Translanguaging in Fijian ESL Classrooms: Reframing Multilingual Repertoires for English Language Teaching

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Abstract

Fiji's English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms are situated within a multilingual ecology in which learners may draw on iTaukei, Fiji Hindi, standard Hindi, Urdu, Rotuman, and other community or heritage languages alongside English. Yet, the presence of English as a high-value language of schooling can create a tension: learners are expected to develop proficiency in English, while the linguistic resources they already possess may be underused during formal learning. This literature-based conceptual paper brings two studies into dialogue-Shaikh's quantitative study of translanguaging in a multilingual English classroom in Oman and Hendricks and Xeketwana's qualitative study of translanguaging in South Africa-to consider what their findings may mean for Fijian ESL education. The paper synthesises scholarship on translanguaging, classroom talk, language ideologies and multilingual learning, and contextualises these ideas within Fiji's language-in-education history and rich contemporary linguistic diversity. It argues that translanguaging should be considered a planned pedagogical resource rather than an unstructured replacement for English. Suggested practices include multilingual brainstorming, bilingual vocabulary displays, collaborative reading, translation and back-translation, multilingual planning followed by English drafting, and carefully scaffolded oral presentations. The paper also identifies implementation challenges, including unequal language proficiency among teachers, uneven availability of learning materials, assessment expectations, and the risk that some learners' languages may be privileged over others. Since this is a literature-based conceptual paper and not a report of new classroom data, its recommendations require local empirical evaluation with a proposed research agenda for Fijian ESL classrooms.

Keywords: translanguaging, Fiji, ESL, multilingual education, iTaukei, Fiji Hindi, language ideology, English language teaching

1. Introduction

English occupies an important place in Fiji's education system, public life and inter-community communication. At the same time, Fiji is not linguistically uniform. Learners may arrive at school with knowledge of iTaukei varieties, Fiji Hindi, standard Hindi, Urdu, Rotuman and other languages, as well as different forms of English shaped by family, community, schooling and media. Their repertoires are not identical, even when learners are grouped under broad ethnic or language labels. A classroom can therefore be understood as a meeting place for diverse language histories and communicative resources, rather than as a space in which every learner begins from the same linguistic position.

This diversity presents a central pedagogical question for English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching: how can teachers provide meaningful, sustained opportunities to learn and use English while also recognising the languages learners use to understand the world? A strictly English-only approach may appear to maximise exposure to the target language, but it can also make complex content inaccessible when learners do not yet have the English vocabulary or confidence needed to express their understanding. Conversely, unrestricted use of languages other than English, without purposeful links to English learning objectives, may reduce opportunities for learners to practise the language they are expected to develop. The issue is therefore not whether English matters, but how teachers can teach English effectively in multilingual classrooms.

Translanguaging offers one way to address this question. It describes how multilingual people mobilise their available linguistic resources flexibly to make meaning, participate, learn and communicate. In pedagogical translanguaging, teachers intentionally design tasks that allow learners to draw on these resources, while working towards defined learning outcomes (García & Li, 2014; García et al., 2017). The approach differs from treating languages as sealed, separate systems that must never interact. Instead, it recognises that learners may use familiar

words, expressions, explanations, comparisons and peer discussion to understand an idea before expressing it in English.

The two supplied studies provide the principal starting point for this paper. Shaikh (2025) examined translanguaging across twelve English-learning sessions with 50 multilingual secondary students in Oman. The study reported sustained engagement and indications of supported understanding, although its statistical analysis did not identify significant differences in performance across sessions. Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) investigated translanguaging in South African English First Additional Language classrooms. Their qualitative account illustrates how teachers made space for isiXhosa and English in exploratory talk, learner presentations and written resources, and how this practice could support participation and meaning-making. Neither study was conducted in Fiji, and their findings cannot simply be transferred to Fijian schools. They do, however, offer concepts and classroom examples that can be critically adapted to Fiji's multilingual context.

The purpose of this paper is to relate the arguments and evidence in these two studies to Fijian ESL classrooms. It develops a context-sensitive discussion of how translanguaging might support English learning, what limitations should be acknowledged, and what teachers, school leaders, teacher educators and researchers could do to evaluate the approach responsibly. The paper is conceptual and literature-based: it does not claim to present original observations or empirical findings from Fiji. Its contribution is to establish a reasoned framework for future classroom practice and research grounded in the two supplied papers and relevant scholarship on ESL education in Fiji.

