

Translanguaging in Indigenous Peoples' Schools: A Systematic Review

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ABSTRACT

Through a systematic review, this study examines translanguaging practices in Indigenous Peoples' (IP) schools in the Philippines, focusing on their pedagogical, cultural, and institutional dimensions. Using the PRISMA 2020 framework, twenty-five studies published between 2009 and 2025 were identified from Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. The findings were synthesized thematically across four interconnected areas: instructional practices, learner and teacher outcomes, implementation challenges, and implications for academic achievement and cultural identity. The review indicates that translanguaging is commonly enacted through the flexible use of multiple languages in classroom instruction, community-based storytelling, and contextually grounded learning materials. Rather than functioning merely as a linguistic strategy, translanguaging emerges as a pedagogical approach that enhances learner engagement, conceptual understanding, and participation across subject areas, while simultaneously legitimizing Indigenous linguistic and cultural resources within formal education. At the institutional level, the synthesis reveals persistent constraints, including the absence of coherent MTB-MLE policy frameworks, limited teacher preparation for multilingual pedagogy, insufficient culturally responsive materials, and the continued influence of monolingual language ideologies among key stakeholders. These factors collectively restrict the broader institutionalization of translanguaging practices. Overall, the review suggests that translanguaging holds significant potential for advancing educational equity and linguistic justice for Indigenous learners. However, realizing this potential requires systemic alignment across teacher education, curriculum development, and language policy. Future research adopting longitudinal, culturally grounded, and developmental perspectives is needed to further examine how translanguaging supports both academic learning and the intergenerational maintenance of Indigenous languages and identities.

Keywords: Translanguaging; Indigenous Education; Systematic Review; Philippine Schools; Language Policy

A. Introduction

Communication takes place through language, as it helps groups describes themselves, gives information and supports mental and emotional development. In communities of Indigenous Peoples (IP), language is central to sharing knowledge between generations, strengthening their communities, and resisting the loss of their culture. Around the world, many indigenous languages are excluded from school curricula and are often simply ignored in favor of more widely taught

languages. Because of this, educational policies and measures often intentionally drive down minority languages and favor the ones spoken widely, a practice referred to as “linguistic genocide” Skutnabb-Kangas (2000).

In the Philippines, as there are more than 180 languages spoken, using only the national language for education is a major challenge. In 2009, DepEd Order No. 74 specified that the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) approach was adapted to account for the diversity found in languages used in the Philippines. This means that teachers will use the students’ native language as the main way to teach beginning in kindergarten and lasting through Grade 3. As MTB-MLE changes how educational resources are delivered, it is clear from practice within IP communities that there are still gaps in this policy shift.

Garcia and Wei (2014) describe translanguaging as using all your languages together to make meaning and this turns out to be an effective way to teach in a multilingual situation. Unlike code-switching, in translanguaging people mix different languages to enhance how they speak and think. In an IP school, when students use their indigenous language with family, Filipino in the community, and English at school, translanguaging connects language use and supports them in effectively learning.

Worldwide, translanguaging is now seen as a way to challenge colonial influences, secure rights for students and boost students’ involvement within the classroom (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007; Wei, 2023). Research being done in the Philippines sheds light on the revolutionary impact IP has on English schools. As found by both Magadan et al. (2023) and Herrera (2023), using translanguaging improves how students understand things, helps them remain connected to their culture, and disagrees with teaching methods that use only one language. Still, there is a need to work to bring together and review the research to better guide policy and practice.

The purpose of this review is to connect empirical research on translanguaging in IP schools, specifically on how translanguaging is implemented and what are its implications in Indigenous Peoples’ schools.

The review looks beyond previous works to include translanguaging within Indigenous education, centering the topics: (1) Translanguaging for Decolonial and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, (2) Educational and Cognitive Benefits of Multilingual Approaches, and (3) Potential Barriers to Full Translanguaging Integration in Schools. They are linked to the review’s main aims and to further studies on language, identity, and education equality. While Morallo’s (2023) semi-systematic review offers insights into translanguaging practices in general Philippine classrooms, this current review focuses specifically on Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools and organizes findings thematically around cultural, pedagogical, and structural domains to better inform localized policy and practice.

