

# From Spontaneous Practice to Strategic Pedagogy: Vietnamese EFL Teachers' Translanguaging Development in Tertiary General English Courses

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## Abstract

Translanguaging is increasingly recognized as a pedagogical practice in English classrooms, but most existing studies tend to concentrate on what it does and how it is perceived, leaving an open question of how teachers' translanguaging develops, from spontaneous reactions to intentional pedagogical choices. This longitudinal qualitative case study investigates how translanguaging develops through the experiences of three Vietnamese EFL teachers teaching general English courses at a public university in Southern Vietnam. Data were collected through three sequential semi-structured interviews with each teacher across one academic semester and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis informed by the pedagogical translanguaging framework of stance, design and shifts. The findings show that teachers initially employ translanguaging spontaneously to address student confusion, task difficulty, affective concerns and time pressure and still maintain English as the primary instructional language. Over time, repeated classroom experiences enable teachers to transform reactive bilingual shifts into strategically planned pedagogical practices characterized by anticipatory language sequencing, explicit alignment with learning objectives and intentional re-entry into English. The transition from spontaneous to strategic translanguaging was shaped by accumulated classroom evidence, teaching experience, student proficiency, institutional expectations and assessment demands. The study concludes that translanguaging should be considered a developing pedagogical competence rather than a fixed instructional technique. These findings advance translanguaging theory by framing pedagogical translanguaging as a developmental process and suggest implications for teacher education, curriculum design and language policy in Vietnamese as well as other bilingual higher education settings.

**Keywords:** General English, Pedagogical Translanguaging, Teacher Development, Translanguaging.

## Introduction

Despite the continuing influence of English-only ideologies in many English as a foreign language (EFL) contexts, actual classroom interaction is often characterized by multilingual meaning-making practices in which teachers and learners draw flexibly on multiple linguistic resources. As a consequence, there has been an ongoing tension between institutional expectations promoting exclusive target language use and pedagogical realities requiring bilingual support to enhance comprehension, participation and learning. Translanguaging in EFL classrooms does not occur in ideologically neutral conditions. In many higher-education settings, English-only norms continue to operate as institutional markers of professionalism, language proficiency and instructional quality. As a result, teachers who employ bilingual practices often navigate tensions between pedagogical effectiveness and institu-

tional accountability, particularly during lesson observations, curriculum implementation and assessment preparation (1, 2). These structural and ideological pressures complicate the uptake of translanguaging pedagogy, even when its instructional value is well established. This shift has contributed to the growing recognition of translanguaging, understood as the flexible deployment of multilingual speakers' full linguistic repertoires rather than movement between separate language systems (1, 2). In educational settings, pedagogical translanguaging refers to both spontaneous and intentionally planned uses of multiple languages to scaffold comprehension, activate prior knowledge and facilitate classroom participation (3). Translanguaging pedagogy was further conceptualized through the interconnected dimensions of stance, design and shifts, emphasizing that effective translanguaging

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involves not only flexible language use, but also principled pedagogical reasoning and instructional planning (4). In EFL contexts such as Vietnam, translanguaging practices have been widely documented at the classroom level. Empirical studies show that teachers frequently integrate Vietnamese alongside English to clarify meaning, manage activities, address affective concerns and maintain instructional flow, particularly with lower-proficiency learners (5, 6). These practices are increasingly recognized as purposeful rather than deficient. Pedagogical translanguaging is especially valuable in Vietnamese EFL classrooms where rigid English-only instruction may restrict participation and comprehension, particularly in rural and under-resourced settings (7). Teachers' translanguaging varies according to experience, with novice teachers relying more heavily on intuition and experienced teachers demonstrating greater strategic awareness and control (8). Evidence of intentional planning includes predefined switch points and planned language distribution across lesson stages (9). Nevertheless, existing research in Vietnamese EFL settings remains largely descriptive and cross-sectional, focusing on the functions, frequency, or perceived value of translanguaging rather than on its developmental trajectory. While prior studies affirm that translanguaging is pedagogically legitimate and often strategic, they offer limited insight into how teachers move from spontaneous, interaction-driven language shifts toward systematically planned translanguaging pedagogy over time, particularly in tertiary general English courses shaped by institutional policies and assessment pressures.

Therefore, addressing this gap is timely and significant. Understanding how EFL teachers develop translanguaging pedagogy has implications not only for theory, but also for teacher education and curriculum design in contexts where English-only ideologies continue to coexist with bilingual classroom realities. By tracing teachers' pedagogical reasoning longitudinally, it becomes potential to examine how spontaneous classroom responses inform intentional design, how experience mediates pedagogical control and how institutional and learner factors affect translanguaging decisions.

On this basis, the present study adopts a qualitative case study approach to explore how

Vietnamese EFL teachers' translanguaging practices develop from spontaneous classroom responses into intentionally planned pedagogical design in tertiary general English courses. Drawing on sequential semi-structured interviews with three teachers representing different stages of professional experience, the study examines translanguaging development through the lens of stance, design and shifts, while accounting for contextual influences and accumulated classroom evidence. By framing translanguaging as a developmental pedagogical competence rather than a fixed technique, the study moves Vietnamese research beyond functional descriptions toward a more process-oriented understanding of teacher development. Particularly underexplored is how spontaneous translanguaging practices become recognized, refined and gradually transformed into strategic pedagogical design over time.

The study is therefore guided by the following research questions:

- a) What spontaneous translanguaging practices do Vietnamese teachers initially employ in tertiary general English classrooms?
- b) How do these spontaneous practices develop into intentionally planned translanguaging strategies in lesson design?
- c) What factors influence teachers' progression from spontaneous to strategic translanguaging?

### **Translanguaging**

Translanguaging has become an important and influential construct in contemporary applied linguistics and language education, reflecting a conceptual shift of language, bilingualism and meaning-making in multilingual societies (10). Theoretically, translanguaging is defined as the deployment of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire without dependence on socially and politically constructed boundaries of named languages (2). From this perspective, speakers utilize their own idiolect, producing communication through the fluid, integrated deployment of their semiotic resources rather than by switching between separate, bounded language systems (2). This viewpoint challenges the conventional notion of bilingualism as two distinct monolingual systems, proposing that linguistic competence illustrates a unified and flexible repertoire, especially evident among bilinguals who draw on a wider range of resources (2).

Furthermore, translanguaging is framed as both a descriptive lens and a transformative tool, emphasizing its potential to disrupt rigid language boundaries and foster innovation in linguistic practices (1). It is further described as spontaneous, agentive and constantly in emergence, foregrounding the performative and creative dimensions of multilingual language use (11). This orientation take language users' agency into consideration, highlighting their capacity to strategically and imaginatively exploit their communicative repertoires in integrated and coordinated ways (12).

