

Making Translanguaging Work Under Exam Pressure: A Co-Design Study in Rural Vietnamese EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

Translanguaging is increasingly advocated in TESOL, yet examination-oriented EFL classrooms often maintain English-only participation and assessment norms that constrain multilingual pedagogy. This qualitative co-design study examined how translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines were developed, enacted, and refined under examination pressure and institutional accountability in rural Vietnamese EFL classrooms. Conducted over 12 weeks in three upper-secondary schools in Vietnam's Central Highlands, the study involved three EFL teachers as practitioner co-design partners and 45 students (15 per grade across Grades 10–12), whose experiences and feedback informed a baseline diagnostic phase and three iterative plan–enact–reflect cycles. Data comprised 21 classroom observations, six teacher interviews, nine student focus groups, reflective journals, student work samples, and co-design artefacts, analysed through reflexive thematic analysis. Findings revealed that teachers gradually reframed assessment fairness from equal English exposure towards differentiated participation opportunities and recognisable evidence of English learning. Students reported reduced participation anxiety, greater willingness to attempt English production, and stronger recognition of their linguistic identities, although these experiences varied across learners. Translanguaging-informed practices became more pedagogically workable when multilingual planning, multimodal scaffolding, and structured collaboration were connected to English-facing outputs and visible assessment evidence. Drawing on these findings, the study proposes the Translanguaging Participation-and-Assessment Infrastructure (TPAI) Model, comprising six interconnected dimensions: four classroom mechanisms—sequenced multilingual planning, multimodal scaffolding, structured collaborative participation, and visible feedback and assessment—and two enabling conditions—negotiated pedagogical legitimacy and adaptive teacher reflexivity. The model offers a provisional, context-sensitive explanation of how multilingual pedagogy may become more accessible, assessable, and institutionally defensible, while its long-term sustainability remains uncertain.

Keywords: translanguaging, co-design research, multilingual pedagogy, exam-oriented EFL, classroom participation, assessment practices

1. Introduction

Translanguaging has become an influential framework in TESOL for challenging monolingual assumptions about language learning and classroom participation. Rather than treating bilingual learners as users of separate linguistic systems, translanguaging conceptualizes multilingual repertoires as integrated resources for meaning-making, participation, and learning (García & Wei, 2014). Within educational contexts, translanguaging pedagogy legitimizes learners' home languages, cultural knowledge, and multimodal resources as meaningful components of classroom interaction and academic development. Previous research has shown that translanguaging can support comprehension, participation, learner confidence, and identity affirmation, particularly among multilingual and ethnolinguistic minority learners (Lan, 2025; Qu & Othman, 2026). However, despite growing theoretical support for multilingual pedagogies, many exam-oriented EFL systems still struggle to sustain translanguaging. English-only participation norms, standardised testing, tightly paced curricula, and institutional accountability pressures frequently position multilingual practices as incompatible with academic rigour or legitimate language learning (Shohamy et al., 2022; Tian et al., 2025). Consequently, translanguaging often remains limited to temporary scaffolding or improvised classroom support rather than becoming a routinized pedagogical practice. This tension is especially visible in rural Vietnamese EFL classrooms where multilingual learners frequently navigate home languages, Vietnamese, and English within highly exam-oriented educational environments. Ethnolinguistic minority students often face limited opportunities to participate under English-only instructional expectations, while teachers must simultaneously meet multilingual learners' needs and examination demands (Nguyen, 2019; Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Under such conditions, translanguaging may be viewed not as a pedagogical resource but as a threat to assessment fairness, classroom control, or teacher professionalism (Bang & Vossoughi, 2016).

Although previous studies have documented generally positive attitudes toward translanguaging, they have paid far less attention to how translanguaging practices can become pedagogically sustainable, assessment-compatible, and institutionally legitimate within

accountability-driven classrooms. Existing research has largely examined translanguaging as spontaneous classroom interaction or flexible pedagogical support rather than as structured participation-and-assessment practice embedded within everyday instruction. As a result, translanguaging scholarship has not sufficiently explained how multilingual pedagogies are negotiated, stabilized, and sustained under exam pressure (Arias & Schissel, 2021; Tian et al., 2025). To address this gap, the present study adopts a qualitative co-design approach in which teachers, students, and the researchers collaboratively developed and refined translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines across three iterative plan–enact–reflect cycles in rural Vietnamese EFL classrooms. The study is theoretically informed by translanguaging theory and sociocultural perspectives that conceptualize classroom participation as multilingual, multimodal, and socially situated (Wei & García, 2022). Accordingly, the study aims to investigate how translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines can become workable and sustainable within rural exam-oriented EFL classrooms. More specifically, the study examines how teachers' understandings of translanguaging, participation, assessment fairness, and pedagogical legitimacy evolved through collaborative co-design processes (Clark et al., 2022; Lopez, 2023); how students experienced translanguaging-informed classroom participation in relation to English-only norms; and what contextual and pedagogical conditions supported or constrained the sustainability of translanguaging-informed practices.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How did teachers' understandings of translanguaging, participation, assessment fairness, and pedagogical legitimacy evolve through the co-design process in rural Vietnamese EFL classrooms?
2. How did students experience translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines in relation to English-only classroom norms?
3. What pedagogical and contextual conditions supported or constrained the sustainability of translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines in rural exam-oriented EFL classrooms?

The study aims to contribute to translanguaging scholarship in three ways. First, it reconceptualizes translanguaging not as isolated classroom interaction but as a routinized participation-and-assessment infrastructure embedded within everyday teaching practice. Second, it examines how teachers negotiated competing understandings of fairness, rigor, and pedagogical legitimacy under exam-oriented constraints. Third, it proposes the Translanguaging Participation-and-Assessment Infrastructure (TPAI) Model as a context-sensitive framework for understanding how multilingual pedagogies may become workable and sustainable within accountability-driven EFL systems. The study also contributes practical insights for teachers, teacher educators, and policymakers seeking to reconcile multilingual inclusion with institutional accountability demands in exam-oriented educational contexts.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Translanguaging Beyond Monolingual Assumptions

Translanguaging has emerged as a major framework in multilingual education for challenging monolingual assumptions about language, learning, and classroom participation. Rather than treating bilingual learners as users of separate linguistic systems, translanguaging scholarship conceptualizes multilingual repertoires as dynamic, socially situated, and semiotically integrated resources for meaning-making (García & Wei, 2014; Vu et al., 2025; Wei, 2018). From this perspective, communication involves flexibly coordinating linguistic and multimodal resources, including gesture, visuals, artefacts, and embodied interaction. Within TESOL, translanguaging has been associated with increased participation, reduced affective barriers, and greater identity affirmation among multilingual learners (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). However, translanguaging scholarship has also generated important critique and debate. Some scholars caution that translanguaging may become conceptually overextended, making it difficult to distinguish principled pedagogy from unstructured language alternation (Tai, 2026). Others argue that translanguaging-oriented pedagogies remain difficult to sustain in systems governed by standardized assessment, tightly paced curricula, and English-dominant accountability structures (Schissel, De Korne, & López-Gopar, 2021; Shohamy et al., 2022). Consequently, although translanguaging is frequently theorized as equity-oriented pedagogy, its institutional legitimacy often remains unstable within exam-oriented educational settings (Qu & Othman, 2026; Wei, 2024). This tension is particularly visible in EFL contexts where English proficiency simultaneously functions as an academic requirement, a measure of school quality, and a form of socioeconomic mobility. Under such conditions, teachers may perceive translanguaging as pedagogically valuable yet professionally risky, especially where English-only participation continues to index competence, rigor, and instructional legitimacy (Tian et al., 2025). Existing research in Vietnam similarly suggests that teachers frequently rely on strategic Vietnamese support to facilitate comprehension and participation while remaining uncertain about the legitimacy of multilingual practices within examination-oriented classrooms (Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024; Kien & Van, 2023). As a result, translanguaging in many EFL contexts remains informal, improvised, and interactionally localized rather than embedded within routinized participation-and-assessment structures. Although previous studies have demonstrated the pedagogical value of multilingual meaning-making, comparatively less attention has been paid to how translanguaging becomes institutionally sustainable, assessment-compatible, and pedagogically defensible within exam-oriented classrooms. This unresolved tension forms the central analytical concern of the present study.

