

Students' Perceptions of the Impacts of Lecturer Translanguaging on EMI Lecture Comprehension

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: EMI, lecture comprehension, translanguaging, Vietnam, higher education

The purpose of this study is to examine students' perceptions of the impacts of lecturers' translanguaging practices on students' lecture comprehension in English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) classes. This mixed-methods study collected questionnaire data from 70 students at a university in Hanoi, Vietnam, followed by semi-structured interviews with five participants. The findings indicated that translanguaging generally supports lecture comprehension micro-skills at the intermediate proficiency level, including lexical and conceptual understanding, inferential comprehension, functional language comprehension, and adaptation to speech rate. However, the spontaneous use of translanguaging was perceived to compromise lexical and conceptual understanding as it decreased exposure to English and diverted learners' attention from lecture content. The current study highlights the benefits of pedagogical translanguaging practices in EMI classrooms as well as the need for its strategic use to maximize the comprehension support.

Introduction

Globalization and internationalization have fostered the adoption of EMI in higher education, particularly in non-English-speaking countries (Tsou & Kao, 2017). Implementing EMI is expected to be a strategy for enhancing universities' international visibility and improving their positions in global rankings (Galloway et al., 2020). With this acclaimed benefit, EMI has been implemented across Asian higher education institutions, including Vietnam. In this Southeast Asian country, the rising popularity of EMI is reflected in the national project "Teaching and learning foreign languages in the public education system from 2008 to 2020", which identifies the expansion of EMI programs as a key objective (Government of Vietnam, 2008).

Despite its expansion, discussions surrounding students' comprehension level of lecturers' instruction remain ongoing, especially in settings where both lecturers and students may not possess native-like English proficiency (Yuan et al., 2022). A central issue in these dialogues concerns the relationship between lecturers' language choices and students' lecture comprehension levels (Romanowski, 2020). To address this issue, translanguaging, the strategic use of multiple languages, has emerged as a means to facilitate comprehension and interaction in EMI classrooms (Jinghui, 2023).

In previous empirical studies, students generally perceived that translanguaging enhances their overall comprehension in EMI classrooms by clarifying terminology, explaining abstract concepts and localizing knowledge in ways that make input more accessible (Aldaghri, 2024; Fang et al., 2022; Wang, 2021). Similarly, research in Vietnam has also revealed students' positive perception regarding mostly concept and lexical comprehension (Nguyen et al., 2024; Nguyen, 2024). These studies, however, typically focus on learners' self-perceptions of a limited number of EMI comprehension subskills, while overlooking other critical aspects such as following speech rate and inferring lecturers' attitudes. Addressing this gap may provide EMI educators with more detailed insights for designing targeted pedagogical interventions that support a broader range of lecture comprehension subskills. Thus, this study has drawn on the gap left in previous studies to investigate Vietnamese university EMI students' perceptions of the impacts of lecturers' translanguaging practices on micro-skills of lecture comprehension. By doing so, it contributes to EMI literature by providing more comprehensive insights into how translanguaging reportedly influences lecture comprehension, particularly in the Vietnamese tertiary context where EMI is increasingly adopted. The findings of this study also provide practical implications for EMI lecturers in strategically employing translanguaging to support learners' academic lecture comprehension.

Literature review

The definitions of translanguaging

In the current literature, the concept of translanguaging is interpreted from a variety of perspectives. Originally, the term was coined in Welsh by Williams (1994, as cited in García & Lin, 2017) to describe a pedagogical practice of switching between languages during reading, writing, or other language-related activities. Beyond educational contexts, Baker (2011) later viewed the term through a social lens, defining it as the process of making meaning, shaping experiences, and gaining understanding through the use of two languages in social interactions. Besides, from a cognitive perspective, Lewis et al. (2012) noted that translanguaging involves using both languages dynamically and functionally to organize and mediate mental processes in understanding, speaking, literacy, and learning. These definitions suggest that translanguaging is a dynamic practice that supports communication, meaning-making, and learning across various fields, but arguably more dominantly in the field of education (García & Kley, 2016).

Distinguishing Translanguaging from Translation and Codeswitching

Since the three terms *translation*, *translanguaging*, and *codeswitching* entail the use of more than one language to convey meaning, they can be easily confused with one another (Balam, 2021; García & Li, 2014). Knowing the distinction between these concepts allows researchers to examine the impacts of each more accurately, thereby providing lecturers with a stronger basis for designing appropriate activities that support meaning-making processes.

Firstly, translation focuses on transferring meaning across two distinct linguistic systems by seeking equivalence between source and target texts (House, 2014). Unlike translation, translanguaging emphasizes the flexible use of all available linguistic resources to facilitate understanding and meaning-making (García & Li, 2014). For instance, an EMI lecturer practicing translanguaging might facilitate group discussions in whichever language is available within students' linguistic repertoire to ensure optimal comprehension.

Secondly, codeswitching is grounded in a monoglossic perspective, suggesting that bilinguals have two distinct language systems to fulfill a certain communicative purpose (Balam, 2021). For instance, a code-switched statement might look like “You’re going to work in pairs, sau đó chúng ta sẽ cùng thảo luận” (You’re going to work in pairs, then we will discuss together). Meanwhile, translanguaging adopts a heteroglossic view, perceiving multilinguals' language use as an integrated linguistic system, rather than separate language systems (García & Li, 2014). Due to this unified nature, translanguaging likely enables learners to draw flexibly on their entire linguistic repertoire to construct and interpret meaning, making it particularly relevant to lecture comprehension (Flowerdew, 1994).

