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Research Article

Pedagogical Translanguaging in Japanese University EFL Classes: A Case Study

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Abstract

Translanguaging has been gaining momentum in ESL and EFL classrooms throughout the world over the past few years, and results of studies that have allowed students to incorporate their whole linguistic repertoire in the classroom to promote language development and build knowledge have shown to be beneficial to students' overall development (Deroo & Ponzio, 2019). This paper will explore the pedagogical translanguaging approach and provide results of a study in which students ($N = 28$) who studied their "Graduation Seminar" class in a translanguaging approach reported that they felt that being able to incorporate their L1 in L2 classes was beneficial to their linguistic and knowledge development.

近年、ESL(第二言語としての英語)およびEFL(外国語としての英語)教育において、トランスランゲージング教育法が広がっている。学生が教室内で自らの全ての言語レパートリーを活用することを許可したことで、言語発達と知識構築の両面において有益であることが示されている(Deroo & Ponzio, 2019)。本研究では、教育的トランスランゲージングアプローチを検討し、その結果を報告する。具体的には、トランスランゲージングアプローチを用いて「卒業セミナー」クラスを受講した学生($N = 28$)を対象に調査を行い、L2の授業においてL1を取り入れることが、学生の言語発達および知識発達に有益であると感じたことを明らかにした。

Translanguaging as a pedagogical approach has gained significant traction in both ESL and EFL classrooms over the past decade (Deroo & Ponzio, 2019). This approach encourages students to utilize their entire linguistic repertoire during classroom and assessment activities, aiming to foster language development and content learning, which has yielded positive results (Lin, 2019). This paper aims to outline various pedagogical translanguaging approaches and highlight the benefits of integrating this method at the classroom level. Additionally, it introduces findings from a two-year study involving 28 Japanese university students who completed their 3rd and 4th year "Graduation Seminar" within a translanguaging environment.

The purpose of this study is to investigate and identify how students felt about studying their Graduation seminar in a pedagogical translanguaging approach, and to outline the results obtained from a post-course survey and a focus group discussion to see what students thought was beneficial to their language development and content comprehension, and whether a class taught in a translanguaging approach was beneficial to developing their research skills to complete an original paper to qualify for graduation from their BA program.

At first, a literature review outlining the theoretical and pedagogical benefits of incorporating translanguaging approaches in the classroom will be provided, before a brief outline of the seminar, its design and the tasks students were asked to do being presented. Then the results of the survey and focus group discussion will be provided and discussed to show that regarding this group of students who took their seminar in a translanguaging approach found that it had a positive impact on their language development, linguistic knowledge, and content comprehension.

Literature Review

Translanguaging, as defined by Garcia and Wei (2014), involves the deliberate and systematic incorporation of a student's full linguistic repertoire in the classroom. This practice supports knowledge building, promotes inclusion, and enhances language development. It allows learners and instructors to leverage the student's native language (L1) in second language (L2) classes, facilitating language acquisition and transfer. Furthermore, translanguaging provides opportunities for students to draw upon their past experiences and expertise on various topics, regardless of their proficiency level in the L2 (Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid, 2015).

In Japanese EFL contexts, translanguaging approaches enable students to utilize Japanese (L1) during English (L2) classes. This is facilitated through using bilingual materials and resources, and it allows students to switch to Japanese during group work discussions in English, thereby promoting the exchange of opinions and clarifying

language nuances (Bartlett, 2023).

By allowing students to incorporate their home language in the classroom, it has been shown to contribute to their overall language development and creates a feeling of inclusivity (Garcia & Lin, 2017; Bartlett, 2023). Although this feeling of inclusivity is more felt in ESL contexts where home languages may not be the main language of use in the country in which students are located, in EFL environments, it enables students to connect their understanding of the foreign language with their broader metalinguistic awareness, thus fostering further comprehension of language rules, structures and usage patterns across from their L1 to L2.

Canagarajah (2011) outlines that permitting code-switching to occur in translanguaging centred classrooms allows for the inclusion of a student's whole linguistic repertoire to be present, which further helps promote L2 language acquisition and the learning of content (p.8). The inclusion of students' L1 in L2 classrooms further aids in communication between participants at different levels of L2 proficiency and allows for language transfer from the L1 to the L2 to occur more succinctly. The process of using learners L1 to support L2 acquisition has been suggested by Cummins (2023) as a means to close the gap between linguistic and content knowledge, and as a way to move students' proficiency from Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) to Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP).