2. Fiji's Multilingual and Educational Context

Fiji's linguistic landscape is shaped by Indigenous languages, migration, colonial history, inter-community contact and contemporary mobility. iTaukei languages and varieties, Fiji Hindi and other South Asian languages, Rotuman and languages associated with smaller communities form part of this wider ecology. English has also become prominent in formal education and many public and professional domains. These languages do not necessarily perform the same functions in every learner's life: a student may use one language with grandparents, another with friends, English for school tasks, and a mixed repertoire in online communication. It is consequently important not to assume that a learner's ethnic identity tells a teacher exactly which language the learner knows best or prefers to use.

The Constitution of the Republic of Fiji (2013) recognises English, iTaukei and Fiji Hindi as official languages. Constitutional recognition, however, does not by itself determine how languages are used in day-to-day teaching, how much time is allocated to them, or whether teachers have suitable multilingual resources. Goundar (2026) argues that English remains prominent in educational domains and identifies the need for more coherent support for multilingualism in language policy, curriculum development, teacher preparation and resource provision. This analysis provides a timely policy context for considering how classroom-level translanguaging could be developed without treating it as a substitute for wider institutional support.

Earlier research in Fiji also highlights a gap between language policy and classroom practice. Shameem (2007), in a study of eight primary schools serving multilingual Indo-Fijian children, found that English was the dominant language of instruction in all 24 observed classrooms, despite policy expectations concerning early mother-tongue use. The study described children who might use Fiji Hindi at home, learn standard Hindi or Urdu at school, use English for formal literacy, and encounter iTaukei through inter-community relationships. Shameem's findings should be read in their historical and study-specific context, rather than as a description of every contemporary classroom. Nevertheless, they underline an important issue: multilingual learners' actual repertoires and language practices may be more complex than a simple home-language/English distinction suggests.

For ESL teachers, this complexity has practical consequences. A learner may understand an idea in Fiji Hindi but struggle to explain it in formal English; another may be more comfortable discussing a text in iTaukei; a third may use English and another language fluidly but have limited literacy in the language spoken at home. Some learners may speak a community language but cannot read or write it confidently (Narayan, 2023). Others may know a language associated with their family heritage but prefer not to use it publicly. Translanguaging should therefore not be imposed as a requirement that all learners use a presumed first language. It should create flexible opportunities for learners to use resources they actually possess and wish to use.

Fiji's context also requires attention to language status and belonging. English may be associated with academic advancement and employment, while local and heritage languages may carry strong relationships to family, identity, cultural knowledge and community life. These associations are not fixed, and learners may value several languages for different reasons (Narayan, 2019). Nevertheless, when English is treated as the only legitimate language for thinking or demonstrating intelligence, learners may infer that their other languages are unsuitable for academic work. Translanguaging can challenge this assumption by making clear that a learner's prior knowledge is not a barrier to English learning but a potential bridge towards it.

At the same time, a Fiji-focused approach must avoid romanticising multilingualism. Linguistic diversity does not automatically produce equal participation. Learners may not share a language with every classmate; dominant language groups may unintentionally exclude smaller groups; teachers may be proficient in only some of the languages represented; and locally relevant resources may be scarce. An inclusive translanguaging pedagogy must therefore be designed around the particular class, the learning objective and the languages that learners report using. It must also provide meaningful English practice and monitor whether students are learning the vocabulary, grammar, reading strategies, writing conventions and interactional skills specified in the curriculum.

3. Understanding Translanguaging

Translanguaging is often discussed in relation to bilingual and multilingual meaning-making. García (2009) describes bilingual practices as involving the use of multiple discursive resources, while García and Li (2014) frame translanguaging as a perspective on language, bilingualism and education that challenges rigid boundaries between named languages. Li (2018) further presents translanguaging as a practical theory for understanding the dynamic ways multilingual people make meaning. From this perspective, a learner does not simply switch between two fully separate systems; the learner draws on a repertoire of linguistic and semiotic resources in response to a communicative task.

In school settings, it is useful to distinguish spontaneous translanguaging from pedagogical translanguaging. Spontaneous translanguaging occurs as learners naturally use the resources available to them, for example by discussing an unfamiliar English word with a peer in a familiar language. Pedagogical translanguaging is deliberately planned by a teacher to support a learning outcome. A teacher might invite students to discuss a story in the language in which they can best explore its meaning, create a bilingual word bank, compare expressions across languages, and then write an English summary. The two forms overlap: a teacher can plan a task that creates space for learners' natural language practices, while remaining responsive to what happens in the classroom.