From the foregoing discussion, translanguaging provides more opportunities for dynamic meaning-making practices than both codeswitching and translation and is therefore adopted as the most appropriate concept for the present study.

Conceptualizations of translanguaging

In the current literature, a prominent conceptualization divides translanguaging into two practices: pedagogical translanguaging and spontaneous translanguaging (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Pedagogical translanguaging refers to intentional instructional strategies planned by teachers to facilitate students' comprehension of academic content (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). This means that teachers carefully plan which languages are used for specific activities to scaffold learning. This view aligns with the original conceptualization by Williams (1994), which framed translanguaging as a deliberate classroom strategy utilizing students' entire linguistic repertoire (as cited in García & Lin, 2017). On the other hand, spontaneous translanguaging is defined as “the reality of bilingual usage in naturally occurring contexts where boundaries between languages are fluid and constantly shifting” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020, p.18). In other words, unplanned translanguaging involves spontaneous shifts between languages without pedagogical planning or institutional restrictions, based on the view that languages are not distinct systems (García & Lin, 2017).

Despite this initial distinction, the boundary between these two practices may not always be clearly defined, as pedagogical translanguaging may occur alongside spontaneous practice during meaning-making processes (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). It can therefore be argued that spontaneous translanguaging may also carry pedagogical value when it contributes to learners' understanding. However, many concerns remain regarding spontaneous implementation (Pham

& Vu, 2023; Ngo, 2024; Zhou & Gao, 2021) because this use is prone to misalignment with learning objectives, potentially interfering with L2 development (Halim et al., 2023). Given this caution, the present study considers both pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging to develop a more nuanced understanding of how each shapes participants' lecture comprehension experiences.

Translanguaging in EMI classrooms

Translanguaging in EMI classrooms has been documented to serve three primary functions: content transmission, classroom management, and social and affective involvement (Jia et al., 2023; Genc et al., 2023; Sahan & Rose, 2021). Content transmission is the most frequently observed function, where teachers switch to students' L1 to explain new or complex concepts (Jia et al., 2023). For instance, a lecturer might deliver the content in English, yet at certain points, switch to L1 to introduce or clarify new content before returning to English to present further content. Besides academic functions, translanguaging also supports classroom management, rapport-building, and anxiety reduction in tertiary-level EMI classrooms, although these uses occur less frequently (Datta, 2025; Fang & Liu, 2020; Genc et al., 2023; Sahan & Rose, 2021). Given that pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging arguably coexist in EMI classrooms (Aldaghri, 2024; Halim et al., 2023), the present study considers both forms to provide a more comprehensive account of translanguaging and its influence on lecture comprehension.

Features of lecture comprehension

Many researchers have reached a consensus that listening comprehension and lecture comprehension share some common features (Flowerdew, 1994; Goh, 2008; Hellekjær, 2017). Specifically, to understand certain content, listeners must undergo two interactive processes: real-time processing and phonological/lexico-grammatical processing (Flowerdew, 1994). The former involves the learner's ability to comprehend the message as it is presented. The phonological process includes the ability to recognize acoustic signals such as individual sounds, pausing, false starts, hesitation, stress, and intonation. In addition to phonological features, spoken texts contain distinct lexico-grammatical elements that require listeners to understand both semantic and syntactic information. However, this conceptualization appears to overlook the role of background knowledge in listening. Hellekjær (2010) subsequently incorporated this factor when characterizing lecture comprehension, maintaining that lecture comprehension, similar to listening comprehension, encompasses two key features: bottom-up and top-down processing. In bottom-up processing, listeners construct meanings by integrating information from phonemes, words, and discourse features (Buck, 2001; Vandergrift, 2007). Richards (1983) detailed several factors that directly influence listeners' efforts to process speech from a bottom-up approach, including clausal basis, reduced forms, ungrammatical forms, pausing and speech errors, rhythm and stress, rate of delivery, the use of cohesive devices, and discourse markers. On the other hand, top-down processing involves using context and prior knowledge to understand, verify or fix comprehension. This knowledge arguably enables learners to compensate for the identification of some speech constituents such as syllables and words to achieve understanding (Richards, 1983; Vandergrift, 2007). Reinforcing the important role of background knowledge in lecture comprehension, Flowerdew (1994) identified the requirement for specialist knowledge as a key distinction from general listening comprehension.

From the preceding discussion, it could be deduced that lecture comprehension comprises skills to process both bottom-up characteristics of texts (phonological, lexico-grammatical cues) and top-down features (drawing on background knowledge, context, and inferencing). From the aforementioned contributors to lecture comprehension, it is paramount to have a set of micro-skills that reflect the complex nature of the process, thereby serving both research and teaching purposes. In the current literature, among existing inventories developed for listening comprehension in conversational discourse (e.g., Brown, 2007; Munby, 1978), Richards' (1983) taxonomy has received notable attention, consisting of 18 items targeting academic listening comprehension as follows:

1. ability to identify the purpose and scope of the lecture
2. ability to identify the topic of the lecture and follow the topic development
3. ability to identify relationships among units within discourse (e.g., major ideas, generalizations, hypotheses, supporting ideas, examples)
4. ability to identify the role of discourse markers in signaling structure of a lecture (e.g., conjunctions, adverbs, gambits, routines)
5. ability to infer relationships (e.g., cause, effect, conclusion)
6. ability to recognize key lexical items related to the subject/topic
7. ability to deduce meanings of words from context
8. ability to recognize markers of cohesion
9. ability to recognize the function of intonation to signal information structure (e.g., pitch, volume, pace, key)
10. ability to detect the attitude of the speaker toward the subject matter
11. ability to follow different modes of lecturing: spoken, audio, audio-visual
12. ability to follow the lecture despite differences in accent and speed
13. familiarity with different styles of lecturing: formal, conversational, read, unplanned
14. familiarity with different registers: written vs. colloquial
15. ability to recognize irrelevant matter: jokes, digressions, meanderings
16. ability to recognize the function of non-verbal cues as markers of emphasis and attitude
17. knowledge of classroom conventions (e.g., turn-taking, clarification requests)
18. ability to recognize instructional learner tasks (e.g., warnings, suggestions, recommendations, advice, instructions)

These 18 micro-skills can be seemingly grouped under the two previously mentioned types of listening process suggested by Hellekjær (2010), which are illustrated in Table 1 below. This correspondence facilitates the examination of the impacts of translanguaging practices on these specific aspects of students' lecture comprehension. Therefore, this model is selected as the

theoretical framework for analyzing how translanguaging mediates both bottom-up and top-down processes during lectures.

Table 1

The alignment of lecture comprehension micro-skills with features of lecture comprehension

Features of lecture comprehension (Hellekjær, 2010)	Lecture comprehension micro-skills (Richards, 1983)
Bottom-up processing (focusing on decoding language form, sounds, words, cohesion, intonation)	6. Ability to recognize key lexical items related to subject/topic 7. Ability to deduce meanings of words from context 8. Ability to recognize markers of cohesion 9. Ability to recognize function of intonation to signal information structure 12. Ability to follow lecture despite differences in accent and speed 13. Familiarity with different styles of lecturing (formal, conversational, read, unplanned) 14. Familiarity with different registers (written vs. colloquial)
Top-down processing (focusing on background knowledge, context, discourse structure, and inferencing)	1. Ability to identify purpose and scope of lecture 2. Ability to identify topic of lecture and follow topic development 3. Ability to identify relationships among units within discourse (major ideas, hypotheses, supporting ideas, examples) 4. Ability to identify role of discourse markers in signaling structure of a lecture 5. Ability to infer relationships (cause, effect, conclusion) 10. Ability to detect attitude of speaker toward subject matter 11. Ability to follow different modes of lecturing (spoken, audio, audio-visual) 16. Ability to recognize function of non-verbal cues as markers of emphasis and attitude 17. Knowledge of classroom conventions (turn-taking, clarification requests) 18. Ability to recognize instructional learner tasks (warnings, suggestions, advice, etc.)

The definition of EMI

One widely cited definition of EMI is the use of English to teach academic subjects in contexts where English is not the first language (L1) of the majority population (Galloway et al., 2020). In detail, in those classes, English is normally used for (1) interactions between lecturers and students (2) teaching and learning materials and (3) assessments. Numerous Asian countries such as Hong Kong, India, Japan, Singapore, and China have adopted EMI in hundreds of universities and achieved success (Kirkpatrick, 2017). In Vietnam, to progress in parallel with the regional advancement and global integration, the country has applied EMI in tertiary education since 2008. This is the year in which the Vietnamese government enacted a number of national policies and projects on foreign language teaching and learning, including the National Foreign Language Project 2020 (Government of Vietnam, 2008). The Project aims to achieve multiple goals, including accelerating global exchange, raising educational prestige and providing Vietnam with a high-skilled, bilingual workforce to support its economic development.

The inclusion of EMI in tertiary education was an effort to reach these objectives. Since then, there has been a significant increase in the number of EMI programs, both in Vietnamese public and private universities (Vu & Burns, 2014). At Hanoi University, a public tertiary institution, several EMI programs have been implemented, including Finance & Banking, International Studies, Information Technology, and Business Administration, in which English is the primary instructional language.

Types of EMI programs

Nguyen et al. (2017) classified EMI programs into two main types: foreign and domestic programs. The former is further categorized into two programs: offshoring and franchising. Offshoring programs are co-delivered by local and offshore educational institutions, commonly known as joint programs. On the other hand, a franchising program refers to adapted overseas programs implemented under the agreement of a Vietnamese university and a foreign institution. Meanwhile, domestic programs are administered and taught by Vietnamese universities. The syllabi, materials, and assessment schemes may be informed by overseas programs; however, they must comply with the Ministry of Education and Training's Higher Education Curriculum Framework (Vo, 2023). In Vietnam, the dominant type of EMI is the domestic program, with occasional involvement of foreign teaching staff (Ngo, 2024). Thus, this further raises the issue of whether Vietnamese national lecturers' choice of instructional language has any impact on students' comprehension level.

