

Beyond English-Only: How Translanguaging Reshapes Learning in EMI Classrooms

Saleh Mosleh Alharthi¹

¹English Language Department, College of Education, Majmaah University, Al Majma'ah, Saudi Arabia 11952, Saudi Arabia. P. O. Box 1221 Majmaah 11932-

Abstract

As English Medium Instruction (EMI) expands across Saudi higher education, questions of linguistic equity and pedagogical inclusion have become increasingly central to TESOL research. This study investigates translanguaging as a pedagogical strategy that enables instructors and students to draw on Arabic and English to enhance comprehension, reduce affective barriers, and promote classroom participation. Grounded in sociocultural and critical translanguaging theory (García and Kleya 2016; Sah and Kubota 2022), the study conceptualizes translanguaging not merely as a linguistic support mechanism but as a socially just practice that challenges English-only ideologies in EMI. Data were collected through a 25-item quantitative survey administered to 522 students and 122 instructors from two public universities in Saudi Arabia. The instrument captured perceptions across cognitive, emotional, and instructional dimensions. Results revealed strong endorsement of translanguaging, with instructors showing significantly higher support for its pedagogical and ideological functions. Students likewise recognized its role in comprehension and engagement, but expressed ambivalence regarding its effect on English acquisition. By providing large-scale empirical evidence from the Gulf context, this study contributes to TESOL literature largely informed by small-scale qualitative research. It underscores the need for context-sensitive EMI frameworks that legitimize multilingual practices and empower teachers as agents of linguistic inclusion, advancing TESOL's ongoing shift toward equity-oriented, multilingual pedagogies in global higher education.

Keywords: Translanguaging, English Medium Instruction (EMI), Saudi Arabia, multilingual pedagogy, student–instructor comparison, bilingual education

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past two decades, English Medium Instruction (EMI) has become a defining feature of higher education across the globe, especially in non-English-speaking countries seeking to internationalize curricula and enhance students' global competitiveness (Alasmari et al. 2022; Karabay and Durrani 2024; Macaro et al. 2018; Lasagabaster 2022). In Saudi Arabia, this internationalization agenda has accelerated the adoption of English as the primary medium of instruction in disciplines such as medicine, engineering, and business. While the expansion of EMI aligns with national modernization goals and global academic benchmarks, it simultaneously produces linguistic and pedagogical tensions for both teachers and students who are not native users of English. This tension—between the promise of English for global mobility and the persistence of local linguistic identities—has prompted renewed attention to translanguaging as a pedagogical and ideological resource that can reconcile English dominance with Arabic linguistic and cultural realities. Translanguaging, first developed in bilingual education (Williams 2022) and later expanded as a theory of dynamic multilingual practice (García and Wei 2014; Lin 2016), describes how multilingual speakers flexibly draw upon their entire linguistic repertoire to construct meaning. In recent years, scholars have framed translanguaging not merely as a pedagogical technique but as a critical act of linguistic justice—one that challenges deficit ideologies

and English-only norms in education (García and Kleyn 2016; Flores et al. 2020; Sah and Kubota 2022). Within EMI contexts, translanguaging has been shown to facilitate comprehension of complex disciplinary content, reduce learner anxiety, and foster inclusive participation (Palmer et al. 2014). From a TESOL perspective, these practices open new conversations about how multilingual agency and equity can be operationalized in classrooms historically structured by monolingual assumptions.

Despite this conceptual momentum, translanguaging in EMI settings across the Global South remains under-examined. While extensive research documents translanguaging in Western multilingual classrooms (Creese and Blackledge 2010; García 2017), comparatively little is known about how it unfolds in Arab Gulf universities, where English and Arabic coexist in complex sociolinguistic hierarchies. Similar challenges of balancing global English agendas with local linguistic ecologies have been observed in South Asia (Sah and Kubota 2022), Africa (Severo, Abdelhay, and Makoni 2020), and Latin America (Hornberger and Link 2012), underscoring the global relevance of the issue. In Saudi Arabia, EMI often involves students with limited academic English proficiency and instructors who strategically deploy Arabic to scaffold understanding. Yet, existing research rarely considers teachers' and students' perspectives together, leaving unanswered how these stakeholders co-construct meaning and negotiate language ideologies in the EMI classroom.

The present study addresses this gap by examining the translanguaging beliefs, practices, and perceptions of both instructors and students within Saudi EMI programs. Using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire, the study explores perceptions across cognitive, affective, and ideological dimensions, including the perceived benefits of translanguaging for comprehension, its emotional and motivational effects, instructional strategies, and concerns about its influence on English acquisition. By collecting data from 644 participants, this research contributes one of the few large-scale quantitative analyses in a field dominated by small-scale qualitative studies (Paulsrud and Cunningham 2025). In doing so, it provides empirical grounding for debates on how translanguaging can enhance learning and equity in EMI.

Understanding how translanguaging operates within Saudi EMI classrooms has important implications for TESOL pedagogy and teacher education. In multilingual contexts, translanguaging is not a fallback strategy but an instructional necessity aligned with culturally responsive, student-centered learning. For example, students may rely on Arabic to negotiate meaning or clarify disciplinary terminology, while instructors may draw on it strategically to explain abstract theories or facilitate participation. Acknowledging these dynamic bilingual practices can inform English for Academic Purposes (EAP) curriculum design and TESOL teacher education programs by promoting reflective, multilingual pedagogies rather than prescriptive English-only approaches.

This study thus contributes to TESOL's ongoing dialogue on multilingual justice by foregrounding perspectives from an under-represented Global South context. It situates translanguaging as both pedagogical practice and ideological intervention—a means to redefine legitimate language use, challenge English-centric hierarchies, and advance a more equitable, decolonial understanding of English language education (Pennycook 2021). As EMI continues to expand across the Arab Gulf and beyond, these insights underscore the urgency of developing pedagogies that align global English aspirations with local linguistic realities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

The global expansion of English Medium Instruction (EMI) has reshaped higher education, particularly in non-English-speaking regions seeking international visibility and competitiveness (Macaro et al. 2018; Lasagabaster 2022). As EMI spreads, questions of language access, equity, and identity have become central to research and practice. One concept gaining prominence in this discussion is translinguaging—the dynamic, purposeful use of an individual’s full linguistic repertoire to communicate and construct knowledge (García and Wei 2014). Initially explored in bilingual education, translinguaging has since been recognized as a powerful pedagogical, cognitive, and affective strategy across diverse educational settings. It challenges the assumption that English must operate in isolation within EMI, instead recognizing multilingualism as a resource rather than an impediment to learning. While the practice has been widely studied in Western and Asian contexts, its pedagogical and ideological implications in Gulf countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, remain underexplored.

