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Beyond Boundaries of Languages: Pedagogical Translanguaging in an Ethnic Minority University in Xinjiang

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Abstract: Translanguaging, a pedagogical strategy that alternates between the use of L1 and L2 in EFL/ESL classrooms, has been shown to enhance comprehension, facilitate scaffolding, and promote inclusive and equitable classroom participation in language education. Although translanguaging has attracted growing academic attention in China, little is known about how university English teachers employ translanguaging strategies in multilingual classrooms in Xinjiang. This area would benefit from such research, as it responds to Xinjiang's multilingual reality and supports high-quality English education in minority areas. This research investigated teachers' pedagogical translanguaging practices and students' attitudes in college English classrooms at Yili Normal University in Xinjiang. Adopting a mixed-methods design consisting of an 8-week classroom observation, a questionnaire survey with 170 students (89 minority and 81 Han), and 18 semi-structured interviews, this study aims to categorise the types of translanguaging practices employed by teachers, examine both Han and minority students' attitudes toward these practices, and identify the factors shaping such attitudes. The findings show that teachers' translanguaging practices fell into three categories—explanatory, managerial, and interpersonal—comprising 12 specific subcategories. Quantitative results indicate that a majority of students expressed positive attitudes (scoring above 4) towards these practices, with minority and Han students showing

overall optimism but diverging in certain classroom contexts, with minority students less likely to view translanguaging as signalling deficiency or hindering language acquisition ($t=2.712$, $p=0.007$). Thematic analysis further revealed four key factors influencing students' attitudes: English proficiency, teachers' language choice, the perceived psychological distance between Chinese and English, and awareness of linguistic diversity. As one of the early systematic attempts to explore translanguaging in higher education settings in China's ethnic minority regions, this research proposes that teachers' adoption of translanguaging practices, such as using bilingual explanations, the use of activities explicitly encouraging students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires, as well as teacher training programmes, should include practical workshops on translanguaging pedagogy.

Keywords: pedagogical translanguaging, students' attitudes, equitable language education, multilingual context

Introduction

After decades of discussion, bilingual education has been introduced in primary and secondary schools, as well as in colleges and universities, in Xinjiang since 2011, and has increased multilingual interactions, giving rise to translanguaging as a communicative practice (Li, 2018). In education, translanguaging enables learners to flexibly use their existing languages to meet communicative needs and draw on prior knowledge, facilitating language learning (Van Viegen, 2020). However, monolingual ideologies remain dominant in ESL and EFL teaching, where teachers are encouraged to maximise exposure to the target language (TL) to support L2 acquisition (Cummins, 2019; Fuster & Bardel, 2024). This is particularly relevant in Chinese English classrooms, where students have limited contact with English outside school.

Research Problem

A key debate centres on whether switching between L1 and L2 helps or hinders learning (Liu, 2010). Advocates of L1 exclusion argue that L2-only classrooms provide immersive TL experiences that activate learners' language schema and expand L2 opportunities (Escobar & Dillard-Paltrineri, 2015). Yet strategic use of learners' L1, alongside multi-modal resources such as gestures, visuals, peer support, and technology, can enhance communicative competence and support TL development (Canagarajah, 2018). Recent research adopts a translanguaging perspective, examining its pedagogical use and impact on L2 learning across different contexts, including UK complementary schools (Creese & Blackledge, 2010, 2011), Chinese as a foreign language classrooms (Wang, 2019), and US dual-language programs (Palmer et al., 2014; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). These studies employed qualitative methods - observations, questionnaires, interviews - to explore teacher and student practices and perceptions.

In China's ethnic minority regions, students navigate multiple languages, including minority languages, Chinese, and English, and often face greater learning burdens and limited educational resources. Understanding teachers' pedagogical translanguaging practices and students' attitudes towards them is crucial for effective multilingual education. It can inform more inclusive and effective language teaching, helping minority students access English education more equitably. This study sets out to investigate college teachers' translanguaging practices through classroom observation, examine students' perceptions via questionnaires comparing Han and minority students, and explore the factors influencing attitudes through semi-structured interviews. The findings can help enhance the effectiveness of multilingual teaching and promote fairness in language education.

Research Aim and Research Questions

This study aims to investigate pedagogical translinguaging in university English classrooms in an ethnic minority region of China, focusing on both teachers' practices and students' perceptions. Specifically, the study seeks to examine how teachers strategically use translinguaging during instruction and how students from different linguistic backgrounds — Han and minority — perceive and respond to these practices. By exploring the factors shaping students' attitudes, the study also aims to provide insights into effective multilingual teaching strategies that support language learning across diverse classroom contexts. To achieve this aim, the study addresses the following research questions:

(1). What types of pedagogical translinguaging does the teacher practise in class?

(2). What are students' attitudes—both Han and minority students—towards pedagogical translinguaging in class?

(3). What factors influence students' attitudes towards pedagogical translinguaging?

In answering these questions, the study seeks to illuminate the interplay between teacher practices and student perceptions, offering evidence-based implications for improving teaching effectiveness and promoting equitable language learning in multilingual educational settings.

