RESEARCH ARTICLE

Examining the Tensions of a Translanguaging Stance to Pedagogy in Elementary Dual-Language Bilingual Education

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Abstract

This study examines the challenges elementary Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) teachers face when adopting a translanguaging stance to pedagogy. Using a phenomenological approach, this qualitative study analyzes semi-structured interviews with 24 Spanish-English DLBE teachers across diverse geographic contexts in the United States, revealing two key tensions: (1) the curricular essentialization of language, in which rigid language separation policies, monolingual assessment structures, and the dominance of English limit opportunities for non-standard communication; and (2) the raciolinguistic essentialization of MLs and teachers, wherein translanguaging is framed as a deficit rather than an asset, reinforcing inequities in language instruction and professional agency. While some teachers experience translanguaging as an empowering tool, others face administrative scrutiny and self-doubt, restricting their ability to integrate it fully into their practice. Findings underscore the need for policy reforms that promote flexible language use and increased administrative support that empowers teachers to challenge raciolinguistic hierarchies. By addressing these systemic barriers, DLBE programs can move toward greater linguistic and racial equity for both MLs and their teachers.

INTRODUCTION

The communicative practices of multilingual learners (MLs)[1] in the United States have long been constrained by monolingual biases that shape schooling policies, curricula, and pedagogies (García et al., 2021). This is true in many dual-language bilingual education (DLBE) programs, where students are often seen, taught, and evaluated in monolingual terms (Baker & Wright, 2017; Freire et al., 2023). To view MLs, whose communicative practices do not conform to the standardized criteria of the languages of instruction, in narrowly monolingual terms can have harmful practical implications that reinforce persistent inequalities in educational experiences and outcomes (Flores et al., 2020a).

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[1] In this paper, I use MLs to refer to students enrolled in DLBE programs who are identified to represent the background of the non-English language of instruction, as determined through home language surveys. This does not include white, English-dominant students learning in an additional language.

For example, when languages are understood as discrete categories with clearly defined boundaries, they are often allocated, taught, and assessed monolingually (Hamman-Ortiz, 2019; Otheguy et al., 2015). Where this is the case, languages of instruction are reduced to their standardized (or essential) forms, further reinforcing the perceived borders between them. When MLs are evaluated by the essential standards of each language separately, they are reduced to monolingual terms and judged hierarchically in ways that privilege standard communication, especially in languages perceived to be of higher status or prestige (Flores & Rosa, 2015, 2022). This points to a clear need for a more pluralistic understanding of communication in DLBE planning and pedagogy that disrupts the monolingual essentialization of the languages of instruction and racialized essentialization of MLs as speakers of non-English languages of instruction.

One such theory is translanguaging, which has emerged as both a theoretical framework (García, 2009) and pedagogical stance (García et al., 2017; Wei, 2022) that challenges these monolingual constraints by recognizing MLs' full communicative repertoires as legitimate and vital resources for learning (Otheguy et al., 2015, 2019). From a translanguaging perspective, monolingual terms are insufficient for fully understanding how MLs communicate across the languages of instruction in DLBE classrooms. Rather than asking MLs to conform only to standardized versions of academic communication, teachers should expand what counts as academic to include non-standard practices. However, teachers' engagement with perspectives and pedagogies that align with translanguaging theory is often restricted by tensions that arise from the curricular and ideological manifestation of monolingual biases in many DLBE programs (Poza, 2017).

This study examines how teachers in elementary Spanish-English DLBE classrooms engage perspectives and instructional practices that align with a translanguaging stance when teaching MLs, with a particular focus on the tensions that such engagements produce. Here, I use MLs to refer to students learning English as an additional language, who, in the United States, are predominantly from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. The research question guiding this study is: What challenges do elementary DLBE teachers experience when enacting perspectives and practices that align with a translanguaging stance to pedagogy?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A translanguaging stance is deeply rooted in the context of Spanish-English DLBE in the United States (García & Lin, 2016). Research shows that MLs who complete elementary DLBE

programs tend to achieve higher academic outcomes and greater bilingual proficiency than peers in other models (Lindholm-Leary & Block, 2010; Marian et al., 2013; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020a; Steele et al., 2017). Thus, DLBE is often positioned as a more equitable option for MLs, fostering academic success, heritage language development, and social validation (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Howard et al., 2018).

However, ethnographic studies show how monolingual ideologies continue to shape DLBE program structures, often failing to meet the needs of language-minoritized youth (Dorner et al., 2023; Flores et al., 2020a; Morita-Mullaney et al., 2020b). These ideologies are reinforced as DLBE programs are increasingly marketed to white, middle-class, monolingual families who seek the symbolic capital of bilingualism (Delavan et al., 2024; Flores & McAuliffe, 2020; Valdez et al., 2016), leading to enrollment patterns dominated by English-dominant students (Gándara, 2021; Hurie & Palmer, 2022). Such shifts necessitate further attention to how DLBE programming reinforces language hierarchies and inequities.

Monolingual Ideologies in Spanish-English DLBE

Monolingual ideologies in DLBE programming often result in language essentialization, which means treating languages as fixed, bounded systems rather than fluid, context-dependent practices (Hamman-Ortiz, 2019; Sun et al., 2023). This view upholds language separation and standardization, marginalizing the dynamic ways MLs navigate their linguistic repertoires. This directly influences Spanish-English DLBE planning and pedagogy in numerous cases, where ethnographic research has documented how language instruction often reflects a monolingual bias that assumes languages should be taught and evaluated independently (García & Wei, 2014).

Many programs enforce rigid language separation policies, assigning Spanish and English to distinct subjects, times, or spaces (Palmer et al., 2019; Palmer et al., 2014). While such policies seek to protect Spanish in the context of English hegemony (García & Lin, 2016; Valdés, 1997, 2018), they often fail to support language maintenance or instructional quality (Flores & García, 2017). Moreover, separating instruction by language reinforces hierarchies that privilege standardized, academic varieties, particularly English as a global lingua franca, and marginalize non-standard or community-based forms of Spanish (Wei & García, 2022; Wei, 2022). This essentialist framing extends to student identity and performance, where MLs are judged not only by language use but also by how well they approximate standard forms. Such judgments are often shaped by racialized expectations, which the next section explores.