2.2 Vietnam's Policy Ecology

Vietnam's language-in-education policy reflects a persistent tension between sociolinguistic diversity and a centrally organized

monolingual schooling regime (Vu et al., 2025). Although the country is ethnolinguistically diverse, Vietnamese remains the dominant language of instruction, while English increasingly signals academic achievement, educational quality, and social mobility (Kien & Van, 2023; Nguyen & Tran, 2024). Ethnolinguistic minority languages such as Jarai, Rhade, H'Mong, K'Ho, Mạ, and Chu Ru remain largely marginalized within mainstream schooling structures, particularly in rural highland regions. As a result, multilingual learners in these contexts must navigate layered linguistic demands in which home languages are institutionally peripheral, Vietnamese functions as the language of schooling, and English operates as a high-stakes academic subject. Existing studies suggest that these conditions may intensify participation inequality, linguistic insecurity, and deficit-oriented assumptions concerning minority learners' academic capability (Ngo, 2025; Pham & Nguyen, 2024). Importantly, the issue is not multilingualism itself, but the institutional organization of legitimacy through monolingual participation and assessment norms. Although translanguaging has been proposed as a more equitable response to multilingual classroom realities (Ambele, 2022; Nguyen & Tran, 2024), examination pressure, curriculum pacing, limited teacher preparation, and English-only accountability expectations constrain its implementation in Vietnamese EFL settings. Thus, translanguaging practices often depend on individual teacher discretion rather than being embedded in sustainable pedagogical and assessment routines. Existing scholarship therefore offers limited explanation of how translanguaging-informed practices can become institutionally workable within rural, exam-oriented educational systems. This unresolved tension forms a key focus of the present study.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

Drawing on Garc á et al.'s (2017) stance–design–shifts framework, this study adopted co-stance, co-design, and co-shifts as an initial conceptual lens for examining the collaborative development of translanguaging pedagogy in examination-oriented EFL classrooms. Garc á et al.'s framework conceptualises translanguaging pedagogy through teachers' orientations towards multilingual learners and their linguistic repertoires (stance), the purposeful organisation of multilingual learning opportunities (design), and responsive pedagogical adjustments during classroom interaction (shifts). The present study extended these concepts into a collaborative orientation to examine how teachers and the researcher negotiated pedagogical commitments, redesigned instructional practices, and responded to emerging classroom evidence across iterative co-design cycles.

Within this adapted lens, co-stance concerns the collaborative negotiation of understandings of multilingual participation, assessment fairness, and pedagogical legitimacy, particularly where English-only expectations shape perceptions of professional competence and instructional rigour. Co-design refers to the joint planning, enactment, and refinement of instructional routines that connect multilingual and multimodal meaning-making with opportunities for English-facing production and assessment. Co-shifts captures evidence-informed pedagogical adjustments through which teachers reconsider and adapt these routines in response to students' participation, classroom interactions, and institutional constraints. These dimensions are understood as interrelated and recursive rather than sequential stages: negotiated pedagogical commitments inform instructional decisions, while classroom experiences and reflective dialogue may reshape those commitments and subsequent practices (Pontier & Tian, 2024; Tian & Shepard-Carey, 2020).

This conceptual lens was particularly relevant to the study's examination-oriented context, where teachers had to reconcile multilingual responsiveness with curriculum coverage, English-language assessment requirements, and professional accountability. It directed analytical attention towards the relationship between teachers' developing understandings, their instructional decisions, and their responses to classroom evidence without presupposing that translanguaging would necessarily produce equitable participation or sustainable pedagogical change. Importantly, co-stance, co-design, and co-shifts functioned as sensitising concepts rather than predetermined analytical categories or intervention outcomes. The framework therefore informed the investigation while remaining open to context-specific mechanisms, enabling conditions, and contradictions emerging through reflexive thematic analysis (Garc á et al., 2017; Zheng & Qiu, 2024).

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative co-design approach, informed by design-based research principles and an ethnographic sensibility, to investigate how translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines were collaboratively developed, enacted, and refined in rural, examination-oriented Vietnamese EFL classrooms. The co-design approach was appropriate because the study sought not only to understand participants' experiences but also to examine how pedagogical practices could be iteratively redesigned in response to classroom evidence and institutional constraints. An ethnographic sensibility supported sustained attention to everyday classroom interactions, locally situated language practices, and teachers' professional judgements without positioning the study as a comprehensive ethnography.

Fieldwork was conducted over approximately 12 weeks, from October to December 2025, across three upper-secondary schools. The research comprised a baseline diagnostic phase (Cycle 0), followed by three iterative plan–enact–reflect cycles (Cycles 1–3). The three participating teachers served as practitioner co-design partners, working with the first author to identify instructional challenges, develop multilingual participation-and-assessment routines, examine classroom evidence, and refine subsequent enactments. Students contributed experiences, feedback, reflective accounts, and classroom work that informed the interpretation and refinement of these routines. The study therefore examined pedagogical development as a situated, collaborative process rather than evaluating a standardised intervention implemented identically across classrooms.

Classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, reflective journals, student work samples, and co-design artefacts provided complementary evidence of changing pedagogical practices, participant experiences, and institutional constraints. The iterative

design enabled the research team to examine both emerging possibilities and persistent tensions, particularly those involving examination preparation, participation equity, and the professional legitimacy of multilingual instruction.

3.2 Research Context and Sampling

The study was conducted in rural, multilingual districts in Vietnam's Central Highlands (Lâm Đồng), where students commonly navigate an ethnolinguistic home language, Vietnamese as the schooling language, and English as a high-stakes subject. In this exam-oriented ecology, English-only norms and accountability pressures shape what counts as legitimate participation and evidence for assessment. Three upper-secondary schools were purposively selected for: (i) rural, ethnolinguistically diverse enrolment; (ii) teacher-identified challenges in English engagement/attainment; and (iii) willingness to collaborate, confirmed through formal permissions from school leaders and relevant authorities. To maximize ecological validity, routine redesigns were aligned with mandated curriculum content and teachers' existing lesson plans.

3.3 Participants and Roles in Co-design

Three EFL teachers (pseudonymized as Ngan, Ha, and Lan) participated as practitioner co-design partners across three rural upper-secondary schools, teaching non-English-major classes in Grades 10, 11, and 12, respectively. The teachers were purposively selected to represent different career stages and institutional roles, allowing the study to examine how professional experience and institutional positioning shaped their orientations toward translanguaging and pedagogical legitimacy. The study also involved 45 students (15 from each grade), purposively selected from the participating classes to reflect gender and ethnolinguistic diversity (approximately half Kinh majority and half ethnolinguistic minority). The total sample therefore comprised 48 participants. For the student focus groups, the 15 participating students in each grade were organised into three groups of five, yielding nine focus groups across Grades 10–12. Each student participated in one focus group. The same 45 students also contributed end-of-cycle reflective journals and selected classroom work samples.