Literature Review

Translinguaging and pedagogical translinguaging

Translinguaging was first proposed by Williams (1994) in the context of a Welsh language revitalisation program. Observing that students used English extensively in Welsh classes, Williams introduced a teaching strategy guiding learners to input in English and output in Welsh. Linguaging, as Becker (1995) noted, reflects the dynamic, evolving process of communication, while Swain (2000) described it as a bridge enabling thoughts to be expressed and structured. Baker and Fang formalised the term translinguaging, defining it as “the process of using two languages to construct meaning, organise experiences, acquire knowledge, and understand the world” (2021).

García (2011) extended translinguaging to sociolinguistics, defining it as “multiple discourse practices used by bilingual speakers to understand the world”, highlighting its fluid and holistic nature (García & Lin, 2016) unlike traditional bilingualism, which treats languages as separate systems, translinguaging views multiple language abilities as a single, integrated resource, allowing users to mobilize any linguistic knowledge to achieve communicative purposes (García & Li, 2014; Li, 2018).

Over time, translinguaging has gained recognition as a flexible classroom practice and teaching method (Canagarajah, 2011; García & Li, 2014; Li & Shen, 2021), i.e., pedagogical translinguaging, meaning teacher-designed classroom practices that intentionally activate learners' full linguistic repertoires, including using different languages for input and output or other strategies to maximize students' multilingual resources (Cenoz, 2017; Nguyen et al., 2025). Scholars emphasise its pedagogical value: García (2011) sees it as scaffolding instruction and learning support, Canagarajah (2011) views it as an “active” classroom practice that legitimises multilingual resources, and Li (2018) highlights its role in creating “translinguaging spaces” where students can confidently explore and diversify their communicative abilities. Tai (2021) emphasises that pedagogical translinguaging creates inclusive learning spaces, particularly benefiting minority students by promoting engagement and smoother knowledge building. These developments illustrate translinguaging's significance in both cognitive and educational contexts, emphasising its dynamic, integrated, and meaning-centred nature.

Teachers' Practices of Pedagogical Translanguaging

With the growing recognition of translanguaging's educational value, researchers have sought to describe and classify teachers' pedagogical translanguaging practices across diverse classrooms. Cook (2001) first highlighted the practical roles of students' L1 in bilingual education, including communicating meaning, explaining grammar, and organising classroom activities. Building on this, Creese and Blackledge (2010) identified seven skills that translanguaging helps develop in flexible, complementary school classrooms. Palmer et al. (2014) proposed three strategies: imitating dynamic language practice, positioning students as competent bilinguals, and focusing on language blending. Kao (2022) later identified five approaches: clarification, consolidating content, asking key questions, encouraging student talk, and classroom management.

Other studies have proposed functional and principled frameworks for pedagogical translanguaging. Wang (2019) categorised practices into interpretive, managerial, and interactive functions, while Cenoz and Gorter (2022) classified teaching methods based on the degree of teacher-directed language use. Sun and Zhou (2022) emphasised its roles in organising instruction, maintaining relationships, and establishing values. Translanguaging has also been shown to reduce teachers' apprehension about spontaneous multilingual use and enhance their confidence (Ren & Cai, 2024). In English classrooms, multimedia elements such as images, texts, and discourse design contribute to a culturally inclusive and meaning-focused environment (Zhen & Qiu, 2024).

Despite these insights, research often focuses on specific contexts, limiting generalizability. Wang (2019) notes that current studies remain largely "tentative and exploratory", and comparative analyses across classrooms are scarce (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). To advance the field, more context-based investigations are needed to deepen understanding of pedagogical translanguaging practices and refine existing frameworks based on real-world classroom applications.

Students' Attitudes Towards Pedagogical Translanguaging

Pedagogical translanguaging enables teachers to use multiple languages as resources to create meaning and promote learning (Li & Ho, 2018). Despite this, research on students' views remains limited, even though they are directly affected by teachers' translanguaging practices (Walsh & Mann, 2015). Several studies report positive student attitudes. Rivera and Mazak (2019) found that students at the University of Puerto Rico frequently used both Spanish and English in class. Moody et al. (2019) reported that graduating students in the U.S. held highly positive views, particularly in second language classrooms. Similarly, Wang (2019) found that Hong Kong Chinese language learners preferred teachers' use of translanguaging, and Zhou and Mann (2021) observed that advanced EFL learners embraced translanguaging over traditional single-language instruction.

However, supportive attitudes are not universal in Chinese educational contexts. Wang (2019) found students' preferences evenly split between monolingual and multilingual approaches. Fang and Liu (2020) reported neutral attitudes toward translanguaging in EFL and EMI classrooms. Wang and Shen (2023) observed mixed perceptions: students accepted teacher translanguaging but discouraged its use by students during responses. Zhou and Li (2023) noted that limited translanguaging was seen positively, while a few preferred English-only instruction.