Raciolinguistic Ideologies in Spanish-English DLBE

Standard language ideologies in DLBE often align with racial hierarchies, positioning English and academic Spanish as benchmarks while marginalizing students from Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and working-class communities (Flores, 2016, 2024; García et al., 2021). These patterns commodify bilingualism for white, middle-class students, while simultaneously pathologizing the language practices of MLs (Block, 2018; Flores, 2016; 2024).

Flores and Rosa (2015) define these dynamics as raciolinguistic ideologies, wherein racialized MLs are judged through the lens of the white listening subject, which functions as a surveillance mechanism that devalues non-white linguistic and cultural practices. They illustrate how, even when adhering to standardized norms, these students are often perceived as deficient, particularly when their ways of speaking deviate from dominant expectations. Efforts to teach them "appropriate" language often ignore how such standards reflect white, monolingual norms that condemn linguistic variation.

In DLBE settings, English-speaking students are frequently celebrated as ideal bilinguals, while Spanish-speaking MLs are positioned as needing remediation (Chávez-Moreno, 2022; Flores et al., 2020a). Native speaker ideals and notions of linguistic correctness function as racialized constructs that privilege whiteness and reinforce exclusion (Flores & Rosa, 2022). Language, then, becomes a proxy for race and power, producing inequities that translanguaging pedagogies aim to challenge (Flores, 2024; Rosa, 2019). By disrupting these ideologies, translanguaging theory offers a socially and historically grounded understanding of communication that affirms the linguistic resources and lived realities of racialized MLs. A critical translanguaging stance, therefore, is essential for educators to resist monolingual norms and promote equity in DLBE classrooms.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study examines the tensions that emerge as teachers engage with perspectives and practices aligned with a translanguaging stance. Theoretically, translanguaging challenges the essentialist treatment of named languages by foregrounding the fluidity of multilingual communication (García, 2009; Otheguy et al., 2015). As a pedagogical stance, it affirms MLs' communicative repertoires as legitimate resources for learning. However, teachers' enactment of translanguaging is often mediated by monolingual ideologies embedded in DLBE programming, as well as their own beliefs about language (Palmer et al., 2014). This study treats translanguaging as both a theory of language and a pedagogical stance. Teachers may

intentionally design translanguaging-aligned activities, engage in flexible practices without naming them as such, or maintain traditional bilingual models that emphasize language separation (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025). To account for these variations, this section delineates the key theoretical constructs of translanguaging that inform analysis.

Translanguaging as a Theory of Language

Translanguaging theory critiques monolingual norms and the nation-state logics that fix languages as bounded, standardized systems (García et al., 2021; Otheguy et al., 2019). These ideological borders, sustained by colonialism and Eurocentrism, obscure the flexible ways MLs communicate in practice. While monolingualism appears stable at the societal level, individual language use, particularly among racialized MLs, is dynamic, contextually responsive, and non-standard.

Rather than treating language as an object to be possessed, translanguaging theorizes language as a socially situated, strategic practice (Wei & García, 2022). MLs do not operate as "parallel monolinguals" (Cummins, 2008; Grosjean, 1989) but draw from unified communicative repertoires that defy rigid boundaries between named languages. This perspective directly challenges how DLBE programs essentialize English and Spanish, framing MLs' translanguaging as the norm of multilingual learning, rather than a deviation from it.

Translanguaging as a Stance to Pedagogy

A translanguaging stance moves beyond linguistic flexibility to a political and ideological commitment: recognizing MLs' full repertoires, interrogating language hierarchies, and resisting deficit discourses (García et al., 2017; Wei, 2022). Teachers adopting this stance aim to create inclusive classrooms that leverage and elevate non-standard practices, validate students' identities, and critically engage with raciolinguistic ideologies (Flores, 2019). The purpose of enacting a translanguaging stance is to create spaces where MLs can critically and creatively engage with the entirety of their communicative repertoire to learn.

Research demonstrates that translanguaging-aligned pedagogy supports MLs' academic development, fosters identity affirmation, and cultivates critical engagement (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025). This includes both planned and spontaneous opportunities for students to use their full repertoires. In other words, intentional lesson design should provide structured, multimodal, and linguistically inclusive tasks, while allowing for emergent translanguaging moments during classroom interaction.

García and Kleifgen (2019) identify five pedagogical dimensions of translanguaging: affordances, co-labor, production, assessment, and reflection. Briefly, affordances refer to ways that teachers can provide MLs with material translingual resources, such as multimodal texts, translations, bilingual texts, or examples of translingual mentor texts. Co-labor includes collaboration between teachers and students, as well as among students, to leverage translingual practices collectively. Production focuses on how teachers can elicit translingual practices from MLs across multiple language modes and domains. Assessment involves concrete ways that teachers make space for MLs to produce translanguaging in their evaluations of content knowledge or metalinguistic awareness. Finally, reflection encourages teachers and students to critically consider how translanguaging shapes learning and interaction, and the tensions it produces related to the larger sociopolitical context in which they learn. These dimensions frame how teachers can design, implement, and evaluate instruction aligned with a translanguaging stance. In this study, they serve as deductive codes for analyzing how teachers conceptualize and enact translanguaging in DLBE contexts.

While translanguaging offers pedagogical and sociopolitical potential, systemic constraints often limit its full implementation (Poza, 2017). Teachers must navigate curricular policies, standardized assessments, and ideological expectations that reinforce monolingual norms, threatening to dilute translanguaging's transformative aims (Jaspers, 2018). Nonetheless, its potential to affirm students' multilingual identities and reframe instruction around equity makes it a powerful tool for educational justice.

