

Translanguaging in Hong Kong English Classrooms: A Scoping Review and Implications for TESOL

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Abstract. Translanguaging has become one of the most generative and most contested constructs in applied linguistics, and Hong Kong is among its densest empirical sites: a jurisdiction officially committed to biliteracy and trilingualism while operating a medium-of-instruction regime built on language separation. This scoping review maps the empirical research on translanguaging in Hong Kong English classrooms and asks what that evidence will and will not support for TESOL. The review follows the five-stage scoping framework as later enhanced, and is reported against the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR). A reproducible boolean search of OpenAlex together with supplementary keyword queries identified 630 unique records, from which 41 studies were charted by educational level, instructional site, subject, participants and analytical approach. The corpus is highly concentrated: 36 of 41 studies are set in secondary schools, 29 in content lessons taught through English, and 17 use conversation-analytic methods. Only one study applies a translanguaging frame to data from English-language-subject classrooms, and none measures English learning gains longitudinally or against a comparison condition. The evidence therefore supports principled crosslinguistic scaffolding with a deliberate return to English, rather than the stronger claim that translanguaging improves English attainment. The English-language classroom is the outstanding gap in an otherwise rich literature.

Keywords: Translanguaging, scoping review, Hong Kong, English-medium instruction, TESOL.

1. Introduction

Over two decades, translanguaging has moved from a description of planned bilingual practice in Welsh schools to a general theory of language use, and in doing so has become one of the most generative and most contested constructs in applied linguistics [1, 2]. Its central claim, that bilingual speakers deploy a single integrated repertoire rather than switching between discrete systems [3], has been rejected on linguistic grounds [4] and reframed as unnecessary to pedagogy [5]. For English language teaching the practical stake is sharper than the theoretical one: if learners' other languages are resources rather than interference, the monolingual assumption that has long organised TESOL classrooms requires revision.

Hong Kong is a critical case for that question. Its language-in-education policy proclaims biliteracy and trilingualism while its medium-of-instruction regime is built on language separation [6], and its classrooms have generated an unusually dense body of fine-grained interactional evidence. Existing reviews take stock of how the construct has been conceptualised and applied across educational settings [7], but no scoping review with a Hong Kong English-classroom scope was identified in the databases searched. A further problem is concealed in the phrase itself. An English classroom in Hong Kong may be a lesson in which English is the object of instruction, or one of the many lessons in which English is the medium for teaching mathematics, science or history. Evidence gathered in the second setting is routinely read as though it spoke to the first.

This review maps that literature and separates those settings. It asks: what are the characteristics of empirical research on translanguaging in Hong Kong English-language and English-medium classrooms; what pedagogical functions are attributed to translanguaging across them; and what does the distribution of settings and designs imply for claims about translanguaging in TESOL? The contribution is threefold. The review states a reproducible search and an auditable charting frame; it introduces instructional site as a coding dimension and shows that it changes the reading of the

evidence base; and it identifies, with countable support, the English-language classroom as the field's outstanding gap.

2. Hong Kong as a Critical Case

The trilingual goal, that graduates be literate in written Chinese and English and orally competent in Cantonese, English and Putonghua, was articulated after the 1997 handover and remains the stated objective of the Education Bureau [6]. It coexists with an instrument designed on the opposite principle. The 1997 Medium of Instruction Guidance held that the mother tongue should primarily be adopted as the medium of instruction, and that schools wishing to teach through English must satisfy three prescribed criteria covering student ability, teacher capability and school support measures [8]. From September 1998 the great majority of secondary schools were required to teach through Chinese, and only those meeting the criteria continued in English.

The 2009 fine-tuning circular dissolved that binary from the 2010/11 school year [8]. Time for extended learning activities in English was raised to a uniform 25 per cent of total lesson time excluding English Language lessons; schools could convert that time into English-medium teaching of up to two non-language subjects; the student-ability criterion was met when the average proportion of a school's Secondary 1 intake belonging to the territory-wide top 40 per cent group reached 85 per cent of a class; and schools were no longer classified as Chinese-medium or English-medium. A footnote to the same circular concedes the premise on which the architecture rests: citing a 2004 research study, it records that at most 40 per cent of Secondary 1 students in Hong Kong are able to learn through English. The policy simultaneously expands English-medium exposure and records that a majority of entrants cannot use it unaided. Whether the arrangement has raised attainment remains contested.