Factors influencing students' attitudes include linguistic distance, language ideology, and social context. Greater similarity between languages can foster positive perceptions (Leonet et al., 2020), while the considerable distance between English and Chinese may contribute to lower acceptance compared to English-Spanish classrooms (Fang & Liu, 2020). Monolingual ideologies in China also lead students to view L1 use as indicative of low proficiency (Baker & Fang, 2021). Additionally, social environment, disciplinary

cultures, educational resources, and learning styles can shape perceptions of pedagogical translanguaging (Zhen & Qiu, 2024).

Overall, students’ attitudes toward translanguaging are complex, context-dependent, and influenced by linguistic, ideological, and cultural factors, highlighting the need for nuanced research in diverse educational settings.

Materials and Methods

Sample and Participants

This study was conducted in the spring term of 2024 with undergraduate students enrolled in college English courses at Yili Normal University. A total of 188 students initially completed the questionnaire. The sample included 81 Han students (43.09%) and 107 ethnic minority students (56.91%), representing Uyghur, Kazakh, Kirghiz, Mongol, Hui, Zang, and Man groups.

All students who were officially enrolled in the college English courses and completed the questionnaire were initially included, and after removing cases from ethnic groups with very small sample sizes (Kirghiz, Mongol, Hui, Zang, and Man; fewer than six participants), to ensure adequate statistical power and stable estimates, a total of 170 valid questionnaires remained for analysis.

Table 1

Online Questionnaire Respondents

Contents		N	Percent(%)
Ethnic group	Han (H)	81	47.65
	Minority (M)	89	52.35
	(Uyghur and Kazak)	(Uyghur=61; Kazak =28)	(Uyghur=35.88; Kazak =16.47%)
Gender	Male	59	34.71
	Female	111	65.29
Age	19	5	2.94
	20-21	144	84.71
	22-23	21	12.35
School	School of business	64	37.65
	School of law	56	32.94
	School of Tourism and History	50	29.41

The final sample consisted of 81 Han students (47.65%) and 89 minority students (52.35%), including 61 Uyghur (35.88%) and 28 Kazakh (16.47%) students. As Uyghur and Kazakh both belong to the Turkic branch of the Altaic language family and share many linguistic features (He, 2012), these students were treated as a single category in the analysis to facilitate comparison with Han students. Participants were drawn from three faculties: Business (37.65%, n=64), Law (32.94%, n=56), and Tourism and History (29.41%, n=50). They ranged in age from 19 to 23 years, with 59 male (34.71%) and 111 female (65.29%) students. Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the Academic Committee of Yili Normal University. All 170 participants were provided informed consent before their participation in the study, of the study’s purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and

confidentiality were maintained by assigning pseudonyms and removing identifiable details from the classroom observation recordings, questionnaires, and interview transcripts.

Instruments

Classroom Observation

Classroom observation in the current study takes the form of video recording. As the teacher participant, the second writer recorded the creative and critical instances of teacher-student interactions after each class recording. Additionally, the videotaping allows researchers to “capture a version of conduct and interaction in everyday settings and subject them to repeated scrutiny using slow motion facilities and the like” (Heath & Hindmarsh, 2002). By video-recording the lessons, the researchers were able to examine both verbal exchanges and embodied teaching behaviours to better support holistic meaning-making from a translanguaging perspective.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire (Appendix 1) is adapted from Fang and Liu (2020), which contains two main sections: students’ basic information and their (including Han students and minority students) attitudes towards teacher’s pedagogical translanguaging. Participants were asked to complete a total of 30 questions. The first 11 consisted of basic information, such as age, gender, ethnic groups, and language learning background.

The remaining 23 questions were categorised into three sections: (1) the participants’ general view of translanguaging practices; (2) the participants’ perceptions of teachers’ translanguaging practices in different classroom situations; (3) the participants’ attitudes towards their own translanguaging practices in different classroom situations. The participants were asked to rate these statements on a Likert scale ranging from one to five (1=strongly disagree, 2=disagree, 3=neutral, 4=agree, and 5=strongly agree). Prior to distributing the questionnaire, the term “pedagogical translanguaging” was explained to participants as the practice of switching between languages (Chinese and English in this research) using linguistic and multimodal resources, and five typical examples of translanguaging were provided to help students understand what translanguaging practices entail.

Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interviews aim to explore potential reasons that affect students’ attitudes toward pedagogical translanguaging (Appendix 2). The interview outline was designed based on the analytical results of questionnaire data, containing two main sections: questions about students’ basic information about their English learning experience and questions about their attitudes towards pedagogical translanguaging. Interviewers start with key open questions and guiding prompts, then let the conversation flow naturally by listening actively and asking follow-up questions based on what participants share during the dialogue, working to collect facts for qualitative studies as well as to “pursue deeper understanding in all its complex, elusive and shifting forms” (Richards, 2003).

Data Collection and Analysis

Classroom Observation Data

To ensure valid classroom observation data, the videos of the lessons were supplemented by the teacher-researcher’s reflective notes, allowing triangulation and repeated scrutiny of interactional details, including verbal and embodied translanguaging behaviours. Multiple viewings and collaborative coding enhanced the consistency and credibility of interpretation.

