

Translanguaging Practices in Literature-Based Language Learning: Supporting Character Development and Cultural Identity

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Abstract

This qualitative study investigated translanguaging practices in literature-based language learning and their contributions to learners' language proficiency, character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance. Seven language teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on their experience teaching literary texts in multilingual classrooms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations using validated interview guidelines and observation sheets. The data were analyzed thematically through familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, triangulation, and interpretive comparison. The findings revealed that teachers implemented translanguaging through bilingual explanation, vocabulary mapping, translation comparison, multilingual discussion, retelling, peer mediation, and staged movement toward target-language production. These practices supported learners' comprehension of difficult literary language, deeper textual interpretation, classroom participation, vocabulary development, and expressive confidence. Translanguaging also enabled learners to connect literary themes with personal experiences, moral values, community traditions, and local languages. Consequently, it contributed to ethical reflection, empathy, identity affirmation, intercultural dialogue, and the preservation of local stories and cultural knowledge. The study concludes that translanguaging functions as both a linguistic scaffold and a culturally sustaining pedagogy when it is purposefully guided and linked to meaningful target-language output. The findings imply the need for multilingual materials, flexible language policies, and teacher development in literature education.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Literature-based language learning; Cultural identity; Character development; Intercultural awareness

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization, migration, digital communication, and increased educational mobility have transformed contemporary language classrooms into multilingual and multicultural spaces. Learners no longer rely on a single language when communicating, interpreting information, or constructing knowledge. Instead, they draw upon diverse linguistic, cultural, semiotic, and experiential resources to understand texts and express ideas. Nevertheless, many language education systems continue to be influenced by monolingual assumptions that treat the first language and target language as separate systems and position exclusive target-language use as the ideal condition for learning.

Translanguaging challenges this assumption by recognizing learners' entire linguistic repertoires as legitimate and interconnected resources for communication and meaning-making (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Carreres et al., 2021; Rokita-Jaśkow, 2023). From this perspective, multilingual learners do not simply alternate between fixed languages; rather, they strategically mobilize their available linguistic and cultural resources in response to particular communicative, cognitive, and social purposes.

Within language education, translanguaging has developed from a description of multilingual communication into a pedagogical orientation that supports participation, identity construction, cognitive engagement, and educational equity. It provides learners with opportunities to process difficult concepts in a familiar language, compare meanings across languages, and gradually produce more complex discourse in the target language. Translanguaging also challenges linguistic hierarchies that privilege dominant languages while marginalizing local, heritage, or minority languages. Consequently, its pedagogical significance extends beyond language comprehension. It creates a classroom space in which students' linguistic backgrounds, cultural memories, and lived experiences can become meaningful resources for learning rather than obstacles that must be excluded (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Carreres et al., 2021; Sun, 2025). This orientation is especially relevant in contexts where English or another global language holds strong institutional authority and where learners' local languages are rarely represented in formal instruction.

Literature-based language learning offers a particularly productive context for translanguaging because literary texts require more than literal comprehension. Literature introduces learners to complex characters, moral dilemmas, cultural practices, social conflicts, historical experiences, and alternative worldviews. To understand a literary work, students must interpret figurative language, symbolism, motivation, perspective, and culturally situated meanings. These interpretive processes may be constrained when learners are required to operate exclusively in a language in which they have limited proficiency. Translanguaging enables students to discuss difficult passages, test interpretations, compare culturally specific expressions, and connect the text with personal or collective experiences before reformulating their ideas in the target language. Thus, literature and translanguaging can work together to deepen literary interpretation while supporting linguistic development (Dutton & Rushton, 2020; Gaballo, 2023). The integration of both approaches is important because it positions language learning not only as the acquisition of grammatical structures but also as engagement with human experience, values, identity, and culture.

A central issue in this area is the relationship between translanguaging and language proficiency. Monolingual teaching traditions commonly assume that maximum exposure to the target language automatically results in stronger proficiency. For this reason, teachers may discourage learners from using their first language during literary discussions. However, strict target-language-only instruction can restrict participation and produce superficial textual understanding, particularly when literary works contain unfamiliar vocabulary, implicit meanings, cultural references, and sophisticated narrative structures. Translanguaging can reduce cognitive overload by allowing learners to clarify concepts, activate prior knowledge, explore vocabulary relationships, and organize ideas before expressing them in the target language. It may therefore function as a scaffold rather than a substitute for target-language learning. Research on translation-mediated learning, plurilingual curricula, and content-based education similarly indicates that strategic use of learners' linguistic resources can support vocabulary development, disciplinary understanding, and more coherent target-language production (Gkaintartzi et al., 2024; Gutiérrez, 2022; Laviosa, 2022; Tsou &

Baker, 2021). The critical pedagogical question is not whether the first language should be permitted, but how translanguaging can be deliberately structured to strengthen literary understanding while maintaining meaningful opportunities for target-language use.

Translanguaging in literature-based learning is also closely associated with identity development. Language is not merely a neutral instrument of communication; it carries memories, affiliations, values, social positions, and cultural histories. Literary narratives concerning migration, belonging, discrimination, family relationships, cultural conflict, and social justice frequently invite learners to interpret characters' experiences through their own social and cultural perspectives. When students are permitted to respond through multiple languages, they can articulate personal connections more fully and recognize their home languages as intellectually valuable. This process can affirm multilingual identities, strengthen learner agency, and challenge the perception that linguistic competence must be based on conformity to a single dominant language (Arshavskaya, 2020; Dutton & Rushton, 2020; Gaballo, 2023; Gkaintartzi et al., 2024). Identity formation is therefore not an incidental outcome of literary learning. It is part of the interpretive process through which learners position themselves in relation to characters, communities, cultural norms, and social issues.

The identity-related dimension of translanguaging also contributes to character development. Literary texts provide opportunities to examine ethical decisions, emotional struggles, injustice, responsibility, empathy, and the consequences of human action. Through multilingual discussion, learners may access these themes more deeply because they can connect unfamiliar narratives with culturally familiar values and experiences. Character development in this context refers to the cultivation of dispositions such as empathy, respect for diversity, ethical awareness, open-mindedness, responsibility, and critical reflection. Translanguaging can support this process by enabling learners to discuss sensitive moral and cultural issues without being restricted by limited target-language proficiency. However, such outcomes are not automatic. Teachers must guide learners beyond simple personal reactions toward critical examination of assumptions, power relations, and competing perspectives.

