Analysis of the use of the mother tongue in English classes and its effects on written production

Análisis del uso de la lengua materna en clases de inglés y sus efectos en la producción escrita

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Resumen

Enseñar inglés como lengua extranjera no es una tarea fácil de emprender. Muchos enfoques postulan la estrategia óptima para una mejor enseñanza. Por ejemplo, numerosos investigadores en el campo de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de idiomas creen que el uso de la lengua materna en las aulas de inglés ayuda a facilitar el aprendizaje. Sin embargo, un número significativo de investigadores argumenta que el uso de la lengua materna en las aulas de inglés dificulta el aprendizaje y priva a los estudiantes de la exposición a la segunda lengua.

En esta área, el concepto de translanguaging emerge como un enfoque y la necesidad de investigar el uso de la lengua materna en las clases de inglés y sus efectos en la producción escrita. La investigación se ha desarrollado con estudiantes de alrededor de 8-9 años. Ellos han tenido dificultades al escribir porque necesitan usar su lengua materna para aclaraciones y confirmaciones.

Los resultados demuestran que, el uso de la lengua materna en el grupo de control para instrucciones o aclaraciones fue posible, pero los estudiantes no se sentían seguros al momento de desarrollar la actividad de escritura; el grupo de control necesitó más tiempo para desarrollar la actividad de escritura mientras que en el grupo experimental, cuando los estudiantes aclaraban conceptos o instrucciones en su lengua materna, podían terminar la tarea a tiempo. Sin embargo, el uso de la lengua materna debe ser planificado, no para toda la clase o todas las instrucciones, solo cuando sea necesario a lo largo de la lección.

Los hallazgos sugieren que hay implicaciones y desafíos que enfrentan los maestros y los estudiantes al usar la lengua materna en las aulas de EFL y la transferencia negativa que podría ocurrir al usar el translanguaging.

Palabras clave: inglés; enfoque; L1; lenguaje escrito (Palabras tomadas de ERIC Tesauro Europeo de Educación)

Abstract

Teaching English as a foreign language is not an easy task to be undertaken. Many approaches postulate the optimal strategy for better teaching. For example, numerous researchers in the field of language teaching and learning believe that the use of L1 in EFL classrooms helps to facilitate learning. However, a significant number of researchers argue that the use of L1 in EFL classrooms hinders learning and deprives learners of exposure to the second language.

In this area, the concept of translanguaging emerges as an approach, and the necessity to research the use of L1 in English classes and its effects on writing production. The research has been developed with students of around 8-9 years old. They have struggled while writing because they need to use their L1 for clarification and confirmation.

The results show that the use of L1 in the control group for instructions or clarifications was possible but students could not feel secure at the moment to develop the writing activity; the control group needed more time to develop the writing activity while in the experimental group when students clarify concepts or instructions in their L1 they could finish the task on time but also the use of L1 needs to be planed not for all the class or instructions just when necessary along the lesson.

The findings suggest that there are implications and challenges that teachers and students face when using L1 in EFL classrooms and the negative transfer that could occur when using translanguaging.

Keywords: English; approach; L1; written language (Words taken from ERIC Thesaurus)

Introduction

As any English teacher knows, it can be difficult for students not to use their L1 in the English classroom if they are not used to being taught in a multilingual environment. The issue is therefore important both for student achievement and for helping teachers to develop their skills and understanding of student's needs and preferences (Aithal, 2023)

Proponents of the translanguaging approach think that teachers' instructions in L1 are easy to understand and save the communicative breakdowns. It is also believed that it is very easy to explain the concepts and lexical parallels and equivalents in the first language (Richards & Rogers, 2001) as it is showed in figure 1.

Figure 1. Advantages of translanguaging

Cognitive advantages	Flexibility of thought and attentional control, arising from practicing bilingual skills
Expressive advantages	Creative skills, arising from being bilingual
Educational advantages	Good understanding of the work and the ability to explain concepts more clearly
Linguistic advantages	Opportunity to develop oral/ reading/writing skills in both languages, promoting fluency in both languages
Alternative educational advantages	Ability to bridge between school and home, bridging between school and the wider community
Social advantages	Understanding of cultural differences; tolerance
Health and well-being advantages.	Nurturing self-confidence

Taken from Cenoz & Gorter (2021), p. 15

Macaro (2001) studied the L1 use of six students in the UK and found that they used very little of their L1 during the recorded sessions. The author identified several functions of L1 use among the teachers, most notably for procedural instruction, teaching grammar, and maintaining classroom control. The findings revealed comparatively low levels of L1 use by the students and little effect of the quantity of students' L1 use on the quantity of L1 or L2 use by the learners.