Consistent with the study's translanguaging stance, participants could respond in Vietnamese, English, and/or their home languages (e.g., K'Ho, Mạ, Chu Ru) and draw on multimodal resources, including gestures, drawings, and artefacts, during discussions. Institutional permission was formally requested from the principals of the three participating schools on October 1, 2025, and obtained before the commencement of fieldwork on October 3, 2025. Written informed consent was obtained from the participating teachers and adult student participants, where applicable. For participating minors, student assent and parental or guardian consent were obtained before their involvement in research activities. Participation was voluntary, participants retained the right to withdraw, and confidentiality was safeguarded through pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information.

The dataset comprised 21 classroom observations, six semi-structured teacher interviews, two co-design workshops, researcher and teacher reflective journals, nine student focus groups, 45 student reflective journals, 45 student work samples, and 18 co-designed lesson-plan/routine artefacts. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics and primary data contributions.

Table 1. Participants and Primary Data Contributions

Participant group	Identifier	n	Age/experience	Grade/level	Role/position	Ethnolinguistic background	Primary data contributions
T	Ngan	1	28; 4+ yrs	G10	HoD; provincial core teacher	Kinh	7 Obs; 2 WS; 2 Int; 6 Art
T	Ha	1	34; 10+ yrs	G11	English team leader	Kinh; some K'Ho	7 Obs; 2 WS; 2 Int; 6 Art
T	Lan	1	46; 20+ yrs	G12	English team leader	Kinh	7 Obs; 2 WS; 2 Int; 6 Art
Ss	G10	15	16	G10	Ss	~50% Kinh; ~50% EM	3 FGs (5 Ss/group); 15 RJs; selected SW
Ss	G11	15	17	G11	Ss	~50% Kinh; ~50% EM	3 FGs (5 Ss/group); 15 RJs; selected SW
Ss	G12	15	18	G12	Ss	~50% Kinh; ~50% EM	3 FGs (5 Ss/group); 15 RJs; selected SW
Total	3 T + 45 Ss	48	—	G10–12	—	—	21 Obs; 2 WS; 6 Int; 9 FGs; 45 RJs; selected SW; 18 Art

Note. Obs = classroom observation; WS = co-design workshop; Int = teacher interview; Art = co-designed artefact; FGs = student focus groups; RJs = student reflective journals; SW = student work samples; HoD = Head of Department; EM = ethnolinguistic minority; G = grade; yrs = years. Teacher names are pseudonyms. All three teachers attended the same two workshops. The 45 students participated in nine focus groups (three per grade; five students per group), with each student attending one group. The 21 observations comprised three baseline and 18 intervention lessons. All 45 student journals were collected at the end of Cycle 3. Selected SW were analysed; their total number was not specified.

Within the co-design process, teachers and students contributed in different but complementary capacities. The three teachers were the principal practitioner co-design partners, collaborating with the first author to identify classroom challenges, develop and adapt instructional routines, review enactment evidence, and determine priorities for subsequent lessons. The first author facilitated workshops, documented classroom implementation, and supported evidence-informed reflection. Students were not positioned as equivalent instructional co-design partners; rather, their classroom participation, focus-group accounts, reflective journals, and work samples

provided learner perspectives that informed the interpretation and refinement of the routines. This distinction is important because the study's collaborative design involved both direct teacher participation in pedagogical decision-making and student contributions through experiences and feedback.

3.4 Researchers' Positionality, Reflexivity, and Analytic Validation

The research team comprised three authors whose roles were analytically complementary throughout the study. The first author led the fieldwork, conducted classroom observations, interviews, focus groups, workshops, and artefact documentation, and facilitated the iterative co-design process across the plan–enact–reflect cycles. Her long-term professional engagement in Lâm Đồng Province and involvement in VietTESOL supported access, rapport-building, and sustained collaboration with participating teachers. At the same time, the study recognizes that such proximity may introduce interpretive risks, including selective attention, over-identification with participants, and confirmation bias. Rather than treating researcher influence as fully eliminable, the study approached reflexivity as an ongoing methodological responsibility throughout the research process. The second and third authors contributed critical distance throughout coding, thematic development, and conceptual refinement. Their involvement extended beyond peer debriefing to critically interrogate emerging assumptions, contradictory evidence, coding boundaries, thematic interpretations, and potential over-interpretation during iterative analysis. The first author also maintained reflexive fieldnotes documenting methodological decisions, researcher assumptions, and interactional positioning throughout the study. The team revisited these records during analysis to critically examine how researcher participation may have shaped interpretation and analytic framing.

To strengthen interpretive trustworthiness, emerging interpretations were continuously compared across multiple data sources and revisited recursively across the three co-design cycles. Contradictory cases and implementation tensions were retained rather than excluded, particularly where translanguaging practices appeared constrained by institutional expectations, uneven participation, or teacher uncertainty regarding legitimacy and assessment fairness. Consequently, the study does not claim objectivity in a positivist sense; rather, it prioritizes analytical transparency, reflexive accountability, and interpretive trustworthiness within a collaborative qualitative inquiry framework. The rationale for selecting reflexive thematic analysis and the procedures guiding coding and theme development are detailed in the subsequent Data Analysis section.

3.5 Instruments and Data Collection

The 12-week intervention comprised a diagnostic phase (Cycle 0) followed by three iterative co-design cycles (Cycles 1–3). Cycle 0 established the collaborative partnership and identified the local pedagogical challenges by documenting baseline participation patterns and eliciting teachers' concerns about feasibility and legitimacy under examination pressure. Table 2 presents the sequence of activities and data generation across Weeks 1–12.

During Cycle 0 (Weeks 1–5), the team developed shared design principles through a targeted literature review and collaborative discussions. One baseline observation was conducted in each participating class (Week 2), followed by the first round of teacher interviews (Week 3). An informal synthesis meeting (Week 4) consolidated key institutional and pedagogical constraints, including curriculum pacing, examination accountability, classroom management, and English-only expectations, to establish priorities for redesign. Workshop 1 (Week 5) introduced translanguaging principles and facilitated the initial co-design of participation-and-assessment routines aligned with mandated curriculum requirements. Lesson plans were developed with reference to Tricia's "Sample Lesson Using the Translanguaging Framework" in García et al. (2017).

Cycles 1–3 (Weeks 6–12) followed iterative plan–enact–reflect sequences. During planning, the research team identified participation-and-assessment challenges based on evidence from preceding enactments, including classroom observation notes, teacher reflections, and student feedback, and collaboratively refined instructional materials such as language frames, organisers, collaborative roles, and checklists. During enactment, the revised routines were implemented in regular classroom lessons, with the first author conducting observations across the three participating schools. Each observed lesson was followed by a debriefing with the respective teacher to identify enabling and constraining conditions and establish priorities for subsequent redesign. Observation evidence and teacher reflections were subsequently discussed collaboratively to inform further refinements of the co-designed routines. Following Cycles 1 and 2, Workshop 2 (Week 9) provided a structured opportunity for teachers to critically examine classroom evidence, reflect on implementation challenges, and refine multilingual scaffolding, participation structures, and feedback practices in preparation for Cycle 3. Together, the two workshops supported a progression from initial pedagogical experimentation toward more deliberate, context-responsive, and assessment-compatible classroom routines.

Written reflections documented pedagogical feasibility, classroom participation, and perceived learning throughout the co-design process. The first author maintained analytic field memos, while participating teachers completed brief guided reflections following observed lessons. At the end of Cycle 3, the 45 participating students each completed a reflective journal documenting their experiences of participation access, affective engagement, linguistic identity recognition, and perceived learning value. Students could respond in Vietnamese and/or English, incorporating home-language expressions or drawings where appropriate. Selected student work samples were also collected as routine classroom outputs to provide evidence of learning and support the analysis of assessment-related practices.

