



Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Translanguaging in AI-Enhanced ESL Classrooms

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study examined how pre-service English teachers perceive translanguaging in artificial intelligence (AI)-enhanced ESL classrooms in the Philippines. Although Philippine classrooms are inherently multilingual, English-only policies still dominate instruction, often limiting learners' access to their full linguistic repertoire. Anchored in Translanguaging Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model, the study explored prevailing teacher perceptions of translanguaging, how AI tools shape these perceptions, and the challenges and opportunities of AI-supported translanguaging. Data were gathered through a focus group discussion with five graduating pre-service teachers from a Philippine teacher-education university who had completed practice teaching. Thematic analysis showed that participants perceived translanguaging positively, describing it as a strategy that supports comprehension and, in their view, builds learner confidence, particularly for learners with lower English proficiency, although their support was conditional on task difficulty and learner proficiency. AI tools such as ChatGPT were seen as useful for simplifying instructions and bridging language gaps, but participants also raised concerns about student over-reliance, prompting difficulties, and threats to teacher relevance. The findings, drawn from a single focus group at one institution, point to the need for structured AI-literacy training and clear institutional policies to guide inclusive, technology-supported language pedagogy.

Introduction

Philippine classrooms are inherently multilingual, yet many English as a Second Language (ESL) settings continue to enforce rigid monolingual policies that discourage the use of students' first languages, creating a mismatch between learners' linguistic identities and classroom practice (Burton & Rajendram, 2019; Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). When English is treated as the sole legitimate medium of instruction, students are often cut off from the prior knowledge and linguistic resources embedded in their other languages. Pre-service teachers trained within these monolingual frameworks may remain unaware of, or resistant to, the benefits of translanguaging, limiting their readiness to support linguistically diverse learners.

This tension is especially pronounced in the Philippines, a country with well over a hundred languages, where the medium-of-instruction landscape has shifted repeatedly over the past two decades. Basic education policy has, since the introduction of Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) under the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533), formally recognized learners' first languages as a medium of instruction in the early grades, before English and Filipino take over as the primary media of

instruction in later grades and, almost exclusively, in higher education. Teacher-education programs themselves, including the one in which this study was situated, are conducted predominantly in English, and licensure examinations for future teachers are administered in English as well. Pre-service teachers therefore train within, and are certified through, an English-medium system even as the basic-education classrooms they will enter remain linguistically diverse, and even as national policy has itself endorsed the pedagogical use of learners' first languages. This layered and at times contradictory policy environment forms an important part of the backdrop against which the present study's participants describe their translanguaging practice, and it is revisited in the discussion of findings below.

Translanguaging differs from code-switching in that it does not treat a speaker's languages as separate systems but as a single, integrated linguistic repertoire strategically drawn upon to construct meaning and express identity (Kachru et al., 2006; García & Li Wei, 2014, as cited in Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Pedagogical translanguaging maximizes this repertoire as a resource for learning rather than suppressing it (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021), reinforcing the need to reexamine both pre-service teacher training and classroom language policy.

Alongside this pedagogical shift, artificial intelligence (AI) is reshaping ESL instruction through intelligent tutoring systems, translation applications, and speech recognition tools that can support multilingual scaffolding and real-time feedback across languages (Tai, 2024a). Yet how pre-service teachers interpret and are prepared to use these tools in ways that promote rather than hinder linguistic diversity remains underexplored.

A growing body of research associates translanguaging with increased engagement, deeper comprehension of complex ideas, greater learner confidence, and reduced language anxiety (Rabbidge, 2019; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Liando et al., 2023). It affords learners autonomy over how they draw on their first language to acquire English, positioning them as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients (Lin & Leung, 2024; Yusri et al., 2022). As future educators, pre-service teachers' understanding of translanguaging shapes whether such benefits are realized or foreclosed in practice.

For clarity, this study defines translanguaging as the dynamic, flexible use of a multilingual speaker's full linguistic repertoire rather than a mechanical switch between separate codes; AI as the range of tools, such as chatbots, translation applications, and writing assistants, that mediate language input and output in the classroom; and ESL classroom as the Philippine English-as-a-Second-Language setting in which these practices converge.

