

Translanguaging as an Emerging Approach to English Language Teaching: Teachers' Perspectives

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Abstract:

The rapid societal, technological, and educational changes of the 21st century have led to significant shifts in pedagogical approaches across disciplines, including English language teaching, where a substantial transition towards learner-centred practices has emerged. At the same time, many of the innovative approaches to foreign language instruction remain relatively unfamiliar to teachers. The present paper deals with one of these approaches, specifically translanguaging, aiming to introduce it to teachers and to raise their awareness of its importance to language education. In pursuit of that purpose, the article provides a comprehensive description of the approach and its benefits for the EFL classroom, among which the enhancement of intercultural communication. It also intends to determine the extent of teachers' familiarity with translanguaging and to examine their perspectives on it through a questionnaire conducted among English language teachers in Republic of Moldova. The findings indicated that although many teachers were not acquainted with translanguaging, they demonstrated openness to learning more about it and, having been familiarised with it through the informative and exploratory items of the questionnaire, they could perceive it as beneficial. On the other hand, the study showed that the EFL teachers who used translanguaging in their teaching practice endorsed its implementation in the classroom while recognising the necessity of being properly informed about both its strength and limitations in order to use it effectively and attain the expected results.

Keywords: translanguaging, learner-centred approach, English language teaching, EFL classroom, intercultural communication

Introduction

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English language teaching has considerably changed in recent years, being adapted to the evolving needs of the 21st-century learner. On the one hand, it has increasingly integrated technology and artificial intelligence, which facilitate differentiated instruction and make learning more interactive and engaging. On the other hand, it has undergone a profound shift in pedagogical approaches. Learner-centred approaches such as Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), Project-Based Learning (PBL), Blended Learning, and Flipped Classroom have gradually replaced traditional, more directive approaches. The present study deals with one of the innovative approaches that has lately emerged in English language teaching, namely translanguaging. Translanguaging is gaining growing acceptance among teachers due to the fact that, besides its broad learner-centredness, it connects linguistic diversity and cultural awareness in fostering the development of intercultural competence, which is essential for effective communication in a globalised world. However, there are teachers who hesitate in employing translanguaging because they are either unfamiliar with it or not fully aware of its advantages in teaching. Under the given circumstances, a comprehensive description of translanguaging and a clear presentation of its benefits for the EFL classroom can prove useful to teachers that question its effectiveness or are not acquainted with it, which, according to this research, is common among many Moldovan teachers.

Literature review

The word *translanguaging* is the English equivalent of the Welsh term *trawsieithu*, which was coined by the educator Cen Williams to define “the planned and systematic use of two languages for teaching and learning inside the same lesson” (Lewis et al., 2012: 643). The concept of translanguaging, which first referred to the integration of the native and foreign languages during instruction instead of considering the two languages as separate entities, has extended beyond pedagogical implications, being examined through a universal lens (Lewis et al., 2012: 641). While pedagogy and language teaching are still at its core, the field of translanguaging research has broadened to explore learner identity, sociocultural dimensions, multimodal perspectives, and neurolinguistic processes (Luo and Ruan, 2024: 454). Thus, translanguaging is being perceived as a “spontaneous, everyday way of making meaning, shaping experiences, and communication by bilinguals” (Lewis et al., 2012: 641). This expanded conceptualisation of the term encompasses the intercultural dimension, which, in the context of globalisation, has achieved increased attention, giving rise to a strong need for a more exhaustive examination of translanguaging in language

teaching, as it is considered a prospective method for enhancing intercultural communicative competence (Zhu and Zhang, 2023: 25).

The notion of translanguaging in language instruction has also evolved. At present, it is viewed as the “ability to move fluidly between languages and a pedagogical approach to teaching in which teachers support this ability” (Najarro, 2023). The keyword in the definition provided by Ileana Najarro is the adverb *fluidly*, which many other scholars, including García and Beardsmore (2009), Creese and Blackledge (2010), use likewise to define or describe translanguaging. Fluidity is at the basis of translanguaging since it is regarded as the dynamic process of shifting between languages in a natural way and without difficulty for the purpose of developing communicative potential (García, 2009: 140). Expressed differently, translanguaging refers to students’ ability to think in various languages simultaneously and use their native language as a vehicle to learn a foreign language (Najarro, 2023).