Generally, translanguaging represents more than a communicative strategy as it signals a profound reconceptualization of human linguistic capacity in the twenty-first century, reshaping how scholars understand and enact language, cognition and learning.

### **Pedagogical Translanguaging**

Pedagogical translanguaging has attracted increasing attention for proposing an innovative way to rethink classroom language practices, regarding students' full linguistic repertoires as useful learning resources rather than limitations created by monolingual curricula (1). Pedagogical translanguaging is emphasized as an educational approach that strategically integrates learners' languages to support meaning-making, participation and deeper learning in classroom contexts (13). In educational settings, both teachers and students tend to engage in translanguaging, whether officially sanctioned or not, to support comprehension and content mastery, highlighting its practical value and growing pedagogical necessity (1). However, pedagogical translanguaging extends beyond spontaneous practices to include intentional, strategic and systematically planned instructional designs that integrate two or more languages to facilitate differentiation, knowledge construction, critical thinking and identity formation (3). In this sense, pedagogical translanguaging not only adopts a learner-centered and multilingual orientation that recognizes students as multilingual individuals with interconnected and mutually supportive linguistic resources, but it also acknowledges the fluid, dynamic ways students rely on their full repertoires to make meaning, participate and learn (3). Moreover, it draws on scaffolding, the activation of prior

knowledge and the interconnected development of language skills to strengthen both language and content learning while simultaneously fostering metalinguistic awareness through cross-linguistic reflection within the same lesson (3).

Notably, translanguaging pedagogy is closely associated with commitments to equity and social justice, seeking to challenge raciolinguistic ideologies and educational practices that marginalize learners based on language (1, 14). Nevertheless, translanguaging pedagogy remains constrained by enduring monolingual ideologies embedded in language policies, assessment systems and institutional evaluation practices. In many EFL contexts, English-only instruction continues to signal pedagogical legitimacy and professional competence, prompting teachers to negotiate translanguaging cautiously or even conceal bilingual practices in formal documentation. These tensions underscore that translanguaging is not simply a pedagogical choice but an ideological and institutional negotiation shaped by broader power relations within language education. To make translanguaging pedagogy effective, teachers are supposed to initially hold a translanguaging stance, a principled belief that learners' full linguistic repertoires are legitimate resources for learning. This stance informs translanguaging design, the intentional planning of activities, materials and assessments that leverage students' home and school languages. During classroom implementation, teachers then get involved in translanguaging shifts, modifying their plans in real time to respond to learners' needs, interactional dynamics and learning trajectories (4).

Taken together, pedagogical translanguaging is considered a transformative framework that integrates linguistic, cognitive and affective dimensions of learning across languages, subjects and educational contexts.

### **Translanguaging in Vietnamese EFL Contexts and Research Gaps**

Translanguaging in EFL classrooms spans a continuum from spontaneous interactional support to more strategic pedagogical design. However, how teachers move along this continuum over time remains under-explored, particularly in Vietnamese tertiary general English contexts. Teachers use Vietnamese strategically to support comprehension, participation, classroom

management and affective engagement, particularly among lower-proficiency learners (5, 6). Pedagogical translanguaging has become a promising approach for Vietnamese EFL classrooms, particularly in rural and under-resourced contexts where rigid English-only instruction may limit learner engagement and comprehension (7). Similar practices have also been noted in Vietnamese English-medium instruction (EMI), where lecturers flexibly draw on Vietnamese to clarify disciplinary concepts, manage interaction and mediate institutional English-medium expectations (15).

Translanguaging is increasingly framed not as a sign of linguistic deficiency, but as a pedagogically meaningful resource that facilitates scaffolding and interaction. Translanguaging practices vary according to teachers' professional experience and pedagogical awareness. Novice teachers tend to rely on intuitive and situational language shifts, whereas more experienced teachers demonstrate greater strategic control through planned language sequencing, predefined switch points and differentiated language allocation across lesson stages (8, 9). In particular, developmental movement from intuitive to strategic translanguaging among Vietnamese EFL teachers suggests that translanguaging competence evolves through accumulated classroom experience and pedagogical reflection (8).

However, despite growing recognition of translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical practice, three major limitations remain evident in the literature. First, many Vietnamese studies are mainly descriptive and cross-sectional, focusing on the functions, frequency, or perceptions of translanguaging rather than examining how teachers' practices evolve over time (5, 6). Second, although some studies acknowledge distinctions between intuitive and strategic translanguaging (8), limited attention has been paid to the developmental process through which spontaneous classroom responses gradually become intentionally planned pedagogy. Third, evidence of pedagogical translanguaging has largely been drawn from secondary or ethnic minority contexts (9), leaving tertiary general English classrooms underexplored despite their distinctive institutional pressures, assessment demands and English-only expectations.

Therefore, the present study addresses these gaps by investigating translanguaging as a developmental pedagogical process in Vietnamese tertiary EFL education. Drawing on longitudinal interviews with teachers at different stages of professional experience, the study examines how spontaneous translanguaging practices develop into strategic instructional design and what contextual factors shape this progression.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative case study design to investigate how Vietnamese EFL teachers' translanguaging practices evolve from spontaneous classroom responses to strategically planned pedagogy in tertiary general English courses. Qualitative case study, functioning as a research strategy rather than a single method, is defined as an empirical inquiry that examines a bounded phenomenon in its real-life context through in-depth data collection from multiple sources (16, 17). This design enables holistic exploration of processes, activities and individuals within clearly delimited temporal and institutional boundaries (18). It is particularly appropriate for the present research, as teachers' translanguaging development constitutes a complex and context-sensitive pedagogical process that unfolds over time and is formed by classroom interaction, institutional norms and professional reasoning. By facilitating rich and contextualized analysis, the qualitative case study supports a nuanced examination of both practices and their influencing factors, which helps avoid reductive or decontextualized interpretations of teacher development.

### Participants

In this study, the participants were chosen through purposive sampling, a qualitative strategy that deliberately identifies information-rich cases capable of illuminating the phenomenon under investigation (16, 19). This study adopted a maximal variation approach to capture contrasting perspectives across novice, experienced and senior teachers, allowing comparisons across cases while maintaining sufficient depth within each case (16).

Selection criteria included

- (a) current responsibility for teaching tertiary general English courses,

- (b) sustained experience teaching Vietnamese EFL students in bilingual English Vietnamese instructional contexts,
- (c) acknowledged use of both English and Vietnamese for pedagogical purposes during classroom interaction and
- (d) willingness to engage in semi-structured interviews and provide lesson plans that reflect instructional decision-making.

