


Research Article

Reconnecting Social Justice in Translanguaging: A Conversation Across Top-Down Constraints and Bottom-Up Resistance

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Using the Translanguaging Structures Framework TSF (Tîrnovan, 2023), we juxtapose interviews with two K-12 administrators (a school district mathematics and science Supervisor in a multilingual and multicultural urban school district in New Jersey and a Principal in a dual-language urban elementary school in the same district) and results from a synchronous online autoethnographic workshop with PK-12 educators (teaching emergent multilingual learners in the Northeastern United States). This study aims to analyze how the institutional positioning (vantage points) of the administrators and teachers shape: (a) their translanguaging ideologies, (b) their support of classroom translanguaging, and (c) the teachers' linguistic identities. Our qualitative thematic analysis reveals a paradoxical dynamic: administrators remain

constrained within district boundaries, ideologically conceptualizing translanguaging as a technique requiring top-down initiatives, whereas teachers navigate across multiple structural layers, mobilizing translanguaging as immediate resistance through identity transformation without waiting for institutional change. These findings demonstrate how different vantage points activate or neutralize the potential of translanguaging to challenge linguistic hierarchies and that translanguaging's sociopolitical potential is more activated or neutralized through perceptions of agency rather than through removing barriers. This research contributes to translanguaging scholarship by highlighting how returning to its sociopolitical roots requires attending to the interplay between systemic constraints and grassroots resistance.

Keywords: bottom-up resistance; identity transformation; structural tensions; teacher agency; translanguaging

1. TRANSLANGUAGING FROM TWO PERSPECTIVES

While many educators perceive translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical tool for language instruction and content meaning-making (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022; Li, 2024), its intended ideological and transformative purposes for disrupting the deficit positioning of language-minoritized communities, challenging deficit ideologies, razing walls of linguistic inequalities, and catalyzing social justice have been overlooked (García & Leiva, 2014; Li, 2024). Addressing this, Poza (2017) considers the “dilution of

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translanguaging's more critical theoretical tenet" (p. 102). Similarly, García et al. (2017) emphasize that effective translanguaging requires systematic attention to institutional dynamics rather than isolated classroom practices. Moreover, Mendoza et al. (2023) renounce apolitical discourse, research, and implementations of translanguaging. Thus, this study aims to reconnect the pedagogical use of translanguaging with its foundational goal of addressing sociopolitical oppression (Carvajal-Regidor & Mortenson, 2023). However, while systematic analysis of translanguaging implementation reveals that "context plays a central role in if and how translanguaging transforms teaching and learning," scholarship has inadequately examined how structural positioning within educational hierarchies shapes these contextual differences (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025, p. 14). Through interviews with dual-language public school administrators and an autoethnography workshop with PK-12 teachers, we explore the interplay between administrative and teachers' practices and beliefs about translanguaging in classroom settings.

Herein, we address how bottom-up initiatives, such as professional development approaches, may empower teachers to reconsider translanguaging as a means to challenge sociopolitical oppression, even in the face of perceived top-down institutional constraints. We investigate Țîrnovan's (2024) interviews with an elementary school Principal and a mathematics and science district Supervisor regarding their views on language and translanguaging in classrooms. These interviews reveal their perception of structures that hinder the implementation of translanguaging pedagogies in the classroom. For instance, while the administrators favor translanguaging to challenge monolingual norms and school-based policies that limit personal agency (Johnson & Freeman, 2010; Menken & Sánchez, 2019), they view its classroom implementation as dependent on top-down initiatives, a cohesive district-wide plan, and resources. This aligns with broader documentation on how institutional hierarchies shape the possibilities for translanguaging implementation (Palmer et al., 2014).

Simultaneously, we consider insights from PK-12 teachers working in multilingual learner programs who participated in a professional development workshop on autoethnographic methods exploring linguistic identity (Rivera Guerrero, 2025). The data demonstrate how engaging teachers and researchers in bottom-up experiences can reveal, disrupt, and contest racialized perceptions of language, equipping them for future interruptions of linguistic oppression (Cioè-Peña, 2021; Rosa & Flores, 2017).

By juxtaposing the administrators' and teachers' respective vantage points (i.e., inside versus outside of the classroom or school) regarding translanguaging and its implementation, we recognize that translanguaging effectiveness varies significantly across institutional contexts (Palmer et al., 2014) and affects the person (e.g., agency), practice (e.g., how to implement), and purpose (e.g., for learning or liberation) of implementing translanguaging in the classroom. Notably, considering the findings from both groups simultaneously provides integrated reciprocity, as each informs and contextualizes the other, portraying translanguaging as both a pedagogical approach

and a powerful tool for social justice. This structural positioning approach addresses calls for translanguaging research that attends to complex institutional dynamics rather than treating implementation as context-neutral (Flores & Rosa, 2015).