Furthermore, translanguaging involves leveraging one’s whole linguistic repertoire to improve language and facilitate effective communication (Cenoz and Gorter, 2021). The linguistic repertoire of a person comprises “the full range of semiotic, communicative, and linguistic resources that individuals draw upon in meaning-making” (Albaba, 2025: 2). It includes everything one can deploy to make meaning: not only multiple languages, but also dialects, registers, styles, and non-verbal means such as gesture and posture (García and Wei, 2014: 42; Blackledge and Creese, 2017: 34). Given the above, among the most common and simple examples of translanguaging in language teaching are: the use of a native language equivalent for a word in the target language that is difficult to translate; the clarification of complex grammatical structures by comparing them with the grammatical structures of the first language (L1); the fostering of writing through brainstorming in L1, and the comparison of social etiquette in formal and informal email or letter writing (Hartley, 2024; Najarro, 2023). As can be inferred from the last example provided, translanguaging can also occur within a single language context (Ungvarsky, 2025). Additionally, even within the same language, translanguaging can involve a multimodal transformation, as with the adaptation of well-known classic poems into contemporary pop songs. Such activities have the potential to engage students, stimulate learning and help them develop the competences they need to succeed in a progressively global society (Najarro, 2023).

Employing translanguaging in the classroom offers the learners numerous advantages. Translanguaging encourages the development of the less proficient language. The use of the native language to clarify difficult concepts in the foreign language enhances deeper understanding and confidence. Bi/multilinguals are enabled to develop their metalinguistic skills through the comparison of grammatical and lexical

structures between languages. For instance, analysing grammar rules, word formation and relations between words, students become more aware of the way language functions as a system, thus improving their language competences. Translanguaging provides learners with a more profound understanding of complex topics than a monolingual context, in which they may discuss or write on various subjects without fully comprehending them. Moreover, translanguaging expands resource access by allowing students to draw on a wider spectrum of materials from multiple languages. (Thomas et al., 2022: 27).

As far as the classroom environment is concerned, it is worth mentioning that translanguaging offers a large range of benefits. Firstly, students feel more comfortable, as they do not feel the pressure to use only the target language. Secondly, they feel more interested and motivated in learning due to the fact that translanguaging validates their linguistic identity and allows them to employ their full linguistic repertoire, increasing interactivity and relevance in classroom activities. Thirdly, the language classroom becomes more communicatively and cognitively authentic because it reflects the way bi/multilinguals naturally draw on all their semiotic, communicative and linguistic resources to negotiate meaning, solve problems and convey ideas effectively. Fourthly, translanguaging fosters an inclusive learning environment that supports minority languages and values linguistic diversity. Such an environment establishes connections not only with the learners' languages, but also with their cultures and experiences, developing awareness of diverse cultural views and identities (Seed, 2024).

Building on the final benefit outlined earlier, through the integration of translanguaging into the language classroom, learners can enhance their intercultural communicative competence while increasing their target language proficiency and literacy. Since this approach to language teaching encourages students to leverage their whole linguistic repertoire to overcome interlingual barriers and communicate effectively, it makes them conscious of various ways to express ideas, helps them to better understand different cultures and facilitates the adjustment of their communication style to the linguistic and cultural particularities of people from diverse backgrounds. Specifically, learners acquire a deeper insight into the cultural norms, beliefs and values embedded in the language they study by comparing it with their native language and reflecting on the mutual interplay between language and culture. Consequently, by implementing translanguaging in the classroom, teachers can substantially contribute to the cultivation of their students' intercultural sensitivity and the advancement of successful intercultural communication, which is essential for 21st-century learners (Zhu and Zhang, 2023: 28, 30).