Previous empirical research

In recent years, there has been a rise in the number of research papers examining students' perceptions of translanguaging in EMI classrooms, most of which highlight positive attitudes toward this practice. To demonstrate, studies by Martin-Beltrán (2014) and Zhou et al. (2021) revealed that learners viewed translanguaging as helping them draw on their full linguistic repertoire to understand complex concepts in the lecture, thereby enhancing content comprehension. Other studies across various international contexts confirmed the enhancement of comprehension through the practice of translating complex terminology, thereby reducing

cognitive load in learning (Karakaş, 2023; Macaro et al., 2018; Raman & Yigitoglu, 2015). While these benefits for comprehension arguably apply to both lower-proficiency and more advanced learners (Adamson & Fujimoto-Adamson, 2021), concerns about its effectiveness persist. Specifically, while Vaivrand (2024) contended that excessive reliance on translanguaging may hinder advanced learners' L2 attainment, Öztürk and Çubukçu (2022) emphasized perceived negative impacts on both lower- and higher-proficiency learners. The findings of these two studies may be explained by the argument that frequent L1 use decreases exposure to the target language for all learners, thus potentially compromising their academic comprehension (Kim et al., 2016). These inconsistencies prompt further research into both the possible benefits and drawbacks of pedagogical and spontaneous translanguaging for learners at different proficiency levels.

In Vietnam, although previous studies have reported EMI undergraduates' generally positive perceptions of translanguaging for lecture comprehension (Hanh et al., 2025; Nguyen et al., 2024; Pham & Nguyen, 2024), learners' proficiency levels have not received adequate attention. Moreover, there remains a dearth of research in Vietnam on discrete lecture-comprehension subskills. This study seeks to bridge these gaps by providing a more comprehensive perspective on how translanguaging influences B2-level students' lecture comprehension subskills in EMI classrooms. Occupying an intermediate position, this group of learners is positioned at the threshold between L1 dependence and the need for sustained L2 exposure. Aiming at this proficiency level may therefore provide more information about the conditions under which translanguaging is perceived as either beneficial or detrimental in EMI classrooms.

Research Questions

To fulfill the purpose of the study, the survey sought to answer the following research question: What are students' perceived impacts of lecturers' translanguaging on their comprehension of lectures in EMI classes at a university in Vietnam?

Methods

Pedagogical Settings & Participants

This study was conducted within an EMI program at Hanoi University, a multidisciplinary institution in Vietnam that offers EMI across disciplines, particularly in the International Studies department. This department was chosen as the research setting because it is the second-largest EMI program at the university in terms of student population, therefore allowing for the collection of generalizable quantitative data.

To obtain quantitative data on perceptions, invitation emails were sent to 100 final-year participants aged 22 who were enrolled in the International Studies department at the time of the study. The final-year cohort was selected because these students have had the longest exposure to EMI instruction, enabling them to offer rich reflections on their experiences with translanguaging. Following the invitations, only 70 students responded to the questionnaires;

their self-reported English proficiency levels ranged from B2 to C1, with the majority identifying as B2 users.

To obtain qualitative data on the reasoning behind the identified perceptions, purposive sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2023) was employed to select five students whose responses reflected the survey findings for one-on-one interviews. To protect participants' privacy, pseudonyms were assigned to all interviewees and used in all transcripts and reports. In addition, the interview data were kept confidential among the research team and not disclosed to any individuals outside of the project. Detailed information regarding the interviewees is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Profiles of interview participants

Pseudonyms	Gender	English proficiency level
Participant A	Female	B2
Participant B	Female	B2
Participant C	Female	C1
Participant D	Female	B2
Participant E	Male	B2

Design of the Study

For this study, a mixed-methods approach, specifically a sequential explanatory design, was adopted to explore students' experiences with translanguaging practices in EMI classrooms. This approach was selected because integrating quantitative and qualitative methods enables both the generalization of results and a more detailed understanding of a complex phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In this study's context, integrating numerical data and personal accounts enabled examination of the extent of students' perceptions and the reasons underlying them. This approach was therefore consistent with the research aim, which is to explore how students perceive the impacts of lecturers' translanguaging practices and why they hold such views.

Data collection & analysis

Research instruments

To collect quantitative data on students' perceived impacts of lecturers' translanguaging practices on aspects of their lecture comprehension, a questionnaire was used. This instrument was selected highbecause it is claimed to yield high-quality data, achieve good response rates, and ensure anonymity (Marshall, 2005). The questionnaire was adapted from Richards' (1983) academic listening comprehension model, which includes 18 key items covering various aspects of lecture comprehension. The framework was selected for several reasons. Firstly, the framework captures both bottom-up processes (e.g., processing topic-based vocabulary) and top-down dimensions (e.g., identification of lecture topic and scope) of listening comprehension, which are recognized as central to successful lecture comprehension

(Hellekjær, 2017). Secondly, unlike other taxonomies focusing only on micro skills of general listening ability (Brown, 2007), Richards (1983) explicitly distinguished conversational listening (33 items) from academic lecture listening (18 items). This distinction makes the framework particularly suitable for higher-education EMI contexts as skills specific to lecture comprehension were specifically outlined.

The questionnaire included items that provide a focused representation of key spoken lecture comprehension subskills, while excluding skills that were not directly relevant to these processes. The adaptation was intended to support close alignment with the research question while still covering the microskills considered most essential for the study. The detailed rationale for the exclusion was enclosed in Table 3.