Cenoz (2017) discusses translanguaging in school contexts, and García et al. (2017) organise translanguaging pedagogy around stance, design and shifts. Stance concerns the teacher's commitment to treating learners' linguistic repertoires as resources rather than deficits. Design refers to the planned use of tasks and materials that draw on those repertoires. Shifts are the responsive pedagogical decisions made as a lesson unfolds. Applied to Fiji, stance would mean that a teacher does not shame a student for using Fiji Hindi or iTaukei to clarify a concept. Design could include multilingual vocabulary displays and structured peer discussion. A shift might occur when a teacher notices that several learners have misunderstood an English instruction and invites a brief explanation using a language familiar to them before returning to English.

Translanguaging should not be equated with the absence of language goals or with abandoning explicit English instruction. A lesson can value multilingual meaning-making while still teaching English vocabulary, sentence patterns, text structures, pronunciation, register and conventions. The crucial question is how learners move from understanding to increasingly effective English use. A purposeful task makes that route visible: learners might brainstorm ideas in any language available to them, identify English equivalents for key terms, rehearse an oral explanation, and then produce an English response. In this sequence, multilingual resources help learners enter the task, while English remains a clear learning outcome.

Translanguaging also raises questions about language ideology. Language ideologies are beliefs about what languages are, how they should be used, and which forms are considered legitimate or valuable (Kroskrity, 2004; Silverstein, 1979). In classrooms, these beliefs can shape whether teachers allow students to discuss difficult ideas in another language, whether learners feel embarrassed about their accents, and whether a multilingual draft is seen as a useful stage of writing or as evidence of failure. Martínez et al. (2015) show that educators' views about translanguaging can be complex and sometimes contradictory. A teacher may value students' home languages in principle but still feel that using them in an English lesson is unprofessional or risks examination performance.

For Fiji, the issue is not to replace one hierarchy with another. English remains a necessary learning target in ESL classrooms, but its importance need not be expressed by devaluing other languages. An equitable approach would allow different languages to support thinking and participation while ensuring that all learners receive access to rich English input, guided practice and feedback. It would also avoid assuming that every iTaukei learner speaks the same variety or that every Indo-Fijian learner is equally proficient in Fiji Hindi, standard Hindi or Rotuman. A learner-centred approach begins with actual linguistic repertoires, not with stereotypes.

4. What the Two Supplied Studies Contribute

Shaikh (2025) investigated translanguaging in a multilingual secondary English programme at a private institution in Muscat, Oman. The study included 50 students aged 14–16 whose reported language backgrounds included Urdu, Arabic and Tagalog. Across six weeks, students participated in twelve sessions that incorporated translanguaging in English learning. Data sources included observation checklists, comprehension exercises and recorded classroom discussions. The analysis used the Friedman test to examine performance differences across

sessions. The reported result, $\chi^2(11) = 13.092$, $p = .287$, did not indicate a statistically significant difference in performance across the twelve sessions. The article nevertheless describes sustained engagement and suggests that translanguaging may support understanding, confidence and peer interaction.

This result needs careful interpretation. It does not establish that translanguaging caused achievement gains, nor does it prove that the approach has no educational value. The study was relatively short, involved one institution, and used quantitative measures that may not capture all changes in learners' confidence, participation or meaning-making. Its own discussion recognises the need for longer-term and more qualitative research (Shaikh, 2025). For Fiji, the most defensible lesson is that translanguaging may provide a stable and inclusive environment for participation, but improvement in measurable English achievement should be tested rather than assumed. Teachers and researchers should monitor engagement and comprehension alongside explicit measures of English development.

Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) offer a different kind of evidence. Their qualitative study emerged from a teacher-development project and examined English First Additional Language (EFAL) classrooms in South Africa where learners and teachers used isiXhosa and English. The authors describe teachers creating opportunities for learners to use both languages during exploratory talk, presentations and writing-related tasks. Examples include learners analysing an isiXhosa drama and presenting parts of their work in English, using a familiar language to reason through unfamiliar vocabulary, and consulting bilingual posters that explained text genres and writing processes. The paper argues that teachers' openness to translanguaging could support confidence, participation and access to meaning.

The South African study is particularly useful for Fiji because it moves beyond general claims about multilingualism to show how teachers can make language resources visible in classroom materials and assessment-related activity. Its findings suggest that translanguaging need not remain an informal practice that learners use secretly or only in peer talk. Teachers can legitimise it as part of planned instruction. However, the languages, histories, school conditions and policy environment in South Africa differ from those in Fiji. The specific strategies should be adapted rather than copied wholesale.