Translanguaging in Spanish-English DLBE

The application of a translanguaging stance to pedagogy in Spanish-English DLBE has become a growing focus of recent scholarship (Donley, 2022). Researchers have examined how translanguaging contributes to MLs' identity development, academic engagement, and classroom participation in Spanish-English DLBE settings (García-Mateus & Palmer, 2017; Moses et al., 2021; Poza, 2019). Teachers integrate translanguaging in curriculum, writing instruction, and formative assessment (Bauer et al., 2020; García, 2020; Velasco & García, 2014) and use culturally relevant texts to model linguistic fluidity (Osorio, 2020; Pontier & Gort, 2016).

While some scholars emphasize how teachers use translanguaging to challenge hegemonic ideologies and elevate Spanish as a valued language of instruction (Martínez et al., 2015, 2019), structural and ideological barriers persist (Freire & Feinauer, 2020). English-dominant students

often dominate classroom discourse, limiting opportunities for MLs to engage in non-standard communication (Hamman, 2018; Oliveira et al., 2020). High-stakes assessments continue to privilege monolingual norms (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021; Schissel et al., 2021). Thus, while translanguaging offers a framework for disrupting inequities, its enactment remains fraught and uneven. This study contributes to a growing body of work calling for critical attention to how translanguaging is interpreted, negotiated, and constrained in Spanish-English DLBE classrooms (Qin & Llosa, 2023). It investigates how teachers experience these tensions and how their understandings of translanguaging shape, or are shaped by, DLBE policies, practices, and ideologies.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This study examines the perspectives and instructional practices of 24 elementary teachers working in Spanish-English DLBE programs across the United States. With its focus on participants' understanding of the nature of translanguaging and their experiences with the tensions it can produce in DLBE contexts, a phenomenological approach is relevant. Phenomenology is appropriate for examining how subjects engage in a process of reflection, make meaning, and interact with particular concepts or phenomena (Van Manen, 2016). In this study, the phenomenon of interest is the set of challenges elementary DLBE teachers face when attempting to enact a translanguaging stance to pedagogy within the institutional, ideological, and policy constraints. Here, it is employed as an interpretive approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to deeply explore how teachers engage with perspectives and pedagogies aligned with translanguaging and the tensions that emerge from such engagements.

In this case, the phenomenon under investigation is translanguaging as a theoretical and pedagogical stance and how teachers experience, interpret, and implement (or resist) it in their instructional practice. In translanguaging research, phenomenological analysis can shed light on how translingual communication supports identity formation for multilingual individuals (Hori et al., 2025), how macro-level language hegemonies manifest at the classroom level (Mendoza et al., 2024), and how teachers reflect on how those hegemonies are linked to race and identity (Prada, 2021). By adopting a phenomenological lens, the study does not assume a unified conceptualization of translanguaging. Instead, it explores how teachers construct their own meanings around it, revealing the tensions, challenges, and possibilities within DLBE classrooms.

Recognizing that translanguaging is a contested and often misunderstood concept in educational practice (García & Kleyn, 2016), this study intentionally includes teachers with diverse understandings and enactments of translanguaging. Some participants explicitly identified as proponents of translanguaging, while others engaged in flexible multilingual practices without necessarily naming them as such. Others, still, expressed uncertainty or ambivalence regarding translanguaging pedagogy. Building on this foundation, I outline the study design and analytical procedures used to investigate how teachers engage with a translanguaging stance as a site of ideological tension in DLBE settings.

Participants

In alignment with phenomenological inquiry's emphasis on intentional selection of participants who have directly experienced the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018), participants were selected based on two criteria: (a) actively teaching in Spanish-English DLBE programs at the time of data collection, and (b) having direct Spanish instruction experience with MLs (excluding English-medium monolingual teachers in DLBE programs). Participants were not required to have a formal understanding of translanguaging theory. Rather, a range of perspectives was included, from explicit engagement with a translanguaging stance to implicit or emergent practices.

Recruitment followed a purposeful sampling strategy to elicit a range of perspectives from elementary educators with varied identities and experiences in Spanish-English DLBE programs. Participants were initially identified in Oregon, where the researcher was geographically situated during data collection in the summer and fall of 2021. To expand beyond this regional context and to access a broader network, snowball sampling was employed by asking participants to refer colleagues who also met the study criteria (Parker et al., 2019). This approach supported the inclusion of teachers from California, New York, and Illinois.

As Table 1 demonstrates, the final participant pool reflected diversity across teaching contexts, racial/linguistic identities, and professional experience: it included 18 Latina females, four white females, one Latino male, and one white, non-binary educator. Teachers were evenly distributed across kindergarten through fifth grade, along with two English Language Development (ELD) specialists who taught across grade levels. The sample also included participants with a range of teaching experience, enabling exploration of how translanguaging-aligned stances may evolve over time. Although Latina teachers from Oregon and California

are more heavily represented, this demographic reflects current hiring trends in DLBE programs and provides a nuanced view into how language, identity, and pedagogy intersect in teachers' enactment of or resistance to a translanguaging stance.

Table 1. Participant Information

	state	Program model	grade level	years (experience)	ethnic or racial identity	gender identity
1	CA	one-way	K	1	Latina	female
2	CA	one-way*	1	3	Latina	female
3	CA	one-way*	5	5	Latina	female
4	CA	two-way*	K	12	Latina	female
5	CA	two-way	K	1	Latina	female
6	CA	two-way	1	24	Latina	female
7	CA	two-way	2	4	Latina	female
8	CA	two-way	3	14	Latina	female
9	CA	two-way	3	2	White (USA)	female
10	CA	two-way	4	20	Latina	female
11	CA	two-way*	4	5	Latina	female
12	CA	two-way*	5	14	Latina	female
13	CA	two-way	ELD	9	Latina	female
14	OR	two-way	K/1	1	Latina	female
15	OR	two-way	1	8	Latina	female
16	OR	two-way	2	10	Latina	female
17	OR	two-way	3	2	Latina	female
18	OR	two-way*	3	5	White (USA)	non-binary
19	OR	two-way	4	1	Latino	male
20	OR	two-way	5	3	White (Spain)	female
21	OR	two-way	ELD	21	White (USA)	female
22	NY	two-way	3	11	Latina	female
23	NY	two-way	5	6	White (USA)	female
24	IL	two-way*	5	10	Latina	female

This table displays participants' relevant professional, demographic, and linguistic information. And * denotes a DLBE program strand within an English-medium school.

