A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN THAILAND EFL CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT
The role of translanguaging in Thai EFL teaching and learning has been recognized for over a decade, with emphasis on its multiple advantages. To provide a reliable summary of how translanguaging has been practiced in the Thai EFL context, this study systematically reviewed empirical studies published between 2015 and 2024 from Scopus and Thaijo databases. To ensure its transparency and standard, the systematic review strictly followed the four stages of the PRISMA framework, including the identification, searching, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. The findings highlight several important patterns. At the tertiary level, mixed method studies found perceptions of translanguaging held by lecturers and students to be positive overall. This included fostering engagement, respect, and meaningful learning. In classroom settings, teachers were found to use translanguaging for scaffolding and creating an inclusive space, despite working under "English-only" guidelines. In tutorial groups, translanguaging facilitated longer term, active leadership, and negotiation of meaning. Similarly, at the secondary level, students were found to gain confidence and increased understanding from the use of translanguaging. While noting the limited empirical evidence, it can be concluded that translanguaging functions as a powerful and flexible tool for teaching and learning in the Thai EFL context. Implications for education policy-makers are raised.
Keywords: Systematic Review, PRISMA, Translanguaging, Thai EFL Context

INTRODUCTION

In Thailand, the English language has long held a prestigious status and there are a huge number of studies conducted to find the most suitable methods of successfully teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) to Thai learners. Translanguaging has recently been recognized as one of the practices that has continuously gained in popularity, especially among bilingual contexts (Abilkassymova et al., 2025; Chaisiri, 2022; Lopez et al., 2017).

Translanguaging as a distinct process has been introduced to and employed by Thai EFL teachers and learners for over a decade (Kampittayakul, 2018). The term translanguaging was first introduced as the process where an individual uses their whole linguistic repertoire to communicate effectively (García & Wei, 2014). One of the most outstanding benefits of translanguaging is that it values how students use their first language (L1) as a supportive resource to meet the purpose of their communication-not as a threat; and as an enhancement for teaching and learning instead of a drawback (Mazak & Carroll, 2017). To support this notion, studies suggest that, in the view of EFL teachers, applying translanguaging in EFL classroom contexts promotes inclusivity, enhances language acquisition, and allows learners to use their full linguistic repertoire in their learning process (Canagarajah, 2011; Champlin, 2016; Wei, 2021). Teachers tend to believe that they can practically employ students' L1 linguistic knowledge by integrating it with the target language, which in this case is English, through translanguaging (Palmer & Martinez, 2013).

Regardless of its advantages, there are some limitations for applying translanguaging in Thai English language teaching (ELT) such as using English-only policies (Thongwichi et al., 2025), which indeed clash with observed classroom practices. To alleviate this situation, translanguaging in the Thai context needs more empirical studies to investigate its strength as an efficient Thai EFL classroom practice. Therefore, this systematic review would bring together what and how translanguaging in Thai EFL classroom has been learned and employed over the past decade in a clear and systematic way by strictly following the four stages of PRISMA framework. This reliable and concise picture of how translanguaging practices are used, its advantages and challenges, and issues for future research, will be presented with the purpose of guiding teachers, researchers, curriculum designers, and policymakers of the future directions of use of translanguaging in Thailand.

Research Questions

The two research questions are:

1) How has translanguaging been practiced in Thai EFL classrooms during 2015-2024, and what benefits and challenges have been reported?

2) What gaps remain in the current research, and what directions are suggested for future studies on translanguaging in the Thai EFL context?

Research Objectives

The objective of this study is to examine translanguaging practices in the Thai EFL context by analyzing publications from the year 2015 to 2024. The study highlights the present practices and possible future research issues.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

English Language Teaching in Thailand

English has been seen as a gatekeeper for higher education and employment. Unlike in the past, when native-like proficiency was an ideal goal among Thai EFL learners, the attitudes have recently shifted during 2021-2024 towards Global Englishes (GE) where the focus is on how the language functions in globalized contexts (Ambele & Boonsuk, 2021; Baker, 2008; Boonsuk et al., 2021; Nitsaisook et al., 2025; Pholying, 2025; Rose et al., 2020). Thai EFL learners have expressed their positive views on their own Thai-English accent and cherished English varieties although GE practices are not yet entirely common in Thai ELT, as the shift

has been driven by top-down English education policy in Thailand, which requires more time to implement, while the notion of monolingual practice has been continuously promoted (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Chaisiri, 2022). However, since there are several challenges in many aspects of the Thai ELT classroom such as students' low proficiency, lack of English exposure beyond the classroom, and teachers' difficulty in teaching productive skills, managing curricula, and assessment, it shows that focusing only on the second language (L2) exposure is insufficient (Farrelly & Singwongsuwat, 2021; Noom-ura, 2013). This has led to ongoing discussions about pedagogical practices in Thailand: should classrooms follow an English-only approach or allow bilingual support? (Farrelly & Singwongsuwat, 2021; Tang, 2020). While English-only teaching is promoted to increase exposure, it has not always brought about desired outcomes. In contrast, bilingual support gives learners space to use their L1, which often helps with comprehension and confidence (Laksanasut, 2020; Pholsward & Boonprasitt, 2015; The Bureau of International Cooperation). This situation highlights the gap between language policy at school and university levels, which emphasizes English-only, and classroom reality, where both teachers and students often turn to the L1 as a practical resource.

