
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Students' Perceptions of Using Translanguaging to Understand Business Concepts

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ABSTRACT

Translanguaging, increasingly attracting scholars' attention in recent decades, has been highlighted as a pedagogical practice by most existing studies in promoting students' understanding of materials with their linguistic resources in different education contexts. However, studies related to translanguaging in Chinese EMI classrooms are scarce, and so are students' perceptions of translanguaging in such a context. This study, following a mixed-method with a questionnaire and semi-structured interview, aims to investigate how students perceive the use of translanguaging to understand business concepts in their EMI classrooms. 60 third-year business English students from a university in China participated in this study. The results showed that business English students generally held a supportive perception of using translanguaging and that they agreed with the appropriateness and naturalness of using it in their classrooms to scaffold their learning of business concepts. The qualitative findings reported that translanguaging could help them understand and remember the meanings of those concepts easier without rote learning, assist classmates with lower English proficiency to express their ideas as well as relieve their emotional pressures. The findings lend further support for the use of L1 so as to mobilize students' language resources in learning content in the future.

KEYWORDS

Translanguaging; business English; students' perceptions; business concepts; EMI.

ARTICLE INFORMATION

ACCEPTED: 03 March 2024

PUBLISHED: 25 March 2024

DOI: 10.32996/jeltal.2024.6.1.15

1. Introduction

The acceptance of English as an international lingua franca in the past decades has encouraged a large number of English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) countries, such as China, to adopt English Medium Instruction (EMI) in their content teaching (Lin, 2016). EMI is defined as "using English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro, 2018, p.19). In higher education settings, EMI has been greatly advocated based on the presumption that immersing students in English only environments can benefit both English proficiency and subject knowledge learning. So many teachers may consider that using other languages in their classrooms is unprofessional and unfavorable (e.g. Hillman et al., 2019; Mbirimi-Hungwe, 2019), and some students would still incline to English only for the pure, immersive learning environment and the globally acknowledged position of English (e.g. Liu et al. 2022; Xu, 2017). Due to such circumstances, EMI in the past three decades has been stuck in monolingual instruction where English-as-a-second-language (ESL) students learn all or some subjects only through English (Tai & Li, 2021)

However, such English-only monolingual instruction in learning settings has been challenged by both learners' learning effectiveness and the increasing recognition of the value of L1 in second or foreign language education. It is reported that monolingual instruction was not effective in promoting students' content learning, such as failing to understand teachers' expressions and the content taught (e.g. Lo & Lo, 2014; Airey et al., 2017). Particularly with limited English proficiency, students taught monolingually tended to experience lower comprehension of content, lower confidence and less class participation (Macaro et al., 2018; Hurst & Mona, 2017). Additionally, extensive research on the use of first language in second or foreign-language

learning environments also questions the tenets of monolingual instruction (Lin, 2013). For example, Cook (2010) acknowledged that L1 was a pedagogical resource which should be reckoned with and that excluding the L1 in EFL classrooms may cause a deleterious impact on students' perceptions of the value of their L1 (Phillipson, 1992).

With multilingualism opposing the paradigm of "monolingual bias", the research focus in education is also increasingly moving to the multilingual perspective (Xu & Long, 2021, p.210; May, 2019.) In response to the "multilingual turn", translanguaging, which emphasizes speakers' abilities to flexibly maneuver between two or more languages, has attracted EMI scholars' attention to further exploring the role of students' and teachers' linguistic resources in knowledge construction. Different from code-switching or code-mixing, which assigns language choices to one or another traditional definition of codes, translanguaging mainly concentrates on speakers' construction and the use of original and complex interrelated discursive practices that can make up the speakers' complete language repertoire (García & Li, 2014, p.22). Furthermore, with its interactive, performative and creative nature, it has softened the boundaries among languages, rather than holding a dichotomous view that different languages are treated as separate entities, which then offers a new paradigm for teaching and researching a second or additional language (Cenoz, 2017).