Table 2. Co-design Intervention Timeline and Data Generation (Weeks 1–12)

Cycle/Week(s)	Co-design focus and activities	Instruments/data sources	Outputs for next cycle
C0 / W1	Identify local challenges; develop initial design conjectures	Discussion notes; RM	Shared principles; initial conjectures
C0 / W2	Document baseline participation (one lesson per class)	3 Obs; FN; LA	Baseline profile; key challenges
C0 / W3	Examine teachers' views on feasibility and legitimacy	3 Int (R1); transcripts	Constraint–enablement inventory; stance map
C0 / W4	Synthesise findings; identify redesign priorities	Meeting notes; DL	Agreed priorities; draft routine design
C0 / W5	Introduce translanguaging; co-design initial routines	WS1; LP drafts; RMt	C1 prototypes; implementation plan
C1 / W6–7	Enact and refine routines; strengthen collaboration	6 Obs; PD; TR	Revised materials; refined routines
C2 / W8–9	Improve scaffolds, feedback, and assessment evidence	6 Obs; WS2; Art; PD; TR	Refined toolkit; improved evidence capture
C3 / W10–12	Consolidate routines; integrate identity and voice; examine sustainability	6 Obs; 3 Int (R2); 9 FGs; TR; 45 RJs; SW; Art	Final routines; sustainability reflections

Note. C = co-design cycle; W = week; Obs = classroom observation; FN = fieldnotes; LA = lesson artefacts; Int = teacher interview; R1/R2 = interview Rounds 1 and 2; WS = co-design workshop; LP = lesson plan; RM = researcher memos; RMt = routine materials; DL = decision log; PD = post-lesson debrief; TR = teacher reflection; Art = co-designed artefacts; FGs = student focus groups; RJs = student reflective journals; SW = student work samples. C0 represents the baseline diagnostic phase, while C1–C3 represent iterative plan–enact–reflect cycles. Student reflective journals were collected at the end of C3.

The data sources served complementary analytical purposes. Classroom observations documented the enactment of multilingual routines, participation opportunities, and visible forms of English-facing learning evidence. Teacher interviews and reflective journals provided accounts of pedagogical reasoning, perceived feasibility, assessment expectations, and professional legitimacy. Student focus groups and reflective journals captured learners' retrospective experiences of participation, affective engagement, and linguistic recognition, while work samples and co-design artefacts documented the instructional and assessment products associated with redesigned routines. These sources were interpreted in relation to their respective purposes rather than treated as interchangeable evidence. In particular, student reports of increased confidence or participation were distinguished from observed classroom practices and were not interpreted as direct measurements of English proficiency development.

3.6 Data Analysis

The qualitative dataset was analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Terry & Hayfield, 2020) to examine how translanguaging-informed routines were co-designed, enacted, and refined across Cycles 0–3. The study selected reflexive thematic analysis because it sought to investigate evolving patterns of pedagogical negotiation, participation, and institutional tension across multiple forms of qualitative data collected throughout the co-design process. Compared with approaches such as conversation analysis, which primarily examine micro-level interactional sequencing, reflexive thematic analysis was considered more appropriate for examining broader pedagogical transformation, teacher belief negotiation, and sustainability across iterative intervention cycles.

Analysis combined theoretically sensitized reading with inductive coding. Ruíz's (1984) orientations to language (language-as-problem/resource/right) guided attention to participants' framings of fairness, legitimacy, and pedagogical risk, while inductive coding identified interactional mechanisms and routine features that shaped participation, affective engagement, recognition, and evidence production. Following Braun and Clarke (2021), themes were treated not as objectively discoverable entities but as interpretive patterns developed recursively through sustained engagement with the dataset. The first author led familiarization, transcription management, and iterative coding of meaning units and bounded interactional episodes, including task sequences, teacher–student exchanges, and focus-group interaction. Coding and candidate themes were refined recursively across sites, participant groups, and co-design cycles, with explicit attention to shifts in discourse and classroom practice over time. Cross-cycle matrices linked identified “pressure points” to redesign decisions and subsequent enactment evidence, while reflexive memos documented coding decisions, emerging assumptions, and alternative interpretations.

To clarify the analysis, the coding framework distinguished among three interrelated categories. First, translanguaging referred to the mobilization of more than one named language for identifiable pedagogical or relational purposes. Second, multimodal translanguaging extended beyond linguistic resources to include the coordinated use of semiotic resources, such as gestures, visuals, captions, artefacts, and

embodied interaction (Wei, 2018; Dryden, Tankosić, & Dovchin, 2021). Third, routine design refers to repeatable sequences of classroom participation and assessment, such as multilingual planning, producing English-facing outputs, and multilingual clarification during feedback. Routines were therefore treated as the primary unit of pedagogical change rather than isolated instances of language alternation.

Teacher interviews and student focus groups were conducted primarily in Vietnamese to support detailed participation, while participants were invited to draw on English and their home languages. Recordings were transcribed in the original language(s). The first author produced English translations and reviewed them collaboratively with co-authors against the Vietnamese source segments. Ambiguous phrasing and culturally situated meanings were revisited with teacher participants during validation discussions until a shared interpretation was reached.

Analytical development proceeded recursively between individual data sources, classroom cases, and co-design cycles. Initial readings attended to participants' accounts of translanguaging, assessment fairness, participation, and pedagogical legitimacy, informed by the study's conceptual lens and Ru ǝ's (1984) orientations to language. Subsequent coding examined how multilingual resources were incorporated into instructional routines, how participation opportunities were structured, and how teachers interpreted classroom evidence when refining their practices. Comparisons across baseline and intervention evidence supported the interpretation of pedagogical changes, while cross-case examination identified both recurring patterns and differences associated with grade level, teacher experience, and institutional expectations. Contradictory evidence, including persistent student hesitation and teachers' occasional return to memorisation-oriented instruction, was retained to qualify interpretations of participation and sustainability.

4. Results

This study examined how three rural Vietnamese EFL teachers and their students collaboratively co-designed, enacted, and refined translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines across multilingual Central Highlands classrooms. Drawing on classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, reflective journals, and co-design artefacts, the findings suggest that pedagogical change did not emerge simply from permitting multiple languages within classroom interaction. Rather, translanguaging appeared to become more workable when organized through bounded and predictable participation-and-assessment routines that legitimized multilingual and multimodal meaning-making while still maintaining English-facing outputs aligned with curriculum and examination expectations. Importantly, these shifts were neither uniform nor uncontested. Across sites and cycles, teachers continued to negotiate tensions between multilingual participation, examination preparedness, institutional accountability, and professional legitimacy. Thus, the findings indicate that the primary unit of pedagogical change was not isolated language alternation itself, but the redesign of routines shaping participation, interaction, and the production of assessable learning evidence.

4.1 Teachers' Conceptualizations of Translanguaging, Fairness, and Pedagogical Legitimacy Across the Co-Design Process

During Cycle 0, the three baseline classroom observations and initial teacher interviews revealed tensions between English-oriented expectations of professional legitimacy and teachers' everyday multilingual practices. Although Ha, Ngan, and Lan differed in their reported beliefs and classroom language choices, the evidence suggested a shared concern with demonstrating English proficiency, maintaining instructional efficiency, and meeting examination expectations. In her initial interview, Ha expressed concern that extensive Vietnamese use might undermine perceptions of her professional competence: *"If I use a lot of Vietnamese, students and parents might judge my English competence... because the test is in full English"* (Ha, interview). While Ha and Ngan associated visible English use with professional legitimacy, Lan described Vietnamese primarily as a practical resource for maintaining comprehension and lesson pacing. These contrasting orientations were reflected, to varying degrees, in their baseline classroom practices.

