



## Increasing Multilingual First-Grade Learners' Online Engagement through Pedagogical Translanguaging

Leonardo D. Tejano

Mariano Marcos State University, Philippines

### ABSTRACT

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Engagement is essential to any learning. Engagement allows learners to increase their knowledge, demonstrate that they have mastered the material. However, language differences are one of the reasons that prevent learners from actively engaging in online synchronous classes. Specifically, in the case of multilingual learners, adjustments in the delivery of instruction brought about by the pandemic present an additional barrier as communication strategies vary between online and face-to-face contact. Thus, this classroom action research aimed to address this gap by employing pedagogical translanguaging in Mother Tongue-Ilokano classes. Through observations, the researcher analyzed the translanguaging behaviors of first-graders and outlined a pedagogical translanguaging approach. Through a Learners' Online Engagement Rating Scale, the researcher observed the development in the online engagement of his first graders during the utilization of pedagogical translanguaging. Considering the observations made before and after employing pedagogical translanguaging, it can be concluded that pedagogical translanguaging can increase the online engagement of Multilingual First-Grade Learners. With this finding, employing pedagogical translanguaging in multilingual classes is recommended. Aside from increasing online engagement, other benefits of pedagogical translanguaging such as increasing scores, are also suggested.

### Keywords:

Online Engagement, Multilingual Learners, Pedagogical Translanguaging, MTB-MLE

### INTRODUCTION

Engagement is essential to any learning. And learning needs the learner's active engagement (Mercer, 2019). Engagement allows learners to increase their knowledge, demonstrate that they have mastered the material, and acquire confidence. In addition, it is considered that when learners are engaged, the circumstance boosts their attention, fosters the development of higher-order thinking abilities, and promotes meaningful learning experiences. Moreover, according to Phaswana (2010), learners' engagement in classes is essential for creating innovative, dynamic, and meaningful learning experiences. Nevertheless, despite the various benefits of learners' engagement in classes, there are still learners who continue to struggle with engagement in their classes (Weaver and Qi, 2005). According to Susak (2013), class size, self-esteem, language barriers, classroom atmosphere, opinion of

faculty, feedback from teachers, and subject delivery are significant elements that might impact learners' engagement. In the context of online learning, Jónsdóttir et. al. (2021) corroborates with these findings of Susak (2013) as they cited language as one of the reasons that prevents learners from actively engaging in online synchronous classes.

Specifically in the case of multilingual learners, Gitschthaler et al. (2022) found that unforeseen adjustments in the delivery of instruction in an effort to create a mode in which learning may continue uninterrupted by COVID-19 present an additional barrier. As communication strategies vary between online and face-to-face contact, the language resources that multilingual learners are accustomed to employing to interact with their peers differ significantly from those required online.

Since all levels of education have moved online, it is likely that early grade multilingual learners had the same problems engaging in online classes. In early childhood settings, according to Aydogan et al. (2015), children learn through a variety of activities that require them to pay attention,

Corresponding Author: Leonardo D. Tejano

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observe, actively manipulate materials, comprehend new concepts, and master them. Given its online nature and communication barriers, especially in the case of multilingual learners, online education is unable to provide what Maxwell et al. (2001) described as "classroom activities that promote active engagement, particularly for early grade learners, allow them to actively construct knowledge and make sense of the world and are thus more likely to support learning."

Addressing communication barriers towards active learning engagement particularly of multilingual learners or learners of different mother tongues, Okal (2014) said that the use of mother language and multilingual education allows learners to better absorb lessons and actively engage in the learning process by asking, replying, sharing, and doing things on their own in which she described as translanguaging. According to Garcia (2009), translanguaging is the process of accessing different linguistic features or diverse modes of what are referred to as autonomous languages in order to maximize communication potential. As a pedagogy, translanguaging may be seen as instructional strategies utilized in a multilingual educational setting for pedagogical purposes (Cenoz and Gorter 2017).

