case study exploring the translanguaging practices of three Vietnamese EFL educators at a public university. The study highlighted diverse functions of translanguaging, including checking student comprehension, emphasizing key content, and reducing learners' anxiety when speaking English.

All in all, in the current English teaching and learning context in Vietnam, very few studies to date have investigated how translanguaging is applied in the classroom and its pedagogical functions in EFL classes for EMSs. Therefore, this study aims to explore the translanguaging practices and their functions as employed by teachers in a province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam, using a combination of data collection methods, including classroom observations and interviews.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research site and Participants

The present study was conducted at two lower secondary schools in a province located in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. These schools are located in the suburban regions of the province, away from the urban core. This site was chosen for its convenient access to the teachers. Among the participants contacted by the researcher, these two teachers were readily available and welcoming.

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select the site and participants that best fit the research goals (Johnson & Christensen, 2017), involving two EFL teachers currently working at the selected schools. Of the two participants, one was a female teacher and the other a male teacher. Both are from ethnic minority backgrounds and teach English to classes predominantly composed of EMSs. Each held a university degree in English language teaching and had more than ten years of teaching experience. They also met the English proficiency requirement (level 4/6-B2) as outlined in Document No. 792/BGDĐT-NGCBLGD, issued on February 25, 2014 (MOET, 2014). For confidentiality, pseudonyms are used for the teachers' names. The teacher demographics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1

Profile of Teacher Participants

Profile	Y Yang (pseudonym)	A Ty (pseudonym)
Age	35	49
Gender	Female	Male
Ethnicity	Bahnar	Rengao
Highest qualification	Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching	Bachelor's degree in English Language Teaching
Years of EFL teaching	12	25
Location of school	Suburb	Suburb

3.2 Data collection

Data were collected from multiple sources to ensure a comprehensive understanding of teachers' translanguaging practices and their functions.

First, six classroom observations were conducted in two Grade 6 classes (12-year-old EMSs), with three lessons observed per teacher. Each recorded session lasted 45 minutes, consistent with the secondary school classroom time guidelines presented in the 2018 General Education Curriculum: Overall Program (MOET, 2018), which was issued together with Circular No. 32/2018/TT-BGDĐT. The teachers' talk during these lessons was audio recorded using a smartphone equipped with a smart microphone to minimize background noise and enhance audio quality, following Díaz's (2022) suggestion that "a portable device, such as a tablet or smartphone, will be helpful to record the participant's execution of the task" (p. 61). To capture the clearest possible audio, each teacher wore a microphone clipped to their shirt throughout the lesson, while the smartphone was placed in front of the researcher for convenient control and adjustment of the recording process. In addition, field notes were also taken during the observations to supplement the audio recordings and document contextual details.

Then, to fulfill the study's objectives, in-depth interviews were conducted following the classroom observations. These interviews took the form of extended, face-to-face, one-on-one sessions lasting approximately 30 minutes each. One interview was conducted with each teacher, resulting in a total of two interviews. All interviews were conducted in Vietnamese to ensure clarity and to allow participants to express their thoughts more comfortably. The interviews were semi-structured in format and guided by a protocol outlined in the Appendix.

3.3 Data analysis

3.3.1 *Analyzing translanguaged turns in the lessons*

All audio recordings of the lessons were initially transcribed verbatim using the AI tool TurboScribe. Each transcript was carefully verified by re-listening to the recordings multiple times to ensure accuracy. With the help of Microsoft Excel 2016, the turns were then coded to identify instances of translanguaging. These instances were categorized based on the combinations of languages used, such as English-Vietnamese, Vietnamese-Ethnic Minority Language, English-Ethnic Minority Language, and trilingual mixing.