Read together, the studies offer complementary insights. Shaikh (2025) supplies a repeated-measures quantitative example and cautions against claiming measurable performance improvement without evidence, while Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) provide classroom-level descriptions of how multilingual resources can be integrated into reading, writing, talk and teaching materials. Both support a cautious position: translanguaging has plausible pedagogical value for participation and meaning-making, but its effects depend on context, implementation and how learning is evaluated.

For Fijian ESL classrooms, this synthesis suggests three principles. Firstly, provide structured opportunities for learners to draw on languages they know when exploring difficult concepts or texts. Secondly, plan explicit bridges from multilingual thinking to English output, rather than treating the use of another language as the final stage of the task. Finally, evaluate more than test scores alone, while still tracking English outcomes. Participation, willingness to speak, comprehension of texts, vocabulary development, writing quality and learners' sense of belonging may all matter, but each needs an appropriate method of observation or assessment.

5. Translanguaging Practices for Fijian ESL Classrooms

5.1 Activating Prior Knowledge Before Reading

Before students read an English passage, teachers can invite pairs or small groups to discuss the topic using the languages they know. For a text about community responsibilities, environmental protection, health, or a local historical event, students might first share what they already know in iTaukei, Fiji Hindi, English or another available language. The teacher can then ask groups to identify key ideas and connect them to English terms in the text. This is not a translation exercise for every sentence; it is a way to activate prior knowledge and reduce the possibility that unfamiliar vocabulary prevents students from engaging with the content.

After the discussion, students can annotate the English text, underline unfamiliar words, and create a short bilingual or multilingual glossary. They should then produce an English summary or answer comprehension questions in English, depending on the learning objective. This sequence follows the broader principle that familiar language resources can support access to meaning while English reading remains central. It also gives the teacher an opportunity to identify whether difficulty arises from the concept itself, the English wording, or both.

5.2 Vocabulary Exploration, Translation and Back-Translation

Vocabulary can be taught through carefully scaffolded translation and back-translation. When students encounter an unfamiliar word, they can propose a meaning in a language they know, discuss examples, and then return to the English word to test whether the meaning fits the context. Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) describe a classroom interaction in which a learner used isiXhosa to reason about the meaning of "adversity" before identifying an

appropriate English meaning. The transferable principle is not that a particular isiXhosa equivalent should be used in Fiji, but that learners' familiar linguistic resources can help them infer the meaning of an unfamiliar English expression.

A Fiji-based teacher could use this approach with vocabulary from a prescribed story, a newspaper article, a science-related reading, or an argumentative text. Students might compare possible translations, discuss why a direct equivalent does not always capture the full meaning, and construct original English sentences. The teacher should check the accuracy of proposed meanings and distinguish between everyday and academic meanings. Translation is a learning tool, not a guarantee of equivalence between languages. Where the teacher does not know a learner's language, students can explain their reasoning to peers, use reputable dictionaries, or provide an English paraphrase to confirm understanding.

5.3 Collaborative Reading and Exploratory Talk

Exploratory talk gives learners space to try out ideas, ask questions, disagree, and revise their understanding before presenting a polished response. Barnes (2010) distinguishes the value of talk in learning, while Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) draw on the difference between exploratory talk and more formal presentational talk. In an ESL lesson, students could read a short story in English, discuss character motivations in small groups using the languages available to them, and prepare an English report explaining their interpretation. Teachers can provide prompts such as "What makes you think that?", "Which part of the text supports your view?" and "How could we express this idea clearly in English?"

The purpose is not to let the group discussion replace English practice. Rather, the discussion supports the development of ideas that students can then express in English with greater clarity. Teachers can circulate, listen for misunderstandings and invite students to restate key points in English. If several students share no language other than English, the task should not force a multilingual format; the design should respond to the actual class. If a group has unequal proficiency, the teacher should ensure that confident speakers do not dominate or act as unpaid translators for the whole lesson.

5.4 Multilingual Planning for English Writing

Writing is demanding because students must develop content, organise ideas, choose vocabulary, construct sentences and consider audience and genre at the same time. Translanguaging can separate some of these demands. Students may plan a narrative, recount, report, persuasive paragraph or reflection using a flexible mix of linguistic resources, then organise the ideas into an English outline and draft. A bilingual planning sheet might include columns for the idea, key concept, useful English words and evidence or examples. This can help learners preserve the complexity of their thinking while learning how to express it in English.

