

Translanguaging and Formative Assessment Practices in Multilingual EFL Classrooms

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ABSTRACT

This narrative literature review examines translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy and analyzes its implications for formative assessment practices in multilingual EFL contexts. The review synthesized empirical research from peer-reviewed journals accessed via ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, and JSTOR. Selection criteria focused on empirical studies reporting original data collection in multilingual classroom settings where translanguaging intersected with assessment practices. Analysis organized findings into three thematic categories: translanguaging pedagogical practices, formative assessment techniques, and implementation challenges. Results show that translanguaging supports comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, and learner confidence, while affirming multilingual identities. When integrated into formative assessment, translanguaging enables students to demonstrate knowledge through their complete linguistic repertoires, producing more valid evidence of learning than English-only assessment. Teachers gain accurate insights into student understanding, facilitating responsive instruction based on actual knowledge rather than language proficiency limitations. Students engage more actively in peer and self-assessment processes and develop stronger academic confidence. Implementation faces substantial barriers: contradictory language policies mandating English-only assessment despite multilingual classroom realities; high-stakes testing pressures that restrict formative translanguaging practices; insufficient teacher preparation in both translanguaging pedagogy and assessment literacy; and practical challenges in managing linguistically diverse classrooms. The review identifies critical research gaps that require longitudinal investigation of learning outcomes, comparative studies examining context-specific effectiveness, and participatory research centered on student perspectives. The findings indicate that realizing the equity potential of translanguaging assessment requires coordinated systemic change across policy frameworks, professional development models, teacher education curricula, and institutional support structures rather than isolated teacher-level innovations.

Keywords: *translanguaging pedagogy, formative assessment, multilingual EFL classrooms, classroom-based assessment, language policy*

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching increasingly recognizes that students bring multiple languages into the classroom. These linguistic resources extend beyond English and include home languages, community languages, and other languages students know (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Duarte, 2019). This understanding challenges the English-only approaches that dominated language pedagogy for many years. Multilingual students navigate classrooms where English coexists with their other

languages. Teachers face an important practical question: how can they use students' multilingualism to support English language learning? The monolingual framework that treated home languages as problems rather than resources no longer fits classroom realities (Makalela, 2015).

Translanguaging offers a pedagogical framework that views students' full linguistic repertoires as an integrated resource for learning. Unlike code-switching, which assumes languages to be separate systems, translanguaging emphasizes the fluid and unified use of multilingual competence (Probyn, 2015; Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Teachers who use translanguaging allow students to draw on all their languages to construct meaning, develop metalinguistic awareness, and engage with content (Alasmari et al., 2022; Sun, 2024). Research highlights that translanguaging enhances comprehension and learner confidence, while supporting multilingual identity. (Almashour, 2024; Tran, 2025). Teachers increasingly view home languages not as interference but as cognitive and social resources that support English learning.

Formative assessment is essential in language instruction. Unlike summative evaluation, formative assessment focuses on learning by providing ongoing feedback that helps students understand their current performance and identify ways to improve (Pan et al., 2024; Zeng & Huang, 2021). Effective formative assessment includes strategic questioning, peer and self-assessment, dialogic feedback, and instructional adjustments based on evidence of student learning (Latif & Wasim, 2024; Yan et al., 2022). However, in multilingual EFL classrooms, teachers encounter challenges when aligning formative assessment with translanguaging practices. They must balance standardized expectations with culturally responsive approaches, and they often face institutional pressures that privilege English-only assessment despite students' multilingual repertoires (Ismail et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2024).

When formative assessment incorporates translanguaging, teachers gain more accurate insights into student knowledge. Students can demonstrate what they know rather than being limited by what they can express in English alone (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; D. Wang & East, 2024). They show deeper thinking, take intellectual risks, and engage more actively when assessment allows them to draw on their full linguistic repertoires (Fine & Braaten, 2025; Greenier et al., 2024). Translanguaging shifts formative assessment from a monolingual practice that often disadvantages multilingual learners toward a more equitable process. This approach addresses fundamental questions about assessment validity, cultural responsiveness, and educational equity in multilingual EFL classrooms.

This narrative literature review examines empirical research on translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy and its implications for formative assessment in multilingual EFL contexts.

The review analyzes how translanguaging functions in classroom practice and explores its impact on various formative assessment techniques. It examines the challenges and opportunities that emerge when these approaches intersect. By analyzing empirical studies from diverse geographic and educational contexts, this review shows how translanguaging-informed formative assessment can create more equitable and effective learning environments for multilingual EFL students. The findings offer theoretical insights into multilingual assessment paradigms and practical guidance for educators implementing translanguaging in their formative assessment practices.

METHOD

This narrative literature review examined empirical research on translanguaging pedagogy and formative assessment practices in multilingual EFL classrooms. The search targeted multiple academic databases, including ERIC, Scopus, Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Web of Science. Search terms combined keywords related to translanguaging ("translanguaging," "multilingual pedagogy," "translingual practice") with terms related to assessment ("formative assessment," "classroom assessment," "assessment for learning," "feedback") and context ("EFL," "ESL," "multilingual classroom," "English language learners"). Boolean operators connected these search strings to identify relevant literature. Citation tracking and reference list scanning identified additional studies that were not captured in database searches.

