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Enhancing Reading Comprehension Skills among Bhutanese English Learners through Translanguaging

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Abstract

Translanguaging has recently emerged as a prominent field of study. Despite its growing popularity, its impact on students' reading comprehension skills remains largely unexplored. This study employed a quasi-experimental research design to examine the impact of translanguaging on students' reading comprehension performance. The study also examined students' perceptions of translanguaging to gain a deeper understanding of translanguaging's potential impact. Data were gathered through pre-and post-tests, questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and observations. A sample of 56 Bhutanese school students (33 males, 23 females) were purposely recruited and divided into two groups: the experimental and control groups. The experimental group was taught using the translanguaging approach, while the control group followed a monolingual approach. The findings, based on the comparison of pre-and post-test scores between the two groups, revealed that the translanguaging group significantly outperformed the monolingual group in their post-test scores despite a negligible difference in pre-test scores. This suggests that translanguaging could be an effective teaching approach to enhancing students' reading comprehension skills. Furthermore, despite the dominant position of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in the context, most students perceived translanguaging as an effective pedagogical practice. They reported that it allowed them to

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freely use their language repertoire to discuss and learn new vocabulary and difficult content, improved their confidence to participate in classroom discussions, and enhanced lesson comprehension. This study concludes with practical implications and suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Challenges, EFL student teacher, English-only instruction, teaching practicum.

1. INTRODUCTION

English reading comprehension is an indispensable skill that students of all grades must master to understand the information in textbooks and other reading materials effectively. Students must develop robust reading comprehension skills to understand, analyze, and interpret the texts they read (Castles et al., 2018). Reading without comprehending the main ideas of a text is not truly considered effective reading. Smith et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of reading comprehension skills for students, highlighting their role as the backbone for all learners and how they positively impact overall academic performance. Smith et al. (2021) and Whitten et al. (2019) have asserted a positive correlation between students' reading comprehension abilities and their academic performance.

Mastering reading comprehension skills is arduous, especially in the early grades, due to various factors. One significant obstacle impedes reading comprehension is learners' vocabulary knowledge (Masrai, 2019). Learners with greater vocabulary knowledge often have better reading comprehension abilities, and vice versa. Other factors that hinder reading comprehension include learners' ability to understand the grammatical structure of texts (Hu et al., 2022), their emotional status, such as attitude and motivation towards reading, prior knowledge of the content (Smith et al., 2021), and the ability to think critically and engage actively as readers. This suggests that reading comprehension is a complex language skill (Elleman & Oslund, 2019), requiring considerable linguistic and cognitive resources. Consequently, it has long been a primary concern for educators, and several research studies continue to be conducted in search of the best strategies to help students improve their reading comprehension skills, especially in the English language teaching (ELT) field.

ELT scholars have identified several pedagogical approaches as effective for improving students' reading comprehension skills. These include implementing blended learning (Rombot et al., 2020), incorporating ICT tools (Korkmaz & Öz, 2021), using the skimming method (Dhillon et al., 2020), practicing mind mapping technique (Mohaidat, 2018), and incorporating humor in the reading lessons (Tang et al., 2019) among others. While these pedagogical practices are well documented in the literature, few studies have addressed whether using translanguaging instruction in English classrooms helps students improve their reading comprehension skills. Only a limited number of studies (Goli, 2023; Hungwe, 2019; Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2022; Namrullah & Nasrullah, 2020; Yafele, 2021) have examined the impact of translanguaging instruction on students' reading comprehension skills, indicating a need for more research to fully understand translanguaging's impact as a pedagogical practice, especially in a context like Bhutan, where policy mandates that English be

used as the sole medium of instruction (EMI) for teaching academic subjects other than Dzongkha (the national language of Bhutan). Educators are still unsure whether to use the translanguaging approach in English classrooms.

Language educators, including those in Bhutan, are hesitant to incorporate translanguaging into their English language classrooms due to the enforced EMI policy and the inconclusive findings from previous studies about its effects on learning and education outcomes. While some studies (Bartlett, 2018; Elashhab, 2020; Goli, 2023; Hungwe, 2019; Llanes & Cots, 2020; Yafele, 2021; Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022) found translanguaging to be an effective pedagogical practice, others (Allard, 2017; Hopp et al., 2021; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2021; Wang, 2021) found it ineffective. This study was thus conducted to fill this research gap.

English is taught as a second language in Bhutan (see Bolton et al., 2020; Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024), and it has served as a medium of instruction at all levels of education since the early 1960s. Bhutan is one of the long-standing EMI contexts in Asia, with teachers required by policy to use English in the classroom despite several research studies showing the benefits of translanguaging in English classrooms. English plays a significant role in Bhutan as an intra and inter-lingua franca (Wangdi & Dhendup, 2024). For this reason, English is taught as a compulsory subject at all levels of education in Bhutan to prepare Bhutanese students to be effective communicators, critical readers, and creative inquirers.

