

From Monolingual Silence to Bilingual Confidence: Investigating Translanguaging Strategies in Middle School English Education

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ABSTRACT

This quasi-experimental mixed-methods study investigates the impact of translanguaging pedagogy on the vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency of Turkish and Syrian sixth-grade English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners in a public middle school in Turkey. Sixty students were assigned to either a treatment group, which received instruction incorporating Turkish and Arabic alongside English, or a control group following English-only methods. Quantitative findings revealed significant improvements in all three domains for the treatment group, with Turkish students performing slightly better than their Syrian peers. Semi-structured interviews with 12 students indicated overwhelmingly positive perceptions of translanguaging, highlighting increased emotional comfort, cognitive clarity, and classroom engagement. The results suggest that translanguaging supports both linguistic development and sociocultural inclusion, particularly for refugee and linguistically marginalised learners. The study recommends integrating translanguaging into mainstream English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction to foster equity, confidence, and multilingual empowerment in diverse educational contexts.

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Statement of Publication Ethics

Ethical approval for the present study was granted by the Mersin University Educational Sciences Ethics Committee on 05 May 2025 (Decision No. 93).

Authors' Contribution Rate

The author was solely responsible for the conception, design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, and writing of the entire study.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Reference

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Introduction

The increasingly multilingual nature of today's classrooms has led to growing recognition of the limitations of traditional, monolingual approaches to foreign language instruction (Brown, 2023; Cummins, 2021; Decristan et al., 2024; Ebrahimi, 2023; Genesee, 2022; Hofer & Jessner, 2025; Özturan & Uysal, 2022; Uysal, 2012). Particularly in contexts characterised by cultural and linguistic diversity—such as Turkey's public middle schools where Turkish and Syrian (Arabic-speaking) students are educated together—English language education often fails to fully engage learners with differing linguistic repertoires (Altay & Yuksel, 2025; Eren & Çavuşoğlu, 2023; Kızıl, 2024; Küçükaydin et al., 2024; Toker & Olğun Baytaş, 2022). Conventional English-only pedagogies may unintentionally silence learners who rely on their native languages as cognitive tools, especially in early stages of language acquisition (Anderson et al., 2024; Cummins, 2021; Kaveh & Lenz, 2024; Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022; Ulum, 2024a). This “monolingual silence” has become a structural barrier to equitable and effective foreign language instruction (Arellano, 2024; Gundarina & Simpson, 2022; Kuchah & Milligan, 2024; Set, 2023; Ulum, 2024b). Recent research has emphasised that enabling students to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire can promote deeper understanding and engagement in second language learning (Cutrim Schmid, 2023; Han, 2024; Galante, 2021; Galante et al., 2023; Sulis, 2023). Within this paradigm, translanguaging has emerged as a pedagogical framework that legitimises and systematises the dynamic use of multiple languages in the EFL classroom (Huang & Chalmers, 2023; Liando et al., 2022; Putrawan, 2022; Sobkowiak, 2022; Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022). Rather than treating students' home languages as interference, translanguaging repositions them as valuable cognitive and communicative resources (Bouguerra, 2024; Ergül, 2023; Hopp et al., 2021; Parmegiani, 2022; Samar & Pathan, 2023). This approach is particularly relevant for refugee and immigrant students whose bilingual identities are often marginalised in formal education settings (Ateek, 2024; Karanfil & Demir, 2021; Koyama & Kasper, 2022; Li & Qin, 2024; Mammou et al., 2023).

In the Turkish context, the presence of Arabic-speaking Syrian students in state schools has intensified the need for pedagogical models that acknowledge linguistic diversity while promoting inclusion (Akin-Sabuncu & Kasapoglu, 2024; Maadad & Yilmaz, 2021; Nimer & Arpacik, 2023; Toker & Olğun Baytaş, 2022; Yilmaz, 2024). Despite a growing body of research on translanguaging, empirical studies investigating its classroom impact—particularly in middle school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) settings involving both Turkish and Arabic-speaking students—remain scarce (Alasmari et al., 2022; Bermejo, 2025; Irgin, 2025; Tekin, 2023). Moreover, few studies have assessed translanguaging strategies using a quasi-experimental design that includes not only vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension but also speaking fluency, which is often a neglected skill in multilingual pedagogical research (Mgijima, 2021; Robillos, 2023; Wang, 2021). This study seeks to address this gap by evaluating the impact of translanguaging strategies on vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency among Turkish and Syrian middle school EFL students in a public-school setting. The study further explores students' perceptions of these strategies through semi-structured interviews, aiming to capture their experiential insights and learning

preferences in a multilingual instructional context. In light of this background, the study addresses the following research questions:

- What is the effect of translanguaging strategies on the vocabulary knowledge of Turkish and Syrian middle school EFL students?
- How do translanguaging strategies influence students' reading comprehension skills?
- What impact do translanguaging strategies have on students' speaking fluency?
- What are students' perceptions of the use of translanguaging strategies in English language instruction?
- To what extent do the effects of translanguaging strategies on vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, speaking fluency, and student perceptions differ between Turkish and Syrian middle school EFL learners?