Inclusion criteria required that articles report empirical research with actual data collection, focus on translanguaging practices or formative assessment in EFL or multilingual contexts, and be published as peer-reviewed publications in English. The review excluded purely theoretical papers, conceptual articles without empirical data, and studies focusing exclusively on summative or high-stakes testing without formative assessment components. Thematic analysis identified patterns across the selected articles. Articles were analyzed to extract key information about research contexts, participant characteristics, methodologies, and main findings. The analysis organized findings into three thematic categories: translanguaging pedagogical practices, formative assessment in multilingual contexts, and studies examining both translanguaging and assessment together. Within each category, the analysis identified recurring themes, pedagogical functions, challenges, and opportunities reported across different geographic and educational settings. This approach enabled the review to synthesize findings from diverse contexts while recognizing that translanguaging and formative assessment practices vary across cultural, institutional, and linguistic environments. The narrative synthesis examined not only what researchers found but also how different methodological approaches contributed to understanding these practices. Studies using qualitative methods provided detailed insights into classroom interactions and teacher decision-

making, while mixed-methods research offered both breadth through surveys and depth through interviews and observations.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Translanguaging Pedagogical Practices in Multilingual EFL Classrooms

Examining how translanguaging operates in multilingual EFL classrooms provides essential groundwork for understanding its role in formative assessment. Teachers and students use translanguaging in varied ways that serve distinct yet interconnected purposes. These practices range from spontaneous student interactions to deliberate pedagogical strategies teachers employ to facilitate learning. The forms of translanguaging take and the functions it serves reveal fundamental assumptions about language, learning, and multilingual competence in educational contexts. Teacher perspectives on translanguaging shape implementation in ways that either enable or constrain its pedagogical potential. Analyzing both the practices themselves and the beliefs that support or hinder them clarifies what makes translanguaging effective and what barriers prevent its full realization.

Forms and Functions of Translanguaging Practices

Translanguaging in multilingual EFL classrooms operates through distinct yet interconnected forms. Teacher-initiated translanguaging differs from student-initiated practices, yet both contribute to learning in ways that challenge monolingual assumptions. When teachers use translanguaging deliberately, they move beyond reactive code-switching toward what Probyn (2015) identifies as "pedagogical translanguaging." This intentionality matters because it positions translanguaging as planned pedagogy rather than linguistic accommodation for student deficiency. As Tian & Li (2024) emphasize, translanguaging should be seen as a reconceptualization of pedagogy that transcends the limitations of monolingual language teaching.

Teacher-initiated translanguaging typically addresses instructional needs, such as clarifying complex concepts, providing scaffolding for challenging tasks, or ensuring comprehension of critical information. Teachers control when, how much, and which translanguaging forms appear in instruction. Research in Saudi Arabian universities shows teachers employed translanguaging during classroom management, giving instructions, providing feedback, and explaining complex concepts (Alasmari et al., 2022). These practices occurred more often during virtual office hours than formal class sessions, suggesting teachers view translanguaging as particularly useful for one-on-one support.

Student-initiated translanguaging emerges during peer interactions and reflects learners' meaning-making processes. Students draw on their complete linguistic repertoires to explore ideas, negotiate understanding with peers, and construct knowledge collaboratively. Duarte's (2019) observations of multilingual students in German mainstream classrooms revealed how students used translanguaging spontaneously for elaboration, translation, interpretation, giving examples, and asking questions. These high-order speech acts activated complex cognitive processes naturally during content-based tasks. Bouguerra (2024) likewise found that EFL learners valued translanguaging as a legitimate resource for meaning-making and identity expression, contrasting it with English-only instruction that felt restrictive.

The pedagogical functions of translanguaging serve to extend well beyond simple comprehension support. Research across Chinese, Turkish, and South African contexts demonstrates how translanguaging scaffolds understanding, builds metalinguistic awareness, facilitates meaning-making, supports learner identity, and reduces anxiety (Probyn, 2015; Sun, 2024; Ulum, 2024). When students consciously draw on cross-linguistic knowledge, they develop a deeper understanding of both their home languages and English. This metalinguistic awareness represents a cognitive advantage that multilingual learners possess that monolingual frameworks fail to leverage (Sun, 2024). A systematic review by Huang & Chalmers (2023) further confirms that translanguaging interventions in EFL classrooms enhance comprehension, higher-order thinking, and learner participation. However, methodological limitations across reviewed studies preclude strong causal claims, necessitating more robust intervention research. The underlying rationales differ: in South Africa, translanguaging is framed as essential for equity and access in multilingual classrooms, whereas in Turkey and China, it is often presented as a supplementary strategy to ease anxiety and enhance engagement. This comparison suggests that translanguaging functions both as a structural necessity in highly multilingual African contexts and as a pedagogical innovation in Asian EFL settings.

