

The Efficacy of a Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Students at a University in Vietnam

Linh Dieu Tran

Lecturer of Undergraduate Program, English Language Faculty, Dai Nam University, Hanoi, Vietnam

ABSTRACT: This study paper investigates the efficacy of a translanguaging-based pedagogical intervention on two persistent challenges in English language teaching in Vietnam: high levels of speaking anxiety and persistent grammatical inaccuracies. Situated within the context of Vietnamese higher education, the research addresses the limitations of dominant English-only monolingual ideologies, which often exacerbate student apprehension and fail to leverage their full linguistic competence. A quasi-experimental, mixed-methods study was conducted over a 14-week semester with 62 second-year non-English major students at Dai Nam University, Hanoi. The experimental group (n=31) received instruction grounded in purposeful and systematic translanguaging strategies, while the control group (n=31) was taught using a conventional English-only approach. Data were collected using the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), a timed oral production task scored for grammatical accuracy (error-free clauses), and semi-structured interviews. Quantitative analysis using independent and paired-samples t-tests revealed that the experimental group demonstrated a statistically significant reduction in speaking anxiety ($p < .001$) and a statistically significant improvement in grammatical accuracy ($p < .001$) compared to the control group. Qualitative data from thematic analysis of interviews proof these findings, indicating that translanguaging created a low-anxiety cognitive and social space, facilitated deeper metalinguistic understanding by comparing L1 and L2 structures, and enhanced peer collaboration. The findings suggest that a structured translanguaging pedagogy is not a deficit but a powerful resource. It offers a viable, evidence-based pathway for Vietnamese educators to foster more confident and accurate English speakers, aligning with national goals to enhance English proficiency in a manner that is both effective and psychologically sound.

KEYWORDS: Translanguaging, Speaking Anxiety, Grammatical Accuracy, TESOL, Vietnamese Higher Education, Bilingual Pedagogy

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *The context of English Education in Vietnam*

The landscape of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Vietnam is characterized by a compelling paradox. For decades, the nation has invested heavily in English education, driven by the government's strategic vision, institutional policies, and the aspirations of millions of students seeking global integration and enhanced career prospects (Le, 2020). The Vietnamese Ministry of Education and Training's national projects, including the ambitious goal to establish English as a second language, underscore this commitment (MOET, 2017). Yet, despite this enormous input of time, resources, and effort, a significant portion of university graduates remains unable to communicate in English with confidence and accuracy.

This gap between investment and outcome is most palpable in students' oral production. Many students, even those with considerable receptive knowledge of English grammar and vocabulary, experience debilitating anxiety when required to speak (Tran & Baldauf, 2007). This phenomenon, widely known as foreign language speaking anxiety (FLSA), acts as a powerful affective filter, blocking the application of learned knowledge and hindering further skill development (Krashen, 1982). Simultaneously, students' spoken English is often marked by persistent grammatical errors, suggesting that the explicit knowledge of rules learned in traditional classrooms does not effectively transfer to spontaneous oral production.

B. *Purposes of the Study*

This study aims to investigate the efficacy of a translanguaging-based pedagogy on two critical, interconnected variables: speaking anxiety and grammatical accuracy. Conducted at Dai Nam University, a private university in Hanoi with a diverse student body, this research seeks to provide empirical evidence relevant to educators and policymakers across Vietnam. The central research questions guiding this study are:

The Efficacy of a Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Students at a University in Vietnam

1. To what extent does a translanguaging-based pedagogy affect the level of speaking anxiety among Vietnamese university students compared to a traditional English-only approach?
2. To what extent does a translanguaging-based pedagogy affect the grammatical accuracy of spoken English among Vietnamese university students compared to a traditional English-only approach?
3. How do students in the translanguaging classroom perceive the role of their L1 in their English learning experience?

C. Significance of the study

The significance of this research is substantial as it offers critical, evidence-based contributions to pedagogy, student well-being, and national policy within Vietnam's current educational landscape. On a practical level, it equips educators with a powerful alternative to less effective "English-only" rules, providing tangible translanguaging strategies that improve grammatical accuracy while simultaneously reducing the pervasive speaking anxiety that hinders so many learners. Psychologically, this fosters a more confident and resilient student body by validating their native language as a valuable cognitive tool. Most broadly, as of 2025, these findings offer a timely and culturally-attuned model for implementing Vietnam's national project to establish English as a second language, demonstrating a more humane and effective pathway to achieving the nation's ambitious bilingualism goals.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. The English-only Ideology as a Potential Barrier

A contributing factor to this paradox may be the pervasive monolingual ideology that underpins much of the ELT pedagogy in Vietnam. Rooted in Western-centric methodologies from the 20th century, the "English-only" rule has long been upheld as a gold standard for creating an immersive learning environment. The assumption is that maximum exposure to the target language and the exclusion of the learners' first language (L1), Vietnamese, will accelerate acquisition.