The learners' L1 is a valuable resource, as are the L2 grammar, the textbooks, the teacher, and the cultural production of the learners' new language. Just as it would be unthinkable to teach grammar or vocabulary without an explicit pedagogical approach or framework, it

should be unthinkable to articulate a pedagogy for language teaching and learning without attention to the co-construction of norms and critical reflection on code choices in the language classroom (Levine, 2012).

Auerbach (1993) agrees with Cook (1992) and, to add a little more to the idea says, "L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learners' lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves. The learner is then willing to experiment and take risks with English" (p.46). Cook (2001) argued that the L1 can help students explain the task to each other, negotiate the roles they are going to take, or check their understanding or production of the language with them.

On the other hand, there are many arguments against the use of L1 in teaching L2. Some studies evidence the negative influence of L1. The researches made by Swain & Lapkin, (2000), and Turnbull & Arnett (2002) found that overuse of L1 reduces learners' exposure to the target language input. According to Lightbown and Spada (1999), the patterns transferred from the L1 are definitely the fundamental sources of errors in L2 learning. Similarly, Krashen and Terrel (1983) emphasis on the 'comprehensible input' and 'meaning' also calls for maximum exposure to the target language in the L2 classroom.

Another argument against using L1 in the classroom is that students focus more on translating rather than thinking directly in English. At lower levels, however, it may be essential for students to use translation as their 'training wheels'. L1 can help them get used to speaking English and mastering pronunciation, build confidence, and teach them essential phrases. They can then go on to more advanced language learning (Cambridge 2019).

Translanguaging was developed in Wales in the 1980s to promote equal value for both languages in bilingual education settings and to challenge linguistic dominance. It is the practice of employing two languages interchangeably in a single instruction, each with a distinct purpose. For example, one language could be used for output (like student replies or activities) and the other for input (like instructions or explanations). By utilizing the linkages between languages and encouraging flexibility in language use through simultaneous processing, this dual-language strategy seeks to strengthen language learning. In summary, although legitimate worries exist regarding an excessive dependence on translation and other barriers to language learning, especially for advanced speakers, careful use of the L1 as a supportive tool, combined with translanguaging strategies, can offer valuable benefits for language learners, especially at the initial stages of their language journey (Lewis et al., 2012).

Encouraging translanguaging builds on the idea of Vygotski's "zone of proximal development," (García et al., 2016) which describes what the learner can achieve with scaffolding and/or help from a more knowledgeable peer or teacher. This allows students to

build on the knowledge they already have and achieve greater academic success by developing the skills.

However, in the words of researchers Velasco & García (2014): writing is an extremely difficult and complex skill. While navigating the conventions and guidelines of writing, the author must keep an eye on elements like structure, form and elements, objectives and goals, and the needs and viewpoints of the reader. The ability to control oneself when writing is essential. The writer needs to be introspective, resourceful, and goal-oriented. Proficient writers possess the ability to employ effective tactics to assist them in achieving particular writing objectives. One such tactic in emerging bilinguals is translanguaging.

Finally, based on these previous studies, this project aims to analyze the use of students' L1 in English classrooms and its effects on students' writing production. How this strategy "TRANSLANGUAGING" can help students in writing development.

Material and methods

Three instruments were developed for this study: a worksheet taken from the textbook the students were working on, a checklist to consider students' preferences about when and how the teacher used their L1 in class, and a text quality rubric.

The worksheet was evaluated based on the rubric. After the students of both groups completed the task, the checklist was administered to know how their experience was during the writing activities. The writing quality rubric included five four-point components (i.e. content and ideas, organization, sentence structure and grammar, vocabulary and word choice, and spelling and mechanics). The rubric was designed based on the ages and English proficiency levels of the students.

Participants
The participants in this study included 34 learners from a private school in Riobamba, 17 students from the experimental group and 17 students from the control group (18 males and 16 females). With an average age of 7.5, the participants have studied English for an average of 3.5 years at the time they participated in this study. They all shared the same L1 (i.e. Spanish) and were enrolled in two sections of a writing course taught by the same teacher.

