Translanguaging in Saudi classrooms: A study of upper secondary learner perceptions

Aziza Saleh Alzabidi [a] [1] iD , Arif Ahmed Mohammed Hassan Al-Ahdal [b] iD

[a] Department of English Language and Translation, College of Sciences and Arts, Methnab, Qassim University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
[b] Department of English Language, College of Arts and Sciences, Methnab, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Given the rapid rise of multilingual classrooms worldwide, the need for translanguaging is more critical than ever. Studies have shown that students are learning Arabic as a second language benefit from classroom translanguaging. However, the function of translanguaging in upper-secondary English courses in Saudi Arabia has not been extensively studied, certainly not from the students' perspective. This research fills this research gap and examines upper-secondary Arab students' perspectives on translanguaging in ESL classrooms using both quantitative and qualitative data from the respondents. Focus group interviews were conducted with 50 Saudi students studying at two different schools. Results showed that students in Saudi Arabia still favor the more conventional approach to SLA. Students solely speak English in the classroom, despite a growing body of scientific data supporting the use of translanguaging in second language education. According to the participants in this study, academics in the country keeps to the traditional view, few exceptions. Finally, finding show that Saudi English language students are not familiar with the translanguaging approach or its benefits to them.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Upper Secondary EFL learners; Saudi EFL Teachers; Learning; second language

1. Introduction

Despite the fact that the world's population is more multilingual now than ever before, schools are reluctant to use translanguaging in language instruction for unknown reasons. Since the beginning of the 21st century, the number of languages spoken globally seems to have expanded significantly, which implies that migration has intensified. Migration to Europe has resulted in an increasing number of individuals becoming proficient in more than one language About a quarter of the students in Saudi Arabia are foreign-born (Al-Ahdal & Alqasham, 2020; Al-Ahdal, 2020a; Al-Ahdal, 2020b). Increasingly, kids from many backgrounds are working together in multicultural classrooms. Non-Arab students make up the majority of those who fail their courses in school, according to yearly data from the Arab National Agency of Education in 2003, which Karlsson et al., (2016, 2018) feel may be ascribed to their lack of resources for swiftly developing their second language.

According to recent statistics, the number of individuals who speak other languages is ever expanding across the globe. Only elementary and secondary school textbooks on translanguaging are

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[1] Corresponding Author.
E-mail address: a.aziza@qu.edu.sa

present in the United States and the United Kingdom, according to Mazak and Carroll (2017). Cummins (2017) affirmed that the previous decade has been dominated by monolingual SLA teaching methods rather than ideal bilingual teaching strategies. Researchers have previously looked at schools and instructors' opinions, but no study has been done specifically on the perspectives of Arab students in English courses. It is crucial to know how young people in Saudi Arabia feel about translanguaging. This study examines the attitudes of upper-secondary students in Saudi Arabia on translanguaging in English classrooms. Even native Arabic speaking students have the chance to express their ideas on translanguaging when learning a second language. A study of translanguaging in Arabic ESL classes has already been conducted, thus the focus here is on both students and teachers.

The first language is often referred to as the one a person learns from their parents or guardians, while second languages are acquired after they have mastered their first language (Abrahamsson, 2009). In order to communicate effectively, it is not necessary for a speaker to be proficient in the language they speak (Abrahamsson, 2009). Cook and Cook (2003) assert that contrary to popular assumption, one's first language (L1) influences one's second language (L2) rather than the other way around. According to Cook and Cook (2003), "multi-competence" means that one can speak and comprehend two or more languages at the same time. This means that bilingual students cannot acquire their second language the same way that monolingual students can. This is because both the first and second language are stigmatized. Defining the idea of monolingualism is necessary in order to explain multilingualism in a clear manner. One must speak just the language they learnt as children in order to be considered monolingual (Cook & Cook, 2003). However, the capacity to speak a number of languages is called individual multilingualism (or plurilingualism, as stated by García and Li (2014). Remember that there is a difference between societal and individual multilingualism. Not everyone in a multilingual society is fluent in the language(s) of the society. It is possible that the word "multilingualism" may be mistaken with "bilingualism," which is the capacity to speak and comprehend two separate languages (García & Li, 2014, p. 11).

The term "translanguaging" was first used by a Welsh teacher in 1994 to describe the process of educating multilingual children (García & Kleyn, 2016; García & Li, 2014; Mazak & Carroll, 2017). His students were charged with employing all of their language abilities in order to better grasp Welsh and English. Integrated bilinguals were produced as a result of the integration of the two languages throughout the learning phase (García & Kleyn, 2016). "Translanguaging" was characterized as a speaker's "full linguistic repertory" (García & Kleyn, 2016, p. 14), switching between languages and students' use of their repertoires as an integrated system (García & Li, 2014). As opposed to code-switching, translingualism covers the whole lexicon, not simply one word (García & Li, 2014; Otheguy et al., 2015).