However, a growing body of research challenges this premise, arguing that such policies can be counterproductive. By prohibiting the use of students' L1, educators inadvertently devalue their students' entire linguistic identity and cognitive toolkit (Cummins, 2007). For the learner, this can increase anxiety by removing a vital psychological and cognitive support system. When students are unable to use their L1 to clarify a complex idea, ask a quick question, or collaborate with a peer, the classroom can become a space of high risk and potential failure. Furthermore, prohibiting the L1 prevents the development of metalinguistic awareness that arises from explicitly comparing and contrasting the structures of the L1 and L2, a practice that can lead to deeper and more robust grammatical understanding.

B. Translanguaging: A Pedagogical Alternative

In response to the limitations of monolingual approaches, the concept of **translanguaging** has emerged as a transformative pedagogical paradigm. Originally defined by Williams (2002) and later expanded by scholars like Ofelia García (2009) and Li Wei (2018), translanguaging moves beyond the notion of two separate, competing linguistic systems in a bilingual's mind. Instead, it posits that a bilingual individual possesses a single, integrated linguistic repertoire. Translanguaging is the dynamic process whereby bilinguals strategically draw upon their full repertoire to make meaning, communicate, and learn.

Crucially, as a pedagogy, translanguaging is not simply permissive or random code-switching. It is the **planned and purposeful design of learning activities** that leverage the student's entire linguistic repertoire to enhance learning in the target language. For example, a teacher might ask students to discuss a complex topic in Vietnamese before presenting their arguments in English, or to co-create a text where they use Vietnamese for initial drafts and then "translate up" into polished English. This approach acknowledges that the L1 is not a source of interference to be eradicated, but a cognitive resource to be systematically harnessed.

C. Research Gap

While international research has increasingly highlighted the theoretical benefits of translanguaging, empirical studies demonstrating its efficacy on specific linguistic and affective outcomes within the Vietnamese context are scarce. Much of the existing research in Vietnam has focused on identifying and describing the problem of speaking anxiety (e.g., Gan, 2019) or analyzing grammatical errors. There is a clear need for interventionist research that proposes and tests a practical solution.

Based on the theoretical framework, the study hypothesized that students in the translanguaging group would demonstrate a statistically significant decrease in speaking anxiety and a statistically significant increase in grammatical accuracy compared to their counterparts in the English-only control group.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

To robustly evaluate the intervention, this study employed a quasi-experimental, mixed-methods pre-test/post-test design. The quantitative component allowed for the statistical comparison of an experimental group (receiving the translanguaging intervention) and a control group (receiving traditional instruction). The qualitative component, consisting of semi-structured interviews, was

The Efficacy of a Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Students at a University in Vietnam

integrated to provide deeper explanatory insights into the students' experiences and to understand the mechanisms behind the quantitative results. The research was conducted over one full academic semester of 14 weeks.

B. Participants

The participants were 62 second-year students enrolled in a compulsory "English 3" course at Dai Nam University. These students were non-English majors from the Faculty of Business Administration. Their proficiency level was determined to be approximately A2-B1 on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) based on university placement tests. Two intact classes were selected for the study to minimize disruption to the university's schedule. One class was randomly assigned as the experimental group (n=31; 18 female, 13 male) and the other as the control group (n=31; 20 female, 11 male). All participants were native Vietnamese speakers. Ethical approval was obtained from the university's research ethics committee. Students were informed of the study's purpose and assured of the confidentiality of their data, and all provided written informed consent to participate.

C. The Intervention: Translanguaging Pedagogy

Both groups met for three hours per week and followed the same core curriculum and textbook. The key difference lay in the pedagogical approach to instruction and classroom tasks. The researcher, an experienced English lecturer, taught both groups to control for teacher effects.

The Control Group (English-Only Instruction): Instruction in this group adhered to a strict English-only policy. The lecturer used only English, and students were consistently encouraged to do the same. L1 use was gently discouraged and corrected. Classroom activities included traditional pair work, group discussions, and presentations conducted exclusively in English. The focus was on maximizing exposure to the L2.