Data Collection

Data collection relied on semi-structured interviews, a widely used method in phenomenological research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This allows for deep, reflective engagement with participants' perspectives (Hays & Singh, 2023). Each participant engaged in a 45- to 60-minute virtual interview via Zoom, providing an opportunity to explore not only their instructional practices but also the ideological and contextual tensions surrounding translanguaging in their teaching settings. The interview protocol was designed to elicit participants' narratives and interpretations of their pedagogical choices, focusing on language planning and policy in their local context, attitudes towards MLs, communicative variation in

classroom (instruction and assessment) practices, as well as perceived challenges and tensions. Table 2 includes example questions for each topic included in the interview protocol.

Table 2. Interview Protocol Examples

topic	example questions
local language planning, and policy	How would you describe the language policies in your school or district? How do they shape your teaching? What guidelines, if any, exist for how and when students should use Spanish and English in your classroom? Have you ever felt constrained by institutional language policies in your teaching? If so, can you share an example?
attitudes towards MLs	How do you define bilingualism or multilingualism in your own words? What do you believe are the most effective ways to support multilingual learners in developing their linguistic and academic skills? Have your views on multilingualism evolved over time? If so, what influenced that change?
communicative variation in classroom practice	Can you describe a typical day in your classroom in terms of how students use language? How do you decide when to use Spanish, English, or both in instruction? Have you ever encouraged students to use all their communicative resources to express themselves? Can you share an example?
perceived challenges and tensions	Have you encountered any resistance (from colleagues, administrators, families, or students) to allowing flexible multilingual practices in your classroom? What challenges do you face when implementing multilingual teaching practices? Are there any tensions between your own beliefs about language use and the expectations placed on you as a teacher?

This table displays example questions for the topics included in the semi-structured interview protocol.

As the researcher, I am a white, U.S.-born male, fluent in both English and Spanish, with previous experience as a secondary social studies teacher in a Spanish-English DLBE program. Given the linguistic diversity of participants and the bilingual nature of their classrooms,

interviews were conducted flexibly in English, Spanish, or at times a translingual mix, depending on participants' preferences. While most interviews were conducted entirely in English, three were conducted fully in Spanish, and several included spontaneous shifts between Spanish and English. All interviews were audio-recorded and automatically transcribed via Zoom. Interview transcripts were then proofread and corrected by me as the researcher.

Data Analysis

Analysis followed a multi-stage process to identify and interpret both explicit articulations and emergent understandings of a translanguaging stance. This process began with immersion in the data through repeated readings and reflective engagement with the interview transcripts (Saldaña, 2021). Upon completion of each interview, I captured preliminary impressions, emergent patterns, and notable tensions in a detailed memo of teachers' narratives. Rich, detailed passages were identified where teachers reflect on their pedagogical choices, language ideologies, or experiences navigating DLBE structures.

At this stage, I sought to understand the essence of each teacher's lived experience with translanguaging, without immediately imposing predefined theoretical categories. Since phenomenological inquiry values participants' diverse perspectives and varying degrees of familiarity with the phenomenon under study, this research does not assume that all teachers name or conceptualize their practices through a translanguaging lens. Thus, the scope of analysis includes any asset-based, flexible multilingual instructional practices that challenge monolingual bias and the essentialization of language and speakers, regardless of whether participants explicitly framed them as translanguaging.

The next stage in the analytic process involved two cycles of coding, balancing deductive and inductive approaches to ensure a more robust analysis (Clarke & Braun, 2014; Denzin & Lincoln, 2017). In the first phase, I engaged in deductive coding using García and Kleifgen's (2019) five dimensions of translanguaging pedagogy as sensitizing concepts to identify moments in the data when participants described practices or tensions connected to: 1) affordances (curricular materials and resources for learning), 2) co-labor (collaborative learning and meaning-making), 3) production (student-generated communicative practices), 4) assessment (evaluative spaces and methods), and 5) reflection (teachers' metalinguistic awareness and ideological positioning). These five dimensions guided my attention to the instructional modes or spaces where translanguaging was present, constrained, or resisted. This

phase illuminated rich curricular and pedagogical moments as well as teachers' ideological stances and instructional decision-making. It further surfaced how teachers describe, justify, and enact (or resist) translanguaging pedagogy within their specific contexts.

In the second phase, I used inductive coding following Braun and Clarke's (2021) approach to reflexive thematic analysis. I closely re-analyzed excerpts generated in the deductive phase, this time focusing on broader meanings and patterns of tensions, ideological negotiations, and interpretive framings across participants. From this process, I developed two overarching themes that structure the findings section: (1) confronting curricular monolingualism and (2) challenging raciolinguistic ideologies. These themes emerged not from the five pedagogical dimensions themselves (García & Kleifgen, 2019) but from tensions that teachers voiced in navigating their pedagogical commitments and institutional constraints.

While García and Kleifgen's components supported initial coding by identifying pedagogical arenas of interest, the themes presented in the findings represent interpretive categories that speak to the core tensions participants described. These thematic groupings allow for a more coherent presentation of the analysis, revealing how teachers mobilize or resist translanguaging within broader structures shaped by language policy, assessment regimes, and racialized ideologies. This dual-layered analytic approach enabled me to capture both the pedagogical depth of teachers' practices and the systemic forces that shape their work.