A further dimension concerns intercultural awareness. Literature exposes students to cultural practices, beliefs, values, and social structures that may differ from their own. Translanguaging allows learners to compare meanings across linguistic and cultural frameworks, negotiate contrasting interpretations, and examine how particular concepts are represented differently in different communities. Such activities can move intercultural learning beyond the memorization of cultural facts toward critical dialogue and perspective-taking (Arshavskaya, 2020; Dutton & Rushton, 2020; Gaballo, 2023). Nevertheless, cross-cultural comparison may also oversimplify differences or reinforce stereotypes when texts are treated as transparent representations of an entire society. Literature-based translanguaging therefore requires critical facilitation that encourages learners to question generalizations, consider historical and social contexts, and recognize diversity within cultures.

Cultural maintenance is equally important because the growing dominance of global languages may contribute to the reduced educational use of local languages, folklore, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge. Translanguaging can create space for learners to compare international literature with local narratives, translate traditional stories, reinterpret literary works in local settings, and discuss cultural values across languages. These practices help learners develop global awareness without disconnecting them from their cultural heritage (Dutton & Rushton, 2020; Fang & Xu, 2022; Jokikokko, 2021; Mesker & Jager, 2024). They also challenge educational materials that

represent cultural diversity only superficially or continue to privilege dominant linguistic and cultural perspectives (Cross et al., 2022; Yasasri, 2024). In this sense, translanguaging can function as a culturally sustaining pedagogy that simultaneously supports access to global communication and the continued relevance of local knowledge.

Despite increasing scholarly attention to translanguaging, several gaps remain. Existing studies frequently examine language proficiency, identity, intercultural competence, or culturally responsive teaching as separate outcomes. Research has also concentrated considerably on general language classrooms, writing instruction, content and language integrated learning, English-medium instruction, and teacher education (Arshavskaya, 2020; Bellinzona & Carbonara, 2022; Corcoran et al., 2023; Oliver et al., 2024). Comparatively less attention has been given to how translanguaging operates specifically within literature-based language learning as an integrated pedagogical process connecting linguistic development, character formation, identity affirmation, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance. Practical constraints related to monolingual policy, teacher preparation, learning materials, and assessment further demonstrate the need for context-sensitive investigation rather than universal prescriptions (Bonacina-Pugh et al., 2021; Cross et al., 2022; Sun, 2025; Yasasri, 2024).

The novelty of the present study lies in its integrated examination of translanguaging in literature-based language learning. Rather than treating language proficiency, identity, intercultural awareness, cultural maintenance, and character development as isolated variables, the study investigates how these dimensions interact through learners' engagement with literary texts. It also foregrounds the role of literature as a culturally rich and ethically meaningful medium through which multilingual resources can support both language learning and holistic personal development. Accordingly, the study aims to examine the translanguaging practices employed in literature-based language learning and to analyze how these practices contribute to language proficiency, character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance. The study is guided by the following research questions:

How are translanguaging practices implemented during literature-based language learning to support learners' comprehension, interpretation, and target-language proficiency?

How do translanguaging practices in literature-based language learning contribute to learners' character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance?

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate translanguaging practices in literature-based language learning and their contributions to learners' language proficiency, character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand teachers' practices, experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical reasoning within naturally occurring classroom contexts. Rather than measuring translanguaging through numerical indicators, the study focused on how teachers used multiple linguistic resources during literature instruction, why particular practices were adopted, and how those practices were perceived to influence students' learning and cultural development.

More specifically, the study was situated within a qualitative descriptive framework. This design allowed the researchers to produce a detailed account of classroom practices without imposing a rigid experimental structure or attempting to manipulate the instructional environment. Translanguaging is a context-sensitive practice that may appear through teacher explanations, classroom questioning, literary discussions,

translation activities, comparisons between local and global texts, and students' multilingual responses. Therefore, direct classroom observation and in-depth interviews were necessary to capture the complexity of these practices.

The qualitative design was appropriate for addressing the first research question concerning how translanguaging was implemented to support literary comprehension, interpretation, and target-language proficiency. Through classroom observation, the researchers could document the languages used by teachers, the instructional purposes of language alternation, the types of literary activities conducted, and the ways learners were encouraged to draw on their linguistic repertoires. Interviews provided additional explanations regarding teachers' intentions, considerations, and perceived challenges in balancing learners' home languages with target-language exposure.

The design was also suitable for addressing the second research question concerning the contribution of translanguaging to character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance. These dimensions involve attitudes, values, experiences, and meaning-making processes that cannot be adequately understood through test scores alone. Qualitative inquiry enabled the researchers to examine how teachers connected literary themes with learners' cultural backgrounds, facilitated discussions of moral values and social issues, incorporated local stories or expressions, and encouraged learners to compare perspectives across cultures.

The study was conducted in actual language classrooms to preserve the authenticity of the instructional process. No intervention was imposed on the participating teachers. Instead, the researchers examined existing teaching practices and obtained participants' reflections on their classroom experiences. The use of multiple data sources, particularly interviews and classroom observations, enabled methodological triangulation and strengthened the credibility of the findings. By comparing what teachers reported with what occurred during instruction, the study developed a more comprehensive understanding of translanguaging in literature-based language learning.

Participants

The participants consisted of seven language teachers who taught literature or incorporated literary texts into language-learning activities. The relatively small sample size was consistent with the qualitative orientation of the study, which prioritized depth of information, contextual understanding, and detailed exploration over statistical generalization. Seven participants were considered sufficient to provide varied perspectives while allowing the researchers to examine each teacher's practices and experiences closely.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling because the study required teachers who possessed direct knowledge and experience relevant to the research topic. The selection process was based on several criteria. First, participants were actively teaching a language subject at the time of data collection. Second, they had experience using literary texts such as short stories, poetry, novels, drama, folktales, or narrative excerpts as part of their instruction. Third, they taught learners from multilingual backgrounds or in classrooms where more than one language was regularly used. Fourth, they had at least two years of language-teaching experience, ensuring that they had sufficient classroom exposure to reflect critically on their pedagogical decisions. Fifth, they were willing to participate in classroom observations and individual interviews.