Translanguaging's role in supporting learner identity and reducing anxiety connects pedagogical practice to socio-emotional dimensions of learning. Multilingual students often experience language classrooms as sites where their home languages carry deficit associations while English represents aspiration and success. This linguistic hierarchy creates anxiety and undermines confidence. When teachers welcome translanguaging, they communicate that students' home languages have value and legitimacy in educational spaces. The anxiety reduction reported across Turkish (Ulum, 2024) and Chinese (Sun, 2024) contexts reflects more than linguistic comfort—it signals identity validation and a sense of belonging. Song et al. (2022) also show that

translanguaging supports students' social-emotional learning by reducing negative emotions and fostering classroom belonging.

The relationship between translanguaging and cognitive engagement challenges assumptions about language learning that require maximum target-language exposure. Research demonstrates that translanguaging facilitates deeper cognitive processing rather than impeding English development. When students can think through complex problems using their complete linguistic resources, they engage at higher cognitive levels than when they struggle to operate exclusively in English. The cognitive energy saved by not constantly translating into English allows focus on critical thinking, analysis, and creativity. Thus, if cognitive engagement is prioritized over maximal English-only exposure, translanguaging becomes not merely acceptable but pedagogically advantageous for multilingual learners (Duarte, 2019; Galante, 2020; Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Plata & Macawile, 2022).

Teacher Beliefs and Attitudes

Teacher beliefs about translanguaging exist in tension between pedagogical convictions and institutional constraints. Many teachers recognize translanguaging's value for learning (Galante, 2020) while simultaneously worrying about violating English-only norms or fostering L1 dependency (Yuvayapan, 2019). Others express concern that translanguaging may inadequately prepare students for English-dominated assessment systems, a dilemma also noted in South African and European contexts (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Probyn, 2015). This ambivalence reflects larger contradictions in multilingual education where policies espouse multilingual competence as a goal while actual practices privilege monolingual performance. Teachers navigate these contradictions daily, making moment-by-moment decisions about language use without clear institutional guidance or professional consensus about best practices (Huang & Chalmers, 2023).

The shift from monolingual ideology toward multilingual acceptance appears neither linear nor complete. Even teachers who intellectually embrace translanguaging often retain monolingual habits and assumptions shaped by their own educational experiences (Duarte, 2019). The process requires more than exposure to translanguaging theory; teachers need opportunities to examine their beliefs about language learning and analyze how these beliefs influence practice. Without such critical reflection, professional development focused solely on strategies produces superficial change that may not persist when institutional pressures mount (Plata & Macawile, 2022).

Teacher attitudes toward translanguaging vary considerably across contexts and are influenced by personal language learning experiences, professional training, and institutional cultures. Research in Turkish contexts shows pre-service teachers hold positive views toward

translanguaging as a natural and beneficial practice, yet they identify challenges in maintaining balance between L1 and L2 and express concerns about potential L1 dependency (Ulum, 2024). These concerns reveal how teachers internalize competing discourses about language learning—valuing multilingualism intellectually while worrying about practical implementation. The worries reflect not ignorance but rather teachers grappling with genuine pedagogical dilemmas about optimal language use across different contexts and purposes. For example, pre-service teachers in Turkey view translanguaging positively as a natural part of meaning-making (Ulum, 2024), while teachers in South Africa adopt a more ambivalent stance, balancing its necessity for comprehension with policy-driven English dominance (Probyn, 2015). In Middle Eastern contexts like Saudi Arabia, teachers accept translanguaging informally but hesitate to legitimize it formally (Alasmari et al., 2022). This pattern shows that teacher beliefs cannot be separated from institutional power structures and language ideologies across regions.

How teachers conceptualize their role also shapes the implementation of translanguaging. Those who see themselves primarily as English language instructors may view translanguaging as compromising their teaching mission (Yuvayapan, 2019), while others who frame their role as supporting overall student development more readily embrace translanguaging as legitimate pedagogy (Galante, 2020). This identity dimension matters because it influences not only whether teachers use translanguaging but also how they frame it for students, administrators, and themselves. When teachers believe their professional responsibility includes leveraging all students' resources for learning, translanguaging becomes a principled practice rather than a reluctant accommodation.

The relationship between teacher beliefs and actual practice proves complex. Teachers may hold positive translanguaging beliefs yet implement them inconsistently due to contextual constraints, lack of confidence, or insufficient pedagogical knowledge (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Conversely, some teachers translanguage regularly despite harboring reservations about its appropriateness, responding to immediate classroom needs even when uncertain about theoretical justifications (Probyn, 2015). This belief–practice gap suggests that supporting the implementation of translanguaging requires addressing both ideological and practical dimensions simultaneously.