Translanguaging Pedagogy in EFL Classrooms

In recent years, translanguaging pedagogy has gained substantial traction as a dynamic and inclusive approach to language education, particularly in multilingual and multicultural learning environments (Antony et al., 2024; Fang et al., 2022; Itoi, 2024; Tai, 2022; Wawire & Barnes-Story, 2023). Coined by Williams (1996) and later expanded by García (2011), translanguaging moves beyond the concept of code-switching by embracing the fluid, interrelated nature of multilinguals' entire linguistic repertoires (Balam, 2021; Bhatt & Bolonyai, 2019; Goodman & Tastanbek, 2021; Przymus, 2024; MacSwan, 2022). It is both a theoretical lens and a pedagogical practice that actively encourages learners to draw upon all of their linguistic resources—including home languages—in a structured and purposeful way during learning processes (García & Kleyn, 2016). Unlike traditional monolingual models that often consider students' first languages (L1s) as interference, translanguaging pedagogy repositions these languages as epistemic and affective resources that contribute to deeper understanding, cognitive processing, and emotional security (Özkaynak, 2020). This reorientation is especially vital in classrooms involving refugee or minority learners, such as Arabic-speaking students in Turkish schools, where learners' identities, linguistic capital, and cultural experiences are frequently undervalued or excluded from formal education settings (Toker & Olğun Baytaş, 2022). In such contexts, translanguaging offers a means to validate these identities while promoting meaningful academic engagement (Capstick & Ateek, 2024).

A growing body of empirical research highlights the positive impact of translanguaging pedagogy on key language competencies, including vocabulary development, reading comprehension, and oral fluency (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Hopp et al., 2021; Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022; Robillos, 2023; Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022). In addition to enhancing linguistic outcomes, translanguaging fosters learner agency, reduces anxiety, and promotes identity affirmation (Dovchin et al., 2025). In linguistically diverse classrooms, rigid English-only policies can create barriers to inclusion and equitable participation (Del Carmen Salazar, 2008); translanguaging pedagogy offers an alternative model grounded in linguistic justice and pedagogical responsiveness (Bhasin et al., 2023; Cioè-Peña & Snell, 2015).

While translanguaging was initially conceptualised in bilingual and ESL contexts, it has increasingly gained attention within English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, where English is not spoken in learners' everyday lives (Ooi & Aziz, 2021). In such settings, the challenges of limited exposure to English, combined with learners' varying proficiency levels, often hinder engagement and comprehension (Rabbidge, 2019; Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022; Yuvayapan, 2019). Translanguaging, in this context, serves multiple pedagogical functions: it scaffolds meaning-making (Cui & Pacheco, 2023), builds academic vocabulary (Wang et al., 2025), and reduces affective filters such as fear of making mistakes or speaking anxiety (Back, 2020; Bouguerra, 2024). Scholars argue that translanguaging can be particularly effective in EFL environments where students struggle to articulate complex thoughts in the target language (Robillos, 2023). For example, García-Mateus and Palmer (2017) found that bilingual learners engaged more deeply with content and demonstrated improved retention of vocabulary when encouraged to use their whole language repertoires. Similarly, Sayer (2013) showed that translanguaging practices in classroom dialogues increased student participation, boosted self-confidence, and created a more inclusive atmosphere for learners of all proficiency levels.

Beyond linguistic gains, translanguaging pedagogy plays a critical role in learner identity formation (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017). By enabling students to express themselves in their preferred linguistic modes, it affirms their lived experiences and nurtures a sense of agency and belonging (Huang, 2021). This is particularly crucial in multicultural classrooms, where language intersects with power, race, and cultural marginalisation (Fu et al., 2029). For refugee students in particular, such as many Syrians in Turkey, translanguaging can serve as a protective mechanism that eases their socio-emotional adjustment and enhances classroom inclusion (Sunata & Beyazova, 2022). Nevertheless, despite its growing appeal, the practical implementation of translanguaging pedagogy in EFL classrooms presents challenges (Liu et al., 2020; Wei & Lin, 2019). Teachers may lack training in managing multilingual classroom discourse or feel constrained by national curricula that prioritise monolingual, English-only instruction (Liyanage & Tao, 2020). Additionally, some educators express concerns that translanguaging may reduce students' exposure to the target language (Brevik & Rindal, 2020). However, research by Cenoz and Gorter (2014) counters this assumption, demonstrating that translanguaging—when used intentionally—enhances rather than detracts from English learning by offering more accessible input and culturally contextualised engagement.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in the theoretical framework of translanguaging pedagogy, which positions multilingualism not as a challenge to be mitigated but as a resource to be cultivated in the language learning process (Donley, 2022; García & Kleyn, 2016). Drawing from sociocultural and critical theories of language, identity, and power, translanguaging offers a paradigm shift in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education by reconceptualising language boundaries as fluid, negotiable, and contextually constructed (Chang-Bacon et al., 2021). At the heart of translanguaging theory lies the sociocultural theory of learning (Vygotsky, 1978), which posits that language development

occurs through mediated interaction within a social context. From this perspective, allowing learners to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire—including their home and community languages—enables deeper cognitive engagement, enhances participation, and fosters meaningful knowledge construction (Lantolf, 2006). Translanguaging thus acts as a scaffold, bridging prior knowledge with new learning in ways that are personally relevant and culturally situated (Pinho Feller, 2022).