An eight-week classroom observation was conducted from May to June 2024 to examine translanguaging practices in a college English class. A total of eight lessons (360 minutes) were observed. The focus was on teacher discourse — how the teacher mobilised linguistic repertoires for meaning-making, interactive communication, and knowledge explanation—alongside classroom procedures, activities, and student participation.

The analysis of video-recorded interactions followed three phases: transcription, categorisation, and data selection. First, recordings were transcribed using Quark AI, with accuracy verified through repeated checks by the researcher. Instances of multimodal resources, such as gestures, images, and videos, were also annotated. All translanguaging practices were then coded and categorised in NVivo 15. Instances were grouped into subcategories based on their classroom use and then reorganised into broader functional categories. The primary framework was Wang's (2019) threefold classification of translanguaging practices: explanatory (cognitive and metalinguistic scaffolding), managerial (operational classroom instructions), and interpersonal (constructing teacher–student relationships). Modifications were made to better align with the current data. Finally, representative extracts of pedagogical practices were selected for presentation and analysis to illustrate key patterns observed.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was adapted from Fang and Liu (2020), a previously validated instrument, ensuring content validity. Questionnaire data collection and analysis proceeded in two stages: (1) testing reliability and validity in a pretest and (2) conducting statistical analysis of students' attitudes.

After the teacher's translanguaging practices concluded, a pilot questionnaire was distributed to 30 students via the Wenjuanxing platform, which helped refine wording for clarity and cultural appropriateness, strengthening face validity. This pretest ensured reliability and validity. Results showed a Cronbach's α of 0.907, indicating strong reliability, and a KMO value above 0.6, confirming construct validity. Following the pretest, the finalised questionnaire was distributed to all participants.

Quantitative analysis was performed in SPSS 26.0. Mean scores and standard deviations (SD) were calculated from the 5-point Likert scale. Values between 2.5 and 3.5 indicated neutral attitudes, values above 3.5 reflected favourable perceptions, and values below 2.5 suggested negative attitudes (Moody et al., 2019; Fang & Liu, 2020).

To examine differences between Han and minority students, independent-samples t-tests were conducted. Statistical results, including p-values and F-scores, highlighted attitudinal variation across groups. These findings were later triangulated with interview data to enhance the interpretation and contextualization of results.

Semi-structured Interview Data

The semi-structured interview guide was designed based on questionnaire findings and reviewed by two experts to ensure content validity. Interviewers used flexible probing to elicit rich responses, and brief member-checking at the end of interviews helped confirm participants' intended meanings, enhancing credibility.

Eight students (4 Han, 4 minority) participated in semi-structured interviews conducted via WeChat. To preserve anonymity, they are identified as H1–H4 and M1–M4, with ethnic backgrounds specified where relevant. Each interview lasted at least one hour and explored students' subjective attitudes toward the teacher's translanguaging practices, focusing on whether such practices supported their English learning. All interviews were conducted in Chinese to ensure accessibility and allow participants to express their views with greater nuance (Mann, 2011).

Interview transcripts were analysed thematically following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework. First, the researchers familiarised themselves with the data through repeated readings and note-taking. Initial codes were then generated to capture significant features. After that, codes were grouped into potential themes, which were then reviewed and refined for coherence. And then themes were defined and clearly named to capture their essence. Finally, findings were synthesised into a narrative supported by illustrative extracts, linked directly to the research questions.

Despite the above efforts, the study's methodology is limited by its reliance on self-reported questionnaire data, a single teacher-researcher's classroom observations, and a sample drawn from only one ethnic minority university, which may affect the generalizability and objectivity of the findings.

Results

Teacher's Practices of Pedagogical Translanguaging

In total, 182 instances of translanguaging were documented: 115 explanatory, 48 managerial, and 19 interpersonal. Some overlapped categories, but the data clearly showed a preference for explanatory practices. This suggests that translanguaging was primarily used to reduce students' cognitive burden and expand their learning framework. The 12 subcategories are detailed in Table 2, with representative extracts provided.

Table 2

The Teacher's Practices of Pedagogical Translanguaging

Category	Frequency	Sub-category	Frequency
Explanatory	115	Translating words or sentences	79
		Explaining content	17
		Explaining grammar rules	13
		Explaining learning methods	3
		Interpreting cultural knowledge	3
		Translating words or sentences	79
Managerial	48	Giving instructions	15
		Checking engagement and comprehension	14
		Planning assignments	8
		Stimulating students' thinking ability	6
		Offering feedback (praising/disapproving)	5
Interpersonal	19	Activating atmosphere	12
		Offering warm prompt	7
Total frequency	182		

Explanatory practices supported meaning construction through cognitive and metalinguistic scaffolding, including exploring grammar, expanding vocabulary, discussing content, and explaining cultural background. Managerial practices referred to classroom operations such as giving instructions, offering formative assessments, monitoring attentiveness, and assigning tasks. Interpersonal practices primarily occurred in teacher-student interactions, such as motivational prompts and guided participation in discussions, with the dual aims of building rapport and fostering an inclusive atmosphere.

