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TRANSLANGUAGING: THE PRACTICAL APPLICATION IN THE CLASSROOM - A CASE STUDY

Abstract

The paper primarily focuses on researching the students' attitudes towards the use of translanguaging in the classroom along with the students' performance following the actual application of translanguaging strategies. The study included 137 pupils, from seventh and eighth grades, in the primary school "Begov Han" in Begov Han. The collected data includes answered questionnaires, completed tests and teacher's observations. The results of the study indicate that the use of translanguaging is not only seen favourably by the students but it is also followed by better test results. This leads to the conclusion that incorporation of translanguaging in classrooms should not be so easily disregarded.

Keywords: *translanguaging, B/C/S, English, attitude, impact.*

Introduction

The globalisation of today's society makes multilingual and multicultural classrooms a reality for many teachers. The need to help students in such classrooms assimilate better and learn faster and more efficiently has led to the re-emergence of the debate on translanguaging practices. Though the very first appearance of the term translanguaging is connected to Cen Williams (1994), the origins of bilingual education go back much further. Mackey (1978, pp. 2-3) refers to the unearthed tablets in Aleppo, Syria, in 1977, which contained evidence of bilingual schooling dating back to 4000-5000 years before. In the same vein, Lewis (as cited in Hornblower, 1977) writes about the bilingual Greek-Latin education of young aristocratic Roman boys. To offer the most encompassing definition that is pertinent to this paper, it is possible to broadly define translanguaging as the use "of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire"

without taking into consideration any prescriptive rules and guidelines (Otheguy, Garcia, & Reid, 2015, p. 281). The term “translanguaging” was originally coined by Williams (1994) and Baker (2011) to describe a specific pedagogical practice, namely using L1 in foreign and second language classes to translate, explain, or clarify terms (Wei, 2018). Baker (2011) describes translanguaging as “the process of making meaning, sharing experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages” (Baker, 2011, p. 39).

According to recent trends, it seems that translanguaging has finally been getting attention from a didactical standpoint, and a new, more favourable view of translanguaging is being allowed back into the classrooms. The role of the mother tongue is no longer overlooked, with Hall and Cook (2012) stressing the importance of our own language describing it as “the greatest pedagogical resource” and the one that “lays the foundation for all other languages we might want to learn” (Hall & Cook, 2012, p. 282). Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009, p. 13) talk about this taboo of mother tongue use and the shift that seems to be happening, comparing the process to “an act of theoretical house-cleaning”. Many recent studies and much research on translanguaging have implied that the use of translanguaging strategies in the classroom benefits bilingual and multilingual students (Makalela, 2015, p. 213; Palmer et al., 2014; Worthy et al., 2013; Martin-Beltran, 2014, p. 217). Lambert (1974) makes a distinction between the additive and subtractive bilingualism; additive bilingualism being the addition of an L2 to the mother tongue, and subtractive bilingualism being the slow and gradual subtracting of L1 from the L2 input. Garcia and Sylvan (2011) also add the third type, the dynamic bilingualism described as “the development of different language practices to varying degrees in order to interact with increasingly multilingual communities in the global world” (Garcia & Sylvan, 2011, p. 388). This definition seems to be the closest to the aims of the introduction of translanguaging strategies in classrooms and to the reasons behind the renewed interest in this topic. Such a conclusion is especially interesting in light of the previously well-established view that the mother tongue should not be used in the English classroom and that the main goal is to conduct whole classes solely in English (Krashen, 1985). This leads to a discord between what is mandated and required of teachers and what brings the best results. Williams (1994) has suggested that using the mother tongue helps maximise students’ and teachers’ linguistic resources in the process of building knowledge and problem-solving (Wei, 2018). Naturally, as translanguaging allows students to draw upon their entire knowledge banks and as it shows appreciation for their previous experiences, schools should “encourage (students) to bring all their linguistic resources to bear in a given situation” (Palmer et al., 2014, p. 385). Similarly, translanguaging should not be seen only as a basic code switching or shift between two separate

