

Comparative Efficacy of English-Only Policies and Multilingual Scaffolding: A Meta-Synthesis of Language Proficiency Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative meta-synthesis aims to examine the comparative impact of English-Only Policy (EOP) and multilingual scaffolding on student language proficiency. The core concepts investigated include fluency, comprehension, learner confidence, and classroom engagement. Utilizing a document analysis framework and thematic coding, the methodology synthesizes data from peer-reviewed ESL and EFL studies published between 2015 and 2025. Results reveal that EOP significantly improves oral fluency and structural accuracy but poses affective challenges for low-proficiency learners. Conversely, multilingual scaffolding effectively facilitates conceptual understanding and engagement but may not resolve foundational language deficits. The study concludes that both approaches are complementary, advocating for a context-responsive, hybrid instructional model that integrates both strategies to foster optimal and sustainable language acquisition outcomes.

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, being proficient in the English language has been one of the most crucial skills for students to survive in various fields. The ability to communicate effectively in English does not only open up opportunities for academic success but also improves employability and cross-cultural communication skills (Crystal, 2020). Current studies emphasize the importance of effective teaching methodologies, highlighting that both English Only Policies (EOP) and multilingual scaffolding can play important roles in enhancing language proficiency (Baker, 2021; Cummins, 2022). EOP promotes immersion in the English language, which has been shown to expedite language acquisition in certain contexts (Miller, 2021). Conversely, multilingual scaffolding makes use of a student's native language as a support mechanism during English language learning, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding and application of language concepts (Garcia & Wei, 2021). This debate reflects broader questions about how language proficiency is best developed and what pedagogical approaches are most effective in promoting both comprehension and communicative competence. Given the increasing linguistic diversity in classrooms worldwide, it is necessary to re-examine these approaches and their respective impacts on student proficiency.

However, recent developments in language education research have increasingly challenged the effectiveness of strict EOP, particularly in multilingual and low-proficiency contexts. Scholars argue that exclusive reliance on English may impose cognitive and affective barriers for learners, especially when they struggle to comprehend complex concepts. In response, multilingual scaffolding, often operationalized through code-switching and translanguaging, has emerged as a viable alternative. Code-switching enables teachers and learners to alternate between languages in a purposeful manner to facilitate understanding, clarify meaning, and maintain interaction (Ulfah and Perangin-angin, 2026). Suryarini (2022) further reports that teachers perceive code-switching as an essential instructional strategy that enhances comprehension and classroom participation.

The theoretical foundation of multilingual scaffolding can be traced to sociocultural perspectives on learning, particularly Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, which emphasizes the role of guided support in facilitating learning. From this perspective, the use of learners' first language is not a hindrance but a resource that can bridge gaps in understanding and support cognitive development. Contemporary studies reinforce this view, demonstrating that multilingual practices reduce cognitive load, increase learner confidence, and promote deeper engagement with instructional content (Garcia & Wei, 2021). Moreover, translanguaging has been shown to enhance metalinguistic awareness, enabling learners to compare and analyze linguistic structures across languages, thereby strengthening overall language proficiency.

At the national level, the Philippine context provides a compelling setting for examining this issue due to its inherently multilingual nature. Filipino

learners typically operate within a complex linguistic environment that includes English, Filipino, and various regional languages. In such contexts, the strict implementation of EOP presents practical challenges, as students often rely on their first language to process and understand new information. Studies conducted in Philippine classrooms indicate that code-switching is widely used as a natural and effective communication strategy. For instance, (Santos and Cabardo, 2021) found that the use of multiple languages in instruction enhances comprehension and facilitates more meaningful classroom interaction.

Additionally, learners' perceptions of code-switching in the Philippines further support its pedagogical value. (Raymunde, 2023) reports that students view code-switching as beneficial for clarifying complex ideas, reducing anxiety, and expressing themselves more confidently in classroom discussions. This is particularly relevant in English language learning, where students with varying proficiency levels may experience difficulty in fully understanding lessons delivered exclusively in English. At the same time, the importance of English proficiency in the Philippines cannot be overlooked, as it remains a key determinant of academic success and employability. This dual reality underscores the need to balance the goals of linguistic competence and accessibility in language instruction.