Moreover, the theoretical foundation of this study aligns with critical applied linguistics, which interrogates the ideological underpinnings of dominant language practices, particularly those that marginalise minoritised learners (Pennycook, 2004). Within this critical lens, translanguaging challenges the hegemony of English-only instruction and monolingual ideologies that silence learners' identities and lived experiences—what García (2011) refers to as "*monolingual bias*." Instead, it affirms the legitimacy of all languages as tools for meaning-making, self-expression, and academic success.

In multilingual classrooms composed of Turkish and Arabic-speaking Syrian students, the classroom becomes a contested space where language ideologies, national policies, and teacher practices intersect (Nimer & Arpacik, 2023). As such, translanguaging pedagogy serves as a transformative approach that not only facilitates language acquisition but also fosters equity, belonging, and identity validation (Yidie & Fan, 2024; Yilmaz, 2021). For refugee learners in particular, whose linguistic repertoires are often devalued or stigmatised in mainstream education, translanguaging provides a platform for reasserting their agency and experiencing school as a linguistically safe space (Capstick & Ateek, 2024). This study also draws upon the concept of translanguaging spaces, introduced by Wei (2011), which conceptualises the classroom as a site of negotiation and hybrid meaning-making. In these spaces, learners are not forced to suppress parts of their linguistic identities but are encouraged to integrate their complete semiotic resources in order to interact, think, and learn (Hua et al., 2017). These dynamic spaces resist linguistic compartmentalisation and instead promote a holistic understanding of language use, particularly beneficial in culturally and linguistically diverse EFL classrooms (Wei, 2018).

By integrating these theoretical perspectives, the present study conceptualises translanguaging pedagogy as a vehicle for both linguistic development and sociocultural transformation. It recognises the centrality of learners' multilingual identities in shaping their academic trajectories and advocates for pedagogical practices that validate, rather than suppress, these identities. The framework informs the design of the intervention, the selection of assessment tools (including vocabulary, reading, and speaking measures), and the interpretation of learners' perceptions through qualitative inquiry. Ultimately, this theoretical lens underpins the study's aim to evaluate how translanguaging can serve as both an instructional strategy and a platform for multilingual empowerment within the Turkish EFL context, as illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Theoretical Framework

Level		Component
Level 1	macro framework	Translanguaging Pedagogy
Level 2	theoretical foundations	Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978) Critical Applied Linguistics (Pennycook, 2004) Translanguaging Spaces (Wei, 2011)
Level 3	pedagogical applications	Meaning-Making through Full Linguistic Repertoire Identity Affirmation & Belonging Countering Monolingual Hegemony Empowerment of Refugee and Minority Learners
Level 4	research implementation	Vocabulary Knowledge Reading Comprehension Speaking Fluency Student Perceptions in Turkish-Syrian EFL Classrooms

Methodology

This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-methods design to investigate the impact of translanguaging pedagogy on the vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency of Turkish and Syrian middle school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, as well as to explore their perceptions regarding the use of translanguaging strategies in the classroom. The integration of quantitative and qualitative methods enabled a more comprehensive understanding of both measurable outcomes and learner experiences within a multilingual educational context.

Participants and Setting

The study was conducted in a public middle school located in southern Turkey, where Turkish and Arabic-speaking Syrian students are educated together. A total of 60 sixth-grade students participated in the study, selected through purposive sampling based on their linguistic backgrounds and accessibility to the study site. The sample was divided equally into two groups: a treatment group ($n = 30$) and a control group ($n = 30$). The treatment group comprised 8 Syrian (Arabic-speaking) and 22 Turkish students, while the control group consisted of 7 Syrian and 23 Turkish students. Although a perfectly symmetrical distribution was not feasible due to existing classroom compositions, both groups reflected a balanced representation of the school's linguistic and cultural diversity. This design enabled meaningful comparisons between Turkish and Syrian students in their responses to translanguaging pedagogy. All participants had comparable levels of English proficiency, as determined by school records and initial classroom observations conducted by the researcher and collaborating English teacher.