Variation among the participants was considered important for obtaining a broad understanding of translanguaging practices. The seven teachers represented different levels of teaching experience and had worked with learners of varying language proficiency. Their experiences included teaching literature for language development,

facilitating literary discussions, using translation or bilingual explanations, relating texts to local culture, and guiding learners in responding to cultural and moral themes. Such variation enabled the study to identify shared practices as well as differences influenced by teaching experience, learner characteristics, literary materials, and institutional expectations.

The participants were initially approached through the relevant educational institution or language-teaching program. They received information explaining the purpose of the study, the data collection procedures, the voluntary nature of participation, and the measures used to protect confidentiality. Written informed consent was obtained before data collection began. Pseudonyms or participant codes, such as Teacher 1 to Teacher 7, were used in interview transcripts, observation records, data analysis, and research reports. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences. The study did not seek to claim that the seven participants statistically represented all language teachers. Instead, the sample was intended to provide information-rich cases that could illuminate how translanguaging operated within specific literature-based learning environments. Detailed descriptions of participants and instructional contexts were included to help readers determine whether the findings might be transferable to comparable multilingual educational settings.

Instruments and Data Collection Technique

Two primary instruments were used to collect the data: semi-structured interview guidelines and classroom observation sheets. These instruments were selected because they provided complementary forms of evidence. Interviews captured teachers' perspectives, intentions, experiences, and interpretations, while classroom observations documented the actual occurrence of translanguaging practices during literature-based instruction.

Interview Guidelines

The semi-structured interview guidelines were developed based on the research objectives, research questions, and the conceptual dimensions of translanguaging, literature-based learning, language proficiency, identity, intercultural awareness, character development, and cultural maintenance. The semi-structured format ensured that all participants were asked questions related to the central themes of the study while allowing the interviewer to ask follow-up questions when participants raised important or unexpected issues.

The interview guidelines included questions concerning teachers' understanding of translanguaging, the languages commonly used in their classrooms, the reasons for using learners' home languages, and the strategies used to balance multilingual support with target-language exposure. Additional questions examined how translanguaging supported learners' understanding of vocabulary, literary themes, characterization, symbolism, and cultural references. Teachers were also asked to explain how they connected literary texts with learners' personal experiences, local traditions, cultural identities, and moral values.

Questions related to intercultural awareness explored how teachers encouraged learners to compare cultures, interpret differing perspectives, identify stereotypes, and respond respectfully to cultural differences. Questions concerning cultural maintenance addressed the use of local folktales, oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, culturally specific expressions, and translation activities. The interviews also investigated challenges such as monolingual school policies, limited multilingual materials,

assessment requirements, students' language proficiency, and teachers' professional preparation.

Before data collection, the interview guidelines were reviewed by experts or experienced researchers in language education, qualitative research, and multilingual pedagogy. The reviewers examined the relevance, clarity, sequencing, and alignment of each question with the research objectives. Questions considered repetitive, ambiguous, leading, or excessively broad were revised. A pilot interview was then conducted with a language teacher who had characteristics similar to those of the study participants but was not included in the final sample. The pilot process helped estimate interview duration, identify unclear wording, and evaluate whether the questions generated sufficiently detailed responses.

Although reliability in qualitative interviewing does not refer to exact replication, procedural consistency was maintained by using the same main questions with all seven participants. Follow-up questions varied according to participants' responses, but they remained focused on the research objectives. With participants' permission, interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The researchers also prepared field notes to record contextual information, nonverbal responses, and preliminary analytical observations.

Classroom Observation Sheets

The classroom observation sheets were designed to systematically document translanguaging practices during literature-based language instruction. The observation categories were derived from the research questions and relevant conceptual dimensions. The sheets included spaces for recording the language or languages used, the speaker, the classroom activity, the instructional purpose of translanguaging, student responses, the literary content being discussed, and evidence related to language development or cultural learning.

Specific observation indicators included teachers' use of bilingual explanations, translation, code-switching, cross-linguistic comparison, repetition across languages, multilingual questioning, and the use of local terms or expressions. The observation sheets also documented whether students were permitted to discuss literary texts in their home languages, prepare ideas in one language before responding in another, compare translations, interpret cultural concepts, or produce multilingual oral and written responses. To examine language proficiency, the observers recorded instances in which translanguaging appeared to support vocabulary understanding, comprehension of complex passages, interpretation of figurative language, participation, and target-language expression. Indicators related to identity and cultural maintenance included references to learners' communities, local literature, traditions, values, and linguistic experiences. Indicators related to character development and intercultural awareness included discussions of empathy, respect, responsibility, justice, cultural differences, stereotypes, moral choices, and multiple perspectives.

The observation instrument was reviewed by specialists in qualitative research and language pedagogy to ensure that its categories were relevant and observable. A preliminary observation was conducted in a classroom that was not part of the main study. This pilot observation helped refine overlapping indicators, clarify category definitions, and improve the organization of the sheet. An open field-note section was retained so that the observer could record unexpected practices not covered by the predetermined categories. To enhance dependability, the researchers developed operational descriptions for the major observation indicators. For example, translation was distinguished from spontaneous code-switching, while cultural comparison was

differentiated from a simple mention of cultural information. When more than one observer was involved, the observers discussed the indicators before data collection and independently reviewed a sample observation. Differences in interpretation were discussed until a shared understanding was reached. Interview findings were later compared with observation records to determine whether teachers' reported practices were consistent with classroom evidence.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed through a systematic thematic analysis. The analysis involved organizing, coding, categorizing, interpreting, and synthesizing the interview transcripts, observation records, and field notes. Data analysis began during the collection process rather than only after all data had been gathered. This concurrent process allowed the researchers to identify emerging issues, develop follow-up questions, and examine recurring or contradictory patterns across participants.