Translanguaging in Formative Assessment Practices

Moving from general translanguaging pedagogy to its specific applications in formative assessment requires examining how multilingual perspectives reshape assessment theory and practice. Formative assessment in multilingual contexts raises fundamental questions about which assessment measures to use, how validity is conceptualized, and whose knowledge counts as

legitimate. Traditional assessment frameworks designed for monolingual contexts prove inadequate for multilingual learners whose competencies exceed what they can demonstrate in English alone. The techniques teachers use for formative assessment—feedback, questioning, peer and self-assessment, documentation—all take on different dimensions when translanguaging becomes possible. Student experiences with translanguaging assessment reveal how these practices affect learning, engagement, and identity in ways that teacher-focused research often overlooks. Understanding translanguaging in formative assessment thus requires attention to theoretical reconceptualization, practical implementation strategies, and learner perspectives simultaneously.

Reconceptualizing Assessment in Multilingual Contexts

Traditional assessment in language education rests on monolingual assumptions that distort what multilingual learners know and can do. When assessment requires English-only performance, it conflates language proficiency with content knowledge and positions multilingual students' linguistic resources as deficits to overcome (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Probyn, 2015). Such practices generate systematically invalid data about multilingual learners' actual capabilities. The invalidity matters because assessment data shape educational decisions about placement, instruction, and advancement, and when assessments underestimate students' knowledge, they receive inappropriate instruction and unequal opportunities. Broader critiques of monolingual ideologies in education reinforce this problem (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Galante, 2020).

Reconceptualizing assessment requires distinguishing what assessment measures from what it should measure. In content areas, assessment ideally evaluates conceptual understanding rather than English fluency (Probyn, 2015; D. Wang & East, 2024). Students may grasp scientific principles or historical analysis without fully articulating their understanding in English. Monolingual assessments cannot distinguish between a lack of knowledge and a lack of English proficiency. Translanguaging assessment offers a solution by allowing students to demonstrate knowledge through their full linguistic repertoires, producing more valid data because it captures the intended construct—content knowledge—rather than the confounded construct of knowledge expressed only in English (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Broader pedagogical perspectives also highlight the role of translanguaging in rethinking classroom practice (Duarte, 2019).

The shift from assessment of learning to assessment for learning takes on particular urgency in multilingual contexts where formative assessment serves equity purposes. Formative assessment provides ongoing feedback to support learning improvement rather than judging final performance (Demekash et al., 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024). For multilingual learners, translanguaging within formative assessment creates low-stakes opportunities to demonstrate

emerging understanding, receive comprehensible feedback, and develop both content knowledge and English proficiency (Pan et al., 2024). The formative context makes translanguaging pedagogically appropriate in ways that summative assessment may not, since the goal is learning rather than gatekeeping. Broader teacher-perspective research also suggests that embracing translanguaging fosters equity and inclusion (Ulum, 2024). In African schools, translanguaging-based formative assessment primarily addresses equity concerns by validating students' multilingual repertoires (Probyn, 2015), whereas in Asian contexts it is often linked to efficiency and creativity in language learning (Greenier et al., 2024; Pan et al., 2024). This distinction illustrates how translanguaging in assessment can serve either justice-oriented goals or pragmatic pedagogical ones, depending on the socio-political context.

Assessment practices also reflect cultural assumptions about appropriate interaction, acceptable ways to demonstrate knowledge, and norms for feedback. Western assessment traditions privilege individual performance, explicit verbal expression, and direct questioning, which may feel unfamiliar to students from other cultural backgrounds (Song et al., 2022). Culturally responsive formative assessment must therefore accommodate not only linguistic diversity but also diverse norms for participation and knowledge display (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Pan et al., 2024). If these cultural assumptions remain unexamined, translanguaging alone cannot address inequity in multilingual assessment (Galante, 2020).

The validity question central to any assessment innovation takes on specific characteristics in translanguaging assessment. Some worry that allowing multiple languages compromises the measurement of English proficiency, but this reflects confusion about the purposes of assessment (Probyn, 2015; D. Wang & East, 2024). In formative contexts, English proficiency may not be the construct being measured; students can legitimately demonstrate disciplinary understanding using translanguaging without invalidating assessment of those competencies. When the construct is language development itself, translanguaging assessment requires carefully designed tasks and rubrics to distinguish purposeful multilingual communication from the inability to use English. Research shows that teachers and students use translanguaging strategically rather than excessively, suggesting that validity concerns are often overstated (Yuvayapan, 2019). Supportive research on identity and attitudes confirms that worries about translanguaging stem from broader ideological tensions rather than empirical evidence (Almashour, 2024; Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). A further contrast emerges when comparing policy environments: in contexts with strict English-only mandates, such as Saudi Arabia, translanguaging remains marginalized despite its pedagogical benefits (Alasmari et al., 2022). By contrast, in South Africa and some European systems, translanguaging is legitimized within equity-oriented policy frameworks (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017;

Probyn, 2015). This divergence underscores that institutional policy either constrains or enables teachers' agency, shaping whether translanguaging is framed as resistance or as officially sanctioned pedagogy.

Translanguaging-Informed Formative Assessment Techniques

Feedback represents perhaps the most critical formative assessment practice that translanguaging can enhance. The effectiveness of feedback depends on student comprehension; when feedback is only in English, learners may not fully grasp its meaning and thus cannot use it productively (Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Teachers strategically use L1 to clarify the meaning of feedback before guiding students back into English, which supports both comprehension and target language development (Duarte, 2019; D. Wang & East, 2024). This scaffolded approach emphasizes that content understanding and English proficiency can develop together rather than compete with each other.