Research Design and Procedure

The study followed a pre-test–post-test control group design over a five-week instructional period. The treatment group was exposed to translanguaging-based instructional strategies, which allowed students to use their home languages—Turkish and Arabic—alongside English during classroom activities. In contrast, the control group followed the national EFL curriculum using a strict English-only approach.

Instructional Phases

Week 1 (Preparation): Informed consent forms were distributed and collected.

Pilot testing was conducted to ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments.

Week 2 (Pre-Test): All participants completed three assessments: a vocabulary test, a reading comprehension test, and a speaking task, which was scored using a fluency rubric.

Weeks 3–4 (Intervention): The treatment group students participated in lessons enhanced with translanguaging strategies, including bilingual vocabulary instruction, reading tasks with cross-linguistic scaffolding, and speaking activities involving transitions from Turkish/Arabic to English. Control group students received the duplicate content through English-only instruction, with no use of LIS.

Week 5 (Post-Test and Interviews): Both groups completed the same three assessments as those administered at the pre-test. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 12 students from the treatment group (6 Turkish, 6 Syrian) to explore their perceptions of translanguaging.

Data Collection Instruments

Vocabulary Knowledge Test: A 30-item multiple-choice test developed based on the Oxford 3000 Word List was used to assess students' mastery of the target vocabulary introduced during instruction. This instrument was piloted with 10 sixth-grade students (not included in the main study) to ensure clarity, reliability, and construct validity. The pilot analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .82, indicating high internal consistency. Minor adjustments to item wording were made to enhance comprehensibility and alignment with grade-level expectations before its use in the pre-test and post-test stages.

Reading Comprehension Test: A teacher-developed assessment consisting of one short reading passage followed by 4–5 open-ended questions was employed to measure reading comprehension. Responses were evaluated using a detailed analytic rubric. During pilot testing, this instrument demonstrated acceptable internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of .79. Revisions were made to question phrasing and rubric descriptors to improve clarity and ensure alignment with the cognitive demands of the curriculum.

Speaking Fluency Rubric: Speaking fluency was assessed using a 5-point scale adapted from established fluency rubrics, evaluating fluency, grammatical accuracy, and lexical appropriateness based on student responses to situational prompts. While Cronbach's alpha is less applicable to rubric-based performance measures, pilot testing confirmed inter-rater agreement and rubric clarity. Feedback from the pilot informed refinements to scoring guidelines to enhance reliability and ease of use.

Semi-Structured Interview Protocol: Interviews were conducted to explore students' emotional and cognitive responses to translanguaging strategies, focusing on comprehension, engagement, identity expression, and classroom comfort. The interview protocol underwent expert review to establish content validity, ensuring that questions were age-appropriate, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the study's research questions. Pilot feedback led to minor wording adjustments to promote open, reflective responses.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS (v. 28). Independent samples t-tests were employed to compare pre- and post-test scores between groups for vocabulary and reading comprehension. Given the ordinal nature of speaking rubric scores, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to compare speaking fluency. Descriptive statistics were also calculated to assess overall trends. Additionally, subgroup comparisons were conducted to examine differences between Turkish and Syrian students, addressing the research question concerning group-based variation. Qualitative data from interviews were analysed using thematic content analysis. Transcripts were coded inductively, and emergent themes were organised around students' emotional responses, perceived benefits, identity-related expressions, and language preferences during classroom activities. Triangulation with quantitative results enabled validation and deeper interpretation of student perspectives.

In line with the study's theoretical framework, all data analysis procedures were conducted through the lens of translanguaging pedagogy, grounded in sociocultural theory, critical applied linguistics, and the concept of translanguaging spaces. Quantitative analyses (t-tests, Mann–Whitney U, Wilcoxon signed-rank tests) were interpreted not only for statistical significance but also for their implications on how multilingual resources function as cognitive and cultural scaffolds. Similarly, the thematic analysis of qualitative data followed Braun and Clarke's (2023) framework, with coding and theme generation guided by the theoretical view that language practices are socially mediated, identity-affirming, and resistant to monolingual hegemony. This integration ensured that both numeric trends and emergent themes were understood within the broader aim of evaluating translanguaging as a transformative pedagogical practice in multilingual EFL classrooms.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Mersin University Educational Sciences Ethics Committee (Date: 05.05.2025, Decision Number: 93). Parental consent and student assent were secured, and all participants were informed about the voluntary nature of the study and their right to withdraw at any stage. Pseudonyms were used in all qualitative data to ensure participant anonymity.

Findings and Results

Instrument Validation through Pilot Testing

During the preparation phase (Week 1), a pilot study was conducted with a group of 10 sixth-grade students (not included in the main study) to examine the clarity, reliability, and construct validity of the three assessment tools: the vocabulary knowledge test, the reading comprehension test, and the speaking fluency rubric. The pilot results indicated satisfactory internal consistency across all instruments. Specifically, the vocabulary test yielded a Cronbach's alpha of .82, and the reading comprehension test showed alpha reliability of .79. Minor revisions were made to item phrasing and scoring guidelines to enhance clarity and ensure alignment with grade-level cognitive expectations. The final versions of the instruments were subsequently administered during the pre-test and post-test stages of the study.