languages but more as a way for speakers to “select language features and soft assemble their language practices in ways that fit their communicative needs” (Garcia, 2011a, p. 7). Such definitions of translanguaging should be of particular importance if we subscribe to the view that languages influence how we see the world and that people conceive of the world differently across languages (Broditsky, 2001; Whorf, 1956). Therefore, translanguaging can also be described as “the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system” (Canagarajah, 2011, p. 401). Translanguaging sees the language as a mobile and flowing instrument, and in such a view, it is “no longer adequate sociolinguistically to think of language as the property of speech communities or communities of speakers” (Baynham & Lee, 2019, p. 17). Here we see that translanguaging is described with a focus on the entirety of the students’ knowledge and experiences, once again proving that it goes beyond simple division into L1 and L2 allotted time in the classroom.

One important point to note is that translanguaging is seen as encompassing code-switching (Garcia, 2009, p. 25) and that code-switching is only one of the elements of translanguaging practical applications. Therefore, Sayer (2013) believes that “the argument against using code-switching and vernacular is a political one influenced by attitudes and ideologies of language” and emphasises that decisions on educational policies and approaches should primarily be influenced by “a linguistic and pedagogical examination of what actually helps students learn language and content” (Sayer, 2013, p. 79). Looking at translanguaging from this particular standpoint makes it easy to conclude that very often the use of the mother tongue or any other language in the classroom is dictated by the law, which can be quite limiting. In fact, the use of translanguaging as a way of preserving the students’ identity and allowing for better self-expression and acceptance has often been implied (Garcia, 2011b; Kanno, 2000).

In pedagogical terms, translanguaging is seen as “a pedagogical practice where the input tends to be in one language, and the output in the other language” (Baker, 2006, p. 297). This is perhaps best seen during learner-learner interactions, which have already proven to be successful (Rasman, 2018). Moreover, an entire translanguaging practice was built around the use of peer-lingual education (Johnson, 2012). In such instances, bilingual students translate for their peers who have difficulties with the teaching materials. Translingual writing is another one of the prominent translanguaging practices, and it focuses on the incorporation of the entirety of the knowledge fund during the writing process (Canagarajah, 2006). Overall, it is possible to conclude that translanguaging helps develop “a variety of cognitive processing

skills in listening and reading” (Lewis et al., 2012). According to Baker (2011), translanguaging has four main advantages in that it promotes a deeper and fuller understanding of the subject matter, helps develop the weaker language, facilitates home–school links and cooperation, and helps the integration of fluent speakers with early learners (Baker, 2011, p. 289). Similarly, translanguaging allows us to use and teach the English language in a broader context, one that is not self-limiting, as translanguaging “takes us beyond the ugly and simplistic labels of grammar-translation versus communicative language teaching” (Pennycook, 2008, p. 307). However, because of the insistence on using only the mother tongue in English lessons, teachers who do use translanguaging methods are often not willing to admit it (Rabidge, 2019, p. 7). Translanguaging allows us to go against this “ideology of ‘native-speakerism’” (Seltzer and Garcia, 2020, p. 10). There are three theories teachers usually hold about using L1 in the classroom:

- the ‘virtual position’ theory, where teachers exclude the L1 to mirror perceived language usage in the target country,
- the ‘maximal position’ theory, where teachers believe L1 exclusion is not possible, and are therefore flexible with L1 use,
- ‘optimal position’ theory involves teachers who believe that using the L1 enhances TL learning (Macaro, 2009).

The first position is the most common because this theory is something English teachers are usually taught as students and is, quite often, the default public policy for English classes. However, as Rabidge (2019) notes, in reality, most teachers do use L1 in their classes, especially if they have students with varying proficiency levels, as is usually the case.

As with most newer classroom practices, teachers seem to be aware of the benefits that translanguaging brings, but they feel unsure about its actual use, and it is often left at the level of an idea rather than an implemented practice (Nambisan, 2014; Rosen, 2017). On the topic of both teachers’ and students’ attitudes towards the use of translanguaging, results seem to differ as to the appropriate frequency and types of such translanguaging uses. Some studies have shown that students reserve L1 use to grade discussions or individual instructions (Johansson, 2013) while others see it as best fit for explanations on grammatical points (Ke & Lin, 2017). However, the overall consensus seems to be that there are quite a few occurrences of translanguaging in the EFL classrooms, and they are mainly deemed beneficial or are even proven to influence the improvement of the examination results during certain studies, such as

I-Chung Ke and Shumin Lin's (2017) study on the translanguaging approach to TESOL in Taiwan.