Despite the numerous benefits of using translanguaging in the language classroom, many teachers are cautious about adopting the

practice on a regular basis. On the one hand, they are confronted with a radical shift in pedagogical approaches, as traditional language teaching focuses on monolingual immersion. Accordingly, it may be challenging for them to alter the deeply ingrained teaching principle that the first language should never be used in foreign language instruction, even more so given the risk of overusing the first language. On the other hand, their prudence may stem from a desire not to fall short the expectations held by their institutions, colleagues, and students' parents, who consider that language lessons can be authentically immersive only when no recourse to the first language is made (Hartley, 2024). Another possible reason for teachers' wariness about employing translanguaging in the classroom lies in the lack of comprehensive information on its benefits. Teachers should be made aware of the fact that translanguaging is conducive not only to students, as clearly presented above, but also to teachers, since it contributes to the broadening of their instructional knowledge and practice for bi/multilingual learners, enhances their pedagogical and linguistic flexibility, and supports their teaching efficiency, among others (Sembiante and Tian, 2023: 920; Seed, 2024).

Methodology

To inform EFL teachers about translanguaging pedagogy and increase their awareness of its value for language teaching and learning constitute two major objectives of the present study. These objectives are intended to be achieved in two ways: directly by providing teachers with a complete description of translanguaging and its advantages, which was included in the previous section of the article, and indirectly by administering a questionnaire to English language teachers in Moldova. Despite its informative potential, the questionnaire's primary purpose, which is twofold, was to determine how many teachers use translanguaging in their teaching practice, or at least possess some familiarity with it, and to explore their perspectives on it.

The questionnaire is entitled *Translanguaging as an Emerging Approach to English Language Teaching* and consists of twelve questions. The first three questions refer to the respondents' age range, the city/town/village of their workplace, and the level of education they teach. The next two items of the questionnaire are multiple-response questions that include a list of nine learner-centred approaches to English language teaching and were designed to collect data regarding teachers' familiarity with and use of the specified approaches in their teaching practice. The questionnaire has other two multiple-response questions that ask the respondents to select, based on their perspectives, the benefits of integrating translanguaging into the EFL classroom and the translanguaging strategies they use or would consider using in the

classroom. Two items of the questionnaire use a five-point Likert scale to assess the teachers' level of agreement or disagreement with the statements *L1 (first language/mother tongue) should never be used in the English language classroom* and *Translanguaging supports intercultural communication*. Another question based on a Likert scale was intended to measure teachers' perceptions of the extent to which translanguaging is beneficial in the EFL classroom. It employs response options ranging from *not beneficial at all* to *extremely beneficial* and allows the teachers who are not familiar with the approach under discussion to refrain from selecting a rating by choosing *cannot judge / not familiar with translanguaging*. The last two items of the questionnaire are open-ended questions which require respondents to share their opinions on how translanguaging can enhance intercultural communication and provide their comments or suggestions regarding translanguaging as an emerging approach to English language teaching. Given the way the questionnaire was developed, both quantitative and qualitative data on the integration of translanguaging into the EFL classrooms in Moldova could be collected and subsequently analysed.

Results and discussion

The questionnaire was distributed to English language teachers from across the Republic of Moldova, namely key locations such as Chişinău, Bălţi, and Cahul. A number of 57 teachers accepted the invitation to complete it. Most of them were school teachers (68,4%), some of them were university teachers (26,3%) and the smallest number of teachers worked in vocational or professional colleges (10,5%). As far as the age range is concerned, the majority of respondents were aged 40-49 years (42,1%), followed by 30-39 years (29,8%), 20-29 years (19,3%), 50-59 years (7%), and 60 years or older (1,8%).

When required to select the learner-centred approaches to English language teaching from the provided list to indicate which they were familiar with, the respondents chose the approaches, as illustrated in the bar chart below.

