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INCLUSIVE ENGLISH TEACHING THROUGH TRANSLANGUAGING AND CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

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Abstract: Inclusive language teaching is often reduced to accommodations, yet inclusion also requires cultural and linguistic affirmation—especially in multilingual contexts where learners' home languages and identities shape participation. This article presents **translanguaging** and **culturally responsive pedagogy** as complementary approaches to inclusion in English classrooms. Translanguaging positions learners' full linguistic repertoires as resources for meaning-making, while culturally responsive teaching emphasizes relevance, dignity, and equitable interaction. The article discusses how monolingual norms can marginalize students, and it offers classroom strategies: multilingual scaffolds, identity-safe discussion routines, culturally sustaining materials, and assessment practices that value growth and communication. It argues that inclusion is achieved not only by removing barriers, but also by strengthening belonging—so learners see their languages and experiences as legitimate in academic spaces.
Keywords: translanguaging; culturally responsive teaching; multilingual learners; inclusive pedagogy; EFL/ESL; equity; classroom discourse

Introduction

English teaching takes place within social realities: students bring languages, accents, histories, and identities that affect who speaks, who feels "smart," and who is heard. In many contexts, English classrooms have been shaped by monolingual ideologies—expectations that "good learning" happens only in English. While English exposure matters, strict English-only policies can reduce comprehension, increase anxiety, and position multilingual learners' home languages as problems rather than assets (García & Wei, 2014).

Inclusive language teaching therefore includes an equity dimension: it must support access and achievement while also affirming learners' identities. Two powerful approaches are **translanguaging**—the strategic use of learners' full linguistic repertoires for learning—and **culturally responsive teaching**, which connects instruction to learners' cultural knowledge and lived experiences (Gay, 2018). These approaches align with sociocultural perspectives: language develops through mediated activity and meaningful interaction, not only through isolated practice (Vygotsky, 1978). When learners can think, plan, and negotiate meaning using all their resources, they engage more deeply and participate more confidently.

Discussion

1) Why "English-only" can be unintentionally exclusionary

English-only norms often privilege students who already have higher proficiency or who have had more exposure outside school. Others may become silent, dependent on memorization, or afraid of making mistakes publicly. From an inclusion perspective, this is a participation barrier. Translanguaging offers an alternative: it does not replace English practice; it structures it so that learners can access content, collaborate, and build accuracy using strategic language support (García & Wei, 2014).

Inclusive principle:

- English is the target, but *meaning-making* can be multilingual—especially during planning, comprehension, and collaborative problem-solving.

2) Translanguaging as a scaffold for comprehension and higher-order thinking

Translanguaging enables learners to discuss complex ideas at a higher cognitive level than their current English proficiency may allow. This matters in academic English instruction, where the goal is not only grammar but thinking, arguing, and interpreting texts.

Classroom-ready translanguaging strategies:

- **Preview in L1, perform in English:** Students read a short text and discuss key ideas in their strongest language first; then they summarize in English using a scaffold (keywords, frames).
- **Bilingual concept maps:** Students create concept maps with mixed-language labels; the final output is in English.
- **Team translation for precision:** Groups translate key sentences and compare versions to notice meaning differences (supports vocabulary depth and pragmatics).
- **Multilingual word walls:** Include English words plus equivalents and example sentences contributed by students.

These practices reflect the idea that language learning involves building form-meaning links through repeated encounters and meaningful use, not through forced silence in the home language (García & Wei, 2014).

3) Culturally responsive pedagogy: belonging is part of achievement

Culturally responsive teaching (CRT) emphasizes that students learn better when instruction is connected to their cultural contexts and when classroom relationships communicate respect and high expectations (Gay, 2018). In language classrooms, this includes text selection, task prompts, and interaction norms.

Inclusive material design:

- Choose reading/listening topics that reflect diverse communities and avoid tokenism (single "culture day").
- Teach pragmatics through culturally varied scenarios (requests, refusals, apologies across contexts).
- Use discussion questions that invite students' experiences without forcing personal disclosure.

CRT also requires examining classroom discourse: who gets interrupted, who gets praised, whose errors are mocked, and whose accent is treated as "wrong." Inclusion is not neutral; it is produced through daily interaction.

4) Identity-safe interaction routines that increase participation

Even strong tasks fail if students feel unsafe speaking. Research on classroom talk suggests that equitable participation structures matter for learning opportunities. Inclusive interaction routines reduce social risk and distribute voice.

Routines that support inclusion:

- **Structured turn-taking** (e.g., "everyone speaks once before anyone speaks twice").
- **Wait time + rehearsal:** Students write a sentence first, then share in pairs, then optionally share publicly.
- **Respectful language norms:** Teach disagreement frames ("I see it differently because…") to prevent conflict and humiliation.
- **Micro-affirmations:** Teachers validate meaning first ("I understand your point"), then support form ("Let's say it this way…").

These align with sociocultural learning: language grows through supported participation (Vygotsky, 1978).

5) Inclusive assessment when learners use more than one language

A common concern is: "If students use L1, how do I assess English?" The solution is clarity: assess English in the **final performance**, but allow multilingual scaffolding during learning.

Teachers can also assess **process** (planning, collaboration) separately from **product** (English output).

Assessment practices for inclusive multilingual classrooms:

- **Two-stage tasks:** (1) planning notes can be multilingual; (2) final output must meet English criteria.
- **Growth-focused rubrics:** emphasize improvement, communicative effectiveness, and strategic language use.
- **Portfolio assessment:** drafts + feedback + final version demonstrate development over time (Black & Wiliam, 2009).

This protects access while keeping standards transparent.

6) Practical lesson example (mini-model)

Topic: "Community and environment" (intermediate EFL)

Goal: Students present a short proposal using persuasive language (should, must, could, because, therefore).

1. **Input (accessible + relevant):** short video about local environmental issue; provide bilingual glossary for key terms.
2. **Meaning-making (translanguaging allowed):** groups discuss causes/solutions in any language; create a concept map.
3. **Language focus:** teacher models persuasive frames; students practice with sentence starters.
4. **Output (English):** groups present a 2-minute proposal in English; they may use a multilingual planning sheet.
5. **Feedback:** two "stars and a wish" plus teacher micro-feedback on one language target (e.g., connectors).

This design increases inclusion by enabling comprehension and complex thinking while protecting English performance goals.

Conclusion

Inclusive language teaching is not only about accessibility features; it also requires linguistic and cultural justice. Translanguaging and culturally responsive pedagogy help learners participate, think deeply, and feel respected—key conditions for sustained language development. Rather than seeing home languages as interference, inclusive teachers treat them as bridges to English proficiency and academic success. When learners' identities are affirmed and classroom talk is equitable, more students speak, risk-taking increases, and language learning becomes both more effective and more human.

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