

Exploring University Teachers' and Students' Perceptions on Translanguaging Practices in English Classrooms

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Abstract

The study aims to analyze the university teachers' and students' perceptions of 'translanguaging' practices as a medium of instruction in ESL classrooms in Sialkot. A qualitative study was conducted to analyze the perceptions of teachers and students towards 'Translanguaging.' In this regard, data was collected through semi-structured interviews with nine English Language teachers and eighteen undergraduate students of the English Department from three public and private universities in Sialkot. It has been analyzed through thematic analysis with the key aspects of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1987). Findings revealed that 'Translanguaging' acts as a scaffolding tool to bridge the Linguistic gap, peer collaboration, Interaction, learning engagement, Class Participation, etc. Incorporating students' native language alongside English as a medium of instruction in an ESL classroom is beneficial. The study concludes with recommendations for further research on 'Translanguaging' practices.

Keywords:

Translanguaging practices, sociocultural theory, ESL Classrooms, Teachers' Perceptions, Students' Perceptions

Introduction

Pakistan is a multilingual society where people have diversified academic, family, economic, and educational backgrounds. It has been observed that new university entrants find it challenging to tackle the academic challenges because of varied backgrounds and less exposure to the English language. According to educational policy, English is the primary medium of instruction in higher education. The researchers have been exploring innovative teaching strategies to enhance students' learning. This has raised the domain of pedagogical approaches (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Translanguaging is a dynamic pedagogical approach that pertains to the strategic use of learners' full repertoire to facilitate learning and communication (Garcia & Wei, 2014). In a multilingual context, where students and teachers often possess varying levels of proficiency in languages like Urdu, Punjabi, and English. This approach challenges traditional teaching pedagogies, fostering deeper learning and inclusivity by taking up linguistic diversity (Lewis, Jones & Baker, 2012). Despite various research on 'Translanguaging' as an effective pedagogical practice, the implementation of Translanguaging practices remains limited. Often, teachers adhere to monolingual practices in the classroom to maintain academic rigor. This approach marginalizes the students who rely on their native languages for communication and comprehension, ultimately hindering their learning experiences (Creese & Blackledge, 2010). Whereas, Translanguaging offers the potential to bridge the linguistic gap and foster meaningful engagement. It is a misconception that the deviation from standard language practices is rather than a resource for language development. Teachers and students perceive it as a threat to English proficiency. These critical conflicts highlight a critical gap in understanding the role of Translanguaging in English language teaching and learning.

The use of 'Translanguaging' practices enhances students' learning and a better understanding of the context within the classroom (Masood, 2019). This study aims to reveal the teachers' and students' perceptions of 'Translanguaging' practices in ESL classrooms and intends to address the existing gap in understanding the dynamics of teaching methods. The study investigates teachers' and students' perspectives on using different languages as a teaching method and assessing its impact on language teaching and learning within the classroom. More specifically, this research intends to investigate whether 'Translanguaging' improves students' understanding of knowledge, motivation, language competency, and overall learning experience. In such a way, attention will also be paid to the local languages to construct knowledge and better understanding. Moreover, Translanguaging' is a social phenomenon where linguistic features such as code-switching convey an individual's identity, social affiliations, and cultural background (Grenner & Jönsson, 2020). Furthermore, it enables adaptable learning environments that are either multilingual or monolingual. Gaining insights into the perceptions and experiences of beginner ESL learners regarding 'translanguaging' practices is important for developing effective language teaching techniques and creating an inclusive educational environment. In this regard, the following research questions have been generated:

- What are the English Language teachers' perceptions of 'translanguaging' practices in ESL classrooms?
- What are the perceptions and attitudes of undergraduate students towards the use of 'translanguaging' in English Classrooms?

Literature Review

The study of 'translanguaging' is a new field (Lewis et al., 2012a). This concept has attracted the attention of scholars, decision-makers, and people with insights into bilingual education (Simpson, 2016). Most researchers have supported the traditional Western notion of using one language while teaching (Cenoz, 2017; Creese & Blackledge, 2015; Fallas Escobar, 2019; Hornberger & Link, 2012; Nagy, 2018; Wei, 2017). Recently, there has been growing interest in the 'translanguaging' approach, specifically, in

multilingual environments for teaching and learning languages. This approach contradicts traditional monolingual methods, which discourage speaking other languages in the classrooms and concentrate mainly on the target language (García & Wei, 2014). The current research in Pakistani higher education explores the adaptability of ‘translanguaging’ and its effectiveness. There has been extensive research on different aspects of ‘translanguaging’, but little has focused on how teachers understand, perceive, and engage with this practice (Ticheloven et al., 2019).