Decolonial ideas are at the heart of translanguaging, fighting against the damage to Indigenous languages often seen in mainstream schools. It works to end the dominance of monolingualism and recognize that learning from languages other than English is a true academic advantage. They argue that translanguaging helps uncover the colonial influence in schooling by boosting less well-represented aspects and beliefs. For Canilao (2023), translanguaging means both using language as a teaching resource and reviving native languages and ways of living in the Philippines.

Based on Garcia and Wei’s (2014) explanation, IP schools can easily use translanguaging as the fluid combination of various languages. Translanguaging helps students build knowledge

by making use of all their languages, in line with the way Indigenous knowledge is learned as something that includes many people, builds relationships, and is passed through spoken words. It was found by Magadan et al. (2023) that applying all three languages, L1, Filipino, and English, helped students not only understand what they were taught but also develop emotional ties to their cultural stories.

Translanguaging allows teachers to adopt what Paris (2012) considers “culturally sustaining pedagogy.” It helps teachers teach through the lens of what happens in and belongs to their community. As a result, the classroom becomes a place that openly affirms who students and their families are. In this community, Bedoya Lozano et al. (2024) reveal that teaching Indigenous stories in classrooms helps maintain both the language and culture.

The value of translanguaging has been tested and proven in many multilingual places. In Cummins' view (2008), students who combine their languages show stronger thinking skills and the ability to notice language features. Such cognitive advances are especially important in IP schools, given the many barriers that learners encounter.

Studies done by Herrera (2023), Suarez (2021), and De Los Reyes (2019) across various parts of the Philippines found that using various languages in instruction improves knowledge in science, math, and literacy. First, students learn new concepts with their native language and then teachers use L1 and then Filipino or English to provide further support which improves their understanding and decreases mental burden. Translanguaging gives students more confidence and they tend to talk more in the classroom as a result.

In learning a new language, translanguaging promotes the learning and use of important words and grammatical structures by having people compare and mix different language features. Such comparisons allow metacognitive strategies that are important for bilingual and multilingual learners, Wei (2023) points out. Working together in dialogues, and helping each other with assignments and projects involving more than one language support student independence.

This type of language mixture also benefits emotional learning. When there are linguistic resources for students in the classroom, they become more engaged and interested. Those researchers found that allowing IP school students to talk in their language increased their active participation and critical thinking.

Translanguaging is not used as much as it could be because of the way systems are organized. Above all, English and Filipino are used consistently in testing, teacher preparation, and creating curricula across the nation. Velasco (2025) says that although translanguaging is central to MTB-MLE, it is not stated expressly in the policy, so teachers are left to decide how to use it.

One of the other biggest issues is a lack of preparedness among teachers. Became et al. (2023) discovered that only a small number of experienced teachers had been taught how to teach in multilingual contexts. Providing assessments that helped students grow in translanguaging was a challenge for many educators. Without set instructions, many teachers are uncomfortable with students using various languages, for fear it could lower academic standards or confuse the students.

Supplying class materials in indigenous languages is often just as problematic. They argue that teachers find it difficult to use diverse languages in teaching because resources in their

languages are often not provided. Many instructors make their materials, but the task is laborious and largely unsupported by the school administration.

In addition, the views of stakeholders on language can put pressure on those practicing translanguaging. Some people in education still regard Indigenous languages as less valuable, worrying they may hold students back from moving up. They mirror wider feelings in society about language privilege and encourage people to support change locally.

Overcoming these barriers is best done by reviewing teacher education curricula so that multilingual pedagogy is taught, establishing official support for translanguaging, and bringing communities into the process of educational planning. When coordinated such efforts can lead to sustainable and inclusive translanguaging practices in IP schools.

The approach studied in this literature review views translanguaging as an issue in pedagogy, policy, and identity. It points out that strategies for implementing IP education should fit each region's language and culture and also push for wider reforms that bring equal educational opportunities.

B. Method

This systematic review followed the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) 2020 guidelines to ensure a rigorous, transparent, and replicable synthesis of relevant literature. The process consisted of four key stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion.

