
Short Research Papers

Translanguaging: Theoretical and Pedagogical Implications in the Japanese University ESP Classroom

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This research paper describes the findings of a project which explored the implementation of translanguaging approaches in a Japanese ESP-focused university classroom. First, a theoretical overview of translanguaging and the benefits of incorporating learners' L1 (Japanese) in the L2 (English) classroom will be provided from the perspectives of psycholinguistics, sociocultural linguistics, and educational praxis. Then, an overview of how translanguaging approaches were incorporated in the Japanese ESP-focused classroom will be explained to show how students' L1 and L2 can be utilized to increase language retention, communicative output, and motivation. The project involved 90 native-speaking Japanese participants who undertook one of their compulsory English classes in a translanguaging approach and who were asked to write and present about topics related to their science and technology major. Results of this study showed that utilizing a student's whole linguistic repertoire can increase their motivation, language production, content retention, and cognitive strategies

本研究は日本の大学のESP授業において実施したトランスランゲージングのアプローチについて報告するものである。本稿ではまず、トランスランゲージングの理論的背景を紹介し、英語の授業において学習者のL1(日本語)を取り入れることの利点を心理言語学、社会言語学、教育的視点から論じる。その後、授業内容の概説を通じて、トランスランゲージングがいかに関に学習者の言語リテンション、伝達アウトプット、動機付けの増大をもたらしたかを記述する。参加者は、90人の日本語を母語とする理工学専攻の大学生で、大学における必修としての英語授業を履修していた。当該英語授業では、専攻する理工学に関するトピックについての小論文の執筆や発表を行った。その結果、トランスランゲージングを用いて学習者の言語レパートリーの全てを活用させることが、動機付け、言語産出、学習内容の保持、認知方略の増大につながる事が明らかとなった。

The issue of whether to use a learners' native language in the foreign language classroom has been a topic for debate within many educational institutions. Even today, there are numerous English as a foreign language (EFL) programs throughout universities in Japan in which there are English-only policies, and teachers are divided as to whether the L1 should be used in the classroom (Barker, 2003; Ford, 2009). One of the main reasons as to why some universities are enforcing the exclusion of learners' L1 in L2 classrooms is the belief that it takes time away from interaction within the L2 (Lee, 2013). Yet, monolingual classrooms in which students' L1 is prohibited have been shown to have negative effects on learner motivation and communicative output. A study by Stephens (2006) found that classrooms that adhered to the L2-only dogma were found to lower learners' levels of motivation and morale and also led to higher resentment rates towards studying English. Finding the balance between how much the L1 and L2 should be utilized in the L2 classroom is therefore paramount in creating learner-centred classes that are challenging yet stimulating.

Consideration is indispensable for providing opportunities for students to process and search for information in their L1 and L2, along with providing ample opportunities to use the L2 to discuss what they discovered. For example, Macaro and Lee (2013) found that excessive usage of a student's L1 for communication deprives learners of L2 communicative opportunities; however, limiting students' L1 use can increase their level of anxiety when communicating with limited L2 proficiency. With these considerations, rather than dismissing the use of the L1 completely, curriculum design should consider students' needs, their past EFL learning history, and proficiency scores when attempting to incorporate bilingual approaches within the classroom.

Translanguaging

Originally used in Welsh bilingual education in the 1980's, translanguaging is currently defined as incorporating two languages alongside each other for the purpose of teaching and learning of content (Conteh, 2018). The benefits of translanguaging approaches were recognized as useful for not only the teaching of content but also for the pedagogical implications it could have on foreign

language learners' L2 linguistic development (García, Johnson, & Seltzer, 2017). Translanguaging was also defined by Garcia and Wei (2014) as follows:

The deliberate and systematic use of two languages for education and learning purposes. Second language learners are not considered to be acquiring a new language, but adding to the integrated linguistic system of which their first language is already a part. (pp.19–20)