The following three baseline vignettes draw on one classroom observation per teacher during Cycle 0, interpreted alongside their initial semi-structured interviews. Classroom observations provide evidence of enacted instructional practices and student participation, whereas interview accounts illuminate teachers' reported beliefs, pedagogical rationales, and concerns about professional legitimacy. These complementary sources are distinguished to avoid treating reported beliefs as direct evidence of classroom practice.

Vignette 1 (Ha, Grade 11, Cycle 0): English-Dominant Writing Instruction and Restricted Participation

During the baseline writing lesson, Ha relied heavily on extended English explanations and English-only slides. Observation notes documented prolonged silence, uneven task engagement, and limited written progress among several lower-proficiency students. Vietnamese clarification was introduced after comprehension difficulties became apparent. This episode illustrated how English-dominant instruction, although intended to support language learning and professional expectations, could delay students' entry into writing activities and restrict opportunities to demonstrate their understanding.

Vignette 2 (Ngan, Grade 10, Cycle 0): English Modelling and Uneven Speaking Participation

In her initial interview, Ngan described English modelling as a professional responsibility: *"I need to be an example"* (Ngan, interview). During the baseline speaking lesson, classroom observation revealed that participation was concentrated among higher-performing students, while several lower-proficiency learners struggled to develop extended responses. Their difficulties appeared to involve limited vocabulary resources and uncertainty about acceptable classroom participation. Read alongside Ngan's interview account, the observed interaction suggested a tension between her commitment to English modelling and the need to create more accessible opportunities for students to contribute.

Vignette 3 (Lan, Grade 12, Cycle 0): Vietnamese-Mediated Instruction and English-Oriented Assessment Expectations

In her initial interview, Lan described Vietnamese as a practical resource for maintaining lesson pacing and supporting examination preparation. She explained that extensive English instruction could require repeated translation and reduce instructional efficiency. Her baseline classroom practice similarly reflected a pragmatic orientation towards Vietnamese-mediated explanation, while English remained central to the expected learning outcomes. Considered together, the interview and observation evidence suggested that Vietnamese use did not necessarily challenge English-oriented assessment expectations. Rather, multilingual support appeared to function primarily as a means of facilitating comprehension and curriculum coverage, with limited opportunities for extended student-generated English production.

Across classrooms, co-design gradually shifted the perceived object of pedagogical change from learner deficit (“students are weak”) toward the design of participation routines under institutional constraint. Workshops, observations, and reflective discussions repeatedly suggested that many students possessed relevant conceptual knowledge but lacked legitimate entry routes into English-facing participation.

Vignette 4 (Ngan, Grade 10, Cycle 0): “Green Living” and the Visibility of Student Knowledge

Classroom observation notes from Ngan's baseline Grade 10 lesson documented an episode illustrating the tension between students' conceptual understanding and their ability to demonstrate that understanding in English. When asked, “*What should/shouldn't you do to live green?*”, one student responded primarily in Vietnamese (“*Chúng ta nên ăn trái cây, ăn rau và đi ngủ sớm...*”), incorporating only isolated English vocabulary. Although the response demonstrated relevant conceptual knowledge, the student's limited English production restricted how that knowledge could be expressed and recognised within English-dominant classroom expectations. This observed episode illustrates how linguistic performance requirements may obscure students' existing understanding, raising questions about participation equity and legitimate evidence of learning.

Teacher workshops and reflections further revealed how examination pressure, institutional accountability, and professional legitimacy concerns shaped early reliance on “memorize-the-sample” routines. Ha admitted: “*To be honest, I am not confident to conduct these productive lessons*” (Ha, interview). Ngan questioned whether parents and school leadership would perceive multilingual routines as academically legitimate, while Lan worried that multilingual interaction might create “chaos” or grammatical confusion. These reflections suggested that resistance to translanguaging was not simply ideological opposition but also a response to institutional pressures regarding what counted as credible evidence of English learning.

By Cycles 2–3, teachers increasingly reframed translanguaging not as unrestricted language flexibility but as routinised participation-and-assessment sequencing involving multilingual planning, structured collaboration, English-facing production, and multilingual clarification during feedback. Importantly, these shifts were neither uniform nor unconditional. Teachers continued to carefully regulate multilingual interaction, particularly during assessment-oriented activities where concerns about examination preparedness and pedagogical legitimacy remained salient.

Nevertheless, patterns across classroom observations, teacher reflections, and student focus groups suggested that these routinised structures expanded participation opportunities for many previously hesitant learners, particularly ethnolinguistic minority and lower-proficiency students. Ha described growing willingness to experiment with multilingual interaction: “*I found it interesting to integrate TL... Students engage... Especially when speaking K'Ho... They felt emotionally affirmed*” (Ha, reflection). Ngan similarly reported broader participation among students who had previously remained silent during English-only speaking tasks. Lan increasingly linked translanguaging to assessment-compatible scaffolding through pre-speaking preparation, multilingual clarification during feedback, and structured self-, peer-, and teacher-evaluation routines.

Importantly, the findings do not suggest that translanguaging functioned as a universal solution to participation inequality or examination pressure. Participation gains remained uneven across learners and classroom contexts, while institutional expectations continued to shape how far multilingual interaction could be extended. Rather than replacing English-oriented goals, translanguaging appeared to become more pedagogically legitimate when organized through bounded and defensible routines capable of widening participation while still producing visible English-facing learning evidence. Consequently, the findings suggest that sustainability depended less on permissive multilingualism itself than on how multilingual participation was strategically sequenced, interactionally managed, and aligned with institutional accountability demands within this particular rural exam-oriented context.

4.2 Students' Experiences with Co-Designed Translanguaging-Informed Participation-and-Assessment Routines

Student focus groups and reflective journals revealed that English-dominant classrooms were frequently experienced as high-risk environments, particularly by lower-proficiency learners concerned about public errors and limited opportunities for speaking and writing. Grade 10 students described English-only lessons as “stressful” or “tiring,” while Grade 11 students associated productive-language difficulties with previous instruction emphasising Vietnamese explanations but offering limited scaffolded English practice. Grade 12 students highlighted examination pressure and fear of embarrassment. For some ethnolinguistic minority learners, uneven Vietnamese proficiency created additional barriers to classroom participation. These accounts suggested that silence reflected not only linguistic difficulties but also the conditions under which students were expected to demonstrate their knowledge publicly.

Across the co-design cycles, students reported greater willingness to participate when classroom routines incorporated multilingual preparation, peer collaboration, multimodal support, and scaffolded English production. These arrangements provided opportunities to develop ideas before attempting public English responses, although their benefits varied across learners.

Vignette 5 (Lan, Cycle 1): First Public English Participation

In a redesigned speaking routine combining multilingual planning, collaborative discussion, and scaffolded English output, several Grade 12 students described increased confidence in classroom participation. One student stated, “*This is the first time I could speak English in Lan’s speaking class... I feel... happy*” (student account; source to be verified). Similar experiences were reported in student focus groups and reflective journals, particularly among lower-proficiency learners who valued preparation time and peer support. Nevertheless, some students remained hesitant during public English production and continued to depend heavily on Vietnamese during planning.

Students also reported that home languages and culturally familiar resources made classroom interaction more meaningful. Grade 11 participants described hearing K’Ho used publicly during lessons and learning expressions from their peers, while Grade 10 students highlighted the value of captioned videos, visuals, gestures, and strategic Vietnamese clarification.