It is worth noting that the feasibility of translanguaging practices has been supported by many empirical studies. For example, Canagarajah (2013) found that multilingual learners tended to establish their own identities with the use of translanguaging practices during learning. Palmer et al. (2014) also reported that translanguaging practices enabled students to actively engage in some sensitive and important topics and encouraged them to express themselves. The existing studies have undoubtedly documented the benefits of translanguaging in the learning environment where students can utilize all languages for making meaning and understanding concepts, a function that keeps up with the need for content learning in EMI educational programs (Zhou, Li & Gao, 2021).

Studies have highlighted the efficacy of translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in promoting students' understanding of materials with their linguistic resources, but most of them are from the teaching perspective (e.g. Zhou, Li & Gao, 2021; Tai & Li, 2021). However, as learners are the main affected by such practices, information about their response to translanguaging practices is important to their academic success (Rivera & Mazak, 2017). Their attitudes would affect the adoption of it as a regular pedagogical strategy in future classrooms to an extent. While several studies have reported students' positive attitude toward the use of translanguaging in enhancing comprehension of challenging concepts across disciplines such as building science (Carstens, 2016) and computer science (Mbirimi-Hungewe & Hungewe, 2018), the majority of these studies address non-English major students. Scarce attention is devoted to exploring the perception of translanguaging among English major students. Given the pivotal aim of English majors to enhance proficiency in the language, there is a legitimate concern that the incorporation of translanguaging may be perceived by students as a potential obstacle to their learning.

Business English, one of the disciplines of foreign language and literature in China, has distinct interdisciplinary characteristics, aiming to develop competencies in both business knowledge and English proficiency. However, such dual-goal poses challenges for the students in the discipline. For one thing, the abstract and complex nature of some business concepts may pose challenges for the students; for another, business English texts usually contain a large number of polysemous professional expressions whose meanings are different from what is used in daily exchanges (Li, 2010). The situation is further compounded for students with limited English proficiency levels. Consequently, many students in this discipline are stuck in comprehending business concepts in English (Cai et al., 2018; Łacka-Badura, 2021; Zhang, 2017). Therefore, it seems valuable to examine learners' perceived effect of translanguaging in the EMI classroom for business English majors. Specifically, this study attempts to investigate students' perceptions of using translanguaging in learning business concepts in EMI classrooms. Two questions are addressed:

- Q1: What are students' perceptions of the use of translanguaging in EMI business classrooms?
- Q2: How does translanguaging affect students' understanding of business concepts?

2. Literature review

2.1 Translanguaging

The term translanguaging was originally developed by Cen Williams in 1996 in Wales, where Welsh students were allowed to use both English and Welsh to make meaning and comprehend concepts in academic contexts. García (2009, p.140) extended it to the complex language practices performed by bilinguals/multilinguals so as to maximize their communicative potential, as well as pedagogical approaches involving the use of those complex practices. Then Baker (2011, p.288) defined it as the process of making meaning, shaping experience, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages, which has been recognized as generalizing different cross-language practices both in bilingual/multilingual communities and educational domains. (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; García & Li, 2014).

As a practical theory of language evolving from post-structural linguistics, translanguaging can represent the fluid nature of languages as it features in individuals' extracting from one single linguistic repertoire with different language varieties rather than separate ones (García & Li, 2014). Instead of developing a full mastery of every language, the language proficiency of bilinguals/multilinguals resorts to the construction of this repertoire. As such, limiting students to one language over another would prevent them from fully deploying their linguistic resources (Kevin & Morales, 2016). The core tenets of translanguaging emphasize that languages are actually integrated linguistic systems available for communication (García & Li, 2014), which bilinguals/multilinguals are allowed to seamlessly adopt to make sense of their worlds (García & Lin, 2017).

Translanguaging offers bilinguals/multilinguals various advantages since it not only advocates a deeper understanding of content but also enhances the weaker language scaffolded by the dominant one (García & Li, 2014). García et al. (2017) summarize some significant benefits of using translanguaging: helping to achieve a deep understanding of content, providing opportunities for academic language practice and development, and creating a pathway to acquire knowledge for developing learners' bilingual skills. It is clear that translanguaging provides learners with different corners to build their competence in the weaker language by using their prior knowledge of the dominant one(s) (Yuvayapan, 2019). Additionally, available research has served as evidence for the cognitive benefits of using translanguaging in classrooms. As Mazak (2017) has noted, translanguaging can be a pedagogic theory that allows students and teachers to make full use of their linguistic resources to deepen the cognitive engagement of content materials. Baker (2011) argues that translanguaging can enable students to grasp the subject matter in a deeper and fuller way when students receive information through one language (e.g. English) and generate information in another language (e.g. Chinese). Since translanguaging empowers learners to utilize all languages at their disposal, it actually advocates a student-centred approach to ensure that students can understand and make meaning of learning materials.