McCarthy et al. (2010) described a turn as "each occasion that a speaker speaks, and a turn ends when another speaker takes a turn" (p. 58). In this study, a turn was defined as a complete and continuous spoken segment initiated by the teacher that served a communicative or instructional purpose. Each new speaker - whether teacher or student - marked the beginning of a new turn. Importantly, even when multiple languages were used in a single utterance, it was still considered one turn as long as the speaker remained the same and the speech was uninterrupted. Only the teacher's translanguaging turns were selected for analysis. The EMLs used in translanguaging are written in bold, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Excerpt from a participant teacher

School: suburban school with a variety of majority, regional minority			
Grade 6: (12-year-old EMSs)			
Teacher's mother language: Bahnar			
Teacher	Utterance (Vietnamese, English, EMLs)	Types of mixed translanguaging	Turn
Y Yang	-T: Look at the picture, please. Tell me what city is it. We have...We have cái đồng hồ gì đây? Đồng hồ gì? Đồng hồ Big Ben đúng hông? (ACL1-Ms. Y Yang) <i>/Look at the picture, please. Tell me, what city it is. We have... What kind of clock is this? What clock? Is it Big Ben?/</i>	English-Vietnamese	1
	-T: Một số từ hiểu, một số từ pị hiểu , cô giải thích lại nhan. <i>/ You understood some words but not others, right? Let me explain again./</i>	Vietnamese-Ethnic Minority Language	1
	-T: Ái Thùy, the words I wrote hăm vào hăm thau? <i>/Ái Thùy, do you understand the words I wrote?/</i>	English-Ethnic Minority Language	1
	- T: Đúng rồi, giỏi. Ah, gu chi hiểu ha bvi? If not, let me explain again. Để cô giải thích lại bằng cách đơn giản hơn nhé. Mo klah thunh iau hru, hru! (ACL2-Ms. Y Yang) <i>/That's right, good job. Do you all understand? If not, let me explain again. Let me explain it in a simpler way. Listen carefully!/</i>	Trilingual Translanguaging (English-Vietnamese-Ethnic Minority Language)	1
Total			4

The excerpt in Table 2 is taken from a teacher at a suburban school with a diverse mix of majority and regional Rengao EMSs. Although the teacher belongs to the Bahnar ethnic group, she utilizes Rengao - the language spoken by her students - when translanguaging, and this is referred to as the ethnic minority language in the table. As shown in Table 2, translanguaging was strategically employed for pedagogical purposes such as eliciting responses, clarifying vocabulary, and checking comprehension. In Turn 1, the teacher used a combination of English and Vietnamese (“We have cái đồng hồ gì đây?”) to help students identify the object in the picture (Big Ben), demonstrating an English-Vietnamese translanguaging strategy. In subsequent turns, she switched between Vietnamese and the local ethnic language (e.g., “Một số từ hiểu một số từ pị hiểu”) to further clarify meaning, particularly when students showed partial understanding. Later, the teacher integrated all three languages - English, Vietnamese, and Rengao (e.g., “Đúng rồi, giỏi. Ah, gu chi hiểu ha bvi? If not, let me explain again. Để cô giải thích lại bằng cách đơn giản hơn nhé.”) - which exemplifies trilingual translanguaging. A total of four translanguaging turns are shown in Table 2.

Overall, across the six audio-recorded lessons delivered by two teachers, all such turns were identified and analyzed to better understand how translanguaging facilitated learning in multilingual classrooms.

3.3.2 Analyzing the pedagogical functions of translanguaging

The categorization of the pedagogical functions of translanguaging by Wang (2019) was adopted to classify translanguaging into two primary teacher-initiated functions: (1) the interpretive function and (2) the managerial function. The former involves explaining linguistic aspects of the target language, such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and cultural concepts. The managerial function encompasses classroom management activities, including giving clear instructions, providing feedback, praising or encouraging students, and checking students' understanding. This framework was well-suited to the research context of classroom-based translanguaging, as it offers clearly defined categories, which match well with classroom interaction data. Table 3 presents the translanguaging functions and corresponding examples extracted from the teacher talk.