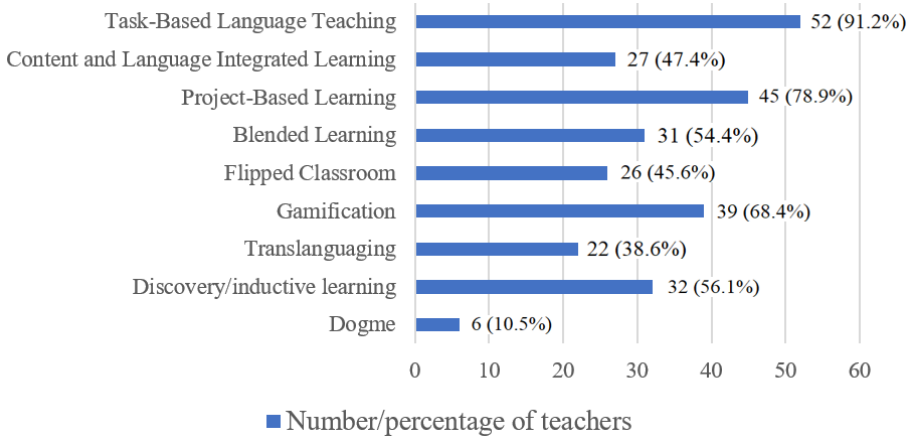


Figure 1. Familiarity with learner-centred approaches to English language teaching

Almost all teachers (91,2%) were familiar with Task-Based Language Teaching. A large majority of the respondents had knowledge of Project-Based Learning (78,9%) and Gamification (68,4%). Approximately half of the teachers who filled in the questionnaire selected Discovery/inductive learning (56,1%), Blended Learning (54,4%), Content and Language Integrated Learning (47,4%) and Flipped Classroom (45,6%). In comparison with the previously reported percentages, the proportion of teachers that were familiar with translanguaging is quite low (38,6%), pointing to insufficient information regarding the entire spectrum of emerging learner-centred approaches to language teaching. It is worth mentioning that no noticeable difference was observed between school and university teachers in terms of their familiarity with translanguaging, which may suggest that the level of education is not a determining factor and that both groups of teachers benefit of similar professional development opportunities. This finding seems to challenge the assumption that university teachers are better informed about the latest approaches. By contrast, the percentage of respondents teaching English in vocational or professional colleges that were acquainted with translanguaging is significantly lower than the one presented above, reaching only 16%. Nevertheless, no meaningful interpretation can be made due to the small number of the respondents belonging to the group of teachers under discussion.

Age was also explored as a potential factor influencing teachers' familiarity with translanguaging. The respondents over fifty had no exposure to translanguaging. 37,5% of the teachers whose age ranged between 40 and 49 years selected translanguaging when asked what approaches they were familiar with. The percentages are higher for the teachers aged 30-39 (47%) and for those in the 20-29 age group

(45,45%). Moreover, the youngest age category recorded the largest percentage of respondents using translanguaging in their practice (45,45%), with a 1:1 ratio between familiarity and use. Such a ratio could not be observed in the other age groups, in which approximately three fourths of the teachers familiar with translanguaging reported employing it in the classroom. These results indicate that age may play a role in determining the respondents' awareness and implementation of translanguaging, which tend to decrease as age increases.

As mentioned above, although the great majority of respondents acquainted with translanguaging used it in their practice, a proportion had still not integrated it into the classroom. One of the plausible reasons for the gap between familiarity and use could be a lack of confidence in the effectiveness of translanguaging in the classroom. When EFL teachers were asked how beneficial translanguaging was, 28,1% of them answered that it was moderately beneficial and 5,3% considered it to be slightly beneficial (see Fig. 2). These findings may suggest that some teachers are not fully informed of the vast range of benefits translanguaging provides to both students and teachers and, therefore, they question its effectiveness.