2.2 Translanguaging in EMI

Inspired by translanguaging, which prioritizes learners' multilingual or even multimodal resources, many EMI scholars have joined in conducting studies on translanguaging in EMI classrooms to explore how teachers and students apply these resources to make meaning and construct knowledge. Remarkably, the pedagogical benefits of using translanguaging have also been manifested in the EMI context. For example, Tai and Li (2021) conducted one study about how translanguaging was used by the teacher to construct playful talk in a secondary EMI mathematics classroom in Hong Kong, and they found that translanguaging, together with other social factors (e.g. teacher's belief, socio-culture) could be a critical resource for creating playful talk to achieve rapport building, content explanation and communication with students. Zhou et al. (2021) adopted a mixed method to examine students' translanguaging practices and attitudes toward classroom language uses in an EMI finance course in an international school, whose results also showed that most of the students preferred translanguaging used as a way of communication in the class and that it could help to develop their bilingual academic knowledge and promote comprehension of content. Even in the tertiary EMI classrooms, translanguaging practices also showed paramount potential. Chen et al. (2020) carried out a qualitative study on teachers' linguistic and pedagogical characteristics in 20 EMI science classes at a Chinese university, and they concluded that these participants would switch their language resources purposefully to complete such teaching aims as facilitating students' knowledge comprehension and creating beneficial relationships with students.

The review of relevant studies has mainly confirmed the role of translanguaging in EMI classrooms in promoting knowledge learning, interpersonal relationships and classroom management. However, the body of research on translanguaging in the EMI context remains fewer overall, and most of the existing ones are conducted in non-English disciplines. Seldom has been set within settings for foreign language disciplines, yet less in the field of business English (a branch of English for specific purposes), whose courses are, in principle, adopted the EMI as a teaching method. As mentioned previously, challenging expressions and the required English-only teaching principle in this major may lead to students' confusion or misunderstanding. With the emphasis on facilitating understanding by learners' linguistic repertoire, it seems more conducive to take translanguaging as a pedagogical practice in business English classes. But, as indicated by Zavala (2019), translanguaging might work differently in different settings and may not be absolutely good all the time, so this study, set within an under-explored setting, could enrich the limited body of studies on translanguaging in EMI and fulfill the picture of its feasibility. It is expected that the results can provide pedagogical implications for future business English teaching and learning to ensure content learning.

2.3 Perceptions of translanguaging in higher education

Although most research on translanguaging in the context of higher education has mainly focused on multilingual teaching environments or language background of multilingual students and on analysis of multimodal and multilingual resources in the teaching process (Song & Lin, 2021), studies of perceptions of teachers and students about it applied in the tertiary settings have also received attention in recent years, since they are the direct stakeholders of the practices (Zhou & Steve, 2021). Notably, most of them have acknowledged the supportive role of translanguaging in learning contexts, especially in collaborative activities

(Carstens, 2016; Kwihangana, 2022). For instance, in a qualitative study conducted by McMillan and Rivers (2011), they focused on the attitudes of 29 'native English speaker' teachers at a Japanese university where translanguaging was applied in the English classrooms, concluding that the teachers were positive about the selective use of students' L1 in teaching English contrary to the official English-only policy. Mbirimi-Hungwe (2019) explored 11 science lecturers' perceptions of using translanguaging for pedagogical purposes, whose results found that these teachers approved of the value of translanguaging and used it to teach science content. However, some still recognized the high status of English, which was the required language in teaching and assessment at that university. So it could be inferred that, although they perceived positively the use of translanguaging, there would be some obstacles that prevent teachers from following such practices, which may include the expectations and rules from their institutions (Yuvayapan, 2019), the lack of professional guidance (Wang, 2019) and the perceived potential dangers (e.g. students' overuse of L1) (Rivera & Mazak, 2017).

