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**Research Article**

# Translanguaging Effects on Anxiety and Participation in Young Eikaiwa Students

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**Abstract**

This study aims to explore the impact of using multiple languages in English language classrooms for Japanese students and the benefits of translanguaging, highlighting its potential to reduce anxiety, increase student participation, and enhance learning outcomes. Factors such as student motivation, classroom environment, and individual abilities are considered in relation to active participation and enjoyment in language learning. Questionnaires were used to gauge reactions of 22 participants. Findings suggest that, while translanguaging can be a valuable tool for scaffolding English knowledge and motivating learners, caution is necessary to prevent overreliance on students' native language. Given the limited sample size, the study calls for further research involving larger and more diverse participants to deepen the understanding of translanguaging's effects on academic growth and communication abilities. By addressing the limitations and leveraging the benefits of translanguaging, educators can optimize language learning experiences for young English learners in *eikaiwa* (English conversation school) settings.

本研究では、英会話を学ぶ小中学生を対象に、トランスランゲージングの学習効果を検証した。その結果、トランスランゲージングは生徒の不安を軽減し、参加意欲を高め、学習成果を向上させる可能性が示唆された。さらに、生徒のモチベーションや教室の環境、個々の能力などが、言語学習における積極的な参加と楽しさとの関連性に影響を与えることも考察された。このように、トランスランゲージングは英語学習の基盤を支え、学習者のモチベーションを促進する有力な手法である。一方で、生徒が母国語に過度に依存しないよう配慮する必要がある。今後は、さらに多様な参加者を含む研究を進めることで、トランスランゲージングが学力向上やコミュニケーション能力に与える影響を理解するための基盤を築いていく必要がある。

There has been much debate surrounding which is the best method for teaching Japanese students English. In 2017, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) revised the Course of Study, urging teachers to conduct English lessons entirely in English, minimizing the use of students' native language (L1). MEXT also advocated a transition from the traditional grammar-translation method to a communicative approach ("All-English" approach), which differs significantly from the previous Course of Study (MEXT, 2008). Although MEXT advocated minimal L1 use, recent research suggests that an entirely English-only approach may not be the most effective for Japanese students (Mizukura, 2020; Torikai, 2017; Weschler, 1997). Furthermore, Japanese teachers of English may not be capable of English-only lessons, as they may not have had the training needed for that teaching style. Incorporating translanguaging—the concept of utilizing learners' full linguistic repertoire in the classroom instruction—could provide a more balanced and effective method.

Several pedagogical practices and terms currently involve using L1 in teaching English to English as a foreign language (EFL) learners, e.g., code-switching and L1/L2 usage. Some examples of L1 use include translating words or sentences from English into the learner's L1. However, in the current study, we adopted the term pedagogical translanguaging for two reasons. First, this concept challenges the traditional view that languages should be kept separate, encouraging the use of multiple languages in the classroom. Second, if the goal is for Japanese learners to speak English, ignoring students' linguistic resources through a monolingual approach appears counterproductive (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020), especially if the aim is to develop multilingual skills, as recommended by MEXT. Alongside the two reasons given, translanguaging can also foster the creation of translanguaging spaces, which reduce learners' language-learning anxiety and promote a greater sense of belonging within the classroom (Back et al., 2020)

Despite MEXT advocating an "All-English" approach, empirical research on its effectiveness for Japanese learners, particularly younger students, is limited. Previous studies demonstrate translanguaging's positive effects on high school and adult learners in Japan (Aoyama, 2020; Azami & Yamaguchi, 2015; Sakai & Shimura, 2019). However, research on how translanguaging impacts younger learners in *eikaiwa* (English conversation school) settings is scarce. This study aims to address these gaps by investigating how translanguaging affects the attitudes of young learners in eikaiwa schools and identifying factors influencing their enjoyment and active classroom participation.

We aim to suggest possible translanguaging pedagogical directions for teachers of young learners and highlight points of caution when adopting translanguaging. This contribution deepens the understanding of the translanguaging literature. The current study is relevant given the limited research on translanguaging in Japanese contexts, particularly in eikaiwa settings targeting young English language learners.