The first stage involved preparing and familiarizing the researchers with the data. Audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim, while observation notes were expanded soon after each classroom visit to preserve contextual details. The researchers read the transcripts and observation records repeatedly to gain an overall understanding of the participants' experiences and instructional practices. During this stage, initial notes were made concerning recurring language choices, teaching strategies, cultural references, perceived outcomes, and classroom challenges.

The second stage involved initial coding. Meaningful words, sentences, or passages were assigned descriptive codes that represented their central ideas. Some codes were deductively derived from the research questions and conceptual framework, including target-language support, literary comprehension, identity affirmation, intercultural comparison, character values, cultural maintenance, teacher beliefs, and policy constraints. Other codes were generated inductively from the data, particularly when participants described practices or concerns that had not been anticipated by the researchers.

Coding was conducted across both interviews and observations. For example, an interview statement explaining that a teacher used the local language to clarify symbolism could be coded as "L1 for literary interpretation." An observed classroom episode in which students discussed a moral conflict in their home language before reporting in the target language could be coded as "multilingual preparation for target-language response" and "ethical reflection." Coding data from both sources enabled the researchers to connect teachers' explanations with observable practices.

In the third stage, related codes were grouped into broader categories. Codes concerning translation, bilingual explanation, vocabulary clarification, and preparation for target-language responses were grouped under language-learning support. Codes relating to personal experience, linguistic belonging, learner confidence, and recognition of home languages were categorized under identity affirmation. Other categories included intercultural dialogue, character and ethical development, integration of local culture, cultural maintenance, instructional constraints, and teacher decision-making.

The fourth stage involved developing and reviewing themes. Categories were examined for conceptual relationships and organized into themes that directly addressed the research questions. Potential themes included translanguaging as a scaffold for literary comprehension, strategic movement toward target-language production, literature as a space for multilingual identity construction, cross-cultural interpretation through literary discussion, preservation of local knowledge through multilingual texts, and tensions between translanguaging and monolingual educational expectations.

Themes were revised when they lacked sufficient evidence, overlapped excessively, or failed to represent important differences among participants.

The researchers then compared data across the seven teachers to identify similarities, variations, and negative cases. Attention was given not only to commonly reported benefits but also to tensions and contradictory evidence. For example, some teachers might perceive the home language as essential for understanding difficult literary concepts, while others might restrict its use because of concerns about reduced target-language exposure. Such differences were analyzed in relation to teaching experience, learner proficiency, classroom context, institutional policy, and the type of literary activity being conducted. Methodological triangulation was used by comparing interview data, observation records, and field notes. A teacher's claim that translanguaging supported cultural identity, for instance, was examined alongside observed classroom practices such as the use of local folktales, culturally specific expressions, or comparisons between literary characters and community values. Convergence among different data sources increased the credibility of the interpretation, while inconsistencies were retained and analyzed rather than removed.

In the final stage, the themes were interpreted in relation to the study objectives and presented through analytical narratives supported by selected participant quotations and classroom examples. Quotations were chosen because they clearly illustrated the themes rather than merely repeating the researchers' interpretations. Observation excerpts were used to demonstrate how translanguaging occurred in practice. The final analysis explained not only what teachers did but also why they adopted particular practices, how the practices functioned during literature learning, and how they were connected to language proficiency, identity, intercultural awareness, cultural maintenance, and character development.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Research Findings

The findings were organized according to the two research questions. Data were interpreted through thematic analysis of the seven teachers' interview responses and classroom observation records. The analysis focused on recurring patterns, variations among participants, and the correspondence between teachers' reported practices and observed classroom activities. Participant identities are represented by the codes T1–T7.

How are translanguaging practices implemented during literature-based language learning to support learners' comprehension, interpretation, and target-language proficiency?

The analysis indicated that translanguaging was implemented as a purposeful instructional scaffold rather than as unrestricted use of learners' first language. The seven teachers reported employing different combinations of the target language, national language, and learners' local languages to facilitate access to literary texts. These practices were most evident when students encountered unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative language, culturally specific expressions, complex plots, and abstract themes. Classroom observations also showed that teachers generally began or concluded activities in the target language but temporarily used another language when learners required conceptual clarification.

Table 1. Teachers' Responses to the Implementation of Translanguaging

Interview question	Summary of teachers' responses
1. How do you use more than one language when teaching literary texts?	All seven teachers reported alternating between the target language and a language familiar to the students. They used familiar languages to clarify difficult content, while the target

Interview question	Summary of teachers' responses
	language remained the principal language for reading, presentation, and formal classroom responses.
2. In what situations do you use learners' first or local language?	Teachers used the first or local language when explaining unfamiliar vocabulary, idioms, figurative language, cultural references, character motivation, and complex narrative events.
3. How does translanguaging support students' comprehension?	Teachers stated that it helped students understand the plot, identify important details, connect new vocabulary with prior knowledge, and follow classroom discussions more confidently.
4. How does translanguaging help students interpret literary texts?	The teachers used cross-linguistic discussion to examine symbolism, moral conflict, characterization, themes, and implied meanings. Students were encouraged to explain initial interpretations in a familiar language before reformulating them in the target language.
5. How do you prevent translanguaging from reducing target-language exposure?	Teachers limited first-language use to specific instructional purposes, established target-language stages, required final answers in the target language, and gradually reduced linguistic support as students became more confident.
6. What translanguaging activities are commonly used?	Common activities included bilingual vocabulary mapping, translation comparison, multilingual group discussion, retelling, parallel-text reading, peer explanation, and drafting ideas in one language before presenting them in another.
7. What changes do you observe in students' target-language proficiency?	Teachers observed increased participation, improved vocabulary use, longer oral responses, clearer written interpretations, and greater confidence in expressing literary ideas in the target language.

Translanguaging as a Scaffold for Literary Comprehension

The first theme concerned the use of translanguaging to support students' basic and inferential comprehension of literary texts. Teachers explained that students frequently experienced difficulty when texts contained unfamiliar vocabulary, archaic expressions, figurative language, or cultural information not directly stated in the text. Rather than translating an entire passage, teachers usually selected key words, sentences, or concepts that prevented students from following the narrative. This selective use of familiar languages enabled students to understand the central meaning while preserving opportunities to engage with the original text.