Research Aims

The main aim of the research was to investigate students' attitudes and feelings towards the use of translanguaging in English classrooms. Additionally, the further aim was to provide insight into the results of the practical application of translanguaging. This made it possible to look more closely at any possible correlations or discrepancies between the students' attitudes and the actual results of the use of translanguaging. The purpose of the study was to gain a deeper understanding of any potential benefits of translanguaging practices in the classroom.

The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the students' attitudes and previous experiences towards the use of translanguaging in the classroom?
2. Are the students' attitudes confirmed by the results, or are there any discrepancies between the two?

The quantitative part of the analysis focused on the questionnaire feedback and final test results, while the qualitative part of the research focused on the students' impressions in the open-ended question of the questionnaire and the interpretation of the test results along with the teacher's notes during the held classes.

Methodology

The case study was conducted in a school located in Begov Han, a rural area near Zepce. It is a primary school with approximately 300 students. Grades 7 and 8 were the focus of the study. This amounted to 8 grades and 137 students in total. The research was conducted in two separate time periods with different sets of students over a period of three years. The testing was supposed to be conducted in 2019 and 2020, but because of COVID-19, in 2020, it was impossible to hold live in-person classes of the same duration (45 minutes per class). Therefore, the second part of the study had to be postponed until 2022, when the classes were once again held live and in person. All students but one had Bosnian as their mother tongue. One student in the 8th grade had Albanian as his mother tongue. The students' ages ranged from 13 in grade 7 to 14 in grade 8.

As the very first step, the school principal was asked for approval to conduct the study, and the students' parents were asked to sign the permission slips allowing their children to be a part of the research. The next step was to create lesson plans incorporating several translanguaging strategies, such as direct translations in teaching vocabulary, allowing more advanced students to translate instructions to L1 for the benefit of their less fluent peers, eliciting answers in L1, providing additional explanations and information in both languages, and so on. Classes focusing on using only English to explain and conduct lessons in grades VII-1 (in 2019 and 2022), VIII-1 (in 2022) and VIII-2 (in 2019) were first carried out, and then they were followed by those focusing on translanguaging practices in grades VII-2 (in 2019 and 2022), VIII-1 (in 2019) and VIII-2 (in 2022).

Students exposed to translanguaging practices, as well as those exposed to lessons conducted solely in English, were then asked to complete a short test at the end of the class. The test was designed to check their understanding and practical applications of the course materials. All the students included in the study also completed questionnaires focusing on their attitudes and experiences with using translanguaging in the classroom. The questionnaire included six questions in the form of the basic three-point Likert scale, one forced-choice question, and finally, an open-ended question. The questionnaire was written in Bosnian to ensure that all students were able to understand the questions and that their answers were not limited by their language knowledge. Because they had filled out these questionnaires during classes, there were almost no annulled answers, as all the students had to answer all the questions before submitting the papers. These materials can be found in the appendix of this study. Observations focused on the students' reception of L1 use and their own production following the use of L1.

After each target lesson for this study was finalised, the students had to complete a test to check how much they had memorised and understood from the lesson. A survey concerning their attitudes towards translanguaging practices was also carried out. The tests were marked, counted, and presented as percentages in relation to the number of correct answers: 0% to 25%, 26% to 50%, 51% to 75%, and 76% to 100%. The survey answers were collected, counted, and presented as percentages and raw figures. The number of unanswered survey questions was very low - 1 or 2 for each question. The only exception is the final, open-ended question which 10 (7.29%) of the students failed to answer. The full results of the survey are presented in Appendices 1.2. and 1.3. Percentages were calculated using an online percentage calculator (<https://percentagecalculator.net/>).