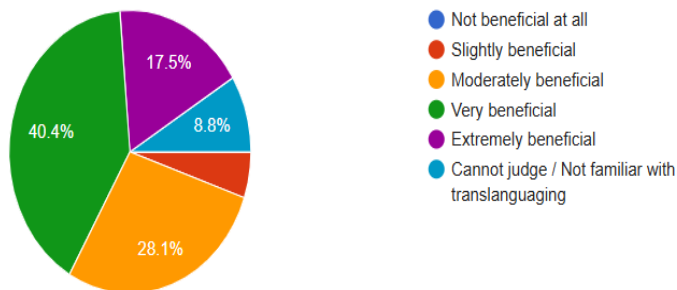


Figure 2. The effectiveness of translanguaging in the EFL classroom

Another reason behind the aforesaid gap lies in foreign language teachers' attitudes towards the use of the first language in the classroom. The teaching principle that the first language should not be employed in the language classroom in order to make it truly immersive continues to be supported despite the growing worldwide emphasis on equality, diversity, and inclusion. 21,1% of the EFL teachers who completed the survey agreed (19,3%) and strongly agreed (1,8%) with the fact that no recourse to the students' first language(s) should be made during language lessons. 26,3% of the respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, revealing uncertainty about the use of the first language in foreign language instruction and, implicitly, about the integration of translanguaging (see Fig. 3). A total of 52,6% of the participants selected

the remaining two response options of the five-point Likert-scale question: disagree (35,1%) and strongly disagree (17,5%). It is notable that the number of the teachers choosing one of the two options presented in the previous sentence is bigger among the respondents under 40. This result aligns with other findings concerning the age of the respondents, pointing to a trend toward greater openness to new approaches to language teaching and increased flexibility in embracing them at the expense of more traditional teaching principles among younger teachers compared to older teachers.

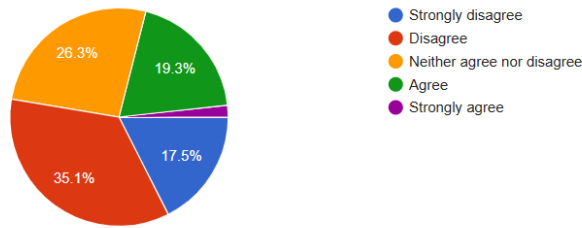


Figure 3. Teachers' attitudes towards the use of the first language in the English language classroom

A further significant finding emerging from the item of the questionnaire regarding the effectiveness of translanguaging in the EFL classroom is that only 8,8% of all respondents selected the option *Cannot judge / Not familiar with translanguaging*. The given percentage is noticeably lower than the one calculated based on the question referring to teachers' familiarity with various learner-centred approaches to English language teaching, where 61,4% of teachers did not identify translanguaging as one of the pedagogical approaches they were familiar with. Such a marked difference could be accounted for the fact that the question *How beneficial do you consider the use of translanguaging in the EFL classroom?* is followed by an extensive explanatory note that clearly defines translanguaging and provides examples of how it can be employed in the language classroom. It seems that the note was informative enough to enable the respondents who had not indicated familiarity with translanguaging to perceive its benefits for the EFL classroom.

In addition to the previously mentioned question and its accompanying explanatory note, the questionnaire has two more items intended to both inform the teachers that are not familiar with translanguaging and to explore the perspectives of the teachers who apply it in their teaching. One of them asks the respondents to select the benefits of using translanguaging in the EFL classroom from a comprehensive list (see Fig. 4). Most teachers participating in the survey considered that integrating translanguaging into the English language classroom was

beneficial because comparison with other languages helps learning (68,4%) and because translanguaging provides connections with the students' languages, cultures and experiences (59,6%). All the other benefits account for less than 50% of responses, which apparently suggest that many teachers are sceptical of or unaware of the favourable impact translanguaging can have on various aspects of the teaching and learning process, including students' motivation and time efficiency of classroom activities. Moreover, only a few respondents admit that the linguistic resources of minority language speakers are acknowledged and valued in classrooms employing translanguaging. These findings underscore the need to inform language teachers who lack awareness about translanguaging and dispel doubts regarding its effectiveness through research-based evidence and practical experience shared with them.