Teachers should make the expected final product clear. If the assessment is designed to measure English writing, the final submission should demonstrate the relevant English skills, and feedback should address them explicitly. The multilingual planning stage should not be penalised as if it were the final product. Instead, the teacher can evaluate whether the strategy helps learners produce more coherent English writing over time. Hendricks and Xeketwana's (2024) discussion of bilingual genre posters and writing frames offers a useful model for classroom resource development. In Fiji, teachers could develop locally relevant examples for narrative structure, summarising, report writing, paragraph organisation and argumentation, with English explanations supported by languages actually used by students.

5.5 Multilingual Classroom Displays and Learner-Created Resources

A print-rich classroom can make academic vocabulary visible beyond the moment in which it is introduced. Teachers and students can jointly create word walls, genre charts, sentence frames, glossaries and concept maps. Where appropriate, these may include English alongside iTaukei, Fiji Hindi or other languages represented in the class. The resources should be checked for accuracy and should acknowledge dialect and register differences where these matter. Students can contribute examples, explain how a concept is expressed in their language, and identify situations where a literal translation may be misleading.

Such displays should not become decorative tokenism. They need to be used in actual reading, speaking and writing tasks. A teacher might ask students to consult a word wall when drafting a paragraph, explain a word choice during peer review, or compare two possible English expressions. If a teacher cannot verify a translation, the resource should be checked with a competent speaker or reliable source before it is presented as authoritative. Smaller language communities should not be excluded simply because their languages are less familiar to the teacher; students can be invited to contribute resources without being required to represent an entire language community.

5.6 Oral Presentations and Assessment Preparation

A common challenge in ESL classrooms is that a student may understand the topic but be reluctant to speak

publicly in English. Translanguaging can provide a route from preparation to presentation. Students can first discuss the topic in a familiar language, create notes using a flexible repertoire, rehearse key ideas with a partner, and then present in English. Teachers can supply English sentence starters, model useful transitions, and allow rehearsal time. The final language requirements should match the learning outcome: some tasks may assess English presentation skills specifically, while others may assess content knowledge alongside language development.

Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) show that students can use both isiXhosa and English while preparing and delivering responses, with teachers providing feedback that models English. A Fiji adaptation might allow a student to clarify an idea briefly in another language during rehearsal, then support the student in expressing it in English for the assessed presentation. The teacher should avoid publicly embarrassing learners for language errors. Feedback can identify one or two high-priority areas-such as tense consistency, pronunciation of key terms or logical sequencing, while also acknowledging the strength of the argument and the student's willingness to participate.

5.7 Literature, Identity and Local Knowledge

Literature tasks can connect English learning with the stories and knowledge learners bring from home and community. Students might compare a character, theme, proverb, oral narrative or community experience with a text studied in English. Where copyright, access and curriculum requirements are permitted, teachers can use texts by local writers and ask learners to compare how similar ideas are expressed in different languages. Students could discuss the meaning of a proverb in a familiar language, identify its underlying message, and write an English paragraph explaining how the message relates to a story or contemporary issue.

This approach can validate cultural knowledge without treating any language or culture as homogeneous. Teachers should avoid asking a learner to speak on behalf of all iTaukei people, all Indo-Fijians or any other community. Students must be free to share, decline, or interpret their own experiences. The aim is to create intellectual connections between local knowledge and English literacy, not to reduce cultural identity to a classroom example.

5.8 Digital and Multimodal Resources

Where reliable access is available, learners can use audio, images, dictionaries and digital texts to support multilingual meaning-making. Students might listen to an English passage, discuss its meaning, check unfamiliar words, and produce an English response. Digital translation tools can be useful starting points but may provide inaccurate or contextually inappropriate equivalents, particularly for dialects, idioms or less-resourced languages. Teachers should therefore ask students to verify important meanings using context, dictionaries, peer discussion and teacher feedback. Digital access should never be assumed to be equal across learners; offline alternatives and paper-based resources remain important.

Across these practices, the teacher's role is to make the movement between meaning-making and English learning deliberate. Students should know why they are using a particular strategy and what they are expected to learn from it. Translanguaging is most useful when it increases access, participation and reflection while keeping the English learning objective visible.

6. Potential benefits and the need for caution

6.1 Comprehension and Access to Meaning

A likely benefit of translanguaging is that it can help learners access the meaning of a text or concept when English vocabulary is a barrier. Learners can connect new ideas with prior knowledge, test interpretations with peers and clarify unfamiliar words. Research discussed by Shaikh (2025) and Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) supports the pedagogical plausibility of these practices. However, a plausible mechanism is not the same as proof of improved achievement in every setting. Teachers need to examine whether learners actually understand more deeply, retain vocabulary, and become better able to read and write in English.