Results and discussion

Firstly, when asked whether they prefer to use English or Bosnian during their English language classes, 34.30% of students responded that they prefer English, 40.14% preferred Bosnian, and, finally, 24.08% were not sure. The difference between students who chose Bosnian and those who chose English was relatively small, suggesting that students may have mixed feelings when it comes to using their native tongue in English lessons. They may feel more confident explaining some grammatical concepts in L1, as talking about language itself is one of the more difficult tasks for the students, especially at this level.

The following four questions referred to the students' opinions as to whether the use of English or Bosnian made it easier to follow directions and learn vocabulary items and content materials. The results were very interesting, as 43.79% of students agreed that they understood the lesson better when the teacher provided explanations in Bosnian. Conversely, 42.33% of them disagreed with this. As language proficiency levels among students vary, teachers usually employ some sort of translanguaging strategy when giving directions for the tasks. So it is no surprise that a lot of students, 40.14% to be precise, cannot understand the directions for tasks without the help of L1, whereas 34.30% of them can. Similarly, a considerable number of students agree that it is easier for them to learn new words when they are translated to Bosnian (48.90%).

On the other hand, using these new words in English sentences did not seem to make much of an impact as 35.03% of students said that it did not help them understand the word meanings better, whereas 29.19% of them thought that it did. This suggests that using L1 does, in some way, help students understand English better. It helps them understand and relate grammatical concepts to their own language, which in turn enables them to memorise these new concepts better.

Question six focused on peer lingual education and student-to-student interactions, and, interestingly, the students were not in favour of using L1. The results show that 43.79% of students disagree that talking to other students about the task in Bosnian helps them understand the task better in English. Though 35.03% of students do think it helped, the results do not suggest that it is the most beneficial aspect of translanguaging. It may be that the tasks themselves were too difficult for them to do even with additional help from peers in L1 or that any additional explanations were not necessary as the instructions in English were clear enough. The tasks used in textbooks tend to follow the same patterns; this could potentially account for these results as students usually pick up the similarities between instructions fairly

quickly, such as “use the verb in the brackets in n tense”, “decide if the statements are true or false”, and so on. These are repetitive phrases that occur fairly regularly in language classrooms, so further clarifications may not be necessary. The students’ answer to question 7, where 79.56% of students agree that using Bosnian helps them understand English better, suggests that this explanation may hold some merit.

The final question was an open-ended question: Do you think that using Bosnian in English lessons has a positive effect on your learning? Most students opted for simple yes-no answers and 72.99% of them answered YES, 7.29% did not answer the question at all, whereas only 19.70% answered NO. In addition, some students have written some insightful comments. For example, a student from the 7th grade wrote that using Bosnian in English lessons is not beneficial to them, but “for others it may be”. Another one wrote: “I think not because we wouldn’t remember anything as it is easier to remember things when they are spoken in English”. One added that “of course it does because they can understand what it is all about”. A student from eighth grade wrote that “of course it does. I’m learning a foreign language. Of course I need Bosnian”. This suggests that students may already have some notion about the possibilities of using their own language as a basis for learning a foreign one.

The test results also suggest that students tend to understand and memorise the material better when they use translanguaging practices. These results include binary classification accounting for the translanguaging group and the English-only group. In tests carried out in the 7th grade, 40% of students answered over 76% of questions correctly after the class where translanguaging practices were used. Contrastively, in the classes where only English was used, only 22.58% of students achieved high scores. On the other hand, the results for the eighth grades are a bit different. Over 45% of students answered more than 75% of the test correctly in the class where only English was used. In the translanguaging group, 25.64% of them answered more than 76% of questions correctly (Table 1).

Grade	VII	VII	VIII	VIII
Translanguaging (T) or only English (E)	E	T	E	T
Number of students	31	30	37	39
The percentage of the correct answers:				

0-25%	19.35%	23.33%	5.40%	5.12%
26-50%	29.03%	30%	24.32%	20.51%
51-75%	29.03%	6.66%	29.72%	43.58%
76-100%	22.58%	40%	45.94%	25.64%

Table 1: Test results in different grades

The overall results favour translanguageing practices (Figure 1). A lot more students have answered more than 76% of the questions. In classes conducted using only English, more students have answered more than 25% of questions, and the highest percentage of students answered between 51 and 75% of questions. This latter number is a lot lower for the translanguageing groups. One explanation may be that for some students who are not yet proficient in English, the use of L1 is very beneficial, which is why there is a lower number of students answering between 51 and 75% of questions in the translanguageing groups.