## Literature Review

The literature review will be organized into three sections. The first paragraph provides a brief overview of translanguaging, while the second paragraph examines learner anxiety and explores how translanguaging has supported learners in various contexts. The final paragraph focuses on the application of translanguaging within Japanese contexts.

Translanguaging was first conceptualized by Williams (1994) in his doctoral thesis after observing Welsh bilingual education in schools, where translanguaging referred to a pedagogical practice that "deliberately switches the language mode of input and output in bilingual classrooms" (Lewis et al., 2012, p.663). Williams (2002) defined translanguaging as "receiving information in one language and then using it in the other language" (p.42). Since then, various definitions have emerged (Leung & Valadés, 2019; Vogel & Garcia, 2017; Wei, 2018a; Wei, 2018b), covering both pedagogical practices and sociolinguistics. Garcia and Wei (2014) offered an accessible definition, describing translanguaging as an approach to language use and bilingual education that views bilingualism not as two distinct language systems but as a single linguistic repertoire with features socially constructed as belonging to separate languages. Cenoz and Gorter (2020) added that, while languages are distinct, they are fluid and holistic with no clear boundaries (see also Leung & Valadés, 2019). This definition is visualized in Figure 1, depicting the traditional perception of languages before the emergence of translanguaging and the current view when observed through a translanguaging lens.

**Figure 1**

*Traditional Language Perception Versus Translanguaging Perspective*



How Languages were Perceived Traditionally | How Translanguaging Perceives Languages
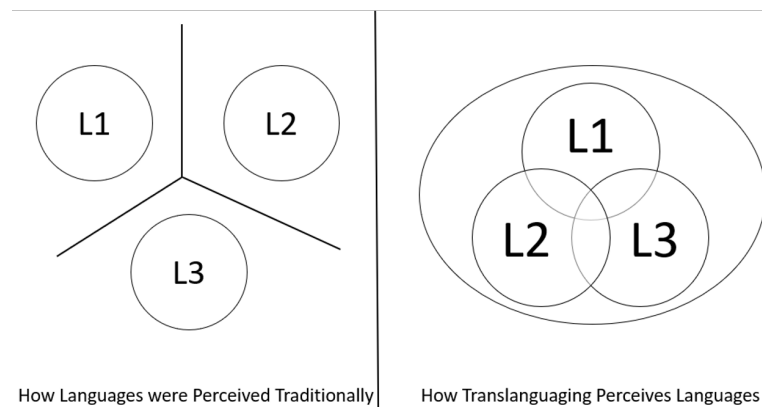
Foreign language anxiety was first identified by Horwitz et al. (1986). According to Song (2024), foreign-language anxiety is a multifaceted phenomenon arising from the "particularities of the language learning process and its connection to classroom language acquisition" (p.795). Consequently, it cannot be attributed to a single, easily identifiable factor. Nonetheless, in the context of translanguaging, empirical studies have demonstrated that incorporating translanguaging into classroom instruction reassures learners, enhances their confidence, and reduces anxiety and emotional stress (Back et al., 2020; Dryden et al., 2021; Sanjaya et al., 2023).

Empirical studies in Japan have explored the effects of using students' L1 in English classes for Japanese EFL learners. Azami and Yamaguchi (2015) assessed 240 high school students, finding that, while English-only classes were challenging to understand, they improved students' four language skills. However, the use of L1 was beneficial for understanding complex concepts such as grammar. Sakai and Shimura (2019) found that, over three years, high school students supported L1 use in English classes, particularly for explaining language structures, which deepened their understanding of L2. Aoyama (2020) observed that high school students used L1 during L2 communication activities not due to a lack of linguistic resources but to aid peers' comprehension. Aoyama concluded that L1 use indicated a desire to employ L2 more effectively.

Thus, previous studies in both global and Japanese contexts have demonstrated translanguaging's positive effects on Japanese EFL learners' attitudes and learning outcomes in high school students. Given these findings, eikaiwa businesses that emphasize English-only instruction might benefit from implementing translanguaging, as this could be more advantageous for students given it can help scaffold the learners' learning and lower the learners' language-learning anxiety. However, while translanguaging has displayed promise for high-school—and older—students, its effects on younger students have not been examined, since literature assessing learners' anxiety and participation in Japanese eikaiwa contexts is scarce. Additionally, the effects of L1 usage on young learners remain under explored,

hence this study's aim to investigate translanguaging's impact on young learners attending eikaiwa schools. Specifically, this study addresses these two gaps in the literature with the following research questions: How does translanguaging affect the attitudes and anxiety of young learners of English who attend eikaiwa schools over six months? What learner and class factors influence enjoyment and active participation within the class when adopting translanguaging?