Table 3

Functions of Translanguaging

Functions of translanguaging	Examples taken from teacher talk
The Interpretive function	
1. Explaining grammar points	Ví dụ nè ha, I have a pen. Đây là câu có “I” - đại từ nhân xưng làm chủ ngữ. Đại từ nhân xưng oe a ly đầu câu. Tiếp theo là This is my pen. - “my” là tính từ sở hữu, đứng trước danh từ ‘pen’ nha. (ACL2-Mr. A Ty) <i>/ For example, I have a pen. This sentence has “I” – a subject personal pronoun. Personal pronouns stand at the beginning of a sentence. Next, we have “This is my pen.” – “my” is a possessive adjective, which comes before the noun “pen”./</i>
2. Clarifying pronunciation features	Các em nhìn này, từ đầu tiên là động từ go, phát âm là /gəʊ/, âm /əʊ/. Còn từ thứ hai là now, phát âm /naʊ/, âm /aʊ/. Nhớ nhé: go là /əʊ/, còn now là /aʊ/. (ACL1-Ms. Y Yang) <i>/Look here, the first word is the verb go, pronounced /gəʊ/, with the /əʊ/ sound. The second word is now, pronounced /naʊ/, with the /aʊ/ sound. Remember: go has the /əʊ/ sound, and now has the /aʊ/ sound./</i>
3. Teaching or analyzing vocabulary	Ngôi nhà trong hai bức tranh này thật modern - modern nghĩa là hiện đại, vậy trái nghĩa với modern là gì? (ACL1-Y Yang) <i>/Alright, the house in these two pictures is modern - modern means “hiện đại”, so what word is the opposite of modern?/</i>
4. Explaining cultural concepts	In Vietnamese, we say “chợ”, which means “market” - and in our Bahnar language, we call it “ kơ chợ ”, nơi bà con tụ họp để trao đổi đồ ăn, quần áo, giống như cái chợ dưới phố. (ACL1-Mr. A Ty) <i>/In Vietnamese, we say “chợ”, which means “market” and in our Bahnar language, we call it “kơ chợ”, a place where people gather to exchange food, clothes, and other goods, just like the market in town./</i>
The Managerial function	
5. Giving activity instructions	Rồi, work in groups, các con làm việc theo nhóm và nói về tấm bưu thiếp, nơi mà các con go travelling nha. (Skills 1-Mr. A Ty)

	<i>/ Alright, work in groups, you all work in groups and talk about the postcard, the place where you go travelling, okay?/</i>
6. Giving feedback	Ồ, Tro boih , thuê đúng rồi. Ừm, thuê muốn, yes. (Skills 1-Y Yang) <i>/Oh, that's right. "Rent" is correct. Rent, yes./</i>
7. Checking comprehension and knowledge retention	Nào, the answer là cycle to the Old Town, đúng không? Có ai chọn đáp án khác không? Tại sao? (Skills 1-Mr. A Ty) <i>/Alright, the answer is cycle to the Old Town, right? Did anyone choose a different answer? Why?/</i>
8. Praising and encouraging students	Yes, rogei leh very good. Giỏi ngồi xuống. (ACL1-Y Yang) <i>/Yes, very good, very good. Well done, sit down/</i>
9. Disapproving or correcting behavior	Vậy mà hiểu hờ? pị hiểu ngồi đó nói mà chuyện. Ngồi xuống theng bor dik . (ACL1-Y Yang) <i>/You understood that? No, you didn't! Just sitting there chatting. Sit down and be quiet./</i>
10. Planning assignments and preparing for assessments	Ok, when you get home, làm bài tiếp nha and prepare the new lesson cho cô. (Skills 1-Y Yang) <i>/Ok, when you get home, keep working on your homework and get the new lesson ready for me, okay?/</i>

Inter-reliability

To ensure reliability, inter-coder reliability was established by two independent coders analysing the translanguaging functions of over 50% of the data (three randomly selected transcripts out of six). The first author and another EFL instructor identified teachers' translanguaging practices and its functions. The percentage of agreement for teachers' translanguaging turns was from 80 % to 100% while that for translanguaging functions ranged from 97.10 % to 98.97% (Table 4 and 5). Miles and Huberman (1994) recommend that coding consistency should reach at least 80% agreement to ensure good qualitative reliability. In instances of differences and ambiguity, the two coders resolved issues through discussion. If they still could not reach agreement, another EFL instructor was consulted. When consensus remained unattainable, those cases were excluded from the analysis. The first author then coded the remaining data.