These criteria ensured a strong match between participant characteristics and the study's aims, resulting in a thorough exploration of how translanguaging practices emerge, develop and are mediated by individual experience and contextual constraints.

The participants were three EFL teachers teaching tertiary general English courses at a public university in Southern Vietnam (GPS coordinates: 10.029670° N, 105.770019° E). The participants differed in gender, age and professional experience in order to capture diverse developmental perspectives on translanguaging pedagogy across career stages. Their demographic variation was important because professional experience and institutional positioning were expected to

influence teachers' pedagogical reasoning, confidence and instructional decision-making regarding translanguaging. They were selected to represent different stages of professional experience and pedagogical development. To ensure confidentiality, the teachers were assigned pseudonyms: Ms. Lan, a female novice teacher in her late twenties with three years of teaching experience; Mr. Minh, a male mid-career teacher in his mid-thirties with approximately ten years of experience; and Ms. Hoa, a senior female teacher in her late forties with over twenty years of EFL teaching at the tertiary level. All three educators taught non-English-major students in compulsory general English courses and regularly navigated tensions between English-only expectations and students' emergent learning needs. Their varied professional backgrounds provided a meaningful basis for examining differential translanguaging practices and developmental pathways from spontaneous classroom responses to intentional pedagogical design. Table 1 summarizes the participants' professional backgrounds and teaching contexts relevant to the study.

**Table 1:** Participants' Demographic and Professional Characteristics

Participant (Pseudonym)	Career Stage	Gender	Approximate Age	Teaching Experience	Teaching Context
Ms. Lan	Novice teacher	Female	Late twenties	3 years	Non-English-
Mr. Minh	Mid-career teacher	Male	Mid-thirties	About 10 years	major general English courses
Ms. Hoa	Senior teacher	Female	Late forties	More than 20 years	

## Research Instrument

The study used a series of online sequential semi-structured individual interviews to capture detailed insights into how Vietnamese EFL teachers' translanguaging practices developed over time. Semi-structured interviews combine fixed-question surveys and open conversations, offering both a guiding structure and enough flexibility to explore participants' views in depth (20). Instead of following a strict script, the interviewer can respond to participants' answers, pursue emerging topics and probe their reasoning as the discussion unfolds (20). This flexible approach is suitable for examining evolving and under-theorized pedagogical practices, such as teachers' movement from spontaneous translanguaging to intentional design, which require access to their reflections and professional sense-making.

The interviews were conducted synchronously via Zoom, aligning with definitions of online interviewing as real-time and video-mediated interaction that closely mirrors face-to-face conversations while enabling geographically dispersed participants to join from comfortable environments (21). Each teacher completed three individual interviews over one semester, with each session lasting 45-60 minutes and conducted in Vietnamese to support nuanced expression and reduce linguistic barriers. All interviews were video-recorded, allowing the researcher to focus on participants' narratives during the conversation and later revisit the recordings during familiarization and coding to capture subtle verbal and non-verbal cues such as pauses, emphasis and embodied responses (21).

Individual interviews, rather than group discussions, were chosen to encourage reliable reflections on classroom decisions, professional uncertainty and institutional pressures, major topics that participants may be less willing to discuss openly in collective settings (20).

The interview protocol was informed by pedagogical translanguaging theory, particularly the stance-design-shifts framework (4) and structured into three sequential phases corresponding to the study's research questions. The first interviews explored teachers' spontaneous translanguaging practices and underlying beliefs; the second examined emerging intentionality and lesson planning; and the third investigated mediating factors and teachers' reflective evaluations of their pedagogical development. To guarantee its clarity and coherence, the protocol was piloted with two EFL teachers outside the main study, leading to minor adjustments to question wording and sequencing. Overall, the online sequential semi-structured individual interviews offered a rigorous and context-sensitive approach for investigating the developmental trajectory of translanguaging pedagogy in Vietnamese tertiary EFL settings.

### **Data Collection and Analysis**

The participants were initially contacted via email after meeting the study's sampling criteria and were provided with detailed information about the research aims, methodology - particularly procedures and data use, as well as anticipated contributions. Ethical procedures highlighted voluntary participation, confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Participation was confirmed through the completion and submission of written informed consent forms. After that, qualitative data were collected over the first semester of 2025-2026 academic year through a sequence of three individual semi-structured interviews with each teacher. The interviews were designed to be iterative and cumulative, with insights from earlier sessions informing subsequent questioning while preserving a consistent analytic focus across cases. The first interview, conducted at the early stage of the semester, focused on teachers' spontaneous translanguaging practices and the beliefs underlying their immediate classroom language choices. The second interview, held mid-semester, examined emerging intentionality, with particular

attention to lesson planning, anticipatory decision-making and pedagogical reasoning related to the use of English and Vietnamese. The final interview, conducted toward the end of the semester, invited participants to reflect on consolidation and change over time, as well as on the individual, institutional and pedagogical factors influencing their translanguaging development. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes and was conducted in Vietnamese to support depth, precision and reflexivity in participants' responses. All interviews were audio- and video-recorded, transcribed verbatim and translated into English for analysis, with careful attention to preserving meaning rather than producing literal equivalence. Subsequently, the data were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis (22). Analysis began with repeated familiarization with the interview transcripts, supported by close reading of both the Vietnamese originals and the English translations. Initial coding was carried out manually using an inductive approach, enabling patterns and categories to emerge organically from the data. Early codes captured precise pedagogical actions and rationales, such as spontaneous scaffolding, anticipatory language support, or moment-by-moment modification. These codes were then examined comparatively within and across cases to generate broader candidate themes that represented developmental tendencies, such as triggers for pedagogical change or increasing strategic awareness. The following phases were reviewing and refining themes and systematically mapping them onto the pedagogical translanguaging framework of stance, design and shifts in order to maintain conceptual coherence. Member-checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants, allowing them to clarify intentions and confirm the plausibility of analytic claims. In the final analytic stage, findings from the thematic analysis were synthesized through process modelling to construct descriptive accounts of translanguaging development. This synthesis generated three emergent pathways illustrating how teachers with distinct levels of professional experience moved from spontaneous practice toward strategic pedagogical design.

### **Ethical Consideration**

This study complied with established ethical standards for research involving human

participants, with particular attention to participants' rights and well-being (23). Prior to data collection, teachers were informed of the study's aims, procedures and data use. Later, they all submitted their written informed consent forms before the first interviews. The participation was entirely voluntary and the participants were reminded that they could decline to answer any question or withdraw at any stage without consequence. As the study focused on lecturers'

professional practices, it posed minimal risk; nevertheless, care was taken to ensure that participation did not affect teachers' professional roles or institutional relationships. Confidentiality was ensured through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information. All interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored and accessible only to the researchers.