Vignette 6 (Cycle 3 Mini-Projects): Expanding Participation and Recognition

During projects in which students assumed the roles of “community leaders” discussing local environmental and cultural issues, participants reported greater engagement when their community experiences informed classroom discussions. These activities created opportunities for ethnolinguistic minority students to contribute culturally grounded knowledge and develop it into English-facing products, extending participation beyond linguistic performance alone.

Vignette 7 (Cycle 1 Cultural Performance): Recognition and Belonging

In a speaking activity involving cultural songs, traditional clothing, and community stories, several ethnolinguistic minority students expressed pride when classmates showed interest in their languages and cultural practices. One student reflected, “*We feel well-respected, confident and proud*” (student account; source to be verified). Such accounts suggested that recognising home languages and cultural knowledge could strengthen students’ sense of belonging and willingness to contribute.

However, these experiences were neither uniform nor unconditional. Some students continued to prefer English-only performance or expressed uncertainty about the assessment value of multilingual participation. Others remained reluctant to speak publicly despite additional scaffolding. Overall, the student evidence indicated that structured multilingual and multimodal routines could create more accessible and culturally affirming pathways into English participation, without eliminating differences in confidence, proficiency, or perceived examination risk.

4.3 Constraint Ecology Shaping Feasibility and Sustainability

Findings from classroom observations, interviews, workshops, reflective journals, and co-design artefacts indicated that constraints on translanguaging implementation were ecological rather than merely attitudinal. Four interrelated pressures shaped pedagogical practices across the three classrooms. First, examination accountability and curriculum pacing reinforced drill-based, test-oriented instruction. Second, concerns about professional legitimacy discouraged the visible use of Vietnamese and students’ home languages during English lessons. Third, English-only ideals embedded in professional training and institutional expectations constrained teachers’ willingness to adopt multilingual practices. Finally, varying levels of teacher confidence in facilitating speaking and writing activities encouraged reliance on memorisation and model-text routines to manage perceived instructional and examination-related risks.

Nevertheless, co-design appeared to support pedagogical change by repositioning these constraints as conditions for negotiation and instructional redesign rather than barriers to be eliminated. Iteratively refined lesson plans, participation organisers, multilingual word walls, checklists, and student artefacts provided tangible evidence of how multilingual scaffolding could support participation while maintaining English-facing learning outcomes. Classroom observations conducted by the first author, followed by individual teacher debriefings and collaborative reflection, enabled teachers to critically examine previously overlooked participation inequities, particularly among lower-proficiency and ethnolinguistic minority learners. These evidence-informed reflections informed subsequent adjustments to multilingual scaffolding, collaborative participation structures, and assessment practices, illustrating how teachers negotiated greater pedagogical inclusivity within existing curriculum and examination constraints.

Across cycles, teachers repeatedly described tension between multilingual responsiveness and institutional accountability. As Ha noted earlier, “*the test is in full English*,” reflecting broader concerns that visible multilingual interaction might be interpreted as insufficiently rigorous or professionally credible. Similar concerns emerged in workshops and reflective discussions, where teachers questioned whether multilingual participation would be viewed as compatible with examination preparation, parental expectations, or institutional observation criteria. These patterns suggest that resistance to translanguaging was shaped not solely by personal ideology, but also by accountability structures that defined what counted as legitimate English teaching and assessable learning evidence in rural, exam-oriented classrooms.

Culturally grounded speaking and project-based tasks also appeared to support engagement by providing students with more familiar and meaningful content for participation. Across focus groups and journals, many students described greater willingness to contribute when classroom activities connected with local culture, community experience, or home-language knowledge. However, these shifts in participation were neither uniform nor unconditional. Some students remained hesitant during public English production, particularly in assessment-oriented activities where linguistic accuracy and examination performance remained highly visible. Similarly, some teachers continued to regulate multilingual interaction cautiously because of concerns about pacing, classroom control, and assessment legitimacy.

By Cycle 3, all three teachers reported greater confidence in implementing structured multilingual participation-and-assessment routines. These practices combined multilingual preparation, multimodal scaffolding, collaborative interaction, English-facing production, and feedback that made learning visible. Nevertheless, their enactment remained conditional. During intensified examination preparation,

teachers occasionally returned to memorisation-oriented and tightly controlled instruction, reflecting continuing concerns about curriculum pacing, assessment coverage, and professional accountability. Thus, the findings indicate emerging pedagogical adaptability rather than established long-term sustainability. Translanguaging-informed routines became more workable when teachers could adjust them to classroom needs while preserving assessable English-learning outcomes.

5. Discussion

This study examined how translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines were collaboratively developed, enacted, and refined within three rural Vietnamese EFL classrooms shaped by examination pressure and English-only instructional expectations. Across the co-design cycles, the findings suggest that pedagogical change emerged not simply from permitting multiple languages within classroom interaction, but from reorganizing the participation structures through which learning became publicly visible, interactionally legitimate, and institutionally defensible. In this sense, the study extends existing translanguaging scholarship by shifting attention from isolated multilingual interaction to routinised participation-and-assessment infrastructures that can operate within accountability-oriented educational environments.

5.1 Reframing Translanguaging, Fairness, and Pedagogical Legitimacy (RQ1)

The findings suggest that teachers' understandings of translanguaging evolved less through abstract ideological conversion than through iterative encounters with participation inequities embedded within English-only routines. At the beginning of the study, all three teachers associated visible English performance with professionalism, instructional rigor, and examination alignment, reflecting earlier TESOL research in which English-only norms function as institutional markers of legitimacy (Ngo, 2025; Pham & Nguyen, 2024; Tian et al., 2025). Across the co-design cycles, however, teachers increasingly recognized that many students possessed relevant conceptual understanding but lacked legitimate entry routes into English-facing participation.

Importantly, these shifts did not involve abandoning English-oriented goals or examination expectations altogether. Instead, teachers gradually reframed fairness from equal English exposure to more differentiated access to participation and visible evidence of learning (Kien & Van, 2023; Shohamy et al., 2022; Wei, 2024). This distinction is analytically significant because it suggests that translanguaging became pedagogically legitimate not when English disappeared from classroom interaction, but when multilingual planning and multimodal support were strategically sequenced toward English-facing outcomes. In this sense, the findings complicate binary framings that position translanguaging and examination-oriented instruction as inherently incompatible (Dryden, Tankosić, & Dovchin, 2021).

At the same time, these legitimacy shifts remained partial and contextually negotiated rather than uniformly transformative. Teachers continued to carefully regulate multilingual participation during assessment-oriented activities, particularly when institutional accountability and examination preparedness remained highly salient. Consequently, the findings suggest that translanguaging functioned less as unrestricted linguistic flexibility than as bounded pedagogical sequencing designed to manage tensions between inclusion, participation, and accountability within rural exam-oriented classrooms.

5.2 Participation, Affective Risk, and Recognition (RQ2)

Across focus groups, journals, and classroom observations, many students described English-only participation as interactionally high-risk, particularly in speaking and writing activities requiring immediate public performance. These findings align with prior research suggesting that English-dominant participation norms may disproportionately disadvantage lower-proficiency and ethnolinguistic minority learners in multilingual EFL settings (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Lan, 2025). However, the present study suggests that participation difficulties were shaped not solely by linguistic proficiency, but also by classroom conditions regulating when, how, and through which resources students could participate legitimately.

Students most consistently described participation shifts when routines introduced predictable multilingual planning phases before scaffolded English production. Multimodal supports, collaborative interaction, captioned videos, gestures, and culturally grounded tasks also appeared to reduce immediate performance pressure for many learners. Importantly, however, these participation shifts were neither universal nor unconditional. Some students remained hesitant during public English production, particularly in assessment-oriented contexts where linguistic accuracy and examination performance remained highly visible (Ambele & Nuemaihom, 2024; Vu et al., 2025).