The form feedback takes matters as much as its linguistic composition. Translanguaging feedback can be oral or written, teacher-provided or peer-generated, immediate or delayed, each serving different pedagogical purposes (Makalela, 2015). Oral feedback during teacher-student conferences enables responsive translanguaging, in which teachers adjust their language use based on students' comprehension cues (Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Written feedback permits more deliberate bilingual composition, modeling English structures while ensuring clarity through L1 explanations (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). Peer feedback in shared languages also provides opportunities for collaborative meaning-making, thereby extending students' assessment capacity (Plata & Macawile, 2022; D. Wang & East, 2024).

Interactive assessment through questioning and classroom dialogue creates formative opportunities particularly well-suited to translanguaging. Strategic questioning, as demonstrated in TEFL contexts, allows teachers to probe understanding and stimulate deeper thinking (Pan et al., 2024). When students can draw on their full linguistic repertoire, more learners participate actively, providing richer evidence of their thinking (Probyn, 2015; Sun, 2024). This participation also strengthens students' confidence and helps bridge the gap between cognitive challenge and linguistic accessibility (Yan et al., 2022). Well-designed translanguaging questions thus function as both assessment and language development tools.

Collaborative assessment practices, including peer and self-assessment, benefit from translanguaging because they require metacognitive awareness and articulation of learning processes (Ulum, 2024). Students need appropriate language to describe their strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, and translanguaging provides that expressive capacity

(Song et al., 2022; Yuvayapan, 2019). Limiting students to English alone risks superficial evaluation and weakens the formative value of assessment. Allowing translanguaging reduces cognitive load and encourages deeper engagement with assessment criteria (Almashour, 2024; D. Wang & East, 2024).

Documentation and assessment tools also require reconceptualization to integrate translanguaging effectively. Traditional rubrics often presuppose English-only performance and overlook the communicative value of multilingual artifacts (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Teachers face complex questions: whether to assess languages separately or holistically, how to weigh content against linguistic form, and how to recognize communication effectiveness regardless of language choice (Zeng & Huang, 2021). Adapted rubrics in Chinese and Turkish contexts, for example, have credited students for strategic language use and clarity of expression across languages (Ulum, 2024; D. Wang & East, 2024). This reflects a paradigm shift from treating language as a barrier to recognizing it as a resource in assessment (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

Portfolio assessment offers particular affordances for translanguaging because portfolios collect diverse artifacts over time, enabling students to demonstrate learning through multiple modes and languages (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). A portfolio might include English-only work, L1 compositions, and translanguaged texts, revealing the full range of student abilities (Galante, 2020; Tian & Li, 2024). Reviewing portfolios together allows teachers and learners to discuss language choices, reflect on translanguaging as a learning strategy, and articulate developmental trajectories (Bouguerra, 2024; Tran, 2025). This makes translanguaging visible as a developmental resource rather than a hidden or remedial practice.

Student Experiences and Outcomes

Student perspectives on translanguaging in formative assessment reveal insights that teacher-focused research often misses. Students show sophisticated awareness of when and why translanguaging supports learning and when it may pose challenges (Fine & Braaten, 2025). They note that using multiple languages reduces anxiety, removing the constant fear of English errors, while enabling deeper engagement with ideas (Song et al., 2022; Ulum, 2024). Students also recognize that translanguaging communicates respect for their linguistic identities, rather than only valuing them as future English speakers (Galante, 2020).

Research with sixth-grade students reveals particularly nuanced understandings of translanguaging's role in collaborative assessment contexts. In formative science assessments, students reported that using multiple languages with peers enabled them to focus on scientific concepts without constant translation (Fine & Braaten, 2025). They perceived translanguaging as

supporting both English development and deeper content understanding, challenging assumptions that L1 hinders L2 acquisition (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Students articulated that translanguage enabled them to demonstrate knowledge they possessed but could not yet fully express in English (Probyn, 2015). This metacognitive awareness reflects sophisticated thinking about language and learning that English-only frameworks often fail to capture (Duarte, 2019).

The relationship between translanguage assessment and student confidence operates through multiple mechanisms. Allowing students to use all linguistic resources removes barriers and encourages them to attempt challenging tasks (Fine & Braaten, 2025). Translanguage also enables students to produce work that more accurately reflects their competence, providing a realistic sense of achievement (D. Wang & East, 2024). Moreover, by validating students' multilingual identities, translanguage assessment strengthens academic self-concepts beyond language-specific outcomes (Almashour, 2024; Galante, 2020).

Engagement with formative assessment processes increases when translanguage makes assessment accessible and meaningful. Students participate more actively in peer assessment when they can use shared languages, and they offer richer self-assessment when articulating thoughts with their full repertoires (Plata & Macawile, 2022; Song et al., 2022). They also ask more questions and seek feedback more readily when not confined to English (Fine & Braaten, 2025; Pan et al., 2024). This active involvement matters because formative assessment depends on student engagement; passive reception of feedback diminishes its learning potential.