Regarding reading, the National School English Curriculum Framework of Bhutan (classes PP – XII, 2022) states that:

Learners need to be discerning readers who possess broad world views while staying rooted in the Bhutanese ethos by staying well-informed and self-directed. For this, learners need to develop the skill to process and evaluate information closely, critically, and judiciously according to purpose, audience culture, and context (National School English Curriculum Framework of Bhutan, 2022, p. 5).

Reading is regarded as an essential skill in Bhutan, which students must develop because English courses are predominantly literature-based (e.g., short stories, poems, plays, novels, and essays). Moreover, to learn and comprehend the content in textbooks for subjects such as science, geography, history, economics, and others, Bhutanese students are required to have relatively advanced English reading skills, as all textbooks are in English. By class VIII (at the level of current participants), students should:

Read fluently and demonstrate comprehension of grade-appropriate texts with challenging themes and vocabulary from a variety of texts (fiction and non-fiction); view and demonstrate comprehension of visual texts with complex ideas and specialized features (e.g., websites, reference books, magazines); use a variety of strategies to construct and confirm meaning, and evaluate texts in different media and technologies; understand and derive meaning from the structures and features of a range of texts; read academic articles to garner information and ideas; analyze how an author's choices of text structure create effects such as mystery, tension, and surprise, and be able to read relevant major literary works from Bhutan and other countries to reflect on the cultural and fundamental values like Truth, Goodness and Beauty. (see National School English Curriculum Framework of Bhutan, 2022, p. 22).

However, Bhutanese students continue to struggle to meet the required reading skills. Research has noted that among the four strands of language (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), Bhutanese students performed the lowest in their reading

sections of the Bhutanese high-stakes examination (see [Lhamo & Sakulwongs, 2023](#)). This study was conducted in response to this issue, with the hope that the findings will help improve the reading comprehension skills of English learners, such as Bhutanese students, who are struggling to perform better in reading comprehension tests or who lack reading skills. This study investigates the effect of using the translanguaging approach in the classroom on students' reading comprehension skills. The findings of this study are also expected to serve as a guideline for policymakers who are unsure whether L1 or students' language repertoire should be allowed in English classrooms. More importantly, the findings of this study will benefit teachers by enabling them to implement the current evidence-based translanguaging practice in their respective contexts to teach English reading discourse if it proves effective. To this end, this study seeks to answer the following two research questions.

1. To what degree does the implementation of translanguaging in the English classroom contribute to the improvement of learners' English reading comprehension skills?
2. How do learners perceive the translanguaging approach in the context?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Translanguaging for This Study

Translanguaging, or the use of multiple languages in the teaching process, can be traced back to its origins in Wales, where teachers pioneered the practice by incorporating both Welsh and English to instruct English language skills ([García & Kleyn, 2016](#)). This early adoption of translanguaging in Wales serves as a significant historical reference point, highlighting its effectiveness and impact on language education practices. Today, the term "translanguaging" has multiple definitions based on practitioners' conceptualizations and practices in their respective contexts. In this study, translanguaging is defined as the use of two or three languages (English, Dzongkha, and Nepali) by teachers and students in English classrooms to help add meaning to the content and maximize students' understanding of the lesson. This definition aligns with previous definitions (see [García & Lin, 2017](#); [Wei, 2018](#)).

Translanguaging has been widely recognized for its positive impact on various aspects of language education. Research by [Cenoz and Gorter \(2021\)](#) suggests that translanguaging supports students' reading comprehension, linguistic acquisition, and academic performance. Moreover, it has been observed to mitigate boredom among students and enhance their active participation in the classroom ([Kwihangana, 2021](#)). The practice of translanguaging is commonly employed in bilingual/multilingual contexts for teaching English, with numerous studies supporting its benefits ([Elashhab, 2020](#); [Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022](#)). These studies highlight the effectiveness of translanguaging as an instructional strategy for promoting language development and positive learning outcomes.

2.2 Related Studies

Many empirical studies have been conducted in recent years, weighing the benefits of the translanguaging approach to teaching and learning. Most of these

studies have investigated the impact of the translanguaging approach on students' language development. [Llanes and Cots \(2020\)](#), for instance, explored the effects of incorporating translanguaging/plurilingual pedagogy on students' English language proficiency. They concluded that translanguaging is an effective pedagogical approach that helps students improve their English language proficiency in terms of fluency, accuracy, lexical knowledge, and grammatical complexity. Students in the translanguaging group performed better than those in the monolingual group in the proficiency test.

In another study investigating the impact of translanguaging on learners' four language skills (reading, writing, speaking, and listening), [Yuzlu and Dikilitas \(2022\)](#) reported that translanguaging helped their participants improve four primary language skills, and students acknowledged the use of translanguaging in the English classroom. Likewise, [Elashhab \(2020\)](#) highlighted how translanguaging enhances students' language communication skills, while [Bartlett \(2018\)](#) revealed its positive impact on English language usage, outcomes, retention, and motivation to learn.