The idea of ‘translanguaging’ first appeared in bilingual schools in Wales in the 1980s. Cen Williams introduced the term ‘Trawsieithu’, later translated as ‘translanguaging’. It involves the structured use of two languages in a single teaching and learning session. ‘Translanguaging’ is considered a valuable approach to enhance bilingual learners’ skills and comprehension of the subject matter (Leung & Valdes, 2019). However, Poza (2017) states that the definition of ‘translanguaging’ is sometimes limited to code-switching, which restricts the concept of ‘translanguaging’.

‘Translanguaging’ in language teaching and learning involves integrating the students’ diverse and ever-changing linguistic activities. It highlights how colonial language theories promoted social inequalities by favoring certain racial, cultural, and linguistic preferences (Dolsa, 2020). Serai (2022) investigated the ‘translanguaging’ behaviors and attitudes in Algerian university EFL courses. They proposed that both languages should co-exist and grow together, considering ‘translanguaging’ practices to see the two primary languages in bilingual education as part of an interconnected system rather than separate entities. Similarly, students in Pakistan belong to diverse educational and cultural backgrounds, and frequently use their first language in the classroom due to limited exposure to the target language. To address this need of the students, teachers have been increasingly using ‘translanguaging’ as a teaching strategy (Cenoz & Gorter, 2019). As well, Hussain & Khan (2021) claimed that ‘translanguaging’ is common in multilingual classrooms in Pakistani higher education institutions, although Pakistan’s Higher Education Commission has recommended monolingual teaching methods for teachers.

According to Deroo (2020), non-native English language teachers can still use ‘translanguaging’ techniques in their classrooms. Teachers use these techniques by asking students to translate certain words for other students or by using online dictionaries to see the translation of important words. Similarly, Alzahrani (2019) investigated the ‘Translanguaging’ Practices and attitudes of International students in Higher Education at an American University. He explored the impact of one’s proficiency on writing in their native language. On the other hand, Aoyama (2020) explored the use of the first language in communicative EFL classroom settings by Japanese high school students. The study examined how proficient Japanese high school students perceive the use of their native language (Japanese) in the practice of ‘translanguaging’ when communicating in a second language (English). Similarly, Masood (2019) executed the study by analyzing how students and teachers in Bangladeshi universities perceive the term ‘translanguaging’. It caught the interest of the current researchers, who decided to examine the university students’ perceptions of the Pakistani environment. Additionally, Grenner & Jönsson (2020) discussed the concept of ‘translanguaging’, which involves combining one’s native language with other languages to maintain an effective, meaningful conversation. ‘Translanguaging’ might be considered a response to knowing the weaknesses of native language students (Asfour, Ndabula, Chakona, Mason, & D’O, (2020). Mirza & Rubab (2024) investigated the bilingual practices at Pakistani schools through various strategies and their implications in the classrooms of compulsory subjects.

Extensive research has been done on bilingualism and multilingualism, but the research on ‘translanguaging’ practices has seen a significant lack in Pakistani ESL classrooms. In Pakistani universities, interest has been developing in the use of ‘translanguaging’ practices due to students’ diverse backgrounds. However, in the Sialkot region, there is less understanding of teachers’ and students’ perceptions of the use of these techniques in classrooms. Therefore, it is significant to look into the

perceptions of Sialkot undergraduate teachers and students towards the use of ‘translanguaging’ in ESL classrooms. The insights for this study have been taken from the sociocultural theory proposed by Vygotsky (1978). According to this theory, learning is influenced by the social, cultural, and linguistic context because it cannot be gained in an isolated environment. Language is essential in building a connection between students’ previous information and their new information. This theory provides a basis for analyzing university teachers’ perceptions and students’ attitudes toward ‘translanguaging’ practices in ESL (English as a second language) classrooms. This research will bridge up the gap with reference to the use of ‘translanguaging’ practices in classrooms in the Sialkot region.