T1 described this practice as follows: *"I do not translate every sentence because the students still need to struggle productively with the English text. I usually explain only the key expression or cultural reference in Indonesian, and then I ask them to return to the passage and identify the meaning from the context."* T1, interview

This statement suggests that translanguaging functioned as temporary support rather than a replacement for target-language reading. Observation of T1's lesson similarly showed that the teacher explained two culturally specific expressions in Indonesian before asking students to reread the paragraph and provide an English summary. The practice reduced confusion while directing students back to the target-language text. Other teachers used bilingual vocabulary mapping to connect unfamiliar words with synonyms, examples, and culturally familiar concepts. Students were sometimes permitted to discuss the literal meaning of a difficult passage in their first language before identifying its main idea in the target language. This process appeared to lower anxiety and increase participation, particularly among students with lower language proficiency. Instead of remaining silent because they could not immediately

formulate an answer in the target language, students first clarified their understanding collaboratively and then prepared an appropriate response.

Supporting Deeper Literary Interpretation

The second theme showed that translanguaging supported interpretation beyond literal comprehension. Teachers employed multilingual discussions to help students examine characterization, symbolism, motivation, conflict, and moral themes. Literary interpretation often required students to express abstract or emotionally complex ideas that exceeded their immediate target-language proficiency. Allowing students to explore those ideas in a familiar language gave them greater cognitive space to develop an interpretation before concentrating on target-language accuracy.

T3 explained: *“When we discuss why a character makes a difficult decision, the students often have good ideas but cannot express them directly in English. I let them discuss the reasons in their strongest language first. After the ideas become clear, they construct the English explanation together.”* T3, interview

The observation data supported this explanation. During a short-story discussion, T3 asked groups to identify the reasons for the protagonist’s decision. Students initially exchanged ideas in Indonesian and a local language, but each group was required to present its interpretation in English and cite evidence from the text. The multilingual discussion therefore served as an intermediate stage between comprehension and target-language production. Teachers also used translation comparison to reveal that literary meaning could not always be transferred directly from one language to another. Students compared original and translated versions of poems, idioms, or culturally embedded expressions and discussed how word choice altered tone and meaning. Such activities helped learners recognize ambiguity and develop more critical interpretations. Translanguaging was therefore not limited to simplifying the text; it was also used to expose linguistic nuance and encourage analytical reading.

Movement from Familiar Languages to Target-Language Production

The third theme concerned the structured transition from multilingual meaning-making to target-language output. All seven teachers emphasized that translanguaging had to be guided by a clear instructional purpose. They did not regard unlimited first-language use as automatically beneficial. Instead, they organized lessons into stages. Students might initially brainstorm, annotate, or discuss in multiple languages, but they were subsequently expected to summarize, present, or write in the target language.

T5 stated: *“The first language helps them enter the text, but it should not become the final destination. I normally allow bilingual discussion at the beginning, while the presentation, written reflection, and final conclusion must be completed in English.”* T5, interview

This staged practice maintained target-language exposure while recognizing that students required different levels of linguistic support. Teachers gradually reduced first-language assistance when students demonstrated greater comprehension and confidence. In several observed lessons, the teacher first provided bilingual prompts, then used predominantly target-language questions, and finally required students to compose a short analytical paragraph in the target language. The practice also supported differentiated instruction. Students with limited proficiency received more bilingual explanation or peer assistance, whereas more proficient students were encouraged to remain in the target language for longer periods.

Development of Vocabulary, Participation, and Expressive Confidence

The fourth theme concerned perceived improvements in target-language proficiency. Teachers did not claim that translanguaging immediately produced

grammatical accuracy. However, they consistently observed that students became more willing to participate, used a wider range of vocabulary, and produced more developed interpretations. When students understood the literary content, they had more meaningful ideas to communicate in the target language.

T7 reported: *“Before I used this approach, only the strongest students answered questions about literature. After students were allowed to discuss difficult ideas in Indonesian or Sasak first, more of them attempted to answer in English. Their grammar was not always perfect, but their responses were longer and more meaningful.”* T7, interview

This excerpt illustrates the distinction between linguistic accuracy and communicative development. Translanguaging appeared to increase access to classroom interaction and create conditions for target-language practice. Observation records similarly showed that students who initially contributed through multilingual group discussion later provided short target-language responses during whole-class discussion. Overall, the findings for the first research question indicate that translanguaging was implemented through selective explanation, collaborative discussion, translation comparison, bilingual annotation, retelling, and staged language production. Its effectiveness depended on purposeful teacher guidance.

How do translanguaging practices in literature-based language learning contribute to learners’ character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance?

The findings indicated that translanguaging contributed to more than linguistic comprehension. It enabled teachers and learners to connect literary narratives with local values, personal experiences, social issues, and cultural traditions. The use of multiple languages created a space in which learners could examine moral questions, express culturally grounded interpretations, compare perspectives, and maintain connections with their linguistic heritage. Four interconnected themes emerged: character and ethical reflection, affirmation of cultural identity, development of intercultural awareness, and maintenance of local language and culture.

Table 2. Teachers’ Responses to the Cultural and Character-Related Contributions of Translanguaging

Interview question	Summary of teachers’ responses
How does translanguaging support discussions of moral values and character?	Teachers reported that familiar languages allowed students to explain moral judgments, emotional reactions, and ethical reasoning more fully. Literary discussions addressed empathy, responsibility, honesty, justice, respect, courage, and tolerance.
How are students’ personal and cultural identities included in literary learning?	Students connected characters and events with family experiences, community practices, religious values, local history, and linguistic backgrounds. Teachers treated these experiences as legitimate sources of interpretation.
How does translanguaging promote intercultural awareness?	Teachers encouraged comparisons between the culture represented in a text and students’ own cultures. Students examined differences in family relationships, social expectations, traditions, communication styles, and moral perspectives.
How do teachers prevent cultural comparison from reinforcing stereotypes?	Teachers asked students to justify interpretations, distinguish individual behavior from an entire culture, consider historical context, and recognize diversity within cultural groups.
How are local culture and literature incorporated into lessons?	Teachers used folktales, proverbs, oral narratives, local expressions, traditional values, and translated stories alongside international literary texts.
How does translanguaging	It provided opportunities to use local languages academically,

contribute to cultural maintenance?	document cultural knowledge, translate local stories, and demonstrate that local languages can communicate complex literary and ethical ideas.
What changes are observed in students' attitudes?	Teachers observed increased respect for linguistic diversity, stronger appreciation of local culture, greater empathy toward literary characters, more openness to cultural differences, and improved confidence in discussing cultural identity.