## Methodology

A quantitative approach was employed to investigate the effects of translanguaging on young learners. Before conducting the study—spread over six months, from October 2023 to March 2024—the researcher obtained consent from students, parents, and the school. The study participants comprised 22 language learners ranging from those below Eiken 5th grade (below CEFR A1) to those who had achieved Eiken 2nd grade (CEFR A2–B1). The students were aged from 9 (elementary school third grade) to 14 years (junior high school second grade), with an average age of 11.1 years. The researcher taught all participants, who had been attending the eikaiwa school since April 2023 and had studied English for at least six months. Based on their Eiken proficiency and language level, the students were divided into three categories: beginner (Eiken 5th grade or below, $n = 13$), intermediate (Eiken 4th grade, $n = 4$), and advanced (Eiken 3rd grade or above, $n = 5$). The lessons were conducted primarily in English, with translanguaging used to scaffold students' understanding of the content (e.g., translating vocabulary and passages, and providing instructions). To ensure honesty and accuracy in self-reported data, the researcher informed the eikaiwa school of the teaching methods and explained the new classroom environment to all students to prevent any surprises.

### Data Collection

Data were collected using the following three primary methods to provide a deeper understanding of translanguaging's effect on young learners: 1) pre-and post-test questionnaires, 2) vocabulary tests conducted by the eikaiwa school, and 3) reflection sheets along with audio recordings for every class held over the six-month period.

### Pre-test and Post-test Questionnaire

The students were asked to fill out the questionnaire in October 2023 and again in March 2024. These questionnaires served as pre- and post-tests to gauge students' reactions to translanguaging and its implementation. The questionnaires included seven factors: foreign language aptitude, difficulty of language learning, nature of language learning, learning and communication strategies, motivation and expectations, anxiety, and self-efficacy. The first five factors were adapted from Yamada (2020), the sixth from Kumada and Okumura (2017), and the seventh from Kashiwahara et al. (2017). All questionnaires used a five-point Likert scale, with 1 representing 'strongly disagree' and 5 indicating 'strongly agree.' Additionally, while the original questionnaires were in Japanese, the language used was modified (e.g., rephrased in simpler terms or sentences) to match the learners' proficiency levels in Japanese, as the participants were young learners with limited vocabulary.

### Vocabulary Tests

The eikaiwa school where the study was conducted used vocabulary tests to assess students' proficiency and encourage English vocabulary study at home. Students received a list of approximately 100 vocabulary words in October and again in January. These words, selected by the eikaiwa school, were basic vocabulary items that would appear on the Eiken grade 5 (below CEFR A1 Level) test. Vocabulary tests were then conducted approximately two to three months later to assess students' abilities. The word list distributed in October was tested in December, and the January list was tested in March. The maximum possible score on the tests was 100. The average score of the participants for the December test was 63.2, while that for the March test was 52.9. Due to privacy considerations, the complete tests cannot be disclosed. However, to provide readers with an understanding of the test format, examples of the vocabulary included topics such as colors, days of the week, and weather. The tests required students to perform tasks such as writing the meanings of target vocabulary words in either English or Japanese, matching vocabulary words to their correct meanings, and identifying the appropriate words from a list of options based on corresponding images.

### Reflection Sheet

Reflection sheets were employed in each class to examine how students reacted to translanguaging. Adapted from Baba (2012), the reflection sheets were designed to assess active participation, class enjoyment, learning outcomes, and difficulties encountered, while including space for comments or questions.