Language learning may be either integrative or instrumental, depending on whether the student wishes to identify with the language, its speakers, and its culture, or only utilize the tool to attain another purpose (Abrahamsson, 2009). According to Celce-Murcia et al., (2014), language learning success or failure depends on whether or not the student is motivated to learn the language. Moreover, Celce-Murcia et al., (2014) divided the phase into intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which is essentially the same as Abrahamsson's (2009) integrative definition of intrinsic motivation. Getting a high score, avoiding punishment, or gaining social prestige are all examples of extrinsic goals for students who are motivated by instrumental factors (Celce-Murcia et al., 2014).

Multilingualism and translanguaging have been studied by a number of academics. Berényi-Kiss (2012) looked at how "teachers perceive linguistic variety and individual multilingualism and how they handle the concerned languages as a consequence" (p.2). Researcher Berényi-Kiss (2012) claimed that foreign language classrooms are ideal for studying bi- and multilingualism. Secondary school EFL lessons in Vienna emphasize on multilingualism and linguistic variety, and how they are seen in context. Berényi-Kiss (2012) also examined German and other languages in the EFL classes, or in

other words language validity in the EFL settings were examined and the consequence of such validiity on the students' performance. Similarly, Berényi-Kiss (2012) claimed that multilingualism is typically seen as a burden rather than an asset in language courses across the globe. Because no one in the school speaks the same language as the children, they adjust to solely using the school's vehicular language. Furthermore, the findings reveal that instructors exploit the students' diverse cultural origins as an advantage; however, linguistic diversity is not seen in the same light. Similarly, the author asserted that linguistic variety is just as significant to an individual's identity as culture and should thus be used equally in the classroom. Learners should be encouraged to utilize their L1 and trained explicitly in adopting translanguaging as a learning approach.

2. Research Objectives

Generally, this study will address the following research queries

(1) To what extent do Arab EFL students use translanguaging?

(2) Do students in Saudi Arabia have an opinion on the usage of L1 in the classroom?

(3) When it comes to using L1 in the classroom, how do students feel about it?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study used both quantitative and qualitative research design. Surveys with 50 participants from two different schools were utilized to collect quantitative data, while interviews with four students from the same class were used to get qualitative data. Every student received an email with a link to the questionnaire in the form of a survey. To protect the participants' privacy, just the researcher's name was used and no e-mail addresses were collected. The survey questionnaire took about thirty minutes to complete. The interviewer recorded the unstructured focus group interviews with the participants' consent (see 2.2.2. Interview). Participants only referred to one another as A, B, C, and D throughout the interview; the interviewer was never told who they were talking about. A total of 15 minutes were allotted for the interview, including the introduction. Using a combination of words and numbers, Dörnyei (2007) describes mixed methods research as a process in which "words may provide meaning to numbers and numbers can correct words" (p. 45). Using the best features of both quantitative and qualitative methods, researchers can complete a single study using quasi-quantitative research methods. Whereas researchers who previously used quantitative methods have considered qualitative approach to rely unduly on contexts, at the same time, those who prefer qualitative methods have considered quantitative approaches to be too simplistic because they do not present the meaning behind each participant's actual view on a given topic. Mixed methods research is thought of to be the best of both worlds because of the flaws of each methodology (Dörnyei, 2007).

3.2 Sample

Students in upper-secondary schools in Saudi Arabia who are translanguaging in English classrooms are an important focus of this study. This will be shown via the use of four student interviews and a 50-person survey. Participants come from two separate high schools: School A has 21 students and School B has 41 students. This study does not have the tools to compare these two schools. The rationale behind having participants from two schools is that results are more readily generalized when there are varied participants than when there are fewer individuals.

3.3 Research Tool

Questionnaires fit the quantitative method's requirements since they include short and simple questions, says Dörnyei (2007). Further, adding open-ended questions shifts the questionnaire's structure from a quantitative one to a qualitative one, which is crucial to keep in mind. If another one follows a closed-ended item, open-ended goods are desirable (ibid.). In the questionnaire used in this study, they appear only after a multi-choice question since they meet his requirements. It is possible that open-format data may provide substantially more depth than strictly quantitative data since it allows for greater freedom of expression. Open-ended replies may include examples, quotes, and fresh ideas, which might be visual and explanatory (p. 107). Confirmation questions are often included in questionnaires, which ask respondents to expound on their replies to previous questions. Some participants may not be able to answer all of the clarifying questions because of the sensitive nature of the issues. To collect data, the following steps were taken: Based on feedback from a small sample of individuals, the questionnaire was reworked. It was distributed to teachers from different schools once the changes were made so that they were aware of what the questionnaire was about. They set up sessions to complete the survey anonymously for three teachers who exhibited an interest after discussing it with their students. Students received a link to the survey from their school forums on the day of the meeting to keep it anonymous. The lecturer and researcher were there to answer any questions that could arise. Participants received an explanation of the most essential words in the questionnaire as part of a brief introduction.