At the local level, particularly in the Visayas region, the dynamics of multilingualism are further intensified by the widespread use of Cebuano alongside English and Filipino. In such settings, teachers often adopt flexible language practices to address the diverse needs of learners. Code-switching becomes a practical strategy for bridging linguistic gaps and ensuring that all students can participate meaningfully in classroom activities. (Rihane, 2021) notes that code-switching serves various communicative functions, including clarification, emphasis, and relationship-building, all of which contribute to a more inclusive learning environment.

In light of these considerations, the present study seeks to compare the impact of English-Only Policy and multilingual scaffolding on student proficiency. By examining key dimensions such as fluency, comprehension, confidence, and classroom participation, this study aims to provide empirical evidence that can inform instructional practices and contribute to the development of more effective language teaching strategies. Ultimately, the findings of this research may support the formulation of a more balanced and context-responsive approach to language education, one that recognizes the value of both immersion and linguistic support in fostering meaningful and sustained language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Time-on-Task Hypothesis and Early SLA Theories

The foundational logic underpinning English-Only Policies is heavily reliant on early theories of second language acquisition (SLA), particularly those emphasizing maximum target language exposure and the "time-on-task" hypothesis (Carroll, 1963). In this traditional framework, the first language is conceptualized primarily as an impediment—a source of negative transfer or interference that disrupts the acquisition of English phonology, syntax, and semantics. Consequently, institutions enforce EOP to artificially simulate an immersive monolingual environment, theoretically forcing learners to process and produce the target language. This is often driven by the "maximum exposure myth," which erroneously posits that exclusive target language use is the only path to mastery (Benson, 2008).

The Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis

However, this monolingual paradigm has been heavily contested by modern cognitive SLA theories, most notably Jim Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis (Cummins, 1979). Cummins posits that bilingual and multilingual individuals do not possess separate, isolated linguistic systems in the brain; rather, they operate with a Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP). According to this framework, the cognitive and academic skills acquired in a learner's native language naturally transfer to and scaffold the acquisition of subsequent languages. Therefore, multilingual scaffolding does not dilute target language exposure; it provides the indispensable cognitive foundation required for understanding complex, abstract academic constructs. While EOP may foster Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS), it often fails to develop the Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) necessary for high-level academic success. Research indicates that students leveraging their L1 through scaffolding demonstrate deeper conceptual understanding, particularly in complex subjects like science (Cummins, 1979).

The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Furthermore, rigid EOP enforcement frequently triggers Stephen Krashen's concept of the "Affective Filter" (Krashen, 1982). When students are strictly forbidden from utilizing their primary means of expression, it induces high levels of language anxiety, lowers self-confidence, and erects an emotional barrier that actively prevents linguistic input from reaching the language acquisition device. A primary distinction between language policies lies in their orientation toward the learner's first language (L1). Multilingual scaffolding promotes additive bilingualism, where the L1 is valued and utilized to support the acquisition of an additional language (L2). In contrast, EOP often facilitates subtractive bilingualism, where the L1 is marginalized or replaced, potentially leading to "linguistic deprivation" and the "thinning" of student understanding.

Ecological Theory and Translanguaging

Translanguaging refers to the fluid discursive practice of drawing on one's full linguistic and semiotic repertoire—including gestures and multimodal

signs – to maximize communicative potential (García & Wei, 2014). Spontaneous translanguaging is a natural meaning-making process, while pedagogical translanguaging involves planned teacher strategies (e.g., multilingual planning for essays, bilingual glossaries) to achieve specific learning outcomes. Grounded in Leo van Lier's (2004) ecological theory, the classroom is viewed as a "linguistic ecosystem" where learning emerges through the perception of affordances (possibilities for action). EOP restricts these affordances by removing L1 tools, whereas multilingual scaffolding creates an "affordance-rich" environment that supports learner agency and reduces communication anxiety.

The Tripartite Model of Language Policy

The choice between EOP and scaffolding is analyzed through Bernard Spolsky's (2004) *Tripartite Model*, which identifies three interrelated components of language policy:

- *Language Practices*: The actual observable behaviors, which often include "clandestine" code-switching in EOP settings as teachers attempt to assist struggling students (Evans & Morrison, 2011).
- *Language Beliefs (Ideology)*: The values assigned to languages, such as the "maximum exposure myth" which posits that English mastery requires the total exclusion of other languages.
- *Language Management*: Explicit efforts to modify practices, such as the Philippine Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy versus historical English-only mandates.