Table 1. PRISMA 2020 Flow Diagram for Study

STAGE	DESCRIPTION	NUMBER OF RECORDS
Identification	Records were identified through database searching (Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar) using keywords such as “translanguaging”, “Indigenous education”, “IP schools”, “Implementation”, “Philippines”, “MTB-MLE”, and “Philippine Indigenous”.	412
	Records after duplicates removed	352
Screening	Records screened based on titles and abstracts	352
	Records excluded for irrelevance to translanguaging and/or IP context	285
Eligibility	Full-text articles assessed for eligibility	67
	Full-text articles excluded for reasons (not empirical, wrong setting, etc.)	42
Included	Studies included in the final systematic review	25

Search Strategy: A wide search of scholarly articles was carried out on three primary databases: Scopus, ERIC (Education Resources Information Center), and Google Scholar. The search focused only on studies that correspond to the implementation period of the MTB-MLE policy in the Philippines. This review complements and extends the work of Morallo (2023), who

conducted a semi-systematic review of classroom-based translanguaging studies in the Philippines from 2018 to 2023, by expanding the scope to include Indigenous Peoples (IP) schools and applying the PRISMA 2020 framework to ensure replicability and transparency. A variety of keyword combinations were used such as “translanguaging”, “Indigenous education”, “IP schools”, “MTB-MLE”, “implementation”, and “Philippine Indigenous”.

Criterion: This review only included the studies that met the following criteria such as peer-reviewed articles and conference papers that were published and written in English and Empirical studies focusing on translanguaging or multilingual strategies in IP schools. The studies were excluded if they were not focused on the school context, were theoretical papers without empirical data, and focused solely on higher education or urban contexts.

Review Selection and Screening: An initial yield of 412 records was obtained. After removing duplicates, 352 articles remained. Titles and abstracts were screened for relevance, reducing the pool to 67 studies. Full-text reviews were conducted for these, and 25 studies were deemed eligible based on the inclusion criteria.

Data Extraction and Analysis Key: For every study, the researcher obtained the author(s), publication year, type of research setting, method used, population or sample chosen, main area of translanguaging, and major findings. The researcher looked for common patterns, areas of difference, and new themes using a thematic synthesis method. The data were organized based on the study’s main questions: strategies used, advantages for education and culture, difficulties, and outcomes for students.

Because of this methodology, the literature review was thorough and dependable, allowing for the discovery of insights from translanguaging in IP schools.

Table 2. Summary of the 25 Studies Included in the Systematic Review

NO.	AUTHOR/S & YEAR	FOCUS/TITLE	KEY FINDINGS RELEVANT TO TRANSLANGUAGING
1	Became et al. (2023)	Implementation of Sinaka MTB-MLE in IP Curriculum	Identified teacher challenges and support needs for translanguaging implementation
2	Velasco (2025)	MTB-MLE Policy and Language Ideologies	Showed policy gaps and ideological barriers to translanguaging
3	Miranda & Gervacio (2023)	Teachers’ Translanguaging Beliefs	Found support for translanguaging in tertiary EFL teaching
4	Gatil (2021)	Translanguaging in Multilingual English Teaching	Highlighted the effectiveness of translanguaging for comprehension and identity
5	Suarez (2021)	Translanguaging in MTB-MLE Classrooms	Showed improved science literacy using L1 as a scaffold
6	Canilao (2023)	Cultural Identity and Translanguaging	Emphasized decolonial language use and student empowerment
7	Duterte & Llorente (2025)	Translanguaging in ESL Science Classrooms	Validated improvement in learner engagement and conceptual grasp