These reviewed studies mainly focus on teachers' perceptions of translanguaging, and studies from students' perspectives remain rare in number. The exceptions include Mbirimi-Hungewe (2021), who carried out a qualitative study to examine undergraduate students' perceptions about using translanguaging to understand academic concepts in a medical university. Based on the results from a focus group discussion, she reported that the students did not find different languages as one barrier to the comprehension of the texts and that a translanguaging approach to learning can assist in understanding difficult concepts. Liu et al. (2022) focused on students' perceptions of translanguaging at a Chinese university. Similarly, they found that most of the participants valued the use of translanguaging in learning academic concepts, building rapport, and facilitating group discussions where they could delve into knowledge and share ideas with their linguistic tools (Hillman et al., 2019).

Overall, most of the existing studies have indicated that both tertiary teachers and students often agree with using translanguaging, which can help them explain subject content, promote comprehension of complex concepts, and establish harmonious relations. However, few have explored whether students from language disciplines perceive translanguaging in the same way as non-English major students. Kircher (2016) has argued that knowledge of students' feedback on translanguaging in classrooms is essential to the success of teaching and learning, so it is worth examining if and how these students are affected by translanguaging practices in their learning. Additionally, an investigation of their perceptions is hoped to help them become aware of the value of their own language resources in learning both subject materials and language.

Hence, considering translanguaging as the dynamic and fluid language practices of bilinguals (García & Lin, 2017), the current study aims to elicit business English students' perceptions of using translanguaging in learning business concepts, which is expected to verify whether the use of such a strategy could assist them to understand the definitions of those concepts.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research context and participants

The study was targeted at students majoring in Business English at a local university in Guangzhou, China. More than 100 teachers and 160 courses at the university have been accredited as EMI certifications since 2018. In this study, EMI business courses on international economy, trade, and international business are given.

According to the *Teaching Guide for Business English* proposed by the *ELT Advisory Board under the Ministry of Education* (2020), business English students are required to enhance English knowledge and business knowledge such as economics, marketing and international finance for the purpose of cultivating interdisciplinary talents during their learning periods. In this study, sophomore and junior business English students are the participants because, based on the training program set by the university, most EMI business courses are given in the second and third academic years. A total of 60 business English students (11 males and 49 females) participated in this study. A possible explanation for such uneven gender samples was that, compared with females, few male students tended to choose language majors in China. The participants were aged 20 on average, ranging from 19 to 21, and they had learned English for at least 10 years. According to their self-reported proficiency and English scores in the Chinese college entrance examination, their English proficiency level ranges from low intermediate to advanced. Then, their basic information was presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic Information in the Questionnaire

Items	N
Gender	
Male	11
Female	49
Third language	
French	14
Japanese	24
Spanish	22
Self-reported English proficiency	
Low	0
Low intermediate	6
Intermediate	27
High intermediate	16
Advanced	11

3.2 Data collection

Before the formal data collection, consent from the participants was accepted, and their personal information was guaranteed to be protected. The study conducted a mixed-method design with two major instruments: questionnaires and semi-structured interviews.

The questionnaire is a useful method for understanding the students' perceptions and obtaining specific information from the observed participants. The items in the questionnaire on the perception of translanguaging were designed mainly with reference to Jiang et al. (2022) and Fang and Liu (2020) with a five-point Likert-scale section from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The questionnaire mainly consisted of two sections with 22 items; one was the demographic information like gender, age, and English learning experience, and the other was about students' perceptions of translanguaging in EMI business courses. Specifically, it included (i) students' perceptions of teachers' translanguaging and their own use of translanguaging; (ii) the effect of teachers' use of translanguaging and students' use of translanguaging. The Cronbach's Alphas of the whole questionnaire were over 0.8, and the KMO value is 0.736, indicating a good reliability of the scale.

A semi-structured interview was used to explore how translanguaging takes effect from students' perspectives further. Five participants (three females and two males) were willing to register their answers, whose demographic information is shown in Table 2 below. The whole process of the interview was recorded by the author, and they were prompted to answer the following interview questions without word limit:

- (1) *How does translanguaging (e.g. learning in both Chinese and English) affect your understanding of business concepts? Please explain why.*
- (2) *Why and when do you use both English and Chinese during your learning of business English?"*
- (3) *How do you feel when you are allowed to use your first language to express concepts and ideas?*

The semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face in Chinese. Each student lasted about 15 minutes in this study, 75 minutes in total.