The findings also suggest that translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines occasionally reorganized classroom recognition by legitimizing home languages and culturally grounded knowledge within academic participation. Several ethnolinguistic minority students described feelings of pride and increased visibility when classmates engaged with K'Ho expressions or local cultural knowledge. Nevertheless, these forms of recognition remained contextually bounded and did not fully disrupt broader institutional hierarchies privileging English performance (Tai, 2026). Consequently, the findings do not suggest that translanguaging eliminated participation inequality, but rather that it created lower-risk pathways into classroom participation for many learners within this particular rural exam-oriented context.

5.3 Constraint Ecology and the Conditional Sustainability of Translanguaging-Informed Participation-and-Assessment Routines (RQ3)

The findings further suggest that the sustainability of translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines depended heavily on broader ecological conditions shaping classroom practice (Schissel, 2025). Examination accountability, curriculum pacing, English-only professional discourses, and uneven teacher confidence in productive-skill instruction all constrained how far multilingual participation could be extended. These findings support recent scholarship arguing that translanguaging implementation in EFL contexts is shaped not

only by teacher beliefs, but also by institutional accountability structures and assessment regimes (Shohamy et al., 2022).

At the same time, the co-design process appeared to support pedagogical change by treating these constraints as design conditions rather than barriers to be eliminated. Iteratively redesigned lesson plans, participation organizers, multilingual scaffolds, and assessment artefacts functioned as visible pedagogical evidence capable of legitimizing multilingual participation while still maintaining English-facing outcomes. In this sense, sustainability appeared to depend less on permissive multilingualism itself than on whether translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines could remain pedagogically defensible within institutional accountability structures (Puzio et al., 2013).

Importantly, however, examination pressure continued to exert a substantial influence throughout the study. During periods of intensified test preparation, teachers occasionally returned to memorization-oriented and tightly controlled instructional routines due to concerns regarding pacing, assessment coverage, and public accountability. Consequently, the findings do not suggest that translanguaging displaced examination-oriented pedagogy altogether or functioned as a universally applicable equity solution. Rather, the findings indicate that translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines appeared to become more sustainable when organized through carefully bounded, sequentially structured, and assessment-compatible practices capable of widening participation while preserving visible English learning outcomes (Arias & Schissel, 2021; Tian et al., 2025).

Within this study, the routines that appeared most sustainable generally combined: (1) sequenced multilingual planning leading toward English-facing production, (2) multimodal scaffolding, (3) structured collaborative interaction, and (4) feedback and assessment artefacts capable of making learning visibly accountable. Although these findings may offer potentially relevant insights for comparable multilingual EFL settings, the study does not claim empirical transferability beyond the present context. Rather, the study proposes a context-sensitive explanation of how translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines may become pedagogically workable within examination-oriented environments shaped by competing demands for inclusion, legitimacy, and accountability.

5.4 The Translanguaging Participation-and-Assessment Infrastructure (TPAI) Model: An Analytical Synthesis

Drawing on evidence across the three classrooms and successive co-design cycles, this study proposes the Translanguaging Participation-and-Assessment Infrastructure (TPAI) Model as a context-sensitive explanation of how multilingual pedagogical practices became more workable within examination-oriented EFL instruction. While co-stance, co-design, and co-shifts provided the initial conceptual lens for examining collaborative pedagogical development, the TPAI Model emerged through recursive interpretation of classroom observations, teacher interviews, student focus groups, reflective journals, and co-design artefacts. It therefore represents an analytical outcome of the study rather than a predetermined intervention framework.

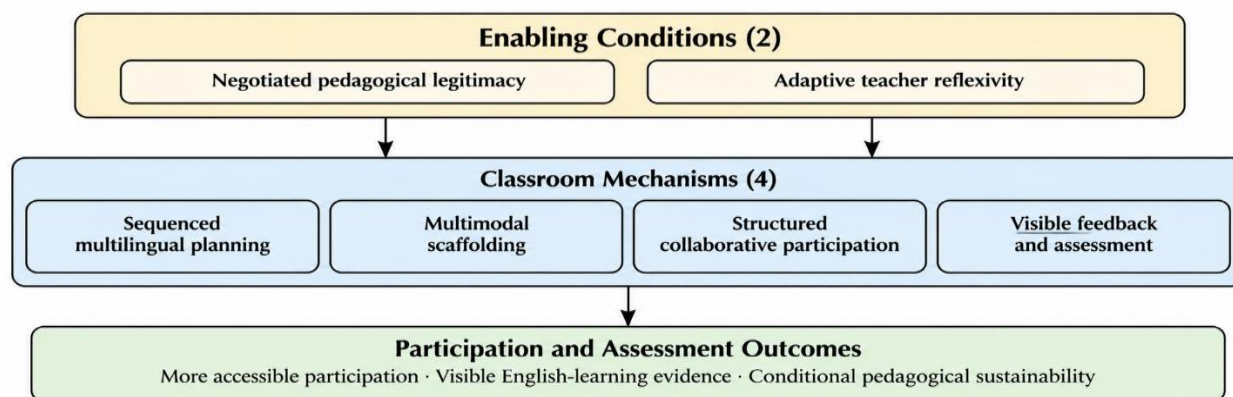


Figure 1. Translanguaging Participation-and-Assessment Infrastructure (TPAI) Model

As illustrated in Figure 1, the TPAI Model comprises six interconnected dimensions organised into two mutually supportive categories: four classroom mechanisms and two enabling conditions. The classroom mechanisms include (1) sequenced multilingual planning towards English-facing outcomes, (2) multimodal scaffolding through linguistic and semiotic resources, (3) structured collaborative participation, and (4) visible feedback and assessment. Together, these mechanisms translate multilingual meaning-making into purposeful instructional routines that broaden opportunities for classroom participation while producing recognisable evidence of English learning. The two enabling conditions—(5) negotiated pedagogical legitimacy and (6) adaptive teacher reflexivity—shape teachers' capacity to enact, justify, evaluate, and refine these routines within examination-oriented institutional contexts. Negotiated legitimacy concerns the alignment of multilingual practices with curriculum requirements, assessment expectations, and professional accountability, whereas adaptive reflexivity involves critically examining classroom evidence and adjusting pedagogical decisions through successive co-design cycles.

The model extends Garc á et al.'s (2017) stance–design–shifts perspective by explaining how collaboratively negotiated pedagogical commitments were translated into structured participation-and-assessment routines under institutional constraints. Specifically, co-stance informed shared understandings of multilingual participation and fairness; co-design supported the development of multilingual scaffolds,

collaborative activities, and assessment-compatible tasks; and co-shifts captured responsive adjustments informed by classroom evidence. Rather than representing a fixed or linear sequence, the six TPAI dimensions interact dynamically: the two enabling conditions support the enactment and refinement of the four classroom mechanisms, while classroom experiences and emerging assessment evidence inform subsequent pedagogical decisions. This interaction helps explain how multilingual participation could become more accessible and English learning more visible without abandoning curriculum and examination requirements.

Importantly, the TPAI Model does not imply that translanguaging automatically produces equitable participation or guarantees long-term pedagogical sustainability. Differences in student participation, teacher confidence, and institutional expectations persisted, and teachers occasionally returned to memorisation-oriented instruction during intensified examination preparation. Accordingly, the model conceptualises sustainability as an emerging, context-dependent capacity to adapt and justify multilingual routines under changing pedagogical constraints, rather than the permanent institutionalisation of fixed practices. Given the three-classroom sample and 12-week intervention period, TPAI remains a provisional, contextually grounded analytical model whose transferability and longer-term explanatory value require further investigation.