Research suggests that through the incorporation of translanguaging approaches in the language classroom, students are not hindered from using their entire linguistic repertoire to express and develop their ideas, while simultaneously improving their L2 abilities in real-life settings. The results of translanguaging approaches are interpreted by Wei (2018) as a means to help “to maximize the learner’s, and the teacher’s, linguistic resources in the process of problem-solving and knowledge construction” (p. 15). These benefits are observable in both the ESL classroom, and more recently in the EFL classroom (Ford, 2009). Garcia (2017) originally conducted classes with bilingual L1 Spanish/L2 English speakers to develop their L2 language abilities and to promote better content retention. She reasoned that the need for translanguaging came from the “need to teach students, and not teach the language” (Garcia et al., 2017, pp. 43). Thus, it promotes personalised approaches to language teaching and learning for each student. Through the incorporation of translanguaging techniques in the classroom, teachers can bridge the disconnect in communication that could be prevalent due to learners’ language limitations. Translanguaging approaches activate creative thinking for communicative and problem-solving processes which can have multiple benefits on learners’ future study and employment endeavours (Lin & He, 2017).

In the EFL classroom, particularly in Japanese universities, Yamauchi (2018) found that translanguaging approaches increased student motivation and content retention among Japanese learners, and a study by Bartlett (2018) found that language retention and comprehensible output levels in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classes improved when compared to their monolingual classroom counterparts in Japanese EFL settings. Bartlett’s (2018) study showed that incorporating translanguaging approaches has a positive impact on

students' content retention, knowledge building, linguistic competence, learner autonomy, and motivation levels. This shows that translanguaging approaches can provide a reliable means to support students in multiple facets of their educational development. These benefits are a viable means to counter the difficulties outlined in promoting the communicative participation of learners in Japanese EFL contexts, in which cultural constructs and social hierarchy can hinder participation levels in the L2 classroom (Bartlett, 2017). Such difficulties have been outlined in the traditional culture of learning and teaching in Japan, in which the teacher is perceived as the holder of knowledge and students' roles are to acquire it with little to no disruption to the flow of classes (Bartlett, 2017). Further difficulties include a lack of discussion and the existence of opinion exchange tasks within classrooms which are focused on examination success (Bartlett, 2016), and obstacles Japanese teachers have in transitioning from lecture-focused classrooms, which are the norm in Japanese high schools, to discussion and groupwork-focused classes that students encounter at university and that cause confusion about what is expected of them within the classroom (Cacali, 2018). Translanguaging operates best with the acceptance that students' L1 and L2 can work together in the classroom rather than in competition with each other, and teachers can strategically plan for students to use both languages for learning and cognitive development purposes. In particular, translanguaging approaches in the classroom allow for students to develop their native language, L2 language skills, and content comprehension; they can also further aid in learners' social and emotional development.

Yet, with the above benefits being mentioned, one cannot forget that in EFL contexts, the learner is studying a foreign language. The use of the target language is a key tool in language acquisition, and in some cases translanguaging can be a limiting force for students who are not interested in L2 acquisition and who abuse the translanguaging approach by constantly choosing the L1 over the L2 regardless of their L2 level of competence. Especially found within the Japanese case is the overuse of grammar translation methods as a hindrance to language acquisition (Bartlett, 2016).

So long as the goal of incorporating translanguaging techniques is to improve

learners' language usage, content retention, and autonomy, and that these improvements are observable within the classrooms, then the goals of the class and reasons for incorporating translanguaging are easily justifiable in Japanese EFL contexts.

Benefits of L1 usage in L2 classrooms

The benefits of allowing the L1 to be present in the L2 classroom have been outlined by multiple scholars who provide evidence from psycholinguistics, sociocultural linguistics, and educational praxis perspectives as to their potential positive impact on learners' native and foreign language skills.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, allowing the L1 in the L2 classroom permits for better comprehension of the content to take place (Bialystok et al., 2005). This provides opportunities for learners to better consider and understand the linguistic characteristics of their L1 through the process of language transfer. The cognitive connection between languages allows for parallel activation of both L1 and L2 languages to assist with cognitive function both within and outside linguistic domains (Bialystok et al., 2005). This interconnectivity of L1 and L2 has been found to promote communicative competence throughout the learners' full linguistic repertoire, and in particular to the development of their L2 (Lee & Lo, 2017). Additionally, it promotes cross-languaging and encourages positive perceptions of the L2 compared to monolingual classrooms (Bohn, 2018). At the classroom level, the incorporation of L1 allows students to interact with content relevant to their level of knowledge on certain topics and to then transfer and share this knowledge in the L2 communicatively for real-life language usage to be practiced (Caruso, 2018). As expressed by Troedson and Dashwood (2019),

Translanguaging pedagogies promote metacognition, build deeper thinking, and enable emergent bilingual students to engage with texts that are typically considered beyond their instructional capacity (p. 117).