Why Translinguaging Matters in EMI

The increasing reliance on EMI raises fundamental pedagogical and ethical questions about access and inclusion. As universities in non-Anglophone countries shift to English to align with global standards, students often face linguistic and cognitive barriers to learning complex academic content. This tension between English dominance and local linguistic realities makes translinguaging critical: it enables students to draw on all their linguistic and cultural resources to build understanding, reducing anxiety, fostering participation, and sustaining engagement (Zhang et al. 2024; Mazak and Carroll 2016). In Saudi Arabia—where Vision 2030 reforms have accelerated the adoption of EMI—students often begin university with limited academic English proficiency, while instructors are expected to teach technical material entirely in English. Translinguaging thus emerges as a pedagogical bridge that mediates between global English aspirations and local linguistic realities (Hopkins, Zoghbor, and Hassall, 2021). Understanding how this operates in Saudi EMI classrooms is vital for developing policies and teaching models that promote equitable participation rather than linguistic exclusion.

Theoretical Foundations of Translinguaging

Translinguaging is grounded in sociocultural theories of learning, particularly Vygotsky’s (1978) concept of mediation, which positions language as a cultural tool for cognitive development. Within this framework, translinguaging acts as a mediational process that allows learners to access, organize, and internalize new knowledge using both their first language (L1) and second language (L2). This dynamic use of language functions as scaffolding—learners use their stronger language to process complex content before articulating it in English, deepening comprehension and facilitating higher-order thinking. In this regard, Li Wei’s (2011) conceptualization of translinguaging extends the idea beyond cognitive processes to encompass identity and ideology. Rather than a mere act of code-switching, translinguaging represents a generative process through which learners draw on their full linguistic and cultural repertoires to construct meaning and negotiate identity. Within EMI contexts, translinguaging enables students and instructors to co-construct disciplinary understanding and exercise linguistic agency.

Recent critical perspectives further expand translinguaging into the realm of linguistic justice. Building on García and Kleyn (2016), Flores et al. (2020), and Sah and Kubota (2022), scholars have reframed translinguaging as a critical pedagogical stance—a means of resisting English-only ideologies and addressing inequities embedded in global language hierarchies. From this viewpoint, translinguaging challenges deficit narratives that portray local languages as barriers to progress. Instead, it repositions Arabic—across both its

standard and colloquial varieties—and other local languages as legitimate mediums for academic thought, promoting epistemic inclusion and decoloniality within EMI. In the Saudi context, translanguaging unfolds within a diglossic linguistic ecology where English interacts fluidly with both Modern Standard Arabic and regional dialects, allowing learners and instructors to negotiate meaning across formal and colloquial registers (Alghamdi and Al-Sofi 2023; Hopkyns et al. 2021). This critical lens provides the foundation for the present study, which situates translanguaging in Saudi higher education as both a pedagogical practice and an ideological intervention.

Translanguaging in Global EMI Contexts

Global research on EMI highlights the cognitive and affective benefits of translanguaging. In Asian and European universities, flexible bilingual practices have been shown to facilitate comprehension and content retention, particularly among students with limited English proficiency (Zhang, Lin, and Osborne 2024; Yuan and Yang 2023). For example, bilingual scaffolding—where instructors briefly use students' home language to clarify complex terminology—can substantially enhance understanding without compromising English exposure. Mazak and Carroll (2016) found that translanguaging reduces cognitive load, freeing learners to focus on disciplinary reasoning rather than linguistic decoding. Such practices improve both learning outcomes and confidence, demonstrating that translanguaging complements, rather than competes with, English acquisition.

At a broader level, these findings reveal that translanguaging functions as an equity mechanism in EMI classrooms. By enabling learners to access disciplinary knowledge through familiar linguistic resources, translanguaging mitigates the stratifying effects of English proficiency differences. As a result, EMI can evolve from an exclusionary model privileging the elite to a more democratic form of education that values multilingual competence. This global evidence underscores why exploring translanguaging in Saudi Arabia is timely: it offers a lens through which to examine EMI's potential to balance global aspirations with local linguistic justice.

Translanguaging in the Gulf and Saudi Arabia

English-medium instruction (EMI) has expanded rapidly across the Gulf under national policies that frame English as a marker of modernization and global competitiveness (Barnawi 2017). Yet this policy-driven expansion often reveals a gap between national ambition and classroom reality. In Saudi Arabia, many students transition from Arabic-medium schooling with limited English proficiency, which creates challenges in understanding lectures, textbooks, and assessments (Jia and Pun 2023; Elyas and Mahboob 2021). Instructors likewise report the need to slow content delivery and simplify materials to support comprehension. As Alharbi and Alqefari (2023) observe, these conditions make translanguaging not merely a pedagogical choice but an instructional necessity, a practical and ethical response to linguistic inequities in EMI classrooms.

Empirical research in Gulf universities shows that both students and teachers use Arabic strategically to clarify meaning, manage affective barriers, and facilitate deeper engagement. Jia and Pun (2023) note how instructors employ Arabic explanations for disciplinary concepts and how students spontaneously engage in peer discussions in Arabic before responding in English. Such practices, however, exist within an institutional framework that officially promotes English-only instruction in higher education (Barnawi 2017; Alharbi and Alqefari 2023). Rather than fully sanctioned pedagogy, translanguaging in Saudi EMI classrooms often reflects teachers' adaptive strategies to bridge comprehension gaps and maintain student participation. Importantly, in a context where Arabic remains central to cultural and national identity, these translanguaging practices can also be read as subtle forms of ideological negotiation—validating local linguistic capital within a system that continues to privilege English as the dominant medium of academic legitimacy. In this

sense, translanguaging both accommodates and quietly resists EMI policy, bridging the ideological divide between global language mandates and national linguistic heritage.