Table 3

Modifications for items in Richards' (1983) framework

No	Item	Rationale for exclusion
1	Recognizing intonation functions (item 9)	This item was excluded because English and Vietnamese employ different prosodic systems. While English relies on intonation, Vietnamese primarily uses tones to convey meanings. Therefore, using Vietnamese was unlikely to facilitate students' recognition of English intonation functions.
2	Ability to follow different lecture modes: spoken, audio, audio-visual (item 11),	
3	Familiarity with different registers: written vs. colloquial (item 14),	Unsuitable for the present research as this study is solely concerned with face-to-face spoken academic lecturers.
4	Familiarity with lecture styles: formal, conversational, read, unplanned (item 13)	This micro skill was excluded because it mainly concerns how information is delivered, while this study aims at how academic information is understood.
5	Ability to recognize function of non-verbal cues (item 16)	This item was removed because the present study concerns primarily with the spoken alternation between English and Vietnamese, making the inclusion of non-verbal cues unapplicable.
6	Knowledge of classroom conventions (item 17)	This item was omitted because it reflects students' familiarity with classroom procedures rather than their comprehension of lecture content.
7	Recognition of instructional tasks (item 18)	This item was excluded because it focuses on students' ability to identify and respond to instructional requirements rather than comprehend academic content.

In addition, a five-point Likert scale was employed, with 1 as strongly disagree and 5 as strongly agree. Reliability can be established through statistical analysis (Dörnyei, 2007). In this study, the questionnaire's reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding an acceptable coefficient of 0.86, which indicates that the instrument was suitable for use in the main study (Pallant, 2020).

To complement the quantitative data, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gain insight into the underlying reasons for students' certain perceptions about their lecturers'

translanguaging practices. Semi-structured interviews were selected because they enabled the researchers to gain an insight into respondents' personal viewpoints. Moreover, compared to a structured interview, the semi-structured format allows for flexibility, which provides room for the interviewer to probe further based on students' responses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). The semi-structured interview protocol consisted of ten open-ended questions, containing two main parts, namely (1) overall background questions about participants' experiences with translanguaging; (2) questions to elicit their explanations for the identified benefits and challenges of translanguaging on their comprehension level. Before the official interviews, two pilot interviews were conducted with two voluntary students whose backgrounds are similar to that of the target participants. After this process, modifications regarding wording were made to improve the clarity of the interview questions. Revisions were constantly discussed among the research team to ensure the clarity and validity of the questions.

Data collection procedures

The survey was distributed online to ensure accessibility and efficiency, specifically to the university email addresses of 100 students currently enrolled in the International Studies department. This quantitative data collection process took 7 days in total and yielded 70 valid responses. Subsequently, invitation emails for interviews were sent to five participants, outlining the objectives and measures taken to ensure confidentiality. Five interviews were conducted virtually via Zoom in English over three days, at times convenient for the participants. Each session lasted approximately 45 minutes and was audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

Data analysis

The questionnaire data were processed and analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 22. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores and standard deviations, were used to summarize the collected data and identify patterns and trends in students' responses (Dong, 2023). Moreover, as the questionnaire items were designed using a Likert scale, using the average values is a common approach (Alkharusi, 2022). Interpretation of the mean score ranges was provided in Table 4 below.

Table 4

Interpretation of mean score ranges

Mean Score Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 1.80	Strongly Disagree
1.81 - 2.60	Disagree
2.61 - 3.40	Neutral
3.41 - 4.20	Agree
4.21 - 5.00	Strongly Agree

The perceptions were initially divided into several key themes, including promoting lexical understanding; assisting conceptual understanding; improving inferential skill; enhancing functional language understanding; and increasing adaptation to speech rate.

To analyze the interview data, thematic analysis was employed (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Given that themes had already been constructed from the quantitative data, thematic analysis allowed further exploration of those pre-identified themes. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019), all interview transcripts were reread multiple times to familiarize the researchers with the participants' responses. Subsequently, initial codes were assigned manually in Excel and grouped into predefined themes derived from the survey findings. Additionally, several codes regarding the disadvantages of unstructured translanguaging practices emerged and were grouped into separate themes. Overall, the use of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews enabled themes of both positive and negative perceptions to emerge. The last step involved reviewing themes to merge repeated themes and remove irrelevant ones. To ensure inter-coder reliability, all researchers participated in reading the transcripts and reviewing all generated codes. Any discrepancies were resolved through frequent discussion to enhance the credibility of the findings.

Ethical considerations

Several measures were taken to ensure the ethical standards of the current study. Specifically, participants' names remained anonymized and were not disclosed to individuals outside of the project. After the interviews, transcripts were sent to the five participants to ensure the accuracy of the information.

Findings & Discussion

The positive perceived impacts of pedagogical translanguaging

Promoting lexical understanding

Table 5

The perceived impacts on lexical understanding

Items	Mean	SD
1. Ability to deduce the meaning of new words in the lecture	3.58	0.90
2. Understanding of key terminologies in the lecture	3.65	1.02

The participants reported high agreement that pedagogical translanguaging aids lexical understanding, with mean scores of 3.58 (SD = 0.90) for deducing new words and 3.65 (SD = 1.02) for understanding key terminology. This finding was further elaborated by in-depth interview data. Specifically, Participant A described pedagogical translanguaging “as a savior” in helping them understand economic terms such as “financial projection”, defined as an estimation of future economic trends. The participant indicated a sense of relief when the term was translated into Vietnamese as *dự báo tài chính*, noting that: “If the lecturer only explains

the term in English, I don't think I know what it is." This perception aligns with several prior empirical studies which consistently suggested that translanguaging is perceived to support lexical acquisition within EMI contexts (Duarte, 2019; Källkvist et al., 2022; Pham & Vu, 2023). This correspondence can be reasoned from current findings in the literature. Firstly, translanguaging appears to enable students to access their full linguistic repertoire, therefore connecting the terms taught in the second language (L2) with the already-acquired L1 vocabulary (Martin-Beltrán, 2014). This explanation is justifiably reflected in Participant C's elaboration:

"Vietnamese history-related terms such as the Republic of Vietnam (Việt Nam Cộng Hoà), strategic hamlets (ấp chiến lược), and guerrilla war (chiến tranh du kích) are more effectively conveyed in Vietnamese because we had already had understandings about these terms in the mother tongue."