Two qualifications follow. The circular prescribes media of instruction, not intra-lesson language behaviour, so claims that Hong Kong policy prohibits Cantonese overstate the documentary record; the constraint operates through school-level and examination-level ideology. And Cantonese is not every learner's first language. Ethnic-minority learners, many of South Asian heritage, are an established presence in Hong Kong classrooms [9], and in such classrooms an instruction to draw on the first language is incoherent unless the repertoire in question is specified.

3. Conceptual Framework

Translanguaging originates in the planned alternation of input and output languages within a lesson, a practice named and evaluated in North Wales and later anglicised [1]. It was subsequently reframed as the fluid discursive practice of bilinguals whose languages form one repertoire [1], and then developed into a theory of language concerned with practices that transcend the boundaries between named languages and between language and other semiotic systems [2]. The strongest version holds that bilinguals' mental grammars are structured but unitary collections of features, so that bilingual practice consists of feature selection rather than grammar switching [3]. This is the claim that separates translanguaging from code-switching, and the claim critics contest.

The dispute does not have to be settled before the classroom evidence can be read. It has been argued that bilinguals possess a single repertoire but a richly differentiated mental grammar, so that multilingualism is both psychologically real and socially meaningful [4]; and that the unitary and crosslinguistic versions of the theory carry identical pedagogical implications while differing in theoretical framing [5]. Since the present review concerns what classroom evidence supports, the second observation licenses attention to the evidence rather than the ontology. Two further distinctions are used analytically. Pedagogical translanguaging denotes intentional instructional strategies integrating two or more languages, as against spontaneous classroom practice [10]; and the construct has been operationalised within two incompatible approaches, a fixed-language approach and a fluid-languaging approach, which accounts for a good deal of apparent disagreement [7].

Criticism of the transformative claim is also relevant. Translanguaging has been argued to be less transformative than asserted, to share ideological deep structure with the monolingual authorities it criticises, and to risk becoming a dominating rather than a liberating force [11]. Whether learners' other languages belong in a language classroom is in any case not a new question, and named categories remain pedagogically necessary whatever their ontological status. To these distinctions the present review adds one of its own: instructional site, separating lessons in which English is the object of instruction from those in which it is the medium, and from Chinese-as-an-additional-language lessons serving ethnic-minority learners.

4. Method

The review follows the five-stage scoping framework [12] as enhanced by the recommendation that the final stage combine descriptive quantitative analysis with qualitative thematic synthesis [13], and is reported against the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) [14]. A scoping rather than a systematic review was chosen because the objective is to map the extent, range and nature of a body of work rather than to synthesise effects. The population is learners and teachers in Hong Kong at any level; the concept is translanguaging and its cognate and antecedent constructs; the context is lessons in which English is the object or the medium of instruction. Table 1 states eligibility.

Table 1. Eligibility criteria

Dimension	Included	Excluded
Population	Learners and teachers in Hong Kong, any level from kindergarten to higher education	Settings outside Hong Kong; Greater China studies with no separate Hong Kong stratum
Concept	Translanguaging, trans-semiotising, translingual or plurilingual practice, and the antecedent constructs of classroom code-switching and first-language use	Language contact outside an instructional frame; no classroom or participant data
Context	Lessons in which English is the object of instruction or the medium of instruction; Chinese-as-an-additional-language lessons bearing on the same question for ethnic-minority learners	Out-of-school and family language practice; workplace and public-space multilingualism
Evidence	Empirical studies reporting classroom interaction, participant perception or artefact data	Errata, editorials and book reviews; records with no retrievable bibliographic entry
Language	Published in English; no date limit applied	Not applicable

Records were retrieved from OpenAlex on 8 August 2026 using a field-restricted boolean query, reproducible verbatim: title_and_abstract.search ("translanguaging" OR "translanguage" OR "trans-semiotizing" OR "trans-semiotising" OR "translingual") AND title_and_abstract.search ("Hong Kong" OR "Cantonese"). Results were paginated to exhaustion. Thirty-six supplementary keyword queries covering theory, critique, prior reviews, Hong Kong medium-of-instruction policy, the antecedent code-switching literature and scoping-review methodology were run in parallel. Records were screened on title and abstract for a Hong Kong setting, the concept, and an instructional focus, then assessed for eligibility. Each included study was charted on educational level, instructional site, subject, participants, analytical approach and principal contribution.