[Hungwe \(2019\)](#) examined the effects of translanguaging on reading comprehension and found that allowing students to utilize their available languages contributes to better meaning-making and a deeper understanding of texts. Furthermore, [Goli \(2023\)](#) emphasizes that the translanguaging approach improves learners' motivation, confidence, and active participation in the classroom by allowing them to understand complex texts and engage in higher cognitive processes in their first language (L1). [Yafele \(2021\)](#) also recognizes the benefits of translanguaging in the English classroom, noting that it improves students' reading comprehension abilities and performance. The author emphasizes that language alternation promotes students' confidence, helps them interpret and understand texts, and makes learning more enjoyable.

While the studies above support the effectiveness of translanguaging in enhancing students' language learning and academic outcomes, there are opposing viewpoints. [Qureshi and Aljanadbah \(2021\)](#) found no significant difference in the scores of students taught using translanguaging compared to those taught with regular monolingual instructions. Likewise, [Allard \(2017\)](#) and [Wang \(2021\)](#) argue against the use of translanguaging in the English classroom, stating that it does not significantly contribute to understanding content, material retention, or overall language development. [Hopp et al. \(2021\)](#), in their investigation on the impact of the translanguaging approach on students' vocabulary, grammar, and metalinguistic awareness, concluded that there was no significant difference in performance compared to students who received monolingual instruction alone.

To shed more light on these inconsistent claims regarding the impact of the translanguaging approach on students' learning and academic outcomes, several researchers have explored the perceptions of educational stakeholders, teachers, and students on translanguaging ([Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2021](#); [Karabassova & San Isidro, 2020](#); [Liu & Fang, 2022](#); [Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2021](#); [Moody et al., 2019](#); [Romanowski, 2020](#)). The majority of these studies have reported positive perceptions toward translanguaging. For instance, [Mbirimi-Hungwe \(2021\)](#) discovered that students in an African context acknowledged the use of translanguaging to discuss reading texts, emphasizing its role in enhancing meaning-making and knowledge construction. Similarly, [Romanowski \(2020\)](#) in Poland and [Moody et al. \(2019\)](#) in the Southwestern United States found that their participants displayed positive perceptions

towards the use of translanguaging as an instructional approach. These findings provide additional evidence of the widespread recognition and acceptance of translanguaging as a beneficial pedagogical practice across diverse geographical and linguistic contexts.

However, [Al-Bataineh and Gallagher \(2021\)](#) found ambivalent perceptions among their participants. Some recognized the linguistic benefits of translanguaging, while others expressed reservations, particularly in written discourse and for young learners. [Fang and Liu \(2020\)](#) found that Chinese students held neutral to positive perceptions of translanguaging practice in the classroom. Overall, student perceptions of translanguaging are inconclusive. The pattern of previous research findings suggests the need for additional research in various educational contexts to gain a more comprehensive understanding of learners' perspectives on translanguaging.

3. METHODS

3.1 Context of the Study

Translanguaging has become a widespread practice throughout the South Asian region ([Sah & Kubota, 2022](#)), including Bhutan, where English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has long been established. However, research in Bhutan is not as dynamic as in other countries. There is a lack of evidence to compare and discuss whether translanguaging is actively practiced alongside the EMI policy. Nevertheless, many Bhutanese educational scholars and practitioners acknowledge that code-switching, code-mixing, and translanguaging occur unintentionally in schools and institutions in Bhutan. As noted by [Shimray and Wangdi \(2023\)](#), Bhutanese teachers often use students' first language (L1) to explain complex concepts in English language classrooms. The practice is especially prevalent in rural Bhutanese schools, where students generally have lower English proficiency, such as in Denchukha Lower Secondary School. This remote school, located in one of the far-flung villages, Dorokha, Samtse district, Bhutan, has approximately 312 students and 18 teaching staff. The school was chosen based on the criteria that most students speak at least two languages (Nepali and Dzongkha) besides English. Most of the students in this school spoke Lotshamkha (Nepali) as their first language since it is located in the southern part of Bhutan. Bhutan is a multicultural and multilingual country with many people speaking more than two to three languages. In this context, if proven effective, incorporating translanguaging approaches in English classrooms could be highly beneficial.

3.2 Research Design and Participants

A quasi-experimental design was employed due to the lack of proper randomization for the control group, which served as a comparison group without any treatment (see [Rogers & Revesz, 2019](#)). The groups could not be randomized because the selected school only had two groups of grade eight students. The homogeneity of participants' baseline reading comprehension abilities was measured using pre-test scores, with the experimental group averaging 8.75 and the control group averaging

8.82 out of 20. These students studied ‘English Reading and Literature for Class VIII,’ published by the Royal Education Council (REC) of Bhutan in 2022.