When it comes to classroom praxis, pedagogical translanguaging promotes flexible assessment tasks that mainly focus on formative assessment to provide scaffolding opportunities, which allows for learners to gradually develop their language skills and academic skills while drawing on past knowledge from their L1. Once students have had opportunities to develop their language and form their opinions on certain topics and themes following formative and developmental tasks, it is only then suggested that students are given summative tasks to check their language and comprehension accordingly (Baker, 2011).

Incorporating collaborative learning approaches such as group discussions, group presentations, and then getting students to write papers after they have worked in groups allows for students to discuss and clarify their ideas and opinions prior to writing a paper or giving a presentation for assessment purposes. It is during these formative tasks where the benefits of Translanguaging are most prevalent in EFL classrooms. By allowing students to code-switch and use their L1 as a support tool during group discussions in their L2, it allows for the discussion to continue to flow, for real time feedback on their language usage from their peers to be ascertained, and for them to continue to develop their ideas on the topic at hand which is conducive to developing their CALP skills. It can further be evident that incorporating Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT) in classrooms that follow a pedagogical translanguaging design are beneficial (Creese and Blackledge, 2010).

This case study involved Japanese university students in a seminar class that was taught using a pedagogical translanguaging approach, that also incorporated elements from CLIL, in which students were simultaneously learning the required language and contents required to complete an original research project in their area of specialization in order to qualify to graduate from the Bachelor of Arts in English and Global Studies.

Seminar Design

This case study was conducted in a seminar class at a university in Japan. The seminar in question is a compulsory subject that students start studying in their third year. During the second semester of their second year, students are provided with outlines of all of the seminars offered by the faculty, and then apply for the seminar that they are most interested in. In the Department of English and Global Studies, there are currently 21 different seminars offered, ranging from topics such as the literature of Shakespeare, American Literature, International Business, Language Acquisition in children, international outreach and NPO activities, Education, Intercultural Studies to name a few.

The seminar in question is focused on improving students' CALP skills, while exploring content in the areas of Education, ESL/EFL, Social studies and Anthropology. In this seminar, students explore themes related to English Education in Japan, and further focus on socio-cultural issues and intercultural studies themes in which they compare Japan and another country. The subject, though mainly conducted in English, also allows for Japanese to be used. The teacher introduces information in English, and then summarises it in Japanese if necessary to clarify any points that students may not have understood. The teacher introduces materials written in Japanese and English, and students compare and contrast the materials through a text analysis, outlining the different opinions presented in both papers based on cultural standpoints (such as Japan's stance on a particular topic VS an Australian/American/ British stance based on the English article). Students then discuss the similarities and differences in groups.

During these group discussions, students are encouraged to talk in English, but are also told that they can switch to Japanese if they want to clarify things that they are not sure of how to express in English. Through this translanguaging approach, students can develop their specialist vocabulary in English, seek confirmation in Japanese, and also compare and contrast opinions outlined in the papers to enhance their cross-cultural understanding as a means to develop an intercultural viewpoint. When students are conducting a literature search, they are encouraged to find articles written in both Japanese and English about the topic, and compare the differences in opinions outlined in an attempt to compare the ideas introduced based on the country in which the study took place in order to broaden their intercultural understanding and view the issue through many lenses.

The focus of the seminar in third year is aimed towards teaching students how to conduct research, search

for information and reference materials, and to get them familiar with how to analyse original data. During the first semester of their third year, students explore themes that are related to their lived experience, with the question “University students and _____” being provided. Students in groups decide on the theme they want to explore, and through group discussions and group literature searches and analysis, students form their opinions on the theme they have selected. They then write a literature review, create surveys using Google Forms to give to their classmates, and compare the responses received to what they discovered in the literature. Towards the end of the semester, students write a group research project in English which includes a literature review, methodology, results, discussion, conclusion, and references section, and then give a final 15-minute group presentation in English about their project. Some of the themes explored in semester 1 are:

- University students and stress
- University students and time management
- University students and part-time work/finances
- University students and their use of SNS