A Transdisciplinary Framework for SLA

This meta-study is guided by the Douglas Fir Group's (2016) Transdisciplinary Framework for SLA. This framework conceptualizes language learning as a complex, dynamic, and holistic process situated across three levels of social activity:

- *Micro Level*: Social action and interaction, where "semiotic learning" occurs.
- *Meso Level*: Sociocultural institutions and communities that "socially gate" access to learning.
- *Macro Level*: Ideological structures that permeate all levels of instruction and identity work.

The framework's ten fundamental themes—including the recognition that variability is central to learning and that affect and emotion matter at all levels—provide a robust lens for evaluating the efficacy of different language policies (Douglas Fir Group, 2016).

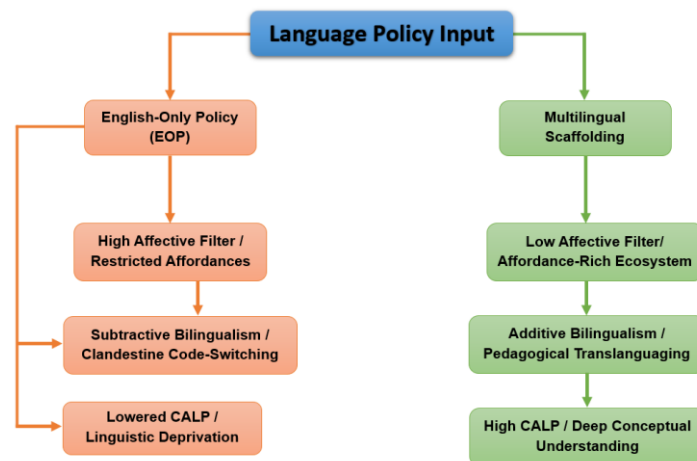


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework mapping the impact trajectories of language policies on student proficiency

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a rigorous qualitative meta-synthesis research design to seamlessly integrate, evaluate, and interpret the diverse findings from an extensive corpus of qualitative and mixed-methods primary studies. The core objective of this synthesis was to transcend the isolated, localized findings of individual primary studies and construct a holistic, higher-order, and globally applicable understanding of the comparative efficacy of English-only instruction versus multilingual scaffolding. By utilizing an interpretive paradigm, the synthesis examined not only the measurable, quantitative language proficiency outcomes but also the deeply nuanced contextual, socio-cultural, and pedagogical mechanisms that drive and shape these outcomes within the classroom ecology (Singay et al., 2026; Chong & Plonsky, 2021). Qualitative research synthesis allows for the generation of new theoretical frameworks by identifying commonalities and divergences across seemingly disparate educational contexts.

RESULTS

The reflexive thematic analysis and meta-synthesis of the comprehensive global corpus yielded five primary themes and one overarching meta-theme. This synthesis evaluates the multidimensional, deeply entrenched, and often contradictory impacts of instructional language policies on linguistic proficiency, cognitive development, pedagogical efficacy, and educational equity across diverse geographic and disciplinary contexts. Guided by established standards for the synthesis of qualitative health and educational research, such as the Enhancing Transparency in Reporting the Synthesis of Qualitative Research (ENTREQ) framework (Tong et al., 2012), the extracted data illuminate the severe tensions between macro-level policy directives and micro-level classroom realities. The synthesized data overwhelmingly indicate that the rigid enforcement of monolingual ideologies fundamentally clashes with the dynamic, heterogeneous linguistic realities of modern educational environments.

Theme 1: Cognitive Processing, Academic Comprehension, and the Illusion of Immersion

A pervasive and historically rooted assumption underlying English-Only Policies (EOP) is that maximum, unadulterated exposure to the target language correlates linearly and seamlessly with accelerated linguistic proficiency (Fang & Liu, 2020). Monoglossic ideologies traditionally assert that any reliance on a learner's first language (L1) impedes the acquisition of the target language. However, the synthesized data reveal that strict adherence to EOP frequently induces severe cognitive overload, particularly when language learners are actively engaging with complex, discipline-specific academic content (Ahmad, 2024). In stark contrast to monolingual paradigms, multilingual scaffolding serves as a vital cognitive bridge, significantly enhancing both immediate academic comprehension and the long-term integration of target linguistic structures (Alasmari et al., 2026).

In Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and medical education, the profound limitations of the English-only approach are starkly evident. A robust quasi-experimental study by Alasmari et al. (2026) evaluated 102 first-year medical and health science students navigating highly complex biology lectures in Saudi Arabia. The control group, subjected strictly to English-only instruction, reported experiencing severe cognitive strain and academic dissonance during the learning process. Only 32% of the students in the monolingual cohort felt that the approach reduced classroom distractions, and merely 56% believed that it actually aided their understanding of the scientific material.