Table 2 Demographic Information in the Interview

Items	N
Gender	
Male	2
Female	3
Third language	
French	1
Japanese	2
Spanish	2
Self-reported English proficiency	
Low	0
Low intermediate	0
Intermediate	2
High intermediate	2
Advanced	1

3.3 Data analysis

Data derived from the questionnaires were analyzed quantitatively with the *R* tool. In this study, the *R* tool with descriptive analysis was opted to explore the information of the research subjects and their overall views of using translanguaging, while the correlation analysis was to explore if students would perceive differently between translanguaging used by teachers and by themselves.

Then, the recordings collected from the semi-structured interview were mainly analyzed using the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this study, the data were first transcribed by the transcribing software and then checked by the author herself for double-checking the transcriptions. Then, the initial codes were developed based on collected data. In this step, the author closely studied and coded instances of the effects of translanguaging practices. These codes were later collated into potential themes. For example, the author classified responses in the interview like “clarify the intricate or unfamiliar business concepts” and “get the concepts easily” as one theme named “grasp the key points of the concepts”. The coding results were reviewed by the second author of this paper, and those discrepancies were discussed and revised.

4. Results

4.1 Students' Perceptions of translanguaging

The results of the descriptive analysis of the questionnaire were presented in the following tables. Table 2 (near here) shows how business English students perceived their teachers' using translanguaging in the classrooms. As indicated by the mean scores in the table, the majority of students (80%) generally agreed that teachers could use translanguaging (both Chinese and English) in the business English courses ($M=4.02$, $SD=.822$), especially when explaining the meanings of business concepts and analyzing the business articles, because they thought that the use of translanguaging could help them understand and memorize the learning materials relatively easily. In addition, translanguaging could improve learning efficiency with a relaxed learning environment and make it easier for students to grasp the content in their dominant language. Although the students held positive perceptions, some (10%) were still concerned that frequent use of two languages in the classrooms would make some students always overuse or dependent on Chinese ($M=3.60$, $SD=.855$), which was also shared by some participants in Fang and Liu's study (2020).

The perceptions of business English students themselves using translanguaging in the classrooms are shown in Table 3 (near here). The participants (96.67%) mainly approved of the natural and appropriate phenomenon of translanguaging that occurred in the business English classes ($M=3.88$, $SD=.811$), which can benefit them in class participation, providing a scaffold for low-proficiency students, comprehension and application of business concepts. Notably, most of them (93.33%) did not consider that using Chinese in their learning business concepts indicated a lack of English proficiency ($M=2.63$, $SD=.669$). Overall, the participants positively perceived the advantages of using two languages in the EMI business English classrooms ($M=3.90$, $SD=.709$).

In the paired sample test of students' perceptions of translanguaging by teachers and students themselves, the Paired Sample correlation value for teachers' translanguaging and students' translanguaging was 0.773 and p (sig.) = .000 < 0.05 (Table 4 near here), which indicated a correlation between these two groups. As for the Paired Samples T-Test for teachers' translanguaging and students' translanguaging, the t value was 1.038, with a p (sig.) value of .288 > .05 (Table 5 near here), meaning that there was no significant difference between the two groups. Therefore, it can be interpreted that business English students supported the use of translanguaging in the classrooms, whether by their teachers or by students themselves.

Table 2 Students' perceptions of teachers' translanguaging

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>V</i>
Teachers' using both Chinese and English in business English classes can improve teaching efficiency.	4.17	.740	.548
Teachers' proper using both Chinese and English in business English class can relieve students' pressure.	4.30	.646	.417
Teachers' frequent using both Chinese and English in business English class makes students relied on their first language.	3.60	.848	.719
Teachers should use both Chinese and English when giving instructions to students.	4.03	.882	.779
Teachers should use both Chinese and English when explaining the definitions of business concepts.	4.07	.821	.673
Teachers should use both Chinese and English when analyzing the application of business concepts.	4.00	.902	.814
Teachers should use both Chinese and English when analyzing business articles.	3.97	.920	.846
Overall	4.02	.822	.685