Guided by these intersecting concerns, this study investigated pre-service teachers' perceptions of translanguaging practices in AI-enhanced ESL classrooms, with the aim of informing inclusive, innovative, and culturally responsive teaching strategy. Specifically, it sought to answer:

What are the prevailing perceptions of pre-service teachers toward translanguaging practices?

How does the presence of AI tools influence their perceptions of translanguaging?

What challenges and opportunities do pre-service teachers perceive in applying AI-supported translanguaging strategies? and

How can these findings inform the development of inclusive and innovative language pedagogies?

This inquiry responds to a specific gap in the literature: while translanguaging has attracted growing scholarly attention, and while a separate body of work has begun to examine generative AI in language learning, studies that treat pre-service teachers and AI-mediated translanguaging together remain scarce, particularly in the Philippine context. It is also a timely inquiry: the practicum experiences discussed by participants took place while generative AI tools were becoming widely available to Philippine students and teachers alike, meaning this cohort of pre-service teachers is among the first to have formed their views on translanguaging and their views on AI concurrently, rather than encountering AI as a later addition to an

already-settled pedagogical stance. By examining how future educators in a multilingual, AI-adopting country understand, accept, and anticipate implementing translanguaging alongside AI tools, this study aims to contribute context-specific insight that can inform teacher-education curricula, institutional AI policy, and future research designs in comparable settings.

The study was purposively scoped to graduating pre-service teachers from the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English program at a Philippine teacher-education university who had completed practice teaching. This focus permitted rich, context-sensitive insight into how future educators who had already applied theoretical knowledge in real classrooms conceptualize translanguaging and AI, though it also means the findings reflect perceptions rather than observed classroom behavior, and cannot be generalized beyond this single institutional setting. Because the sample was limited to one focus group at one university, the findings should be read as an initial, context-sensitive account of how this particular cohort of future English teachers is thinking through translanguaging and AI, rather than as a representative measure of pre-service teacher opinion nationally.

Literature Review

The scholarship on translanguaging in ESL contexts largely affirms its transformative potential even as a gap persists between theory and classroom implementation. Some instructors treat translanguaging merely as a temporary scaffold toward English proficiency rather than a legitimate multilingual pedagogy (Burton & Rajendram, 2019), while others show how it deepens engagement with complex texts and broadens communicative repertoires (García, 2009; Canagarajah, 2011). Studies on classroom interaction (Lin & Leung, 2024), interactional competence (Tai & Dai, 2024), and inclusive English-medium instruction (Tai, 2022, 2024b) collectively point to translanguaging as a resource for belonging, agency, and responsive teaching.

Among pre-service teachers specifically, studies in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Turkey report largely favorable attitudes toward translanguaging as a means of easing comprehension, alleviating anxiety, and supporting both spoken and written English development (Bongcarawan & Capal, 2024; Lestari et al., 2022; Ulum, 2024; Yolanda et al., 2024). Even so, some future teachers view it only as a scaffold rather than a legitimate pedagogy in its own right (Santoso & Hamied, 2022; Gervacio & Miranda, 2023), and institutional or national policies have yet to formally recognize the practice in tertiary and teacher-education settings, even where basic-education policy has (Gervacio & Miranda, 2023). Within the Philippines specifically, translanguaging has been documented as a pedagogical resource used by in-service secondary English teachers (Macawile & Plata, 2022), suggesting that the graduating pre-service teachers in the present study are entering a profession in which the practice, while not yet formally sanctioned in teacher-education policy, is already informally established among practitioners. Researchers converge on the need for structured teacher training that gives pre-service teachers hands-on opportunities to practice translanguaging (Tian, 2020, as cited in Tian & Zhang-Wu, 2022; Ulum, 2024).