This allows them to then transfer these skills to their L2 for more focused topic-based engagement.

Within the field of sociocultural linguistics, which explores the interactions

between language, culture, and society, research shows multiple areas in which learner identity and language use are intertwined (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005). First, according to Alrabah, Wu, Alotaibi, and Aldaihani (2016), when teachers incorporate students' L1 in the classroom, they show an understanding and accommodation of their learners' linguistic and cultural identity; doing this facilitates the L2 acquisition process by allowing the individual, their language, and their lived experiences to be present within the classroom. Bartlett (2018) outlines that the use of students' L1 in EFL classrooms allows for better interpersonal connections to be established with the teacher and other learners. This permitted for students to maintain interest in language enquiry, therefore promoting language acquisition and increasing learning motivation and willingness to communicate.

Concerning educational praxis, the use of L1 in classrooms has been shown to benefit language analysis, comprehension checking, error feedback, and classroom management. For example, Sharma (2006) stated that the use of the learners' mother tongue allows for students to make connections between the language being studied and the language that they possess. Such connections allow for better cognitive connections to be established between the language being taught and learners' mother tongue. The use of L1 through translanguaging develops students' language analysis abilities that assist with the acquisition of grammar and vocabulary in the L2. Comprehension checking can occur when teachers ask students to provide reasons and examples for their answers which may be based on native language resources used to search for information (Shariati, 2019). Rather than getting students to read only a sentence or rote phrases back to others in the classroom word for word from the materials provided, having them provide the answers and reasons in their L1 for said responses (for lower-level learners) shows teachers that students have fully comprehended what was covered during class time if the teacher is proficient in the learners' L1.

Methods

In order to address the research question “Does translanguaging have a positive effect on science and technology students’ communicative output and language retention?”, 90 students were selected to study a second/third-year ESP-focused English subject in which translanguaging approaches were incorporated. As this researcher has seen the benefits translanguaging can have on science and technology majors at a different university (Bartlett, 2018), this study was in part an exploration to see whether students at a different university showed the same increases to motivation, L2 output, and content retention as was recorded in the 2018 study. The project followed an explanatory sequential mixed methods research design in which participants were first given surveys, then put into follow-up focus group discussions. In this study, class sizes were 46 and 44 students, and they were taught in the second semester of 2019. The average TOEIC IP score of students in April 2019 was 375 (max 715, min 170).

Classroom praxis

Throughout the Japanese 16-week semester, students were introduced to topics that related to their majors (science and technology focused), with the main theme focused on “Artificial Intelligence: Its Merits and Demerits.” As part of the requirements for the course, students in groups of five or six were assigned to practice writing an abstract, literature review, methods, and results section for a research paper on a problem within a sub-topic of the theme, based on their past knowledge within their major course of study. The group leader oversaw the selection of the sub-topic. The teacher explained the guidelines for writing each section of the paper. Options for sub-topics (AI and \~) were as follows:

- Agriculture
- Transportation
- Medicine
- Education
- Robotics
- Care work

After the paper was fully researched over a six-week period both in and out

of class, and their results and ideas about solving the “problem” were written up, the groups were then asked to create a PowerPoint presentation and give a 5-10-minute talk based on the paper. The presentations introduced the data they found when reading about the topic, and explained their ideas/solutions/recommendations for future developments within the field to the audience (other groups within the same class).

When it came to searching for information for their papers, the instructor introduced students to Google Scholar and explained how to use it, along with the university’s online library resources. Students were each asked to find articles in Japanese, articles with a similar focus in English, and a newspaper article written in English about their sub-topic. Students at first read articles in Japanese individually for content checking, then created a vocabulary list in their groups for specialist words that they didn’t know in English. Next, students were then asked to read the English articles in groups during class time to see whether they had similar or differing concluding ideas and to make additions to their vocabulary lists based on vocabulary that they didn’t know from the English articles that they read.