Table 4

Agreement Percentage of Turns

	Coder 1	Coder 2	Percentage of Agreement (%)
Vietnamese	305	301	98.69
English	136	134	98.53
EMLs	30	30	100
Vietnamese & English	227	233	97.42
Vietnamese & EMLs	42	40	95.24
English & EMLs	4	4	100
All three languages	5	4	80

Table 5

Agreement Percentage of Translated Turns

Functions	Coder 1	Coder 2	Percentage of Agreement (%)
Interpretive function	138	134	97.10
Managerial function	193	195	98.97

3.3.3 *Analyzing interview data from teacher participants*

The study adopted a thematic analysis approach as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which involves a systematic and recursive process consisting of six phases: (i) familiarizing oneself with the data; (ii) generating initial codes; (iii) searching for themes; (iv) reviewing themes; (v) defining and naming themes; and (vi) producing the final report. After transcription, the interview texts were read multiple times to develop a holistic understanding of the data, and initial codes were created to capture meaningful units of information. Then, direct quotations from the interviews were used to illustrate key themes and to support the interpretation of classroom observation data collected through audio recordings. Due to space limitations, only translated quotes are presented in this study. Furthermore, the accuracy of the translations was carefully verified by the authors. In addition, member checking was conducted by returning the interview transcripts to the participants to confirm accuracy. As McKim (2023) notes, member checking helps to “ensure the findings accurately reflect participants’ experiences” (p. 48).

4. Findings and discussion

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 *Teachers’ pedagogical translanguaging practice in EFL classes for EMSs*

To explore how teachers implemented pedagogical translanguaging in EFL classes for EMSs, this section analyzes data from six classroom observations and in-depth interviews with the two observed teachers. The results show that EFL teachers employed various forms of pedagogical translanguaging in both planned and spontaneous ways to support EMSs in EFL classrooms, most often by switching between Vietnamese and English, less frequently by combining Vietnamese with EMLs, or English with EMLs, and occasionally using all three languages together. The spontaneous use was typically shaped by students’ participation and responses.

As shown in Table 6, Vietnamese was the most frequently used language, accounting for 42.22% (667 turns) of the total. English turns made up 20.7% (327 turns) and were used for target language exposure, but with less consistency than Vietnamese. Meanwhile, EMLs amounted to just 1.9% (30 turns), which shows that their use was limited, likely occurring only when absolutely necessary for specific purposes. The combined use of Vietnamese and English comprised 31.39% with 496 turns, suggesting that alternating between these two languages was a common strategy that teachers used in EFL classes to support EMSs. Additionally, Vietnamese and EMLs turns constituted 3.23% (51 turns) while English and EMLs turns formed just 0.25% (4 turns). The simultaneous use of all three languages, Vietnamese, English, and EMLs, occurred in 0.32% (5 turns), indicating that EMSs’ home languages play only a marginal role in trilingual instruction.

On average, in each lesson, the teachers produced 111 Vietnamese turns ($M = 111.17$), 55 English turns ($M = 54.50$), and 5 ethnic minority language turns ($M = 5.00$). In addition, there were 94 translanguaged turns, namely: 83 Vietnamese and English turns ($M = 82.67$), 9 Vietnamese and ethnic minority language turns ($M = 8.50$), 1 English and ethnic minority language turn ($M = 0.67$), and 1 turn involving all three languages ($M = 0.83$). These figures not only indicate but also support the notion that teachers mainly relied on Vietnamese and English in their translanguaging use, while EMLs were used much less often and mostly in combination with the other two languages for specific purposes.

Table 6

Amounts of Vietnamese, English, and Ethnic Minority Languages Use by Turn in the Lesson

Lesson (n = 6)	Turn					
	n	%	Min	Max	M	SD
Vietnamese	667	42.22	62	184	111.17	42.64
English	327	20.70	19	91	54.50	24.73
EMLs	30	1.90	0	20	5.00	8.37
Vietnamese & English	496	31.39	56	102	82.67	18.65
Vietnamese & EMLs	51	3.23	0	25	8.50	9.14
English & EMLs	4	0.25	0	2	0.67	1.03
All three languages	5	0.32	0	3	0.83	1.33
Total	1580	100.00				

The data from interviews showed that teachers used translanguageing in their EFL classes as part of their regular teaching activities. When asked about the languages they typically used while teaching, both teachers confirmed that they used a combination of English, Vietnamese, and their students' EMLs. Ms. Y Yang stated, "I usually start with English first. But, you know, when I see that my students look confused, I translate into Vietnamese. I also use an ethnic minority language sometimes." She further elaborated, "I have learned and used Rengao, my students' native language, for translanguageing purposes, even though I am Bahnar. Rengao is somewhat similar to Bahnar as it is a language within the Bahnaric branch." Sharing the same view, Mr. A Ty reported:

At the beginning of each lesson, I use English as much as possible. Then, I switch to Vietnamese. Additionally, I sometimes translate into the ethnic minority language to support their comprehension. This really helps students understand better and feel more confident in their learning.

