

Translanguaging in the EFL Practicum: How English Proficiency Shapes Language Practices of Chinese Preservice Teachers

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ABSTRACT

Translanguaging, a practice that integrates a first language (L1) and a second language (L2), has gained attention in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching for its potential to facilitate communication and learning. Although translanguaging is increasingly studied, research specifically examining its impact in EFL practicum settings remains limited. This mixed-methods study investigates how English language proficiency (ELP) influences the translanguaging practices of 180 Chinese EFL preservice teachers during their practicum at a central China university. Quantitative data were collected using the TOEFL Independent Speaking Rubric to assess ELP and a translanguaging questionnaire to measure translanguaging frequency. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and classroom observations. Quantitative analysis explored correlations between ELP and translanguaging frequency, while qualitative data were analysed thematically to understand how ELP shapes translanguaging practices. The findings suggest a positive correlation between ELP and translanguaging practices. Specifically, preservice teachers with higher ELP use translanguaging more frequently, particularly for explaining complex content in L1, supporting language proficiency in L2, and creating an inclusive classroom environment. The findings imply that enhancing ELP among Chinese preservice teachers could be instrumental in promoting effective translanguaging practices within EFL classrooms. This study highlights the need to prioritise ELP development in EFL practicum programs. The findings could inform EFL teaching reforms and further the integration of translanguaging in EFL education.

Keywords: English language proficiency, practicum teaching, preservice teacher, translanguaging

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INTRODUCTION

Translanguaging, which involves the use of both a first language (L1) and a second language (L2) in

teaching, has been increasingly recognised in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education for its potential to improve communication and learning outcomes (Duarte, 2016; García & Li, 2014). Although widely studied, translanguaging's role in EFL practicum settings remains underexplored, particularly regarding how English language proficiency (ELP) influences its application by preservice teachers. Practicum settings provide a unique, real-world context for preservice teachers to practice and adapt translanguaging strategies, yet the relationship between ELP and translanguaging frequency or effectiveness remains unclear (Li et al., 2024).

Existing studies have primarily focussed on translanguaging within classroom instruction (Beltran-Palanques et al., 2024), leaving a gap in understanding how ELP shapes preservice teachers use of translanguaging in practicum experiences. This gap is particularly evident in China, where EFL preservice teachers often face challenges in building both their own English proficiency and effective instructional strategies (Wang & Ai, 2024).

This mixed-methods study examines the influence of ELP on the translanguaging practices of 180 Chinese EFL preservice teachers during their practicum at a university in central China. Quantitative data, collected via TOEFL-based assessments and translanguaging questionnaires, will assess ELP and translanguaging frequency. Qualitative insights from interviews and classroom observations will further reveal how ELP affects specific translanguaging practices, such as using L1 to simplify complex concepts and L2 to build language skills. Findings are anticipated to underscore the importance of ELP in fostering effective translanguaging, offering guidance for EFL teacher training programs, and informing instructional strategies.

METHODS

This study involved 180 Chinese EFL preservice teachers at a central China university, selected due to its prominent role in training future English teachers and its diverse educational context, which provides a valuable setting for examining translanguaging practices and how their English language proficiency (ELP) influences these practices during their practicum. ELP was assessed using the TOEFL Independent Speaking Rubric, and translanguaging frequency was measured through a questionnaire, for which reliability and validity were checked. Additionally, semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were conducted. Quantitative analysis explored the correlation between ELP and translanguaging, while qualitative analysis using thematic analysis (semi-structured interviews) and content analysis (classroom observations) examined how ELP shaped translanguaging practices, such as explaining complex content in L1 and supporting L2 learning. Ethical approval for this study was granted by SEGi University Research Ethics Committee. All participants provided informed consent before taking part in the

study. Their confidentiality and privacy were ensured, and they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study found a positive correlation between English language proficiency (ELP) and translanguaging practices among Chinese EFL preservice teachers. Quantitative analysis showed that teachers with higher ELP scores employed translanguaging more frequently, $r(178) = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$, especially using their first language (L1) to explain complex concepts and the second language (L2) to enhance language proficiency. Qualitative results supported this, with observations indicating that higher proficiency teachers balanced L1 and L2 to create an inclusive classroom environment (Tai & Wong, 2023), aiding student understanding (Sun, 2024). In contrast, lower proficiency teachers leaned on L1 without utilising L2 effectively.

The study faced limitations, such as being conducted in a single institution, which could restrict the generalisability of findings. Further research across multiple universities and additional measures, like student engagement and learning outcomes, is recommended to confirm the role of ELP in translanguaging practices.

CONCLUSION

This study offers initial insights into how English language proficiency influences translanguaging practices among Chinese EFL preservice teachers. Findings suggest that higher proficiency facilitates more effective use of translanguaging, supporting inclusive teaching and clearer communication. Further research could deepen understanding and guide EFL practicum enhancements.

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