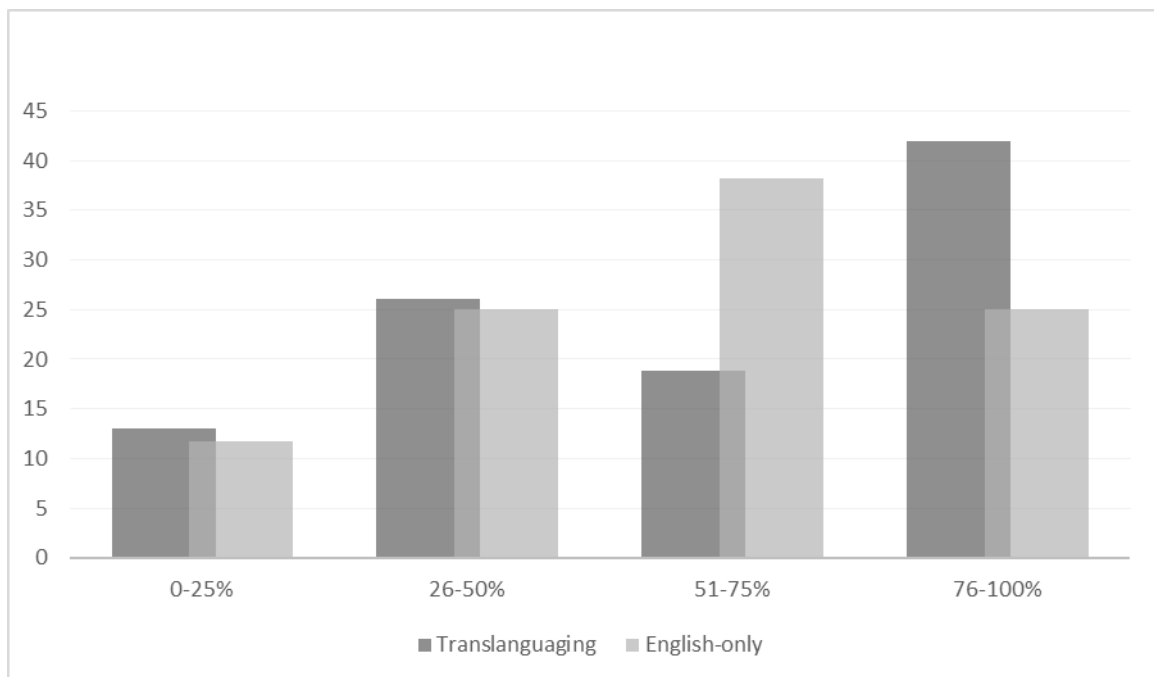


Figure 1: The graphical representation of overall results of the testing done in classrooms

During the analysis of the results an interesting pattern occurred. As there was no way of knowing that an infectious outbreak would occur and cause lockdown all around the globe, when the study was originally planned, it was impossible to predict the way time and the

lockdown might impact the results. Thus, there is a clear difference in the answers of the students who participated in the study in 2019 before the COVID-19 epidemic and those who participated in 2022 after the pandemic. Their answers are shown in Figure 2 side by side for comparison.

The results seem to suggest that students' views on translanguaging practices changed, but that is not very likely. Students who participated in the 2022 study spent almost three years