Instructor Attitudes Toward Translanguaging

Instructors' perspectives on translanguaging reflect broader ideological tensions within TESOL and EMI. Some educators remain influenced by the traditional English-only ethos, fearing that translanguaging might undermine students' English immersion (Cenoz 2019). These concerns stem from the "native-speakerist" assumption that successful language learning requires minimizing L1 use—a belief widely critiqued in TESOL scholarship (Sembianti and Tian 2020; Pennycook 2021). However, growing evidence indicates that instructors who understand translanguaging's theoretical foundations adopt it not as linguistic leniency but as deliberate pedagogy that enhances access and equity (Paulsrud and Cunningham 2025). Teachers who employ translanguaging purposefully report higher classroom participation, reduced silence, and more meaningful engagement (Muguruza, Cenoz, and Gorter 2023).

In the Saudi context, instructors' attitudes toward translanguaging appear to be gradually shifting as recent studies report growing openness to flexible language use in EMI classrooms (Alharbi and Alqefari 2023; Almayez 2022). While some remain hesitant due to institutional expectations of English-only instruction, many have pragmatically embraced translanguaging as a tool for survival in linguistically diverse classrooms. This pragmatic shift reflects a broader ideological reorientation—from seeing translanguaging as a deviation from TESOL norms to viewing it as a resource for inclusive, student-centered pedagogy. Professional development programs that explicitly incorporate translanguaging principles could further help EMI instructors align practice with evidence-based TESOL approaches.

Student Experiences and Perceptions

From students' perspectives, translanguaging enhances comprehension, reduces anxiety, and fosters confidence in EMI classrooms (Manan 2024; Sultana 2025). By enabling learners to access disciplinary knowledge through Arabic, translanguaging helps them grasp abstract concepts that might otherwise remain inaccessible. Emotionally, it reduces the cognitive pressure of learning solely in English and creates a sense of belonging by legitimizing their linguistic identities. Studies across Global South contexts have shown that students feel marginalized when their home languages are excluded but empowered when these are recognized as legitimate learning resources (Choi and Liu 2024). In Saudi Arabia, where educational inequality often correlates with English proficiency, translanguaging plays a critical equity role by leveling the playing field for students from public-school backgrounds who might otherwise be disadvantaged in EMI settings.

This dimension extends beyond pedagogy to social justice. Translanguaging challenges linguistic hierarchies that privilege English and, by extension, socioeconomic elites who have greater access to English education. By integrating Arabic into EMI instruction, educators promote inclusivity and counteract stratification. Thus, translanguaging not only facilitates comprehension but also embodies an ethical stance that resonates with TESOL's global commitment to equity and access.

Critical Translanguaging and Linguistic Justice

Recent developments in TESOL call for a more critical understanding of translanguaging—not merely as a cognitive scaffold but as a socially transformative practice. Scholars such as García and Kleyn (2016), Flores et al. (2020), and Sah and Kubota (2022) advocate for critical translanguaging pedagogy, which views multilingual practices as acts of resistance against linguistic imperialism and epistemic exclusion. Within EMI, this approach reframes the classroom as a site for reimagining power relations between English and local languages. In the Saudi context, applying a critical translanguaging lens

means recognizing Arabic not as a hindrance but as an epistemic partner to English, capable of generating disciplinary knowledge in its own right. This perspective aligns with broader decolonial TESOL movements that seek to dismantle the native-speakerist hierarchies embedded in global English education (Pennycook 2021). Integrating such a stance into Saudi EMI has the potential to transform policy discourse—from enforcing linguistic uniformity to celebrating linguistic plurality.

Research Gaps and TESOL Implications

While substantial progress has been made in understanding translanguaging globally, significant research gaps remain in theorizing and empirically documenting how it operates in policy-driven EMI environments such as Saudi Arabia, where tensions between English dominance and local linguistic identities persist. Most existing studies isolate either teacher or student perspectives, neglecting the interactional dynamics of bilingual pedagogy in shared EMI environments (Choi and Liu 2024; Lu et al. 2025). Few quantitative studies provide comparative insights across both stakeholder groups, especially in the Gulf, where EMI practices are rapidly evolving yet under-documented. The present study addresses this gap by examining both Saudi students and instructors, offering large-scale evidence of their perceptions and practices. This dual focus contributes methodological breadth to a literature dominated by small-scale qualitative research.

For TESOL practitioners and EMI instructors, these insights extend beyond Saudi Arabia. They underscore the importance of preparing educators—both local and expatriate—to implement translanguaging-informed pedagogy in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and content classrooms. Research in the Gulf region similarly highlights the need for teacher training that fosters translanguaging awareness and reflective pedagogical practices (Alharbi and Alqefari 2023; Alharbi and Alqefari 2025). Consequently, teacher education programs should incorporate modules on critical translanguaging awareness, classroom discourse analysis, and inclusive assessment strategies that recognize multilingual competence. By connecting translanguaging to EAP design and teacher preparation, TESOL can advance a more equitable model of English education—one that values linguistic diversity rather than conformity. Building on this synthesis, the current study is guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: How do Saudi Arabian EMI students perceive the role of translanguaging in enhancing comprehension, motivation, and participation?

RQ2: What are instructors' beliefs and practices regarding translanguaging in EMI classrooms?

RQ3: To what extent do students' and instructors' perceptions align or differ regarding the pedagogical and ideological value of translanguaging?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional survey design to investigate the perceptions, beliefs, and practices surrounding translanguaging among students and instructors within English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms in Saudi Arabian universities. Grounded in the theoretical frameworks of translanguaging articulated by García and Wei (2014) and Creese and Blackledge (2010), the study positioned translanguaging not merely as a pedagogical tool but as a dynamic practice that facilitates deeper cognitive processing and inclusive learning. A structured survey design was chosen to capture large-scale attitudinal data and enable comparative statistical analysis between two key stakeholder groups—students and instructors. Given the limited empirical evidence on translanguaging in Gulf EMI contexts, particularly those engaging both

students and teachers concurrently, this approach aimed to generate nuanced, contextually grounded insights into EMI pedagogy within Saudi higher education.