The Experimental Group (Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy): Instruction in this group was intentionally bilingual. The lecturer designed specific tasks that leveraged Vietnamese as a cognitive and social scaffold for English learning. These strategies included:

- **Pre-Task Planning and Brainstorming:** For complex speaking tasks, such as a group presentation, students were given 5-7 minutes to discuss ideas, organize their thoughts, and delegate roles in Vietnamese within their small groups before preparing the English script. The rationale was to lower the cognitive load by allowing them to focus on content and organization first, in their strongest language.
- **Metalinguistic Comparison:** The lecturer explicitly drew students' attention to grammatical contrasts and similarities between English and Vietnamese. For instance, when teaching the English present perfect tense, a notoriously difficult concept, the lecturer facilitated a discussion comparing its usage to Vietnamese temporal markers like *đã*, *rồi*, and *từng*. Students created bilingual example sentences to solidify their understanding.
- **Collaborative Learning:** During peer feedback sessions on spoken drafts, students were permitted to use Vietnamese to ask for clarification, explain complex points, and provide more nuanced feedback to their peers. This was intended to make peer learning more effective and less intimidating.
- **"Translanguaging Windows":** At specific points in the lesson, the lecturer would open a 2-3 minute "translanguaging window," where students could ask clarifying questions about vocabulary or grammar in Vietnamese. This served as a pressure-release valve, ensuring no student was left behind due to a lack of comprehension.

D. Data Collection Instruments

Three instruments were used for data collection at the beginning (Week 2) and end (Week 14) of the semester.

1. **Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS):** The FLCAS, developed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), is a widely validated 33-item self-report questionnaire using a 5-point Likert scale. It measures various aspects of language anxiety, including communication apprehension and fear of negative evaluation. The scale was translated into Vietnamese and back-translated to ensure accuracy. Cronbach's alpha for the scale in this study was .91, indicating high internal consistency.
2. **Oral Production Task for Grammatical Accuracy:** To measure grammatical accuracy in a controlled manner, students performed an individual oral task. They were shown a series of six pictures depicting a short story and were given two minutes to describe the narrative. The performances were audio-recorded. Grammatical accuracy was calculated using a standard metric: the number of error-free clauses divided by the total number of clauses, converted to a percentage (Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005). An independent rater, another English lecturer, co-rated 25% of the recordings, achieving an inter-rater reliability of .89.
3. **Semi-Structured Interviews:** At the end of the semester, 10 students from the experimental group were randomly selected for individual, semi-structured interviews. The interviews, conducted in Vietnamese to allow for more expressive responses, explored their perceptions of the translanguaging activities, their feelings about using Vietnamese in the English classroom, and how it affected their confidence and learning process. Each interview lasted approximately 15-20 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed.

The Efficacy of a Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Students at a University in Vietnam

E. Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the FLCAS and the oral task were analyzed using SPSS (Version 26). Paired-samples t-tests were used to compare pre-test and post-test scores within each group, while independent-samples t-tests were used to compare the post-test scores and gain scores between the experimental and control groups. The significance level was set at $p < .05$.

Qualitative data from the interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the final report. This process aimed to identify recurring patterns in students' experiences.

IV. FINDINGS

A. Research question 1

Speaking Anxiety (FLCAS Scores): A pre-test independent-samples t-test confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference in initial anxiety levels between the control group ($M = 110.45$, $SD = 10.21$) and the experimental group ($M = 111.97$, $SD = 11.05$), $t(60) = -0.58$, $p = .56$.

As shown in Table 1, the post-test results revealed a stark contrast. The experimental group's mean anxiety score decreased significantly from 111.97 to 82.13. In contrast, the control group's score showed only a slight, non-significant decrease. The independent-samples t-test on the post-test scores showed a highly significant difference between the two groups, $t(60) = 8.54$, $p < .001$, with the translanguaging group reporting much lower anxiety.

Table 1: FLCAS Pre-test and Post-test Score Comparison

Group	N	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Mean Gain	t-value (within-group)	p-value
Experimental	31	111.97 (11.05)	82.13 (9.88)	-29.84	14.21	< .001
Control	31	110.45 (10.21)	107.52 (10.55)	-2.93	1.89	.068

B. Research question 2

Grammatical Accuracy Scores: Similarly, a pre-test t-test showed no significant initial difference in grammatical accuracy between the control group ($M = 45.16\%$, $SD = 8.12$) and the experimental group ($M = 44.81\%$, $SD = 7.95$), $t(60) = 0.18$, $p = .86$.