Pre-Test Results: Baseline Language Proficiency

Before the instructional intervention, all participants completed three baseline assessments: a vocabulary knowledge test, a reading comprehension test, and a speaking fluency task. The goal of the pre-test phase was to determine the initial equivalency between the treatment and control groups, ensuring that any subsequent differences in post-test scores could be attributed to the instructional method rather than prior proficiency.

Vocabulary Knowledge Pre-Test

An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the vocabulary scores of the treatment and control groups. The results indicated no statistically significant difference between the groups at the pre-test stage, $t(58) = 0.43$, $p = .668$, suggesting that both groups had similar levels of vocabulary knowledge prior to the intervention.

Table 2. Vocabulary Knowledge Pre-Test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Treatment	30	17.20	3.55
Control	30	16.87	3.48

Reading Comprehension Pre-Test

Similarly, an independent samples t-test revealed no significant difference in reading comprehension scores between the groups, $t(58) = 0.59$, $p = .558$. This result confirmed that the learners' reading comprehension abilities were comparable at baseline.

Table 3. Reading Comprehension Pre-Test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Treatment	30	12.63	2.14
Control	30	12.30	2.08

Speaking Fluency Pre-Test

Due to the ordinal nature of the speaking rubric, a Mann–Whitney U test was conducted. The analysis indicated no statistically significant difference in fluency scores between the treatment and control groups at pre-test, $U = 425.00$, $p = .412$. Median fluency scores were closely aligned, suggesting initial parity in oral production skills.

Table 4. Speaking Fluency Pre-Test

Group	N	Median	Mean Rank
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Group	N	Median	Mean Rank
Treatment	30	3.00	30.97
Control	30	3.00	29.03

These results collectively confirm that both the treatment and control groups were statistically equivalent in their vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency before the implementation of translanguaging strategies.

Post-Test Results: Impact of Translanguaging Pedagogy

Following the four-week instructional period, both the treatment and control groups completed the same three assessments previously administered during the pre-test stage. The post-test results revealed statistically significant differences in favour of the treatment group across all three skill areas: vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency. Furthermore, within the treatment group, Turkish students consistently outperformed their Syrian peers, although both subgroups showed clear gains compared to the control group.

Vocabulary Knowledge Post-Test

An independent samples t-test showed a significant difference in vocabulary knowledge between the treatment and control groups, $t(58) = 4.91, p < .001$. The treatment group achieved higher mean scores, with Turkish students showing the highest performance, followed by Syrian students.

Table 5. Vocabulary Knowledge Post-Test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Treatment (TR)	22	24.27	3.14
Treatment (SY)	8	22.13	2.91
Control (TR)	23	17.65	3.32
Control (SY)	7	16.28	3.54

Reading Comprehension Post-Test

A t-test comparison revealed a significant improvement in reading comprehension for the treatment group compared to the control group, $t(58) = 3.87, p < .001$. The use of translanguaging scaffolds during reading activities has enhanced comprehension, particularly among Turkish learners.

Table 6. Reading Comprehension Post-Test

Group	N	Mean	SD
Treatment (TR)	22	18.41	2.24
Treatment (SY)	8	17.00	2.36
Control (TR)	23	13.43	2.61
Control (SY)	7	12.57	2.74

Speaking Fluency Post-Test

A Mann–Whitney U test was conducted to analyse post-test speaking fluency scores, given the ordinal nature of the rubric. The treatment group scored significantly higher overall ($U = 251.00$, $p < .001$), with Turkish students again achieving slightly higher fluency levels than their Syrian peers.

Table 7. Speaking Fluency Post-Test

Group	N	Median	Mean Rank
Treatment (TR)	22	4.00	36.25
Treatment (SY)	8	4.00	34.13
Control (TR)	23	3.00	25.39
Control (SY)	7	2.00	22.57

These findings collectively demonstrate the positive effect of translanguaging strategies on key components of language acquisition. Not only did the treatment group outperform the control group across all assessed domains, but both Turkish and Syrian learners in the translanguaging context showed considerable gains, affirming the potential of multilingual pedagogies in diverse EFL classrooms.

Within-Group Pre–Post Comparisons

To directly assess the impact of the five-week instructional period, within-group comparisons were conducted for the treatment and control groups across vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency.

For vocabulary knowledge, the treatment group's mean score increased significantly from 17.20 ($SD = 3.55$) to 23.70 ($SD = 3.10$), $t(29) = 10.46$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.91$, indicating a large effect. The control group's increase from 16.87 ($SD = 3.48$) to 17.30 ($SD = 3.33$) was small and not statistically significant, $t(29) = 0.88$, $p = .386$, $d = 0.16$.