The learning outcomes associated with translanguage assessment extend beyond task performance to long-term skill development. Students build stronger bilingual academic competence when assessment recognizes both languages (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017; Tian & Li, 2024). They also strengthen content knowledge by expressing a full understanding without linguistic restriction. Through self-assessment, they develop metacognitive awareness and begin to see languages as integrated resources rather than separate systems (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; Duarte, 2019)—this metalinguistic awareness benefits communication across academic domains.

Student experiences with translanguage assessment vary by linguistic background and educational context. Those who share home languages with peers experience translanguage differently than isolated speakers in diverse classrooms (Bouguerra, 2024). Social prestige of languages also shapes whether translanguage feels empowering or risky (Alasmari et al., 2022). Moreover, students in contexts where translanguage is institutionally supported engage with greater confidence than those in contexts where it is unofficial or contested (Fine & Braaten, 2025; Makalela, 2015). These variations show that the impact of translanguage depends not only on pedagogy but also on the broader social and policy environment. In primary classrooms, such as

in Chinese contexts, translanguaging often functions as a scaffold for comprehension and collaborative meaning-making (Greenier et al., 2024), while in middle school science classes in the U.S., students emphasize its role in fairness and identity (Fine & Braaten, 2025). At the university level, however, translanguaging is frequently framed in relation to academic English demands and identity negotiation (Almashour, 2024). This cross-level comparison suggests that younger learners view translanguaging pragmatically as a tool for understanding, whereas older learners attach broader socio-academic meanings linked to equity, legitimacy, and academic identity.

Challenges, Opportunities, and Implications

Implementing translanguaging in formative assessment involves navigating a complex landscape of constraints and possibilities that shape what teachers can accomplish in actual classroom contexts. The challenges are not merely technical difficulties to overcome through better training but reflect deeper tensions between competing educational values, institutional structures, and ideological commitments. At the same time, the opportunities translanguaging assessment offers extend beyond individual student benefits to potentially transforming how multilingual education conceptualizes competence, equity, and learning. The implications reach across multiple domains—research agendas requiring attention, policies needing reform, practices demanding development, and professional preparation requiring redesign. Understanding these challenges and opportunities in relation to one another reveals that translanguaging assessment implementation cannot succeed through isolated interventions but requires systemic change that addresses multiple dimensions simultaneously.

Challenges in Implementation

Policy contradictions create fundamental implementation challenges that individual teachers cannot resolve on their own. Educational systems often espouse multilingualism as valuable while simultaneously mandating English-only instruction and assessment. These contradictory policies place teachers in untenable positions where following official mandates means ignoring professional knowledge about multilingual pedagogy (Alasmari et al., 2022). When teachers translanguage despite restrictive policies, they risk administrative censure even as they serve student learning needs (Makalela, 2015). This tension underscores the need for policy reform rather than relying only on teacher training.

The high-stakes testing culture exerts a powerful influence on formative assessment practices, even when formative and summative assessments serve different purposes. The dominance of English-only standardized tests sends implicit messages that translanguaging lacks

legitimacy and that formative practices not aligned with summative expectations are less valuable (Zeng & Huang, 2021). Teachers internalize these messages and restrict translanguaging in formative contexts, despite evidence that translanguaging supports learning (D. Wang & East, 2024). The persistence of a hierarchy—where translanguaging is tolerated in formative but excluded from summative assessment—reveals lingering monolingual bias (Plata & Macawile, 2022). This dynamic communicates to students that translanguaging is acceptable only in low-stakes contexts, undermining claims that multilingual competence has genuine value.

Professional development for translanguaging assessment faces challenges beyond insufficient time or resources. The transformative potential of translanguaging assessment requires shifts in beliefs about language, learning, and assessment that workshops alone cannot accomplish (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). Teachers need opportunities to examine their own linguistic ideologies, practice translanguaging assessment with peer support, and reflect on its impact on learning (D. Wang & East, 2024). Without institutional commitment, professional development risks producing superficial changes that fade under pressure from monolingual policies (Almashour, 2024).

The balance between supporting students through L1 use and developing English proficiency is a genuine pedagogical dilemma with no formulaic solutions. Teachers worry that excessive translanguaging reduces exposure to English needed for acquisition (Probyn, 2015). Research highlights that the "optimal" use of translanguaging depends on proficiency levels, task purposes, and content difficulty (Duarte, 2019; Tian & Li, 2024). Because contextual factors vary so widely, teachers require frameworks for situated judgment rather than universal rules (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). This uncertainty creates anxiety among teachers who wish to support learners effectively without undermining English development.