Initially, there were 33 students in the experimental group and 32 in the control group. However, the scores of some students were excluded from the final analysis due to incomplete data. For example, one student from each section missed the pre-test, one from the experimental group, and two from the control group missed the post-test. Additionally, data from two students in the experimental group and one in the control group were excluded because they had absented themselves more than two times from the class. The final sample included 56 students (33 male and 23 female), with 28 students in each group. Their ages ranged from 14 to 16, and they spoke Nepali, Tshangla, Dzongkha, and English. Most participants (51 students) spoke Nepali as their first language, with a few speaking Tshangla (3) and Dzongkha (2). Notably, all students could communicate in at least three languages (Nepali, Dzongkha, and English), and some spoke four, including Tshangla.

3.3 Measures

3.3.1 Pre- and post-test

Researchers developed a single set of questions for both pre-test and post-test to measure students’ reading comprehension skills. The question items were verified and validated by two experts who are English teachers with over 15 years of experience in Bhutan. The final set included five demographic items (student ID, age, gender, section, and the number of languages they speak/write) and 20 multiple-choice items based on three reading texts: a poem, an essay, and a short story from the course textbook designed by the REC of Bhutan for grade eight. Texts were the poem ‘Drop a Pebble in the Water’ by James W. Foley (5 questions), the essay ‘Prayer Flags Blowing in the Wind’ by Gustasp Irani (10 questions), and the short story ‘The Red Sweater’ by Mark Hager (5 questions). The study focused on these three texts because teaching them required almost a week each, given their length and associated activities such as group discussions, dramas, poem recitations, and reading comprehension exercises.

3.3.2 Survey questionnaire, interview, and observation

The survey questionnaire, developed by the researchers, comprised 20 items emphasizing the potential advantages and disadvantages of translanguaging for secondary students, particularly its role in understanding reading discourse. Before administration, the items were verified by experts and pilot-tested with 15 random students to ensure reliability using the Cronbach Alpha Coefficient test, yielding a value of .88, indicating good reliability.

Interview questions were pilot-tested with two random students to ensure alignment with research objectives. Sample guiding questions included: “What is your opinion about the use of the translanguaging approach in the classroom?” “How did you feel when a teacher used a translanguaging approach in the classroom?” “Do you think teachers and students should be allowed to use the translanguaging approach at schools? Why?” and “In your opinion, what are some advantages/disadvantages of using the translanguaging approach in the English classroom?” and several questions

followed up based on the participants' responses. Interviews were conducted in the language of students' choice (such as in Dzongkha or Nepali) to gain a deeper understanding of their views.

Furthermore, the researchers kept an observation record to support the overall findings on the impact of translanguaging as a pedagogical approach to teaching English language learners.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

The second author collected the data at Denchuka Middle Secondary School, Samtse District, Bhutan, over approximately three weeks. The detailed process of data collection is explained below.

3.4.1 Treatment

The experimental and control groups were taught by the same English teacher, fluent in Nepali, Dzongkha, and English, and could communicate effectively in Tshangla. Following the Bhutan Ministry of Education curriculum, the teacher employed various instructional practices and pedagogical approaches, such as direct instruction, cooperative learning, and reading aloud, among others, to teach English literature, such as poems, stories, and essays, to both the experimental and control groups. The sole distinction between the experimental and control groups was that the participants of the translanguaging group had the liberty to use their preferred languages (Nepali, Dzongkha, and English) during classroom activities. In contrast, the control group adhered to the conventional monolingual approach following Bhutan's English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy. During the treatment, the teacher's instruction followed a structured approach consisting of pre-reading, while-reading, and post-reading activities for each session in both groups (see Appendix A for details).

3.4.2 Test data collection

Before collecting data, informed consent was obtained from the head of the school, parents, and students. After obtaining consent, the English teacher briefed students in the experimental group about translanguaging as operationalized in this study and said that it would not affect their regular academic curriculum and grades. A pre-test that lasted for 35 minutes was administered to the experimental and control groups during co-curricular classes a week before the intervention. The experimental group then followed a translanguaging approach using English, Dzongkha, and Nepali, while the control group followed a monolingual (only English) approach. The intervention lasted for three weeks (50 minutes x 6 days x 3 weeks = 15 hours), more than it should have been because the teacher followed the course curriculum scheduled by the institutions. This was done on purpose so that it does not affect the actual academic calendar and plans of the school and students' learning. After the intervention, a post-test was again administered to both groups during one co-curricular class. The post-test also lasted for 35 minutes.

3.4.3 Questionnaire data collection

After the post-test, a questionnaire was administered to the experimental group to assess participants' perceptions of the translanguaging approach. Participants completed the questionnaire via Google Forms in the school's ICT room, taking an average of 20 minutes.

3.4.4 Interview and observation data collection

The researchers recruited 11 students (pseudonyms S1 to S11) for follow-up interviews. Researchers only considered participants who expressed a willingness to participate. The semi-structured interview was conducted in the participants' first languages (Dzongkha and Nepali) and in bilingual (L1 and English mixed). Participants were given the option of choosing their preferred mode of communication. The interviews averaged 10 minutes per student and were recorded with the participants' permission. The interview data was transcribed and translated into English with the help of language experts for analysis.