Research Methodology

The study is qualitative in nature and was conducted in the major universities of Sialkot, Punjab. In this regard, data were collected through semi-structured interviews to analyze teachers’ and students’ perceptions of ‘translanguaging’ practices in ESL undergraduate classrooms in Sialkot. For this, a convenient sampling technique was used to choose nine teachers and eighteen students from the English departments of “Government College Women's University Sialkot,” “The University of Sialkot,” and “The University of Management and Technology”. The content of interviews was comprised of information about teachers’ and students’ positive and negative aspects of ‘translanguaging’ practices and their challenges. Data have been analyzed by using thematic analysis. After analyzing the data, several themes emerged on the basis of teachers' and students' beliefs and opinions with reference to ‘translanguaging’ practices.

Data Analysis

The analysis has been divided into two sections: ‘Section A’ and ‘Section B’. Section A focuses on teachers' perceptions of ‘translanguaging’ practices in university classrooms to enhance the students’ learning in English Language. On the other hand, Section B focuses on students’ perceptions and attitudes towards ‘translanguaging’ in university ESL classrooms with the aim of improving students’ learning and comprehension of subject matter in the English language.

Section-A

With reference to teachers’ opinions, eight themes have emerged in this regard. These themes describe how ‘translanguaging’ facilitates both cognitive and social development of students, as well as language teaching, which are given below:

Theme 1: ‘Translanguaging’: A Mediation Tool for Learning

In ESL classrooms, the term ‘translanguaging’ is considered a mediational tool for learning the target language because it mediates students’ previous knowledge with their current understanding of new English concepts. Most of the participants showed positive responses towards ‘translanguaging’ practices. They were of the view that it is a very effective technique for explaining difficult ideas, concepts, vocabulary words, and meaning-making. Teachers shift between different languages, from English to Urdu, and sometimes Punjabi, to make the complex content/ideas easier for students. It is essential to shift between languages to make the content understandable for students by including examples from daily life and current affairs to keep the students focused. One of the participants stated that:

‘In the lecture, we talk in Urdu and Punjabi through daily life examples and current affairs, so that every student feels included and refers to that one main point that we are talking about. I think shifting in the language is very important as far as your term ‘translanguaging’ is concerned; it’s very important. It is a

need, a necessity, and also for the sake of better understanding, so we need to shift languages because we want to make thee feel connected, so we have to talk about everything.’

Teachers use both languages in the classroom instructions because students are dual language speakers; that is why it is feasible for them to understand both languages, especially with the grammar-translation method. One of the participants commented on this:

‘Yeah! I use both languages because our students are dual language speakers, that’s why it is feasible for them to understand, especially with the grammar-translation method.’

Students’ competence level is very important for teachers, so teachers should use both languages in the classrooms. It would be useless for teachers to talk in English continuously with zero student input.

Theme 2: Addressing the Needs of the Students

With respect to ‘addressing the needs of the students’ refers to students' basic learning needs in ESL classrooms. Each student has different needs, ways of learning, and levels of comprehension. ‘Translanguaging’ facilitates teachers to change their teaching methods according to the different learning demands of the students. Every student in the classroom is from a different academic background, so they are not good at their English proficiency. One of the Participants said in this way:

‘Yes! I teach both English and students’ L1 because it depends on the students’ competence level. They are all different sometimes; Even most of the time, I have to switch to Urdu. Still.’

Teachers addressed that it would be challenging for them to understand if you did not talk to the students in their desired languages. The purpose is to fulfill the demand according to the students’ needs and competence level. One of the participants asserted that:

‘Teachers' native language is not so important for them. The target is to achieve the goals that meet the students’ learning needs.’

Some teachers said they use ‘translanguaging’ to motivate the students and maintain the environment in the classroom because each student is different from others in terms of competence level due to their different linguistic backgrounds.

Theme 3: ‘Translanguaging Impact on Students’ Learning and Comprehension

With reference to the above theme, teachers opined that using ‘translanguaging’ in teaching techniques improves students’ classroom participation. This approach motivates students to participate in the class since they feel comfortable expressing themselves. With their perspectives, communicating in Urdu is not an issue as long as students know what they are doing, along with it they need to write in English. Students engagement matters the most. One of the participants asserted this:

‘It is good as long the students talk rightly. He/she knows what they are talking about, especially the content, and then everything is acceptable.’