Students' Attitudes Towards Pedagogical Translanguaging

Table 3 presents the students' overall attitudes toward translanguaging. Results show that statements reflecting positive attitudes all scored above 4, indicating that both Han and minority students generally welcomed translanguaging practices. Statements 2 and 6 were reverse-scored, meaning higher scores represented more negative perceptions. The mean score for statement 2 was 2.51, suggesting neutrality, while statement 6 scored 2.34, indicating relative disagreement with the idea that translanguaging hinders second-language learning.

Comparative analysis of Han and minority students' responses shows that both groups strongly agreed with statement 4 ($M=4.35$ and 4.34), highlighting translanguaging's role in facilitating new language learning. Yet independent-samples t-tests revealed significant differences on statements 2 ($t=2.512$, $p=0.013$) and 6 ($t=2.712$, $p=0.007$), indicating that minority students were more supportive of translanguaging than Han students. Specifically, minority students were less likely to view it as signalling a deficiency or hindering language acquisition.

Table 3

Students' Overall Attitudes Towards Pedagogical Translanguaging Practices

Statement	Total		Minority students		Han students		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
1	4.23	0.792	4.26	0.833	4.20	0.749	0.499	0.618
2	2.51	1.316	2.74	1.426	2.25	1.135	2.512	0.013*
3	4.16	0.790	4.11	0.885	4.22	0.671	-0.905	0.367
4	4.34	0.731	4.34	0.768	4.35	0.692	-0.076	0.939
5	4.26	0.758	4.29	0.815	4.23	0.694	0.493	0.622
6	2.35	1.325	2.61	1.512	2.07	1.022	2.712	0.007**
7	4.15	0.826	4.16	0.767	4.14	0.891	0.169	0.866

Note.* $p<.05$,** $p<.01$.

Table 4 shows students' attitudes towards pedagogical translanguaging practices in different classroom situations. Statements 8–10 represent the teacher's explanatory practices, 11–15 the managerial ones, and the remaining statements the interpersonal category. Statements 11 and 12 received lower agreement, indicating that translanguaging was perceived as less necessary for giving instructions ($M=3.56$) and offering feedback ($M=3.84$). In contrast, students strongly supported its use in helping low-proficiency peers ($M=4.21$) and explaining content ($M=4.14$), both viewed as scaffolding functions.

Table 4

Students' Attitudes Towards Pedagogical Translanguaging Practices in Different Classroom Situations

Statement	Total		Minority students		Han students		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
8	4.08	0.884	4.21	0.761	3.93	0.985	2.141	0.034*
9	4.14	0.809	4.18	0.806	4.10	0.816	0.651	0.516

10	4.04	0.909	3.99	0.935	4.09	0.883	-0.698	0.486
11	3.56	1.201	3.71	1.179	3.41	1.212	1.637	0.103
12	3.84	1.019	4.03	0.885	3.62	1.113	2.683	0.008**
13	4.08	0.917	4.10	0.930	4.05	0.907	0.367	0.714
14	3.99	0.994	4.18	0.820	3.79	1.126	2.558	0.012*
15	4.02	0.913	4.13	0.882	3.89	0.935	1.765	0.079
16	4.10	0.940	4.12	0.939	4.07	0.946	0.342	0.733
17	4.21	0.954	4.33	0.836			1.729	0.086

Note.* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

While Han students rated statement 10 the highest ($M=4.09$), showing strong support for translanguaging in explaining content, minority students rated statement 17 the highest ($M=4.33$), reflecting approval of teachers' assistance for less proficient learners. Minority students' stronger endorsement suggests greater self-perceived language disadvantage. Both groups rated statement 11 lowest (Han: $M=3.41$; minority: $M=3.71$), indicating limited value placed on translanguaging for giving instructions. Independent-samples t-tests revealed significant group differences in statements 8, 12, and 14 ($p < .05$), showing minority students' stronger preference for translanguaging in explaining, offering feedback, and checking comprehension. These functions require higher cognitive processing and are therefore more sensitive to linguistic gaps, which minority students experience more acutely. The effect suggests that translanguaging functions primarily as a compensatory cognitive scaffold for minority learners, particularly in high-demand instructional episodes.

Table 5 shows students' moderately positive attitudes toward their own translanguaging practices ($M=3.88$), which are slightly less supportive than their attitudes toward teachers' practices ($M=4.01$). The highest mean scores were for "enabling participation by students who are less proficient" ($M=4.05$) and "discussing contents in small groups" ($M=3.95$), showing that students recognise the role of translanguaging in facilitating collaboration and comprehension. Conversely, "answering teachers' questions" scored lowest ($M=3.74$).