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The study sample comprised 644 participants, including 522 students and 122 instructors from two publicly funded universities in Saudi Arabia. The student participants were enrolled in undergraduate EMI programs spanning disciplines such as business, health sciences, and engineering. The instructor cohort consisted of faculty members responsible for delivering content in English across similar disciplines. All the instructors possessed at least a postgraduate qualification in applied linguistics, education, or their subject specialization, with an average teaching experience of more than five years. A purposive stratified sampling strategy was used to ensure variation in gender and field of study across the two universities. This dual-sample structure allowed for the exploration of both convergence and divergence in translanguaging beliefs and practices, addressing a critical research gap in Gulf EMI contexts, where most studies have examined either students or instructors in isolation.

3.3 Instrumentation

Data were collected through a 25-item self-administered questionnaire designed based on established constructs in translanguaging, bilingual education, and EMI pedagogy (García 2017; Wei 2018). The instrument comprised three sections. The first section (Items Q1–Q10) examined students' perceptions of translanguaging in relation to comprehension, motivation, participation, and learning outcomes. The second section (Items Q11–Q20) measured instructors' translanguaging practices and pedagogical orientations concerning the integration of Arabic alongside English in classroom instruction. The final section (Items Q21–Q25) included shared items administered to both groups to facilitate direct comparison on ideological and instructional acceptance of translanguaging. All items were rated on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). The questionnaire underwent expert validation by three applied linguistics and TESOL scholars for content relevance, clarity, and construct alignment. A pilot test with 20 participants (10 students, 10 instructors) confirmed internal consistency, yielding Cronbach's alpha values between 0.85 and 0.89 across dimensions, indicating high reliability.

3.4 Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected over four weeks via a secure online Google Form distributed through institutional mailing lists and academic communication channels. The opening page of the survey outlined the study's objectives, purpose, voluntary nature, and data confidentiality, ensuring that participants were fully informed before participating. Duplicate and incomplete entries were removed during data cleaning, resulting in 644 valid responses for analysis. The use of a web-based survey allowed for efficient, geographically broad participation while maintaining data integrity and participant anonymity.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study followed established ethical principles for minimal-risk, voluntary, and anonymous participation in educational research. The first page of the online questionnaire provided participants with detailed information about the study's objectives, purpose, voluntary nature, and data-confidentiality procedures. Informed consent was obtained digitally: participants who selected "Yes, I agree to participate" proceeded to the main survey, while those who selected "No" were automatically redirected to a submission page. This built-in consent mechanism ensured that only consenting respondents completed the questionnaire.

In line with the British Educational Research Association's (BERA, 2018) Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research, all responses were treated as confidential and anonymous, and no personally identifying information was collected. The study thus

upheld the principles of integrity, transparency, and respect for participant autonomy consistent with international ethical standards for online research in applied linguistics and TESOL.

3.6 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 26). Descriptive statistics—means and standard deviations—were first computed to summarize overall patterns within each participant group. These results helped identify items showing strong agreement, neutrality, or divergence concerning the cognitive, emotional, and instructional dimensions of translanguaging.

Subsequently, independent-samples t-tests were conducted for the five shared items (Q21–Q25) to examine significant perceptual differences between students and instructors. A significance threshold of $p < .05$ was adopted. Where statistically significant differences emerged, the magnitude and direction of mean differences were interpreted to assess practical implications for EMI pedagogy. To enhance interpretability, results were visualized using comparative bar charts, emphasizing areas of alignment and divergence. This combination of descriptive and inferential analysis provided both a macro-level overview and micro-level insight into translanguaging perceptions in Saudi EMI contexts. The design aligns with current best practices in multilingual education research that bridge empirical data with pedagogical application (Semiante 2016; Muguruza, Cenoz, and Gorter 2023; Lu et al. 2025).

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

This section presents the quantitative findings derived from descriptive and inferential analyses examining how students and instructors in Saudi English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms perceive translanguaging as both a pedagogical and ideological practice. The analysis integrates numerical evidence with interpretive and theoretical examination to delineate the cognitive, affective, and ideological dimensions of translanguaging within this context. Tables 1–3 present the statistical results, and Figure 1 visually illustrates the cross-group differences.

4.1. Students' Perceptions of Translanguaging in EMI Classrooms

As shown in Table 1, students demonstrated a broadly positive orientation toward translanguaging as a pedagogical facilitator. The highest mean values were recorded for comprehension-oriented items—'Enhances comprehension' and 'Links English with Arabic understanding'—reflecting students' belief that translanguaging enables the consolidation of new linguistic knowledge through cognitive scaffolding. These findings align with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of sociocultural mediation and García and Wei's (2014) concept of a unified linguistic repertoire, both of which suggest that learners' meaning-making processes are enriched when they are allowed to mobilize all available linguistic resources.

Table 1 Students' Perceptions of Translanguaging in EMI Classrooms

Items	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Enhances comprehension	4.02	0.60	High agreement
Links English with Arabic understanding	4.20	0.59	Very high agreement
Reduces anxiety	3.77	0.72	Moderate agreement
Enhances expressive clarity	3.70	0.68	Moderate agreement

Affects English acquisition negatively	3.00	0.75	Neutral/Ambivalent
--	------	------	--------------------

Source: Primary data (n = 522)

Students' endorsement of translanguaging for comprehension underscores the pedagogical salience of bilingual mediation in language development. The moderately high ratings on affective dimensions, including anxiety reduction and expressive clarity, point to the emotional comfort that translanguaging affords in EMI classrooms. However, the neutral mean on the item concerning negative effects on English acquisition reveals lingering ideological uncertainty. This tension demonstrates the persistence of English-only ideologies and the 'native speaker' normativity (Sembianti and Tian 2020; Sah and Kubota 2022) that still influence learner attitudes.

From a broader interpretive standpoint, these results reflect an evolving bilingual consciousness among learners who simultaneously embrace and question translanguaging. Much like the emotional negotiations described in Sultana (2025), Saudi EFL students appear to navigate between the empowering and stigmatized dimensions of bilingual practice. Their responses suggest that translanguaging is not merely a linguistic choice but also a site of identity work, where learners redefine what counts as legitimate English within academic spaces.

4.2. Instructors' Translanguaging Practices and Pedagogical Orientations

Instructors expressed even stronger endorsement of translanguaging across cognitive and instructional domains, as evident in Table 2. The highest mean values—pertaining to comprehension support, motivational influence, and content retention—demonstrate that teachers recognize translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical mechanism that sustains learner engagement and knowledge transfer. The favorable rating of Arabic's role in clarifying technical concepts further suggests that instructors perceive bilingual strategies as integral to pedagogical inclusivity.