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Procedure

A diagnostic test was administered to all students of both groups at the beginning of the study and another writing test was administered after the study.

In the control group, the instruction was given in ENGLISH before the writing activity that the students were expected to do. All instructions were in L2 trying to make them understand what they had to do. Whereas in the experimental group, L1 and L2 were combined strategically not for all the instructions just when students showed misunderstanding.

The students had to do the worksheet where they had to apply the vocabulary and grammar that they had seen in previous lessons. Learners were allowed to use the L2 to rehearse lexis and sentences that they had considered incorporating into the writing.

The students were not allowed to use dictionaries or other resources to ensure that these factors do not influence their writing. Participants were given one hour to complete the task while the teacher walked around the classroom observing students' performance, taking notes as needed, and observing that the task requirements were largely being fulfilled.

The students' progress during the writing activity was observed and a checklist was used to inform when students use translanguaging. Qualitative data was obtained based on the observation.

After finishing the task, the worksheet was evaluated, especially the writing part where students had to write what they did in a day, based on the writing rubric.

Results

The goals of this research are to investigate the use of translanguaging and its effects during the writing process of students. This section represents the results of the pre-test and post-test taken for the control group and experimental group in which can be noticed that the use of translanguaging can be beneficial for students but also in some cases could have some negative impact on students' writing process.

Table *1*: Pre-test results
CONTROL GROUP PRE-TEST

	q1	q2	q3	total	PERCENTAGE
S1	8	5	5	14.5	41.4 %
S2	8	5	4.5	13	37.1%
S3	6	4	6.5	16	45.7%
S4	6	4	6	15.5	44.3%
S5	4	2	4.5	12	34.3%
S6	10	5	7.5	14.5	41.4%
S7	8	4	4	14	40.0%
S8	10	5	4.5	15	42.9%
S9	8	5	5.5	15	42.9%
S10	10	5	5	16.5	47.1%
					41.7%

Table *2*: Pre-test results
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP PRE-TEST

	q1	q2	q3	total	PERCENTAGE
S1	8	4	16.5	28.5	85.7%
S2	10	5	18	33	95.7%
S3	10	5	17.75	32.75	97.1%
S4	10	5	54	69	95.7%
S5	8	5	17.5	30.5	87.1%
S6	6	4	16	26	77.1%
S7	6	4	15.5	25.5	75.7%
S8	8	4	15.75	27.75	87.1%
S9	10	5	16.5	31.5	98.6%
S10	8	5	16	29	82.9%
					88.2%

Note: Data collected by the author on the 15th of January 2023

Analysis and interpretation

Table *3*: Post-test results
CONTROL GROUP POST-TEST

	q1	q2	q3	total	PERCENTAGE
S1	8	5	12.5	25.5	72.9%
S2	10	5	10.75	25.75	73.6%
S3	10	5	9.5	24.5	70.0%
S4	8	4	10	22	62.9%
S5	8	5	11	24	68.6%
S6	10	5	12.5	27.5	78.6%

S7	8	5	10	23	**65.7%**
S8	10	5	9.75	24.75	**70.7%**
S9	10	5	11.5	26.5	**75.7%**
S10	10	5	12	27	**77.1%**
					71.15%

Table 4: Pre-test results
EXPERIMENTAL GROUP POST-TEST

q1	q2	q3	Total	**PERCENTAGE**
10	5	18.5	33.5	**95.7%**
10	5	19	34	**97.1%**
10	4	19	33	**94.3%**
10	4	18.5	32.5	**92.9%**
10	5	18	33	**94.3%**
10	5	18	33	**94.3%**
10	5	19.5	34.5	**98.6%**
10	5	19.5	34.5	**98.6%**
10	5	20	35	**100.0%**
10	5	20	35	**100.0%**
				96.4%

Note: Data collected by the author on the 15th of March 2024

Analysis and interpretation

The results of the study showed that the experimental group scored higher than the control group based on the post-test results.
The experimental group (table 2 and 4) that used translanguaging demonstrated increased writing fluency and creativity compared to the control group (table 1 and 3) that used L2. This is attributed to the way language users employ, create, and interpret different kinds of signs to communicate across contexts and participants.