6.2 Participation and Confidence

When students are allowed to use familiar resources during early stages of a task, they may be more willing to contribute ideas. The South African study describes learners participating in presentations and classroom work while using isiXhosa and English, and Shaikh (2025) reports sustained engagement in the Oman study. For Fiji, this suggests that translanguaging may create additional entry points for students who hesitate to speak in English. Yet confidence is affected by many factors, including teacher relationships, peer attitudes, task difficulty and classroom climate. Translanguaging should be one part of an inclusive teaching approach rather than a complete solution to participation barriers.

6.3 Peer Collaboration and Metalinguistic Awareness

Comparing expressions across languages can encourage students to notice meaning, word formation, register and differences in how ideas are organised. Collaborative discussion may also help students explain their reasoning

and learn from classmates. However, peer language support needs careful management. A student who is proficient in a particular language should not automatically be made responsible for translating all instructions or supporting classmates. Teachers should distribute participation opportunities fairly and check that learners who are quieter or speak less widely represented languages are not sidelined.

6.4 Identity, Belonging and Language Equity

Recognising learners' languages can communicate that their knowledge and identities are welcome in school. García et al. (2017) frame translanguaging pedagogy as a way of challenging monolingual assumptions and enabling multilingual learners to draw on their repertoires. In Fiji, where languages have different histories and institutional roles, this recognition may be particularly meaningful. Nevertheless, inclusion must be enacted, not merely declared. Teachers need to avoid privileging the most widely spoken languages in a class, while overlooking Rotuman or other smaller language communities and should not assume that every student wants their home language made public.

6.5 English Exposure and Development

A common concern is that use of languages other than English may reduce exposure to the target language. This concern should not be dismissed; learners need sufficient opportunities to hear, read, speak and write English if they are to develop proficiency. The response is to plan translanguaging strategically rather than to remove English from the lesson. Teachers can use other languages to activate prior knowledge or clarify a difficult concept, then return to English for close reading, modelling, rehearsal, drafting and feedback. The amount and type of English practice should be appropriate to learners' proficiency and the task.

It is also important to distinguish between the language of thought and the language of assessment. If an assessment measures English writing, learners need to produce writing in English and receive feedback on its quality. Translanguaging may support the planning process, but it does not remove the need to teach English conventions. Similarly, if the aim is oral fluency, a lesson should include substantial English-speaking time. Translanguaging is not a shortcut around practice; it is a way to make practice more accessible and purposeful.

6.6 Avoiding Overgeneralisation

Neither of the two supplied studies demonstrate that all forms of translanguaging improve all learning outcomes. Shaikh's (2025) study did not find statistically significant performance differences across sessions, and its duration and single-institution setting limit generalisation. Hendricks and Xeketwana's (2024) study provide detailed qualitative evidence from a particular South African project, but it is not an experimental evaluation of outcomes in Fiji. Teachers should therefore treat translanguaging as a promising, context-sensitive approach whose effects require evaluation, not as a guaranteed intervention. The most responsible position combines openness to multilingual resources with evidence-informed monitoring of English learning.

7. Challenges for Implementation in Fiji

One practical challenge is that teachers may not know all the languages represented in a classroom. A teacher who speaks English and iTaukei may have students whose strongest language is Fiji Hindi, Rotuman or another language; another teacher may face the reverse situation. Translanguaging does not require the teacher to become fluent in every language. It does, however, require a respectful classroom design that gives learners ways to clarify meaning, explain their reasoning and check key information. Teachers can use student-generated glossaries, peer collaboration, trusted dictionaries and carefully checked resources, while remaining alert to inaccurate translation.

The second challenge is resource development. Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) describe bilingual posters and writing frames as tools that make multilingual support visible. Developing equivalent resources in Fiji would take time, consultation and quality assurance. Directly translating English materials may not always work because languages differ in grammar, idiom, register and literacy conventions. Resources should be co-developed with teachers, language specialists and communities where possible, tested in actual classrooms, and revised based on learner use. School-level collaboration could help teachers share and adapt materials rather than each teacher starting from scratch.

A third challenge concerns assessment and accountability. Teachers may feel pressure to use English exclusively because formal assessments are conducted in English or because parents equate English-only teaching with academic rigour. These concerns should be discussed openly. Translanguaging activities must be linked to curricular outcomes, and teachers should explain to learners and families how the approach supports rather than replaces English learning. Schools can collect evidence of progress in English vocabulary, comprehension, writing and speaking, alongside participation and learner feedback. Such evidence can make professional discussion more specific than arguments based on ideology alone.