Table 2 Instructors' Translanguaging Practices and Pedagogical Perceptions in English-Medium Instruction Classrooms

Items	Mean (M)	SD	Interpretation
Supports comprehension	4.30	0.61	Strong agreement
Enhances motivation	4.30	0.60	Strong agreement
Improves content retention	4.40	0.59	Very strong agreement
Clarifies terminology via Arabic	4.10	0.58	High agreement
Concern for overreliance	3.40	0.70	Moderate caution

Source: Primary data (n = 122)

The instructors' responses substantiate the notion of 'flexible bilingual pedagogy' proposed by Creese and Blackledge (2010), wherein teachers strategically negotiate linguistic boundaries to optimize comprehension and participation. The moderate caution rating concerning overreliance indicates a reflective equilibrium—educators are aware of maintaining an instructional balance between English immersion and linguistic accessibility.

These findings also highlight an ideological shift among EMI practitioners in Saudi Arabia. Teachers increasingly view translanguaging not as a deviation from linguistic purity but as a pedagogical innovation aligned with inclusive and learner-centered teaching principles (Muguruza, Cenoz, and Gorter 2023). This orientation represents a departure from

traditional English-dominant models toward a view of language as an adaptive, dialogic resource that bridges cognitive and cultural divides.

4.3. Comparative Analysis of Shared Perceptions

Independent-samples t-tests conducted on five shared items yielded nuanced insights into group alignment and divergence (see Table 3). Statistically significant differences were found for three items—identity/cultural bridging, institutional recognition, and reduction of English exposure—where instructors consistently reported higher means. These differences indicate that instructors hold a more positive ideological orientation toward translanguaging, conceiving it as both a pedagogical and sociocultural asset.

Table 3 Comparison of Students' and Instructors' Shared Translanguaging Perceptions in English-Medium Instruction Classrooms

Item	Students M (SD)	Instructors M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d	Significance
Translanguaging bridges identity/culture	3.96 (0.59)	4.33 (0.61)	−4.74	< 0.001	0.51	Significant
Institutional recognition	4.19 (0.58)	4.34 (0.52)	−2.17	0.031	0.32	Significant
Reduces English exposure	3.64 (0.66)	3.91 (0.66)	−3.20	0.002	0.40	Significant
Comfort using both languages	4.12 (0.63)	4.20 (0.61)	−1.13	0.259	0.12	Not Significant
Transitional aid toward academic English	4.08 (0.64)	4.12 (0.60)	−0.46	0.642	0.05	Not Significant

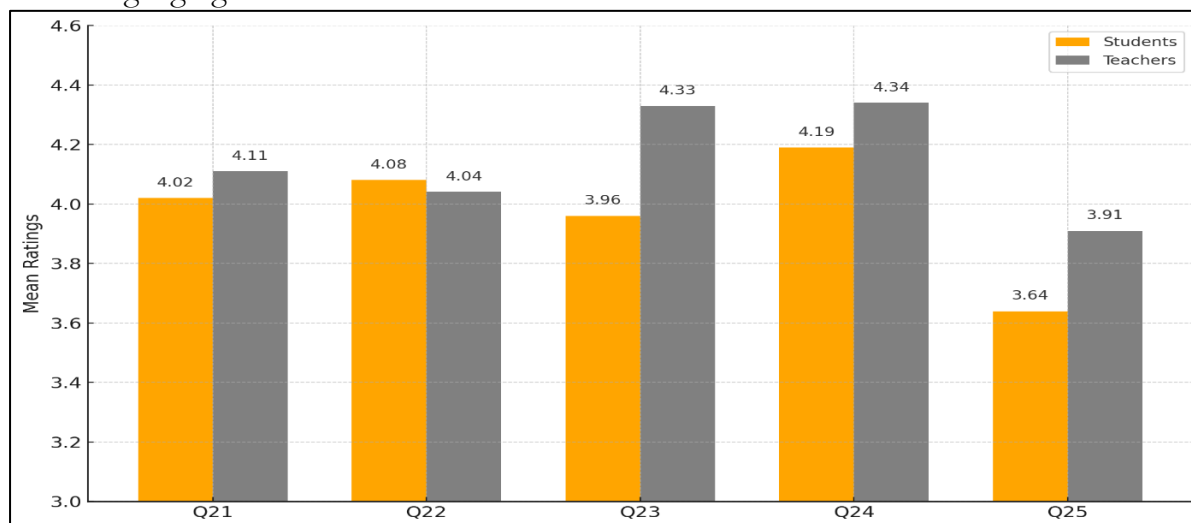
Source: Primary data (Students = 522; instructors = 122)

The results reveal a pattern of ideological asymmetry between the two groups. Instructors perceive translanguaging as instrumental in identity affirmation and institutional legitimacy, whereas students display lingering hesitation due to concerns over diminished English exposure. This divergence reflects Lin's (2020) distinction between language-as-resource and language-as-target orientations. The findings imply that instructors have advanced toward an epistemic understanding of bilingualism as an instructional norm, while students still internalize the ideology of English linguistic supremacy.

However, the non-significant differences in comfort and transitional aid highlight areas of convergence: both groups acknowledge that bilingual flexibility aids communication and serves as a bridge to academic English proficiency. This mutual recognition marks a gradual ideological reconciliation within EMI contexts, corroborating cross-contextual evidence from multilingual higher education environments (Bojsen et al. 2023; Yuan and Yang 2023).

Across all three analyses, the data portray translanguaging as a multifaceted construct encompassing cognitive scaffolding, affective reassurance, and ideological repositioning. For students, translanguaging operates primarily as a means of comprehension and emotional security, but one shadowed by concerns over linguistic legitimacy. For instructors, it represents both an instructional strategy and an emancipatory act that validates learners' identities and fosters epistemic access.

Figure 1 Mean Comparison of Student and Instructor Responses on Shared Translanguaging Items



This synthesis corroborates García and Wei's (2014) theoretical framing of translanguaging as a dynamic semiotic process that transcends linguistic compartmentalization. Within the Saudi EMI context, translanguaging appears to mediate the tension between monolingual institutional policy and multilingual learner reality. It not only enhances comprehension and inclusion but also functions as a symbolic act of reclaiming voice and identity within English-dominant academic discourse.