Almost all teachers were of the view that majority of the students feel more comfortable because they understand anything in their native language (Urdu). English terminology can be improved by comprehending the main concepts in the students' native language (Urdu) as mentioned below:

‘I must say 60 to 70% students because once you get the idea of anything in your native language. You can have the grip on it. Their learning and comprehension could be enhanced.’

Translanguaging improves students' understanding of complex concepts and motivates them to express their thoughts as they want. Most participants expressed positive views towards using L1 because, in this way, students learn comfortably without any pressure.

Theme 4: Benefits of Translanguaging

With respect to teachers' perceptions, translanguaging has multiple benefits in ESL classrooms. Translanguaging embraces and identifies students' native language (Urdu) through a sense of belonging and encourages them not to feel neglected. One of the teachers commented that:

‘Yes, it impacts their learning, understanding, and connectivity. It is also important to better understand the students to feel connected, focused, and engaged.’

For example, in English classes, students interrupt teachers when they fail to understand the lecture, and using L1 fills in the gaps, which helps them to connect with course content. A teacher commented that:

‘Sometimes, even if the students ask for the translation, they interrupt the teacher and ask if they can explain this again.’

Furthermore, teachers mentioned that it enhances the students' cultural knowledge and identity construction, which allows them to see the broad cultural perspectives and worldviews.

Theme 5: Building Collaborative Connection and Class Management

Teachers opined that speaking different languages in the classroom during lectures increases classroom management in more effective way. Teachers assign different activities and group assignments/tasks, and allows students to use L1 (Urdu) and L2 (English) or any other language in order to promote active engagements among them. So, a teacher mentioned that:

‘Students are more interactive while performing different kinds of activities in the classroom.’

While delivering lectures, most of the teachers prefer ‘translanguaging’ to give examples and jokes in Punjabi and share real-life stories to make the session livelier. One of the participants commented that:

‘Translanguaging makes ESL classes more enjoyable. When we crake a joke in their native language or add some daily life examples; this increases the students’ engagement.’

Peer collaboration and interaction between students give them the freedom to participate in discussions, Q&A sessions, and projects. This freedom makes students feel more relaxed and interested in presenting their views.

Theme 6: Language Flexibility and Cultural Identity

Translanguaging maintains students' language flexibility and cultural identity while gaining new information. Teachers asserted that students can incorporate their cultural backgrounds, values, and individual experiences while speaking in L1 and L2. A Teacher asserted that:

‘I won't put any compulsion on them; I would let them talk in whatever way they feel comfortable. They would feel comfortable talking so I will neither discourage nor encourage them.’

Language plays a significant role in a students' cultural identity. When students communicate in different language, they are more appreciated and develop confidence. Indeed, students should not feel reluctant or

sad because it is their recognition and identity, and speaking the mother tongue does not affect the second language. One of the teachers commented that:

‘You should not feel reluctant about it. It’s your confidence, your recognition, and your identity, so yes, it must not affect the second language learning.’

Teachers believed that language flexibility is another effective way of creating an interactive learning environment that honors students’ cultural identities. This method produces a more respectful environment, and students’ participation makes them feel more a part of the learning process.

Theme 7: Effective Implementation ‘Translanguaging’ Practices

An approach suggested by the teachers is situation-based ‘translanguaging.’ In this approach, students are given random situations and allow them to talk freely with each other in specific settings or contexts, which helps them to interact strongly with each other. This random conversation or dialogue delivery permits students to improve their language skills in an informal environment and boosts their confidence in communicating in English. A teacher asserted that:

‘We would give them a situation, and we will be able to get some good results after some time. In such a way, they can enjoy such situations in their comfort Zone along with their friends or choose a partner because they know that nobody will judge and humiliate them.’

Most of the teachers said that revising the present teaching methodologies and teacher training would be an effective technique because it is the responsibility of teachers rather than students. One of the teachers highlighted that:

‘I think a teacher must revise their teaching methodologies; teachers must be trained for teaching so the first responsibility is of the teachers rather than the students’

Teachers emphasized the scope of ‘translanguaging’ practices, which makes learning interesting and enjoyable for students. Using different languages in courses and activities improve students’ comfort level and overall involvement in the subject.