Another plausible explanation is that pedagogical translanguaging is viewed as a scaffolding strategy, allowing instructors to provide confirmation or additional clarification of the target lexical items (Hug & Amir, 2026). This perception may be particularly relevant for low-frequency or discipline-specific terms, which are often associated with greater processing demands (Bulté et al., 2025). Taken together, these findings suggest that students generally identified pedagogical translanguaging as a useful resource for lexical understanding.

Assisting conceptual understanding

Table 6

The perceived impacts on conceptual understanding

Items	Mean	SD
3. Identification of the purpose and scope of the lecture	3.67	1.03
4. Ability to identify the topic of the lecture and follow the topic development	3.52	1.05

The table shows high agreement for lecture comprehension items, with mean scores of 3.67 (SD = 1.03) for identifying topics and following development and 3.52 (SD = 1.05) for identifying the lecture's purpose and scope. The interview data helped clarify why translanguaging was perceived to assist the participants with concept processing. To illustrate this point,

"Using both languages strategically to introduce new knowledge helps me connect the knowledge I learned before in Vietnamese with the new piece of information the lecturers have just presented." (Participant C)

This elaboration implies that translanguaging enables students to draw on L1 conceptual knowledge to internalize new L2 content, rather than having to construct understanding from the beginning.

This perception is consistent with previous empirical studies (Bruen & Kelly, 2017; Baker, 2011; Karakaş, 2023), which proposed that incorporating L1 in L2 classrooms enhances content

comprehension by linking unfamiliar L2 knowledge to existing knowledge in L1. This interpretation is central to Cummins' (1979) *interdependence hypothesis*, which posits that concepts can be made accessible between L1 and L2 thanks to existing foundational background learned in L1. In the tertiary-level EMI settings, this interdependence may be more relevant as students are often required to engage with specialized content while managing the linguistic demands of English simultaneously (Huang, 2025). This combined demand is reflected in Participant C's remark that the introducing concepts in L1 helps learners avoid "working too hard to understand new concepts." Cognitively, such load appears to be related to the complexity of the listening process, which involves both top-down and bottom-up procedures (Buck, 2001). Specifically, when listening to lectures solely in L2, students who have insufficient L2 proficiency may struggle with the bottom-up process reportedly involving decoding sounds, recognizing words and phrases before constructing meaning. When supported by L1, recognition of such elements can become less problematic, thus appearing to facilitate comprehension of the overall concept (Yeldham, 2016). From a psychological perspective, previous research has suggested that English-only EMI environments may generate anxiety and frustration for some learners (Yeh, 2014; Zumor, 2019). Participants may therefore perceive translanguaging as creating a sense of emotional security, which they believed supports their comprehension (Ghafouri & Esmaeilee, 2025). Viewed from both cognitive and psychological perspectives, the findings help explain why participants regarded that translanguaging assists their understanding in lecture content.

A noteworthy remark by Participant D was that since her course materials were presented in both English and Vietnamese, teachers' in-class translanguaging practices consolidated the concepts introduced in those written texts. While the role of spoken L1 for concept comprehension in the EMI classrooms has been demonstrated (Phyak et al., 2022), little has been charted about its benefit for learners' understanding of bilingual written materials. Participants' perceptions of this relationship therefore point to a potential direction for future research.

Improving inferential skill

Table 7

The perceived impacts on inferential skill

Items	Mean	SD
5. Inferring the relationships of the lecture's details more easily (e.g., comparison, cause and effect, conclusion)	3.54	1.04
6. Inferring the lecturer's attitude toward the subject matter more easily	3.51	1.02

The mean score of the first item in the table falls within the "Agree" range, indicating that the participants generally perceived that the lecturer's translanguaging aids students' inference of lecture details. Previous empirical studies support this finding, demonstrating that combining translanguaging with multimodal tools such as gestures, visual cues and technology deepen learners' understanding of the links between lecture details (Huq & Amir, 2026; Pawliszko,

2025; Tai, 2022). However, the present interview data primarily emphasized participants' perceptions of the indispensable role of verbal translanguaging, particularly for addressing abstract or culture-specific content. Specifically, reflecting on a foreign policy lecture, Participant C noted that Vietnamese examples accompanying the English definition of *comprehensive strategic partnership* “enhanced the connections between the main idea and its supporting ideas significantly”. According to the participant, this support became more important as the content grew increasingly complex across economic, military, and cultural dimensions.

This perception is broadly consistent with Huq and Amir's (2026) argument that visual and gestural resources primarily “supplement verbal definitions” and “enrich the explanation” (p. 9), suggesting that verbal explanations remain central to meaning-making processes. This perceived usefulness of verbal translanguaging may stem from the lack of direct L2 equivalents for highly specialized terminology (Sanesi, 2024), which challenges lecturers attempting to rely solely on English instruction. Consequently, this study underscores that EMI students generally recognized verbal translanguaging as a particularly valuable resource, with other semiotic resources serving complementary roles in EMI classrooms.