Two features of the search bear on the findings. A search restricted to translanguaging terminology does not retrieve the antecedent literature: of the 41 included studies, eight entered through citation searching and the antecedent literature rather than through screening of the search records, among them the earliest Hong Kong work on classroom code-switching; one of the eight appears in the

retrieval pool but carries no indexed abstract and therefore failed title-and-abstract screening. A review of this topic therefore requires a two-concept search string. Second, every included record was resolved against the Crossref registry, and the version-of-record year was adopted, because online-first and issue years diverge widely in this literature and citing the former alongside a print volume is a common error. The 41 included studies are identified in full, with digital object identifiers, in Table 3; the reference list contains the works cited in the text.

5. Results

5.1. Search Results

The boolean query returned 178 records and the supplementary queries 497, with 45 records common to both arms, giving 630 unique records after deduplication by OpenAlex identifier. Screening on title and abstract excluded 469: 399 with no Hong Kong setting, 44 outside the concept and 26 not set in education. Of the 161 records assessed for eligibility, 128 were excluded, principally because they reported no classroom or participant data. The search yielded 33 included studies, and citation searching and the antecedent literature a further 8, giving 41 in total. Fig. 1 shows the flow.

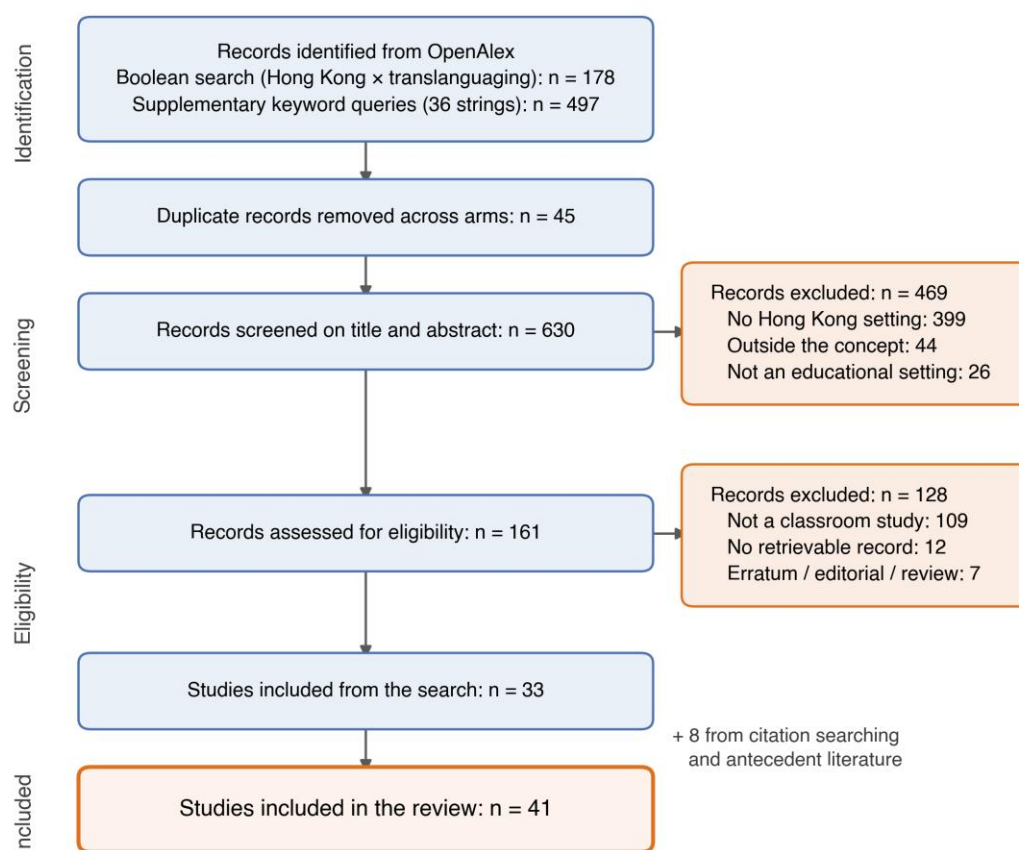


Fig. 1 PRISMA-ScR flow of records through the review

5.2. Characteristics of the Included Studies