**Table 2:** Summary of Major Themes

Theme	Analytical Focus
Spontaneous translanguaging practices	Immediate bilingual responses to support comprehension and classroom interaction.
Transition toward strategic translanguaging	Gradual movement from reactive language shifts to intentional pedagogical planning.
Evolution of teacher beliefs	Changing perceptions of translanguaging from temporary support to legitimate instructional practice.
Conflict between monolingual ideology and multilingual practice	Tensions between English-only institutional expectations and actual classroom needs.
Institutional influences on instructional decision-making	Effects of policy expectations, curriculum demands and assessment pressures on classroom language use.
Challenges in implementing strategic translanguaging	Difficulties related to language balance, lesson pacing, classroom unpredictability and learner dependence.

## Results

Table 2 presents the major themes identified across the interview data. Together, these themes illustrate how translanguaging development involved interconnected changes in teacher cognition, instructional decision-making and institutional negotiation.

### Spontaneous Translanguaging Practices in Early Classroom Use

All three teachers reported that English was the default language of instruction, particularly for lesson openings, task instructions and communicative activities. Vietnamese was introduced selectively when English input did not lead to student comprehension or engagement. Ms. Lan described her practice as follows:

"I try to use English as the main language for instructions and interaction, especially at the beginning of each activity. But because most of my students are low-intermediate, I often bring in Vietnamese when I see they look confused or quiet for too long. So, it is not a strict English-only lesson; it is more like English first and then Vietnamese as a support when necessary."

Similarly, Mr. Minh stated that his lessons were organized mainly in English, but linguistic flexibility was acceptable:

"I try to keep English as the default medium, especially for instructions, classroom routines and communicative activities. However, I integrate Vietnamese strategically when I feel it will save time, clarify complex content, or address affective issues like students' anxiety."

Ms. Hoa also emphasized English primacy, noting that Vietnamese was used selectively rather than continuously:

"English is the primary medium for teaching, interaction and assessment-related activities. However, after many years of teaching, I have developed the habit of weaving in Vietnamese selectively when it can enhance understanding or connect to students' prior knowledge."

Across cases, translanguaging shifts were noted as reactions to observable classroom conditions. The most frequently reported trigger was student confusion. Ms. Lan explained that "the biggest trigger is student confusion; I can see it from their faces, their whispering in Vietnamese, or when they avoid eye contact"; while Ms. Hoa similarly

revealed “the first trigger is students’ facial expressions and responses; after many years, it is quite easy to sense confusion or disengagement.”

Time pressure and task difficulty were also mentioned by Mr. Minh. He noted:

“When I see time is running out and I cannot afford a long clarification in English, I switch to Vietnamese so we can move on without losing the main point.”

All three teachers stated explicitly that most language shifts were made spontaneously during lessons. Ms. Lan reported:

“Honestly, most of them are spontaneous. I go into the lesson with a rough idea that I will try to use more English, but I do not write in my lesson plan exactly where to use Vietnamese.”

Mr. Minh described a partial anticipation of difficulty but emphasized in-the-moment decision-making:

“I sometimes plan that this grammar point may need Vietnamese comparison, but many actual shifts still happen spontaneously, depending on how students react.”

Ms. Hoa reported a similar pattern, noting that despite increased anticipation, classroom interaction remained unpredictable.

Spontaneous translanguaging was used to clarify grammar, explain abstract concepts, manage classroom procedures and reinforce high-stakes information. Ms. Lan described a concrete episode: “I suddenly decided to draw a timeline and explain in Vietnamese how we describe background actions versus main events and I could see them nodding and correcting their sentences more confidently after that.”

Mr. Minh and Ms. Hoa reported comparable uses during reading and writing lessons involving technical or conceptual difficulty.

All teachers reported increased student participation following Vietnamese use. Ms. Lan stated:

“When I switch to Vietnamese, more students start to participate, they ask questions in Vietnamese and then they are more willing to try speaking in English afterward.”

However, Ms. Lan and Mr. Minh expressed concerns about student reliance on Vietnamese.

Mr. Minh noted:

“Some students wait for the Vietnamese version instead of trying to understand in English, so I try to delay it and keep the Vietnamese parts short.”

In summary, interviews 1 data showed that early translanguaging practices were predominantly spontaneous and responsive to immediate classroom conditions. Vietnamese was used briefly to address comprehension, time constraints and task difficulty, whereas English remained the primary instructional language. Teachers reported positive student engagement following such shifts, despite acknowledged risks of learner over-dependence on Vietnamese.

### **Development of Planned Translanguaging Strategies**

All three teachers reported a transformation from purely reactive language shifts toward deliberate application of translanguaging during lesson planning. Ms. Lan stated that she had begun to record predicted translanguaging moments in her lesson plans:

“After our first interview, I started paying attention to where I usually switch spontaneously, like grammar explanations and now I sometimes jot down a note in my lesson plan, like ‘use Vietnamese for tense comparison if needed’. It’s not fully planned every time, but I’m trying to anticipate those moments instead of just reacting.”

Mr. Minh reported a more frequent practice of marking translanguaging points in advance, explaining:

“In my lesson plans, I mark specific ‘translanguaging points’ with rationale, like language for input, Vietnamese for clarification at transition points. I review past classes to predict where shifts worked well spontaneously.”

Ms. Hoa described fully articulated translanguaging planning, noting that her lesson plans explicitly included rationale, timing and re-entry strategies into English. All teachers described intentional sequencing of English and Vietnamese across specific lesson stages. Ms. Lan reported planning a brief Vietnamese comparison after English input:

“I planned from the start to use English for the main explanation and examples, but I wrote in my plan to include a 2-minute Vietnamese summary at the end of the input stage... right before pair practice, so they could clarify before producing.”

Mr. Minh described a multi-stage design in a reading lesson:

“I designed a sequence: English pre-reading questions, then Vietnamese-activated schema for

local climate issues during while-reading vocab support and English post-reading discussion.”

Ms. Hoa similarly described planned distribution of languages across modeling, planning and feedback stages in an argumentative writing lesson. Teachers consistently linked planned translanguaging to explicit learning objectives. Ms. Lan stated:

“The main objective was for students to distinguish the tenses in context... I chose bilingual comparison because from past spontaneous shifts, I know they confuse the nuances.”