Furthermore, the researchers took notes and documented observations after each session with the translanguaging group for one week. This was done to determine whether or not students benefit from translanguaging and how they use their language repertoire to learn the lessons. The researchers stopped documenting once similar observations were noted.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Tests data analysis

Pre- and post-test data were analyzed using SPSS version 26. An independent sample t-test was used to compare the mean scores of the pre-and post-test of the experimental and the control group to determine significant differences in post-test scores after the intervention.

3.5.2 Questionnaire data analysis

The questionnaire data were imported into SPSS, and the percentage of each Likert scale item was calculated and grouped into three categories: strongly agree/agree, neutral, and strongly disagree/disagree.

3.5.3 Interview and observation data analysis

Interview and observation data were thematically analyzed using [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) guideline, which includes getting familiar with the data, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Various measures were undertaken to ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the qualitative findings. During the coding stage, two researchers independently conducted the coding process and subsequently compared their results before reaching a consensus on the themes. According to [O'Connor and Joffe \(2020\)](#), it is important to have at least two coders to establish intercoder reliability. Before

coding, member checking was conducted, wherein the transcribed data from the interviews were shared in the classroom, and students were invited to provide feedback on its accuracy. Additionally, the two researchers carefully reviewed and analyzed the codes repeatedly before clustering them into meaningful themes. Before reporting the findings, the generated codes, themes, transcriptions, and field notes were reviewed by an expert for an audit trail to enhance the trustworthiness of the research process and findings.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Test Results

An independent sample t-test was performed to answer the first research question. Before that, the normality of the data set was tested, revealing that the data was normally distributed for both the experimental (skewness = -0.152 and Kurtosis = 1.845) and control (skewness = -0.458 and Kurtosis = -0.230) groups, with z-values between - 1.96 and +1.96. The independent sample t-test results are presented in Table 1. The results showed that the experimental group, which followed the translanguaging approach, outperformed the control group, which followed the conventional monolingual approach. Although there was no significant difference in the average mean scores of the two groups in the pre-test, there was a significant difference in the post-test scores. The average mean score of the experimental group was 12.68 (SD = 2.21) out of 20, which was 1.97 (12.68 - 10.71) points higher than the control group. This difference was significant at $p < 0.05$. These findings suggest that the translanguaging approach could be an effective method to enhance students' reading comprehension skills when measured by their obtained scores on the reading comprehension test.

Table 1. Comparison of reading comprehension scores between the experimental and control groups.

Groups	Pre-test		Post-test		F	t value	2-tailed sig
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			
Exp (n=28)	8.75	2.41	12.68*	2.21	0.037	-0.114	0.910
Ctrl (n=28)	8.82	2.29	10.71*	2.41	0.032	3.300	0.002*

Note. * $p < 0.05$

4.2 Questionnaire Results

The questionnaire results are tabulated in three columns (strongly agree/agree, neutral, and disagree/agree) and are descriptively presented in Table 2. The overall result revealed that the majority of the participants held positive perceptions of the translanguaging approach in the English classroom. The individual item analysis indicated that more than 80% of the participants recommended translanguaging as a good practice for bilingual/multilingual contexts (Items 1, 2 and 20), such as Bhutan. They believed teachers should use translanguaging to teach English subjects (Items 3 and 17). Participants also reported that translanguaging motivated them to learn English (Items 4 and 19) and helped them participate in classroom discussions (Items

5 and 11). Not only did participants perceive translanguaging as a good practice for students, but also the majority of them agreed that translanguaging helped them understand teachers' instruction better (Item 6), improved reading comprehension skills (Items 7 & 10), enhanced vocabulary knowledge (Item 8), understood reading materials and classroom discussions better (Item 9 and 12), and improved classroom environment (Item 13). They also acknowledged that translanguaging helped them make themselves comfortable in the classroom (Item 14) and less bored (see Items 15 and 18). That said, a minority of participants reported that translanguaging was confusing for them (item 16).

Table 2. Participants' responses to the questionnaire in percentage (%) (N = 28).

Items	Strongly agree/ agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
1. Translanguaging is a good practice for secondary students.	85.70	10.70	3.60
2. Translanguaging is helpful for bilingual/multilingual secondary students.	82.14	10.72	7.14
3. Teachers should use translanguaging in English classrooms.	71.44	17.85	10.71
4. Translanguaging motivated me to learn English.	89.29	3.56	7.15
5. Translanguaging motivated me to participate in classroom discussions.	85.74	10.71	3.56
6. Translanguaging helped me understand teachers' instructions better.	85.72	20.71	3.57
7. Translanguaging helped me improve my reading comprehension skills.	82.14	10.71	7.15
8. Translanguaging helped me improve my vocabulary.	92.86	3.57	3.57
9. Translanguaging helped me understand reading materials (poem, essay, short story).	82.14	17.86	0.00
10. Translanguaging helped me answer the questions on the reading materials (poem, essay, short story) correctly and accurately.	67.87	12.42	10.71
11. Translanguaging helped me participate/engage in discussions with my classmates.	82.14	14.29	3.57
12. Translanguaging helped me understand discussions with my classmates.	96.43	3.57	0.00
13. Translanguaging helped me improve the classroom environment.	67.86	28.57	3.57
14. Translanguaging helped me feel relaxed in the classroom.	92.86	3.57	3.57
15. Translanguaging helped me feel less bored learning English.	82.16	7.14	10.71
16. Translanguaging was confusing for me.	28.57	7.14	64.29
17. Teachers should not use translanguaging in the English language classroom	25.00	25.00	50.00
18. I felt bored when teachers used translanguaging in the classroom	35.71	14.29	50.00
19. I felt less motivated to learn English when teachers used translanguaging in the classroom	25.00	32.14	42.86
20. Translanguaging is not appropriate for us.	21.43	28.57	50.00