Table 2 summarises the corpus and Fig. 2 shows its distribution over time. The literature is concentrated by level: 36 (88%) of the included studies are set in secondary schools, against 2 in primary schools, 2 in kindergartens and 1 in higher education. Concentration by instructional site is sharper: 29 (71%) of the studies are set in content lessons taught through English, 8 (20%) in English-language-subject lessons and 4 (10%) in Chinese-as-an-additional-language lessons. Within content lessons the largest clusters are science and biology (10 studies, one of them a joint science-and-mathematics lesson counted here), mathematics (7) and history (4).

Table 2. Characteristics of the included studies (N = 41). CA = conversation analysis; MCA = multimodal conversation analysis

Characteristic	Category	n (%)
Educational level	Secondary	36 (88%)
	Primary	2 (5%)
	Kindergarten	2 (5%)
	Tertiary	1 (2%)
Instructional site	Content	29 (71%)
	English	8 (20%)
	Chinese	4 (10%)
Analytical approach	CA / MCA	17 (41%)
	Discourse / multimodal	9 (22%)
	Interview / survey	7 (17%)
	Ethnography	5 (12%)
	Case study	2 (5%)
	Conceptual	1 (2%)

Methodologically the corpus is narrow. Seventeen studies (41%) use multimodal conversation analysis or conversation analysis, in most cases triangulated with interpretative phenomenological analysis of video-stimulated-recall interviews. This has produced an account of the sequential organisation of multilingual classroom interaction with few equivalents elsewhere, but it also sets a ceiling: no included study measures English learning gains over time or against a comparison condition. Authorship is likewise concentrated: 17 of the 41 studies are authored or co-authored by one researcher and 6 by another, 23 by one or the other, so the corpus represents fewer independent research programmes than its size suggests.