Following this, when discussing which language they preferred to use and the reasons behind their choice, the teachers emphasized practicality and inclusiveness. Ms. Y Yang shared, "I intentionally use Vietnamese and sometimes my students' native language to teach. The reason is that most of my students have a weak foundation in English, and they often struggle to understand explanations given in English." Mr. A Ty explained:

At first, I tried to speak English as much as I could during English lessons. However, in reality, Vietnamese is the language I use most. Translanguageing is necessary because my students are still weak in English. Since all of them understand Vietnamese, it becomes the most practical option.

When asked how to plan the use of translanguageing, both teachers referred to their lesson plans aligned with the lesson objectives. They shared their specific strategies as follows: "In my lesson plans, I usually make decisions in advance about when to switch languages." (Ms. Y Yang) while Mr. A Ty explained, "I usually keep a separate notebook for my lesson plans where I write down how I intentionally use translanguageing. I also add reflections to review and improve for the next lesson."

These responses illustrate how both teachers engaged in translanguageing as a purposeful pedagogical choice shaped by the linguistic realities of their classrooms. These practices clearly illustrate what Cenoz and Gorter (2021) term "pedagogical translanguageing," which differs from

spontaneous language use. Rather than switching languages informally, both teachers in this study described intentional planning of language choices before and during lessons. In particular, they employed three languages: Vietnamese, English, and EMLs. Among these, Vietnamese was the most frequently used language in their classrooms due to students' limited English proficiency, making explanations more effective and accessible. Using English was an effort on their part to help students develop their language skills in EFL classes, while the ethnic minority language was used less frequently, mainly to check students' comprehension and give feedback, especially when students felt more confident and comfortable hearing their mother tongue.

4.1.2 Functions of translanguage use by turn

Table 7 summarizes the functions of translanguageing that the teachers used, broadly grouped into the interpretive function and the managerial function. The findings show that translanguageing was employed more frequently for managerial functions (59.17%, 329 turns), compared to the interpretive functions (40.83%, 227 turns). On average, the teachers used translanguageing slightly more often for interpretive purposes ($M = 9.46$, $SD = 15.31$) than for managerial ones ($M = 9.14$, $SD = 8.60$). This suggests that translanguageing was a preferred strategy for clarifying content and enhancing student comprehension, rather than for managing classroom routines. The higher standard deviation for interpretive functions also indicates a greater variability in how frequently this strategy was employed across different lessons, suggesting that the need for interpretive translanguageing may vary depending on lesson content.

Table 7

Amount of Functions of Translanguageing Use by Turn

Lesson (n= 6)	Turn					
	n	%	Min	Max	M	SD
Interpretive function (IF)	227	40.83	0	59	9.46	15.31
Managerial function (MF)	329	59.17	0	33	9.14	8.60
Total	556	100.00				

4.1.2.1 Teachers' reported use of translanguageing for interpretive function

For the interpretive function of translanguageing, the data are presented in Table 8 and further supported by teachers' responses from the interviews.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Reported Use of Translanguageing for Interpretive Function

Lesson (n= 6)	Turn					
	n	%	Min	Max	M	SD
1. Explaining grammar points	124	54.63	0	59	20.67	26.90
2. Clarifying pronunciation features	25	11.01	0	14	4.17	5.49
3. Teaching or analyzing vocabulary	70	30.84	3	21	11.67	7.37
4. Explaining cultural concepts	8	3.52	0	3	1.33	1.21
Total	227	100.00				