In semester two of their third year, students continue to develop their knowledge and understanding in their area of expertise while developing their CALP skills. Through group work tasks, students analyse and critically think about the issues related to their area of specialization. Students choose their own work groups based on the topic they want to explore in their fourth-year thesis, and start the background work of learning about the theory and current trends that are prevalent based on their area of exploration. During classes, the teacher works with each group to promote opinion exchange and clarify any information that students are not sure about. Following the same structure as outlined above, students create working groups depending on the theme they want to explore. Some of the themes that students select in semester two are:

- Limitations in high school English education/Developing Communication skills.
- NPO activities in Japan and abroad. How does Japan contribute?
- Gender issues in the workplace?
- Benefits and limitations of studying abroad at the Mukogawa US Campus
- How to improve critical thinking in Japanese EFL classes.

As outlined above, students work in groups discussing the resources they have found, try to find outlined limitations to the themes they are exploring, give a survey to their peers, and then analyse and compare the data to that in the surveys they conducted to those outlined in the literature they used. They then write the research paper and present their results to the class.

Finally, in their fourth year, students once again work in groups and undertake group discussions with students who are exploring similar themes, but this time, students are required to write an independent research paper in English and give the presentation in English on their own. As a result, the fourth-year seminar is a year-long subject, in which students focus on their literature reviews and methodology during semester 1, and then in semester 2 work on their results, discussion and conclusion sections. In the final weeks of semester 2, students give a 10-minute presentation about their project in English, and then officially submit their theses to the academic affairs office for evaluation. If students successfully pass their graduation thesis, and have fulfilled all requirements in their other classes, they then qualify to graduate from the Bachelor of Arts.

Some of the themes that students choose to explore in their fourth-year graduation thesis are:

- Promoting pragmatic comprehension in Japanese EFL classes
- Comparing communicative approaches in EFL classes between Japan and Korea
- Vocabulary development from Elementary to JHS
- Cultural information in university textbooks
- MUSC study abroad and cultural understanding
- Gender issues in the workplace in Japan and America: A comparative study
- Integrating AI to assist Japanese farmers
- Promoting ecotourism in Japan and Australia: A comparative analysis
- L2 language acquisition in younger learners
- Promoting self-expression in EFL classes: Multiple Intelligences.

Methodology

This case study employed an exploratory sequential mixed-methods design, that first collected data through

surveys that were analysed statistically and thematically. Then, in step two of the data collection, a focus group discussion was conducted with randomly selected participants ($n = 12$) to seek further information as to why they answered the questions in the survey the way they did, and to attempt to delve deeper into their opinions and reasons behind how they felt about being taught in and undertaking classes that followed a pedagogical translanguaging approach. Each question of the survey was asked in the discussion group, and participants were asked to expand on their reasons for answering the way they did. The research was conducted over a two-week period with 28 participants who were all Japanese nationals, who belonged to two separate “Graduation Seminar” classes that were taught by the researcher. The overarching research questions of the project were: What are students’ opinions towards taking classes in a translanguaging approach?, and do translanguaging approaches have a benefit on students’ L2 language acquisition and content knowledge?

Participants

28 participants were approached to take part in this case study. At the time of data collection, participants were fourth year students studying a subject titled “Graduation Seminar II”, and were in their final two weeks of semester 2 of the course when the surveys were given out, and in their final week of the course when the focus group discussions took place. All participants also took the prerequisite third year subjects “Graduation Seminar 1A and B” with the researcher in a translanguaging approach. Participants belonged to the Department of English and Global Studies at a Women’s University in Japan.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

A six-question survey was created using Google forms to ask participants about their opinions about being taught in a pedagogical translanguaging approach, and sought to elicit data about whether they felt that they were able to improve their language skills, increase their knowledge in relation to their majors, and whether they felt being taught in a translanguaging approach had a positive or negative impact on their motivation. The survey was created bilingually in English and Japanese to limit misunderstandings that may arise based on participants’ language proficiency. Results were automatically generated by Google Forms and then confirmed by being manually input into an excel spreadsheet. During the focus group discussion, 12 participants were randomly selected using a Google randomizer program, and they were invited to take part in a 30 min focus group discussion held at the end of the final class of the semester. During the focus group discussions, participants were asked to share further information about why they answered the survey questions the way they did, and to provide further details about their experiences studying within a pedagogical translanguaging approach. These discussions were recorded on the researcher’s phone, and were then transcribed and then thematically analysed to attempt to discover why participants answered the questions in the survey the way they did, and to look for further reasons and examples that supported their opinions on the question at hand.