Convincing the respondents to answer this survey was difficult because participants misunderstood the differences between translanguaging and named languages. According to Otheguy et al., (2015), a common misperception is that translanguaging and named languages are interchangeable. Despite the usage of the term translanguaging in the inauguration speech, the students had no previous knowledge of the topic. Some comments are less thorough than they may have been because of this. It might be best to visit the group and work on these terms in group activities, so that members are better prepared when ideas like "first language" appear in the survey. It is important to notice that the bulk of questions are asked in the language that students are already familiar with, even if these terms occur just a handful of times throughout the questionnaire. There are a few questionable areas in the questionnaire, thus the results can't be used to generalize. Even while not all Arab students' thoughts on translanguaging in English classrooms were included in the questionnaire, they do represent an overall attitude that may be shared by the majority of students in Arab upper-secondary institutions.

3.4 Interview Procedures

When conducting focus group interviews, an interviewer must make sure that no one in the group dominates the discussion and detracts from what the group has to say (Flick, 2009). It is usual for mixed-methods studies to incorporate this kind of interview as a supplement to a questionnaire because of its abundance of information (Dörnyei, 2007). Dörnyei (2007) advises the following to get the most out of focus group interviews: In order to guarantee that all participants have an opportunity to contribute, there should be between six and twelve participants, and participants should be separated such that they can understand each other while maintaining a broad spectrum of opinions. Since there were only four participants in this research, just one focus group interview with them produced the best findings. Because of this, despite Dörnyei's initial suggestion, this study does fit the second rule, which is to choose people who are both similar and distinct enough to meet the requirements. The four students were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a 10-15-minute interview in order to gather their perspectives on translanguaging. One-on-one discussions with each student allowed them to decide whether or not they wanted to participate in the focus group interview without the pressure of their peers. The instructor recommended that four students form a focus group, and all the

four students consented to take part. Both the interview's secrecy and the intended use of its findings were made clear in the interview itself. It was informed to the participants that they would be videotaped, and the participants were instructed not to address each other by name, but alphabetically (person A, B, C and D). Anonymity is required, but it must also be evident who is saying what on the recording. On the other hand, taking notes during an interview may lead to inaccuracies in the data collected, since the interviewer would be distracted and notes would be less reliable. In this study, the interview was recorded and then transcribed. This complicates the task of transcribing an interview because of the several voices, says Dörnyei. Prior to the exam, each student was informed of the code allotted to each. This allowed them to study and remember both their own codes and those of their classmates. Prior to speaking, they stated their code and only used the codes to refer to each other throughout their conversation. This made the transcription process much simpler. So, each technique has its own set of advantages and disadvantages. According to Flick (2009), members in a focus group might draw inspiration from one another and so have more to add to the conversation. Using this strategy is troublesome because of the transcribing and documentation procedure (Flick, 2009; Dörnyei, 2007). It is achievable, however, as this research has proved via the distribution of letters to speakers. Finally, focus groups are less expensive and more time-efficient than one-on-one interviews (Flick, 2009).

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Since all replies to the survey and interviews were anonymous, this research met with all the ethical guidelines. Personal information, such as a name or email, was not provided to the researcher. Participants in the research had to be at least 15 years old and given the choice to participate in their usual class or complete the questionnaire. They were also free to decline, and their non-participation in the study was to have no negative consequences. Respondents were not required to disclose any personal information since they just provided permission when filling out the questionnaire, and no questions requested for personal information at any point. Interviewees also had the option of viewing and listening to the transcript of their interview and providing their consent for the conversation to be used in this research. It was made clear that students might withdraw from the activity at any moment and return to their regular seats in the classroom.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The extent of Arab EFL students' use of translanguaging

Table 1 shows the responses of the students on the extent of their use of translanguaging. Majority of the respondents answered yes (70%) over those who answered No (15%). This means most of the students use translanguaing in their learning approaches.