Theme 8: Negative Views towards ‘Translanguaging’

This theme presents the perceptions of a few teachers who are less enthusiastic about using ‘translanguaging’ in ESL classrooms. These teachers commented that encouraging students to utilize their second language (L2) is important for improving fluency and confidence in English. One of them asserted that:

‘I mostly encourage my students to use English. I force my students to do direct talk in a second language so that their second language can be improved.’

According to their perceptions, using two languages in an ESL classroom should not be mandatory because it removes attention from learning English, which they believe is essential for competency. One of the teachers quoted that:

‘It should not be mandatory. So, I will not say that it should be mandatory. It gives students a sort of relaxation.’

Teachers support a strict English-only approach in the classroom, claiming that this method assures students' exposure and practice in the target language. They believe that daily instructions and practices in English are the only ways to gain fluency and confidence.

On the whole the findings reveal that 'translanguaging' is viewed as an extremely beneficial teaching tool that can help in a variety of ways. In this regard, most of the teachers responded that it is a significant in enhancing students' learning, making the complex concepts understandable, improving comprehension, boosting confidence, raising motivation and students' engagement, making courses more enjoyable, encouraging and scaffolding students, and explaining difficult concepts. It enhances the students' linguistic and cultural identity, a sense of inclusion, linguistic flexibility and cultural identity while absorbing new information. This helps in building connections among students. Most teachers prefer situational-based 'translanguaging.' On the other hand, few of the teachers, didn't encourage their students to speak L1 because they think that the target language, L2, is important for improving fluency and confidence in English.

Section-B

With respect to the students' perceptions, mostly views were positive towards 'translanguaging' practices. They considered it acts as a scaffolding tool that raises motivation, confidence, and engagement in the classrooms. Very few participants showed negative views regarding 'translanguaging' because they thought learning a second language was important, and our main goal was to achieve the target language. The analysis of interview transcripts made it possible to identify the following themes:

Theme 1: Bridging Language gaps

The perceptions of the students' attitudes towards 'translanguaging' practices state that they play an important role in bridging gaps in ESL classrooms. Students who are not fluent in the English language feel hesitant when the teachers use only English (L2). Their learning process automatically slows down because they hesitate to ask questions regarding complex concepts/ideas, and this declines their participation in the classroom. 'Translanguaging' practices help students to express more ideas while giving presentations. This boosts their confidence level and decreases their fear and anxiety about making mistakes in the English language. One of the students commented:

'I feel hesitation sometimes while giving presentation in English and sometimes in both languages. It is just a little bit of nervousness to confront the audience in the English Language.'

Most of the students feel difficulty while presenting in English due to a lack of experience and confidence. In the initial semesters, students can clearly express themselves in their native language (Urdu). Speaking in front of students decreases their anxiety and nervousness and makes them feel comfortable. One of the students asserted that:

'I feel confident when I explain things in both languages. I do not feel comfortable in speaking English, but I feel comfortable in my language when I have to explain things.'

Translanguaging techniques are important in bridging the language gaps in ESL classes. These practices make students feel less hesitant, present more easily, and have a more comfortable environment to share their thoughts. They help students to speak freely, to stay focused in the classroom, and to build confidence.

Theme 2: ‘Translanguaging’ as a Scaffolding Tool

Students believe teachers should use both languages as scaffolding tools to make meanings. This method bridges the knowledge gap and helps students to understand the difficult subjects. Students were of the view, when teachers use two languages, they can easily comprehend the complex concepts. One of the students commented that:

‘I find it easier to understand concepts when the teacher explains them in both languages.’

All students belong to different backgrounds, but some have poor educational backgrounds. For them, ‘translanguaging’ is necessary.

‘All the students belong to different backgrounds. Some students cannot understand English due to their poor academic background. I would say that the teachers should use both languages in the classroom.’

Most of the students opined that it also helps them to learn synonyms and their meanings. ‘Translanguaging’ improves students' ability to express themselves in multiple situations. One of the students said that:

‘When the teacher explains the content in both languages, we learn so many synonyms and their meanings.’

Students expressed their thoughts that ‘translanguaging’ should be encouraged more in ESL classes. Teachers save these students and help them with the content by giving explanations in Urdu.