Taking into account the aforementioned claims on the importance of engagement to the education of early grade multilingual learners, especially in the time of online education, this action researcher utilized pedagogical translanguaging to increase multilingual first grade learners' online engagement. In particular, this study sought to accomplish the following:

1. Describe the online engagement of the multilingual first grade learners;
2. Outline how pedagogical translanguaging can be employed to increase multilingual first grade learners' online engagement; and
3. Identify if there is an improvement in the online engagement of multilingual first grade learners after employing pedagogical translanguaging.

### METHODS

This study was conducted at Mariano Marcos State University - Laboratory Elementary School (MMSU-LES), located at Castro Ave. Laoag City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines. The participants of the study were the 63 first-grade learners enrolled for the A.Y. 2021-2022. The study was conducted in the first quarter of the academic year 2021-2022. This study followed the classroom action research design that combines practitioner inquiry with practitioner inquiry to identify what approaches to learning are most effective in a given classroom setting (Orland-Barak, 2009). CAR was founded with the objective of assisting educators in enhancing the quality of teaching they provide in the classroom (Mettetal, 2001). The data needed for this study was gathered during their Mother

Tongue (Ilokano) classes with me. Furthermore, this study followed the protocol approved by the University Research Ethics and Review Board under the project Ilokano-Based Translanguaging Approach to Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in which I am the principal investigator.

The Learners' Online Engagement Rating Scale is the primary research instrument utilized for this study. The said rating scale was used in determining the level of online engagement of the first-grade learners in their Mother Tongue (Ilokano) classes before and after the intervention. The Learners' Online Engagement Rating Scale was adapted from the Student Participation Rating Scale of Richards (2003). It consists of ten statements or indicators that measured aspects of learners' participation, including their communication, interaction and relationships with their classmates. The scale lists down the frequency of actions such as no online engagement, low level of online engagement, high level of online engagement, and highest level of online engagement. This rating scale undergone validation by five classroom management experts. It also undergone try-out. Synchronous Class Recording Transcriptions were also utilized. Notetaking was also done.

Lastly, to analyze the gathered data, mean score was computed to analyze the quantitative data of the level of the participation of the first-grade learners in their classes before and after the intervention was implemented.

### FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

#### *Findings*

#### **Online engagement of the multilingual first grade learners**

This classroom action research was conducted in my Grade 1 Mother Tongue (Ilokano) classes, which is one of the grade levels under the MTB-MLE program. These learners are all residents of Ilocos Norte, where Ilokano is the mother tongue. After documenting, transcribing, and analyzing learners' engagements both during formal online classes and online informal activities such as while waiting for the class to start and during small-group consultations, it can be said that the majority of them (about 75 percent) have a tendency to use English more frequently than Ilokano. Nevertheless, it cannot be said that they do not know Ilokano because they are able to answer and ask some basic questions and participate in activities even though Ilokano is the main language in the question or activity in question. It was also observed that there were learners who could take part in discussions that were mainly taking place in Ilokano, despite the fact that they could not fluently speak Ilokano, just like their other peers, claiming that they could not understand the language. Noting these multilingual tendencies of the Ilokano learners, their knowledge of Ilokano, Filipino, and English was ascertained,

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and their use of language was described as translanguaging, which occurs productively in situations when learners are collaborating or engaging online.

### Outlining a pedagogical translanguaging strategy to increase multilingual first grade learners' online engagement

Before presenting the outline of the pedagogical translanguaging strategy to increase multilingual first grade learners' online engagement, it is important to understand how mother tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) operates. MTB-MLE, which is one of the salient features of the K to 12 Curriculum, is based on the first maxim of education that learning should begin with the concept known by the learner, and from there, the learning of a new concept or knowledge will grow. As a strategy to intensify early childhood education and early literacy, it is strictly implemented from Kindergarten to Grade 3. From Grade 1 to Grade 3, the first language becomes an important vehicle of learning, first as a medium of instruction and second as a subject. In this study, the mother tongue was Ilokano. However, there are situations where there are different mother tongues in a classroom. There is also the situation where the learner is also a speaker of another language and, due to various factors, is more likely to use another language. According to Calinawagan (2016), such a scenario is common in densely populated cities. An example of this is the locale of the current study. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2010), 98.1 percent of households in Ilocos Norte spoke Ilokano as their primary language at home. Nevertheless, there are households that were reported to speak these languages: Tagalog (1.0 percent), Isneg/Isnag/Apayao (0.3 percent), Yapayao (0.2 percent), Itneg/Tingguian, and Maranao (0.1 percent each), and others. Although not reflected in the statistics, Filipino and English are also used due to politics, social and mass media, educational institutions, and the perceived social status of using these languages. In this case, it is important to have a strategy that can be employed in this type of linguistic diversity within the classroom. It should also not be forgotten that part of MTB-MLE is objective on multilingualism, or also learning Filipino and English. This means that, in addition to the strategy already mentioned, this study's strategy can also be used to teach English and Filipino effectively.