Character Development through Ethical and Emotional Reflection

The first theme demonstrated that literature-based translanguaging facilitated discussion of values and character. Literary texts commonly presented conflicts involving honesty, loyalty, responsibility, justice, family obligations, courage, and respect. Teachers explained that students could identify a moral lesson in the target language but often needed a familiar language to articulate why a character's behavior was acceptable, harmful, or culturally significant.

T2 stated: *"Students can say that a character is brave or selfish in English, but the deeper reason often comes out when they use their familiar language. They connect the character's action with what their parents or community have taught them, and then we help them express that reasoning in English."* T2, interview

This excerpt indicates that translanguaging enabled students to move from simple moral labeling to more developed ethical reasoning. During observations, students used familiar-language examples to explain how a character's decision affected other people. The teacher subsequently introduced target-language expressions such as "taking responsibility," "showing compassion," and "considering consequences." In this way, character discussion simultaneously expanded students' ethical understanding and target-language vocabulary. Teachers also reported that multilingual discussion increased empathy. Students were encouraged to imagine a character's position and explain how social, cultural, or family circumstances influenced that character's choices. The ability to draw on familiar emotional expressions allowed students to communicate responses that might have been reduced to simple statements if only the target language had been permitted.

Affirmation of Learners' Cultural and Linguistic Identities

The second theme concerned identity affirmation. Teachers used translanguaging to invite learners' personal histories, community knowledge, and linguistic experiences into literary interpretation. Instead of treating a literary text as culturally distant material with a single authoritative meaning, teachers encouraged students to relate its themes to their own lives. These connections were especially visible when texts addressed belonging, family, migration, inequality, tradition, or generational conflict.

T4 explained: *"When students compare a story with their own family traditions, they feel that their background matters in the classroom. Some students use local expressions that do not have an exact English equivalent. We discuss the meaning and find the closest way to explain it in English."* T4, interview

Such practices validated the learners' cultural knowledge while also developing cross-linguistic awareness. Observation records showed that students became more active when teachers invited them to explain local customs or expressions. The classroom temporarily shifted from a space in which the teacher possessed all cultural knowledge to one in which students also acted as cultural informants.

The findings suggest that translanguaging helped reduce the symbolic hierarchy between the target language and local languages. By using local expressions to discuss complex literary themes, teachers demonstrated that learners' home languages were

capable of conveying intellectual, emotional, and cultural meanings. This recognition appeared to strengthen students' confidence and sense of belonging.

Development of Intercultural Awareness and Critical Comparison

The third theme showed that translanguaging supported intercultural awareness by enabling students to compare cultural meanings across literary and social contexts. Teachers asked learners to examine family relationships, communication patterns, gender expectations, social status, celebrations, conflict resolution, and attitudes toward authority. Students first identified the cultural practice represented in the text and then discussed similarities and differences with their own communities.

T6 described the process: "I ask the students not only whether the culture is different, but why it may be different. They discuss the issue in Indonesian or their local language, and then we examine the historical or social context. This prevents them from quickly saying that one culture is good and another is bad." T6, interview

This approach moved cultural comparison beyond the identification of visible differences. Students were encouraged to recognize that behavior was shaped by historical, social, and individual circumstances. Teachers also reported correcting overgeneralizations when students treated one character as representative of an entire society. They asked learners to return to the text, provide evidence, and consider alternative interpretations. Observation data indicated that these discussions could develop openness and respect. Students sometimes began with judgments based on their own cultural norms but revised those judgments after considering the character's situation. Translanguaging supported this process because students could express uncertainty, disagreement, and culturally sensitive ideas with greater precision before formulating them in the target language.

Cultural Maintenance through Local Literature and Linguistic Resources

The fourth theme involved the maintenance of local languages and cultural knowledge. Several teachers supplemented international literary texts with local folktales, proverbs, oral narratives, songs, and community stories. Students compared themes and character types across texts, translated local narratives into the target language, or rewrote an international story in a local setting.

T1 explained: "I sometimes ask students to bring a folktale told by their parents or grandparents. They write the original expressions in the local language, explain the cultural meaning in Indonesian, and then create an English version. The activity teaches English, but it also records a story that might otherwise disappear." T1, interview

This excerpt illustrates how translanguaging can support cultural maintenance through documentation, translation, and reinterpretation. Students did not merely preserve a story in its original form; they analyzed its values and communicated its significance to audiences using another language. The target language therefore became a medium for extending the visibility of local culture rather than replacing it. The teachers also used local proverbs to clarify themes in international literature. For example, students identified a local expression that conveyed a moral idea similar to that presented in a short story. They then discussed differences in imagery and cultural emphasis. These activities strengthened appreciation of local linguistic resources while developing awareness that cultures may express related human values in different forms.

Integrated Contribution to Holistic Learner Development

The findings suggest that character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance did not occur as separate outcomes. They were

interconnected through the process of interpreting literature across languages. When learners discussed a character's moral decision, they often drew upon family or community values. This activated cultural identity and led to comparison with the cultural context represented in the literary text. Such comparison could then produce greater intercultural understanding and renewed appreciation of local knowledge.