The second key finding indicated that participants perceived lecturers' translanguaging as helping them infer lecturers' attitudes. To explain, Participant D noted that a lecturer's expression of urgency or significance cannot always be fully conveyed through English alone. For example, the participant perceived “It's the key point for your exam, nên là chú ý vào em nhé!” (It's the key point for your exam, so pay more attention!) as conveying emphasis more effectively as the L1 was more emotionally expressive. This perception aligns previous studies suggesting that L1 use may help speakers express concerns, authority or reassurance, thereby enabling students to recognize lecturers' attitudes more easily (Dewaele, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2024; Pham & Vu, 2023). Several linguistic features of Vietnamese may help explain these perceptions. Firstly, Vietnamese contains a dynamic system of personal pronouns, allowing it to express age differences and, more importantly, interpersonal attitudes more flexibly than in many other languages (Nguyen & Nguyen, 2025). Secondly, since Vietnamese is a tonal language, subtle prosodic variations help communicate emotions, politeness, irritation, and hesitation even when the words themselves remain unchanged (Mac et al., 2010). These characteristics may have contributed to participants' perceptions that English–Vietnamese translanguaging helped them interpret lecturers' attitudes more effectively. While prior research supports the role of L1 in identifying speaker attitudes (Dewaele, 2013; Nguyen et al., 2024; Pham & Vu, 2023), the perceived link between English–Vietnamese translanguaging and learners' ability to identify attitudes remains under-researched. The present study therefore contributes to the extension of understanding in this area.

*Enhancing functional language understanding***Table 8***The perceived impacts on functional language understanding*

Item	Mean	SD
7. Ability to identify the role of discourse markers and markers of cohesion in signaling structure of a lecture (e.g., conjunctions, adverbs, gambits, routines)	3.40	0.88

The finding suggests that participants perceived translanguaging as helping them identify how discourse markers organize lectures. While existing literature has documented the perceived benefits of translanguaging for acquiring and utilizing transitional devices, these studies have primarily focused on writing rather than lecture listening (Cabilan et al., 2026; Chen & Dalton-Puffer, 2026). Thus, this finding provides empirical contribution to such an underinvestigated area.

This perceived influence may stem from the argument that a single English discourse marker may correspond with multiple Vietnamese equivalents, depending on the context (Diem, 2021). In this regard, translanguaging may help reduce learners' cognitive load when processing these alternatives, thereby enabling them to follow the lecture's flow more effectively. To illustrate, the marker *now* in English can be understood as *ngay bây giờ* (*at present*), indicating temporality or *nào* in “*nào, mau lên!*” (“*now, hurry up!*”), signaling urgency or immediacy. Furthermore, as most participants in this study were B2-level learners who reportedly relied on more basic, high-frequency connectors such as *for example*, *but*, *so* (Chen, 2023), they might have found less familiar discourse markers used in lectures more challenging to process.

*Increasing adaptation to speech rate***Table 9***The perceived impacts on the ability to adapt to speech rate*

Item	Mean	SD
8. Following the lecturer's different speed more easily	3.58	1.00

It was found that following lecturers' speech rate received a mean score of 3.58, indicating agreement among the participants. Previous empirical studies have similarly reported that students perceived translanguaging as beneficial when processing rapid instructional speech (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025; Tai, 2022). A possible explanation for this consistency can be found in the interview data. Specifically, three participants acknowledged this perceived cognitive advantage, expressing that translanguaging ensured that their “memory is not overloaded” (Participant A) when they had to “pay too much attention to unknown words” (Participant B).

These elaborations broadly align with cognitive psychology research suggesting that listeners' ability to follow speech is constrained by working memory capacity (Dunham et al., 2020). Specifically, when overloaded, working memory can no longer retain additional information, thereby disrupting listeners' ability to follow ideas (Dunham et al., 2020). In this regard, translanguaging may reduce the amount of effort required to process L2 input at multiple levels, including sounds, vocabulary, sentence structures, and overall meanings (Buck, 2001). Participants, therefore, appear to regard translanguaging as helping them allocate cognitive resources more efficiently, which seemingly enabled them to keep pace with the lecture.

Besides, Participant E remarked that “teachers’ translanguaging gives us a small pause to catch up with their speed.” This perception is also consistent with suggestions by Pham and Nguyen (2024) and Tai (2022) that translanguaging introduces opportunities for lecturers to pause, discuss, and translate key information in learners’ stronger language. Therefore, participants may have felt that translanguaging creates additional processing time, which helped them follow the instruction flow more efficiently. In short, from these perceptions, it can be found that pedagogical translanguaging may make classroom speech more manageable, particularly in the EMI settings where subject matter can become abstract and field-specific.

The negative perceptions regarding spontaneous translanguaging

Reduced lexical comprehension

The interview data indicated that some participants perceived spontaneous classroom translanguaging as potentially limiting understanding of L2 academic vocabulary. Specifically, Participant A expressed concern that unintentional translanguaging may make learners become “familiar with oversimplified meanings of specific academic terms and concepts” (Participant A), thereby affecting their ability to comprehend these lexical items in English. This concern aligns with research indicating that simplified language, while supporting understanding among less proficient users, can offer few opportunities to engage with new L2 vocabulary (Nation, 2001). Consequently, participants may have viewed such practices as hindering their lexical development.