Thus, considering the characteristics of the use of language by the first-grade learners, the intervention in increasing multilingual first-grade learners' online engagement is pedagogical translanguaging. According to Otheguy et al. (2015), translanguaging is the ability of a multilingual to make use of the full linguistic repertoire without regard to watchful adherence to the socially and politically defined boundaries of named languages. In translanguaging, language

is viewed as a unitary meaning-making system of speakers. Garcia (2009) describes translanguaging as a mental process and skill always associated with multilinguals. This strategy may help learners enhance their understanding of the lesson and comprehend the meaning of new vocabulary in another language, which will result in increased online engagement. It is particularly termed pedagogical translanguaging because translanguaging is a voluntary, natural, and practical skill of a multilingual person, and, in this case, I outlined and controlled the steps in order to ultimately increase online engagement. Specifically, this intervention followed the following steps:

**Step 1. *Setting a Linguistically Democratic Atmosphere in the Online Classroom.*** At this stage, I informed the learners that they could speak, sing, and participate in the class in any language that they were comfortable with. I did set a linguistically democratic atmosphere in the online classroom by first showing a picture of a jellyfish and letting the first-grade learners describe it. When a learner said that jellyfish cannot talk, I asked the learners if they wanted to be jellyfish as well which cannot talk. When the learners said no, I told them that, therefore, they can speak "English, Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, but not Jelly-jellyfish." When everybody laughed, I said that because the class is Mother Tongue-Ilokano, they all must try their best to speak and learn Ilokano but can still freely speak Tagalog and English. When asked why they must follow such a rule in class, a learner said that if they do not speak, they will not be able to express what they are thinking. According to Jørgensen (2004), democratic learning environments give learners more control over their learning and use shared decision-making to get more learners engaged in the learning situation, thus improving the total learning.

**Step 2. *Identification of the Translanguaging Pattern.*** As mentioned in the previous section, I did document, transcribe, and analyze learners' engagements for this study. This is to identify the translanguaging pattern that will be systematically used for pedagogical translanguaging. It was observed that translanguaging happened during discussions, both formal and informal, of concepts such as how a game can be played; during the contextualization of lessons; relating real-life experiences; and providing examples. The following patterns were identified:

1. First-grade learners systematically codeswitch and code-mix in place of vocabulary or terms unknown to the learner or known by a learner but unknown to a co-learner;
2. As with vocabulary or terms, first-grade learners use linguistic features or grammar from a specific named language when developing sentences in another language

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with which they are unfamiliar. For example, in saying the English sentence, "*The girl is beautiful,*" in Ilokano, a learner has a tendency to follow the same English structure as "*Ti babai ket napintas.*" Though this can be understood in Ilokano, this structure is not natural because Ilokano, and Tagalog, are predicate-initial languages;

3. First-grade learners exhaust their linguistic knowledge in order to clearly explain or prove what they are saying; and
4. The first-grade learners relate their lessons in Mother Tongue-Ilokano with their other lessons in Filipino and English; thus, the codeswitching and code-mixing (in our school, Filipino and English are immediately introduced as early as first-grade, unlike in other schools in the Department of Education).

While it can be noted that codeswitching and code-mixing were recognized as strategies of the learners in order to adjust to their linguistic needs, I am particularly interested in

looking into how the use of linguistic features, regardless of whether these features fall under particular named languages, serves as a mental and innate process to make meaning and sense, thus termed as translanguaging patterns. During instruction, the teacher took note of these patterns and utilized these in giving instructions as well as in developing language activities.