Much like Jiang's (2025) emotional translanguaging of navigating linguistic shame, the statistical findings here narrate an institutional journey—from translanguaging as deviation to translanguaging as legitimacy. The convergence in perceptions between teachers and students signals a developing paradigm of bilingual normalcy in EMI classrooms—a pedagogical reimagining where linguistic diversity is no longer a challenge to overcome but a resource to embrace.

5. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study reaffirm translanguaging as a legitimate and transformative pedagogical resource within English-Medium Instruction (EMI) in Saudi higher education. Rather than functioning as a remedial fallback for linguistic deficit, translanguaging emerges as a constitutive practice through which teachers and learners co-construct meaning, negotiate identity, and promote linguistic equity. Across all measured dimensions, both students and instructors reported positive perceptions, particularly on comprehension ($M = 4.02\text{--}4.30$) and motivation ($M = 4.30$), confirming translanguaging's pedagogical centrality. Yet, students' ambivalence about its influence on English mastery ($M = 3.00$) reflects the persistent ideological weight of English-only norms in academic contexts. The following discussion interprets these quantitative trends through theoretical and practical lenses, advancing implications for pedagogy, policy, and global TESOL discourse.

5.1. Translanguaging as Ideological and Pedagogical Transformation

The results demonstrate that translanguaging is not merely a linguistic strategy but an ideological shift that redefines what counts as legitimate academic communication. The high mean scores on comprehension and conceptual linkage between English and Arabic ($M = 4.02\text{--}4.20$) align with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of mediation and García and Wei's (2014) conceptualization of translanguaging as a dynamic, meaning-making process. Instructors' even higher means ($M = 4.30\text{--}4.40$) on comprehension support and motivation underscore their perception of translanguaging as central to effective

instruction. These patterns validate Li's (2011) notion of the translanguaging space, wherein learners and teachers mobilize all linguistic resources to construct new epistemic identities.

However, students' lower confidence regarding translanguaging's impact on English acquisition reveals the ideological tension between bilingual flexibility and linguistic purity. This hesitation mirrors Sembiente and Tian's (2020) critique of English linguistic imperialism and Pennycook's (2021) observation that English dominance continues to shape learner ideologies. Quantitatively, the significant differences between students and instructors (Cohen's $d = 0.32\text{--}0.51$) reflect this ideological asymmetry: instructors increasingly view translanguaging as a resource, while students remain partially constrained by deficit-based perceptions.

This ideological divide also intersects with teacher identity and agency. Local instructors familiar with students' linguistic repertoires reported strategic Arabic use for scaffolding, whereas some expatriate faculty expressed discomfort, perceiving bilingual practices as undermining English immersion. This variation parallels Doiz and Lasagabaster's (2017) findings that teachers' linguistic biographies influence pedagogical orientation. The results collectively affirm that translanguaging, far from being a spontaneous coping mechanism, constitutes an intentional and professionally accountable pedagogy that enhances engagement and cognitive access. As Lee (2022) contends, translanguaging redefines TESOL professionalism by shifting authority from native-speaker expertise toward intercultural mediation and critical pedagogical agency.

5.2. Translanguaging, Equity, and Institutional Practice

Beyond cognition and engagement, the data highlight translanguaging's social dimension—its potential to promote equity and access within EMI. Students from public-school backgrounds reported greater reliance on Arabic mediation, suggesting that English-only instruction reproduces educational privilege. Translanguaging thus functions as an epistemic equalizer, enabling students with diverse linguistic capital to participate meaningfully in academic discourse. These findings corroborate Manan's (2024) and Sah and Kubota's (2022) arguments that bilingual mediation redistributes learning opportunities and challenges structural inequality in EMI systems.

Within the Saudi context, this pattern reflects the tension between global English policy and local linguistic realities. English-only EMI models, while intended to enhance international competitiveness, can inadvertently marginalize learners lacking prior English exposure. The significant instructor endorsement of translanguaging ($p < .05$) provides quantitative justification for adopting more inclusive bilingual frameworks. As Barnawi (2017) notes, sustainable EMI must reconcile internationalization goals with cultural and linguistic inclusivity. Aligning with Vision 2030, Saudi higher-education policy can integrate translanguaging-informed standards within accreditation and teaching evaluations to ensure equitable participation.

Translanguaging also extends the notion of justice beyond linguistic access toward institutional recognition. The results parallel Flores et al.'s (2020) idea of language architecture, which reimagines multilingualism as a structural form of equity rather than a pedagogical add-on. The empirical convergence between students' appreciation of comprehension support and instructors' strong endorsement indicates a gradual normalization of bilingual practice—a cultural shift from linguistic hierarchy toward communicative inclusivity. By positioning translanguaging as a form of linguistic citizenship, Saudi EMI institutions can advance both pedagogical quality and social justice within higher education.

5.3. Pedagogical and Curricular Implications

At the classroom level, the findings support the operationalization of translanguaging through structured bilingual scaffolding. Instructors can introduce disciplinary concepts in Arabic, facilitate collaborative discussions bilingually, and consolidate key learning outcomes in English. Such design-based alternation, advocated by Lin (2016), enhances comprehension without impeding English development. The consistently high mean values for comprehension and motivation affirm the pedagogical soundness of this model. Curriculum planners should similarly embed translanguaging principles in instructional materials—such as parallel glossaries, bilingual summaries, and dual-language assessments—to lower linguistic barriers, especially in technical and STEM disciplines. Empirical studies by Jiang and Zhang (2023) and Mazak and Carroll (2016) show that translanguaging-oriented curricula not only strengthen content mastery but also improve academic English proficiency. Within teacher education, training modules on critical language awareness and classroom translanguaging should become integral to TESOL certification. For non-Arabic-speaking instructors, orientation to local linguistic ecology is essential to manage bilingual classrooms confidently and prevent the perception of translanguaging as a threat to authority. Collaborative teacher–researcher partnerships, such as those proposed by Tian and Shepard-Carey (2020), can help institutionalize reflective translanguaging pedagogy across Gulf universities.