Table 8 presents the descriptive statistics of the data from the first sub-cluster, known as the interpretive function, which includes four specific pedagogical functions. As shown in Table 8, translanguageing was used for interpretive functions most frequently to explain grammar points, accounting for 54.63% of all turns (124 turns; $M = 20.67$, $SD = 26.90$). Following that, teaching

or analyzing vocabulary was the second most frequent function, comprising 30.84% (70 turns). The mean and standard deviation ($M = 11.67$, $SD = 7.37$) suggest that while teachers commonly used translanguaging for vocabulary instruction, the frequency varied across lessons. In contrast, clarifying pronunciation features represented only 11.01% (25 turns), with a lower mean and a moderate level of variability ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 5.49$), indicating limited and varied use of translanguaging for this function. Finally, explaining cultural concepts had the lowest frequency (3.52%, 9 turns; $M = 1.33$, $SD = 1.21$), reflecting its minimal role in teachers' reported translanguaging practices. Of the four translanguaging functions analyzed, there were two for which the standard deviation was higher than the mean, including explaining grammar rules ($M = 20.67$, $SD = 26.90$) and teaching pronunciation ($M = 4.17$, $SD = 5.30$). This result suggests that the frequency of use of these functions varied greatly between lessons. The variability can be explained by the different focuses of the observed lessons.

In summary, the data indicate that translanguaging was most commonly used to explain grammar points and support vocabulary instruction, while its use for pronunciation and cultural explanation was minimal. This trend highlights teachers' prioritization of core linguistic development, especially grammar and vocabulary, over other interpretive goals when using translanguaging in the classroom.

The finding was further supported by teacher participants' reflections during the in-depth interviews. Upon analyzing the data from their responses, several sub-themes are validated by the teachers' comments. The two functions most frequently discussed were explaining grammar rules and teaching vocabulary.

To be honest, many of my students struggle with grammar during the lessons. When I explain grammar rules in English, they often don't understand clearly. At those times, I tend to switch to Vietnamese, then gradually combine my explanation with English again. This way, students can understand the grammar point better and apply it in their tasks. (Mr. A Ty)

When I teach new vocabulary, I first say the word in English so students can hear how it sounds. Then I translate it into Vietnamese to help them understand the meaning. Sometimes, students still don't get it, especially with difficult words. In that case, I use their ethnic minority language to explain. This makes it easier for them to understand and remember the word. (Ms. Y Yang)

4.1.2.2 Teachers' reported use of translanguaging for managerial function

For the managerial function of translanguaging, the data are presented in Table 9, which shows the frequencies of translanguaging use across six different functions as reported by EFL teachers, followed by supporting responses from the interviews.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of Teachers' Reported Use of Translanguaging for Managerial Function

Lesson (n= 6)	Turn					
	n	%	Min	Max	M	SD
5. Giving activity instructions	127	38.60	11	33	21.17	7.20
6. Giving feedback	61	18.54	6	15	10.17	3.60
7. Checking comprehension and knowledge retention	94	28.57	7	27	15.67	7.20
8. Praising and encouraging students	28	8.51	1	10	4.67	3.33
9. Disapproving or correcting behavior	9	2.74	0	3	1.50	1.23
10. Planning assignments and preparing for assessments	10	3.04	0	3	1.67	1.03
Total	329	100				

Teachers reported using translanguaging most frequently for giving activity instructions, which accounted for 38.60% (127 turns) and had the highest mean score ($M = 21.17$, $SD = 7.20$). Additionally, checking comprehension and knowledge retention made up 28.57% (94 turns), with a mean of $M = 15.67$, $SD = 7.20$, indicating a relatively consistent use of translanguaging to facilitate understanding and reinforce lesson content. Giving feedback accounted for 18.54% (61 turns), with a mean score of $M = 10.17$, $SD = 3.60$, showing that translanguaging was also regularly used to guide, support, and evaluate students in order to promote deeper learning and language development. Translanguaging for the purpose of praising and encouraging students represented 8.51% (28 turns), with a mean score of $M = 4.67$, $SD = 3.33$. Conversely, disapproving or correcting behavior accounted for only 2.74% (9 turns) and had the lowest mean score ($M = 1.50$, $SD = 1.23$), indicating minimal use of translanguaging for maintaining a respectful and focused learning environment. Similarly, planning assignments and preparing for assessments comprised just 3.04% (10 turns), with $M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.03$, suggesting that classroom management functions, which support instructional planning or assessment preparation, were rarely carried out using translanguaging.