Managing classroom linguistic diversity intensifies challenges in implementing translanguaging. In bilingual classrooms where teachers and students share two languages, barriers are primarily ideological (Makalela, 2015). In multilingual classrooms with many home languages, practical challenges multiply: teachers cannot scaffold instruction in every language, and peers may not share the identical linguistic repertoires (Galante, 2020). Assessment of multilingual work also becomes complex when teachers lack proficiency in the languages students use (Bouguerra, 2024). Thus, the question shifts from whether to translanguage to how to translanguage equitably when linguistic resources vary dramatically.

Assessment literacy deficits further compound translanguaging implementation challenges. Teachers who lack a clear understanding of formative assessment cannot integrate translanguaging effectively, even with strong beliefs in its value (Latif & Wasim, 2024). Studies in Ethiopia and

Saudi Arabia reveal that many teachers still conflate formative with summative assessment and rely on traditional testing (Alasmari et al., 2022; Demekash et al., 2024). Adding translanguaging complexity to this shaky foundation proves counterproductive. This highlights the importance of sequencing professional development to first establish strong formative assessment literacy before integrating translanguaging-specific applications.

Opportunities and Affordances

Equity gains through translanguaging assessment address fundamental injustices in how schools evaluate multilingual students. When assessment allows translanguaging, learners can demonstrate knowledge they previously could not show in English-only contexts (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). This more accurate assessment prevents inappropriate remedial placement and opens advanced opportunities, thereby producing more equitable educational trajectories (Makalela, 2015; Probyn, 2015). The equity dimension extends beyond individual benefits to challenging systemic practices that have historically disadvantaged multilingual learners (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Teachers report discovering capabilities that English-only assessment had hidden, prompting instructional adjustments better aligned with student needs (Duarte, 2019).

Beyond improving equity, translanguaging assessment also transforms how multilingualism itself is conceptualized. The shift from deficit to asset-based perspectives on multilingualism represents a profound opportunity that translanguaging assessment offers. Traditional assessment frames multilingual students as deficient in English, whereas translanguaging reframes multilingualism as competence and resource (Almashour, 2024; Galante, 2020). This asset orientation reshapes how teachers, students, and institutions interpret linguistic repertoires, positioning multilingual students as resourceful rather than remedial (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Consequently, such reframing influences curriculum design and institutional culture by validating multilingualism and fostering stronger academic identities and a sense of belonging (Bouguerra, 2024; Tian & Li, 2024).

Equally important, teacher knowledge about student capabilities also improves dramatically when assessment reveals what translanguaging makes visible. Teachers often express surprise at the depth of understanding students show when allowed to use multiple languages (Makalela, 2015). These insights not only reshape perceptions of individual learners but can also shift teachers' broader views of multilingualism as an asset (Duarte, 2019; Galante, 2020). When teachers encounter evidence contradicting deficit narratives, they begin questioning underlying assumptions, a process that supports more equitable multilingual education (Probyn, 2015).

At the pedagogical level, translanguaging enhances the effectiveness of formative feedback. When students fully comprehend suggestions and can apply them productively, feedback becomes genuinely formative.. Bilingual feedback ensures comprehension in ways English-only feedback cannot (Y. Wang & Li, 2022). Students who better understand feedback can act on it, leading to more meaningful improvements in their work (D. Wang & East, 2024). This finding highlights that feedback comprehension is central to formative value; without it, even detailed feedback yields little learning benefit (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018). Translanguaging, therefore, functions less as an accommodation than as a necessity for effective formative assessment with multilingual learners.

Technology-mediated translanguaging assessment creates new possibilities unavailable in traditional contexts. Digital platforms can facilitate bilingual feedback, peer assessment across languages, multimodal submissions, and multilingual portfolios (Sun, 2024). These tools may reduce practical barriers in highly multilingual classrooms where teachers cannot provide scaffolding in all languages (Huang & Chalmers, 2023). While translation tools remain imperfect, they can enable communication that might otherwise be impossible, making translanguaging assessment more scalable and sustainable (Zhang et al., 2024).

Creative assessment design flourishes when monolingual constraints lift. Studies suggest that translanguaging enables students to create multimodal and innovative compositions, capturing creativity and competence beyond traditional essays (Galante, 2020; D. Wang & East, 2024). Such assessments can reinvigorate practices that have become routine, encouraging students to exceed minimum requirements and engage more deeply with content (Ulum, 2024; Yan et al., 2022). The quality improvements indicate that monolingual constraints artificially limit what students can demonstrate, giving teachers only partial views of student capabilities (Tran, 2025).

Implications for Research, Policy, and Practice

Research examining translanguaging in formative assessment needs to move beyond showing that it works toward exploring how, when, and for whom it works best. Current studies suggest that translanguaging assessment benefits multilingual learners across diverse contexts, but the variation in effectiveness remains underexplored (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Zhang et al., 2024). Questions about differences by age, proficiency level, or linguistic background, as well as transfer to summative performance and long-term outcomes, require longitudinal and comparative designs that are still rare. Without such evidence, teachers lack clear guidance for adapting translanguaging assessment to particular classrooms and student populations.