### Audio Recordings

From October 2023 onwards, the researcher taught eight classes, totaling 140 lessons, all of which were recorded using a voice recorder. The voice recorder was placed at the center of the classroom table to capture as many learner

voices and utterances as possible. To measure the ratio of English to Japanese spoken in each lesson, the researcher listened to each recording and used stopwatches to time the duration of English and Japanese spoken by the teacher manually, following Kaneko (1992). The total spoken time (in seconds) of English and that of Japanese were calculated separately and then added together. Finally, the ratio of English to Japanese spoken time was determined by dividing the total time of English by the combined total time, following a method from Kaneko (1992) which was adapted. For instance, the teacher spoke for a total of 1,065.26 seconds, 398.20 seconds of which were in English, with 667.06 seconds in Japanese. By dividing the total speaking time (1,065.26 seconds) by the time spoken in English (398.20 seconds), it was calculated that English accounted for 37% of the teacher's speech, while Japanese comprised the remaining 63%.

## Data Analysis

To address research question 1 (RQ1), pre- and post-test results from the questionnaire were analyzed using JASP software, employing paired t-tests to assess significance. Cohen's d was used to evaluate effect sizes, categorized as 0.2 for small, 0.5 for medium, and 0.7 for large effects. Given the relatively small sample size, significance was set at $p<0.05$ for significant findings and $p<0.1$ for potential trends when implementing translanguaging. This study aimed to identify measurable trends and relationships, and so a quantitative framework was necessary.

For research question 2 (RQ2), a generalized linear mixed model (GLMM) analysis was chosen using R. The fixed factors included active participation and enjoyment, derived from student responses on reflection sheets. The following eight factors were considered as random effects: class level, class order, English ratio, duration of English spoken, student age, study time at home, vocabulary test scores, and Eiken proficiency levels. Significance thresholds were set at $p<0.05$ for significant results and $p<0.1$ for possible trends.

## Results

### Questionnaire Results

As regards to analyzing translanguaging's effects on students, due to the limited space, only factors with $p<0.1$ that were relevant to the study were included, while non-significant results from the questionnaire were omitted. The following section focuses on the significant factors related to the research questions from the paired t-test, followed by the GLMM results.

### Difficulty of Language Learning

The results in Table 1 reveal several interesting outcomes regarding students' beliefs. Q4 indicates that translanguaging significantly reduced students' perception that learning English is difficult. The drop in the mean is meaningful as the results indicate that implementing translanguaging significantly decreases the perception that English is difficult. These results suggest that translanguaging positively affects reducing the students' belief that learning English is challenging.

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Participants' FLSA score*

| Questionnaire Question | Mean | | $p$ | Cohen's $d$ | SE Cohen's $d$ |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | Pre-test | Post-test | | | |
| Q4 English is a difficult language to learn | 3.909 | 3.500 | **0.047 | 0.45 | 0.209 |

*Note.* All questions included in the table were originally in Japanese and translated by the researcher.
**$p<0.05$

### Learning and Communication Strategies

Table 2 presents the results from the questionnaire on learning and communication strategies. Statistics indicate that, after experiencing translanguaging, students considered speaking English with good pronunciation and practicing pronunciation by repeating after a recorded native speaker to be less important. Additionally, students began to believe that on-the-spot practice and guessing the meaning of words were sufficient, rather than relying on repetitive practice. This suggests that translanguaging may influence how students perceive and approach communication in English.

**Table 2**

*Pre-test and Post-test Questionnaire Results for Learning and Communication Strategies*

| Questionnaire Question | Mean | | $p$ | Cohen's $d$ | SE Cohen's $d$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-test | Post-test | | | |
| Q7 Speaking English with good pronunciation is important | 4.591 | 3.773 | **0.006 | 0.650 | 0.322 |
| Q13 If you do not know a word, guessing its meaning is fine | 3.091 | 3.636 | *0.076 | −0.398 | 0.333 |
| Q17 Practicing repeatedly is important | 4.500 | 4.273 | *0.096 | 0.371 | 0.205 |
| Q24 Listening to pronunciation from a CD and practicing is important | 4.409 | 3.955 | **0.005 | 0.677 | 0.199 |

*Note.* All questions included in the table were originally in Japanese and translated by the researcher.
*$p<0.1$, **$p<0.05$

## Anxiety

The questionnaire results revealed that students experienced anxiety when they did not understand the teacher's instructions during class. Furthermore, students appeared to feel safer when their native language was used in the class. Interestingly, a trend seemed to exist whereby students did not feel scared to make mistakes in the English classroom, which could be considered one of the positive aspects of adopting translanguaging.