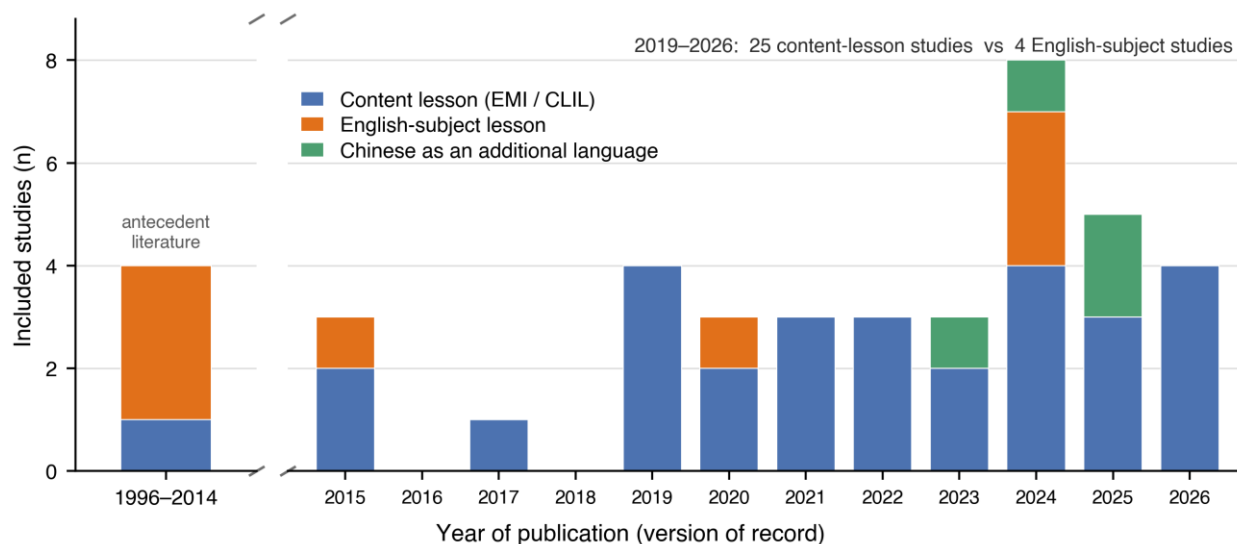


Fig. 2 Included studies by year of publication and instructional site. The antecedent period is aggregated; the axis break is marked

5.3. Where the Evidence Is Not

Output has grown sharply, but the growth has not reached the English-language classroom. From 2019 the corpus contains 25 content-lesson studies against 4 set in English-language lessons. The 8 English-lesson studies are also heterogeneous, as Table 3 shows. Three predate the translanguaging turn and analyse classroom code-switching or mother-tongue use; one examines first-language use in English reading lessons within a first-language framing; one analyses out-of-class computer-mediated communication among tertiary students rather than classroom discourse; one is a practitioner reflection without classroom data; and one frames its analysis through interactional competence [15].

On the criterion of applying a translanguaging frame to recorded English-language-subject classroom data in Hong Kong, one study in the corpus qualifies [16]. That study interviewed and video-recorded eleven native English teachers and derived a taxonomy of resistant, ambivalent and reductionistic engagement, with ambivalence most common. Working under a linguistically policed discourse, its teachers produced two further forms: covert translanguaging, and multimodal translanguaging that does not involve students' first languages, the multimodal route being the politically safer one.

Table 3. Charting of the 41 included studies. Site: Content = content lesson taught through English; English = English-language-subject lesson; Chinese = Chinese-as-an-additional-language lesson. EMI = English-medium instruction; CLIL = content and language integrated learning; EFL = English as a foreign language; CSL = Chinese as a second language; CAL = Chinese as an additional language; EAP = English for academic purposes

Study	Yr	Level	Site	Subject	Approach	DOI
Lin	1996	Sec.	English	English language	Ethnography	10.1016/s0898-5898(96)90006-6
Lin	1999	Sec.	English	English language	Ethnography	10.2307/3587671
Lin	2006	Sec.	Content	Science	Discourse / multimodal	10.2167/le643.0
Carless	2008	Sec.	English	English language	Interview / survey	10.1093/elt/ccm090
Hafner, Li & Miller	2015	Tert.	English	English for science (EAP)	Case study	10.3138/cmlr.2712
Lin & Wu	2015	Sec.	Content	Science (EFL-medium)	CA / MCA	10.1080/13670050.2014.988113
Lo	2015	Sec.	Content	Content subjects (CLIL)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1080/13670050.2014.988112
Lin & He	2017	Sec.	Content	Science (CLIL)	Ethnography	10.1080/15348458.2017.1328283
Leung	2019	Kind.	Content	Visual arts	Discourse / multimodal	10.17206/apjrece.2019.13.1.47
Pun & Macaro	2019	Sec.	Content	Science (EMI)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1080/13670050.2018.1510368
Sanders-Smith & Davila	2019	Kind.	Content	Emergent curriculum	Ethnography	10.1080/15235882.2019.1624281
Wu & Lin	2019	Sec.	Content	Biology (CLIL)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1080/19463014.2019.1629322
Liu	2020	Sec.	Content	Integrated Humanities (CLIL)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1007/s42321-020-00057-z
Tai & Li Wei	2020	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1016/j.system.2020.102364
Wong	2020	Sec.	English	English reading (Chinese-medium schools)	Interview / survey	10.29333/iji.2020.13258a
Pun & Tai	2021	Sec.	Content	Science laboratory (EMI)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1080/09500693.2021.1902015
Tai & Li Wei	2021	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1093/applin/amaa043
Tai & Li Wei	2021	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1080/09500782.2020.1837860
Pun, Thomas & Bowen	2022	Sec.	Content	Science (EMI)	Interview / survey	10.3390/su14042168
Tai	2022	Sec.	Content	Science & Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1007/s11165-021-10018-6