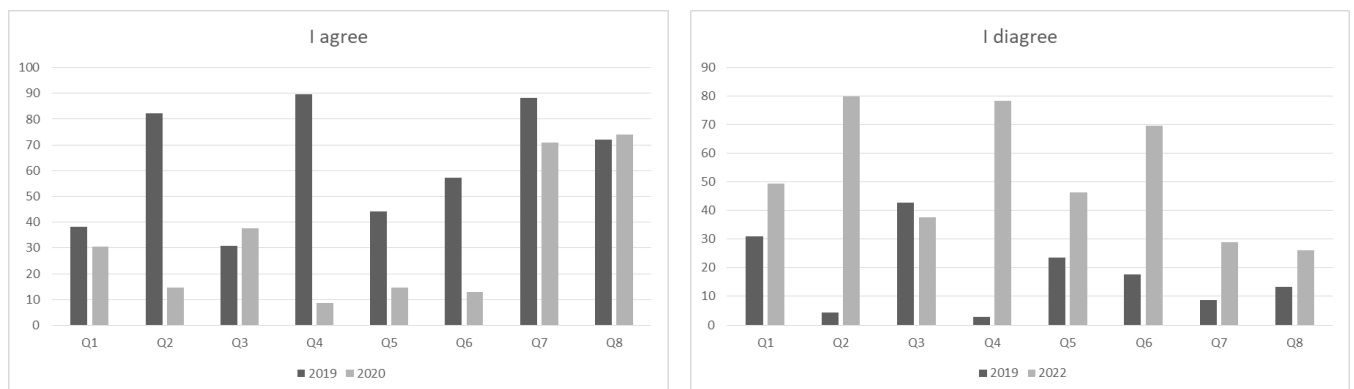


Figure 2: Side by side comparison of students' answers to the survey questions in 2019 and 2022.

learning English through a mix of written instructions, online lessons via the Microsoft Office360 platform, and classes in school, which lasted only 30 minutes. If we compare them to the 2019 group, which had two uninterrupted English lessons weekly for 45 minutes each with detailed instructions from the teacher, the results make much more sense. The largest difference in their answers is in questions 2, 4, 5, and 6. The first three deal with learning and understanding English, and the final one with the help from their peers. A lot of students struggled with the foreign language when the classes went back to normal so it is likely that they found it difficult to keep track of the lessons regardless of whether instructions, translations, and explanations were in English or Bosnian. However, to confirm this, further research should be done across various grades and language levels.

Conclusion

Most teachers, whether they are willing to admit it or not, do use some translanguaging practices when their students share a native tongue. It makes some aspects of teaching English easier and quicker, allowing teachers to focus and give more time to teaching other, more complex concepts. It does make sense to make full use of students' already existing linguistic competences in their native language to teach them a foreign one. This is especially the case with languages that can result in a lot of positive transfers or where possibilities for negative transfers should be emphasised.

The aim of this research was to determine students' attitudes towards translanguaging practices and to investigate whether their attitudes are in line with the actual results of using translanguaging practices in classrooms. Most students answered positively to the questions on the basic benefits of translanguaging stating that it helps them understand materials better and that it gives them confidence to actively participate in class. They prefer to use their L1 when learning new words or discussing a grammatical point. Students also agree that using L1 in English lessons helps them understand the material better. The test results seem to confirm this, as students have done better in classes where translanguaging practices were used.

The noted differences between the grades, especially following the COVID-19 break, do suggest that further research, inclusive of various grades and knowledge levels, should be conducted. Such research may give us more insights as to the frequency and intensity of the application of translanguaging practices. However, it is important to stress that the current results definitely paint translanguaging and its use in a more favourable light, especially compared to earlier beliefs. To conclude, unveiling this powerful tool that can prove beneficial to teachers is something worth investigating, as opposed to grouping it with outdated or 'taboo' practices.

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TRANSLANGUAGING: PRAKTIČNA PRIMJENA U UČIONICI – STUDIJA SLUČAJA

Sažetak

Rad se bavi utvrđivanjem stavova učenika o korištenju transjezičnosti u učionici, kao i proučavanju uspjeha učenika nakon same primjene transjezičnih strategija. U istraživanju je učestvovalo 137 učenika, šestih, sedmih, i osmih razreda osnovne škole "Begov Han", u Begovom Hanu. Prikupljeni podaci uključuju popunjene upitnike, testove i zapažanja nastavnika. Rezultati istraživanja pokazuju da ne samo da učenici vide transjezičnost pozitivno nego postižu i bolji uspjeh na testovima nakon njene primjene. To dovodi do zaključka da se upotreba transjezičnosti ne bi trebala tako lako odbacivati.