A comparison of Han students' and minority students' responses demonstrated different tendencies: overall means were 3.74 and 4.01, respectively. Han students showed a neutral attitude toward using translanguaging in answering questions ($M=3.46$), while minority students were more positive, finding L1 use helpful for confidence and participation. Both groups agreed that translanguaging best supports less proficient peers (statement 22: $M=3.96$, 4.13). T-test results indicated significant group differences for statements 18 and 19 ($p < 0.01$), confirming minority students' stronger reliance on L1 for oral communication. These significant differences demonstrate that minority students' linguistic challenges translate into measurably greater dependence on L1 resources during interactive tasks—an insight that highlights translanguaging as an essential communicative support rather than merely a pedagogical choice in minority-dominant classroom contexts.

Table 5

Students' Attitudes Towards Their Own Translanguaging Practices in Different Classroom Situations

Statement	Total		Minority students		Han students		t	p
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
18	3.74	0.993	3.46	0.962	4.00	0.953	3.693	0.000**
19	3.85	0.927	3.62	0.916	4.07	0.889	3.249	0.001**

20	3.95	0.886	3.81	0.868	4.07	0.889	1.871	0.063
21	3.88	0.962	3.89	0.935	3.87	0.991	-0.160	0.873
22	4.05	0.844	3.96	0.872	4.13	0.815	1.328	0.186
23	3.81	1.066	3.69	1.103	3.92	1.025	1.409	0.161

Note.*p<.05,**p<.01.

Factors Influencing Students' Attitudes Towards Pedagogical Translanguaging

The interview data revealed several factors shaping students' attitudes toward pedagogical translanguaging, shedding light on why most students view translanguaging as beneficial, while Han and minority students differ in their perceptions of teacher and self-use in specific contexts.

Both Han and minority students endorsed teachers' use of translanguaging, primarily because their English proficiency was insufficient to fully comprehend in all-English classrooms fully. Many emphasised its role in clarifying grammar and vocabulary, reducing anxiety, and boosting engagement. For example, minority participants (M1, M4) and Han participant (H2) reported that whole-English instruction made them lose track of lessons and increased nervousness. Students also reflected on their own translanguaging. Initially, they viewed the use of Chinese as evidence of weak competence, reflecting the influence of monolingual policy. However, after reflection, many acknowledged that strategic Chinese use could support participation and comprehension. Overall, students' limited English proficiency underpinned their positive stance: translanguaging was seen as both a comprehension aid and a participation booster.

Teachers' language use also shaped student attitudes. Despite China's monolingual policy, most classrooms employed a blended Chinese–English model, shaped by exam culture and stakeholder expectations. Students adapted to this practice and hoped it would continue. Regional variation emerged. Minority participants noted that limited teacher availability and weaker professional training in Xinjiang historically led to greater reliance on Chinese, both for teacher convenience and student comprehension. Conversely, Han participants generally reported sufficient, well-trained teachers capable of more English-medium instruction. These contrasts explain why minority students relied more heavily on translanguaging: in their classrooms, Chinese was indispensable for meaningful participation.

A third factor was students' perception of language distance. Objectively, Chinese and English belong to different language families, suggesting a large gap. Yet students emphasised psychological distance—how similar languages feel in practice. Many perceived Chinese word order as close to English, which reduced perceived difficulty and encouraged acceptance of translanguaging. Minority students faced additional complexity, as Uyghur and Kazakh (Turkic languages) are further removed from English. Nevertheless, some noted lexical similarities that aided memory and motivation. Still, they overwhelmingly relied on Chinese rather than their ethnic languages for learning English, citing teachers' use of Chinese and their stronger proficiency in Chinese. Thus, a reduced psychological distance between Chinese and English supported positive attitudes toward translanguaging across groups.

Finally, students' awareness of linguistic diversity shaped their acceptance of translanguaging. China's multilingual ecology — Mandarin, ethnic languages, and regional dialects — normalises code-switching. Students showed high adaptability and cultural sensitivity, making them more receptive to multilingual practices in classrooms. For minority students, Mandarin plays a central mediating role. Often learned from an early age, Mandarin is tied to both education and national identity, reinforcing their

multilingual awareness. Consequently, they strongly accepted translanguaging as natural and beneficial for English learning.

Discussion

Features of Pedagogical Translanguaging Practices

The analysis reveals three main categories of pedagogical translanguaging—explanatory, managerial, and interpersonal. Translanguaging emerges not only as a teaching aid but also as a cognitive mediator, extending Wang’s (2019) framework. By refining subcategories, the research further uncovered the diversity of translanguaging practices in micro-level cognitive operations, which resonates with Cenoz and Gorter’s (2022) theory of “multimodal resource integration”. And this refinement also addressed Li’s (2018) critique of the “fragmentation” in translanguaging research while providing actionable indicators for subsequent quantitative analysis.

Explanatory practices dominate. The teacher scaffolded learning through bilingual translation, grammatical contrast, and multimodal resources (gestures, visuals), lowering cognitive load and reinforcing knowledge internalisation. Managerial practices help enhance classroom efficiency: teachers use L1 for complex instructions, attention regulation, or feedback adjustment, reflecting functional language allocation—L1 for cognitively demanding phases, L2 for output. Interpersonal practices, though less frequent, reduce anxiety and foster inclusion through humour or affective prompts, aligning with Krashen’s Affective Filter Hypothesis (1982).