Williams	2022	Pri.	Content	Science (CLIL)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1080/13670050.2020.1754752
Tai	2023	Sec.	Content	Multiple (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1016/j.system.2022.102959
Tai	2023	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1016/j.linged.2023.101227
Wang	2023	Sec.	Chinese	Chinese as second language	Interview / survey	10.1007/s12564-022-09795-0
Chan & Walsh	2024	Sec.	English	English language + EMI content	Interview / survey	10.1111/ijal.12486
Jiang, Gu & Fang	2024	Sec.	English	English language (TESOL)	Interview / survey	10.1515/applirev-2022-0062
Tai	2024	Sec.	Content	History (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1093/applin/amac039
Tai	2024	Sec.	Content	Western History (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1080/09500782.2023.2174379
Tai	2024	Sec.	Content	History (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1080/13670050.2023.2232089
Tai & Lee	2024	Sec.	Chinese	Chinese as additional language	CA / MCA	10.1016/j.system.2024.103496
Tai & Li Wei	2024	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1177/13621688211027851
To	2024	Sec.	English	English language	Conceptual	10.1080/1358684x.2024.2307897
Cheng	2025	Sec.	Content	Content subjects (EMI)	Interview / survey	10.1515/cjal-2025-0205
Ching & Ruowei	2025	Sec.	Chinese	Chinese writing (CSL)	Ethnography	10.1111/ijal.12674
Tai	2025	Sec.	Chinese	Chinese as additional language	CA / MCA	10.1515/applirev-2025-0049
Tai & Li	2025	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1515/applirev-2024-0256
Tai & Li Wei	2025	Sec.	Content	History (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1080/09500782.2023.2248958
Cheung, Erduran & Oancea	2026	Sec.	Content	Science / nature of science	Case study	10.1080/09500693.2024.2444439
Liu	2026	Sec.	Content	Liberal Studies (CLIL)	Discourse / multimodal	10.1080/15348458.2023.2281959
Tai	2026	Pri.	Content	Programming	CA / MCA	10.1093/applin/amae076
Tai & Li Wei	2026	Sec.	Content	Mathematics (EMI)	CA / MCA	10.1177/13621688231152858

5.4. What the Studies Report

Across settings, four functions recur in the studies charted in Table 3. Translanguaging is reported to scaffold access to disciplinary concepts and to bridge terminology; to sustain participation and interaction, including playful talk that builds a translanguaging space [17] and co-learning that reconfigures the teacher-learner relation; to affirm the identities of minoritised learners and support inclusion [9]; and to manage classroom order and affect. Meaning is consistently reported as multimodal rather than merely bilingual, with gesture, gaze, objects and screens doing analytic work that a two-language model cannot capture, and studies of Chinese-as-an-additional-language lessons extend the same findings to ethnic-minority learners.

Two findings cut against a simple reading. A comparison of early- and late-EMI science classrooms found that where first-language use was much greater, teachers asked higher-order questions and interaction was more dialogic, while classrooms with four additional years of English exposure produced lower-order questions and more monologic interaction [18]. This does not

establish that the first language causes higher-order thinking; it does show that maximising English and maximising cognitive demand are not the same objective. Separately, an analysis of thirty content lessons found the proportion of first-language use tracking learner proficiency closely, with teachers using little of it with high-proficiency classes, and concluded that teachers were sensitive in drawing on students' existing repertoires [19]. The corpus also contains its own corrective: in Chinese-as-an-additional-language classrooms, teachers' reliance on a restricted set of resources rather than learners' full repertoires can limit the transformative power of a translanguaging space, a pattern named unequal translanguaging [20]. Attention to who in a classroom is empowered by translanguaging, and who is not, is now an explicit condition of research in this area.

