

Deanery Digests are short, plain language summaries of the Department of Education's research outputs. This Deanery Digest is based on the following published research article: Huang, X., & Chalmers, H. (2023). Implementation and Effects of Pedagogical Translanguaging in EFL Classrooms: A Systematic Review. *Languages*, 8:194. [https://doi.org/ 10.3390/languages8030194](https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030194)

What are the effects of Pedagogical Translanguaging on English language outcomes in EFL classrooms?

What is this research about and why is it important?

Pedagogical translanguaging is when teachers provide opportunities for multilingual learners to use all of their languages when engaged in learning. Pedagogical translanguaging as a concept is very popular in research and practice around the education of multilingual learners. Its advocates say that it helps multilingual learners learn more effectively than would be the case if they were only allowed to use one language. For example, some people claim that learners of English will learn the language more successfully if they use pedagogical translanguaging compared to if they use only English (the default position in many English language classes). Before doing this research, we were not clear how well supported by evidence claims like that are. It is important for teachers to know how likely a new approach to teaching will improve outcomes compared to what they already do before expending time, energy and resources in changing practice to that new approach. Therefore, we conducted this study to help English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers decide whether they should change from an English-only approach to a pedagogical translanguaging one.

To do this, we conducted a systematic review, collecting as many comparisons of pedagogical translanguaging and English-only approaches as we could find, then considering what, collectively, they tell us about the relative effects of these alternatives on clearly defined English language outcomes.

We found only 10 reports of relevant research. Together they paint an uncertain picture of the relative effects of pedagogical translanguaging. Some found that it helped, but only on some measures. Some found that it was no better and no worse than English-only approaches. No study found that it was detrimental to English learning. Importantly, many of the studies were conducted in such a way as to make us question how trustworthy their results are.

What did we do?

We conducted a systematic review. Systematic reviews try to find *all* the research that has ever been conducted on a particular topic, then consider what the entire body of evidence can reliably tell us. This helps us to avoid the bias that occurs when people are selective in which research they cite when debating the merits of a new teaching approach. We looked for research that compared the effects of pedagogical translanguaging with English-only approaches on measures of English language proficiency. We also assessed the trustworthiness of the studies that we found, i.e. whether they were conducted to a standard that would allow us to have confidence in their results.

What did we find?

In total, we found ten reports (reporting eleven individual studies) that compared pedagogical translanguaging with English-only approaches. They addressed a variety of different outcomes, such as scores on assessments of English reading, writing, and speaking, as well as more fine-grained outcomes such as understanding comprehension questions that were written in the passive voice.

In about half of the studies, pedagogical translanguaging was associated with better English language outcomes than English-only approaches. In about half, English-only and pedagogical translanguaging approaches seemed equally effective. One study found that it appeared helpful for some outcomes but not for others.

In our analysis of the quality of the studies we found that most had important limitations. Only two studies were conducted in a way that leaves us confident about their results. The remaining studies were compromised by methodological choices that make it difficult to draw any firm conclusions.

What does it all mean anyway?

We are not confident that there is enough research of sufficiently high quality to help EFL teachers decide whether a switch to a pedagogical translanguaging approach would be worth the investment of time, energy and resources in terms of English language outcomes. However, given that no study found that it was detrimental to English language proficiency, we think that EFL teachers who are motivated to explore pedagogical translanguaging with their learners should feel reassured that it will not disadvantage them. Indeed, we know of many studies that ask language learners how they feel about pedagogical translanguaging that demonstrate that they like it and feel engaged by it. This may be reason enough to consider adopting the approach, regardless of the uncertainty around its effects on English language outcomes. However, if English language outcomes are the priority in any EFL teachers' context, they should keep an eye on the emerging research in this area, call for more and better research to inform their practice, and participate in well-designed studies that help reduce that uncertainty.

Material, data, open access article: The full report of our systematic review is open access. You can download it free of charge from [https://doi.org/ 10.3390/languages8030194](https://doi.org/10.3390/languages8030194).

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