Conversely, the experimental test group receiving planned, strategic multilingual scaffolding—integrating both Arabic and English explanations through pedagogical translanguaging—demonstrated statistically significant gains in post-test knowledge acquisition compared to the control group (Alasmari et al., 2026). Qualitative feedback from the experimental cohort was overwhelmingly positive: 86% of the translanguaging group reported reduced cognitive distractions, and an overwhelming 98% cited substantially improved understanding of the biological concepts. The qualitative data revealed that strategically utilizing the learners' L1 for core conceptual explanations allowed students to successfully bypass the linguistic bottleneck, allocating their working memory toward processing the underlying science rather than simply trying to decode the target language.

This profound cognitive affordance extends seamlessly into K-12 educational settings. Research demonstrates that utilizing structured multilingual scaffolding—such as facilitating peer sense-making in the L1 and developing cross-linguistic schema building—effectively activates students' prior knowledge (Fang & Liu, 2020).

Interestingly, reliance on multilingual scaffolding shifts dynamically in relation to the learner's existing English proficiency and the specific disciplinary demands of their coursework. Quantitative research from a Turkish university utilizing a partial English Medium Instruction (EMI) model uncovered an "apparent proficiency threshold" among students (Yuksel et al., 2025). For students in the social sciences, reliance on and positive attitudes toward translanguaging decreased significantly as their overall English proficiency

reached the B2 level of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. A Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) confirmed that proficiency was a significant predictor of translanguaging attitudes for social science students.

However, engineering students maintained highly positive attitudes toward translanguaging regardless of their measured English proficiency level (Yuksel et al., 2025). The MANOVA results showed no significant multivariate effect of proficiency in engineering programs. This indicates that the dense spatial, mathematical, and problem-solving demands inherent in STEM disciplines persistently necessitate the cognitive relief provided by the L1.

Theme 2: Longitudinal Academic Achievement and Trajectories of Proficiency

Proponents of English-Only Policies frequently point to rapid, observable short-term gains in basic conversational fluency resulting from strict immersion environments. However, the longitudinal data document a distinctly different and vastly more complex trajectory for the development of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) – the sophisticated academic register required to succeed in educational settings.

A monumental, decade-long longitudinal study tracked approximately 18,000 English-learner (EL) students within the Los Angeles Unified School District, meticulously comparing the academic and linguistic outcomes of English Immersion programs against bilingual and dual-language instruction models (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2014). While students enrolled in English immersion programs exhibited faster short-term progress in the earliest elementary grades, the trajectory eventually and inevitably inverted. Over the long term, students receiving sustained instruction in two-language classrooms caught up to, and subsequently surpassed, their English-immersion counterparts in both academic performance metrics and ultimate linguistic proficiency.

Specifically, EL students in bilingual programs grew at a rate equal to or faster than comparable students in strict English immersion settings in standardized test scores. Furthermore, a sub-study focusing specifically on Latino EL students found that while those in two-language programs were reclassified as "Fluent English Proficient" at a slower pace initially, they demonstrated significantly higher overall rates of reclassification by the end of high school (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2014).

These quantitative longitudinal findings are strongly corroborated by qualitative insights from dual-language immersion schools, which indicate that using the learners' L1 actively fortifies the meta-linguistic awareness necessary to master complex English syntax and vocabulary (Salman, 2024).

Table 1 outlines the comparative trajectories between the two pedagogical models synthesized from the corpus.

Pedagogical Model	Short-Term Linguistic Outcomes	Long-Term Linguistic and Academic Outcomes
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English-Only Immersion (EOP)	Rapid acquisition of conversational vocabulary; emergence of superficial Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS).	Frequent plateau in deep Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP); lower high-school reclassification rates; increased risk of academic marginalization (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2014).
Multilingual Scaffolding / Dual-Language	Slower initial emergence of English output as learners process biliterate foundations and cross-linguistic mapping.	Superior Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP); higher ultimate reclassification rates; enhanced meta-linguistic awareness (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2014; Salman, 2024).