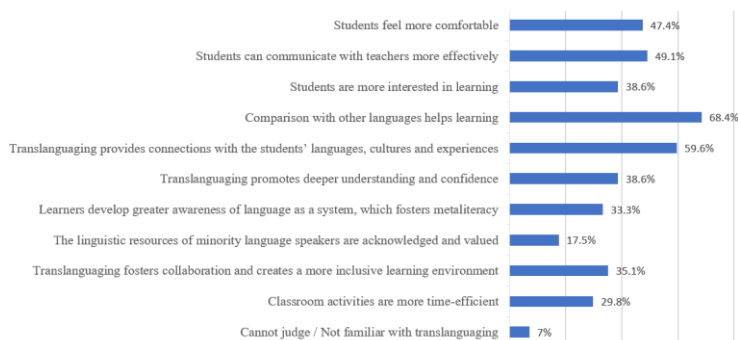


Figure 4. The benefits of using translanguaging in the EFL classroom

Another exploratory and informative item of the questionnaire is a multiple-response question requiring teachers to indicate the translanguaging strategies they use or might consider implementing in the classroom. The list of strategies presented to the respondents comprises a strategy involving shifts within a single language, such as register changes and even multimodal adaptations. The highest percentage (75,4%) corresponds to *using students' native language to compare grammatical structures in the target language* and the next highest (50,9%) corresponds to *leveraging students' native language equivalents to clarify meaning and facilitate understanding*. The other four strategies listed represent less than 50% of participants' selection, with the lowest percentages for *allowing students to brainstorm in their native language to support learning* (28,1%) and *providing learners with opportunities to draft texts in their native language as part of the writing process* (19,3%).

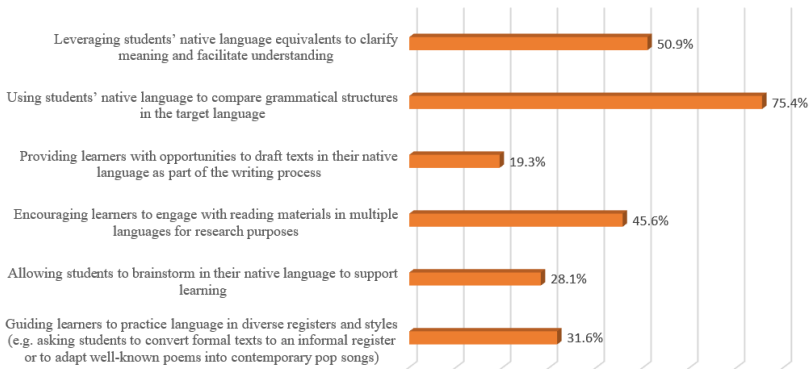


Figure 5. Transanguaging strategies in the EFL classroom

Such a distribution of responses seems to confirm the findings already discussed and reveal teachers' wariness toward the employment of transanguaging strategies, especially of those involving the native language for purposes other than comparison of grammatical structures and clarification of difficult words in the target language. As highlighted earlier, it appears that the given caution emerges from two main sources: teachers' resistance to the use of the first language in the classroom, which has been widely considered a hindrance to establishing a truly immersive environment, and their uncertainty about the effectiveness of transanguaging due to a lack of exhaustive information about this particular learner-centred approach or potentially as a result of their limited practical experience with it.

The final aspect that the survey addresses is the connection between transanguaging and intercultural communication. On the one hand, the questionnaire measures the extent to which EFL teachers agree with the statement *Transanguaging supports intercultural communication*. On the other hand, it requires participants who agree or strongly agree with the statement to express their opinions on how transanguaging can enhance intercultural communication. The results showed that a total of 79% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the statement was accurate, while 17,5% neither agreed or disagreed, and only 3,5% strongly disagreed (see Fig. 6). As the substantial majority of participants indicated agreement or strong agreement with the statement, it emerges that many EFL teachers acknowledge the usefulness of transanguaging beyond the improvement of language skills, namely its contribution to the development of intercultural communicative competence.

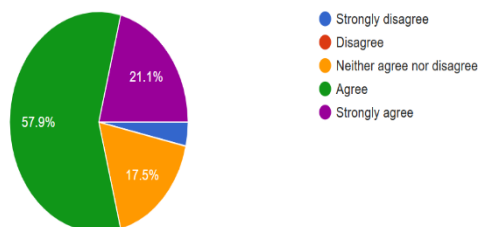


Figure 6. Extent of agreement with the statement that translinguaging supports intercultural communication

Additionally, over 50% of the teachers who completed the questionnaire accepted to comment on the role of translinguaging in the enhancement of intercultural communication. Most of them explained that the potential of translinguaging in helping students become interculturally competent lies in the fact that it allows learners to draw on their full linguistic repertoires to negotiate meaning across different cultures and reduce communication barriers. They commonly highlighted the positive impact of translinguaging on the creation of an inclusive, non-discriminatory environment based on intercultural understanding, mutual respect and empathy, as well as on the affirmation of the students’ identities and the growth of their confidence.