Student voice also requires greater attention. Fine & Braaten (2025) show that students can offer sophisticated insights into how translanguaging affects their learning and assessment

experiences, yet most studies focus on teacher practices with limited student perspectives. More participatory approaches could generate knowledge grounded in learners' realities rather than adult assumptions, highlighting dimensions of motivation, identity, and equity that teacher-centered research may overlook.

The development of frameworks and tools represents another urgent area. Teachers often adapt existing assessment approaches on their own without systematic guidance. Research-based frameworks could provide principles for task design, rubrics that evaluate multilingual work, and protocols for bilingual feedback (Ascenzi-Moreno, 2018; D. Wang & East, 2024). These resources must remain adaptable to context while offering enough structure to support teachers unfamiliar with translanguaging assessment.

Policy implications extend beyond permission to active support. Studies show that official policies often mandate English-only assessment even while classrooms rely daily on translanguaging practices (Alasmari et al., 2022; Probyn, 2015). Effective policy support would require funding for professional development, time for teacher collaboration, curriculum materials that incorporate translanguaging approaches, and accountability systems that value multilingual demonstrations of knowledge. Without such alignment, the gap between policy and practice will persist, leaving teachers to negotiate contradictions individually.

For practice, the challenge is to help teachers develop judgment about when translanguaging enhances assessment and when it might complicate measurement. Professional development should address not only strategies but also the underlying beliefs about language and learning that shape assessment decisions (Demekash et al., 2024; Latif & Wasim, 2024). Short workshops are unlikely to achieve this; teachers need sustained opportunities for reflection, peer support, and experimentation.

Teacher education also bears responsibility for preparing future educators to see translanguaging as a standard aspect of assessment literacy rather than a specialized topic. Programs that normalize multilingual assessment across methods courses and practicum experiences can foster this shift (Galante, 2020; Ulum, 2024). Critical reflection on monolingual ideologies should be integral, encouraging pre-service teachers to examine how deficit views have shaped their own experiences and to envision more equitable approaches for their students.

Realizing the full potential of translanguaging assessment will require coordination across researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, practitioners, and students themselves. Each group contributes knowledge and resources that cannot be developed in isolation. Without such collaboration, translanguaging assessment risks remaining a marginal practice taken up sporadically by individual teachers rather than a mainstream component of equitable multilingual education.

In sum, the reviewed studies suggest that translanguaging in formative assessment serves multiple purposes depending on context: in African schools, it functions as an equity mechanism for access, in Asian classrooms, it is often leveraged for efficiency and engagement, and in Western middle schools, it connects to identity and fairness. Across levels of education, younger learners emphasize comprehension and participation, while older students highlight issues of legitimacy and academic identity. Policy environments further shape how translanguaging is framed—either as resistance in English-only systems or as legitimate pedagogy in multilingual-friendly frameworks. These patterns indicate that translanguaging should be understood not as a uniform method, but as a context-sensitive strategy whose value emerges at the intersection of pedagogy, policy, and learner identity.

CONCLUSION

Evidence from translanguaging research in multilingual EFL classrooms exposes a significant disparity between multilingual learners' competencies and the restricted expression permitted by monolingual assessment frameworks. When formative assessment welcomes translanguaging, students show deeper conceptual understanding, engage more actively in learning processes, and develop stronger academic identities. Teachers obtain clearer insights into students' understanding, allowing them to tailor instruction to genuine learning needs rather than perceived shortcomings tied solely to English proficiency. The pedagogical functions of translanguaging—scaffolding comprehension, building metalinguistic awareness, reducing anxiety, and validating identity—work synergistically with formative assessment's learning-oriented purposes. However, implementation faces substantial challenges rooted not in translanguaging's pedagogical soundness but in systemic contradictions between multilingual realities and monolingual ideologies. Policy frameworks mandate English-only assessment while classrooms become increasingly multilingual. High-stakes testing pressures restrict formative translanguaging even as research documents its effectiveness. Teachers lack both the foundations of assessment literacy and professional development specific to translanguaging to implement these approaches confidently. These challenges require systemic solutions addressing policy alignment, institutional support, professional preparation, and resource allocation simultaneously.

The path forward requires reconceptualizing multilingual competence as the norm rather than the exception in language education. Translanguaging in formative assessment offers more than accommodation for linguistic deficiency—it represents fundamentally different assumptions about what counts as knowledge, how learning happens, and whose linguistic resources have legitimacy in educational contexts. Current research establishes that translanguaging assessment

benefits multilingual learners, but questions remain about optimal implementation across diverse contexts, long-term developmental trajectories, and scaling beyond individual teacher innovation. Future investigation needs longitudinal designs examining how translanguaging assessment affects sustained learning outcomes, comparative studies identifying which approaches work best for whom under what conditions, and participatory research centering student voices in assessment design. The transformative potential of translanguaging assessment for promoting equity in multilingual education can be achieved through collective action involving researchers, policymakers, teacher educators, and classroom practitioners. Without such coordination, translanguaging risks remaining a marginal practice rather than standard professional knowledge in contexts where most language learning actually occurs—multilingual classrooms where students bring rich linguistic resources that current assessment paradigms fail to recognize, value, or leverage for learning.

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