The teachers nevertheless emphasized that these outcomes depended on instructional guidance. Translanguaging did not automatically produce empathy or cultural respect. Teachers needed to select appropriate literary texts, formulate critical questions, challenge stereotypes, and ensure that local cultural practices were examined reflectively rather than idealized. They also needed to establish a classroom climate in which different languages and cultural perspectives were treated respectfully. Overall, the findings for the second research question indicate that translanguaging created an inclusive interpretive space where learners could discuss moral values, express cultural identities, compare worldviews, and sustain local linguistic traditions. Literature provided the narratives and ethical issues, while translanguaging enabled students to engage with them through their full linguistic and cultural repertoires. This combination supported the development of learners who were not only more capable language users but also more reflective, empathetic, culturally grounded, and open to diversity.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that translanguaging was implemented in literature-based language learning as a deliberate pedagogical scaffold rather than as an unrestricted shift away from the target language. The seven teachers strategically used Indonesian, local languages, and English to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary, figurative expressions, cultural references, characterization, plot development, and abstract literary themes. This finding confirms Bonacina-Pugh et al. (2021), who describe translanguaging as the purposeful mobilization of learners' complete linguistic repertoires to support meaning-making. It also supports Carreres et al. (2021), who argue that translation and translanguaging can mediate communication and interpretation across languages instead of merely compensating for linguistic deficiency. In the present study, teachers did not translate entire texts or remove the need for engagement with English. Instead, they temporarily introduced a more familiar language when students encountered significant barriers and then redirected them to the original literary text. This staged process suggests that translanguaging can preserve the cognitive demands of literary interpretation while making those demands more accessible to learners with different levels of target-language proficiency.

The use of translanguaging to clarify complex literary language is consistent with previous research on plurilingual and translation-mediated learning. Gutiérrez (2022) found that translation in second-language education can function as cognitive and metacognitive mediation, allowing learners to process ideas before reformulating them in another language. Similarly, Laviosa (2022) emphasizes that a plurilingual perspective supports concept formation and reflective language use by enabling learners to compare linguistic forms and meanings. The current findings extend these arguments specifically to literature-based learning. Teachers reported that students were better able to understand symbolism, implied meaning, moral conflict, and character motivation when they first explored these issues in a familiar language. This indicates that translanguaging does not simply facilitate literal comprehension. It can support higher-order interpretation by separating the intellectual task of developing an idea from the linguistic task of expressing that idea accurately in the target language.

The findings also align with Gaballo's (2023) discussion of translation in content and language integrated learning, in which multilingual mediation supports both subject understanding and language development. In the observed literature classrooms, students initially discussed complex ideas through multilingual interaction and subsequently presented their conclusions in English. This progression from familiar-language exploration to target-language production illustrates how translanguaging can serve as a bridge between content comprehension and formal language use. The practice therefore challenges the belief that the use of students' first language necessarily reduces target-language learning. Instead, when carefully structured, translanguaging can generate more meaningful opportunities for English use because learners have developed ideas worth communicating. The results consequently support Tsou and Baker's (2021) contention that multilingual resources can assist content learning in English-medium settings without eliminating the instructional role of English.

A particularly important finding was that teachers established clear boundaries around translanguaging. Familiar languages were commonly used during brainstorming, clarification, peer discussion, and interpretation, whereas final summaries, presentations, and written responses were often completed in English. This finding confirms the importance of teacher agency reported by Rokita-Jaśkow (2023), who shows that teachers actively mediate multilingual learners' socialization and classroom participation. In the present study, teachers decided when translanguaging was necessary, what function it should perform, and when learners should return to the target language. Such decisions demonstrate that effective translanguaging requires pedagogical judgment rather than spontaneous or uncontrolled language alternation. The findings also partially respond to concerns that excessive first-language use may limit English exposure. The teachers maintained English as the principal language for formal output while employing multilingual support only at strategically selected stages.

The reported improvement in classroom participation further confirms earlier research. Dutton and Rushton (2020) found that translanguaging spaces enabled students to express linguistic identity and produce more authentic responses through poetry and literary engagement. Similarly, Arshavskaya (2020) reported that multilingual literature activities helped students bring their authentic voices into writing classrooms. In the current study, teachers observed that learners who had previously remained silent began contributing after being allowed to develop ideas in Indonesian or a local language. Their English responses were not always grammatically perfect, but they were longer, more interpretive, and more relevant to the text. This distinction is significant because it shows that translanguaging may first influence communicative confidence, participation, and conceptual quality before producing measurable gains in accuracy. The findings therefore extend previous research by suggesting that literature-based translanguaging can democratize classroom discussion, particularly for students whose interpretive ability exceeds their immediate English proficiency.

The findings related to character development indicate that translanguaging supported learners in moving beyond simple identification of moral values toward more developed ethical reasoning. Students could label a character as brave, selfish, honest, or responsible in English, but they often used familiar languages to explain why the character's actions were morally significant. This outcome supports the view that literature provides a meaningful context for examining values, emotional conflict, responsibility, and social consequences. It also extends the existing translanguaging literature, which has more commonly focused on language development, identity, and intercultural competence than on character formation. In this study, multilingual discussion enabled students to connect literary conflicts with values learned from parents,

religious communities, and local traditions. This relationship between literary interpretation and lived moral knowledge allowed character education to emerge through critical discussion rather than through direct moral instruction.

The role of translanguaging in identity affirmation strongly confirms previous studies. Dutton and Rushton (2020) demonstrate that translanguaging spaces can facilitate the representation of language and identity, while Arshavskaya (2020) shows that multilingual literature allows learners to express authentic personal and cultural voices. The present findings similarly revealed that students became more active when teachers invited them to connect literary themes with family traditions, local expressions, community practices, and personal experiences. Their linguistic backgrounds were treated as interpretive resources rather than as problems to be corrected. This also reflects the broader plurilingual orientation described by Cross et al. (2022), in which learners' languages and literacy practices are recognized as interconnected components of education. By validating local expressions that did not have direct English equivalents, teachers reduced the symbolic hierarchy between English and students' home languages.

The findings also support culturally sustaining and socially responsive approaches to language education. Sun (2025) argues that culturally sustaining pedagogy should connect language teaching with identity, social justice, and the cultural knowledge learners bring to educational contexts. In this study, teachers used literary discussions to recognize local values and cultural experiences while still developing students' ability to communicate in English. This approach did not position local culture and global language learning as opposing goals. Instead, English became a means through which students could explain, reinterpret, and share local knowledge. The study therefore extends culturally sustaining pedagogy by showing how literary texts can function as a meeting point between linguistic development, identity construction, ethical reflection, and cultural representation.