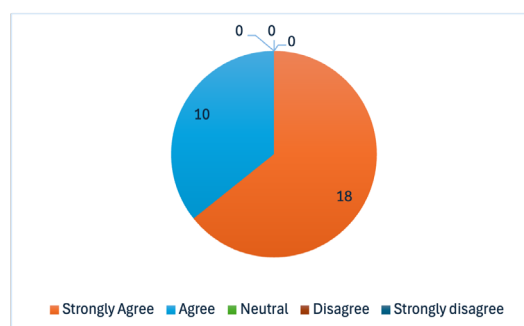
Results

Question 1 of the survey asked students whether they think being able to use their L1 and L2, and being able to search for and use materials in both English and Japanese was beneficial to preparing for writing their graduation thesis. As seen in Figure 1, 64% ($n = 18$) of participants responded that they “strongly agree” that it was beneficial, with 36% ($n = 10$) of respondents stating that they agreed it was beneficial. No responses were recorded from neutral, disagree, or strongly disagree. This shows that all 28 participants responded positively when they were able to use bilingual / multilingual resources to prepare for writing their graduation theses. During the focus group discussions, reason such as:

- Participant C: I could compare content and see the differences between Japanese and foreign ideas.
- Participant F: It helped me to understand different viewpoints and approaches.
- Participant H: I could learn how to write an academic paper by looking at real examples in both Japanese and English, and using them as a template to develop my ideas from.

Figure 1

Using L1 and L2 to Search for Materials



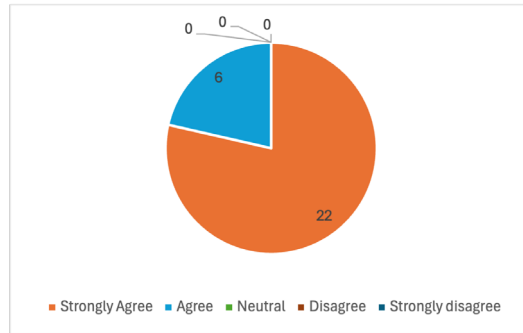
These responses show that students felt that they were able to compare and contrast different ideas, and compare different approaches based on the country that the articles they used were published in, which helped them to develop their understanding of the main ideas present in their areas of specialization, and then to utilize that knowledge in their graduation theses.

Question 2 of the survey asked participants whether they believed that being taught in a translanguaging approaches assisted them with both language acquisition and developing their specialist knowledge in their related fields, as can be seen in Figure 2, 79% ($n = 22$) of participants responded that they strongly agreed that it did, while 21% ($n = 6$) of participants replied that they agreed that it did. These results show that based on the participants in this study, they felt that translanguaging was beneficial in assisting them in gaining both language skills and specialist knowledge related to their majors. During the focus group discussions, reasons such as:

- Participant B: I was able to improve my English by looking at Japanese examples, and then how they are written about in English. I could also see the differences in opinions about similar topics which helped me think more deeply about teaching approaches.
- Participant C: I could learn how to talk about my topic and area of study in English better, and could hear different opinions that my classmates had.
- Participant I: I was able to see differences in opinions provided from Japanese researcher and foreign researchers, and felt I was able to see how there are different focuses based on where the paper was written.

Figure 2

Impact of Translanguaging on Language Acquisition and Content Knowledge



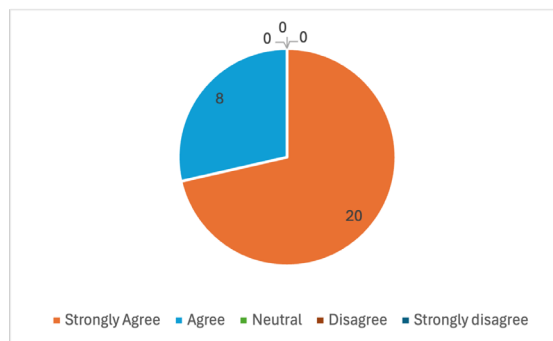
The above responses outline the reason why students felt that learning in a pedagogical translanguaging approach had a positive impact on both their language acquisition and knowledge and content comprehension.