Theme 3: The Discrepancy Between Monolingual Ideologies and Classroom Implementation Realities

A prominent theme emerging consistently from the global literature is the severe distressful dissonance between macro-level institutional language policies and micro-level classroom practices. In the highly commodified context of Australia's English Language Intensive Courses for Overseas Students (ELICOS) sector, a mixed-methods study uncovered a profound discrepancy between theoretical policy beliefs and the practical reality of implementation (Kharchenko & Chappell, 2019). The ELICOS sector officially subjects both teachers and international students to strict English-only mandates. However, qualitative group interviews and survey data revealed that educators view the strict application of an English-Only Policy as elusive, utopian, and highly problematic. Teachers reported experiencing significant emotional strain, feeling constantly torn between acting as a supportive facilitator to struggling students and serving as a rigid disciplinarian enforcing unnatural linguistic boundaries.

This subterranean reality of spontaneous translanguaging in the face of monolingual mandates is echoed globally. In contexts where the ideology of maximum English exposure is deeply entrenched, observational classroom data reveals a starkly different reality. In Chinese EFL contexts, teachers and students fluidly and naturally engage in translanguaging to facilitate meaning-making and manage classroom behavior (Fang & Liu, 2020). In Zimbabwe, where centralized educational policies explicitly restrict L1 use in upper grades, qualitative research found teachers unconsciously utilizing translanguaging as

an essential instructional strategy to ensure true concept mastery in mathematics and science (Nhongo & Tshotsho, 2019).

The persistence of this practice necessitates a clear conceptual distinction between spontaneous translanguaging and pedagogical translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). Spontaneous translanguaging refers to the discursive, unplanned practices of multilingual speakers naturally alternating languages to communicate, while pedagogical translanguaging involves structured, deliberate instructional strategies planned by teachers (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017). When educational institutions mandate strict English-only environments, they do not eradicate L1 use; rather, they force spontaneous translanguaging underground, depriving teachers of the opportunity to develop formal pedagogical strategies.

Theme 4: Socio-Emotional Resilience, Identity Formation, and Epistemic Justice

Language is inextricably linked to personal identity, cultural heritage, power dynamics, and social belonging. The strict enforcement of English-Only Policies frequently operates as a mechanism of linguistic hegemony, taking a severe socio-emotional toll characterized by increased anxiety and classroom marginalization. In a qualitative study examining the implementation of an English-Only Policy among Grade 11 STEM students in the Philippines, learners reported profound hesitancy to participate in classroom discussions (Pradia & Bawa, 2023). This silence was driven largely by a paralyzing fear of making grammatical errors and facing punitive measures or strict correction.

Conversely, the intentional integration of multilingual scaffolding serves as a powerful catalyst for epistemic justice, recognizing the fundamental right of all individuals to be legitimate creators and contributors of knowledge regardless of their target language proficiency (Singay et al., 2024).

A compelling qualitative case study from Café Sem Troco, a rural public school near Brasília, vividly illustrates the profound socio-emotional impact of reversing epistemic injustice through multilingual pedagogies (Oliveira de Paula et al., 2026). Educators working with highly vulnerable Warao Indigenous refugee students from Venezuela actively resisted national assimilationist pressures by building a multilingual classroom ecology where the Warao language, Spanish, Portuguese, and Brazilian Sign Language (Libras) coexisted equally alongside the instructional language.¹⁰ Translanguaging functioned not merely as an academic tool, but as a trauma-informed, culturally sustaining pedagogy. By explicitly validating the students' diverse funds of knowledge through community food gathering and oral storytelling, educators significantly reduced linguistic anxiety, affirmed cultural identities, and fostered a deep, stabilizing sense of belonging.

This transformative socio-emotional shift is equally evident in urban settings. A qualitative study tracking the transition from monolingual models to integrated translanguaging pedagogies in New York City public schools documented a paradigm-shifting ideological transformation among educators (Menken & Sánchez, 2019). Students previously marginalized under strict English-only mandates exhibited a massive surge in engagement, utilizing their

home languages to navigate highly complex academic texts and assert their bilingual voices with newfound confidence.

Theme 5: Institutional Complexities, Teacher Workload, and Assessment Bottlenecks

Despite the overwhelming empirical evidence supporting the pedagogical benefits of multilingual scaffolding, its systematic implementation is significantly hindered by deeply entrenched institutional barriers.¹ Global educational systems remain deeply tethered to standardized, high-stakes testing conducted exclusively in the dominant target language, which creates a severe detrimental washback effect on daily classroom pedagogy (Menken, 2008).¹¹ Teachers, driven by intense accountability mandates, frequently revert to English-only instruction to "teach to the test" (Ngcobo, 2018).