AI's role in this landscape is similarly double-edged. AI tools personalize instruction according to learners' needs and linguistic backgrounds (Kushmar et al., 2022) and can support pronunciation, fluency practice, and corrective feedback at a scale human teachers cannot always match. More broadly, generative AI tools are increasingly discussed as resources across education generally, from drafting instructional materials to supporting differentiated learning (Butarbutar, 2024; Feuerriegel et al., 2024; Khalilova et al., 2025; Ng et al., 2025), a trend that provides the wider backdrop against which participants' more specific, translanguaging-focused use of AI in this study should be read. Yet infrastructural gaps, limited teacher training, and inadequate technical support remain significant barriers, particularly in under-resourced contexts, and scholars caution that human-centric skills such as critical thinking and creativity must not be displaced by algorithmic instruction.

Teacher readiness further depends on digital competence, understood as the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to leverage technology meaningfully (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022). Philippine studies suggest that teacher-education stakeholders feel prepared to select digital resources but often lack facility with learning management systems and more advanced technologies (Alda et al., 2020), while public-school teachers show uneven competence across digital literacy, communication, and problem-solving domains (Lagos & Nabos, 2023; Camarillo, 2024). This uneven competence is not confined to the Philippines: nationwide and cross-context studies elsewhere report similarly mixed readiness among both pre-service and in-service teachers (Alnasib, 2023; Althubyani, 2024; Nagel, 2021). Programs that treat technology as a stand-alone topic, rather than embedding it across the curriculum, appear insufficient to prepare teachers for digitally mediated classrooms (Falloon, 2020; Fernández-Batanero et al., 2022).

The interplay between translanguaging and AI is itself an emerging area of inquiry. Generative AI has been found to open a translanguaging space that raises learners' cognitive engagement while providing linguistic and semiotic resources (Yang & Lin, 2025), even as the same tools risk fostering over-reliance, plagiarism, and biased output. AI systems also remain limited in their support for minority and regional languages (Godwin-Jones, 2025), underscoring the need for continued human oversight as these technologies evolve (Tzirides, 2021).

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

The study was anchored in Translanguaging Theory and the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM). Translanguaging Theory holds that multilingual speakers draw from a single, integrated linguistic repertoire rather than from separate language systems, selectively deploying linguistic features to make meaning across communicative situations; in ESL classrooms, it invites teachers to validate students' full linguistic backgrounds as assets for learning. TAM (Davis, 1989), one of the most widely applied frameworks for understanding technology adoption (Silva, 2015), holds that acceptance is driven by perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Together, these frameworks offer a lens for understanding how pre-service teachers' beliefs about translanguaging interact with their readiness to adopt AI tools in ways that support inclusive, multilingual pedagogy.

TAM is ordinarily a quantitative, variable-based model; here, however, perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use were not measured through survey instruments or tested as statistical predictors of adoption; rather, the two constructs were used interpretively, as sensitizing concepts for reading and organizing participants' qualitative accounts of why particular AI tools did or did not appeal to them as teaching aids. In practice, perceived usefulness is reflected in the analysis wherever participants described AI as saving instructional time, simplifying language for learners, or bridging dialectal gaps, while perceived ease of use is reflected wherever they described straightforward prompting practices as yielding usable output, or, conversely, described vague or compounded prompts as producing poor results. Participants' hesitations, such as concerns about unreliable output, unfamiliar dialects, and threats to their own professional relevance, are read as factors that could weaken perceived usefulness or ease of use even amid general enthusiasm. TAM therefore functions in this study as an interpretive lens for making sense of the Results, not as a causal model whose constructs were empirically tested or whose predictive relationships were statistically confirmed.

Within this framework, perceptions of translanguaging sit at the center of a broader conceptual model linking three dimensions: the perceived usefulness of AI tools (drawing on TAM), perceived challenges (such as limited training or institutional resistance to non-English instruction), and perceived opportunities (such as improved engagement and cultural affirmation). This model is offered as an interpretive heuristic for organizing the study's inquiry and its qualitative findings, and not as a causal structure whose relationships were

empirically tested; any connections drawn among these dimensions in the Results and Discussion describe patterns suggested by participants' accounts rather than measured effects. Understood this way, the three dimensions were expected to inform implications for inclusive and innovative pedagogy, providing a basis for teacher-education programs, curriculum developers, and policymakers to consider responsive ESL strategies for the AI era.