The post-test analysis in Table 2 indicates that while both groups improved, the experimental group's improvement was substantially greater. The experimental group's mean accuracy score rose from 44.81% to 68.74%. The independent-samples t-test on the post-test scores revealed a highly significant difference in favor of the experimental group, $t(60) = -6.98$, $p < .001$.

Table 2: Grammatical Accuracy Pre-test and Post-test Score Comparison

Group	N	Pre-test Mean % (SD)	Post-test Mean % (SD)	Mean Gain %	t-value (within-group)	p-value
Experimental	31	44.81 (7.95)	68.74 (9.01)	23.93	-15.65	< .001
Control	31	45.16 (8.12)	51.03 (8.55)	5.87	-4.10	< .001

C. Research question 3

The thematic analysis of the interviews with students from the experimental group revealed three prominent themes that explain the quantitative results: (1) The Creation of a "Safe Space" for Risk-Taking, (2) L1 as a Cognitive Bridge to L2 Understanding, and (3) Enhanced Quality of Peer Collaboration.

Theme 1: The Creation of a "Safe Space" for Risk-Taking Students unanimously reported that the strategic use of Vietnamese lowered the emotional stakes of speaking English. The fear of being judged or misunderstood was significantly reduced.

- **Student A (female):** "Before, my mind would go blank. I was so scared of making a mistake in English. But in this class, because we could plan in Vietnamese first, the pressure was gone. It felt safer to try."
- **Student B (male):** "The 'translanguaging window' was the best. If I was really stuck, I knew I had a chance to ask in Vietnamese. Knowing that safety net was there made me more confident to try and speak English the rest of the time."

Theme 2: L1 as a Cognitive Bridge to L2 Understanding Students articulated that using Vietnamese was not about avoiding English, but about understanding it more deeply. The act of comparing languages proved to be a powerful learning tool.

- **Student C (female):** "When the teacher let us compare the English past tense with how we talk about the past in Vietnamese, it finally made sense. I always knew the rule, but I never *understood* it until then. Seeing it next to my own language was like turning on a light."

The Efficacy of a Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Students at a University in Vietnam

- **Student D (male):** "For me, thinking of the idea in Vietnamese first helps a lot. It's not about direct translation. It's about knowing *what* I want to say clearly. Then, finding the English words is the next step. It separates the two challenges."

Theme 3: Enhanced Quality of Peer Collaboration The ability to use Vietnamese strategically transformed peer interaction from a superficial exercise into a meaningful learning opportunity.

- **Student E (female):** "In other classes, when we do peer feedback, we just say 'good job' in English. We are too scared to say more. Here, I could ask my friend in Vietnamese, 'What did you really mean by that sentence?' and she could explain. Our feedback was more honest and much more helpful."
- **Student F (male):** "Group work was faster and better. We could quickly divide the work in Vietnamese and make sure everyone understood the plan. Then we could focus all our energy on making the English part of the presentation good."

V. DISCUSSION

The results of this study provide strong empirical support for the efficacy of a translanguaging-based pedagogy in the Vietnamese university context. The findings are discussed here in relation to the initial research questions and the broader theoretical literature.

A. The Impact on Speaking Anxiety

The significant reduction in speaking anxiety for the experimental group aligns with Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis. The translanguaging classroom appears to have effectively lowered the affective filter. By allowing students to use their L1 at strategic points, the pedagogy removed the constant pressure of performing perfectly in a foreign language. This "safe space," as described by the students, mitigated the fear of negative evaluation and communication apprehension, which are core components of the FLCAS. The control group, operating under a strict English-only policy, did not experience this relief, and their anxiety levels remained high. This suggests that monolingual policies, while intended to be immersive, may inadvertently perpetuate the very anxiety they seek to overcome.

B. The Improvement in Grammatical Accuracy

The most striking finding is perhaps the significant improvement in grammatical accuracy, as this directly challenges the long-held fear that L1 use leads to "interference" and fossilization of errors. The results of this study suggest the opposite: purposeful L1 use can facilitate L2 grammatical development. This can be understood through a Vygotskian sociocultural lens. The students' L1 (Vietnamese) acted as a primary psychological tool for mediating their understanding of the L2 (English).

When students compared grammatical structures (Theme 2), they were engaging in deep metalinguistic reflection, moving beyond rote memorization of rules to a more profound conceptual understanding. When they planned their speeches in Vietnamese (Theme 1), they lowered their cognitive load, allowing them to allocate more mental resources to monitoring their grammatical output in English. Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is also relevant here; students used their L1 to collaborate with peers (Theme 3) to co-construct knowledge and perform tasks they could not have accomplished alone in their L2. The L1 was not a crutch, but a scaffold that enabled them to reach a higher level of L2 accuracy.