4.3 Interviews and Observations Results

The interviews and observations were done to corroborate the quantitative findings of the survey. Three major themes emerged: limited support for

translanguaging, perceived advantages of translanguaging, and perceived disadvantages of translanguaging.

4.3.1 *Limited support for translanguaging*

In the interviews, some participants (S2, S4, S7, and S10) mentioned that they were not allowed to use their language repertoire other than English in the classroom and within the school campus. This finding indicates that students in this context lack support from their teachers and institutions in using their other language abilities to learn English. On the other hand, it demonstrates that teachers and institutions diligently adhere to the EMI policy enforced by the Ministry of Education of Bhutan. The following excerpts from interviews support this claim:

- (1) I felt comfortable when my teacher allowed us to use Nepali and Dzongkha in the English classroom. However, we are usually not allowed to use Nepali and Dzongkha in English classrooms. (S2)
- (2) Translanguaging is good, but we are not allowed to use translanguaging on the school campus. (S4)
- (3) I think translanguaging has both advantages and disadvantages, but students are not allowed to use Dzongkha and Nepali in English classrooms. Our teacher encourages us to speak English more in school. (S7)

4.3.2 *Perceived advantages of translanguaging*

The majority of the participants in the interviews reported that the translanguaging approach helped them in many ways. For instance, participants S1, S3, S4, S5, S6, S9, S10, and S11 mentioned that translanguaging helped them understand the lesson (poem, essay, and short story) better and more quickly. They could use their language resources, such as their L1, to translate and make concepts and tasks understandable (S4). Further, S6 and S9 stated that they felt like participating more by volunteering in the classroom when translanguaging was in practice. Some excerpts to support these findings are given below:

- (4) I feel comfortable when the teacher uses translanguaging because it helps us understand the lesson better. I can also remember vocabulary better because I can translate it into my mother tongue. (S3)
- (5) Translanguaging helped me to understand poems, short stories, and essays better because we can ask our friends to help us explain in our first language if we do not understand it. (S6)
- (6) I think translanguaging is good for students. My friends participate more in the classroom when the teacher uses translanguaging because they speak confidently when using Dzongkha and Nepali. (S10)

Moreover, similar to what participants reported in their interviews, we observed students actively using their language repertoire to learn vocabulary in the classroom. The following examples showcase the voices of these students.

- (7) Student 1 : *Pebble baneko artha kae-o.* (Nepali) (English translation: What is the meaning of Pebble?)
Student 2 : *Gitti hoi na?* (Nepali) (English translation: Isn't it gravel/pebble?).
Student 1 : *Okay, la la. Thank you.* (Nepali) (English translation: Okay, okay. Thank you.)

Likewise, in the interviews, participants said that translanguaging helped them better remember the vocabulary and understand the content because they could discuss vocabulary meanings with their friends in their mother tongue. Further, most participants acknowledged that translanguaging motivated them to study English and participate in classroom activities such as group discussions. Below are excerpts illustrating the discussions within the translanguaging group of students:

- (8) Student 1 : *Kina Janda laga-un cha?* (Nepali) (English translation: Why do we hoist prayer flags?)
Student 2 : *Molay tha tsa nai. Teacher lai sod dai ra yer nu ni.* (Nepali) (English translation: I do not know. Try asking the teacher).
Student 1 : *Choe gi shoe ga.* (Dzongkha) (English translation: Do you know?)
Student 3 : *Me shay!* (Dzongkha) (English translation: I do not know)
Student 1 : *Teacher, hamilai kina janda laga-un cha?* (Nepali) (English translation: Teacher, why do we hoist prayer flags?)
Teacher : *Hamilai Janda sapai ko kushi ko lagi, shanti ko lagi, ra dhan pangu ko lagi laga-un cha.* (Nepali) (English translation: We hoist prayer flags for the happiness, peace, and prosperity of all sentient beings.)