Methodology

This study employed an exploratory qualitative research design, appropriate when a phenomenon is not yet well understood and when the goal is to surface emerging patterns rather than to test existing theory (Stebbins, 2001). Given the rapidly evolving role of AI in language education and the growing recognition of translanguaging as a tool for inclusivity, the design allowed participants' lived experiences and reflections to be examined inductively through semi-structured, focus-group-based data collection.

The study was conducted in a public, research-oriented, coeducational teacher education university in the Philippines. It was selected for its established role in teacher education and its active engagement with multilingualism, language policy, and digital innovation.

Using purposive sampling, five graduating pre-service teachers from the Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English program, who had completed practice teaching or a related field-study course, took part in a single focus group discussion (FGD). Eligibility required that participants be fourth-year English majors who had completed or were actively engaged in practice teaching, and who were willing to take part in data-collection activities. Because the researchers were themselves enrolled at the same institution, rapport with participants was enhanced, though the researchers remained attentive to reflexivity and professional boundaries throughout data collection; this pre-existing relationship is nonetheless revisited as a limitation below, since it may also have shaped how freely or guardedly participants spoke.

The five participants brought a varied range of practicum contexts to the discussion. Two had completed practice teaching in public secondary schools where they handled both regular and so-called "recovery" sections for learners identified as struggling in English; one had been placed in a public school specializing in the sciences, where students were expected to already have strong English proficiency; and two had additionally completed an international teaching practicum in an English-as-a-Foreign-Language (EFL) setting in Thailand, working alongside a local co-teacher. This diversity of placements meant that participants could compare translanguaging and AI use across markedly different linguistic and institutional conditions within a single discussion. Because English holds a different institutional status in these two settings (an official second language embedded in Philippine schooling versus a foreign language taught alongside a dominant local language in Thailand), findings below are explicitly identified as drawing on the Philippine ESL practicum experience unless a participant's Thailand EFL practicum is specifically named; the two are not treated as interchangeable evidence for the same claim.

Data collection followed an input-process-output sequence (Table 1): an FGD guide was drafted from the literature on translanguaging, AI in ESL, and inclusive pedagogy; refined through expert validation by specialists in translanguaging, ESL pedagogy, and AI in education for clarity, relevance, and cultural sensitivity; and then used, following informed consent, to conduct a single recorded and transcribed FGD organized around four question blocks corresponding to the study's four research questions. The resulting transcript was thematically coded, interpreted through the study's theoretical lens, and used to generate practice-oriented recommendations.

Table 1. Input-Process-Output Model of the Research Study

Input	Process	Output
Literature on translanguaging, AI in ESL, inclusive pedagogy, and institutional context	Craft open-ended FGD questions to explore attitudes, beliefs, and experiences	Draft FGD guide
Draft guide; expert feedback	Refine for clarity, alignment, and contextual sensitivity	Expert-validated FGD protocol
List of eligible pre-service ESL teachers	Purposive sampling; informed consent	List of consented participants
Validated FGD guide; consented participants	Conduct, record, and transcribe the FGD	Verbatim transcript
FGD transcript	Thematic analysis: coding and theme generation	Emergent themes on perceptions, AI influence, and translanguaging practice
Coded themes; literature; researcher memos	Interpret data through the study's theoretical lens	Contextualized understanding of attitudes and ESL implications
Synthesized findings; institutional context	Draft practice-oriented recommendations	Contextualized, evidence-based recommendations for inclusive ESL practice

The data collected were analyzed using a systematic qualitative approach guided by Creswell (2015): verbatim transcription and organization of the data; iterative reading for familiarization; open, inductive coding to identify recurring statements and concepts; interpretation of emergent codes through Translanguaging Theory, inclusive pedagogy, and critical perspectives on AI in education; and presentation of findings as a thematic narrative supported by direct participant quotations. NotebookLM (Google) assisted with organizing the volume of textual data generated from the FGD, though all themes and codes were manually verified by the researchers for accuracy.

The researchers served simultaneously as instrument designers, facilitators, data collectors, and analysts. To establish credibility, dependability, and authenticity, four complementary validation strategies were used: expert validation of the FGD guide by specialists in translanguaging, ESL pedagogy, and AI in education; member checking of preliminary codes and themes with participants; triangulation of FGD data against field notes and theoretical literature; and intercoding with a peer researcher to minimize bias and strengthen analytical rigor (Lincoln & Guba, 1994).