Theme 3: Peer Collaboration and Interaction

Concerning this theme, mostly students were of the view that ‘translanguaging’ approach is important for below-average students in the classrooms. Working with peers, students who struggle with difficult topics might clarify their confusion, learn relevant knowledge and skills, and explore ideas that they would not have done before. Through knowledge exchange and different perspectives regarding a particular subject create a more supportive learning environment for average students. One of the students highlighted that:

‘It is helpful for us, low-average students and those from different backgrounds. We discuss with classmates because in this way we can grasp more ideas and more knowledge; we gather concepts and learn through each other; it helps better knowledge construction.’

Moreover, ‘translanguaging’ helps students see the world from different perspectives. These diverse classroom interactions promote creativity and development among those students who learn from new perspectives. The students commented that:

‘Every other student understands things differently, so by discussing, we can learn about the perspectives of other students. I think when you share your ideas, you get a better understanding and make us comfortable and confident in explaining things.’

Students add that communication with other people teach them new things, such as understanding different projects and difficult terms. Responses suggest that using different languages and, peers as resources enhance the interactions.

Theme 4: Enhancing Classroom Engagement and Class Participation

Regarding this theme, mostly students opined that this approach supports them to participate in different activities and tasks in ESL classroom settings, and to make the classroom environment enjoyable that is

an important factor in increasing engagement. Engaging in discussions and presentations is one of the most successful ways to grab students' interest in lessons. Students' responses highlighted that classroom activities play an important role in students' engagement in the classroom. One of the students asserted that:

'Through activities, students engage themselves. These things make the classroom more enjoyable for all of us.'

Another important way to enhance classroom participation is to divide the students into small groups, pairs, and teams. Rather than the typical teaching structure, teachers should incorporate more activities or presentations into lectures. One of the students said that:

'One should achieve more activities or presentations in lectures rather than the typical teaching structure.'

Teachers develop a more supportive environment, engage students in other activities, encourage group work, and support active involvement.

Theme 5: Negative Views towards 'Translanguaging'

A small number of students gave negative views towards 'translanguaging.' They are very less supportive of using multiple languages in ESL classrooms. Few students prefer speaking English because they think increasing their English skills is more beneficial. A student opined that:

'I prefer it in English because we have been studying English subjects. It is beneficial to speak the English Language in classrooms, we must speak English because that is what we are here for.'

A few students' responses express that the use of L1 (Urdu) does not improve the writing skills of students. These students feel that using their native language (Urdu) plays a role as a barrier to improving English writing skills. These skills involve a complete interest in language proficiency. A student asserted that:

'I don't think so; it improves our writing skills. We do not feel good speaking Urdu in English class because we are here to learn English.'

In addition, some students do not feel comfortable and motivated when L1 (Urdu) is used in an ESL classroom. They feel confident and happy when they speak English.

The findings reveal that 'translanguaging' is viewed as a beneficial approach that can help in a variety of ways: as a scaffolding tool, bridging language gaps linguistic tool, peer collaboration and interaction, enhancing classroom interaction and participation, and somehow negative views. Majority of the students mentioned that incorporating different languages in the classroom enhances their comfort in learning and facilitates better comprehension of complex concepts and challenging vocabulary, their knowledge and communication. It is an effective way for students to express their ideas, understand unfamiliar content, and enhance their communication skills. On the other hand, few of the students are not in favor of speaking different languages in ESL classes. It's not always beneficial in improving writing skills, while some students found it difficult or ineffective while speaking in English language. These students benefit from an environment where they can regularly practice their English skills because it boosts their confidence and proficiency.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research explored how teachers and students perceive 'translanguaging practices in ESL classroom. The findings revealed the major benefits of 'translanguaging' such as enhanced

comprehension, improved communication, and an increase in student participation in the classroom. Teachers believe that it is a beneficial tool for fulfilling the different learning needs of the students, and for maintaining a diverse classroom environment. On the other hand, students also found ‘translanguaging’ as an effective tool because it gives a better understanding of the concepts and improves student’s confidence. ‘Translanguaging’ plays a significant role in improving students' learning and understanding in diverse classroom environments. This research presents strong evidence in favor of ‘translanguaging’ by investigating the perceptions and attitudes of teachers and students in depth. Additionally, it highlights the importance of using ‘translanguaging’ in English language classes because it is a helpful method for increasing students' engagement, improving understanding in a better way, and supporting students in using different languages.

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