Translanguaging in Thai EFL Context

Unlike code-switching, which focuses on the practice of switching from a distinct language to another, translanguaging is a broader concept, defined as the process when an individual uses their entire linguistic repertoire to successfully and meaningfully communicate (García & Wei, 2014). This notion shifts the perception of L1 from being a problem in the classroom to a support to help learners understand the content, enhance participations, and build confidence. Translanguaging has become a considerable practice in Thai EFL settings (Chaisiri, 2022). It yields fruitful benefits for both teachers and learners such as promoting deeper understanding among learners, improving learners' communication skills, boosting learners' confidence, and enhancing teachers' lesson preparation (Haynes, 2025; Kampittayakul, 2018; Mashala & Sanders, 2025; Pawapootanon et al., 2025; Thongwichit et al., 2025). On the other hand, employing translanguaging in the classroom poses challenges such as reduced target language exposure, difficulties with translanguaging pedagogy (Okoye, 2023; Wlosowicz, 2020). Together, these benefits and challenges show that more research is still needed, especially in the Thai context, where a systematic review can help give clearer guidance for both teachers and researchers.

Systematic Review Methods

To systematically review studies related to translanguaging in Thai contexts, two well-known approaches are commonly used, namely the EPPI-Center approach and the PRISMA guideline (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). Both can handle different types of data, keep each stage of the review transparent, and make the process replicable for future studies.

EPPI approach is designed for complex, multi-stakeholder policy reviews and requires extra tools and processes which exceed the scope of this study. With the narrow aim to descriptive synthesize empirical studies in Thai EFL settings, PRISMA offers a clear reporting checklist and flow that fits the study objectives. This study therefore follows the four stages of PRISMA, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, to produce a clear, transparent reports on translanguaging in Thailand EFL context.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Inclusion Criteria

The inclusion criteria are set to exclude unrelated and non-empirical studies. The following transparent inclusion criteria allows valid and reliable results.

1) Keywords and focus: Studies that explicitly mentioned translanguaging in different educational or classroom contexts were included.

2) Context: Only studies directly related to the Thai EFL context were included.

3) Participants: Studies involving Thai EFL learners or users from every level of education were included.

4) Publication year: Only studies published between 2015 and 2024 (a ten-year period) were included.

5) Language: Only studies published in English were included.

Study Types: Only empirical studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods were included.

Searching Process

The search process of this study has been strictly done following the four stages of PRISMA protocol, including the identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion, to systematically review studies related to translanguaging among Thai EFL learners. The process began with identification where both international and local publications related to translanguaging among Thai EFL learners were searched. The search keywords were adjusted to fit different contexts with the purpose of including relevant studies. After the first datasets were collected, any duplicated or unrelated data were removed during the screening process. The researchers then read the titles and the abstracts and excluded those lacking peer-review, or not conducted in Thai EFL settings.

For the eligibility phase, the full texts of potentially relevant studies were reviewed in detail. Decisions were made based on the inclusion criteria. Only empirical studies related to translanguaging in Thai EFL learners were considered. To ensure its reliability, three researchers read and evaluated the full paper independently. Finally, the selected studies were analyzed to summarize the main findings and the ways translanguaging was studied in Thai EFL contexts.

RESEARCH RESULTS

Study Selection Process

The study selection process is sequentially explained, starting from identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and inclusion. In the identification phase, the preliminary total was 5,090 results, which were reduced to 54 after removing duplicate (n = 14) and studies excluding unrelated studies (n = 5,065). The titles and abstracts of the remaining records were screened, leaving 11 studies after 43 were removed. In the eligibility stage, the 11 full texts were assessed, and finally, 5 studies were included in this systematic review.