Ethical safeguards included voluntary participation, informed consent, the right to withdraw without penalty, anonymized and securely stored data, and a nonjudgmental space that allowed participants to decline sensitive questions. Institutional permission was secured prior to data collection, and findings were used strictly for academic purposes.

Results and Discussion

Unless otherwise noted, the accounts below reflect participants' Philippine ESL practicum experience; where a participant instead drew on her additional EFL practicum in Thailand, this is identified explicitly, since the two settings differ in the institutional status of English and could reasonably support different translanguaging norms.

Prevailing Perceptions of Translanguaging

Across the discussion, pre-service teachers held nuanced but predominantly positive views of translanguaging, foregrounding comprehension over literal translation. As one participant explained, translanguaging's "main use is for intelligibility... not just mere translation but rather [focused] on comprehension" (Participant 4). Another described it as "the process of using the language that is more comfortable [for] the students" (Participant 3). This comprehension-first framing treats meaning-making, rather than adherence to linguistic boundaries, as the anchor for language pedagogy. Participants also folded emergent, popular-culture references such as memes and trending content into their practice, suggesting that they understood translanguaging as culturally responsive as well as linguistically flexible.

Support for student translanguaging was conditional rather than unconditional. Participants allowed first-language (L1) use for cognitively demanding tasks but expected English for routine participation, illustrating a distinction between more limited and more expansive uses of translanguaging within the same classroom. One participant summarized this balancing act: "I am allowing them to switch their language... for them to have a recitation, for them to share their knowledge... But for easy questions and personal questions, I am encouraging them to share their answers in English" (Participant 1). Context also mattered within the Philippine ESL setting: participants were more permissive in "recovery" classes serving struggling learners than in regular classes, and stricter in written tasks than in speech, since writing affords more time to formulate an English response. One participant who had also completed her international EFL practicum in Thailand described feeling comfortable when learners there used their native language, but adopting a stricter, English-only stance upon returning to her Philippine ESL cooperating classroom, illustrating how institutional expectations tied to a setting's ESL or EFL status, and not only individual pedagogical belief, shape translanguaging practice.

Nearly all participants believed that L1 use supports rather than hinders English learning, primarily by lowering what they, drawing implicitly on the affective-filter concept (Krashen, 1982), described as learner anxiety, and by building confidence. As one put it, "L1 helps not only with the affective filter but also... eases our students into slowly transitioning, slowly practicing, slowly becoming more confident with using the English language" (Participant 2). Another noted that strict English-only policies could backfire: "if you always impose on them that [it should always be] English, English, English, they will be more shy... and [they will grow more distant from you]" (Participant 1). Participants' accounts here describe their own perceptions of L1 use rather than a measured learning outcome; participants themselves also cautioned that L1 support should not fully replace English practice.

Comfort with future use of translanguaging was generally high but conditioned on student proficiency and the availability of training. Several participants described translanguaging as a strategy that eases both teaching and learning, consistent with Lin and Leung's (2024) claim that it scaffolds instruction and empowers students to co-construct meaning. As one participant explained, "I would first assess the proficiency level of my students" before deciding how much translanguaging to use (Participant 3), while another cautioned that unregulated L1 use risked "babying" students and slowing their English development. Participants also called for greater methodological clarity, noting that a lack of formal training left them uncertain about appropriate parameters, a concern also raised by Santoso and Hamied (2022). Taken as a whole, these four sub-themes suggest that the pre-service teachers in this focus group did not treat translanguaging as an all-or-nothing policy but as a graduated resource: more freely used for difficult content, oral participation, and lower-proficiency or recovery-class learners, and more tightly restricted for routine questions, written output, and already-proficient sections. This graduated stance is itself a form of pedagogical reasoning, even in the absence of formal training, and suggests that these particular pre-service teachers already bring a foundation of practical intuition that teacher-education programs could build on, rather than a blank slate.