4.3.3 Perceived disadvantages of translanguaging

While many participants recognized the benefits of using translanguaging as an approach to teaching and learning English, a few (S2, S5, S7, and S8) expressed concerns that translanguaging may have an adverse impact on their English speaking and listening skills. For example, S7 expressed concerns about how translanguaging might affect students' confidence in speaking English later in life, while S8 pointed out that it could harm their English pronunciation. Overall, these minority participants felt that translanguaging was limiting their exposure to the target English language. Excerpts from interviews are given below to support this claim:

- (9) In my opinion, translanguaging is not good for students because many of my friends do not speak English in class. They use Nepali and Dzongkha more than English. It may lower their confidence in speaking English in the future. (S2)
- (10) The use of too much Nepali will make us forget Dzongkha and the English language. We may also forget English words if we continue using Nepali and Dzongkha in the classroom. (S5)
- (11) I think translanguaging should not be used in the English classroom because I cannot practice pronunciation. (S8)

5. DISCUSSION

This study investigated the impact of the translanguaging approach on Bhutanese English learners' reading comprehension skills. It explored their perceptions of translanguaging as a potential pedagogical practice in the English classroom. The overall findings of this study support the benefits of using both teachers' and students'

full language repertoire in learning English. This approach proves particularly beneficial in comprehending English literature reading discourses.

The initial findings of this study indicated that the translanguaging approach positively impacted students' reading comprehension skills, as evidenced by their improved post-test performance, measured in terms of the number of correct answers. There was a significant difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups, with students who followed the translanguaging approach outperforming those who followed the conventional monolingual (only English) approach. This finding aligns with previous research (Hungwe, 2019; Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2022; Namrullah & Nasrullah, 2020) that posits translanguaging as an effective pedagogical approach for improving reading comprehension skills. However, it contrasts with studies that discourage the use of translanguaging in English classrooms (Allard, 2017; Hopp et al., 2021; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2021; Wang, 2021).

Smith et al. (2021) highlighted that reading comprehension skills are the backbone of learners' academic performance. Therefore, given the verified positive impact of the translanguaging approach on students' reading comprehension, institutions, and teachers are encouraged to incorporate translanguaging into English classrooms. This could help learners improve their reading comprehension and overall academic performance. Language policymakers, especially those enforcing English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI), should develop appropriate strategies to balance language policy with practices that benefit language learners.

Given the new research evidence and findings, it is imperative to reevaluate the EMI or monolingual instructional policy. Policymakers must be aware that prevailing monolingual policies in their respective contexts might be grounded in outdated literature and research evidence. Translanguaging may benefit both teachers and learners, particularly in contexts where learners' language proficiency is low and motivation to learn English is lacking, such as in Bhutan's rural context (Wangdi & Rai, 2022). Research has shown that using students' L1 or language repertoire can reduce boredom, enhance the classroom environment, lower learning anxiety, and motivate learning (Shimray & Wangdi, 2023). Participants in this study also expressed greater comfort in the classroom when allowed to use their mother tongue. Thus, language teachers are recommended to incorporate students' language repertoire as a valuable resource for teaching English.

Nevertheless, the importance of using only English as an instructional method should not be sidelined. Monolingual instruction of the target language in the classroom increases exposure to that language, which, according to Krashen (1981), helps maximize students' target language acquisition. For this reason, although the findings of this study indicated that the use of the translanguaging approach might aid students' language development, the potential downsides of translanguaging should also be considered before implementation. Some empirical studies (Hopp et al., 2021; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2021; Wang, 2021) highlight the need to weigh its implications carefully.

Despite limited support from policy, institutions, and teachers for students to use their language repertoires, the findings revealed that most participants maintained positive perceptions of the translanguaging approach. These findings align with previous studies conducted in diverse contexts (Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2021; Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2021; Moody et al., 2019; Romanowski, 2020). Meanwhile, the

present participants regarded translanguaging as a suitable pedagogical approach for English instruction and reported that it helps improve their vocabulary knowledge retention and reading comprehension skills. The findings also indicated that translanguaging could serve as an effective pedagogical strategy to enhance classroom participation. Most participants felt more inclined to participate when translanguaging was permitted in English classrooms. Observation data revealed that students actively participate in the ongoing discussion when they can use their language repertoire (e.g., Nepali and Dzongkha) in English classes. This finding is consistent with [Kwihangana \(2021\)](#), who reported that translanguaging influences student engagement positively and their involvement in learning.

Furthermore, most participants agree that translanguaging made them feel more comfortable, relaxed, and less bored during classroom activities. They emphasized that translanguaging contributed significantly to their comprehension of various reading materials, such as poems, stories, and essays. However, the perceived disadvantages of translanguaging (no matter how small they are) should not be overlooked. Some participants disliked the approach, expressing concerns that overuse of translanguaging might restrict their exposure to English (the target language), hinder their confidence in speaking English, and impede their ability to learn proper pronunciation. Therefore, if translanguaging is implemented in ESL/EFL contexts, language teachers need to focus on how not to overdo translanguaging. As [Shimray and Wangdi \(2023\)](#) noted, balancing the use of L1 and the target language might help students acquire or learn the target language more effectively.

6. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Several conclusions can be drawn from the findings of this study. First, the translanguaging approach is beneficial for students to engage in ESL/EFL learning, as it helps enhance their reading comprehension skills. The translanguaging group in this study outperformed their counterparts in the monolingual group on the reading comprehension test. Translanguaging may be especially advantageous for students in contexts such as Bhutan, where English language courses are predominantly literature-based (including poems, short stories, and essays) that demand reasonable reading comprehension skills. Further, translanguaging can be implemented in the context where English is used as the medium of instruction for other subjects, and the textbooks contain English texts similar to the context of this study.

Second, many participants in this study held positive perceptions of translanguaging because they believed that the approach has the potential to increase their participation in the classroom, expand their vocabulary, improve their lesson comprehension, and improve the classroom environment while also reducing their anxiety and boredom.

Further research is needed in the EMI contexts to confirm the present findings and explore learners' preferences for instructional methods. While some participants in this study supported translanguaging, others opposed it. Similarly, while many studies have evidenced that the translanguaging approach in English classrooms is beneficial for students ([Bartlett, 2018](#); [Elashhab, 2020](#); [Hungwe, 2019](#); [Llanes & Cots, 2020](#)), others have reported otherwise ([Hopp et al., 2021](#); [Qureshi & Aljanadbah,](#)

2021). These studies suggest that the impact of translanguaging on English learning is still debatable and inconclusive.

Therefore, although the overall findings of this study support many previous studies favoring the translanguaging approach, we recommend that policymakers in EMI contexts, including Bhutan, investigate and evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of using monolingual (only English) and translanguaging (more than two languages) approaches to teach English and practice using the best approach in their respective contexts for enhancing students' learning.

Finally, as with any research, this study has some limitations. Given that the study was conducted in a small remote school in Bhutan, researchers had limited control over the sample size, with only two sections of slightly more than 30 students each. Future researchers should conduct similar studies with larger sample sizes. Additionally, to corroborate the present findings, future studies should investigate the impact of translanguaging on other aspects of language skills beyond reading comprehension. Research at different educational levels may also provide better insights into the translanguaging approach.

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APPENDIX

Pre-Reading: In the pre-reading phase, both the teacher and students engaged in discussing the contextual background of the story, poem, or essay that they were learning in that session. To do so, the teacher wrote the title of the poem/story/essay on the board. The teacher then posed several questions using the English language, such as what the poem/story/essay could be about. Who has written the poem/story/essay? Where can we find pebbles? And so forth to both the experimental and control groups (taught at different hours and classrooms) to help learners develop schematic knowledge. While doing this, both the teacher and students in the translanguaging group used their language repertoire to discuss in the classroom. Both the teacher and students in the control group used only English. The discussion was followed by vocabulary learning. For this, the students were given flashcards consisting of 5 to 10 words each day from the reading text. They were asked to discuss the given words and write the meaning, a synonym, and a sentence for each word in a group of three/four. For this, the translanguaging group was allowed to use both monolingual and bilingual dictionaries (English and Dzongkha), while the control group used monolingual (English only) dictionaries. Although in the experimental group, almost all took advantage of translating the meaning of vocabulary using the language of their preference, none wrote the meaning, synonym, and sentence of the given words in their first language. Everybody wrote in English only.

While Reading: This phase consisted of two main exercises: summarizing paragraphs and retelling stories, poems, and essays to the class. Firstly, the teacher read aloud and explained all paragraphs to the class in English medium to both groups. Then, students were individually instructed to read the assigned paragraphs multiple times within a specified timeframe and then summarize them using their own words and understanding. Subsequently, students were paired up to compare and discuss their written summaries, reaching a consensus agreement before rewriting them. Each pair of students was then required to share their summary with the class. During this phase, students in the translanguaging group were provided with the option to use their preferred languages to write the summary, discuss, rewrite, and share, while the control group exclusively used English. The second phase involved the retelling of the entire story, poem, or essay in class. Each student was tasked with orally retelling the piece. In this phase, all students in the translanguaging group retold the story, poem, or essay in Nepali and Dzongkha, whereas the control group used only English.

Post-Reading: In the post-reading phase, students were presented with follow-up reading comprehension questions, which were designed as open-ended questions and gap-filling exercises. In most instances, these tasks were assigned to pairs or groups of students to encourage collaborative learning and to make students use their language repertoire (especially the translanguaging group). During this stage, both the experimental and control groups received the reading comprehension questions in English. However, in the translanguaging group, students were permitted to discuss the reading comprehension questions using any language of their choice. Nevertheless, they were instructed to provide written answers (only for open-ended questions) in either Dzongkha or English. In contrast, the control group exclusively used English for their discussions and written responses. Following the reading comprehension exercise, the students engaged in a discussion with the teacher. The teacher facilitated the discussion by reviewing the students' answers and providing feedback. Throughout the lesson, to encourage the translanguaging group to use their language repertoire, the teacher also tried to use the language of the students' preference. For instance, the teacher responded/discussed in Nepali when students started their discussion in Nepali.