Table 3 Students' perceptions of students' translanguaging

Items	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>V</i>
Using Chinese and English in business English classes is a natural practice.	3.73	.821	.673
Using Chinese and English in business English classes is an appropriate practice.	4.03	.802	.643

Students' using both Chinese and English in business English classes can increase class participation.	4.17	.693	.480
Students' using both Chinese and English can scaffold peers whose English proficiency is not good enough.	4.37	.712	.507
Students' using both Chinese and English in business English class means a lack of English proficiency.	2.63	.663	.440
Students can use both Chinese and English to confirm understanding of business concepts.	4.33	.601	.362
Students can use both Chinese and English to enhance remembering of business concepts.	4.17	.587	.345
Students can use both Chinese and English to comprehend business articles.	3.80	.798	.637
Overall	3.90	.709	.510

Table 4 Paired sample correlations for teachers' and students' translanguaging

Pair 1	Teachers' & Students	N	Correlation	Sig.
		60	.773	.000

Table 5 Paired samples T-Test for teachers' and students' translanguaging

Pair 1	Teachers' & Students'	Paired Differences			t	df	Sig.(2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean			
		.07321	.37036	.06762	1.038	29	.288

4.2 The role of translanguaging in learning business concepts

The thematic analysis of responses in semi-structured interviews revealed that students might benefit from translanguaging from the following three perspectives: promoting learning business concepts, facilitating interpersonal communication and reducing unpleasant emotions during learning.

4.2.1 Translanguaging in learning business concepts

Responses to this question mainly presented three themes: translanguaging can help (1) grasp the key points of the concepts, (2) understand the concepts precisely, and (3) avoid rote learning.

Four participants agreed that using Chinese and English in learning business English concepts could enable them to comprehend those concepts easily and exactly; for example,

"I think using both English and Chinese to clarify intricate or unfamiliar business concepts is much better, which is easier for most students to understand. Otherwise, if explaining in English-only, there will be some deviations in understanding the definitions to an extent, so I will find out the Chinese equivalents after class". (Jay, male, pseudonym)

"Actually, I tend to learn in English only in order to improve my English competence. But when it comes to learning those professional expressions, I also agree with using English as well as Chinese to define and illustrate them, which can help me get the key points of the concepts more easily". (Ava, female, pseudonym)

One participant claimed that using his native language in learning these concepts helped him avoid rote learning for he could understand the meaning:

"If explaining the definitions in English-only, I will find out the Chinese equivalents after class. And then I would learn the definitions by rote". (John, male, pseudonym)

4.2.2 Using translanguaging in business English classrooms

With regard to the situation where students would use translanguaging in the business English classrooms, the students' responses showed 3 situations: (1) discussing with classmates, (2) clarifying the business concepts or the main ideas of the passage, and (3) answering the questions.

Three students acknowledged that they used to speak both two languages, especially Chinese when they were required to have a discussion with classmates and try their best to explain the definition of business concepts, for example,

"Every time when the teacher asks us to discuss the question with each other, I usually switch to Chinese even though, at the last minute, we still have a lesson in English. And I can use Chinese to express myself easily, and I can explain or summarize the concepts clearly to my classmates compared with that in English, which can also help those lower proficient group-mates understand the meanings clearly". (Amy, female, pseudonym)

Two other participants mentioned that they would use both Chinese and English to answer the questions in the class, which could help them communicate their answers or ideas distinctly and accurately; for example,

"I prefer to answer the questions in Chinese, actually, because I can offer my ideas in a clear and logic way, and the teacher can also understand me. If I answer it in English, I will feel nervous, and I will speak a whole sentence with several model words like 'uh-huh, hmm' because I need to pay attention to the grammar as well as the correct answer together. And if I speak in Chinese, I can finish the question quickly and sit down rather than stand up in front of the whole class, very nervous". (John, male, pseudonym)

4.2.3 Feelings of using translanguaging

Results from the students to the question commonly manifested that using Chinese in an EMI business English classroom helps them (1) share their ideas, (2) enhance communication, and (3) reduce affective pressure.