Ultimately, the Saudi EMI context contributes to the global repositioning of TESOL from a monolingual paradigm to a multilingual one. Translanguaging provides empirical and ethical justification for rethinking English instruction as a socially just practice. By validating students' full linguistic repertoires and professionalizing teachers' bilingual agency, this study advances TESOL's evolution toward a multilingual, inclusive pedagogy—one where linguistic diversity is not a challenge to overcome but a foundation for learning and belonging.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined translanguaging practices within Saudi Arabian English-Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms, comparing students' and instructors' perceptions to illuminate how bilingual practices shape teaching and learning. Both groups viewed translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical resource for bridging comprehension gaps, lowering anxiety, and fostering participation, though instructors demonstrated stronger endorsement and higher mean scores across all domains. This divergence highlights instructors' growing awareness of translanguaging's pedagogical potential and students' residual adherence to English-only ideologies that continue to influence EMI contexts.

By employing a large-scale comparative survey of 644 participants, this study contributes rare quantitative evidence to a field dominated by qualitative inquiry. The dual-perspective design broadens understanding of how translanguaging operates systemically within Gulf higher education, bridging a critical research gap in Global South scholarship. The findings reaffirm Vygotsky's (1978) concept of mediation and extend García and Wei's (2014) integrated repertoire model by demonstrating that translanguaging functions both as a cognitive scaffold and an act of ideological resistance against English-only norms. In this sense, translanguaging unites pedagogical pragmatism with linguistic justice, echoing current TESOL calls for inclusive and equitable multilingual education.

At the pedagogical and policy level, the results advocate for EMI frameworks that legitimize bilingual practices within Saudi higher education. Translanguaging-informed instruction aligned with Vision 2030 can enhance participation and equity without diminishing English proficiency. Teacher education programs, particularly for non-Arabic-

speaking instructors, should include training in translanguaging pedagogy and intercultural competence to cultivate teachers as multilingual mediators. Future research should employ longitudinal and mixed-method designs to explore how translanguaging evolves over time, influences learner identity, and reshapes EMI policy. Such inquiry will further position translanguaging as both pedagogical innovation and ethical practice, advancing TESOL toward a globally responsive and multilingual paradigm.

References:

1. Alasmari, Muhammad, Fawaz Qasem, Rashad Ahmed, and Muhammad Alrayes. 2022. "Bilingual Teachers' Translanguaging Practices and Ideologies in Online Classrooms in Saudi Arabia." *Heliyon* 8 (9). <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2022.e10537>
2. Alharbi, Majed Abdullah, and Abdulrahman Nasser Alqefari. 2025. "Innovative Translanguaging Strategies in Saudi Arabia: A Qualitative Analysis of EFL Saudi Teachers." *Innovation in Language Learning and Teaching*: 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2025.2552868>
3. Alharbi, Majed Abdullah, and Abdulrahman Nasser Alqefari. 2023. "Attitudinal Stance Toward Translanguaging in Saudi Arabia: A Mixed Method Case Study." *International Journal of Applied Linguistics* 33 (1): 47–65. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12448>
4. Barnawi, Osman. 2017. *Neoliberalism and English Language Education Policies in the Arabian Gulf*. Routledge.
5. Bojsen, Heidi, Petra Daryai-Hansen, Anne Holmen, and Karen Risager, eds. 2023. *Translanguaging and Epistemological Decentring in Higher Education and Research*. Channel View Publications.
6. Cenoz, Jasone. 2019. "Translanguaging Pedagogies and English as a Lingua Franca." *Language Teaching* 52 (1): 71–85. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000246>
7. Choi, Julie, and Kailin Liu. 2024. "Knowledge Building Through Collaborative, Translation and Translanguaging Practices." *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 23 (1): 141–156. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2021.1974866>
8. Creese, Angela, and Adrian Blackledge. 2010a. "Translanguaging in the Bilingual Classroom: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching?" *The Modern Language Journal* 94 (1): 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2009.00986.x>
9. Creese, Angela, and Adrian Blackledge. 2010b. "Translanguaging in the Bilingual Classroom: A Pedagogy for Learning and Teaching?" *The Modern Language Journal* 94 (1): 103–115. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12504>
10. Flores, Nelson, Jennifer Phuong, and Karla M. Venegas. 2020. "Technically an EL: The Production of Raciolinguistic Categories in a Dual Language School." *TESOL Quarterly* 54 (3): 629–651.
11. García, Ofelia. 2017. "Translanguaging in Schools: Subiendo y Bajando, Bajando y Subiendo as Afterword." *Journal of Language, Identity & Education* 16 (4): 256–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1329657>
12. García, Ofelia, and Tatyana Kleyn. 2016. *Translanguaging with Multilingual Students: Learning from Classroom Moments*. Routledge.
13. Hopkyns, Sarah, Wafa Zoghbor, and Peter John Hassall. 2021. "The Use of English and Linguistic Hybridity Among Emirati Millennials." *World Englishes* 40 (2): 176–190. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12506>
14. Hornberger, Nancy H., and Holly Link. 2012. "Translanguaging and Transnational Literacies in Multilingual Classrooms: A Biliteracy Lens." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 15 (3): 261–278. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2012.658016>