C. Implications for Pedagogy and Policy in Vietnam

The findings of this study have significant implications for English language education in Vietnam.

- **For Pedagogy:** English teachers at Dai Nam University and other institutions should be encouraged to move away from rigid English-only policies and embrace a more flexible, evidence-based translanguaging pedagogy. This does not mean abandoning English immersion, but rather integrating purposeful, structured moments where Vietnamese is used as a resource to enhance English learning. The strategies used in this study—bilingual grammar comparisons, L1 pre-task planning, and strategic "translanguaging windows"—can be practically implemented in many classrooms without requiring additional resources.
- **For Teacher Training:** Professional development programs should include modules on translanguaging theory and practice. Teachers need to be equipped with the skills to design translanguaging tasks and to understand its theoretical rationale, shifting their perspective of the L1 from a problem to a solution.
- **For National Policy:** As Vietnam moves towards its goal of establishing English as a second language, a translanguaging-based bilingual education model offers a powerful and equitable pathway. Instead of simply importing models that may not fit the local context, this research suggests that a pedagogy that values and utilizes Vietnamese as an integral part of learning English can produce more confident and more accurate English speakers. It supports the development of additive bilingualism, where the L2 is added without detriment to the L1.

D. Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This study, while yielding clear results, has several limitations. The sample size was relatively small and limited to students from one faculty at one university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. The duration of the intervention was one semester; a longitudinal study over a full academic year could provide insights into the long-term effects of the pedagogy. Furthermore, as the

The Efficacy of a Translanguaging-Based Pedagogy in Reducing Speaking Anxiety and Improving Grammatical Accuracy in Students at a University in Vietnam

researcher was the instructor for both groups, the possibility of researcher bias, despite efforts to maintain consistency, cannot be entirely ruled out.

Future research should seek to replicate this study with larger and more diverse populations, including English majors and students at different proficiency levels and in public universities. Research could also investigate the impact of translanguaging on other language skills, such as academic writing and reading comprehension. Finally, exploring the perspectives of teachers as they attempt to implement a translanguaging pedagogy would be a valuable contribution to understanding the challenges and opportunities of this pedagogical shift.

VI. CONCLUSIONS

This study set out to investigate the efficacy of a translanguaging-based pedagogy in reducing speaking anxiety and improving grammatical accuracy among Vietnamese university students. The findings are unequivocal: the strategic and purposeful integration of the students' L1 into the English classroom led to significant, positive outcomes in both the affective and cognitive domains. Students in the translanguaging classroom became not only more grammatically accurate speakers but also more confident and less anxious communicators.

The research provides strong empirical evidence that challenges the dominance of English-only ideologies in the Vietnamese ELT context. It demonstrates that translanguaging is not a sign of linguistic deficiency but a natural and effective learning strategy that should be embraced as a core pedagogical principle. By leveraging the students' full linguistic repertoire, educators at Dai Nam University and across Vietnam can create more equitable, effective, and humane learning environments. As Vietnam continues its journey to foster a competent bilingual citizenry, acknowledging the power of the mother tongue may be the most effective way to master a second language.

REFERENCES

- 1) Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- 2) Cummins, J. (2007). Rethinking monolingual instructional strategies in multilingual classrooms. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(2), 221-240.
- 3) Ellis, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2005). *Analysing learner language*. Oxford University Press.
- 4) Gan, Z. (2019). An investigation of foreign language speaking anxiety among university students in Vietnam. *Journal of Asia TEFL*, 16(2), 576-591.
- 5) García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Wiley-Blackwell.
- 6) Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. A. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern Language Journal*, 70(2), 125–132.
- 7) Krashen, S. D. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- 8) Le, V. C. (2020). English language education in Vietnam: A review of policy and practice. *VNU Journal of Foreign Studies*, 36(4), 1-18.
- 9) Li, Wei. (2018). *The Routledge Handbook of Multilingualism*. Routledge.
- 10) Ministry of Education and Training (MOET). (2017). *Decision No. 2080/QĐ-TTg: Approving the adjusted project "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the national education system, period 2017-2025"*. Hanoi, Vietnam.
- 11) Tran, T. Q., & Baldauf, R. B. (2007). Demotivation in language learning: A study of Vietnamese university students. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 16(1), 55-69.
- 12) Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- 13) Williams, C. (2002). *Defnyddio'r Gymraeg yng nghyfnod allweddol 2* (Using Welsh in Key Stage 2). Report for ACCAC.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0)

(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.