FINDINGS

This study shares two central thematic tensions that shaped teachers' experiences and perspectives in relation to a translanguaging stance to pedagogy in DLBE contexts. First, participants grappled with the curricular monolingualism, particularly the entrenched dominance of English, which limited their perceived ability to fully implement translanguaging-aligned pedagogies. Second, many teachers encountered raciolinguistic ideologies that reinforced linguistic hierarchies, impacting both MLs and the teachers themselves. These tensions shaped how participants generally conceptualized, enacted, or struggled with translanguaging in their classrooms. The following sections explore these themes, beginning with teachers' confrontations with the structural and material constraints of curricular monolingualism, before turning to the impact of raciolinguistic ideologies on DLBE teachers and students.

Confronting Curricular Monolingualism

A pervasive challenge faced by nearly all participants is rooted in the monolingual curricular structures embedded in Spanish-English DLBE programs. Each teacher generally described limited access to bilingual materials, the restrictive nature of standardized assessments, and the pressure to align instruction with English-dominant policies as key barriers to enacting a translanguaging stance in their classrooms.

One significant limitation was the lack of culturally and linguistically responsive instructional materials. At the classroom level, this can restrict teachers' ability to provide translanguaging affordances or curricular materials that support and model communicative variation. A fifth-grade teacher (Participant 3) reflected on her efforts to build a bilingual classroom library, stating:

> There just aren't enough Spanish or bilingual versions of books yet. I have a lot of bilingual picture books, but many are just translations of English stories. We can do better equity-wise to have materials that reflect students' backgrounds.

Without access to materials that affirmatively model multilingualism and non-standard communication, teachers found it difficult to challenge English hegemony in ways that meaningfully supported students' full communicative repertoires.

In 18 of the interviews, teachers explicitly addressed how the pressure to adhere to standardized assessment practices further reinforced monolingual expectations. Participant 20, a fifth-grade teacher, highlighted this tension, explaining that:

> Translanguaging is a great tool for exploring how languages are used differently in different countries and regions, so that none of us feel like we are supposed to speak the 'same' language. But students are still beholden to the exams. We are still so far away from being able to truly assess kids in more than just English.

This misalignment between assessment practices and multilingual pedagogies placed teachers in difficult positions, forcing them to balance a translanguaging stance with the realities of English-dominant testing policies. The pressure to prepare students for monolingual assessments often complicated teachers' instructional choices. Participant 12, also a fifth-grade teacher, described this struggle:

> I'm still navigating how to be intentional with translanguaging while also preparing my students for these monolingual assessments. I want it to be the case that we use translanguaging all the time, but I also don't want to see my students struggle. The system is just not set up to allow us to do that yet.

Later, she attributed this to the increasing English-monolingualism of her school community, reporting that "on paper, it looks like my classroom has more students from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. But even though their home language may be Spanish, they're feeling more comfortable and fluent in English." This illustrates how, beyond standardized testing, English hegemony shaped students' language preferences, often discouraging them from engaging in multilingual or non-standard communication.

A similar observation was made by a fourth-grade teacher (Participant 19) who shared how he designed a multiliteracy profile activity, encouraging students to explore and reflect on their multilingual identities. While the activity was successful in highlighting linguistic diversity, he noticed that students still gravitated toward English:

> They key into the social capital of English very quickly. As soon as they figure out that English is the language of the playground and the cafeteria, then the first thing they want to do is communicate with their friends in English.

In other words, the social dominance of English, reinforced by school and community environments, further complicates efforts to sustain translanguaging pedagogies. A fifth-grade teacher (Participant 24) echoed this concern, stating: "Our school has two DLBE strands and is expanding, but it still doesn't feel like a bilingual school. English dominates outside the classroom." This made it difficult for teachers to motivate students to fully value and practice multilingualism and non-standard communication beyond the classroom walls.

Additionally, 21 of the participants mentioned specific institutional barriers they face when attempting to legitimize translanguaging as an instructional practice. In some cases, administrators imposed rigid literacy programs and strict language separation policies, restricting teachers' ability to explore flexible multilingual strategies. For instance, a kindergarten teacher (Participant 4) recalled: "When our administrators adopted specific literacy programs, that's when strict language separation policies came in. We were told that what we were doing [translanguaging] wasn't structured enough and wasn't measurable." This institutional push for rigid language boundaries left teachers questioning their ability to integrate translanguaging into their classrooms, especially when it conflicted with program expectations.

Similarly, Participant 23, a fifth-grade teacher, pointed to a disconnect between language policy and classroom realities: "There's a dissonance between what research says, what policies dictate, and what teachers are actually doing in the classroom on a daily basis." She further described her desire to "carve out spaces for [MLs] to evolve, grow, shift, and make

room for new kinds of language learning," but felt restricted in her ability to do so by this disconnect. Ultimately, she argued that instead of enforcing top-down curricular demands, policies should be informed by what students and teachers are already doing naturally. However, this was rarely the case.

A second-grade teacher (participant 7) described a similar experience with this tension. On the one hand, she shared how a translanguaging stance gives her more confidence as a DLBE teacher, stating, "I am not an expert. I am still learning too, but I learn with translanguaging, and I should never be afraid of who I am as a bilingual teacher." On the other hand, she lamented how the "school and district administrators only want to see assessment data in English," without placing any value on "the bilingual and bicultural learning that we do in class too." Consequently, this privileging of not just standardization and measurability of language of instruction, but specifically of English, undermines teachers' credibility and agency to adopt a translanguaging stance.