Mr. Minh reported that Vietnamese use was tied to engagement and comprehension goals:

“Objectives were inference skills and vocab in context for their midterms. Vietnamese schema activation was deliberate because spontaneous past experiences showed students disengage from abstract global topics without local ties.”

Ms. Hoa linked Vietnamese use to assessment-related writing outcomes, focusing on discourse-level understanding.

All three teachers explicitly contrasted planned translanguaging with earlier spontaneous practices. Ms. Lan described the difference as proactive rather than reactive:

“In earlier lessons, I would only switch if I saw confusion during practice... This time, it was proactive: I built it into the plan at a predicted trouble spot, so the shift felt smoother.”

Mr. Minh emphasized predictability and lesson flow:

“Spontaneous was reactive - switching mid-struggle... Planned was anticipatory: shifts were sequenced to support flow, with clear re-entry to English.”

Ms. Hoa identified multiple dimensions of change, stating that planned translanguaging was “predictive”, “sequenced” and “integrated with assessment”.

Despite increased planning, all teachers reported ongoing constraints. Ms. Lan identified time and concerns about learner dependence:

“Planning the bilingual part takes extra preparation... Also, I’m worried some students might rely on it too much.”

Mr. Minh cited institutional scrutiny of lesson plans, while Ms. Hoa reported policy tensions and challenges mentoring less experienced colleagues. Notably, Ms. Lan and Mr. Minh both stated that spontaneous translanguaging still occurred

together with planned shifts, indicating that planning was not yet fully comprehensive.

In short, interview 2 data showed that teachers increasingly anticipated and planned translanguaging strategies by identifying predicted difficulty points, sequencing language use across lesson stages and aligning Vietnamese use with instructional objectives. Planned translanguaging differed from earlier spontaneous shifts in its proactive timing, structured placement and clearer re-entry into English, although spontaneous shifts continued to exist due to classroom unpredictability and contextual influences.

### **Factors Influencing the shift from Spontaneous to Strategic Translanguaging**

In all three cases, the movement toward strategic translanguaging was first triggered by teachers’ repeated observation that certain spontaneous bilingual interventions reliably improved student comprehension, participation, or task completion. These recurring patterns prompted teachers to anticipate similar difficulties in future lessons and gradually incorporate translanguaging into their planning.

All three teachers identified accumulated classroom evidence as a principal factor driving their shift toward strategic translanguaging. Ms. Lan reported that repeated observation of student reactions across lessons prompted her to move beyond intuition:

“Observing students’ real-time reactions across multiple classes pushed me from pure spontaneity to noting patterns in my lesson plans.”

Mr. Minh similarly emphasized long-term classroom evidence:

“Classroom evidence over the years has shown that spontaneous shifts boost learning outcomes. That realization prompted me to systematize them.”

Ms. Hoa described a longitudinal process in which extended teaching experience transformed intuition into principled design:

“Longitudinal classroom data has refined my intuitive base into principled design.”

Institutional expectations were reported as both limitations and encouragements. All teachers noted that English-only policies influenced how translanguaging was documented rather than how it was enacted. This issue created a conflict between institutional expectations for monolin-

gual English instruction and teachers' multilingual classroom realities, where Vietnamese was often necessary to support comprehension, learning efficiency and student engagement. Ms. Lan stated: "The English-only policy during lesson inspections makes me cautious. Therefore, I keep my Vietnamese use minimal and I do not document it in formal plans."

Mr. Minh reported reframing translanguaging in official documentation:

"Policies push for English dominance, so I code translanguaging as support strategies in my plans." In contrast, assessment demands were reported as legitimizing bilingual support. Ms. Hoa noted that assessment outcomes aligned with translanguaging use, while Mr. Minh emphasized efficiency for exam preparation.

Student proficiency emerged as a consistent factor influencing translanguaging design. Ms. Lan admitted adjusting planned use based on learner level:

"Beginners need Vietnamese for basic concepts, while higher-level students tolerate more English."

Mr. Minh described systematic differentiation:

"Proficiency levels dictate the ratio of languages... advanced students prefer English immersion, so I tier activities accordingly."

Ms. Hoa reported using Vietnamese extensively for novice learners and more selectively for advanced students, particularly for metalinguistic purposes. All teachers reported that positive student attitudes toward bilingual support encouraged continued development, while reliance on Vietnamese required tighter transitions back to English.

Teaching experience was additionally regarded as a key impact on control and confidence. Ms. Lan described emerging confidence but limited control: "My three years of teaching experience have built some confidence... but my control is still shaky because I over-rely on gut feelings."

Mr. Minh attributed his ability to orchestrate predictable shifts to experience:

"My ten years of teaching experience give me strong control... that turned my intuition into replicable designs."

Ms. Hoa reported full mastery associated with over twenty years of experience, stating that experience reduced the risks in relation to spontaneity.

Engagement with professional learning differed across participants. Ms. Lan reported limited

research engagement but valued collegial discussion and workshops. Mr. Minh cited research literature and online forums as forming his design. Ms. Hoa reported sustained engagement with theory, conferences and peer networks as central influences.

All teachers acknowledged viewing translanguaging as part of their professional competence by the end of the semester. Ms. Lan described it as "an emerging part" of her competence, while Mr. Minh identified it as "a core competence". Ms. Hoa characterized it as "an essential competence" and even kept making plans to mentor others.

To sum up, interview 3 data showed that the shift from spontaneous to strategic translanguaging was influenced by accumulated classroom evidence, institutional constraints, assessment demands, student proficiency levels, teaching experience and access to professional learning. While these factors were shared across participants, their impact varied according to teachers' experience levels, resulting in differing degrees of confidence, control and systematization. Despite growing strategic awareness, implementing planned translanguaging remained challenging. Classroom unpredictability, institutional monitoring, time pressures and concerns about students becoming overly dependent on Vietnamese continued to complicate decision-making. These challenges manifested differently across developmental stages: less experienced teachers struggled with balancing languages, mid-career teachers with pacing and accountability and senior teachers with maintaining flexibility while supporting colleagues. Overall, strategic translanguaging is formed by both pedagogical reasoning and the practical constraints teachers navigate in real time.