Data collection procedure

During week 16, students were asked to complete a survey in English or Japanese (both were provided) which included five multiple-choice questions and were asked to rank their responses on a five-point Likert scale with the following options: 1) Strongly disagree, 2) Disagree, 3) Neutral, 4) Agree, and 5) Strongly Agree.

Two weeks after the course concluded, 15 participants (seven in focus group 1 and eight in focus group 2) were randomly selected to take part in a focus group discussion lasting 20 minutes each. These discussions were recorded using Zoom. The focus group discussion asked participants to provide reasons for why they selected the responses they did on the survey.

Data analysis procedure

Results from the multiple-choice survey were statistically analysed to show the frequency of responses for each question. The focus group responses were input

into NVivo 12, and a thematic and statistical analysis was conducted by coding the responses into themes and creating nodes. These results also underwent a manual statistical and thematic analysis by the researcher to check for clarity and consistency of the data output by NVivo.

Results

The following results were gathered from both student questionnaires and a write up of student responses in the group work discussions. Some of the responses were transcribed from students who responded in English, and others were translated from the students' Japanese responses.

Do you feel that this class allowed you to study/use English in a way that would help you in the future (work, graduate school, etc.)?

The results of Question 1 showed that 84 participants selected strongly agree, and 6 students selected agree. During the focus group discussion, participant E stated that,

In this class, I was able to use my knowledge of engineering in a more practical way. Most of my English subjects focus on topics that are too general, but in

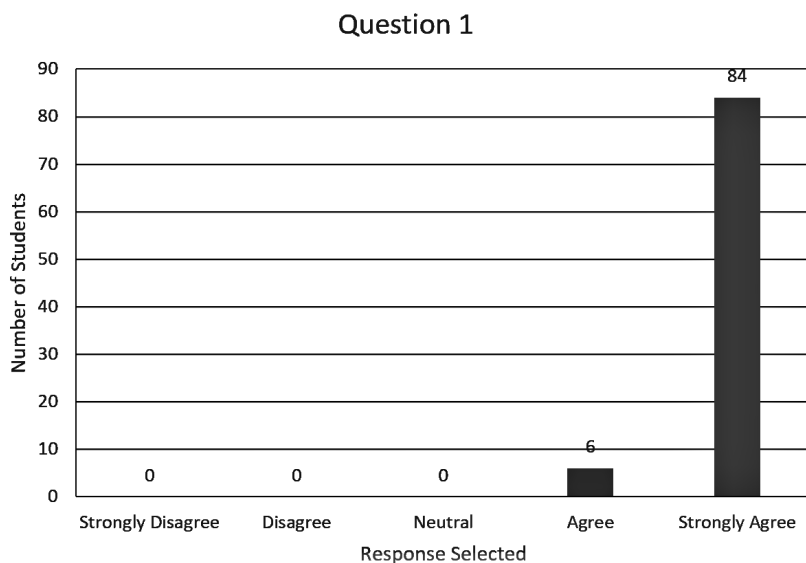


Figure 1. Question 1 responses.

this subject, I could make presentations and learn to read articles in English about my major. I think this will come in useful when I start working.

Furthermore, participant C stated that,

As I plan to go to Graduate school, I was happy to start reading and making presentations in English about my major. When I told my professor (in the department of Engineering) about this, he was very pleased.

These responses show that not only did students feel that incorporating translanguaging approaches in the classroom were beneficial, but allowing their prior knowledge from their majors to be part of the context of the class was also advantageous. Incorporating practical tasks using language specific to their major was viewed positively and perceived by participants to be beneficial to their future work and study endeavours. Furthermore, it shows that some teachers see a benefit to students using their knowledge of science and engineering in the EFL classroom as advantageous to students' content learning.

Question 2: Do you feel that this class allowed you to become familiar with doing research?