For reading comprehension, the treatment group improved from 12.63 ($SD = 2.14$) to 18.07 ($SD = 2.27$), $t(29) = 12.21$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.23$, showing a huge effect. The control

group's change from 12.30 (SD = 2.08) to 13.25 (SD = 2.63) was not significant, $t(29) = 1.46$, $p = .156$, $d = 0.27$.

For speaking fluency, the treatment group's median score rose from 3.00 to 4.00, with the mean rank increasing from 30.97 to 35.67, representing a significant improvement (Wilcoxon $Z = -4.04$, $p < .001$, $r = .52$). The control group's median remained at 3.00, with a negligible change in mean rank from 29.03 to 24.80 (Wilcoxon $Z = -0.59$, $p = .557$, $r = .08$).

These results indicate that the treatment group experienced substantial and statistically significant gains in all three measures, while the control group showed no meaningful change. This pattern strongly supports the effectiveness of the translanguaging-based instructional intervention in enhancing learners' vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency.

Table 8. Pre-Post Test Comparisons for Treatment and Control Groups

Measure	Group	N	Pre-Test M (SD)	Post-Test M (SD)	t / Z	p	Effect Size (Cohen's d / r)
Vocabulary Knowledge	Treatment	30	17.20 (3.55)	23.70 (3.10)	10.46	< .001	1.91
	Control	30	16.87 (3.48)	17.30 (3.33)	0.88	.386	0.16
Reading Comprehension	Treatment	30	12.63 (2.14)	18.07 (2.27)	12.21	< .001	2.23
	Control	30	12.30 (2.08)	13.25 (2.63)	1.46	.156	0.27
Speaking Fluency (Median)	Treatment	30	3.00	4.00	-4.04 (Z)	< .001	.52
	Control	30	3.00	3.00	-0.59 (Z)	.557	.08

Note. t = paired-samples t test value; Z = Wilcoxon signed-rank test value. Effect size is Cohen's d for t tests and r for Wilcoxon tests.

Thematic Analysis of Learner Perceptions

The data were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2023) six-phase framework for thematic analysis, which is widely recognised for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns within qualitative data. This inductive approach ensured that the themes emerged directly from participants' accounts without imposing pre-determined categories, thereby maintaining analytic fidelity to their perspectives. Following transcription, the researcher engaged in familiarisation with the data through repeated readings. Initial codes were generated to capture salient features related to affective, cognitive, and attitudinal dimensions of translanguaging. These codes were then collated into potential themes, which were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness. Each theme was defined and named to reflect its conceptual focus, and representative quotes

were selected to illustrate participants' voices. The final thematic structure was presented in both narrative and tabular form, aligning with APA 7 reporting standards.

To further explore how students in the treatment group received translanguaging pedagogy, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 participants (6 Turkish and 6 Syrian students). Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed five major themes, all of which strongly support the effectiveness and desirability of translanguaging strategies in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. As presented in Table 2, students across both linguistic backgrounds reported increased emotional comfort, improved comprehension, enhanced vocabulary retention, and greater confidence in speaking English when allowed to use their home languages. Turkish students particularly valued clarity and academic efficiency, whereas Syrian students frequently emphasised feelings of inclusion and validation of their identity. The findings demonstrate that translanguaging serves not only as a cognitive scaffold but also as a critical emotional and cultural support mechanism, especially for linguistically marginalised learners.

Table 9. Thematic Analysis of Student Perceptions on Translanguaging Pedagogy

Theme	Description	Representative Quotes
Affective Comfort and Emotional Safety	Students felt more relaxed, less anxious, and emotionally secure when allowed to use their L1 in class.	<i>"I felt calmer and more focused when Turkish was used in class."</i> (Turkish student) <i>"Arabic made me feel this class accepts me."</i> (Syrian student)
Improved Vocabulary Acquisition	L1 explanations helped students understand and retain new English words more effectively.	<i>"I remember the words better when the teacher first says them in Turkish."</i> (Turkish student) <i>"Arabic helped me learn new words faster."</i> (Syrian student)
Enhanced Reading Comprehension	Students understood texts more easily when unfamiliar words or ideas were explained in L1.	<i>"When the teacher explained in Arabic, I could understand the story."</i> (Syrian student) <i>"Turkish explanations helped me not get lost in the reading."</i> (Turkish student)
Increased Speaking Confidence	Students reported feeling more confident when they could structure or rehearse their speech in their native language (L1) before speaking in English.	<i>"I first think in Turkish, then try to say it in English. That helps."</i> (Turkish student) <i>"Arabic first, then English—it made me talk more in class."</i> (Syrian student)
Positive Attitudes Toward Translanguaging	Both groups preferred translanguaging over English-only instruction, citing increased clarity and inclusion.	<i>"With Turkish, I understand better and feel more successful."</i> (Turkish student) <i>"Arabic being allowed makes me feel my language is not wrong."</i> (Syrian student)

Discussion

This study aimed to evaluate the effects of translanguaging pedagogy on the vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency of Turkish and Syrian middle school English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, while also exploring their perceptions of this instructional approach. The findings revealed consistent and statistically significant improvements in the treatment group, suggesting that translanguaging not only facilitates linguistic development but also supports learners' emotional, cognitive, and cultural engagement, especially within linguistically heterogeneous classrooms. These findings were interpreted through the study's theoretical lens, which integrates sociocultural theory, critical applied linguistics, and the concept of translanguaging spaces. From this perspective, the observed linguistic and affective gains are understood not only as improvements in discrete language skills but as evidence of how multilingual practices mediate learning, affirm identities, and challenge monolingual ideologies in the EFL classroom.