## Discussion

This study examines how Vietnamese EFL teachers in tertiary general English courses move from spontaneous translanguaging to more intentionally planned pedagogical use of students' languages. Based on longitudinal interviews with three teachers of varying experience, the findings indicate a common developmental pattern characterized by growing intentionality, predictability and pedagogical reasoning, alongside individual differences shaped by experience,

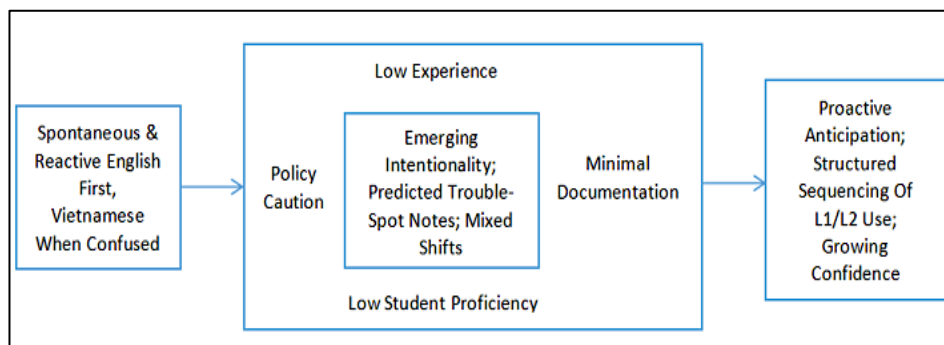
institutional contexts and learner needs. The study argues that translanguaging is not simply an improvised classroom tactic but an emerging professional competence that develops through classroom evidence, reflective planning and alignment with instructional goals.

Addressing the first research question, the findings show that all three teachers initially relied on spontaneous translanguaging shifts, primarily triggered by observable classroom conditions such as student confusion, time pressure and task complexity. These shifts were reactive, brief and dependent on immediate interactional cues, while English remained the major instructional language. This pattern aligns closely with prior Vietnamese EFL research describing translanguaging as interactional scaffolding enacted in response to learners' cognitive and affective needs (5, 6). Notably, the teachers did not perceive these shifts as random or deficit-driven, but as purposeful pedagogical moves intended to restore comprehension and participation. However, an important contribution is a more nuanced understanding of how such spontaneous practices begin to acquire pedagogical salience over time. Rather than remaining purely intuitive, repeated classroom experiences allowed teachers to recognize recurring trouble spots where translanguaging reliably supported learning. This gradual noticing process marks the emergence of a translanguaging stance, understood as a principled belief in the legitimacy of learners' full linguistic repertoires (4). Teachers' beliefs about translanguaging evolved as they gained classroom experience. Early in the semester, they treated translanguaging cautiously as a temporary fallback when English instruction proved insufficient. As they repeatedly observed improvements in comprehension, participation and task completion, these experiences reshaped their beliefs, leading them to view translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical resource rather than a compensatory measure. This shift was evident in the move from using Vietnamese only in moments of difficulty to incorporating it purposefully into lesson design, scaffolding and assessment preparation. In this sense, teachers' translanguaging stances developed progressively through reflective engagement with classroom evidence. The move toward strategic translanguaging arose not from formal theoretical training but from teachers'

interpretation of recurring instructional challenges. Repeated encounters with similar learner difficulties enabled them to convert reactive bilingual responses into anticipatory pedagogical knowledge. Strategic translanguaging thus emerged through an experiential cycle of noticing, evaluating and reapplying effective bilingual scaffolding across contexts. Even in early stages, spontaneous translanguaging was guided by implicit pedagogical values rather than habitual code-switching, supporting the view that intuitive judgement often precedes explicit pedagogical reasoning (8).

In response to the second research question, the findings demonstrate a clear transformation from reactive language alternation to anticipatory translanguaging design. Across cases, teachers increasingly planned when, where and why Vietnamese would be used, linking these decisions with specific learning objectives and lesson stages. Planned translanguaging was impacted by deliberate sequencing of English and Vietnamese, clear pedagogical rationales and explicit re-entry into English following bilingual support. This confirms and extends the conceptualization of pedagogical translanguaging as intentional, systematic and learning-oriented, rather than incidental (3). Three process models illustrate differentiated pathways toward design. As shown in Figure 1, Ms. Lan's development reflects an emergent design trajectory, in which spontaneous shifts gradually inform tentative lesson-level planning. Her planning remains flexible and partial, indicating an early alignment between stance and design, but limited consolidation due to time constraints and concerns about learner dependence. This pathway resonates with the depiction of novice teachers operating between intuition and strategy, where pedagogical awareness is present but not yet fully systematized (8).

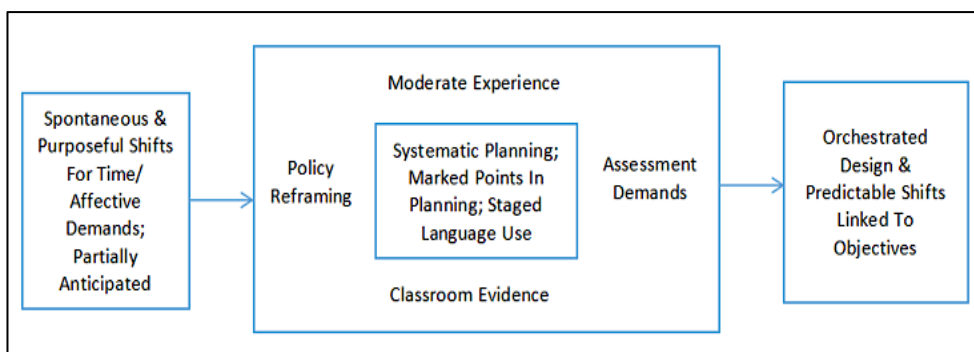
Figure 1 describes translanguaging development at the novice stage which remained highly dependent on immediate classroom experience and reactive judgement. Although Ms. Lan had begun to anticipate certain bilingual support moments, her planning was still tentative and strongly shaped by classroom unpredictability. The figure therefore highlights an early developmental phase in which translanguaging awareness emerges before full pedagogical consolidation.



**Figure 1:** Ms. Lan’s Translanguaging Development Process

In contrast, Figure 2 illustrates Mr. Minh’s transitional pathway, featured by systematic anticipation of translanguaging points and explicit rationales grounded in prior classroom evidence. His design reflects a stable integration of stance and design, with translanguaging functioning as a predictable instructional resource instead of an ad-hoc response. This supports the observation that experienced teachers increasingly formalize translanguaging through lesson planning and language allocation (9), although the present study extends this insight to tertiary general English