**Step 3. Generalization.** In this phase, I synthesize the lesson with particular emphasis on language. Meaning, as the first-grade learners brought out their knowledge of the subject matter regardless of language differences, in this phase, I now bridge it to Ilokano, the main focus of the mother tongue subject. It is done both as a class and through small groups, so learners are given the opportunity to engage with each other as well as scaffold peers who are not familiar with the language (Ilokano).

### Online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners

This subsection presents the data on first-grade learners' online engagement before and after the utilization of pedagogical translanguaging.

### Online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners before pedagogical translanguaging

**Table 1. Level Online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners without employing the pedagogical translanguaging.**

Section	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Masaya	2.38	2.50	2.53	2.44	2.46	Low Level of Online Engagement
Masigla	2.10	2.61	2.71	2.58	2.50	High Level of Online Engagement
<b>Overall Mean</b>					<b>2.48</b>	<b>Low Level of Online Engagement</b>

*Legend: Range of Mean*

<i>Range of Mean</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation</i>
3.50-4.00	Highest Level of Online Engagement
2.50-3.49	High Level of Online Engagement
1.50-2.49	Low Level of Online Engagement
1.00-1.49	No Online Engagement

Table 1 presents the level of online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners for one month without employing pedagogical translanguaging. The table reveals that without pedagogical translanguaging, first-graders' online engagement mean is 2.48, or Low Level of Online Engagement. During this month, I adhered that during mother tongue classes and even informal sessions, Ilokano must be used. Although other languages such as Tagalog and English responses were accepted, it was only between me, as the teacher, and the learner. Online engagement among learners was also not so much observed, especially among learners. According to

Kiramba, (2017); Martinez-Alvarez, (2017); Velasco and Gracia (2014), learners do not engage in class activities if they lack the vocabulary to effectively express what they want to convey. Considering that these learners have various linguistic backgrounds, such hesitance in engaging corroborates the assumption of Dorner and Layton (2014) that learners struggle to engage and fully express themselves if the language being used in the classroom does not reflect the language of their experiences and ideas. This then implies the need for teachers to really know not only the experiences of the

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learners but also the language in which these experiences are created and ultimately adjust teaching approaches.

### *Online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners after pedagogical translanguaging*

**Table 2. Level Online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners employing pedagogical translanguaging.**

Section	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Masaya	2.78	2.78	2.88	3.06	2.88	High Level of Online Engagement
Masigla	2.65	2.71	2.81	2.90	2.78	High Level of Online Engagement
<b>Overall Mean</b>					<b>2.83</b>	<b>High Level of Online Engagement</b>

*Legend: Range of Mean*

<i>Range of Mean</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation</i>
3.50-4.00	Highest Level of Online Engagement
2.50-3.49	High Level of Online Engagement
1.50-2.49	Low Level of Online Engagement
1.00-1.49	No Online Engagement

The table above shows the online participation of first-grade learners when pedagogical translanguaging was employed. It reveals that the mean of the four observations made when pedagogical translanguaging was utilized is 2.83, which can be descriptively interpreted as *High Level of Online Engagement*. During these periods, I observed that more learners are engaging in their classes. Furthermore, it was observed that learners are helping each other to translate or help their learners express themselves in Ilokano, which is the

goal of the subject. According to Kampittayakul (2018), opening a "translanguaging space" creates a learning environment in which pupils can feel more comfortable using their linguistic resources. Wei (2011) also added that translanguaging encourages the use of linguistic resources to create understanding of the subject matter. It also indicated that translanguaging improves communication skills, comprehension, proficiency, and class engagement.