Three students claimed that using both Chinese and English enabled them to share their ideas more efficiently and effectively, especially during the discussion, and also enhanced their willingness to communicate with classmates, even teachers, for example,

"When teachers ask us to explain or discuss the main idea of the passage with my classmates, actually, I usually use both English and Chinese because it can help us express ourselves much better. If we keep the English-only, the conversation is finished much quicker because we cannot keep communicating in English in the whole process." (Vicky, female, pseudonym)

"I cannot keep speaking in English all the time, for my oral English is not good enough. I often use Chinese to express my ideas with classmates without a teacher's supervision, especially when I encounter something I don't understand. And actually, when I am learning a business article, I don't comprehend a lot of them at the time, so using English-only merely constrains my desire to express." (Jay, male, pseudonym)

Two participants stated that they felt relaxed and felt no pressure when using Chinese and English to communicate with group-mates, which could facilitate the whole discussion process; for instance,

"In most cases, I certainly use Chinese and English in discussions with group-mates, which makes me feel relaxed and helps me communicate with them smoothly. What's more, if one of us uses English only in the whole discussion, other group-mates will consider him/her to show off the English ability". (Ava, female, pseudonym)

5. Discussion

The aim of the present study was to explore business English students' perceptions of using translanguaging practices to learn business concepts in an EMI setting. The data from the questionnaire revealed that a majority of the participants held positive attitudes toward the use of translanguaging in learning environments, whether by their teachers or students themselves. Consistent with Moody et al. (2019) and Fang and Liu (2020), translanguaging was perceived as a natural and appropriate practice by bilingual/multilingual students for facilitating their learning, which could infer that intermixing languages was a common phenomenon in the actual classrooms and that the students tended to activate their own resources to act as the scaffold. Supporting the quantitative results, students' responses in semi-structured interviews also showed that they positively agreed with translanguaging as an available strategy in helping them understand and remember the meanings of difficult or abstract business concepts precisely. By mobilizing their language resources (mainly Chinese and English), the students can grasp the content taught clearly and easily compared with traditional monolingual instruction, which is similar to the results in previous studies (e.g. Liu et al., 2020; Lasagabaster, 2013), where translanguaging has been manifested to be helpful in enhancing students' academic knowledge and strengthening their comprehension of subject content by utilizing students' entire linguistic repertoire (Zhou et al., 2021). Also mentioned in students' interviews, using translanguaging in business English classrooms has encouraged them to express themselves clearly and logically, facilitate communication with classmates who share the same first language, as well as relieve students' emotional pressures, which echoes the findings in previous ones (e.g. Cenoz et al., 2022) that translanguaging practices can help them feel comfortable and less embarrassed in engaging class activities.

Indeed, such a strategy is beneficial to some students (Carstens, 2016), especially those with lower English proficiency, in learning difficult business concepts because their stronger language knowledge and previous experience that have been gained by the L1 can scaffold them to process the learning materials (García & Li, 2014). In line with Liu et al. (2020), allowing the use of translanguaging could enable these low-proficient students to follow the teaching content more easily and strengthen their

confidence in class participation, which, in turn, promoted the whole teaching efficiency (Yuvayapan, 2019), a further demonstration of our analysis of the questionnaire. The results in this present study also serve as evidence to challenge the belief and practice of monolingual instruction, that is, the target language only (e.g. English). As indicated in students' responses, regarding a student's L1 language as a pedagogical resource (Cook, 2010) can increase students' confidence, participation and comprehension in classes whose official teaching language is not students' first language because switching between two languages enables them to communicate their ideas and learn in an inclusive and respectful way (Liu et al., 2022).