Figure 2 shows results from Question 2; 69 participants selected strongly

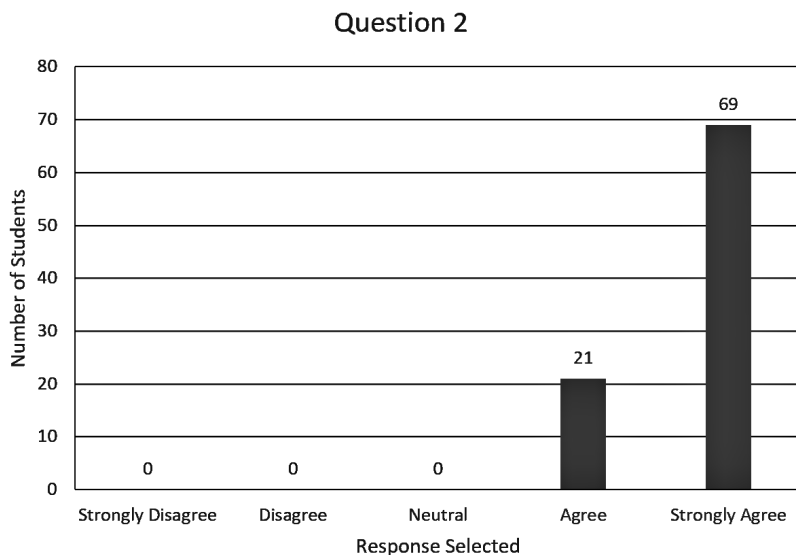


Figure 2. Question 2 responses.

agree, with 21 students selecting agree. This shows that students viewed this subject as one where they were not only using English in a positive way but were also gaining literature search skills.

During the focus group discussions, Participant J explained that, I really enjoyed this class because it allowed me to learn vocabulary necessary to my major by reading real articles in English. Although I don't like to study English, this subject allowed me to become more interested because I could see how useful English is to conducting research. I enjoyed learning new things about my major that I hadn't studied yet.

Furthermore, participant B stated that, I like how we read about the topics in Japanese and English, and that we could choose articles freely. I think that seeing how English is used in research, and then being able to use that information in my paper and presentation was useful to allow me to better understand how to conduct research.

These responses show that not only do participants sense the value of translanguaging techniques in their language development, but they also perceive the benefits they have on being able to read about and conduct research within their majors in the future.

Question 3: Do you feel that this class allowed you more opportunities to communicate in English with your classmates compared to your other English subjects?

For this question, 82 participants strongly agreed that it did, with 8 participants agreeing that it did. When participants were asked about this in the focus group discussions, participant F responded that,

In my other English subjects, the teacher does most of the talking and we focus on reading and answering questions in short sentences. Even though the teacher puts us into groups to answer these questions, we don't really need to communicate, but in this subject, we needed to speak more. In my group, we had to talk about what we read in English, and how we were going to approach the report and the presentation.

Participant I added that,

In my other English subjects, we are always told to speak in English, so if I

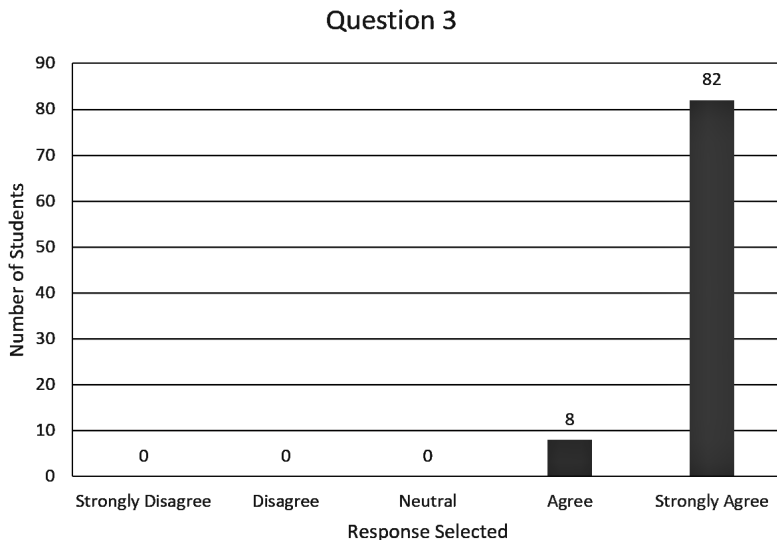


Figure 3. Question 3 responses.

don't know a word, I don't participate. But in this subject if I didn't know a word, I would be able to say it in Japanese and my group members would be able to tell me the English for the word. I think in this class, I was able to participate and talk more because of this.