Table 1. Extent of Arab EFL students use translanguaging

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	35	70 %
No	15	30 %
Total	50	100 %

Based on the interviews with the respondents, on asked what they think when they speak other languages in their lesson, one student answered *"My classmates don't seem to understand why I'm conversing in a foreign language. For me, it's a little odd since I constantly want to speak English but my classmates aren't interested in doing so."* Another respondent also affirmed "*It's tough for me to converse with my students in a language other than Swedish, especially if they're speaking to me in that language. Currently, I'm attempting to learn the language, but it's been a while since my previous*

teachers allowed me to speak Arabic in the class." Yet another student said *"I use it often because I don't understand what I'm saying."* Hence, there is some truth to the idea that students prefer to use their first language in EFL classes since outside of class, they are constantly conversing in their L1. In certain cases, students think that hearing instructions in their common L1, i.e. the class vernacular language, makes it simpler for them to comprehend what is required of them in class. In EFL classes, most students say they do not need to use their native language, but those who disagree claim that they use their L1 to better understand the English terminology and because they are self-conscious about their speaking ability.

4.2 Level of competence and attitude of the students on the usage of L1 in the classroom

Table 2 shows the assessment on the competence of the students on translanguanig. Results show that most of the students have fair level of competence (64%). Twenty percent are competent and sixteen percent poor.

Table 2. Assessment on the competence of the students on translanguaging

Level of competence	Frequency	Percentage
Competent	10	20 %
Fair	32	64 %
Poor	8	16 %
Total	50	100 %

Looking at the interview transcripts to support these findings, one participant said, "I am not really good in English, but I can speak it", while another said "I am not smart, but I can do it". In like manner, another student noted "I think I have a fair language ability in English. It's fine for me." Consequently, it becomes clearer that students have a fair level of competence and share a positive attitude towards English as a language.

4.3 Students' feelings about teacher's assessment of their competence

Table 3 shows how students feel when the teacher assesses their competence when it comes to using L1 in the classroom. Data show that a majority of them (86 %) say that their teachers assess their competence if they use a different language in the English class.

Table 3. Students' feelings about teacher's assessment of their competence

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	43	86 %
No	7	14 %
Total	50	100 %

A majority (86%) answered that they agreed with the statement that their teacher judges their EFL competence if they use their L1 or any other language in EFL class. When asked about the responses they get form their teachers, a student said *"Our teacher told us to only speak in English"*, seconded by the other student *"He becomes angry",* another also said *"She told us to speak only in English."* This finding shows that the students considered the role of teachers as being responsible in avoiding translanguaging.

5. Discussion

Traditional conceptions of translanguaging, transfer, and usage of L1 in an L2 learning environment influence students' perspectives on language acquisition, as these studies demonstrate. In order to better grasp a task or phrase, participants seldom utilize their first language (L1), although they do so often when speaking English with Arabic accent. As far as the students are concerned, if they need to speak their native language in the school, they can get away with it. On the other hand, EFL students believe that speaking their mother tongue, even if it is not their first language, is a bad thing.

Among the students' responses, a prevalent theme was the assumption that speaking L1 in an English class would "make my English worse" because their teachers urged that they abstain from doing so. A person's first and primary language is still being used, even though they are conversing in a different language than their mother tongue. According to the responses, students' grades may drop if they study in their home tongue. With these data it is perceptible that some participants believe L1 should be allowed, albeit to a very small extent. However, some students argue that knowing the meaning of a word in both English and their native language helps them understand it better. Teaching in English should be done "as much as feasible" (Skolverket, 2011, p. 11) in accordance with the English curriculum. As a result, students regard translanguaging as a hindrance rather than a strategy (which is given by the students). Although the curriculum explicitly indicates that other methods of learning a second language (L2) should be used, instructors seem not to share this mentality. Students' L1 according to Berényi-Kiss (2012) is just as important to their sense of self as their home language. Instructors, on the other hand, seem to neglect this connection. Translanguaging is impacted by academics' interpretations of the curriculum, whether intentionally or unintentionally.

Even though English is widely spoken, a majority of the participants in this poll said that it is not required that students interact in English since they all speak the same language, i.e., Arabic. As a consequence, instead of English Arabic is the language of choice. If students do not see the benefit of speaking English until they obtain a good grade, then they are motivated by instrumental/extrinsic incentive. Students may avoid utilizing their native language for a number of reasons, including the fear of failure and the notion that doing so signifies a lack of skill in the second language. The goal of passing the course and getting an excellent score may be an extrinsic motivator for them if that is the case. If students had to speak their second language "perfectly" in order to pass a test, they too would be anxious to do it "right" (Szyszka, 2017). Translanguaging may have a bad reputation among students who fear failing the course if they employ it, students in high schools should be allowed to create their own identities as part of their education (Berényi-Kiss, 2012; García & Kleyn, 2016; Svensssson, 2016; Torpsten, 2018). If students' perceptions of the two languages are based on a separation model, this might explain why they avoid speaking or listening to L1 in class. L1 students may avoid using the language or use it with an ulterior motive to undermine their instructor's authority if they get a negative response from their teacher. Although the students believe they are strong English speakers and use English outside of school, they nevertheless feel uncomfortable and inadequate when speaking their second language in class. Perhaps their identities are better accepted outside of the classroom, and that the classroom environment, such as motivational pressure and linguistic anxiety, has a detrimental effect on their identities.