Influence of AI Tools on Perceptions of Translanguaging

Several participants described AI tools, especially ChatGPT, as facilitators of language simplification and comprehension. Participants used AI to shorten and “chunk” instructions, tailor language to grade level, and reflect on their own instructional writing, consistent with AI’s capacity for personalized, differentiated support (Kushmar et al., 2022; Baidoo-Anu & Ansah, 2023). One participant explained asking ChatGPT “how will a grade 6 student... understand my instructions,” using its feedback to make her own directions “a little lighter” (Participant 4). AI also helped teachers refine their own language use: “they [also] give recommendations. They do not just revise your input” (Participant 3), and, according to one participant, bridge dialectal gaps by translating instructions into Chavacano, Cebuano, or Ilocano for learners more comfortable in those languages. Several participants further valued AI for saving time on tasks such as generating rubrics, definitions, and example sentences, consistent with research on AI-enabled efficiency gains in teaching (Mittal et al., 2024).

These benefits were counterbalanced by concerns about reliance and erosion of learning. At least two participants described observing students submitting AI-generated essays and answers with no evident editing: work that was “literally untouched... directly lifted from the AI” (Participant 4), prompting disappointment and, in several cases, a refusal to record such work and a requirement to redo it independently. This resonates with recognized risks of AI-enabled academic dishonesty (Ayala-Pazmiño, 2023) and reinforces the call for stronger teacher guidance over student AI use (Yang & Lin, 2025). Participants also described the effectiveness of AI as highly sensitive to prompt quality, noting that vague or compounded prompts produced inaccurate or “connected” responses carried over from earlier questions; sound prompting practice (simple, direct language, clear context, and periodic refreshing of the AI’s memory) was seen as essential (Holmes & Miao, 2023), consistent with AI’s documented difficulty interpreting nuanced or ambiguous input (Su & Yang, 2023).

A more unsettling theme concerned teacher identity. One participant admitted that AI’s ability to simplify instructions more effectively than she could “actually poses [a] threat... if the ChatGPT could do this, [what use am I] in the future?” (Participant 4). Another participant acknowledged AI’s limits in real-time, multilingual spoken interaction across dialects unfamiliar to the teacher: “when it comes to teaching... it would be hard for me as a teacher to address” unfamiliar dialects (Participant 1), echoing Godwin-Jones’s (2025) observation that many regional languages remain poorly supported by mainstream AI systems. Several participants further raised ethical concerns about students generating complete answers rather than using AI solely for translation or comprehension support, a distinction they treated as the line between acceptable and unacceptable AI use.

These reflections on teacher identity are worth dwelling on, because they surfaced unprompted from more than one participant rather than in response to a direct question about AI replacing teachers. The unease appears to stem less from AI’s raw capability than from its speed: where a teacher revises instructions through trial and error across a class term, AI returns an already-simplified version in seconds, compressing a process that participants had assumed was a marker of pedagogical skill. Read through the lens of TAM, this pattern suggests that a high perceived usefulness of AI’s simplification function does not, on its own, translate into straightforward acceptance: for these participants, the same capability that made AI useful also unsettled their sense of professional value, qualifying what a purely usefulness-driven account of adoption would predict. Seen in this light, participants’ discomfort looks less like a sign that AI is displacing teachers and more like a prompt for teacher-education programs to make explicit, early, what AI can and cannot do, so that pre-service teachers frame these tools as instruments they direct rather than benchmarks they are measured against.

Challenges and Opportunities of AI-Supported Translanguaging

Beyond the immediate classroom, participants identified broader challenges: cognitive offloading and declining critical thinking associated with habitual AI use, a concern consistent

with emerging evidence linking frequent AI use to reduced independent reasoning (Gerlich, 2025); the accuracy and cultural relevance of AI output, which sometimes required local adaptation or independent verification; one participant described cross-checking AI-suggested resources “so I can counter-check if [what it says is] tama”, i.e., correct (Participant 3); and pedagogical-ethical dilemmas around “babying” students, unequal access to devices and connectivity, and the absence of formal translanguaging training. As one participant put it, “we don’t really have training on translanguaging, so we just guess how to use it” (Participant 4). Participants also flagged unequal access to devices and stable internet connectivity as a structural constraint that could turn AI-supported translanguaging into a privilege available only to some learners, a concern consistent with broader reports of infrastructural barriers to technology integration in Philippine public schools (Ballano et al., 2022). Left unaddressed, this access gap risks widening rather than narrowing the very inclusion gap that translanguaging and AI are meant to close.