A study focusing on higher education in South Africa exposed the multifaceted tensions between English dominance and indigenous language development (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024). Students exhibited a strong, strategic reliance on English-only resources purely because they were acutely aware that their final, high-stakes assessments would be conducted exclusively in English. This awareness effectively rendered their rich, indigenous linguistic repertoires obsolete in the eyes of the formal academic institution, forcing a pragmatic abandonment of translanguaging.

Furthermore, effective multilingual scaffolding requires meticulous lesson planning. However, educators globally express a profound lack of professional development in deploying scaffolding strategies across highly diverse classrooms, leading to inconsistent application and a significantly heightened teacher workload (Pare, 2024).

DISCUSSION

The findings synthesized in the preceding results section reveal a profound paradigm shift occurring at the intersection of language acquisition theory, cognitive science, and educational policy. The traditional adherence to English-Only Policies rests upon a foundational assumption that total linguistic immersion equates to optimal language acquisition. However, the qualitative and longitudinal data exhaustively demonstrate that this monolingual idealization frequently functions in direct opposition to the neuro-cognitive and socio-emotional realities of human learning.

The Psycholinguistic and Cognitive Dimensions of Translanguaging

A critical interpretation of the synthesized data requires analyzing the deep cognitive mechanisms of academic comprehension. The observed cognitive strain resulting from strict English-only instruction illuminates the severe limitations of forcing students to decode complex academic registers without access to their primary cognitive schemas (Alasmari et al., 2026). When students are barred from utilizing their first language, they are actively severed from their established cognitive foundations.

This phenomenon is powerfully articulated by Cummins' (2019) Iceberg Theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP), which posits that underlying

cognitive proficiency sustains and nourishes both languages simultaneously.¹² Multilingual scaffolding, therefore, functions as an advanced psycholinguistic affordance that strategically unburdens working memory. By permitting the utilization of the first language to grasp foundational concepts, educators enable students to bypass the linguistic bottleneck (Ahmad, 2024).¹ This targeted intervention allows learners to engage deeply with the academic content first, subsequently mapping the target language vocabulary and syntax onto an already established conceptual understanding.

Furthermore, the synthesis reveals highly nuanced, discipline-specific thresholds regarding the necessity of translanguaging (Yuksel et al., 2025). The observation that students in the social sciences naturally decrease their reliance on translanguaging upon reaching upper-intermediate proficiency levels, whereas engineering students maintain a high reliance on multilingual scaffolding regardless of their fluency, highlights a crucial intersection between language and academic epistemology. Social science disciplines frequently utilize narrative structures where increased language proficiency directly alleviates reading barriers. Conversely, the abstract spatial and mathematical problem-solving inherent in STEM disciplines perpetually necessitates the conceptual relief provided by the native tongue, signifying that pedagogical interventions must be discipline-sensitive.

Longitudinal Trajectories of Proficiency

This cognitive dynamic clearly explains the trajectory inversion observed in large-scale longitudinal studies comparing strict immersion models with dual-language programs (Stanford Graduate School of Education, 2014). The initial lag in target language output within dual-language settings is not indicative of delayed learning, but rather representative of a critical incubation period wherein learners are actively engaged in complex cross-linguistic mapping. By leveraging the concept of a common underlying proficiency, learners fortify a deep-seated meta-linguistic awareness that eventually propels them past their immersion-taught peers in the acquisition of robust Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) (Salman, 2024).

Socio-Political Ramifications and the Imperative of Epistemic Justice

The data strongly suggest that the enforcement of strict monolingual policies extends far beyond pedagogical inefficiency, venturing deeply into the realm of structural inequity and epistemic injustice. Fricker's (2007) theoretical framework of epistemic injustice—conceptualizing the ways individuals are wronged specifically in their capacity as knowers—is highly applicable to the English-only classroom. When educational institutions mandate that all valuable knowledge must be articulated exclusively in English, they generate both testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (Singay et al., 2024). Students who lack absolute fluency in the target language are structurally silenced because they are denied the necessary linguistic vehicle required to express their intellect (Pradia & Bawa, 2023).

Conversely, the implementation of structured translanguaging operates as an essential instrument of epistemic justice and cultural affirmation. The striking evidence drawn from the instruction of Warao Indigenous refugee populations demonstrates that translanguaging transcends mere cognitive

scaffolding to become a deeply trauma-informed, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Oliveira de Paula et al., 2026). By explicitly validating marginalized languages, educators actively repair the socio-emotional fractures caused by forced assimilation. This active validation fundamentally reconfigures classroom power dynamics, shifting the educational paradigm from a model of linguistic deficit to one of pluralistic abundance (Menken & Sánchez, 2019).