6. Discussion: Implications for TESOL

That distribution of settings constrains what may be claimed. Evidence that Cantonese and gesture jointly unlock a chemistry concept is evidence about learning chemistry; it becomes evidence about learning English only if the episode is followed by work in English. Because 29 of 41 studies were gathered in content lessons and none measured English gains, the defensible position is neither an English-only classroom nor unrestricted translanguaging, but principled crosslinguistic scaffolding with an explicit return to English.

A sequence consistent with the reviewed findings runs: an attempt in English; a strategic multilingual or multimodal bridge where that attempt stalls; conceptual development in whatever resources carry it; explicit mapping of the resulting meaning onto English; and English retrieval or production (Fig. 3). The first stage protects target-language exposure; the third prevents reasoning from collapsing to the level of the learners' available English, the failure documented in early-EMI classrooms [18]; the last is what makes the sequence belong to TESOL rather than to content teaching. This is a synthesis derived from the reviewed findings, not a validated model.

Four further principles follow from specific results. Support should be graded to proficiency rather than allocated by quota, since teachers already do this and do it sensitively [19]. Interaction should be scaffolded for weaker learners rather than withdrawn from them: the largest directly relevant study found lower-proficiency students receiving form-focused examination preparation in place of opportunities to speak [15]. Multimodality offers a route into translanguaging for teachers who do not share their learners' languages, which distinguishes multilingual competence in a teacher from multilingual pedagogical competence [16]. And because Cantonese is not every learner's first language, the operative question is whose repertoire is actually taken up [9, 20].

The sequence is bounded as well as staged. It prescribes no proportion of lesson time: the amount and function of bridging that serves a class tracks what its learners can already do in English, and competent teachers grade it continuously rather than by rule [19]. Nor does it assert a universal benefit: where the objective is fluency practice with familiar material, the defensible bridge may be no bridge at all. The case for crosslinguistic support is strongest precisely where cognitive demand outruns available English, which is where insisting on the target language demonstrably flattens reasoning and interaction [18]. So bounded, the sequence is a decision rule about when meaning may leave English and what must bring it back, not a quota for either language.

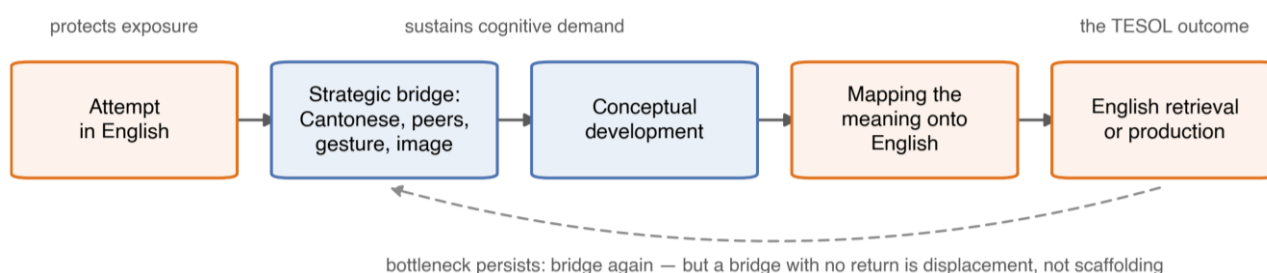


Fig. 3 The bridge-develop-return sequence for principled crosslinguistic scaffolding, synthesised from the reviewed studies. Orange stages are conducted in English; blue stages may legitimately run on other resources

The sequence can be turned into an observation instrument. Table 4 sets out an episode-coding template: each crosslinguistic or multimodal move in a recorded lesson is coded for the problem it addresses and for what happens to English afterwards. The weighting is deliberate. The first eight codes name functions the Hong Kong corpus documents; the final two, the English-return move and first-language displacement, record whether scaffolded meaning is subsequently carried into English work, and so prevent the analysis from assuming that every crosslinguistic episode is beneficial. Coding a handful of recorded lessons against this template, together with the teacher's own stimulated-recall commentary, the companion method in most of the corpus's conversation-analytic studies, gives a school-level action-research cycle: identify the trigger, name the function, follow the English. The template also states, in observable terms, what closing the field's outstanding gap requires: the same codes applied in English-language lessons, joined to pre-, post- and delayed measures of the English each episode was meant to enable.