Question 3 of the survey asked participants whether they thought being able to work bilingually in groups had a positive impact on their English language development. As can be seen in Figure 3, 71% ($n = 20$) of participants strongly agreed that being able to work bilingually in groups was advantageous to their English language development, while the remaining 29% ($n = 8$) agreed that it had a positive impact. These results show that participants believed that being able to utilize their L1 and L2 in group discussions had a positive impact on their language development. During the focus group discussions, reasons such as:

- Participant A: Being able to use Japanese to confirm understanding when the English was difficult was helpful.
- Participant D: I could talk more without taking a break and stopping.
- Participant F: It was good to clarify ideas in Japanese and then to try and explain them in English.

Figure 3

Bilingual Group Work



The above responses show that participants felt that being able to take part in group discussions incorporating both their L1 and L2 had a positive impact on their language development.

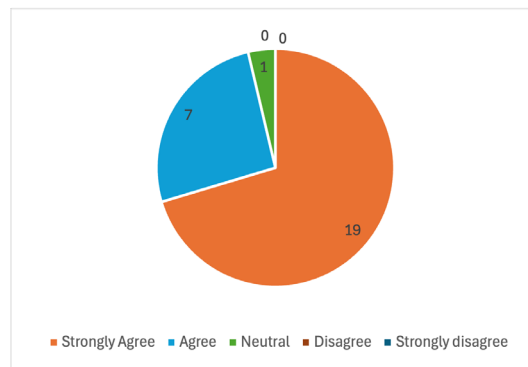
Question 4 of the survey asked students if they felt that being taught in a translanguaging approach had a positive impact on their motivation. As shown in Figure 4, results show that 70% ($n = 20$) of participants strongly agreed that it did, that 26% ($n = 7$) of participants agreed that it did, and that 4% ($n = 1$) of participants replied with neutral. During the focus group discussions, reasons such as:

- Participant A: In all English classes, it's too hard to focus when the content is too difficult, so I lose focus and motivation. In this class, I was able to stay focused because I could clarify my understanding in both languages, which was fun.
- Participant D: Using both L1 and L2 materials felt like I was learning something new each class, and I always looked forward to this class.
- Participant F: I feel more comfortable using both languages to participate. Talking with my friends using English and Japanese, and looking at papers from multiple countries was exciting.

The above responses show that being able to use L1 and L2 during classes and for task preparation had an overall positive impact on their motivation.

Figure 4

Impact of Translanguaging Approaches on Motivation



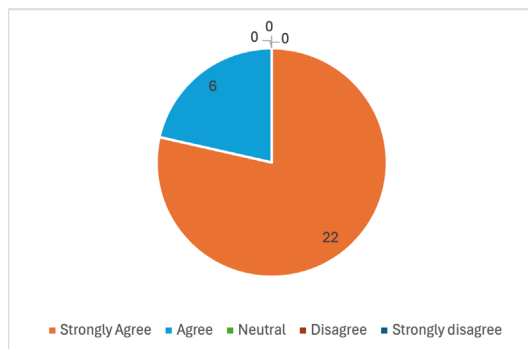
Question 5 of the survey asked participants if they felt that being taught in a translanguaging environment had a positive impact on both their English and Japanese language skills. 79% ($n = 22$) of participants responded that they strongly agreed that it did, with 21% ($n = 6$) of participants responding that they agreed it did. During the focus group discussions, reasons such as:

- Participant D: I could transfer what I read in L1 and L2 to better understand content, and to write more succinctly in both languages.
- Participant F: My style of writing and summarising points in both languages improved.
- Participant K: It helped me think about how I express myself in both languages more clearly.

The above responses show that participants believe that studying in a class that followed a translanguaging approach had a positive impact on both their L1 and L2 language skills and made them think critically about their language usage in both languages.