The Policy-to-Practice Dissonance

A profound discrepancy exists between macro-level policy declarations and the micro-level realities of classroom instruction, resulting in a state of chronic professional dissonance for educators globally (Kharchenko & Chappell, 2019). When institutions mandate an artificial monolingual boundary, they fundamentally contradict the organic, fluid nature of bilingualism. The pervasive occurrence of spontaneous, underground translanguaging across virtually all geographic contexts analyzed indicates that prohibiting the use of the native language is not only pedagogically unsound but practically impossible (Cenoz & Gorter, 2017).

By officially prohibiting translanguaging, educational institutions inadvertently strip themselves of the ability to regulate, refine, and optimize the practice. Spontaneous translanguaging lacks the structured, upward-building intentionality of formal pedagogical translanguaging. Acknowledging and formalizing translanguaging policies would alleviate the immense emotional labor experienced by educators, allowing them to transform clandestine coping mechanisms into sophisticated, evidence-based instructional designs.

Systemic Evaluation and the Washback Effect

Perhaps the most formidable structural barrier to the widespread adoption of multilingual pedagogies is the deeply entrenched nature of monolingual, high-stakes assessment (Menken, 2008). The data synthesized indicate a fundamental incompatibility between inclusive, multilingual classroom practices and exclusive, monolingual evaluation frameworks.

This phenomenon, commonly referred to as the washback effect, demonstrates how the format of testing dictates the boundaries of acceptable classroom pedagogy (Ngcobo, 2018). Even when students recognize the cognitive benefits of utilizing their full linguistic repertoires, the looming reality of a strictly monolingual examination forces a pragmatic retreat to English-only instruction (Mlambo & Matfunjwa, 2024). This systemic bottleneck reveals a critical reality: pedagogical innovation is inherently constrained by the mechanisms of assessment. For translanguaging to transcend its current status as a supplementary instructional tool, evaluation metrics must evolve to actively value cross-linguistic competence, offering mechanisms for students to demonstrate their disciplinary mastery unhindered by target-language limitations.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This comprehensive meta-synthesis demonstrates that strict English-only environments are not the optimal path to language proficiency and often

marginalize linguistically diverse students by imposing hidden cognitive and emotional costs. Instead, implementing multilingual scaffolding fosters deeper critical thinking, enhances long-term academic success in complex subjects like STEM, and preserves vital cultural identities, serving as a paramount socio-economic asset in our interconnected, globalized society. To harness these benefits and provide the empirical justification needed to dismantle outdated, deficit-based language policies, educational institutions must formally institutionalize pedagogical translanguaging, officially recognizing students' native languages as valuable cognitive resources. Furthermore, authorities should urgently realign assessment frameworks to include bilingual scaffolding, ensuring that superficial language barriers do not obscure true content mastery. Successfully implementing these changes requires pivoting teacher preparation away from purely monolingual methods toward targeted training in structural and interactional scaffolding, alongside fostering collaborative co-teaching models between content specialists and English language experts. By adopting these integrated reforms, educational systems can truly serve their multilingual populations and cultivate a more resilient, cognitively flexible, and culturally aware global citizenry.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

Future empirical research must prioritize bridging the specific gaps identified in the current qualitative literature. First, there is a critical and immediate need for longitudinal qualitative and mixed-methods studies focused specifically on primary and early childhood education, aiming to understand precisely how early translanguaging interventions shape lifelong academic trajectories and cognitive development. Second, as digital environments and educational technology increasingly dictate instructional delivery, researchers must rigorously investigate the efficacy of multimodal and AI-driven multilingual scaffolding tools—such as adaptive real-time translation software, bilingual digital narratives, and AI language models—in facilitating equitable language acquisition. Third, extensive empirical research is needed to actively design, pilot, and validate dynamic, multilingual assessment instruments that can satisfy rigorous institutional accountability requirements without unjustly penalizing emergent bilinguals. Finally, further comparative studies analyzing the effectiveness of translanguaging strategies across fundamentally different academic disciplines (e.g., the interpretive nature of the humanities versus the precise nomenclature of the hard sciences) will help refine subject-specific scaffolding methodologies for future educators.

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