Language is not simply a means of expressing existing thoughts but is necessary for the formation of cognitive processes. Therefore, the use of L1 in a second language classroom can help students understand and practice writing skills within their Zone of Proximal Development. By providing explanations, examples, and feedback in the student's native language, the teacher can effectively guide students through the writing process, and help them develop their writing skills within their current level of potential development (Mcleod, 2024).

In the experimental group, students could switch between languages so they could effectively convey their ideas and concepts, thus overcoming potential language barriers that may impede their writing process and accomplishing the class aims; on the other hand, in the control group, it has been noticed that even if students understand the instructions they did not feel secure during the writing process because they were waiting until the end the teacher confirmation in their L1 so because of that the process of writing took more time than expected.

Williams (2002) says that translanguaging involves a complex mental process with a great deal of thinking. He appears to assume that the thinking process lies between the input and output stages of the entire process without explicitly addressing it as such. As a theoretical model, the process of translanguaging certainly entails input, thinking, and output.

In activities 1 and 2, the control and experimental groups were easy for students because of the extra examples and demonstrations. It was not difficult for students to catch the instructions and do the activities without any problem. However, in activity 3, the students in the control group had to put their ideas in order and construct a coherent paragraph using the vocabulary and grammar structure. Even though they were familiar with the language and grammar, they had to use words like "not" instead of "don't." In other cases, students forgot to include the word "at" when mentioning the time, or they wrote sentences in a fragmented fashion that lacked coherence.

The rubric was used to evaluate content, ideas, organization, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling. The control group had more difficulties building the paragraph than the experimental group, while the control group, just wrote sentences with grammar and spelling mistakes with no connection between sentences, and they could not finish the activity in the established time. In the experimental group, they could finish the paragraph with some grammar mistakes.

After taking the post-test, the performance of both groups was satisfactory, as shown in Table 4, both groups improved their writing performance, and although the control group did not achieve a perfect score, they were always willing to practice EFL, asking for clarifications and help while writing. Effective teacher planning is crucial for this method, as it requires more time preparation, additional material, and numerous examples to help students understand the class and guide them through the writing process.

The use of translanguaging has been observed to create a safe environment in the class, students are allowed to support each other during the writing process or even correct their classmate's mistakes using translanguaging, and students could finish the activity successfully with good paragraphs and it has been noticed that the use of translanguaging as

a strategy in EFL classrooms could bring some advantages in different aspects as the following stated by Cenoz & Gorter (2020).

During the immersion of this method in the classroom, some negative aspects were noticed, one previously mentioned by (Simasiku, Kasanda & Smith, 2015) in which mentioned that learners can be confused when teachers are switching between languages and learners end up not knowing which language to communicate in during lessons because both languages are used concurrently.

It was the main negative aspect seen before, during, and after the writing process.
After taking the post-test, the checklist was implemented with students of both groups.

Table 6: Checklist
EXPERIMENTAL AND CONTROL GROUP
Do you prefer your teacher to use your language when…

	always	sometimes	Occasionally	never	total
giving instructions and managing the class?	8	9	2	1	20
explaining grammar and vocabulary?	15	4	1	0	20
correcting errors?	11	6	2	1	20
chatting with the class?	9	4	6	1	20
helping individual students?	8	7	5	0	20