At the same time, participants saw considerable opportunity in AI-supported translanguaging: enhanced comprehension and intelligibility through structured, chunked instructions; participants associated AI-mediated L1 translation with boosted student confidence and participation, which they attributed to lower anxiety; and improved teacher efficiency through faster rubric-building, translation, and grammar checking. Taken together, participants’ accounts suggest that AI-supported translanguaging is neither uniformly beneficial nor uniformly risky in their perception, but contingent on how deliberately teachers scaffold its use. Time efficiency was a recurring thread across otherwise divergent views: participants repeatedly described AI as freeing up planning time that could then be redirected toward addressing individual learners’ needs, echoing the argument that automating routine instructional tasks allows teachers to focus more attention on students themselves rather than on materials preparation (Mittal et al., 2024). At the same time, several participants were careful to frame this efficiency as a means to an end rather than a substitute for professional judgment, noting that AI-generated suggestions still required a teacher’s review before being used with students.

Several participants also singled out grammar- and integrity-checking tools, such as Grammarly and Turnitin, as a distinct and less contested category of AI support: because these tools refine rather than generate content, participants treated them as acceptable even when they were cautious about generative chatbots. “It saves me a lot of time because I don’t need to start from scratch,” one participant said of using AI to draft a rubric before editing it herself (Participant 2). This distinction between AI as a checking or refining tool versus AI as a generating tool recurred often enough across the discussion that it functioned, in effect, as participants’ own working policy for what counted as legitimate use, well before any of them had encountered a formal institutional guideline.

Implications for Inclusive and Innovative Language Pedagogy

Directly addressing RQ4 (how these findings can inform inclusive and innovative language pedagogy), the recommendations below translate the challenges and opportunities identified above (RQ3) into practice-oriented implications, and extend both the graduated, context-sensitive stance toward translanguaging documented under RQ1 and the perceived-usefulness-and-ease-of-use dynamics documented under RQ2. They are offered as implications suggested by this small, single-site sample for further discussion and testing, not as policies or interventions validated by the study itself.

Several participants converged on the need for comprehensive AI-literacy training that goes beyond brief seminars to full coursework covering the ethical and pedagogical use of generative AI, grammar- and plagiarism-detection tools, and effective prompting technique, alongside exposure to a wider range of AI tools and hands-on practice distinguishing AI-generated from human-produced work (Basilotta-Gómez-Pablos et al., 2022; Burkhanov & Khamidova, 2025). As one participant argued, teacher-education programs should “include a

full course... [not just] training [for] one week or [a few] days about digital and AI literacy” (Participant 4). This recommendation follows directly from the prompting difficulties and the absence of formal translanguaging training that participants raised under RQ3, above.

Participants also called for clear, written institutional policies that regulate rather than prohibit AI use, covering declaration of AI use with attached prompts, thresholds for acceptable AI-assisted content, and differentiated rules that allow more flexibility for spoken translanguaging than for written output, so that ethical maximization, rather than outright restriction, can help preserve students’ critical thinking (Ozer, 2024; Wu, 2023; Okaiyeto et al., 2023). These are proposed directions for institutional discussion, not policies this study has itself validated. Finally, participants recommended contextualized, diagnostic-led application: using entry assessments to determine when translanguaging and AI support are warranted (e.g., in recovery classes versus already-proficient sections), paired with reliable assessment tools such as rubrics and observation logs to verify that AI-supported instruction translates into genuine learning gains rather than mere compliance (Owan et al., 2023). This diagnostic, proficiency-calibrated approach mirrors the graduated stance toward translanguaging itself that participants described under RQ1, extending it from a classroom heuristic into a proposed basis for institutional practice.