The results of the focus group show that not only the types of tasks students were presented with, but also the allowance to incorporate their L1 if necessary, allowed for communication to continue to flow and for language building to take place.

Question 4: Do you think this subject increased your overall motivation to study English?

The questionnaire results showed that 66 participants selected “strongly agree”, with 22 participants selecting “agree” and 2 participants selecting “neutral”. When participants were questioned about their responses during the focus group discussions, a majority of participants stated that motivation increased due to the type of content being covered, which allowed for Japanese to be used when necessary for comprehension checking. According to participant L,

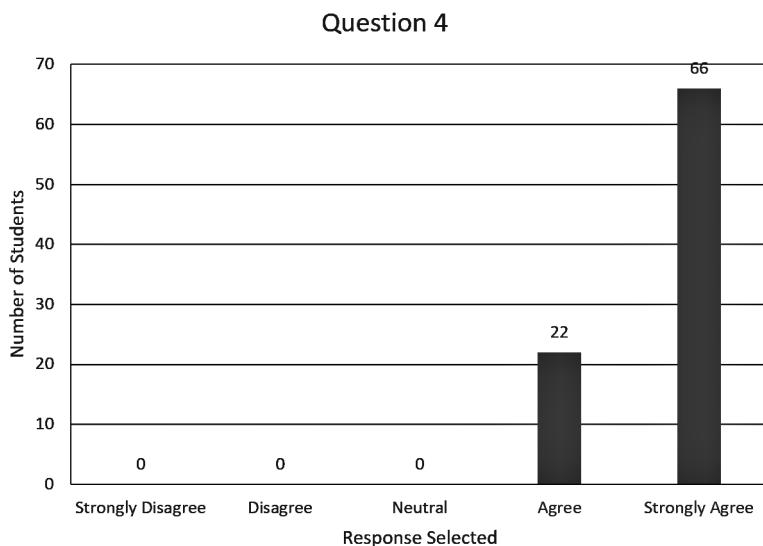


Figure 4. Question 4 responses.

I was happy to study English in this subject more than my other English subjects, as I was able to use knowledge from my major, and study new language that is valuable to my other studies. I like that I could speak with my classmates in English about engineering topics.

Participant H further explained that,

I always looked forward to this class. The teacher provided us with materials that were useful and interesting, and I was able to explore new language using authentic materials. I like how the teacher supported our learning and cared about our future goals. Especially when I didn't know the English, I could consult my classmates and teacher in Japanese and English which was great.

These responses suggest that due to the type of materials covered, the ability to communicate in English during group discussions, and to make enquiries in Japanese all influenced the motivation levels of participants within this study. This indicates that translanguaging approaches, material relevancy, and the ability to inquire in both their L1 and L2 as required increased the amount of motivation students had within the EFL classroom.

Question 5: Do you think that your level of English improved as a result of

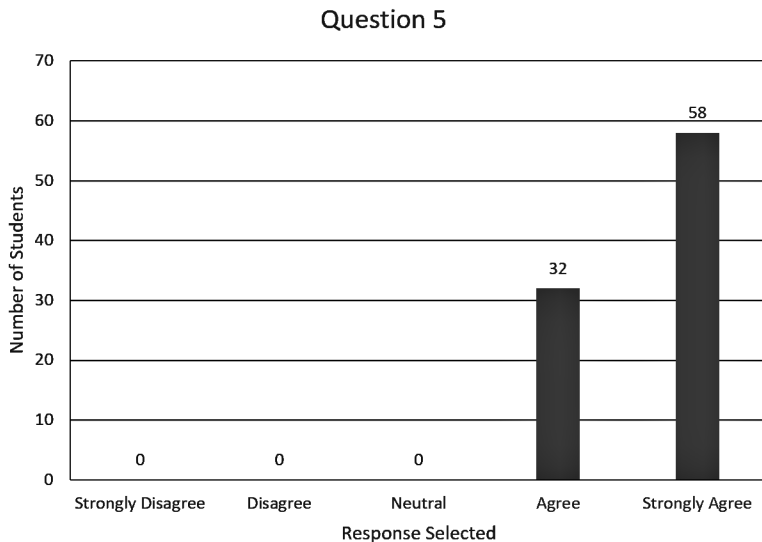


Figure 5. Question 5 responses.

this class?