15. Jia, Wenyun, Xuehua Fu, and Jack Pun. 2023. "How Do EMI Lecturers' Translanguaging Perceptions Translate into Their Practice? A Multi-Case Study of Three Chinese Tertiary EMI Classes." *Sustainability* 15 (6): 4895.
<https://doi.org/10.3390/su15064895>
16. Jiang, Anne Li, and Lawrence Jun Zhang. 2023. "Understanding Knowledge Construction in a Chinese University EMI Classroom: A Translanguaging Perspective." *System* 114: 103024. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2023.103024>
17. Jiang, Jialei. 2025. "Emotional Landscape of Translingualism: Multilingual International Students Navigating Shame Through Translingual Digital Stories." *TESOL Quarterly* 59 (2): 730–754. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tesq.3341>
18. Karabay, Akmaral, and Naureen Durrani. 2024. "The Evolution of English Medium Instruction Research in Higher Education: A Bibliometric Study." *Education Sciences* 14 (9): 982. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14090982>
19. Lasagabaster, David. 2024. "English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the Basque Country." In *The Routledge Handbook of English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education*, 110–121. Routledge.
20. Lee, Jerry Won. 2022. "Translanguaging Research Methodologies." *Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* 1 (1): 100004. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rmal.2022.100004>
21. Li, Wei. 2011. "Moment Analysis and Translanguaging Space: Discursive Construction of Identities by Multilingual Chinese Youth in Britain." *Journal of Pragmatics* 43 (5): 1222–1235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pragma.2010.07.035>
22. Lin, Angel M.Y. 2016. *Language Across the Curriculum & CLIL in English as an Additional Language Contexts: Theory and Practice*. Springer.
23. Lu, Chaoqun, Michelle Mingyue Gu, and John Chi-Kin Lee. 2025. "A Systematic Review of Research on Translanguaging in EMI and CLIL Classrooms." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 22 (2): 1033–1053.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2023.2256775>
24. Macaro, Ernesto, Samantha Curle, Jack Pun, Jiangshan An, and Julie Dearden. 2018. "A Systematic Review of English Medium Instruction in Higher Education." *Language Teaching* 51 (1): 36–76. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000350>
25. Manan, Syed Abdul. 2024. "'English Is Like a Credit Card': The Workings of Neoliberal Governmentality in English Learning in Pakistan." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 45 (4): 987–1003.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1931251>
26. Mazak, Catherine M., and Kevin S. Carroll, eds. 2016. *Translanguaging in Higher Education: Beyond Monolingual Ideologies*. Multilingual Matters.
27. Muguruza, Beñat, Jasone Cenoz, and Durk Gorter. 2023. "Implementing Translanguaging Pedagogies in an English Medium Instruction Course." *International Journal of Multilingualism* 20 (2): 540–555.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2020.1822848>
28. Palmer, Deborah K., Ramón Antonio Martínez, Suzanne G. Mateus, and Kathryn Henderson. 2014. "Reframing the Debate on Language Separation: Toward a Vision for Translanguaging Pedagogies in the Dual Language Classroom." *The Modern Language Journal* 98 (3): 757–772. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12121>
29. Paulsrud, BethAnne, and Una Cunningham. 2025. "Parental Motives in English-Medium School Choice in Sweden: Linguistic Aspirations and Imagined Outcomes." In *Re-Envisioning English-Medium Instruction in K–12 Schools: Policy, Research and Practice*, 171–183. Springer.
30. Pennycook, Alastair. 2021. *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Re-Introduction*. Routledge.

31. Sah, Pramod K., and Ryuko Kubota. 2022. "Towards Critical Translanguaging: A Review of Literature on English as a Medium of Instruction in South Asia's School Education." *Asian Englishes* 24 (2): 132–146.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2022.2056796>
32. Sembiante, Sabrina. 2016. "Translanguaging and the Multilingual Turn: Epistemological Reconceptualization in the Fields of Language and Implications for Reframing Language in Curriculum Studies." *Curriculum Inquiry* 46 (1): 45–61. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03626784.2015.1133221>
33. Sembiante, Sabrina F., and Zhongfeng Tian. 2020. "The Need for Translanguaging in TESOL." In *Envisioning TESOL Through a Translanguaging Lens: Global Perspectives*, 43–66. Springer.
34. Severo, Cristine, Ashraf Abdelhay, and Sinfree Makoni. 2020. "Translanguaging in the Global South." *Scrutiny* 25 (1): 104–109.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/18125441.2020.1851014>
35. Sultana, Shaila. 2025. "Possible Challenges in Reimagining Bilingualism in English-Medium Private Higher Education in Bangladesh." In *Equity, Social Justice, and English Medium Instruction: Case Studies from Asia*, 185–206. Springer.
36. Tian, Zhongfeng, and Leah Shepard-Carey. 2020. "(Re)Imagining the Future of Translanguaging Pedagogies in TESOL Through Teacher–Researcher Collaboration." *TESOL Quarterly* 54 (4): 1131–1143. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48642913>
37. Vygotsky, Lev S. 1978. *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Harvard University Press.
38. Williams, Melanie. 2022. "Fifth Graders' Use of Gesture and Models When Translanguaging During a Content and Language Integrated Science Class in Hong Kong." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* 25 (4): 1304–1323. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1754752>
39. Yuan, Rui, and Min Yang. 2023. "Towards an Understanding of Translanguaging in EMI Teacher Education Classrooms." *Language Teaching Research* 27 (4): 884–906. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168820964123>
40. Zheng, Bingjie. 2021. "Translanguaging in a Chinese Immersion Classroom: An Ecological Examination of Instructional Discourses." *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2018.1561642>

Appendix-I: Questionnaire

Section A: Demographic Information

1. What is your role in the university?
2. What is your gender?
3. What is your age range?
4. What is your college/discipline?
5. What is your first language?
6. How would you describe your English proficiency?
7. What is your level of study/teaching?
8. How many years have you studied/used English as a medium of instruction?
9. Have you previously experienced translanguaging-based instruction?
10. How often do you use both English and Arabic in academic settings?

Section B: Student Perceptions of Translanguaging

1. Using Arabic in EMI classes helps me understand course content.
2. Translanguaging helps me connect English concepts with Arabic knowledge.

3. Using Arabic in class reduces my anxiety during learning.
4. Translanguaging helps me express ideas more clearly.
5. Using Arabic makes me more willing to participate in class discussions.
6. Translanguaging improves my motivation to learn in EMI courses.
7. Translanguaging helps me retain information better.
8. Using Arabic helps clarify complex terminology.
9. Using Arabic may negatively affect my English language development.
10. Overall, translanguaging is helpful in EMI classrooms.

Section C: Instructor Translanguaging Beliefs and Practices

1. Translanguaging helps support students' comprehension of EMI content.
2. Allowing some Arabic use in class increases student motivation.
3. Translanguaging helps improve students' retention of course material.
4. Using Arabic helps clarify technical or discipline-specific vocabulary.
5. I use Arabic strategically to scaffold learning when needed.
6. Students engage more actively when translanguaging is allowed.
7. Translanguaging supports student confidence in EMI classrooms.
8. Separating English and Arabic strictly is not necessary for effective learning.
9. I am concerned students may overdepend on Arabic.
10. Overall, translanguaging enriches the learning experience in EMI classrooms.

Section D: Shared Student–Instructor Items

1. Translanguaging helps bridge cultural and identity connections in EMI classes.
2. Translanguaging should be recognized officially in university academic policy.
3. Using Arabic in EMI reduces English exposure.
4. I feel comfortable using both Arabic and English for learning/teaching.
5. Translanguaging serves as a transitional aid toward mastery of academic English.