6. Conclusion

It was the goal of this study to gather the thoughts of Arab EFL students on translanguaging. Based on the study's three research questions, it seems that most students do not use translanguaging, with a few exceptions. The students' replies to the survey reflect both positive and negative attitudes towards translanguaging. This may be due to instructors' opinions on translanguaging, while participants' views

are more negative since they believe that they would learn more effectively in EFL classes if they were only allowed to use English. Using the students' native language (L1) in class is seen to elicit a negative or indifferent response from their teachers. Some children may be suffering from linguistic anxiety based on their replies to the survey. While a few participants said that they use their native language to understand the target language better, a majority of participants could see the risk of earning a worse grade if they utilized their L1. According to the English curriculum, students' identities are an important aspect of language teaching, however research shows that this is not the case as one of the students said, English is a language they use outside of the classroom which shows that the English classroom is not seen as a secure location for the students to construct their L2 identities.

7. Recommendations

The study findings show that a great deal lacks on the teachers' front as far as translanguaging in the L2 classroom is concerned. Therefore, it is recommended that in-service teachers be exposed to the latest happening in the field of language research, especially on the subject area of this study that is translanguaging. Efforts should be invested in helping teachers form positive attitudes to the use of L1 in L2 classrooms, and they should be educated how their perspective affects the learners' motivation, language anxiety, and success in the L2 classroom. On a parallel track, senior school learners may be encouraged to use creative means in the language learning experience without fear of reprimand or other forms of punishment. Overall, the teacher-learner combine need to be given a new focus on the potential of translanguaging to ensure its entry into the L2 classroom.

8. Limitation and Future Direction

Many students' opinions on translanguaging have been offered in this research, but it would have been even more accurate if classroom observations had been done to see how instructors' ideas and responses to the usage of L1 in an L2 situation were perceived. Although students' perceptions of their translanguaging abilities have been captured in this research, it is not possible to know exactly how well they do in class based on the students' actual performance. To further explore this idea, it would be interesting to conduct a pre- and post-test on participants in an Arab school context, such as Roskilde University (Daryai-Hansen et al, 2017). The study of second language anxiety in upper-secondary English courses in Saudi Arabia might also provide light on how this influences students' second language identities in the classroom.

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AUTHOR BIODATA

Aziza Saleh Alzabidi is an assistant professor in the department of English Language and Translation, College of Sciences and Arts, Methnab, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. She practiced teaching English for different age groups besides guiding teacher trainees. She has examined Master dissertations in linguistics and applied linguistics. She has published papers on translation and contrastive analysis. Her interests are applied linguistics, translation, and autonomous learning.

Dr. Arif Ahmed Al-Ahdal is a Full Professor of Applied Linguistics in the Department of English Language, College of Arts and Sciences, Methnab, Qassim University, Saudi Arabia. Though his vocation is teaching, Dr. Al-Ahdal is an established poet and writer. He has to his credit two bi-lingual poetry collections, To Yemen with Love and Joys and Sorrows, published in Yemen in 2010 and a reference book, Preparing EFL Teachers for Tomorrow: Opening New Vistas in Teacher Development with INSET, published in Germany in 2015. He is also credited with nearly 50 research papers published in internationally indexed journals. Apart from this contribution to research, he has examined many PhD theses and is presently writing two books on Literary Translation and Applied Linguistics. With a vast cross-cultural teaching experience and diverse exposure gained across three countries: Yemen, India and Saudi Arabia, he is now Editor-in-Chief of both, Journal of Translation and Language Studies, Kuwait, and International Journal of Language and Literary Studies, Italy; Monograph Editor, Sage Open Journals, America; Distinguished and Honoured Advisor, Asian EFL and Asian ESP Journals, UK, and TESOL International Journal, Philippines; Board Member of ELT Journal, Canada; Arab World English Journal, Malaysia; International Journal of English and Literary Studies, Australia; Journal of ELT and Applied Linguistics, India, among others. He is also a freelance language trainer and an IELTS Examiner, certified by Cambridge University, UK.