Another caution concerning the constrained exposure to terms was echoed by Participant B,

“Explaining academic terms primarily in Vietnamese might limit students’ exposure to English terminology, which is essential for understanding academic texts, writing research papers or participating in discussions.”

This perception has been reported in previous EMI studies, which have suggested that spontaneous translanguaging reduces opportunities for learners to interact meaningfully with disciplinary English (e.g., Aldaghri, 2024; Ngo, 2024; Zhou & Gao, 2021). This might arguably reduce exposure to the language and therefore hinder L2 attainment (Aldaghri, 2024) and compromise vocabulary comprehension (Muñoz & Cadierno, 2021). One possible explanation is that a strong understanding of an L2 word typically requires repeated exposure to its form, meaning, and use as well as opportunities for its active use (Nation, 2001). When these conditions are not met due to excessive translanguaging, participants may view translanguaging as detrimental to their lexical comprehension. Thus, this finding suggests that translanguaging should be used “in a controlled and minimized way” (Aldaghri, 2024, p.9) to avoid potentially

undermining lexical understanding while maintaining a certain degree of comprehension support. This perception is particularly relevant for B2 language users who require continued exposure to academic English to progress to higher proficiency levels (Cambridge Assessment English, 2021).

Reduced conceptual comprehension

During the interview, besides the benefits, both Participants D and E expressed concerns that spontaneous use of translanguaging might decrease their ability to understand lecture concepts. This perception corresponds with studies by Wang (2021) and Vaivrand (2024), which suggest that extensive reliance on translanguaging might be associated with challenges with content comprehension, especially among advanced learners.

Several explanations may account for this perception. Firstly, the over-reliance on L1 might cause lecturers to give “lengthy and unfocused explanations” (Participant D). This issue is also reported by Domalewska (2015), who suggested that the mother tongue may often be used as the default medium for casual conversation, thereby likely leading to unnecessary content during lectures. This redundant information may increase learners’ extraneous cognitive load, thereby reducing the cognitive resources available for conceptual comprehension (van Merriënboer & Sweller, 2005).

Secondly, unnecessary translanguaging practices might “disrupt students’ train of thought, causing them to lose track of the lecture’s main ideas” (Participant D) and even “have lower academic performance” (Participant E). These findings align with prior research indicating that frequent and abrupt language shifts diminish listeners’ ability to concentrate on important information (Golumbic et al., 2012; Rodriguez-Fornells et al., 2011). One possible interpretation is that processing multiple languages typically requires listeners to manage many linguistic systems simultaneously, thus potentially increasing cognitive demands. Over time, the prolonged cognitive efforts may diminish concentration, an element necessary for comprehension of extended lectures (Blackburn & Wicha, 2022; Salig et al., 2025).

Pedagogical implications

Taken together, the perceptions discussed suggest that pedagogical translanguaging is viewed as a vital scaffold for improving lecture comprehension in EMI classes, particularly for intermediate EMI learners. In detail, it is perceived as helpful across a number of lecture comprehension micro-skills, including lexical and conceptual understanding, inferential skill, speech rate adaptation, and functional language comprehension. Given these reported benefits, EMI educators may consider moving away from English-only policies and instead incorporate purposeful translanguaging to strengthen lecture comprehension. However, in light of the two self-identified challenges from participants’ perceptions, the practice should be implemented strategically. Specifically, clear rules for translanguaging should be established in classrooms, such as selectively using L1 to explain key concepts and technical terms while maintaining L2 as the main medium of instruction to prevent compromised exposure to academic English (Fang & Liu, 2020). This is particularly relevant for B2-level English users who are generally capable of following English academic discourse, yet still benefit from intensive exposure to the language. Furthermore, since needs analysis is considered essential for designing effective

instructional strategies (Yuan, 2024), the frequency of translanguaging can be surveyed through needs analysis to ensure that its implementation aligns with students' specific needs and language competencies.

Conclusion

In summary, the quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrated that pedagogical translanguaging was perceived to play a crucial role in supporting the multilayered components of lecture comprehension for intermediate learners. To be specific, the reported bottom-up gains include enhanced comprehension of topic-based vocabulary, functional language, and processing of lecturers' delivery. Meanwhile, the top-down benefits involve improved comprehension of concepts and interpretation of logical relationships among ideas as well as lecturers' attitudes. Although participants generally expressed positive perceptions of pedagogical translanguaging, the findings also revealed several reservations regarding its spontaneous use. In detail, the overuse of translanguaging was perceived to compromise understanding of both L2 vocabulary and concepts by limiting exposure to academic English and disrupting the flow of instruction. The coexistence of positive and negative perceptions highlights the importance of pedagogical translanguaging, rather than spontaneous translanguaging, to address comprehension difficulties.

The current study is subject to some limitations. Firstly, the quantitative and qualitative data generated were obtained from a limited number of participants ($N = 70$ and $N = 5$, respectively) and drawn from a single institution in Hanoi, so the generalizability of the findings might be constrained. This suggests further research with larger samples of EMI undergraduates in Vietnam and other countries to confirm the impact of lecturers' translanguaging practices on lecture comprehension. Furthermore, the study relied on self-reported data, which might not accurately represent students' actual listening comprehension. Thus, incorporating additional measures, such as comprehension tests and classroom observations, would complement the current data on learners' perceptions.

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