Students’ Perceptions of Pedagogical Translanguaging

Quantitative results show students generally view translanguaging positively, but attitudes vary across groups and contexts. Overall, both Han and minority students recognise translanguaging’s role in reducing cognitive load and boosting confidence. Minority students more strongly reject the idea that teachers should avoid translanguaging, reflecting their reliance on it to navigate dual linguistic challenges (English as L3, Mandarin as L2), whereas Han students are more influenced by monolingual immersion ideology.

It is also found that students strongly support explanatory uses of translanguaging to bridge knowledge gaps. Managerial uses receive more cautious support, as some see L1 as disruptive to efficiency. This finding partially aligns with García’s (2011) “functional language allocation” theory—students prefer L1 for high-cognitive-demand tasks (e.g., clarifying complex instructions) but expect L2 dominance in routine teaching. Minority students favour translanguaging, particularly for explanations and feedback, highlighting its role as a cultural tool to reduce barriers; in contrast, Han students, who are more accustomed to monolingual norms, are often cautious about using L1, viewing it as potentially undermining their English proficiency. Furthermore, students endorse translanguaging for peer collaboration and group discussions, in line with Vygotsky’s emphasis on social interaction. However, they are more conservative in direct output tasks, especially Han students, who internalise monolingual norms and fear that L1 use undermines English competence. Minority students, facing greater challenges, depend more on translanguaging. This contrast shows Han students prefer “L2-dominant, L1-supplementary” approaches, while minority students seek flexible “dynamic translanguaging”, echoing Fang and Liu (2020), who found broad endorsement for teachers’ strategic translanguaging in scaffolding contexts.

Influencing Factors of Students’ Attitudes

Four major factors shape students’ attitudes: English proficiency, teachers’ language choices, psychological distance, and awareness of language diversity.

Lower-level students favour translanguage as a scaffold, consistent with Wang (2019) and Moody et al. (2019). Minority students rely more on translanguage due to dual linguistic challenges, while Han students see it as a temporary measure, reflecting the influence of monolingual ideology. In addition, the mixed Chinese–English model is common in China. In minority regions, limited resources push teachers towards heavier reliance on Chinese, not always by choice but by necessity. While partially supporting García’s (2011) theory of functional allocation, this finding highlights contextual constraints: language practices are shaped not only by pedagogy but also by teachers’ proficiency and policy environments.

Beyond the objective distance between languages, students’ subjective perception of similarity plays a stronger role. For example, perceived word-order similarities between Chinese and English lower psychological distance, fostering acceptance of translanguage. This challenges structuralist assumptions (Su, 2000) and underscores the importance of learner cognition. Interestingly, minority students, despite greater objective distance, perceive positive connections, suggesting that subjective closeness can mitigate structural gaps. Finally, China’s plurilingual ecology (coexisting dialects, ethnic languages, and Putonghua) naturally enables students to accept translanguage, resonating with Yu and Zhou (2024). Minority students, however, show unique adaptations: although they speak ethnic languages, Mandarin often serves as the bridge to English due to its institutional dominance. This “Mandarin-mediated translanguage” reflects language hierarchies (Putonghua > ethnic languages > English) and positions translanguage as not just a pedagogical tool but also a space of cultural negotiation, where students balance policy pressures, academic needs, and identity.

Minority students’ stronger support for translanguage demonstrates its value in affirming cultural identity and reducing linguistic barriers, reinforcing the view that multilingual classrooms are key sites of identity negotiation and inclusion (Becker, 2024). Politically, the patterns observed in Xinjiang highlight the need for balanced language policies that promote national language proficiency while recognising minority languages as legitimate learning resources, echoing calls for equity-oriented multilingual education in China’s minority regions (Hong & da Silva Iddings, 2025). Pedagogically, divergences between Han and minority students underscore the necessity of flexible, context-sensitive translanguage practices that scaffold understanding and support participation (Mufori et al., 2025). Teachers, therefore, require professional development that frames translanguage as a strategic, theory-informed practice rather than unstructured code-switching, ensuring that classroom language use remains both inclusive and aligned with curricular goals.

Conclusions

This study examined pedagogical translanguage practices in a Chinese ethnic minority context by triangulating classroom observations, student questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews. Findings revealed three overarching categories of translanguage — explanatory, managerial, and interpersonal — with twelve subcategories. Explanatory practices, such as translating vocabulary, explaining grammar, and interpreting cultural content, were most frequent, reflecting teachers’ emphasis on clarity and comprehension. Managerial practices included giving instructions, providing feedback, and checking engagement, while interpersonal practices supported affective interaction and encouraged student participation. Together, these functions highlight translanguage as both a cognitive and relational resource in teaching.

It is also found that both Han and minority students largely hold positive attitudes toward translanguage, though minority students displayed stronger endorsement. They valued translanguage not only for explanatory functions but also for formative feedback, comprehension checks, and communicative activities, demonstrating its significance in reducing learning barriers and fostering engagement.