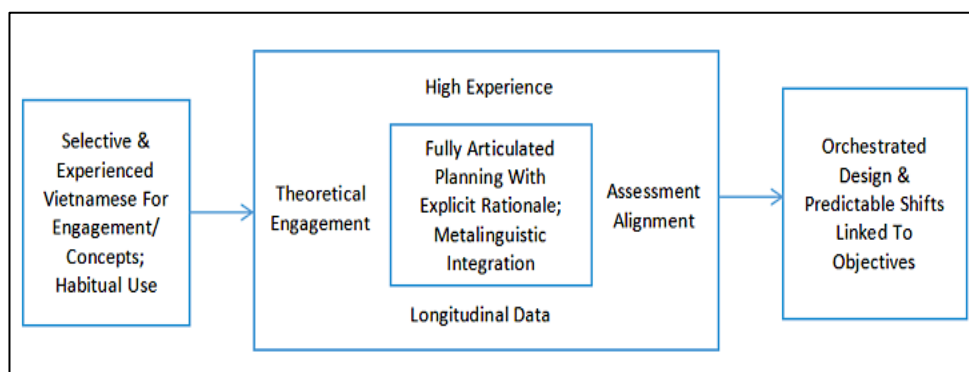
contexts. As shown in Figure 2, translanguaging became increasingly organized around recurring instructional patterns identified through prior classroom experience. Compared with Ms. Lan’s pathway, Mr. Minh’s process demonstrates greater pedagogical predictability, clearer sequencing of languages and stronger alignment between translanguaging and lesson objectives. The figure therefore reflects a transitional stage in which translanguaging shifts from situational responsiveness toward systematic instructional design.



**Figure 2:** Mr. Minh’s Translanguaging Development Process

Finally, Figure 3 depicts Ms. Hoa’s consolidated pathway, in which translanguaging design is fully embedded within lesson architecture and assessment preparation. Her practice demonstrates a high degree of pedagogical control, where spontaneous shifts continue to occur but are subsumed within an overarching design logic. This finding aligns with the description of senior teachers’ principled and theory-informed translanguaging (8) and illustrates the stance-design-shifts framework operating in a coherent and recursive manner (4). Figure 3 further

demonstrates how extensive teaching experience contributed to a more integrated and flexible translanguaging pedagogy. Rather than separating spontaneous and planned shifts, Ms. Hoa incorporated both within a stable instructional framework shaped by assessment goals, learner needs and accumulated professional knowledge. The figure thus represents a consolidated developmental stage in which translanguaging functions as an embedded component of pedagogical expertise rather than an occasional support strategy.



**Figure 3:** Ms. Hoa's Translanguaging Development Process

To answer the third research question, the findings indicate that the transition from spontaneous to strategic translanguaging is largely triggered by teachers' repeated recognition of recurring classroom difficulties and the perceived success of earlier spontaneous language shifts in resolving them. Across cases, teachers described how moment-to-moment bilingual responses to confusion, disengagement, or task difficulty gradually accumulated into classroom evidence that informed later pedagogical anticipation and lesson planning. Translanguaging became strategic once teachers no longer viewed these shifts as isolated reactions but as reusable instructional solutions that could be predicted, sequenced and aligned with learning objectives. This developmental movement was further shaped by teaching experience, student proficiency, institutional expectations, assessment demands and access to professional learning. Accumulated classroom evidence was noted as the most consistent driver across cases, reinforcing the idea that translanguaging expertise develops through longitudinal engagement with learners. Teaching experience was a mediating variable that transformed intuition into replicable design, supporting prior claims that pedagogical translanguaging constitutes a developmental competence rather than a fixed skill (8).

The findings additionally reveal a persistent tension between monolingual institutional ideology and the multilingual realities of classroom practice. Although English-only policies positioned exclusive English use as a marker of effective teaching, teachers reported that sustaining comprehension, participation and instructional flow often required flexible movement between English and Vietnamese. Translanguaging was therefore pedagogically necessary but institutionally sensitive. Translanguaging should not be

idealized as an uncomplicated solution. Although bilingual practices supported comprehension, participation and assessment preparation, teachers still worked within structural constraints that limited their autonomy. Institutional surveillance, English-only ideologies and expectations for visible target-language performance often pressured them to minimize, justify, or conceal translanguaging despite recognizing its value. This tension shows that translanguaging operates within unequal institutional power structures, where multilingual practices can be pedagogically effective yet remain ideologically marginalized.

Teachers adapted their language use according to institutional visibility: Vietnamese was used openly during assessment preparation or complex explanation, yet was frequently minimized, reframed, or omitted in formal lesson documentation to align with expectations of English-only professionalism. This pattern echoes conclusions that translanguaging is often practiced covertly despite its pedagogical value (6). Such concealment does not indicate a rejection of translanguaging, but reflects the continued symbolic dominance of monolingual ideology in EFL education. These tensions were not only pedagogical but also identity-related. Teachers continually negotiated what it meant to appear "professional" within institutional cultures that equated visible English-only instruction with teaching quality, linguistic competence and academic legitimacy. Although they recognized the pedagogical value of translanguaging, they still felt pressure to perform English exclusivity during lesson observations, curriculum inspections and formal evaluations. As a result, translanguaging was sometimes minimized, concealed, or reframed in institutional documentation despite being used actively in classroom interaction. This suggests

that translanguaging pedagogy in Vietnamese tertiary EFL settings is constrained not only by policy structures but also by deeply embedded ideological expectations surrounding teacher professionalism and language ownership.

Instructional decision-making was further shaped by curriculum requirements, lesson inspection practices and assessment pressures. Although official discourse promoted maximal English exposure as a sign of teaching quality, teachers found strict English-only practices unrealistic in classrooms where students needed multilingual support to stay engaged and understand the lesson. They constantly balanced institutional expectations for continuous English use with the practical need to use Vietnamese to avoid confusion and keep lessons moving. Teachers still valued strong English input, viewing translanguaging as a way to help students re-enter English-medium learning more effectively. However, they still worried that too much Vietnamese might reduce students' willingness to work through English on their own, creating a persistent tension between clarity and immersion. Furthermore, assessment demands legitimized bilingual support, suggesting that translanguaging gained institutional acceptance when aligned with measurable learning outcomes. Student proficiency also influenced translanguaging design, with teachers adjusting language use according to learners' tolerance for English-medium input - an approach consistent with learner-centred and scaffolded perspectives emphasizing pedagogical adaptability and strategic support according to students' linguistic needs (3, 7, 8, 13, 15), while also addressing concerns about excessive dependence on the first language noted in Vietnamese EFL studies (24, 25).

The execution of strategic translanguaging also presented distinct practical challenges across teachers' developmental stages. Novice teachers struggled with determining the appropriate timing, duration and balance between English and Vietnamese, often worrying that excessive bilingual support might reduce students' English exposure. Mid-career teachers faced challenges related to lesson pacing, curriculum coverage and the need to justify translanguaging decisions within institutional expectations. For senior teachers, difficulties shifted toward maintaining pedagogical flexibility while mentoring less

experienced colleagues still influenced by monolingual norms. Across all cases, classroom unpredictability remained a persistent challenge, as even carefully planned translanguaging sequences required spontaneous adjustment in response to learner reactions, participation patterns and time constraints. These findings suggest that strategic translanguaging does not eliminate spontaneity; rather, it requires teachers to coordinate planned bilingual design with ongoing interactional responsiveness. Ultimately, all three teachers described translanguaging as part of their professional identity, marking a transition from viewing Vietnamese as a backup tool to recognizing it as a legitimate and integral pedagogical resource.