Note: Data collected by the author on the 19th of March 2024

Analysis and interpretation
Based on the checklist done for all the students, 20 in total, the following information was obtained.
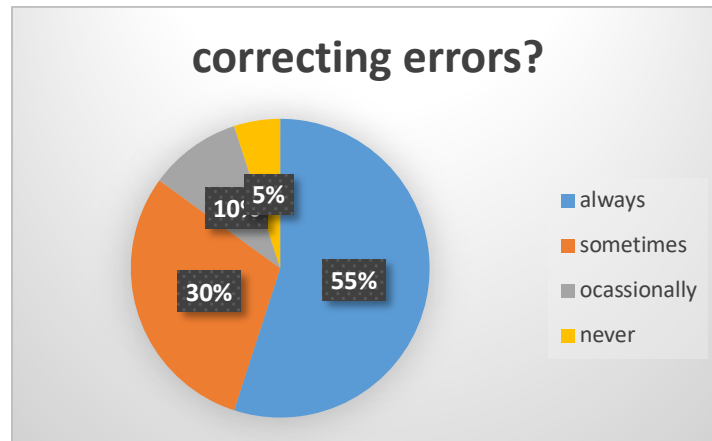Figure 2. Students´ responses to item 1
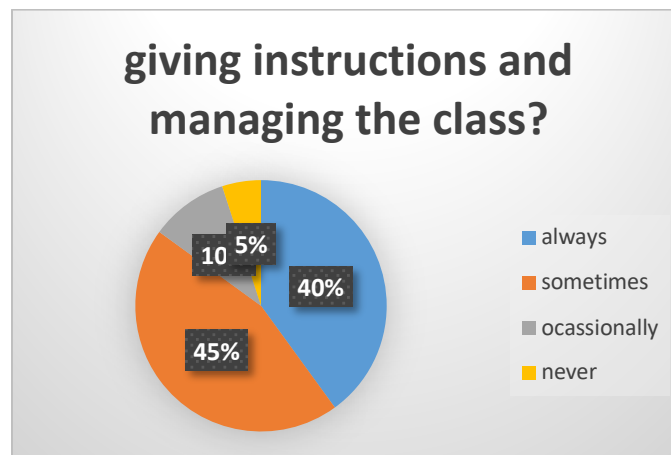
In question 1, 40% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 always when giving instructions, 45% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 sometimes, 10% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 occasionally, and finally just 5% of students prefer the teacher to use just second language when giving instructions.
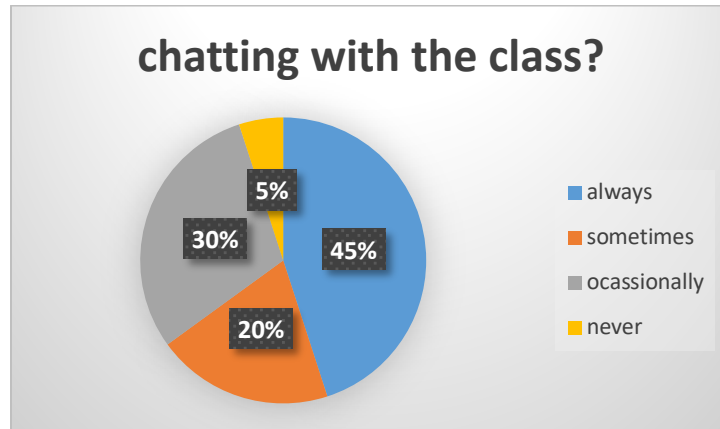
Figure 3. Students´ responses to item 2
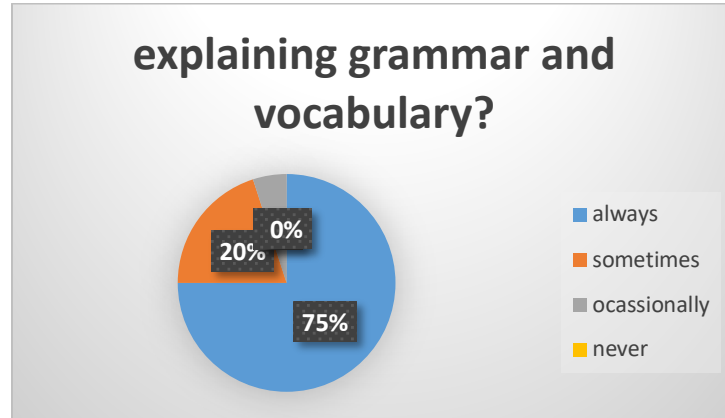
In question 2, 75% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 always when explaining grammar and vocabulary, 20% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 sometimes, 5% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 occasionally, and finally no one prefers the teacher to use just second language when explaining grammar and vocabulary.
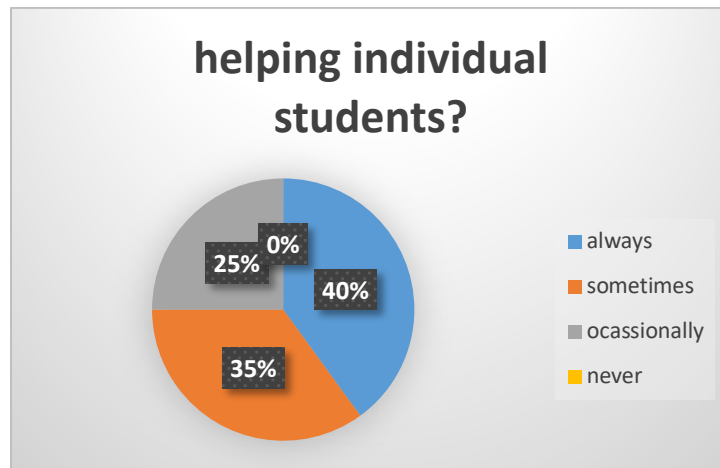
Figure 4. Students´ responses to item 3