The qualitative data derived from the open-ended question under discussion suggest two key findings. First, the questionnaire provided sufficient information to enable teachers, including those who were not familiar with translinguaging, to understand its wide range of benefits for the EFL classroom and subsequently identify its connection with intercultural communication. It should also be pointed out that the respondents who initially lacked familiarity with translinguaging and responded the question showed willingness to learn more about the approach, as the questionnaire offered them this opportunity. Second, some teachers were well-versed in the topic of translinguaging and had a more comprehensive knowledge about it than that covered in the survey items, as, while commenting on how translinguaging can help students develop their intercultural communication, they referred to aspects or examples not encompassed in the questionnaire. For instance, a few respondents mentioned idioms, with one stating that the use of foreign idioms and their equivalents in the students’ native language facilitates an understanding of cultural differences, as idiomatic expressions reflect the cultural values and meanings embedded in language. Another respondent emphasised the favourable impact of translinguaging on deepening pragmatic awareness, noting that it “allows individuals to convey [...] politeness strategies, and discourse norms that may not translate directly”. Moreover, several teachers compared translinguaging

to a bridge, defining it as “a natural way for students to [connect] what they know [with] what they are learning”, explaining the comparison on the basis that translanguaging “prioritizes meaning-making over grammatical purity”, or, more importantly with regard to intercultural communication, highlighting its function in “help[ing] learners interpret meanings, values, and cultural references more effectively”.

The last item of the questionnaire is an optional open-ended question which aims to elicit teachers’ perceptions of translanguaging as an emerging approach to English language teaching. 22,8% of all participants answered the question, expressing their views on the topic. While some of them acknowledged that they needed to conduct more research to comment or offer suggestions, most of them provided valuable feedback, declaring that “translanguaging is very important for learning a foreign language” and that it “should be encouraged in English language teaching”. It is worth mentioning that certain teachers displayed awareness of the fact that translanguaging should be used appropriately to achieve beneficial outcomes. For example, one of them indicated that teachers need to receive adequate training to gain clarity about the underlying ideology and be able to apply the practical strategies necessary for the effective implementation of translanguaging. In the same vein, another teacher stated that “[t]ranslanguaging may become an essential approach in language education if used properly. In other words, for the translanguaging approach to have a positive impact in language education in the Republic of Moldova, teachers should make sure that they understand the concept with all of its benefits and limitations”.

Conclusions

The study has shown that translanguaging is not widely known among English language teachers in Moldova. However, it has also demonstrated that a carefully designed questionnaire proved sufficient to offer teachers initial familiarisation with this emerging learner-centred approach to language teaching, while they exhibited openness to learning more about it. Evidently, teachers should be further informed about translanguaging and trained in its appropriate use and classroom implementation through research-based evidence and practical experience to successfully apply various translanguaging strategies. Such provision of exhaustive information and training would be helpful to both teachers who are newly introduced to the approach and those who question its effectiveness.

Concerning the evaluative component of the research, it should be noted that EFL teachers in Moldova generally hold positive attitudes towards translanguaging, since the majority of the teachers who participated in the survey considered it beneficial and most of those who

used it in their teaching practice supported its integration into the language classroom. Moreover, the study has revealed that some of the teachers who endorsed translanguaging had a thorough understanding of it and were fully aware of teachers' need to develop conceptual clarity about its theoretical foundations and critically evaluate its limitations in order to adopt it adequately, thereby achieving the expected results. Given the above, the present paper may be a valuable resource that teachers can consult to acquire a deeper insight into the approach and a clearer comprehension of its conceptual framework.

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