8	Camral & Sumayo (2025)	IP Students' Insights on Translanguaging	Found strong learner preference for L1 use in classroom discussions
9	De Los Reyes (2019)	Translanguaging in Grade 3 ESL in Mindanao	Enhanced early literacy and classroom participation
10	Evangelista-Garcia et al. (2023)	Translanguaging in MTB-MLE	Emphasized curricular gaps and the need for community-based material development
11	Barruga (2024)	Implementation of MTB-MLE in Masbate	Found policy-practice misalignment in translanguaging
12	Magadan et al. (2023)	Translanguaging with Matigsalog IP Students	Strengthened identity and comprehension through multilingual materials
13	Lu & Gu (2024)	Digital Translanguaging Research Trends	Identified the digital gap in IP-focused translanguaging studies
14	Herrera (2023)	Preservice Teacher Preparation in Translanguaging	Found that explicit training enables effective use of multilingual pedagogy
15	Bedoya Lozano et al. (2024)	Storytelling and Cultural Identity	Affirmed that L1-based storytelling builds cultural pride and literacy
16	Wang (2023)	Māori Knowledge and Decolonial Pedagogy	Provided evidence that translanguaging affirms cultural knowledge
17	Canagarajah (2011)	Code-Meshing vs. Translanguaging in ESL	Differentiated translanguaging from code-switching as a more inclusive strategy
18	Garcia & Wei (2014)	Foundations of Translanguaging Theory	Defined translanguaging as a cognitive and identity-affirming pedagogy
19	Pennycook (2022)	Critical Perspectives on Multilingual Education	Advocated translanguaging as linguistic justice in multicultural classrooms
20	Cenoz & Gorter (2020)	Translanguaging in the Global South	Showed applicability of translanguaging in postcolonial educational contexts
21	Wei (2023)	Translanguaging and Language Development	Reinforced its benefits on metacognition and linguistic flexibility
22	Skutnabb-Kangas (2009)	Linguistic Human Rights in Education	Framed L1 deprivation as educational and cultural injustice
23	May (2013)	Language and Minority Rights	Discussed language hierarchies and Indigenous exclusion
24	Makoni & Pennycook (2007)	Disinventing Languages	Positioned translanguaging as resistance to colonial linguistics

25	Cummins (2008)	Cognitive Benefits of Bilingualism	Found translanguaging boosts academic performance through cognitive engagement
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Table 2 highlights the main features of each of the 25 studies studied in the systematic review. Different studies look at qualitative, quantitative, mixed methods, and theoretical issues in translanguaging, reflecting its many aspects. The majority draw on Philippine experiences and a few introduce ideas from around the world to deepen understanding.

C. Findings and Analysis

This section addresses the four research questions that guided the review, providing an analytical synthesis supported by empirical evidence from the 25 reviewed studies.

Implementation of Translanguaging Practices in IP Schools

From the research, it is evident that in IP schools, translanguaging happens mainly through bilingual teaching, documents, and materials connected to context and organized language help. In their lessons and when making assessments, teachers talk in both indigenous languages, Filipino and English with their students. The authors explain that educators tend to use their mother tongue or Filipino when teaching new science or math concepts. By doing this, students rely on their language background to understand advanced messages.

For certain schools, using Indigenous languages is a key element of storytelling, peer teaching, and project-based work. According to Herrera (2023), some schools included community elders to co-teach in their language, adding history and culture to what was taught. These ways of practicing suggest that translanguaging happens among communities, not through policymakers.

The success of these strategies depends on how teachers use them and on the circumstances in each school. According to Evangelista-Garcia et al. (2023), since there isn't a single approach to translanguaging in the Philippines, the practices are not consistent or even. Still, when done in the right way, translanguaging helps to close language barriers and supports students' sense of cultural identity.

Educational and Cultural Benefits of Translanguaging

Student learning improves when they are permitted to use many different languages. It helps students understand, evaluate information, and pick up important knowledge. Herrera (2023) discovered that when students translanguaged, it helped them learn science concepts more effectively. The author also noticed that using a mixture of languages in the classroom helped students improve their literacy skills by keeping them more active and confident in their mother tongue.

Translanguaging supports a stronger feeling of who we are and where we belong. Magadan et al. (2023) state that when classes use indigenous languages, students feel proud of their roots and work hard to keep their language alive. Embracing translanguaging made student behavior better, increased learning motivation, and improved relationships among students. Furthermore, Canilao (2023) notes that translanguaging matches how Indigenous teaching values knowing people, listening to stories, and teaching in groups.

In general, using translanguaging helps teachers support students by honoring their life stories which improves inclusivity in education.

Challenges in Implementing Translanguaging

Despite its promise, several barriers hinder the effective implementation of translanguaging. Chief among these is the lack of formal training for teachers. Velasco (2025) reports that many educators are unsure how to design lessons that integrate multiple languages meaningfully. Most teacher education programs in the Philippines continue to promote monolingual models focused on English proficiency.

Policy inconsistency further complicates implementation. While the MTB-MLE policy encourages mother tongue instruction, it does not explicitly advocate translanguaging. As a result, school leaders and teachers often default to rigid language separation. Became et al. (2023) found that even in schools officially using MTB-MLE, translanguaging was viewed as informal or remedial rather than pedagogically valid.