Beyond curricular and assessment challenges, at least 13 teachers in the study were also contending with programmatic gentrification, where shifts in student demographics altered the linguistic and cultural landscape of DLBE programs. A kindergarten teacher (Participant 5) reflected on changes in her community: "I remember walking around in this community being so immersed in Spanish - in the city, in the church, in the school. It's not the same now. Our kids are immersed in English everywhere they go." For her, this shift reduced opportunities to model and sustain translanguaging practices, as the growing presence of English-dominant students and families placed additional pressure on teachers to center English in instruction. Many teachers found themselves at a crossroads, navigating the tensions between adopting a translanguaging stance and the persistent influence of curricular monolingualism and English hegemony in and beyond the classroom. These challenges, however, were not solely structural; they were also deeply ideological, as many teachers encountered ideologies that shaped how translanguaging was perceived and valued within their schools.

Challenging Raciolinguistic Ideologies

Beyond curricular monolingualism, many participants identified raciolinguistic ideologies as a persistent challenge in their engagement with a translanguaging stance. These ideologies shaped not only how MLs were positioned in DLBE classrooms but also how teachers themselves were perceived and constrained in their instructional choices. While more than half of the participants saw translanguaging as a powerful tool for disrupting racialized language

hierarchies and fostering a more inclusive, identity-affirming learning environment, the others noted that these hierarchies remained deeply ingrained, often privileging English-dominant students while restricting opportunities for Spanish-dominant MLs. This section examines how teachers leveraged translanguaging as a means of resistance while also grappling with its limitations within racialized educational structures.

In 14 of the interview transcripts, teachers described translanguaging as a means of strengthening students' sense of identity and validating the cultural and linguistic diversity present in their classrooms. A first-grade teacher (Participant 2) emphasized the potential of a translanguaging stance to foster belonging, explaining: "It's a powerful tool to build community around difference. Even though we all do [translanguaging] differently, we now have a word that describes what we have in common." This sense of linguistic and cultural affirmation was echoed by a third-grade teacher (Participant 8), who argued that a binary view of bilingualism often erases the full spectrum of students' identities:

> There is a whole spectrum of identities that we cannot easily talk about or include in our curriculum if we only think of students as bilingual or bicultural. A translanguaging stance acknowledges the incredible amount of diversity that exists on each side of those binaries.

Others shared a similar sentiment, such as a fourth-grade teacher (Participant 10) who framed a translanguaging stance as more than just a linguistic tool for scaffolding and comprehension, but also as a way of understanding identity, including her own: "It's about so much more than just conjugating verbs in different languages. Translanguaging describes my cultural identity too, as a person with a Peruvian mom and a white dad." She later shared that embracing translanguaging in her pedagogy gave her the confidence to share her own cultural identity with students, which, in turn, empowered students to do the same.

For at least eight teachers in the study, this pedagogical stance also encouraged students to challenge dominant norms about academic language. An ELD teacher (Participant 13) explained that across grade levels, she engages students in critical conversations about linguistic authenticity and the ideological constraints of standard academic English: "We talk about writing and speaking in our authentic voices and how it doesn't always have to be held to certain grammar, academic, or pronunciation standards." She saw this as an act of resistance against raciolinguistic ideologies, reinforcing that: "Our authentic voice is also our academic voice. This is part of taking a stance for social justice." Despite these affirmations, most of the teachers reported encountering structural and ideological barriers that limited the transformative potential of a translanguaging stance in their classrooms.

A fourth-grade teacher (Participant 11) reflected on how adopting a translanguaging stance helped her move away from labeling words as "informal," recognizing that all language practices are part of students' linguistic repertoires. However, she noted that this shift in perspective did not eliminate existing disparities: "There's still a huge Spanish learning gap in my classroom. Students who have opportunities to speak Spanish at home are so much further ahead of English-dominant students." She struggled with the reality that while translanguaging was supposed to create equitable learning spaces, it was often leveraged more as a scaffold for English speakers than as a means of fully supporting Spanish-dominant MLs. She reflected:

> My Spanish-dominant students have lost out on so much rich content instruction, at no fault of their own. I keep finding myself using translanguaging mostly as a way to develop Spanish for English speakers, rather than equitably engaging my Spanish-dominant MLs.

A similar contradiction emerged in how teachers navigated expectations around standard academic language. An ELD teacher (Participant 21) acknowledged that while translanguaging was a natural and intuitive practice for students, the pressure to adhere to academic language norms remained strong among educators: "Kids naturally do translanguaging all the time—the adults seem to be the ones that have a hard time with it. But we still teach and use formal language like it's the one correct way to speak." This was often driven by concerns about academic rigor, reflecting a broader tension between translanguaging as an inclusive practice and institutional demands for linguistic standardization.

Nearly half of the teachers described some way that raciolinguistic ideologies restricted access to non-standard approaches to language learning. A first-grade teacher (Participant 6) passionately argued that creative, playful uses of language should be valued in bilingual education: "Inventive language should also have value in learning. The creativity of playing with language. It's beautiful and rich." However, she observed that English-dominant students were often afforded more agency to engage in non-standard language play than their Spanish-speaking peers. Participant 18, a third-grade teacher, reported a similar perception: "White students learning Spanish are encouraged to experiment with language, but Spanish-speaking students of color, even if they already speak English, are not seen as operating with the same language of power." This dynamic reflects the persistent racialization of bilingualism, where MLs are held to higher linguistic expectations while English-speaking students are given more flexibility to engage in multilingual play.

Beyond shaping student experiences, raciolinguistic ideologies also influenced how teachers saw themselves as bilingual educators. For example, A second-grade teacher

(Participant 16) recounted how, early in her career, she grappled with uncertainty about her bilingual teaching abilities: "I didn't know how to be a bilingual teacher at first, and I noticed myself defaulting to translanguaging as my natural teaching practice." Over time, she came to see this as an asset rather than a limitation, explaining: "It's what made the most sense to me at the time, and I have really appreciated the flexibility it gives me to teach in ways that make sense to me and my students." Participant 14, a first-year kindergarten teacher, also shared how a translanguaging stance has affirmed her identity as a bilingual educator: "Being comfortable with being bilingual has been a challenge for me." Like her, 14 other participants mentioned some way that a translanguaging stance has helped them to perceive their own bilingualism and bilingual teaching abilities more positively.