A fourth challenge is uneven power among languages and learners. A classroom can unintentionally treat one language as the default support language while other languages remain invisible. Teachers should ask learners

which languages they use and which resources they find helpful, rather than making assumptions from names, ethnicity or family background. They should also provide ways for learners to participate without disclosing personal language histories. The goal is to expand options, not to force students into public performances of identity.

A fifth challenge is the risk of confusing translanguaging with unplanned translation of every instruction. If a teacher routinely repeats every English sentence in another language, learners may become dependent on translation and have fewer opportunities to process English independently. Strategic translanguaging should have a purpose: activating knowledge, clarifying a complex concept, exploring word meaning, planning a response or comparing language choices. Teachers can gradually reduce support as learners gain confidence, while continuing to provide appropriate scaffolding when tasks become more complex.

Finally, implementation requires professional learning and leadership support. Teachers need opportunities to plan tasks, examine language beliefs, share materials, observe colleagues and reflect on evidence. Goundar (2026) highlights wider policy and system-level issues in Fiji, including the need for coherent support for multilingual education. Classroom innovation cannot solve structural shortages of time, training or materials on its own. Schools and education authorities should consider how teacher development, curriculum guidance and resource provision can support multilingual practices while maintaining clear English learning goals.

8. Implications for Teachers, Schools and Policy

For classroom teachers, the first implication is to begin with a language map of the class. This need not be a formal test. Students can indicate which languages they understand, speak, read or write, which they use for particular activities, and whether they would like to use them in learning. The map should be treated as flexible and private where appropriate. It helps teachers design tasks without assuming that all learners share the same language or literacy profile.

Second, teachers should identify where translanguaging serves a specific purpose. It may be most useful before reading, during collaborative interpretation, when exploring difficult vocabulary, in planning writing, or during rehearsal for presentations. The purpose should be connected to the lesson objective. If students are learning to use English connectors, for example, they can discuss an argument flexibly but then practise using “however”, “therefore”, “in contrast” and other relevant expressions in an English paragraph.

Third, teachers should build a bridge to English output into each planned task. Students can use familiar languages to explore ideas, but should also practise restating those ideas in English, using academic vocabulary, organising sentences and revising drafts. This bridge helps guard against the misconception that translanguaging means that target-language development is no longer important. It also allows the teacher to observe whether learners can transfer their understanding into English.

For school leaders, a useful step would be to create collaborative planning time for teachers to develop multilingual resources and discuss classroom evidence. A small group could pilot bilingual vocabulary charts, reading prompts or writing frames, then share examples of student work and reflect on what appears to help. Leaders should encourage respectful experimentation without claiming success before evidence is available. They can also support consultation with families and communities, particularly where language choice is connected to identity, heritage or concerns about educational opportunity.

Teacher education programmes could introduce translanguaging alongside second-language acquisition, sociolinguistics, literacy pedagogy and assessment. Pre-service and in-service teachers should examine the difference between spontaneous language use and planned translanguaging, practise designing tasks, and consider how language ideologies shape decisions. Professional development should also address the practical issue of multilingual classes where the teacher does not know all the languages. The aim is not to demand perfect translation, but to develop inclusive routines and reliable ways of checking meaning.

At the policy level, Fiji’s constitutional recognition of English, iTaukei and Fiji Hindi provides an important point of reference, but effective classroom practice also depends on curriculum materials, teacher preparation and local implementation. Policy discussion should distinguish between teaching a language as a subject, using a language as a medium of instruction, and using multilingual resources to support learning English. These are related but not identical practices. Translanguaging in an ESL lesson does not automatically imply a complete change in the medium of instruction; it may instead be a carefully planned strategy within an English-focused lesson.

Education authorities and researchers should also consider how smaller language communities are represented in resources and professional discussions. The aim should be an equitable approach that recognises linguistic diversity without making unrealistic demands on teachers or assuming that every language can immediately be supported equally in every school. A phased approach-starting with learner-informed practices, building teacher confidence, developing materials and evaluating outcomes-may be more sustainable than a blanket instruction to translanguage in every lesson.

9. A Research Agenda for Fijian ESL Classrooms

The most important limitation in applying the two supplied studies to Fiji is the absence of direct evidence from Fijian ESL classrooms within this paper. The recommendations offered here should therefore be treated as propositions for local testing. A research agenda should examine both what teachers do and what learners experience, as well as whether translanguaging relates to changes in English development.