Strategic translanguaging is more than an instructional move; it also requires teachers to navigate institutional ideologies that continue to privilege monolingual norms. Teachers had to balance pedagogical responsiveness with expectations for accountability, making deliberate choices about when translanguaging could be openly defended and when it needed to remain discreet. Developing translanguaging practice meant not only improving teaching strategies but also learning how to handle institutional resistance while still being seen as a legitimate English-language teacher. Professional development should therefore address both the theoretical basis of translanguaging and the practical judgement teachers need to recognize classroom patterns, anticipate learner difficulties and decide when bilingual support is most effectively integrated into lesson design.

## Conclusion

This study is aimed at examining how Vietnamese EFL teachers' classroom translanguaging develops from spontaneous responses into intentionally planned pedagogical design in tertiary general English courses. By investigating teachers' practices longitudinally across different stages of professional experience, the research depicts translanguaging as an evolving form of pedagogical competence shaped through reflection, experience and contextual negotiation. The findings show that teachers initially rely on spontaneous translanguaging shifts to address immediate comprehension, affective and time-related challenges, but primarily utilize English

during classroom instruction. Over time, teachers repeated noticing of the effectiveness of these spontaneous responses made them pedagogically salient, leading them to anticipate recurring learner difficulties and integrate translanguaging more systematically into their planning and instruction. The three process models illustrate differentiated developmental pathways, demonstrating how increasing experience transforms intuitive practices into systematic translanguaging design, while still allowing space for adaptive in-the-moment shifts. Together, these findings directly address the research questions by revealing both how translanguaging practices evolve and why this evolution occurs.

Additionally, the findings highlight the continuing mismatch between monolingual institutional ideologies and multilingual classroom realities, suggesting that English-only policies may inadequately reflect how learning is actually scaffolded in Vietnamese tertiary EFL classrooms. Moreover, teachers' translanguaging beliefs developed gradually through reflective classroom experience, even as institutional expectations continued to shape and constrain their instructional choices. The application of strategic translanguaging remained demanding, as teachers had to navigate lesson goals, learner needs, institutional accountability and the unpredictability of real-time interaction. Translanguaging development cannot be considered individual pedagogical growth, because it is continually shaped by institutional environments that treat English-only instruction as a criterion of legitimacy, professionalism and teaching quality. Teachers cultivated translanguaging competence by refining classroom strategies and learning to navigate the ideological tensions between bilingual classroom realities and monolingual institutional expectations. Thus, translanguaging pedagogy involves both instructional decision-making and ideological positioning.

The study contributes theoretically by operationalizing the stance-design-shifts framework as a developmental process and pedagogically by establishing translanguaging as a legitimate and learnable professional competence in EFL higher education. Practically, the findings suggest several actionable implications for English language instruction, teacher education and institutional policy. First, teacher education

programs should move beyond monolingual teaching assumptions by incorporating structured training on pedagogical translanguaging, including how to sequence languages strategically, design effective re-entry into English and differentiate bilingual support according to learner proficiency. Second, reflective practice activities such as lesson analysis, peer observation and guided reflection on translanguaging moments should be integrated into professional development programs to help teachers transform spontaneous bilingual responses into intentional instructional design. Third, institutions should reconsider rigid English-only policies and instead develop more flexible guidelines that recognize principled translanguaging as a pedagogically legitimate resource for supporting comprehension, participation and assessment preparation. Institutions may benefit from shifting evaluation practices away from visible English-only performance and toward pedagogically grounded criteria that consider learner comprehension, interactional effectiveness and teachers' responsiveness to emerging classroom needs. Fourth, curriculum designers and teacher trainers should provide practical exemplars of translanguaging-informed lesson planning, particularly for tertiary general English classrooms where learner proficiency levels and assessment pressures frequently require bilingual scaffolding. Finally, teachers should be encouraged to view translanguaging not as a replacement for English-medium instruction, but as a strategic support mechanism that can facilitate clearer progression back into meaningful English use.

Several limitations should be acknowledged in this study. First, the research involved only three teachers from one public university in Southern Vietnam, which limits the transferability of the findings to other institutions, educational levels, or disciplinary contexts. Although the study used an in-depth qualitative design to capture developmental complexity, translanguaging practices may differ in private institutions, English-medium instruction (EMI) programs, secondary schools, or universities operating under different policy conditions. Second, the study relied mainly on self-reported interviews and reflective accounts rather than direct classroom observation. While the longitudinal interviews offered valuable insight into teachers' reasoning and evolving beliefs, participants' accounts may

not fully represent the frequency, complexity, or interactional dynamics of actual classroom practice. Third, the study focused solely on teachers' perspectives and did not examine how students perceive or respond to translanguaging over time. Because translanguaging is inherently interactional and learner-oriented, the inclusion of student voices would help explore how bilingual practices shape participation, comprehension, engagement and language learning trajectories. Moreover, the study also examined translanguaging within tertiary general English courses, meaning the findings may not reflect the demands of discipline-specific EMI classrooms, high-stakes exam preparation, or multilingual programs involving additional local or minority languages. In the future, relevant research could combine interviews with classroom observation, include student perspectives and investigate translanguaging development across different institutional and educational contexts. Longitudinal studies following teachers over longer periods may also provide deeper insight into how translanguaging competence develops in relation to institutional expectations and classroom experience.

### Abbreviations

EFL: English as a foreign language, L1: first language, L2: second language.

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### Author Contributions

Ngoc Bao Chau Tran: Conceptualization; Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing - original draft, Minh Tan Nguyen: Conceptualization, Investigation, Validation, Writing - review, editing, Submission of the manuscript.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors have no conflicts of interest to declare.

### Data Availability

The dataset is confidential, but it may be provided upon reasonable request by reaching out to the authors, Ngoc Bao Chau Tran (tnbchau@ctu.edu.vn) or Minh Tan Nguyen (nmtan@ctu.edu.vn).

### Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance Process

The authors declare that no generative AI or AI assisted technologies were used in the preparation of this manuscript. The authors take full responsibility for the content's originality, interpretation and accuracy.

### Ethics Approval

Consent was obtained from all participants.

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