However, not all teachers felt empowered in their bilingual identities. A first-year kindergarten teacher (Participant 1) described receiving conflicting messages about her Spanish proficiency from professors and administrators: "My professors affirmed my tendency to shift flexibly between English and Spanish while teaching, but my administrators saw it as inappropriate for DLBE instruction." This led her to question her legitimacy as a bilingual teacher, making her feel pressured to adhere to monolingual instructional expectations. A fifth-grade teacher (Participant 3) recalled how a former mentor teacher critiqued her Spanish as "not academic enough", causing her to doubt her place in DLBE: "Am I good enough? Maybe I should not be teaching in [DLBE]." These examples suggest that DLBE teachers can also be viewed from deficit-based raciolinguistic perspectives, much like MLs, which can harm their engagement with a translanguaging stance.

For 19 of the participants, these deficit-based perspectives also came from administrators who monitored their instructional practices. A third-grade teacher (Participant 9) shared that she intentionally integrates translanguaging into her classroom, but only when she knows that she is not being observed: "I try to integrate more translanguaging practices… until the principal walks in." This fear of institutional scrutiny was a recurring theme, particularly among early-career teachers. However, some veteran educators felt more empowered to resist these expectations. A third-grade teacher (Participant 22), with over a decade of experience, explained: "I can get away with it more than our newer teachers. I no longer get punished for it, but I always get asked to explain why I do it." This suggests that while experienced teachers may feel emboldened to adopt a translanguaging stance, their practices still face institutional skepticism, mirroring the raciolinguistic constraints imposed on MLs themselves.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges that elementary DLBE teachers encounter when adopting a translanguaging stance in their classrooms. Across participants' experiences, two key tensions emerged. First, teachers described how curricular monolingualism and the dominance of English constrained their ability to implement translanguaging practices fully. These challenges included limited access to translingual instructional materials, the rigidity of monolingual assessment practices, and the broader sociolinguistic pressures that elevate English above Spanish both inside and outside the classroom. This was exacerbated by a lack of institutional support from administrators and the ongoing processes of programmatic gentrification, which reinforced the privileging of English-dominant students over MLs.

Second, teachers expressed a commitment to affirming MLs' identities through a translanguaging stance, yet raciolinguistic ideologies continued to limit the potential for this stance to fully disrupt deficit-based perspectives of MLs. These ideologies shaped how teachers themselves were positioned as bilingual educators, at times affirming their own identities but also restricting their agency to engage in translanguaging pedagogy. While some teachers found empowerment in embracing a translanguaging stance, others grappled with external pressures to conform to monolingual and racialized language norms. In what follows, I connect these tensions to the broader ideological structures of DLBE, analyzing how they shape and constrain teachers' pedagogical agency while also exploring the ways in which teachers find personal and professional empowerment through a translanguaging stance.

Confronting the Curricular Essentialization of Languages

Despite their best efforts to affirm multilingualism, teachers in this study described how monolingual curricular structures essentialize language in ways that limit their ability to adopt a translanguaging stance. Participants spoke at length about the rigid language separation policies that discourage fluid language practices and the lack of multilingual resources that could facilitate translanguaging in instruction. These limitations reflect institutional barriers that sustain monolingual biases within DLBE, reinforcing what Hamman-Ortiz (2019) and Palmer et al. (2014, 2019) describe as the persistent framing of bilingualism through static, essentialist notions of language. Here, we can be reminded of the perceptions of Participant 12, who desires to engage with a translanguaging stance more freely but confronts a system that can be ideologically opposed to such a stance.

This tension between the affirmation of linguistic diversity and the institutional push toward standardization aligns with prior research on monolingual assessment structures in bilingual education (Ascenzi-Moreno & Seltzer, 2021; Schissel et al., 2021). These assessment practices position Spanish and English as fixed, measurable competencies, which narrows the space for translanguaging pedagogy and leaves teachers with few tools to assess MLs in ways that align with their full linguistic repertoires. The dominance of English in instructional practices and student interactions further contributes to the marginalization of Spanish and the suppression of non-standard communication. Teachers observed that MLs often shift toward English due to its higher status within and beyond the classroom, a phenomenon that mirrors Hamman's (2018) and Oliveira et al.'s (2020) findings on the increasing English dominance in DLBE contexts.

In other words, the growing English hegemony of student interactions in DLBE contexts reflects how language speakers can be essentialized through the curriculum, furthering MLs' loss of status in contrast to English-dominant students. Together, these findings reflect how English is often prioritized in DLBE, reinforcing its reputation as a global language and its prestige over Spanish (Flores & García, 2017; Wei & García, 2022). Further, some teachers attributed the declining presence of Spanish in DLBE programs to programmatic gentrification, in which shifting student demographics alter the linguistic and cultural makeup of bilingual classrooms. This is also reflected in a growing body of scholarship that critically examines processes and outcomes of DLBE gentrification (Delavan et al., 2024; Gándara, 2021; Valdez et al., 2016).

Challenging the Raciolinguistic Essentialization of Multilingual Learners

In addition to tensions related to the curricular essentialization of the languages of instruction, strengthened by monolingual biases and English hegemony, teachers also described how raciolinguistic ideologies unequally shape the value placed on MLs' identities and communicative practices. To put it differently, teachers not only confront challenges related to how languages are essentialized in the curriculum but also how MLs are essentialized as speakers of those languages, usually along racial and cultural lines. For example, several participants observed that racialized MLs' translanguaging practices are often framed as deficiencies, reinforcing the surveillance mechanisms of the white gaze that position non-standard language use as inappropriate (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

This dynamic further aligns with research on how bilingualism is racialized in ways that privilege white, middle-class students while disciplining students of color for their non-standard linguistic practices (Chávez-Moreno, 2022; Flores et al., 2020a; Rosa, 2016). Beyond impacting MLs, these ideologies also shaped how teachers viewed themselves as bilingual educators. While some teachers found confidence in adopting a translanguaging stance, others felt their linguistic abilities were scrutinized through deficit-based perspectives. This seems to suggest that the raciolinguistic essentialization of MLs in DLBE (Flores et al., 2020b) can further extend to teachers in ways that reinforce unequal racial hierarchies and that privilege standardized communication norms.