Based on the analysis of data from the interviews, the two translanguaging functions that teachers reported using most frequently were giving activity instructions and providing feedback. Ms. Y Yang mentioned, “I usually start giving instructions in English, but then I switch to Vietnamese to make sure all my students understand clearly. This way, the instructions become easier for them to follow.” Meanwhile, Mr. A ty shared, “Switching between three languages during feedback helps students better understand corrections and become more confident.”

However, there was an interesting discrepancy between teachers' self-reported use of translanguaging and their actual classroom practices. While interview data from both teachers suggested that “giving instructions” and “giving feedback” were the most frequently used functions, the analysis of the audio recordings from one teacher revealed that “giving instructions” and “checking comprehension and knowledge retention” were most commonly observed. These findings indicate that what teachers perceive or report is not always akin to what they actually do in practice. This gap underscores the difference between perception and real-time classroom behavior, highlighting the need for greater reflective awareness in the use of translanguaging.

4.2 Discussion

The findings from classroom observations and interviews revealed a clear pattern in teachers' translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms for EMSs. One prominent finding was the dominant use of Vietnamese, which served as the national language and was used both independently and in combination with English and EMLs (Liando et al., 2023; Putri & Rifai, 2021; Sahib, 2019; Zhang & Chan, 2021). This aligns with Cenoz's (2017) conceptualization of pedagogical translanguaging as a practice based on the use of students' resources from the whole linguistic repertoire. The strategic use of Vietnamese-English combinations and occasional trilingual utterances indicates that teachers made deliberate linguistic choices based on students' needs, comprehension levels, and the complexity of instructional tasks.

Second, the two major functions of translanguaging, interpretive and managerial, affirm its pedagogical value. The interpretive function was primarily used for grammar explanation and vocabulary teaching, supporting previous studies that stress the value of translanguaging in content clarification (Chen et al., 2024; Pham & Vu, 2023; Wang, 2019; Zhang & Chan, 2021). These practices enabled students to access complex linguistic concepts through familiar languages, which is particularly important for learners with limited proficiency in English. The managerial function, especially in giving instructions and checking comprehension, was even more frequently observed. This reflects a key feature of translanguaging as a classroom management strategy (Chen et al., 2024; Cong-Lem, 2025; Wang, 2019), helping teachers maintain lesson flow and support student engagement. Interestingly, a discrepancy was noted between what teachers reported in interviews and what they practiced. While teachers believed they used translanguaging most often for giving instructions and giving feedback, classroom recordings showed greater use for giving instructions and checking comprehension. This misalignment suggests a potential area for teacher reflection and training on how their language choices align with pedagogical goals.

Another noteworthy finding in the present study is that translanguaging was expanded and enacted in a multilingual environment when teachers made efforts to learn their students' languages. For instance, the Bahnar teacher, although not from the same ethnic group as the students, made a deliberate effort to learn Rengao, the students' native language, in order to support their comprehension. This suggests that the effective use of EMLs in pedagogical translanguaging depends not only on whether teachers share the same mother tongue with their students but also on their willingness to engage with and learn students' languages. This finding highlights the agency and commitment of teachers in creating more inclusive and supportive learning conditions.

The teachers' adaptive and deliberate use of Vietnamese, English, and EMLs reflects what Cenoz and Gorter (2021) define as pedagogical translanguaging—a strategic instructional practice that integrates multiple languages to support learning. These practices also resonate with García and Wei's (2014) concept of translanguaging as a theory of practice, emphasizing fluid and dynamic language use to embrace inclusion. Furthermore, the classification of translanguaging into interpretive and managerial functions provides a meaningful analytical lens that reflects Wang's (2019) pedagogical model and is consistent with prior studies in multilingual settings (Putri & Rifai, 2021; Zhang & Chan, 2021). These theoretical connections reinforce the

view that translanguaging is not simply a practical tool, but an effective pedagogy that empowers EMSs by validating their linguistic identities while promoting English acquisition.