Analysis of the Included Studies

The analysis of the included studies displays how translanguaging has been used in different settings of Thai EFL classrooms from 2015-2024. In tutorial sessions, translanguaging helped students take longer turns, show listenership, and negotiate meaning. Students with lower proficiency relied more on their L1, while those with higher proficiency used their L1 more strategically to support communication. At the university level, teachers' positive attitudes towards translanguaging were found as they used it as a tool to enhance comprehension, encourage participation and facilitate content learning. Teachers also described using translanguaging for scaffolding in teaching to create safe and welcoming learning environment. The only mentioned barrier was the English-only policy that the teachers had to follow. On the other hand, as revealed in a mixed-method study, students also valued translanguaging and confirmed its advantages, such as clearer comprehension, stronger engagement, and greater class interactions. At the secondary level, students reported the benefits of translanguaging as it boosted their confidence and improved their understanding of the lessons; however, the practices solely depended on teachers' decision and the school policy. The summary of included studies is displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Summary of Included Studies on Translanguaging in Thai EFL Context from 2015-2024

No.	Authors & Year	Type of Research	Scope	Findings
1	Kampittayakul (2018)	Qualitative-observational study	Translanguaging and interactional competence in one-to-one EFL tutorials	Helped students extend turns, show listenership, and negotiate meaning. Lower-proficiency learners used L1 dependently; higher-proficiency learners used it more strategically.
2	Ambele (2022)	Qualitative-multi-site study	University lecturers' perceptions and classroom use	Lecturers viewed translanguaging positively. It supported comprehension and participation, though tensions with English-only ideologies remained.
3	Thongwichit & Ulla (2024)	Qualitative-exploratory interviews	Translanguaging pedagogy in higher education EMI classes	Teachers used translanguaging for scaffolding and inclusivity. They supported L1 use despite policy pressures, creating safer classroom spaces.
4	Nuemaihom, Chutopama & Putklang (2024)	Mixed-methods-questionnaires + interviews	Lecturers' and students' perceptions at Buriram Rajabhat University	Both lecturers and students reported favorable attitudes (M≈4.1-4.2). Benefits included comprehension, engagement, and mutual respect.
5	Le (2024)	Mixed-methods-survey + interviews	Secondary school students' stance and use of translanguaging	Students frequently translanguaged and found it useful for confidence and understanding. Its use depends on teacher support and school policy.

DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

The present systematic review sought to address two guiding questions: 1) How has translanguaging been practiced in Thai EFL classrooms during 2015-2024, and what benefits and challenges have been reported? and 2) What gaps remain in the current research, and what directions are suggested for future studies on translanguaging in the Thai EFL context?

With regard to the first question, the findings of the review consistently demonstrate that translanguaging has been widely employed across different levels of Thai EFL education, yielding predominantly positive outcomes. All five studies included in this review reported that translanguaging enhanced learners' comprehension, increased their confidence, promoted participation, and fostered inclusive classroom environments. These findings are congruent with international scholarship emphasizing translanguaging as a resource that enables learners to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires for meaning-making and participation (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2011; Mazak & Carroll, 2017). Importantly, the reviewed evidence suggests that these benefits are evident across proficiency levels: learners with lower proficiency rely on L1 support for basic comprehension, while more advanced learners employ translanguaging strategically to negotiate meaning and sustain communication (Kampittayakul, 2018).

However, the results also highlight that the implementation of translanguaging is not uniform, but mediated by contextual factors such as teaching techniques, teachers' beliefs, and institutional language policies. For instance, lecturers in higher education reported using translanguaging to scaffold content and build inclusivity in English-medium instruction, even while operating under English-only guidelines (Ambele, 2022; Thongwichit & Ulla, 2024; Nuemaihom et al., 2024). This duality reflects the enduring tension between top-down monolingual ideologies in Thai ELT policy (Boonsuk et al., 2021; Nitsaisook et al., 2025) and bottom-up classroom practices that recognize the practical and pedagogical value of bilingualism. As the literature review demonstrated, English-only approaches have long been promoted as a way to increase L2 exposure (Tang, 2020; Farrelly & Singwongsuwat, 2021), but they have not consistently produced the desired learning outcomes. By contrast, translanguaging appears to provide more immediate benefits by reducing anxiety, fostering learner agency, and supporting comprehension.

While the evidence at the tertiary and secondary levels is substantial, the review reveals a notable research gap: the absence of empirical studies on translanguaging practices in Thai primary schools. As the literature on ELT in Thailand suggests, early exposure to English is often constrained by limited proficiency and lack of resources (Noom-ura, 2013; Laksanasut, 2020). Thus, future research should explore how translanguaging could support young learners at the foundational stages of language acquisition. Additionally, questions remain regarding how translanguaging can be systematically integrated into assessment practices and how different frequencies and modes of language switching affect learning outcomes.

In response to the second research question, this review identifies several future directions. Longitudinal studies are particularly needed to investigate the long-term effects of translanguaging on learners' academic achievement and language development. Comparative research between English-only instruction and translanguaging-based approaches could further clarify the relative benefits and limitations of each method, offering more robust guidance for policy and pedagogy. Furthermore, professional development initiatives should be examined as a means of equipping teachers with strategies to balance translanguaging practices with curriculum demands, especially in contexts where English-only policies remain dominant.

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