Also reflected in the findings are broader patterns in how bilingual teachers, especially those from racialized backgrounds, are often positioned as less competent than their white, English-dominant colleagues (Flores & Rosa, 2022). However, other participants described how translanguaging empowered them to see value in their bilingual identities and to embrace them as acts of resistance against linguistic norms. These perspectives highlight how a translanguaging stance can serve as an important tool to challenge the raciolinguistic essentialization of MLs and their teachers, as it not only benefits students but also affirms teachers' own identities.

While this study provides salient insights into DLBE teachers' experiences with translanguaging, it is not without limitations. In scope, it is restricted to elementary Spanish-English DLBE programs, which, while common, do not represent the full diversity of bilingual education in the United States. It is important to acknowledge that students and teachers may also draw on additional linguistic resources not captured in this analysis. These may include heritage or home languages beyond Spanish and English, as well as varieties of these languages that do not align with standardized norms. By centering only two named languages, this study may overlook the full extent of students' and educators' plurilingual repertoires and the broader sociolinguistic realities present in DLBE classrooms. Findings may differ in secondary schooling settings or DLBE programs with other partner languages of instruction.

Also related to scope, this study centers DLBE teachers' perspectives while not directly including a wider range of perspectives from students, administrators, or policymakers, which also shape how a translanguaging stance is perceived and implemented. Finally, this study operationalizes a narrow definition of MLs specifically as students in DLBE programs identified as being from Spanish-speaking backgrounds. Therefore, the findings do not fully reflect tensions related to monolingual biases and raciolinguistic ideologies in other DLBE

contexts. Despite these limitations, there are valuable insights on translanguaging, DLBE, and teacher agency to consider for a variety of stakeholders.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

While translanguaging offers a framework for affirming the identities of MLs and resisting deficit perspectives, its classroom implementation remains constrained by structural forces, particularly those rooted in monolingual language planning and raciolinguistic ideologies. This conclusion foregrounds the significance of the institutional context and the extent to which it shapes teachers' ability to engage with a translanguaging stance.

The agency of teachers to align their perspectives and practices with translanguaging is shaped not only by curricular mandates and standardized assessments but also by the broader sociopolitical hierarchies that position English as the dominant, higher status language of instruction. This study demonstrates how teachers' experiences reflect a spectrum of agency as some leverage translanguaging pedagogies as a form of resistance and advocacy, despite these constraints. The participants who shared experiences of resilience and agency worked in contexts of stronger institutional support, in contrast to those who reported less confidence to fully embrace a translanguaging stance.

Thus, when examining the tensions of a translanguaging stance in DLBE settings, we must consider that teachers do not operate in isolation. Rather, school administrators play a crucial role in shaping the conditions that enable or suppress translanguaging-aligned curricula and pedagogies. Moreover, there exists a web of professional expectations, language policies, and evaluation frameworks that often reflect the same monolingual ideologies that a translanguaging stance seeks to resist.

It can therefore be concluded that administrative beliefs and leadership practices significantly influence teachers' engagement with translanguaging, especially in contexts where macro-level policies and accountability pressures restrict instructional flexibility. In sum, this study emphasizes that translanguaging is not only a pedagogical approach but also a political and ideological stance that requires institutional support to reach its full transformative potential. Critically revisiting monolingual policies and supporting teachers' professional agency remain essential to challenging raciolinguistic hierarchies and advancing equity for MLs. This points to several considerations for DLBE stakeholders.

Language allocation and enrollment policies that reflect English-dominant ideologies should be revisited with greater flexibility. For instance, rather than enforcing rigid language separation, programs might adopt policies that support dynamic language use guided by instructional intent and student needs. This can help validate student-initiated language practices while still promoting sustained bilingual development. Similarly, policy shifts should intentionally center the experiences and outcomes of racialized MLs while ensuring equitable enrollment practices. Incorporating critical consciousness as a core principle of DLBE, by encouraging students and educators to reflect on the intersections of race, language, and power, can further strengthen these equity-oriented reforms (Cervantes-Soon et al., 2017; Palmer et al., 2019). Thus, future research should explore how shifts in language policy influence instructional practices and classroom discourse, and how students from different racial and linguistic backgrounds experience translanguaging under evolving policy conditions.

Additionally, when school leaders create professional environments that affirm teacher autonomy and buffer educators from punitive oversight, they empower teachers to explore innovative translanguaging pedagogies with confidence. Thus, both teachers and administrators alike may benefit from opportunities for professional development aligned with translanguaging theory. For example, targeted training for school leaders on critical language awareness and translanguaging-aligned instructional planning can enhance their ability to support teachers' development of a coherent stance. This is particularly important given the varied familiarity teachers reported with translanguaging concepts (Donley, 2023; Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025). Further research should examine how administrative beliefs, leadership styles, and policy enforcement influence the classroom applications of translanguaging. Additionally, studies should investigate how DLBE teachers navigate their professional identities under raciolinguistic scrutiny to understand better how translanguaging may serve as a source of resilience, tension, or professional transformation.

To conclude, there remains a persistent tension within DLBE: while its design aspires toward equity, its implementation is often constrained by monolingual and raciolinguistic ideologies. Translanguaging theory offers a compelling pedagogical and ideological stance for addressing these inequities, but its transformative potential depends on systemic support. With investment in more flexible policies, leadership that supports teacher agency, and critical professional learning, DLBE programs can move closer to realizing their promise as liberatory spaces for MLs and the educators who serve them.

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