**Table 3. Level Online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners before and after pedagogical translanguaging.**

Section	Before pedagogical translanguaging	Descriptive Interpretation	After pedagogical translanguaging	Descriptive Interpretation
Masaya	2.46	Low Level of Online Engagement	2.88	High Level of Online Engagement
Masigla	2.50	High Level of Online Engagement	2.78	High Level of Online Engagement
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>2.48</b>	<b>Low Level of Online Engagement</b>	<b>2.83</b>	<b>High Level of Online Engagement</b>

*Legend: Range of Mean*

<i>Range of Mean</i>	<i>Descriptive Interpretation</i>
3.50-4.00	Highest Level of Online Engagement
2.50-3.49	High Level of Online Engagement
1.50-2.49	Low Level of Online Engagement
1.00-1.49	No Online Engagement

### **Discussion**

Based on the data that can be seen from the findings, it can be said that pedagogical translanguaging can increase the online engagement of multilingual first-grade learners. So, in the conclusion and recommendations section of this paper, I will suggest using pedagogical translanguaging in multilingual

classes, such as in the Philippines, where there is a Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education program, which is a strategy to increase the literacy rate of the country; make teaching more effective by using the language or languages that learners already know and are comfortable with; and support multilingual learning towards Filipino, English, and



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other languages. Although supported by data, I am aware that the recommendation to use it in classes may still not be supported by some teachers or school administrators for various reasons.

First, there is still a misconception about Philippine languages, the Philippine language situation, and a child's mother tongue that affects the perspective of teachers and school administrators. An example is the continued belief that the languages of the Philippines are bound entities, and teaching, although there is MTB-MLE, is still monolingual (Parba, 2018). To put this in context, Northern Luzon, the region of the Philippines where this study was conducted, can be considered a multilingual region. According to the Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2021), there are 54 languages in Northern Luzon. As to language use or the actual linguistic performance of the people, aside from one's mother language, it is common for the people of Northern Luzon to also speak Ilokano, the regional lingua franca, Filipino, the national language, and English, which is a medium of instruction in almost all of the educational institutions in the country (Calinawagan, 2020). Afable (2004) also noted that people of Northern Luzon can also speak and understand multiple local languages, such as Ibaloy, Kalanguya, I'uwak, Ikaraw, and Kankanaey. Related to this complex multilingualism is the intense language contact, which can provide implications for the language background and linguistic performance such as alternative pronunciations, grammatical structures, and vocabulary mixing and switching (Gramley 2012). Taking into account the principles of learner-centered education, these linguistic traits must also be in line with the way learners are taught for learning to be effective. Thus, it can be said that monolingual approach is suitable for teaching multilingual learners such as in the Philippines.

Secondly, there is still a persistent misconception about the outcome of language contact, such as the integration of linguistic features known to a speaker as a mark of lack of language proficiency (Anastassiou and Andreou, 2017). In other paradigms, the integration of linguistic features is called code mixing and code switching. Although these two sociolinguistic terms are different, with code mixing referring to the hybridization of language use and code-switching as movement from one language to another, mixing and switching occur in the speech of all multilinguals (Anyar, 2017). In this study, although I recognize the aforementioned paradigms, I chose to use the paradigm of translanguaging because it is focused not on looking at linguistic features as codes but rather on how the features, regardless of which named languages they fall under, contribute to the making of meaning and sense, which is my particular interest as a teacher. Because of this ongoing misconception, the monolingual persistence mentioned in the previous paragraph continues.

If the Philippines is truly going to embark on multilingual education, it is fundamental to adjust or correct these beliefs.

In this way, the discussion will be opened towards the development of new and innovative teaching approaches and strategies suitable for our learners. In the use of pedagogical translanguaging, particularly in this study, it will be noted that I first confronted the difference in language that gave way to focus on the development and use of a teaching approach called pedagogical translanguaging. This step is in accordance with the claims of Garcia (2009) and Creese and Blackledge (2015) that by breaking the artificial and ideological boundaries of languages, translanguaging empowers both the learner and the teacher, transforms the power relations, and focuses the process of teaching and learning on making meaning, enhancing experience, and developing identity. Ultimately, this development of an approach that recognizes multilingual realities that are not new but natural characteristics, such as contextualizing the previous paragraphs and providing our learners with multilingual learning skills, pedagogical translanguaging, restores and intensifies the type of engagement that is not only learner-centered but also culturally-sensitive.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Considering the observations done before and after employing pedagogical translanguaging, it can be concluded that pedagogical translanguaging can increase the online engagements of Multilingual First-Grade Learners. With this finding, employing pedagogical translanguaging in multilingual classes is recommended. Aside from increasing online engagements, other benefits of pedagogical translanguaging such as increasing scores are also suggested.

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