Four factors were revealed to influence students' attitudes, i.e., English proficiency, teachers' instructional language choices, psychological language distance, and awareness of linguistic diversity. Students with lower proficiency and greater multilingual experience were more receptive to translanguaging. In addition, students perceived Chinese and English as psychologically closer than structurally assumed, facilitating acceptance of blended practices. Minority students, situated in a multilingual ecology, especially embraced translanguaging as natural and beneficial.

The above findings inform pedagogical practice by highlighting the systematic integration of translanguaging practice, promotion of multilingual awareness among students, and differentiated support for minority students. Teachers are encouraged to adopt translanguaging practices in EFL classrooms, e.g., using bilingual explanations for complex grammar or cultural concepts, providing feedback in both English and Chinese, and using humour or prompts to lower anxiety. It is also advisable for teachers to design activities explicitly encouraging students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires, which helps counteract the monolingual ideology and reframe translanguaging as a legitimate academic strategy rather than a deficiency marker. Furthermore, differentiating support for minority students is highly recommended. In contexts such as Xinjiang, teachers should give targeted translanguaging support during vocabulary/grammar explanations, formative feedback, and comprehension checks, and monitor minority students' responses to ensure that instructions are clear. Finally, teacher training programmes should include practical workshops on translanguaging pedagogy to equip educators with actionable strategies and encourage a shift away from English-only classroom practices.

Suggestions for future research

While this study offers meaningful implications, it is also bounded by several limitations. The participants in this study included only Uyghur and Kazakh students from a single university in southern Xinjiang, while the region itself is vast, with diverse ethnic groups and sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, this study was limited to one instructor's practices and students' attitudes, without addressing teachers' own views or students' actual translanguaging behaviours in real learning tasks. A third issue is that the third research question was examined solely through semi-structured interviews, which may have introduced subjective bias.

Future studies could therefore recruit larger and more varied samples, drawing on multiple minority groups and examining concrete teaching and learning outcomes to strengthen the validity of current findings, expand the scope to explore both educators' and learners' practices and beliefs, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of classroom translanguaging, and employ multiple methods to triangulate evidence, thus providing more reliable insights for pedagogical application in Xinjiang. You need to write down the author's proposals for solving the problem.

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Conflict of Interest

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in this questionnaire. The purpose of this study is to explore your attitudes toward pedagogical translanguaging. Your responses are anonymous and will only be used for research purposes. Please answer honestly, as there are no right or wrong answers.

Part I

1. School
 - School of Law
 - School of Business
 - School of Tourism and History
2. Gender: ○ Male ○ Female
3. Age _____
4. Ethnic group _____
5. How long have you been learning English? _____
6. English score in college entrance examination? _____
7. If you are willing to participate in a follow-up interview, please leave your basic information.
Example: College + name: _____

Part II

Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements using this scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree

	1	2	3	4	5
1 Translanguaging in class is a natural practice for bilinguals.					
2 Translanguaging indicates a lack of linguistic proficiency in your second language.					
3 Translanguaging in class is an appropriate practice.					
4 Translanguaging is essential for learning a new language.					
5 Translanguaging develops my confidence in English.					
6 English teachers should avoid translanguaging because it will prevent second language learning.					
7 Translanguaging in class, it would be helpful for bilingual students.					
It is important for English teacher to use translanguaging (in the following situations)	1	2	3	4	5
8 In explaining words or grammar rules					
9 In explaining content					
10 In interpreting cultural knowledge					
11 In giving instructions					
12 In offering feedback					
13 In increasing students' engagement					
14 In checking students' comprehension					
15 In organizing class activities					
16 In activating atmosphere					
17 In helping low proficiency students					
It is important for students to use translanguaging (in the following situations)	1	2	3	4	5
18 In answering the teachers' questions					
19 In asking teachers questions					
20 In discussing contents in small groups					
21 In brainstorming during class activities					
22 In enabling participation by students who are less proficient					
23 In completing assignments in class and homework (presentations, essays, etc.)					

Appendix 2. Semi-structured Interview Outline

Part I

Basic information of students' English learning experience

1. When did you start learning English?
2. What languages have your English teachers used in English classes since you started learning English?
3. What are your previous English learning resources (mainly around teachers)?
4. When learning English, do you think your native language has any influence on English learning?

Part II

Students' attitudes towards translanguaging practices

5. What do you think of teachers' pedagogical translanguaging practices in class?
6. Do you support the use of pedagogical translanguaging by teachers in the following situations? Please give your reasons.
 - in explaining words and grammar rules;
 - in giving feedback to students;
 - in checking students' understanding.
7. Do you employ translanguaging practices in class? Purposefully or subconsciously?
8. Would you choose to use pedagogical translanguaging in the following situations? Please give your reasons.
 - in answering the teacher's questions;
 - in asking the teacher questions.
9. Do you have any concerns about pedagogical translanguaging practices in class?