An initial exploratory study could observe a small number of ESL classrooms in different school settings. Researchers could document when teachers and learners use English and other languages, what task is underway, who participates, and how teachers respond to language use. Interviews with teachers and learners could explore beliefs about English, home languages, correctness, confidence and assessment. Such a study would avoid assuming in advance that translanguaging is either welcomed or resisted.

A second phase could co-design a short teaching intervention with teachers. The intervention might focus on one or two areas, such as reading comprehension and summary writing, and include explicit strategies such as multilingual brainstorming, vocabulary comparison, bilingual planning frames and English drafting. Teachers would receive support to align the tasks with curriculum objectives and to make the English outcomes clear. The intervention should be adapted to the actual language repertoires of each participating class rather than assuming a single language pairing.

A mixed-methods design would be especially valuable. Quantitative measures could include pre- and post-intervention reading comprehension, vocabulary, writing quality and oral presentation performance. Qualitative evidence could include classroom observation, student interviews, teacher reflection journals, samples of learner work and group discussions. This combination would address a limitation noted by Shaikh (2025): performance measures alone may not capture the full range of classroom experience. It would also allow researchers to test whether reported improvements in participation correspond to changes in English skills.

The design should include an appropriate comparison or baseline where feasible, while avoiding claims of causation that the research design cannot support. If a study uses repeated classroom measures, researchers should report the number of participants, the tasks used, the duration, the assessment criteria and the statistical analyses transparently. If it is a qualitative case study, the authors should explain the selection of classrooms, the methods of analysis and the limits to transferability. In either case, the findings should be described as context-dependent.

Longitudinal research is also needed. A short intervention may reveal immediate changes in participation or comprehension but may not show whether learners develop stronger English writing or reading over time. Following classes across a term or school year could help distinguish short-term scaffolding from sustained language development. Researchers should examine whether learners gradually become more able to complete English tasks independently, and whether the usefulness of particular translanguaging strategies varies by proficiency, task type or learner preference.

Ethics is central. Students should not be labelled publicly according to language ability or asked to disclose sensitive family information. Parental consent and student assent should be obtained where required, and learners should be able to decline participation without penalty. Researchers should also avoid framing multilingual learners as deficient or treating a language community as homogeneous. If student work includes translations or culturally specific knowledge, researchers should check interpretations carefully and involve relevant speakers when needed.

Finally, local research should include teachers as collaborators. Teachers can help identify realistic tasks, interpret classroom dynamics and adapt materials. Their participation can make the research more useful for professional development and can reduce the risk of imposing an imported model that does not fit Fiji's schools. The aim should be to generate evidence that is both academically rigorous and practically useful for Fijian ESL teaching.

10. Concluding Remarks

Translanguaging provides a promising framework for thinking about English learning in Fiji's multilingual classrooms. The two supplied studies show different but complementary aspects of the approach. Shaikh (2025) reports sustained engagement in a multilingual English programme while finding no statistically significant performance differences across twelve sessions. Hendricks and Xeketwana (2024) demonstrate how teachers in South African EFAL classrooms made space for isiXhosa and English through discussion, presentations and bilingual learning resources. Together, these studies suggest that translanguaging can be planned as a means of supporting access to meaning and participation, while also reminding educators that measurable learning outcomes need to be assessed carefully.

In Fiji, this approach is relevant because students' linguistic repertoires extend beyond English, and the languages they bring to school can support understanding, identity and communication. A context-sensitive pedagogy could include multilingual brainstorming, vocabulary exploration, collaborative reading, bilingual displays, multilingual

writing plans and rehearsal before English presentations. Such strategies should not replace English instruction. They should create purposeful routes into English reading, speaking and writing, with explicit objectives and feedback.

Successful implementation will require teachers to understand their learners' actual language practices, to plan links between multilingual meaning-making and English output, and to monitor both participation and achievement. Schools and education authorities can support this work through professional learning, collaborative resource development and clear guidance. Researchers should test the approach in Fijian settings, using methods that capture both measurable English development and learners' classroom experiences.

The central argument is therefore not that every ESL lesson should use every language, nor that translanguaging automatically improves achievement. It is that learners' existing languages can be recognised as potential educational resources rather than treated as obstacles to English. With purposeful design, equitable participation and careful evaluation, translanguaging could contribute to more inclusive and effective English language teaching in Fiji.

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