5. Conclusion and implications

This study's primary objective was to investigate how EFL teachers implement pedagogical translanguaging and the functions it serves in classrooms for EMSs in a province in Vietnam's Central Highlands. In terms of methodology, data were gathered through classroom observations with audio recordings and interviews conducted with two experienced EFL teachers from two lower secondary schools. Addressing the first research question on how translanguaging is practiced, the findings revealed that teachers used three languages: Vietnamese, English, and EMLs, with Vietnamese being dominant. Translanguaging occurred in various combinations, most commonly between Vietnamese and English. Teachers adjusted their language use responsively to learners' proficiency levels and task demands. Concerning the second research question, the study identified ten translanguaging functions, categorized into interpretive (e.g., explaining grammar and vocabulary) and managerial (e.g., giving instructions and checking comprehension) functions. Managerial functions were more frequently observed, though interpretive functions, particularly grammar explanation, were also significant. These results highlight the role of translanguaging as a practical tool in EFL classes.

The findings of this study offer several implications for language education, particularly in ethnic minority student settings. To begin with, teachers should regard translanguaging as a deliberate and empowering pedagogical tool by developing a clearer plan that specifies when and for what purpose it will be used. That said, they should also anticipate emergent issues that might need their timely and responsive translanguaging. It is important to provide students with opportunities to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires. As Le (2022) notes, teachers must explore with students how to access and leverage all the resources that they bring and have access to through their stance, planning, and the ongoing adjustments they make each day to support student learning - a point that resonates with this study's findings, which show that teachers continuously adapted their language use based on students' responses and learning needs. These adjustments, evident in the shift between English, Vietnamese, and EMLs, reflect the kind of ongoing planning and responsiveness that Le advocates for in effective translanguaging pedagogy.

In addition, for the professional development and training curriculum of EFL teachers, there should be thoughtful discussions and guidance concerning the use of Vietnamese and teachers' translanguaging practices in the classroom. The current study reveals that teachers frequently use Vietnamese, which may reduce the target language input available to students. However, the strategic use of Vietnamese also supports students in different classroom activities. Therefore, training should focus on helping teachers identify specific classroom situations and activities where employing Vietnamese is beneficial as a deliberate strategy, rather than as a habitual practice. This is consistent with Le (2022), who emphasizes that teacher support in adapting translanguaging practices to suit specific classroom contexts is critical for successful implementation.

Moreover, for educational policymakers and local administrators, it is essential to promote inclusive language education by not only recognizing translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogy in multilingual classrooms but also institutionalizing professional development policies that empower teachers to reflect on and enhance their translanguaging practices. Instead of

enforcing English-only policies, curriculum designers should provide clear guidance on when and how to use Vietnamese and EMLs for pedagogical purposes. This dual approach aligns with Nguyen and Tran's (2024) view that promoting translanguaging can serve as a cornerstone for national education reform in Vietnam, advancing both cultural diversity and educational equity in multiethnic schools. As Le (2022) emphasizes, teachers should be supported to reflect on their practices of translanguaging by being encouraged to conduct action research and share their findings to build context-specific expertise.

6. Limitations and further research

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small and localized, consisting of two EFL teachers from two lower secondary schools in a province in the Central Highlands of Vietnam. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to all EFL teachers or teaching contexts. Future research should expand the sample to include more schools and a wider range of teacher backgrounds. Comparative studies across regions or ethnic groups could also help identify contextual variables influencing translanguaging practices. Second, while this study focused on actual classroom practices, further research should explore teachers' perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes toward translanguaging to provide a more comprehensive understanding of its implementation in EFL settings. Third, the study examined only teacher-initiated translanguaging practices, without considering the perceptions or experiences of students. Future studies should include students' perspectives to better understand the impact of translanguaging on their learning. Finally, the reliance on audio recordings may have narrowed the scope of data collection, potentially overlooking important non-verbal communication. Employing multimodal data collection methods, such as video recordings, would offer deeper insights into translanguaging practices.

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Appendix

Interview Questions

Part I. Teachers' background

Question 1. How long have you been teaching EFL classes?

Question 2. Could you share which ethnic group you belong to, if you're comfortable?

Part II. The practice of translanguaging in class

Question 1. What languages do you usually use to explain the lesson to your students?

Question 2. Which language do you use most frequently when teaching, and why?

Part III. Functions of translanguaging

Question 1. What purposes do you have for using more than one language during classroom instruction?

Question 2. In what situations do you find translanguaging most helpful for your students' understanding?