But it's worth noting that, although the advantages of using translanguaging have been presented in this study, some student participants, as reported in the questionnaire, still worried that involving Chinese in the classrooms would make them often overuse or dependent on it, which was also described in Wang and Kirkpatrick (2012) and Liu et al. (2020), some of whose participants also considered translanguaging in EMI classrooms would be not conducive to improve their English competency. Even one participant claimed in the interview that she preferred the monolingual classroom because it could immerse her in the English-only environment. Such a concern or preference actually reflects a monolingual ideology that learning one language well should be immersive in a pure target-language-speaking environment (Valdés, 2020), which has long affected English education in many EFL, even ESL countries. However, as we have mentioned previously, the effectiveness of monolingual instruction has been questioned by many studies (e.g. Mbirimi-Hungewe & Hungewe, 2018; Kirkgöz, 2009), especially the advance of "multilingual turn" in education nowadays, as it could not stimulate learning motivation, and also affect the understanding of content knowledge. The learning goal of business English differs from that of general English in its focus on competencies in both English abilities and business knowledge. In this sense, business English students should not abandon learning business content while improving basic English skills (Lei & Hu, 2014). As it happens, the tenets of translanguaging do highlight both language knowledge and subject content (Baker, 2011; Wang, 2021) since students can gain a deeper understanding when they access and compare information in different languages for input and output. From this sense, translanguaging exactly satisfies the learning objectives of business English, and it can act as a pedagogical practice that is feasible in EMI settings for business English majors.

The research emphasis in the present study is on students' perceptions of translanguaging rather than teachers' translanguaging practices that occurred in the teaching activities. As the direct recipients of translanguaging practices, students' positive attitudes toward them in this study, with context set in EMI business classes, again serve as evidence of the effectiveness of translanguaging in the classrooms. Corresponding with the reviewed studies conducted in different majors (e.g. Teng & Fang, 2022; Charamba, 2020), students from the English department also generally claimed positive perceptions of using translanguaging and recognizing its benefits in their learning settings. Furthermore, the results in this study show some pedagogical implications for the EMI courses. Compared with learning in the traditional monolingual approach, it seems more constructive to learn subject content in the form of translanguaging, by which students' full linguistic resources can be motivated and utilized in the learning environment. As Cenoz and Gorter (2022) argue, when it comes to cognitively difficult materials, like new business concepts, learners tend to activate their previous knowledge that is acquired by other languages (usually the L1) so as to support themselves in constructing meaning. In this way, our EMI teachers in the future could accept and consider using students' first language in teaching so as to help them construct or understand knowledge, rather than thinking that students from English disciplines should use English only and keeping the English-only instruction all the time. Students should recognize the importance of their linguistic repertoire and cultivate a proper awareness of translanguaging to facilitate their language and content learning. At the same time, we should keep in mind that using translanguaging in the EMI settings does not mean abandoning English teaching; it means the proper use of students' entire linguistic resources to scaffold them when learning complex or abstract subject content.

6. Conclusions

In summary, both quantitative and qualitative results in the current study revealed that business English students positively perceived the use of translanguaging in learning business concepts, which can assist them in mastering the key points of business concepts precisely, facilitate communications, express their ideas clearly and relieve their emotional pressures. Although some participants showed worries about the possibility of depending on L1, they generally approved of the adoption of translanguaging in the classrooms if the concerns could be solved better. Hence, the results could shed light on future teaching designs where translanguaging practices were to be included, that is, how we could better give full play to the benefits of translanguaging while avoiding students' overusing of the L1.

Despite the business English classroom as the main research setting in this study, as we mentioned above, it still belongs to the EMI learning context. Therefore, the results could contribute to the limited research on Chinese students' attitudes toward using translanguaging in the EMI learning environment, again demonstrating that, from students' views, utilizing their linguistic resources could trigger better knowledge comprehension and absorption compared with that in the English-only instruction. Future studies can be inspired to explore what factors specifically affect students' positive perceptions of translanguaging.

However, several limitations have occurred when conducting this study. Firstly, the participant sample collected in this research was not large enough, and the results were relatively less reliable in generalizing all business English students' attitudes. Future research should register more participants, as the larger the sample size, the more representative the results will be. Secondly, the English levels of the participants were mostly intermediate or high intermediate, and they generally reported supportive perceptions of translanguaging. In the future, we can explore the perceptions of students with advanced proficiency and see whether it will trigger another interesting result. What's more, this study only examined the business English students' acceptance of using translanguaging without involving their actual application of it during learning content. Future studies could conduct an in-depth exploration of this perspective as insight into concrete learning situations could further reflect students' motivation for using translanguaging (Zhao et al., 2021). It is also suggested that studies be carried out on how translanguaging affects or what causes its occurrence in the classrooms.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflict of Interests: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Publisher's Note: All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

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