In question 3, 55% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 always when correcting errors, 30% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 sometimes, 10% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 occasionally, and finally just 5% of students prefer the teacher to use just second language when correcting errors.

Figure 5. Students´ responses to item 4

In question 4, 45% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 always when chatting with the class, 20% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 sometimes, 30% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 occasionally, and finally just 5% of students prefer the teacher to use just second language when chatting with the class.

Figure 6. Students´ responses to item 5

In question 5, 40% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 always when helping individual students, 35% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 sometimes, 25% of students prefer the teacher to use L1 occasionally, and finally nobody prefers the teacher to use just second language when helping individual students.

As shown in the graphics the students prefer the teacher to use L1 in English classes, even if the teacher uses lots of examples or demonstrations, it has seen the necessity of confirmation in L1.

Discussion

Setting out to examine the use of translanguaging in EFL classrooms and its effects on writing production, this study found that translanguaging could be used as a strategic resource to clarify language, encourage student production, and help students feel secure while writing. When used to writing production, translanguaging gives students a scaffold to help them get over linguistic difficulties and improve their writing abilities. For language learners, it is essential that they feel safe and encouraged in their writing tasks, and using their L1 can make a big difference in this regard.

The results of the study imply that incorporating translanguaging techniques into English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes has improved students' writing confidence and enabled clearer communication. This emphasizes how crucial it is to identify and make use of students' linguistic resources, especially their first language (L1), in order to establish more welcoming and productive learning settings.

Translanguaging techniques have been shown to help pupils in EFL classrooms. It is crucial to remember that adopting L1 should be done so sparingly. Language complexity, opposing viewpoints over L1, a lack of resources, time restraints, and inadequate training are some of the barriers to employing translanguaging to enhance teaching and learning processes. Despite these difficulties, the teacher's involvement in the writing process has made the translanguaging support technique effective.

According to research, students in this study are beginning to build confidence in using a second language in class, they are also learning to overcome the shame they feel when making mistakes and the use of translanguaging can play a crucial role in helping them to feel more comfortable at the moment to produce the language. They need to realize that they can produce the language in a good way by employing translanguaging in a very supportive way.

Students have been observed to benefit from translanguaging practices. However, it is important to note that the adoption of L1 should be judicious. The constraints of using translanguaging to support learning and teaching practices include language complexities, contrary views relating to L1, lack of resources, time constraints, and insufficient training. Despite these challenges, the engagement of the teacher during the writing process has enabled the translanguaging support strategy to have a positive impact.

The study has shown that when the teacher uses students L1 in class to guide or to clarify points, it is not necessary to translate every single step or instruction. Even if we as English teachers get good writing tasks, they are not developing all the language skills students need to learn a second language, The use of pedagogical translanguaging aims at improving

language and content competencies in school contexts by utilizing resources from the learners' entire linguistic repertoire

Conclusion

This experimental study disclosed that translanguaging used during writing development has had an impact on students' production, the insecurity students feel before, during, and after writing activities could hinder students' ability to express themselves freely and effectively in L2 writing tasks. As has been shown, a supportive environment where students feel less pressure to rigorously follow the requirements of the target language. They can use their L1 as a scaffold to overcome language barriers, which can help reduce anxiety and promote a more positive writing experience but in the same way, the use of translanguaging must be planned not to be used all the time, just when necessary otherwise students will not do any effort to comprehend instructions or guidance.

The use of translanguaging must be seen by teachers as the last resource to make students put all their effort into understanding and producing the language before using their L1. Rather than translating entire sentences, students can strategically incorporate words or expressions from their native language to emphasize a point, add depth, or convey a specific meaning that may not be easily expressed in their L2.

In summary, the use of translanguaging in EFL classrooms has been shown to have both benefits and challenges, and this study has highlighted its potential to enhance writing performance and language learning.

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