6. Conclusion

This study investigated how translanguaging-informed participation-and-assessment routines were collaboratively developed, enacted, and refined across three rural Vietnamese EFL classrooms through a 12-week co-design process. The findings suggest that translanguaging became more pedagogically workable not simply through permitting multilingual interaction, but through establishing predictable instructional routines that connected multilingual and multimodal meaning-making with English-facing learning outcomes. Across the three iterative cycles, teachers gradually reconsidered English-only expectations and reframed assessment fairness from equal exposure to English towards differentiated opportunities for participation and the production of recognisable evidence of learning. This shift did not diminish the importance of English proficiency; rather, it repositioned multilingual resources as purposeful means of supporting access to English learning within examination-oriented classrooms.

From students' perspectives, sequenced multilingual preparation, multimodal scaffolding, structured collaboration, and culturally grounded activities provided more accessible pathways into classroom participation. Many learners, particularly those with lower English proficiency and ethnolinguistic minority backgrounds, reported reduced participation anxiety, greater willingness to attempt English production, and stronger recognition of their linguistic identities. Nevertheless, these benefits were neither uniform nor unconditional. Some students remained hesitant during public English performance, while examination expectations continued to privilege linguistic accuracy and constrain multilingual participation. These findings suggest that translanguaging can expand opportunities for participation and recognition without necessarily eliminating existing inequalities or institutional language hierarchies.

The study's principal theoretical contribution is the Translanguaging Participation-and-Assessment Infrastructure (TPAI) Model, developed as an analytical synthesis of the empirical findings rather than a predetermined intervention framework. Extending the co-stance, co-design, and co-shifts perspective, TPAI identifies six interconnected dimensions: four classroom mechanisms—sequenced multilingual planning, multimodal scaffolding, structured collaborative participation, and visible feedback and assessment—and two enabling conditions—negotiated pedagogical legitimacy and adaptive teacher reflexivity. Together, these dimensions explain how multilingual meaning-making can be organised into purposeful, assessment-compatible routines that broaden participation while maintaining visible evidence of English learning. Importantly, the model positions pedagogical legitimacy and sustainability not as automatic consequences of translanguaging, but as negotiated and context-dependent achievements shaped by teachers' professional judgements, classroom evidence, and institutional accountability demands.

The findings further indicate that pedagogical sustainability should be understood as an emerging capacity to adapt, justify, and refine multilingual routines under changing classroom conditions rather than as the permanent adoption of fixed instructional procedures. Although teachers demonstrated growing confidence and pedagogical flexibility, examination pressure, curriculum pacing, and professional accountability continued to constrain implementation, occasionally prompting a return to memorisation-oriented instruction. Consequently, the study provides evidence of increasing pedagogical workability and adaptive capacity, but not of established long-term sustainability.

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. The study involved three purposively selected classrooms and a relatively short intervention period, restricting claims about longer-term implementation and applicability beyond the research context. Students' English-language development and formal assessment outcomes were not systematically measured, while the first author's dual role as researcher and co-design facilitator may have influenced pedagogical enactment and interpretation despite reflexive safeguards. Accordingly, TPAI should be regarded as a provisional, context-sensitive analytical model requiring further empirical examination. Future research should investigate its enactment across more diverse educational settings, examine its relationship with measurable English-learning outcomes, and explore how school leadership, assessment policies, and sustained professional learning influence the continuity of multilingual pedagogical practices. Ultimately, the study suggests that making translanguaging workable under examination pressure requires more than legitimising multilingual resources; it requires redesigning the participation-and-assessment conditions through which multilingual learners can access, demonstrate, and develop English learning.

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Author contributions

Huong Vu conceptualized the study, conducted the fieldwork, collected and analyzed the data, and prepared the initial manuscript draft. Eric A. Ambele supervised the research, contributed to the study design, interpretation of the findings, and substantially revised the manuscript for intellectual content. Pilanut Phusawisot co-supervised the research, contributed to the methodological design and data interpretation, and critically reviewed and revised the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript and agree to be accountable for all aspects of the work.

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Competing interests

The authors declare no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The study received ethical approval from the relevant research ethics committee of Mahasarakham University, Thailand (Approval No. 738-572/2568). Institutional permission was obtained from the principals of the three participating schools before data collection. Written informed consent was obtained from participating teachers and adult students, while parental or guardian consent and student assent were obtained for participants under 18 years of age.

AI Disclosure Statement

The authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT and Grammarly to improve the language of the manuscript, including grammar and clarity checks. All content was reviewed and verified by the authors.

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Data availability statement

The qualitative data supporting the findings are not publicly available because they contain potentially identifiable information about teachers, students, and participating schools. De-identified excerpts may be made available by the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to ethical approval and participant confidentiality requirements.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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Appendix

Translanguaging-Informed Lesson Plan (Adapted from Garc ía et al., 2017)

Global Success 12 - Unit 5: The World of Work | Lesson 4: Speaking (Giving Opinions about Jobs) (45-minute lesson)

Lesson aims		Develop interactive speaking about jobs using job vocabulary, adjectives, and reasons; English is the performance product.	
TL objectives		Use Vietnamese/ethnic minority languages for comprehension, planning, and peer support; map meanings to English labels/frames to promote equitable participation and identity affirmation.	
Materials		Bubble-map template; short jobs video (30–90s); job-description/adjective table (+ VN glosses); dialogue frames + word bank; role cards (MC/Advisor/Guests); board/markers; timer; optional dictionary apps; small prize (optional).	
Stage/Time	Activity	Procedures	TL strategies (embedded)
Pre (3')	Work-Word Race	Groups (5) brainstorm job titles on bubble map (any language). Post; quick count.	Multilingual pooling; peer verification; map key items to English.
Pre (4')	Jobs Video Challenge	Watch (no writing) → recall in any language → add English labels → post/check; points for English.	Process→product; cross-linguistic mapping; strategic resourcing; teacher revoicing.
Pre (4')	Follow-up Questions	Select 3 jobs (like/interesting/challenging). Note keywords (any language) → co-construct 1–2 English sentences using frames; share.	L1 ideation; peer scaffolding; English frames for output.
While (10')	TBA 1: Describe Jobs with Adjectives	Pairs underline responsibilities; add quick VN/home-language gloss for difficult adjectives; match 1–3 adjectives/job; justify; brief share.	Multilingual comprehension; mapping meanings; mediation (translate/paraphrase).
While (12')	TBA 2: Pair Dialogue (Preferences)	Teacher–student model + open-pair practice. Provide A1–A2 templates/word bank. Pairs plan (any language) then perform short English dialogue; feedback/revoicing.	L1 planning; process→product; peer support + tools; teacher revoicing.
Post (10')	TBA 3: Role-play 'Job Consultation Program'	Groups: MC, advisor, 3 guests. Plan in any language (jobs+adjectives+reasons) → script with frames → rehearse → selected performances; revoicing.	Multilingual planning; cross-linguistic mapping; co-construction; English performance product.
Wrap (2')	Consolidation	Elicit 3 jobs + 3 adjectives + 1 reason phrase. Exit ticket: 1 job + 2 adjectives + 1 reason (keywords).	Brief reflection on how L1/home languages supported English production.
Homework	Job Detective at Home	Interview a family/community member (any language). Submit A4 card: job title (VN+EN), 3 responsibilities, 3 adjectives, 2 English sentences.	Home–school bridge; multilingual note-taking; mapping to English; identity affirmation.

Assessment (quick): Exit ticket + speaking observation; Homework marked /10 (home–school connection 3, language mediation 3, English output 3, presentation 1).