Table 4. An episode-coding template for crosslinguistic classroom practice. The first eight codes describe functions documented in the corpus; the final two record whether meaning is carried into English

Code	Operational question
Comprehension scaffold	Does another language or mode resolve a comprehension problem?
Terminological bridge	Is a concept mapped across English and another language?
Metalinguistic contrast	Are forms explicitly compared across languages?
Task-management scaffold	Does the switch clarify instructions or procedures?
Cognitive extension	Does flexible language enable more complex reasoning than the learner's available English allows?
Affective and relational move	Does it build solidarity, humour or identity, or reduce anxiety?
Participation rescue	Does the teacher change language or mode after silence or trouble?
Multimodal bridge	Do gesture, image, object or technology carry meaning that language alone did not?
English-return move	Is the scaffolded understanding subsequently converted into English comprehension or production?
First-language displacement	Does familiar-language interaction continue with no meaningful target-language work?

The sequence also bears on assessment, the setting in which English-only reasoning is most defensible. Public examinations assess performance in a named language, and no pedagogy that leaves learners unable to produce English under monolingual conditions serves them. The bridge-develop-return sequence is compatible with that constraint by design, because its endpoint is English production and the bridge is transitional by definition. The documented alternative for lower-proficiency learners, form-focused, examination-oriented instruction in place of interactional opportunity [15], protects neither attainment nor interaction. Within the sequence, examination preparation specifies the target register for the mapping stage; it is not an argument against the bridge.

For teacher education, the operative construct is multilingual pedagogical competence rather than teacher multilingualism. The native-English-teacher evidence shows engagement with translanguaging governed less by belief than by institutional safety, with multimodality adopted as the politically neutral route [16]. Preparation programmes can respond on both fronts: by legitimising the bridge explicitly, so that covert practice need not remain covert, and by training the orchestration itself, eliciting the needed resource from learners, sequencing the return to English, and recognising when a bridge has become displacement. The coding template doubles as the training instrument. Coding one's own recorded lesson against Table 4 is a concrete induction task, and the stimulated-recall method used across the corpus's conversation-analytic studies [17] is available to any school with a camera.

The policy environment leaves more room for this than classroom ideology suggests. The fine-tuning framework already allocates a quarter of lesson time to extended learning activities in English and lets schools convert that time into English-medium teaching of up to two subjects [8]; nothing in the instrument regulates how meaning is scaffolded inside those lessons. A school that treats the bridge-develop-return sequence as its working definition of using English within extended learning activities complies with the circular and is better aligned with its own intake than one that polices Cantonese out of the room. The distance between what policy requires and what school-level ideology enforces [16] is, in that sense, pedagogical space waiting to be claimed.

7. Limitations

Screening and charting were performed by one reviewer without a second coder, so reliability was not estimated. A single bibliographic source, OpenAlex, was searched, with Crossref used only to verify records, rather than the subscription databases a registered review would use; recall on book chapters is likely incomplete, and grey literature surfaced by the searches was excluded rather than systematically pursued. Following scoping-review convention, no quality appraisal was conducted, so the concentration this review reports is a property of the corpus and not a judgement on individual studies. The review was restricted to sources published in English.

8. Conclusion

Hong Kong has produced an unusually dense body of evidence that translanguaging supports meaning-making, participation and cognitively demanding interaction in classrooms. That evidence is drawn overwhelmingly from lessons in which English is the medium rather than the object of instruction, is methodologically homogeneous, and has not been tested against English-learning outcomes. What follows for TESOL is a shift from asking whether Cantonese should be permitted, to specifying the function a crosslinguistic move performs and the English work that follows it. What follows for research is more specific. The English-language classroom is the gap, and the design that would close it is available: recorded lessons analysed for the function of each crosslinguistic episode, combined with immediate stimulated recall and with pre-, post- and delayed measures of the English the episode was meant to enable. Table 4 supplies the coding frame for that design. A within-school comparison of bridged and unbridged task cycles, even across a handful of English classes, would supply the first outcome evidence this literature lacks.

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