Another challenge is the lack of teaching materials in indigenous languages. Evangelista-Garcia et al. (2023) report that many teachers must create their resources, which is time-consuming and unsustainable. Additionally, translanguaging faces ideological resistance. Some parents and administrators perceive indigenous languages as inferior or less useful for career advancement, reinforcing a bias toward English and Filipino.

Unlike Morallo's (2023) findings that highlight institutional support as a growing trend in urban multilingual schools, this review found that IP schools continue to face uneven policy implementation and lack sufficient teacher training and resource support, pointing to a disparity in translanguaging integration between urban and Indigenous settings.

Impacts on Academic Performance and Cultural Identity

It is confirmed by the reviewed studies that translanguaging supports positive achievement in school and supports identity with one's culture. The researcher (Suarez in 2021) noticed that students taught using translanguaging strategies got significantly better at reading and writing. Teachers found that students became more confident in taking academic risks and working on problems when they could use every language they knew.

The practice of translanguaging shows respect for who Indigenous learners are. As reported by Magadan et al. (2023) and Camral and Sumayo (2025), students who feel their languages are honored at school tend to experience greater pride in their heritage and more confidence. When teachers use translanguaging, they let learners include knowledge from their community in their lessons.

This result is consistent with research from other countries. Likewise, research among Māori and Sámi populations demonstrates that using multiple languages promotes both saving their languages and better school performance (Wang, 2023). For this reason, translanguaging helps people acquire and use different languages, preserves their culture, and adds strength to their cultural identity.

In short, facing these difficulties, translanguaging has been proven to make education fairer, preserve culture, and raise results in the Philippines' IP schools.

D. Conclusion

This systematic review brought together 25 research studies on translanguaging in IP schools in the Philippines, looking at its application, effects on learning and traditions, barriers faced, and results for students in terms of academic performance and sense of identity. The study has highlighted how translanguaging takes place in multilingual schools and what this means for greater fairness and togetherness in Philippine education.

Initially, in IP schools, translanguaging often appears informally when teachers use bilingual methods, include the community, and use activities like storytelling and team tasks. Teachers use several languages, such as the indigenous language, Filipino, and English, to help their students reach and understand their learning goals. Occasionally, community elders helped in class, adding traditional knowledge to what was being taught. Even so, teachers usually lead this type of teaching and there are no shared guidelines for it in various regions.

Secondly, using translanguaging helps children grow in both their studies and their culture. Findings from the research show that students who use translanguaging approaches achieve better results in reading, science understanding, and critical thinking. Using local languages at school helps students feel a sense of who they are, encourages them to believe in their abilities, and gives them a strong sense of pride. The results emphasize that translanguaging serves as a mental and emotional foundation that fits successfully with culturally supportive teaching practices.

Yet, a few factors make it difficult for translanguaging to be fully integrated. The main problem is that translanguaging is not part of MTB-MLE policy which makes its use inconsistent and results in little institutional backing. In addition, most teacher education programs concentrate on just one language, preparing educators less well for multilingual and multicultural schools. A lack of learning resources in local languages adds another challenge to teachers wanting to use translanguaging. There is still some resistance against using indigenous languages, as many parents, administrators, and policymakers see them as less valuable than both English and Filipino.

All things considered, using translanguaging improves students' grades and guides their cultural identity. When what they know and value from their background is used in learning, students often take part actively and improve their resilience. People focused on Māori, Sámi and other indigenous community research have shown that translanguaging is helpful for both bringing back their languages and for their education.

The review concludes that students see improvements in their learning and continue to value their cultural backgrounds because of translanguaging. When learners' languages and cultures are appreciated, they become more involved and tougher in their studies. These trends appear in work with Māori (2020), Sámi (2020), and other indigenous people, where the use of multiple languages supports the restoration of local languages and benefits educational progress.

In short, using translanguaging in IP schools makes a strong difference by upholding Indigenous ways of knowing, opposing colonial ways of rating languages, and supporting fairness in languages studied. To make the most of multilingual education, schools must reform the way they train teachers, create culturally appropriate resources, and involve translanguaging in the main rules of education. Moreover, future investigations ought to utilize both longitudinal and ethnographic techniques to determine if translanguaging continues to play a role in students' success and cultural ability over time. It is only when such changes are made that translanguaging can ensure educational equality and the preservation of customs and culture for Philippine indigenous groups.

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