RQ1: What is the effect of translanguaging strategies on the vocabulary knowledge of Turkish and Syrian middle school EFL students?

The post-test results demonstrated the vocabulary gains among learners exposed to translanguaging strategies, with the treatment group outperforming the control group. These results corroborate previous studies, which have shown that utilising students' full linguistic repertoires enhances vocabulary acquisition (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Wang et al., 2025). L1-mediated vocabulary instruction appears to serve as a scaffold for meaning-making, enabling deeper semantic associations and long-term retention (Back et al., 2020; Cui & Pacheco, 2023). Interestingly, Turkish students in the treatment group scored slightly higher than their Syrian peers. This can be attributed to Turkish students' greater alignment between their home and school languages, allowing for more direct and confident integration of L1 knowledge during vocabulary tasks. In contrast, Syrian students, though benefiting from translanguaging, may have experienced a cognitive distance between Arabic and English structures, which might require additional scaffolding (Altay & Yuksel, 2025; Hopp et al., 2021).

RQ2: How do translanguaging strategies influence students' reading comprehension skills?

Reading comprehension outcomes also favoured the treatment group, aligning with previous research that asserts translanguaging supports textual decoding and meaning negotiation (Qureshi & Aljanadbah, 2022; Yasar Yuzlu & Dikilitas, 2022). Both Turkish and Syrian students reported that reading passages became more accessible when key terms and ideas were explained using their L1S—a finding echoed in studies by Bouguerra (2024) and Antony et al. (2024). Once again, Turkish learners outperformed their Syrian counterparts, albeit slightly. One possible explanation is the institutional familiarity of Turkish learners with the curricular and assessment frameworks, which may have enhanced their metacognitive reading strategies. Meanwhile, Syrian students, many of whom are still adjusting to Turkish schooling norms, might face additional socio-academic adaptation barriers (Eren & Çavuşoğlu, 2023; Nimer & Arpacik, 2023).

RQ3: What impact do translanguaging strategies have on students' speaking fluency?

The findings revealed significant improvements in speaking fluency among treatment group participants, with both Turkish and Syrian learners benefiting from the opportunity to structure responses in their L1 before transitioning to English. This aligns with Robillos' (2023) and Sayer's (2013) work, which highlight translanguaging as a tool for lowering affective filters and increasing classroom participation. Students noted that being allowed to plan or rehearse in their home language boosted their confidence and reduced anxiety—a dynamic extensively discussed by Huang (2021) and Creese & Blackledge (2015). That said, Turkish students again scored slightly higher than Syrian students, which may be attributed to language proximity effects and greater prior exposure to English instruction in formalised Turkish settings. However, the fluency gains of Syrian students remain notable, suggesting that translanguaging can serve as a potent compensatory mechanism for refugee and immigrant learners (Capstick & Ateek, 2024; Mammou et al., 2023).

RQ4: What are students' perceptions of the use of translanguaging strategies in English language instruction?

Thematic analysis of student interviews underscored uniformly positive perceptions of translanguaging across both Turkish and Syrian learners. Students appreciated the emotional safety, clarity, and cognitive support provided by translanguaging, echoing findings by Dovchin et al. (2025), Arellano (2024), and Bouguerra (2024). Syrian students in particular described translanguaging as a validation of their linguistic identities, stating that "Arabic made me feel this class accepts me", which reinforces translanguaging's role in creating culturally affirming learning spaces (Ateek, 2024; Capstick & Ateek, 2024). Turkish students emphasised how L1 use made learning more "efficient" and "less confusing", which supports Galante's (2021) argument that translanguaging helps all learners, not only minoritised ones, navigate the complexities of foreign language acquisition more successfully.

RQ5: To what extent do the effects of translanguaging strategies differ between Turkish and Syrian middle school EFL learners?