Ključne riječi: *translanguaging, B/H/S, engleski, stav, utjecaj.*

Appendix

1.1 The questionnaire

Please provide the answers for the following claims:

1) I prefer using English to Bosnian during lessons.

☐ I disagree ☐ I don't know ☐ I agree

2) I understand the lesson better when the teacher provides explanations in Bosnian.

☐ I disagree ☐ I don't know ☐ I agree

3) I can understand the directions for the tasks in English without the translation to Bosnian.

☐ I disagree ☐ I don't know ☐ I agree

4) It's easier for me to learn new words when they're translated to Bosnian.

☐ I disagree ☐ I don't know ☐ I agree

5) It's easier for me to learn new words when we use them in English sentences.

☐ I disagree ☐ I don't know ☐ I agree

6) Talking to other students about the task in Bosnian helps me to do the task better in English.

☐ I disagree ☐ I don't know ☐ I agree

7) Using Bosnian ☐ helps ☐ doesn't help me to understand English better.

8) Do you think that using Bosnian in English lessons has a positive effect on your learning?

1.2. Survey results- percentages

Questions	I agree	I don't know	I disagree	Unanswered
1. I prefer using English to Bosnian during lessons.	34.30%	24.08%	40.14%	1.45%
2. I understand the lesson better when the teacher provides explanations in Bosnian.	43.79%	12.40%	42.33%	1.45%
3. I can understand the directions for the tasks in English without the translation to Bosnian.	34.30%	24.08%	40.14%	1.45%
4. It's easier for me to learn new words when they're translated to Bosnian.	48.90%	9.48%	40.87%	0.72%
5. It's easier for me to learn new words when we use them in English sentences.	29.19%	35.03%	35.03%	0.72%
6. Talking to other students about the task in Bosnian helps me to do the task better in English.	35.03%	19.70%	43.79%	1.45%
	Helps	Doesn't help	Unanswered	
7 Using Bosnian <input type="checkbox"/> helps <input type="checkbox"/> doesn't help me to understand English better.	79.56%	18.97%	1.45%	
	Yes	No	Unanswered	
8. Do you think that using Bosnian in English lessons has a positive effect on your learning?	72.99%	19.70%	7.29%	

1.3. Survey results- raw numbers

Questions	I agree	I don't know	I disagree	Unanswered
1. I prefer using English to Bosnian during lessons.	47	33	55	2
2. I understand the lesson better when the teacher provides explanations in Bosnian.	60	17	58	2
3. I can understand the directions for the tasks in English without the translation to Bosnian.	47	33	55	2
4. It's easier for me to learn new words when they're translated to Bosnian.	67	13	56	1
5. It's easier for me to learn new words when we use them in English sentences.	40	48	48	1
6. Talking to other students about the task in Bosnian helps me to do the task better in English.	48	27	60	2
	Helps	Doesn't help	Unanswered	
7 Using Bosnian <input type="checkbox"/> helps <input type="checkbox"/> doesn't help me to understand English better.	109	26	2	
	Yes	No	Unanswered	
8. Do you think that using Bosnian in English lessons had a positive effect on your learning?	100	27	10	

1.4. Test results per different grades over time

The percentage of the correct answers	VII-1		VII-2		VIII-1		VIII-2	
Translanguaging (T) or only English (E)	E	E	T	T	T	E	E	T
Year	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022	2019	2022
Number of students	16	15	16	14	18	19	18	21
0-25%	6.25%	33.33%	12.5%	35.71%	0%	10.52%	0%	9.52%
26-50%	37.5%	20%	37.5%	21.42%	33.33%	10.51%	33.33%	14.28%
51-75%	18.75%	40%	6.25%	7.14%	44.44%	31.57%	61.11%	14.28%
76-100%	37.5%	6.66%	43.75%	35.71%	22.22%	47.36%	5.55%	61.90%

1.5. Test results for classes held using translanguaging practices (T) and only English (E)

The percentage of the correct answers	T	E
Number of students	69	68
0-25%	13.04%	11.76%
26-50%	26.08%	25%
51-75%	18.84%	38.23%
76-100%	42.02%	25%