Figure 5

Translanguaging Classroom Environment



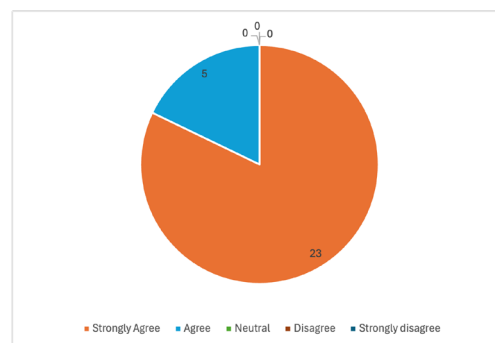
Question 6 of the survey asked participants whether they felt that they were able to study more advanced knowledge and improve their research skills in this subject when compared to their other subjects. As outlined in Figure 6, 82% ($n = 23$) of participants responded that they strongly agreed that they were able to, with 18% ($n = 5$) of participants responding that they agreed that they were able to. During the focus group discussions, reasons such as:

- Participant B: I could learn more different (varied) opinions and standpoints, which helped me form my arguments and opinions.
- Participant J: I could compare different views from around the world and consider them from many angles, which I couldn't do as much in my other classes.
- Participant L: I feel more confident talking about information related to my study (area) of specialization in English now, not only in Japanese.

The above responses show that students were more able to compare information from various regions and sources from which they were studying and allowed them to think critically about the information they were using, thus allowing them to nurture and develop more advanced skills in regard to research and knowledge development.

Figure 6

Could Students Improve Their Research Skills with Translanguaging



Discussion

As can be seen from the results of this case study summarized above, according to the 28 participants who took part in this study, they felt that undertaking their class in a pedagogical translanguaging approach had an overall positive impact on their language acquisition, content knowledge, and motivation levels. Participants highlighted several reasons for these positive outcomes, such as being able to use both English and Japanese resources for preparation to write their research papers and make presentations in English, and enabled them to compare different opinions. This comparison fostered critical thinking from diverse perspectives.

Additionally, observations during class time found that allowing students to use their L1 and L2 during group work tasks was beneficial by enabling students to continue conversations without breaking the flow of discussions, thereby maintaining momentum. This point was similarly found in the studies conducted by Lin (2019). It further provided opportunities for students to learn and experiment with the new L2 language necessary to discuss their areas of specialization which allowed them to feel confident to participate and express their ideas. These results indicated that these translanguaging strategies positively impacted students' levels of motivation and participation in classes. The ability to draw on their full linguistic repertoire not only made the learning process more accessible but also more enjoyable and fulfilling.

The above results clearly demonstrate that pedagogical translanguaging had an overall positive impact on all participants who took part in this study. The findings suggest that translanguaging not only supports language acquisition and content learning but also enhances students' motivation and engagement. This is particularly important in a CALP-focused seminar class, where the integration of language skills and content knowledge is critical.

Additionally, although the survey was created bilingually in an attempt to limit misinterpretation by participants, they may have understood what each question was asking slightly differently to their classmates. Furthermore, due to the participants belonging to the same class, a study with more participants in different subject and educational settings is needed to validate and clarify whether translanguaging approaches are fully able to be implemented across various subject areas and educational settings, which is a prospect for further research into the benefits of translanguaging in the higher education section both in Japan and beyond.

Conclusion

This project sought to outline the benefits of pedagogical translanguaging in a CALP-focused university seminar class designed to enhance both students' language acquisition and specialist knowledge. The findings have demonstrated that allowing students to use their L1 in CALP-focused L2 classes positively impacts their metalinguistic

awareness, motivation levels, and critical thinking skills. Participants reported high levels of satisfaction when it came to asking questions about their L1 and L2 language skills development, their comprehension and acquisition of new specialist content, and their overall levels of motivation.

The implications of these findings are significant. As a result of this study, the researcher intends to expand and adapt the focus of the class, while continuing to incorporate a pedagogical translanguaging approach to better cater to the students' needs and desires. This includes designing activities that more explicitly integrate L1 use in complex content discussions, creating materials that leverage students' bilingual abilities, and fostering an environment that encourages seamless language switching to enhance learning outcomes.

In conclusion, the success of the pedagogical translanguaging approach in this study underscores its potential as a valuable pedagogical tool. Future research could explore its application in different educational contexts and subject areas to further validate its efficacy. By continuing to investigate and implement translanguaging pedagogies, educators can better support language learners and create more inclusive and effective learning environments. The insights gained from this study can inform the development of teaching strategies that recognize and utilize the full linguistic repertoire of students, fostering a more holistic and integrated approach to language and content learning.

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