While both subgroups in the treatment condition demonstrated significant improvements over the control group, Turkish learners consistently achieved slightly higher scores in vocabulary, reading, and speaking. This may be due to several overlapping sociolinguistic and cultural factors. First, Turkish students' familiarity with the institutional language of instruction and their more stable exposure to English within mainstream schooling offer structural advantages. Second, Arabic-speaking Syrian students, while academically capable, may carry additional emotional and socio-political burdens as refugees, including trauma, interrupted education, and marginalisation (Sunata & Beyazova, 2022; Eren & Çavuşoğlu, 2023). These factors can interfere with academic engagement and self-confidence in formal settings. However, this disparity should not be interpreted as a limitation of translanguaging for refugee learners. On the contrary, the significant progress made by Syrian students within the treatment group suggests that translanguaging can serve as a powerful empowerment tool for learners who are navigating both linguistic and sociocultural displacement (Yidie & Fang, 2024). Moreover, qualitative data suggest that Syrian families may view English as a bridge to future opportunities beyond Turkey, often envisioning migration to Western countries. This transnational mindset may amplify learners' intrinsic motivation, despite short-term struggles with language assessments. This

motivation, grounded in a strong instrumental orientation toward English as a pathway to imagined futures, may serve as a long-term resource for continued language growth (Karanfil & Demir, 2021; Li & Qin, 2024).

Conclusion

This study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for linguistically responsive pedagogies by providing empirical evidence on the impact of translanguaging strategies in a multilingual English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Specifically, it investigated how translanguaging affects vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and speaking fluency among Turkish and Syrian sixth-grade learners, and how these students perceive the implementation of their home languages in formal English instruction. Findings from both quantitative and qualitative data sources confirmed that translanguaging pedagogy significantly enhances students' language skills while simultaneously supporting affective engagement and sociocultural inclusion. The treatment group, which received instruction in Turkish, Arabic, and English, outperformed the control group in all measured domains. Furthermore, learners expressed overwhelmingly positive perceptions of translanguaging, citing improved comprehension, increased confidence, and a greater sense of belonging. The study also revealed nuanced differences between Turkish and Syrian students. While both groups benefited, Turkish students demonstrated slightly higher performance, potentially due to their greater linguistic continuity with the school environment and more stable academic trajectories. Syrian learners, many of whom face sociopolitical displacement and perceive English as a vehicle for future migration, nonetheless showed notable gains, suggesting that translanguaging can serve as a powerful tool for mitigating structural disadvantage and fostering empowerment. The results affirm that translanguaging is not merely a practical strategy for facilitating understanding but a transformative pedagogy that honours learners' full linguistic repertoires and lived experiences. In diverse EFL settings such as those found in contemporary Turkey, translanguaging provides a socially just and pedagogically sound foundation for inclusive language education. Its ability to bridge linguistic, cultural, and emotional gaps makes it particularly relevant in classrooms shaped by migration, multilingualism, and shifting global aspirations. By grounding both the design and interpretation of this study in the translanguaging framework, underpinned by sociocultural and critical perspectives, the conclusions extend beyond the statistical outcomes to highlight the pedagogical and ideological significance of multilingual practices. This alignment between theory, analysis, and findings reinforces the validity of the themes identified and the broader claim that translanguaging is both a linguistic and social justice imperative in multilingual EFL contexts.

Limitations and Implications for Future Research

While the findings of this study provide strong evidence supporting the efficacy of translanguaging pedagogy in multilingual EFL contexts, certain limitations must be acknowledged to contextualise the results and guide future research. Firstly, the study was conducted at a single public middle school in southern Turkey, with a relatively small sample size of 60 sixth-grade students. Although the inclusion of both Turkish and Syrian learners added depth and diversity to the participant pool, the findings may not be

generalisable to all EFL settings, particularly those with differing linguistic, regional, or socio-economic profiles. Future research could benefit from larger, multi-site studies that include a broader demographic spectrum, including rural-urban distinctions and gender-based analyses. Secondly, while the study captured short-term effects over a four-week instructional period, it did not address the long-term impact of translanguaging strategies on language development, academic achievement, or learner identity. Longitudinal designs would be instrumental in evaluating the sustainability of gains in vocabulary, reading, and fluency, as well as how translanguaging influences learners' educational trajectories and language ideologies over time. Thirdly, although the study explored perceptions through student interviews, it did not incorporate the perspectives of teachers, school administrators, or families. A more holistic understanding of translanguaging pedagogy—especially in culturally complex contexts involving refugee populations—requires input from multiple stakeholders. Including teachers' views on the feasibility, challenges, and training needs for implementing translanguaging would enhance the ecological validity of future work.

Additionally, language proficiency and literacy in L1 (particularly Arabic) among Syrian learners were not formally assessed, which limits the interpretation of intra-group variation in outcomes. Future studies should consider incorporating L1 literacy levels, prior educational background, and migration histories as explanatory variables when evaluating the effectiveness of translanguaging. Finally, this study primarily focused on academic and affective outcomes. Still, the potential of translanguaging to foster critical consciousness, intercultural awareness, and resistance to linguistic hegemony remains underexplored in the Turkish context. Future research could investigate how translanguaging intersects with issues of identity, integration, and social justice in classrooms shaped by post-migration realities.

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