Conclusion

Across the four research questions on perception, AI influence, challenges and opportunities, and implications, a single pattern recurs: participants consistently distinguished between AI or translanguaging used to support a learner’s own thinking and AI or translanguaging used to bypass it. Every instance of enthusiasm in the data (comprehension, confidence, efficiency) was paired with a corresponding caution (over-reliance, erosion of learning, threatened teacher identity) anchored in that same distinction. This suggests that, for this cohort at least, future training and policy need not treat translanguaging and AI as separate agendas requiring separate rules, but could instead be organized around this one shared principle of learner-owned versus learner-bypassed language use.

The pre-service teachers in this study viewed translanguaging as a valuable, comprehension-driven strategy that they associated with lower anxiety and greater confidence, particularly for learners with lower English proficiency, though their support remained conditional on task complexity, student proficiency, and the goal of developing English fluency. AI tools were seen by participants as powerful facilitators of language simplification, comprehension, and instructional efficiency, yet participants voiced considerable concern about student over-reliance, erosion of critical thinking, prompting difficulties, and threats to their own professional relevance. Both translanguaging and AI use were understood by these participants not as unconditional goods but as strategies requiring discernment, contextual judgment, and clear boundaries.

These findings point to three coordinated efforts that could support inclusive, innovative ESL pedagogy in the AI era. They are meant as implications for further discussion, not as tested recommendations: (1) embedding comprehensive AI literacy, including ethical use, effective prompting, and AI-detection skills, within teacher-education curricula rather than relegating it to short seminars; (2) establishing clear, written institutional policies that regulate rather than prohibit AI use, differentiate between oral and written contexts, and require transparency such as declaration of AI use; and (3) adopting contextualized, diagnostic-led application of translanguaging and AI support, calibrated to learners’ proficiency and evaluated through reliable assessment tools such as rubrics and observation logs. One illustrative, non-prescriptive form these implications could take is a short declaration statement attached to student work that names any AI tool used and the prompts submitted, a modest cap on the proportion of AI-assisted content permitted in a given output before resubmission is required, and a differentiated rule set that is more permissive of AI-supported translanguaging in spoken,

formative activities than in graded written work; these are starting points for institutional discussion, not mechanisms the study has tested or validated. None of these mechanisms is intended to police AI out of the classroom; rather, each is meant to keep the locus of learning with the student while still allowing teachers and learners to draw on AI's perceived strengths in simplification, translation, and feedback.

Several limitations qualify these findings and should guide how they are read. First, data come from a single focus group discussion; this format captures a shared conversational moment rather than repeated or triangulated accounts, and group dynamics may have led some participants to align their responses with more vocal peers or with a perceived group consensus, a form of social desirability and group influence common to FGDs. Second, the sample comprised only five participants from one teacher-education institution, so the findings cannot be assumed to generalize to the broader population of pre-service or in-service teachers, nor even to other cohorts at the same institution. Third, because the researchers were themselves enrolled at the same institution as participants and shared pre-existing rapport with them, responses may have been shaped by this researcher-participant relationship despite the reflexive safeguards described in the Methodology. Fourth, the study relies entirely on participants' self-reported perceptions gathered through a single retrospective conversation rather than on observed classroom practice, so claims here describe what participants said they believe or do, not verified classroom behavior. Fifth, participants' AI experience centered mainly on a limited range of general-purpose tools, principally ChatGPT, alongside grammar- and integrity-checking tools such as Grammarly and Turnitin; the rapidly evolving nature of AI technology means this range, and participants' views of it, may not reflect the fuller and fast-changing landscape of AI tools now available for language teaching. Future research would benefit from multi-institutional samples, classroom observation, and longitudinal designs that track how these perceptions translate into sustained teaching practice. Nonetheless, the convergence between what participants said in this focus group and the concerns already documented in the broader literature on AI and language education suggests that the tensions identified here are unlikely to be idiosyncratic to this single site, and are worth testing across a wider range of teacher-education contexts. It is also worth noting that, as an exploratory study, this research prioritized depth of insight over breadth of measurement: a single, carefully validated and member-checked focus group was chosen over a larger but more superficial survey instrument, on the premise that rich, contextualized accounts of perception are a necessary first step before broader, more generalizable instruments can be meaningfully designed and validated for this population.

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