**Table 3**

*Pre-test and Post-test Questionnaire Results for Anxiety*

| Questionnaire Question | Mean | | $p$ | Cohen's $d$ | SE Cohen's $d$ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Pre-test | Post-test | | | |
| Q1 I get scared if I cannot understand the teacher's instructions during class | 3.000 | 3.500 | **0.031 | −0.494 | 0.198 |
| Q3 I am not afraid of committing mistakes in English class | 2.818 | 3.409 | *0.056 | −0.432 | 0.267 |
| Q10 I feel reassured when Japanese is used in the English class | 3.846 | 4.182 | *0.069 | −0.408 | 0.220 |

*Note.* All questions included in the table were originally in Japanese and translated by the researcher.
*$p<0.1$, **$p<0.05$

## GLMM Factor Analysis

Results regarding the factors influencing active participation and enjoyment in the class are discussed in this section. Although seven factors were analyzed, only the amount of time the teacher spoke in English exhibited significant results for active participation and enjoyment (Table 4), with the plot model indicating negative results. These findings suggest that excessive teacher talk, even in the target language, leads to lower active participation and enjoyment in the class.

**Table 4**

*Students' Active Participation and Enjoyment in Class*

| Factors | Active Participation $p$ | Plot Model Effect | Enjoyment $p$ | Plot Model Effect |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| English spoken time (Sec.) | **0.013 | Negative | **0.047 | Negative |

*Note.* All intercepts were p<0.001.
**$p<0.05$

The one-way factor analysis revealed the factors negatively affecting active participation and enjoyment. To determine the factors positively influencing active participation and enjoyment, further factor analysis tests were conducted using the GLMM. The final results are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5**

*Factors Influencing Active Participation and Enjoyment*

| Interaction | Active Participation $p$ | Enjoyment $p$ |
|---|---|---|
| Level of class | **0.026 | *0.076 |
| Individual student characteristics | **0.001 | **0.013 |
| Level of class × individual student characteristics | **0.003 | **0.016 |
| Vocabulary test score | **0.019 | **0.019 |
| Individual student characteristics | **0.020 | *0.056 |
| Vocabulary test score × individual student characteristics | **0.035 | *0.065 |
| Level of class | *0.067 | 0.183 |
| Vocabulary test score | **0.018 | **0.014 |
| Level of class × vocabulary test score | **0.047 | 0.103 |

*Note.* All intercepts were p<0.001 and were positive on the plot model.
*$p$<0.1, **$p$<0.05

The results indicate that three factors, 1) class level, 2) individual student characteristics, and 3) vocabulary test scores, significantly influence active participation and enjoyment. These findings suggest that, for students to actively participate and enjoy the class, they need to both match the class level they are in and maintain that level while studying with others.

## Discussion

This study aimed to examine translanguaging's effects on students and factors influencing active class participation and enjoyment in the class. Regarding RQ1, the study's results indicated that translanguaging helps reduce students' anxiety, negative perceptions and attitudes toward learning English. They also revealed that students expect teachers to use their L1 in the classroom. These findings align with those of Aoyama (2020) and Sakai and Shimura (2019), which emphasize the effectiveness of using L1. However, the study identified some drawbacks: students indicated that repetitive practice was unnecessary, and correct pronunciation was less important. This may be because adopting translanguaging does not forbid the use of L1, allowing students to rely on their L1 when they do not understand each other. Additionally, as students primarily communicated with the teacher and their peers, these familiar listeners could understand them despite their accents. Another factor regarding these results could be that the teacher did not emphasize the importance of pronunciation, instead encouraging students to increase their overall use of the language.

The results imply that implementing translanguaging in the English classroom can shift students' focus from form to meaning. While this aligns with the overall goal of the MEXT (2017) Course of Study, it raises the question of whether this result is beneficial for students' future intelligibility and comprehensibility. Japanese students who use translanguaging may achieve comprehensibility among their peers, but their intelligibility when speaking to native English speakers might be compromised, as the native speakers may not be familiar with the Japanese pronunciation of English words.