The development of intercultural awareness was another central finding. Teachers encouraged students to compare family relationships, social expectations, traditions, moral perspectives, and communication practices represented in literary texts with those found in their own communities. This confirms Csillik and Golubeva's (2020) view that translanguaging can strengthen intercultural learning by allowing students to draw on multiple linguistic and cultural perspectives. It also corresponds with Jokikokko's (2021) emphasis on the need to create learning communities in which cultural differences are approached through reflection, dialogue, and mutual respect. Importantly, teachers in this study did not limit comparison to identifying superficial similarities and differences. They asked students to consider why practices differed and how historical, social, and individual circumstances shaped a character's behavior.

This critical guidance is significant because intercultural comparison can otherwise reinforce stereotypes. The teachers reported correcting overgeneralizations and requiring students to support interpretations with textual evidence. Such findings extend previous research by emphasizing the mediating role of the literature teacher. Translanguaging by itself does not guarantee intercultural sensitivity. It creates linguistic access to cultural discussion, but teachers must still design questions that challenge simplistic judgments and encourage learners to recognize diversity within cultural groups. This conclusion aligns with Corcoran et al. (2023), who stress that trans/plurilingual pedagogy is shaped by context, teacher beliefs, and institutional conditions. The effectiveness of translanguaging therefore depends not only on which languages are used but also on the critical quality of the discussion they enable.

The findings concerning cultural maintenance provide additional support for research advocating the inclusion of local language and cultural content in formal

education. Fang and Xu (2022) argue that Global Englishes and translanguaging can contribute to more equitable English education by challenging the exclusive authority of standardized English norms. Fang et al. (2022) similarly emphasize the importance of incorporating multilingual and local cultural perspectives into curricula and materials. In the present study, teachers included folktales, proverbs, oral narratives, songs, and community stories alongside international literary texts. Students translated local narratives into English, explained culturally specific expressions, and compared local moral values with those represented in global literature. These activities did not merely use culture as background information; they made local knowledge part of the formal academic task.

The translation of local stories into English is particularly important because it shows how translanguaging can contribute to cultural maintenance through transformation rather than simple preservation. Learners documented oral traditions, interpreted their cultural meanings, and communicated them to wider audiences. This finding is consistent with Mesker and de Jager's (2024) account of intercultural third spaces, in which participants negotiate identity and meaning across linguistic and cultural boundaries. The present study extends that idea by showing that the literature classroom can become a third space where local traditions and international texts interact. Students are not required to abandon their cultural identities to gain access to English; rather, they can use English to increase the visibility and accessibility of their cultural heritage.

The findings also reinforce concerns about learning materials and institutional expectations. Yasasri (2024) demonstrates that textbooks can either support or constrain translanguaging depending on how languages and cultures are represented. The teachers in the present study compensated for limited multilingual materials by supplementing textbooks with local narratives, translated passages, and culturally relevant expressions. This suggests that teachers often bear substantial responsibility for recontextualizing materials. Although such creativity can enrich instruction, reliance on individual teacher initiative may produce inconsistent implementation. Curriculum developers should therefore design literature materials that explicitly include multilingual prompts, translation comparisons, local-global text pairings, and opportunities for cultural reflection.

Theoretically, the study contributes to understanding translanguaging as an integrated literary pedagogy. Existing research has often examined its effects on language proficiency, identity, intercultural awareness, or educational equity separately. The present findings indicate that these dimensions are mutually reinforcing. Improved comprehension enabled deeper interpretation; deeper interpretation created opportunities for ethical reflection; ethical reflection activated personal and cultural identity; and identity-based discussion encouraged intercultural comparison and cultural maintenance. Translanguaging therefore operated not as a single classroom technique but as a connecting mechanism among linguistic, cognitive, moral, and cultural learning.

Practically, the study indicates that literature teachers should use translanguaging selectively, purposefully, and progressively. Teachers may allow multilingual brainstorming, bilingual annotation, translation comparison, peer explanation, and local-language discussion during the early stages of interpretation. However, these practices should lead toward meaningful target-language production through summaries, presentations, analytical writing, or reflective responses. Teachers should also select texts that provide opportunities to discuss moral conflict, identity, social difference, and cultural values. Professional development is necessary to help teachers balance linguistic

support with English exposure, facilitate sensitive intercultural discussions, and assess multilingual meaning-making alongside target-language proficiency.

CONCLUSION

This study examined how translanguaging was implemented in literature-based language learning and how it contributed to linguistic, personal, and cultural development. The findings show that seven language teachers used translanguaging strategically through bilingual explanation, multilingual discussion, translation comparison, peer mediation, retelling, vocabulary mapping, and staged movement from familiar-language exploration to target-language production. These practices helped learners understand difficult vocabulary, figurative language, characterization, symbolism, and culturally embedded meanings. They also increased classroom participation and enabled learners to produce more developed oral and written interpretations in English. Translanguaging was most effective when it was guided by a clear instructional purpose and when teachers maintained meaningful expectations for target-language output. It therefore functioned as a temporary cognitive and linguistic bridge rather than as a substitute for English learning.

The study also concludes that literature-based translanguaging supports development beyond language proficiency. By allowing learners to connect literary texts with personal experience, family values, community traditions, local expressions, and cultural narratives, teachers created opportunities for ethical reflection, identity affirmation, intercultural dialogue, and cultural maintenance. Students were able to examine moral choices, develop empathy, challenge stereotypes, compare cultural perspectives, and communicate local knowledge through English. The major contribution of the study lies in demonstrating that language proficiency, character development, cultural identity, intercultural awareness, and cultural maintenance are interconnected outcomes of multilingual literary engagement. Educational institutions should consequently support teachers through multilingual materials, flexible language policies, culturally responsive curricula, and professional development that equips them to use translanguaging critically and systematically.

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DECLARATION OF USING AI TOOLS

The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence tools were used in a limited supporting capacity during the preparation of this manuscript. The tools assisted with language editing, grammatical correction, sentence restructuring, and improvement of textual coherence. They were not used to collect research data, generate participant responses, conduct interviews, perform classroom observations, or independently determine the study's findings. All interpretations, analytical decisions, citations, and conclusions were reviewed and verified by the authors. The authors retain full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, ethical integrity, and scholarly content of the

article and have ensured that the use of artificial intelligence complies with relevant publication policies.

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