The survey results showed that 58 participants selected “Strongly agree” with 32 participants selecting that they “agree” that their level of English improved as a result of taking this class.

According to participant J in the focus group discussion,

In this class, I was required to use the general English that we had studied since high school and was also required to use English specific to my major. As a result, I was able to practice and use the English I already knew and was then able to use new English related to my major. I think I am now better able to communicate in English than before.

Furthermore, participant K stated that,

I like that in this subject I could use Japanese to ask questions if I didn’t know the English. I was then able to hear the English for the Japanese. This allowed me to learn new vocabulary and listen to how the grammar that I had studied in the past could be used in that sentence. I think I am better able to use the grammar and vocabulary I have learned in the past more confidently because of this.

The responses to the focus group discussion provide evidence that by allowing participants to use L1 in the L2 classroom, along with creating an environment where they had to use a variety of English to complete the tasks, was beneficial to all learners who took part in this study. By allowing participants to practically use their entire linguistic repertoire, their confidence in using English noticeably improved as a result of incorporating translanguaging approaches within the classroom.

Discussion

The results of this study have shown that incorporating translanguaging approaches allows for a higher level of English for Specific purposes to be present with science and technology majors. Translanguaging approaches further permit learners to cater their language learning to their real-life needs (such as language relevant to their majors) which hold a higher probability of being encountered in either graduate school or their future workplace environs where discussing their knowledge and opinions about science and technology focused topics will be essential. Following the recommendations outlined by Hornberger and Link (2012) of varying and interchanging the languages during the input, processing and output stages of information collection and sharing were permitted freely in the earlier stages of the course, with the amount of Japanese being lessened as a result of the new language acquired throughout each lesson, with students encouraged to use English expressions as they learned them.

With translanguaging approaches, learners were able to consolidate and better grasp the language necessary for their major areas of study, and concurrently promoted skills relevant to research and inquiry. Although English is not required in Japan for day-to-day living, offering courses catered to students' majors and interests increases the overall motivation (Bartlett, 2018) and as a result, allows for an increase in their output levels in their language classes to be observed. This is further evident when comparing this study to the one conducted by Bartlett in 2018 at a different university, which showed similar results. Translanguaging approaches assisted with language acquisition in allowing learners to increase their understanding of the language they already

possessed, along with growing their language abilities through ESP-focused tasks.

Furthermore, varying the language used for input, processing, and output, as outlined by Hornberger and Link (2012), has allowed for students to create better lexical networks between the L1 and L2, which has had an observable impact on their use of English both in and out of the classroom. An example from an ESP-focused EFL classroom (Bartlett, 2018) is where students who are science majors use their past language knowledge to find information about the topic under investigation in their own language (L1) or the language being studied (L2). They then comprehend and cognitively process the information while considering the English required to express the knowledge to others through communicative means. They then bring this information to a group discussion and share what they have learned in English (L2). Through multiple classes in which I have used translanguaging as a support tool for content comprehension, this researcher has allowed students to use their L1 to build their linguistic knowledge and to transfer it to their L2, which is a powerful cognitive strategy (Berger, Crossley, and Kyle, 2019).

Using translanguaging as a tool of communication as outlined by (Bartlett, 2017) has allowed for students to do the following:

- paraphrase what students read in the articles in their L1,
- identify prior knowledge (both of English and their content studies), and
- describe how it can be mobilized within the problem being investigated

As a result, translanguaging approaches have allowed for learners' willingness to communicate in English to increase and for their linguistic repertoire to grow. These approaches have had a positive impact on participants' communicative competence and has developed their sociocultural identity as bilingual language users (Lin and He, 2017).

Conclusion

This study has shown that the incorporation of translanguaging techniques has multiple benefits to learners' language usage and comprehensible output. Although more research is needed in other content areas, the benefits of

translanguaging approaches as outlined within this study illustrate that translanguaging approaches within Japanese EFL contexts are a viable means of improving the communicative competence of EFL learners.

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