While pedagogical translanguaging's greatest merit is the use and transaction between the student's mother tongue and the target language, this can also be its biggest pitfall. Williams (2002) contended that, for translanguaging to be effective, both teachers and learners must be familiar and proficient with the student's mother tongue and the target language to some extent. In the eikaiwa environment, where students are fluent in both English (to the extent they know it) and Japanese, they may tend to overly rely on their L1. While translanguaging can help scaffold students' learning, it could potentially become a crutch if students rely on their L1 excessively. This reliance could pose challenges for students' future interactions with non-Japanese speakers. Thus, careful consideration of L1 reliance is essential when implementing translanguaging in the classroom. Strategies to prevent L1 overreliance include maintaining a consistent class flow and using set phrases and instructions in L2 that students hear frequently in class.

Regarding RQ2, the GLMM results indicated that excessive teacher talk decreases both students' active participation and enjoyment in the class. This is understandable, as excessive teacher talk can render learners passive and uninterested (Pawlak et al., 2020). Further factor analysis identified three components contributing to active participation and enjoyment: the classroom environment, individual student characteristics, and student academic ability. These findings align with those of other empirical studies (Abdullah et al., 2012; Sakka et al., 2022). Abdullah et al. (2012) summarized several factors influencing positive student learning, including student personality, instructor skills, classroom environment, and peer interactions. Sakka et al. (2022) additionally concluded that teacher talk influences the student learning process, underscoring teachers' significant role in shaping the classroom environment. While many studies and teachers stress the importance of exposing students to extensive English input, this study's results suggest that exposure should not solely rely on teachers, as the GLMM yielded negative results. Instead, this

study suggests the importance of diversifying English exposure through methods such as worksheets, textbooks, communication activities, and video clips (Bajrami & Ismaili, 2016).

## Conclusion

This study investigated translanguaging's effects on students' attitudes within eikaiwa schools, examining the factors affecting students' active participation and enjoyment. The findings indicated that translanguaging positively affects students by lowering their anxiety levels and the perception that learning English is challenging. However, the results also indicated that translanguaging may have potentially become a crutch for students in the long run, yielding overreliance on their L1, which could hinder their language development.

This study offers several pedagogical implications for EFL English educators and eikaiwa teachers, highlighting both the potential benefits and points of caution when implementing translanguaging. The study demonstrated that translanguaging can help learners become more open to the idea that English is not difficult and reduce their anxiety in eikaiwa contexts. Using students' L1 can motivate learners and scaffold their English knowledge. For example, it can support learners striving beyond their current English level or facing challenging units, potentially shifting negative perceptions over time. The results also indicated that active participation and enjoyment vary depending on the learner's proficiency. Thus, for advanced learners, increasing the use of L2 is advisable. However, while translanguaging offers several advantages, it risks becoming a crutch that hampers student progress. Therefore, when educators implement translanguaging, understanding its potential benefits, limitations, and possible after-effects on learners is important, as translanguaging can be a double-edged sword.

Although this study focused on eikaiwa school students, its findings can also be applied to other EFL contexts. For instance, as this study showed the benefits of employing L1, using more of the students' L1 within the EFL classroom when instructing for lessons or activities is advisable. Additionally, reducing the amount of teacher talk to increase target language exposure is recommended, as is adjusting the L1 to L2 ratio depending on individual learner abilities and the classroom environment.

Despite yielding positive outcomes, the study has several limitations. First, the participants were limited to only 22 students, restricting the results' generalizability. Second, the study spanned only six months, which may not capture translanguaging's full effects over the long term. Finally, the study focused solely on how translanguaging affects students' learning attitudes and did not consider their academic growth.

Future research should address these limitations by including a larger, more diverse sample with participants from multiple eikaiwa institutions. Additionally, longitudinal studies examining the effects of translanguaging and its benefits and after-effects on EFL learners would provide deeper insights into pedagogical translanguaging. Furthermore, collecting qualitative data through interviews to understand students' reactions to translanguaging could yield deeper insights. Transcribing and coding lessons that were recorded to examine how teachers implement translanguaging in the classroom would also be necessary for further analysis to effectively portray translanguaging for students.

In conclusion, while translanguaging has its demerits, its benefits are immense. Acknowledging the limitations and the possible after-effects translanguaging may have on the learner allows teachers to realize its full potential. By addressing the limitations and building on the findings from this study, future research can further advance the understanding of translanguaging and its potential outcomes, ultimately contributing to more successful language learning outcomes for young English learners in general.

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