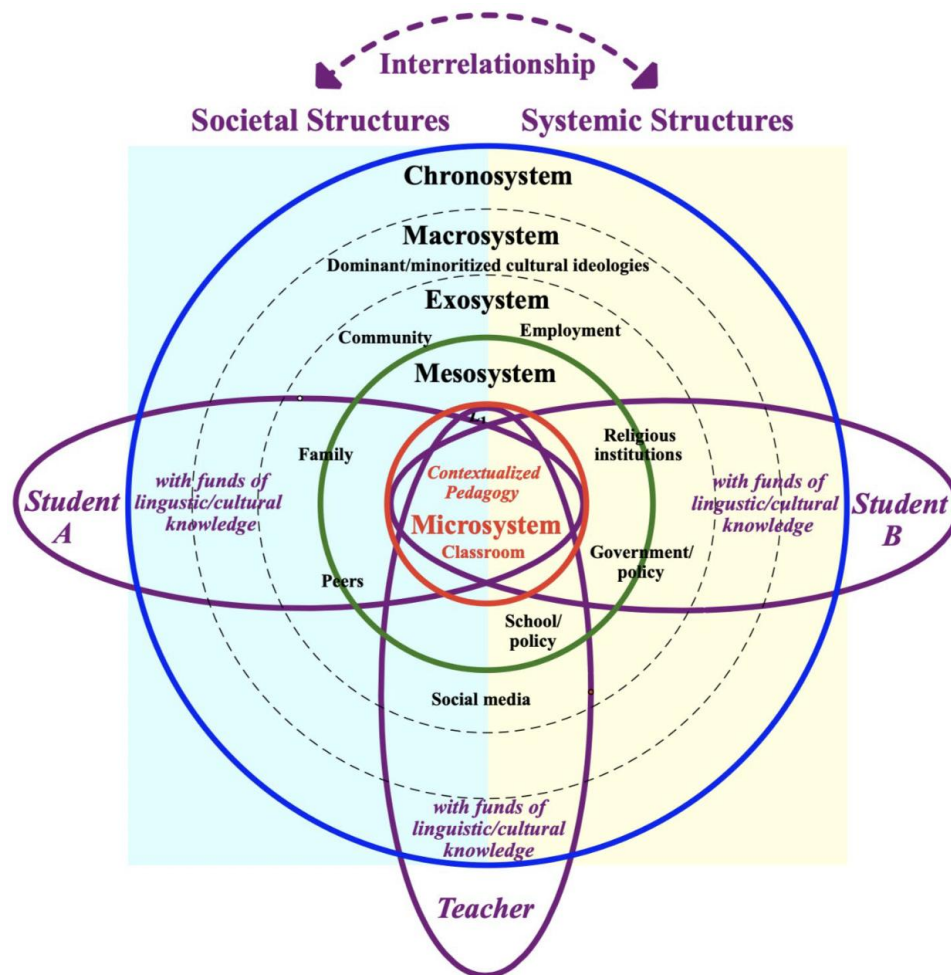
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

We position our work through the Translanguaging Structures Framework (TSF; Țîrnovan, 2023) lens, examining how systemic and societal structures shape translanguaging practices. The TSF synthesizes and extends previous sociocultural and ecological theories, including Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (1979), The Douglas Fir Group's framework for language learning (2016), and Tian's (2020) model of factors affecting translanguaging stances. It offers an integrated ecological perspective that captures the dynamic interplay between systemic constraints and agentive possibilities in the implementation of translanguaging. It acknowledges how societal structures (encompassing personal, interpersonal, and cultural influences) and systemic structures (establishing rules, roles, and regulations) simultaneously shape translanguaging spaces (Țîrnovan, 2023). This dual focus provides a lens for examining translanguaging as both a classroom practice and a socially and politically situated phenomenon that operates across multiple interconnected structural layers, viewed through different vantage points.

The TSF (Figure 1) conceptualizes translanguaging through several nested structural dimensions: The outermost temporal layer (Chronosystem) recognizes historical shifts in language ideologies and policies, situating current translanguaging practices within evolving language policy, practice trajectories, and understandings of multilingualism and educational approaches. Moving inward, the next level (Macrosystem) encompasses dominant and minoritized cultural dynamics, language hierarchies, and ideological contexts that position translanguaging in relation to monolingual norms, constraining or enabling translanguaging as a legitimate practice within educational spaces (García & Kleyn, 2016). The third level (Exosystem) recognizes institutional structures, school policies (e.g., administrative decisions, professional development approaches, and assessment requirements), and resources that shape and mediate the implementation of translanguaging within schools (Menken & Sánchez, 2019). A further inner level (Mesosystem) addresses relationships between contexts (school-community, school-family) that influence translanguaging practices and how translanguaging bridges or disconnects educational spaces from students' broader linguistic environments (España & Herrera, 2020). Finally, the innermost core (Microsystem) represents the classroom environment, translanguaging practices, and pedagogical decisions that affect how interlocutors negotiate language use through moment-to-moment interactions, which either constrain or promote translanguaging as a liberatory practice (García et al., 2017). Beyond these concentric systems, the TSF critically emphasizes the "Arch of Interrelationship" (Țîrnovan, 2023, p. 119) between societal and systemic structures, acknowledging their interconnected and interdependent nature. Through this integrated

lens, this focus on structural interplay allows us to examine how tensions between structures that seek homogenization (systemic) and those that promote identity and agency (societal) shape translanguaging practices.

Figure 1. The Translanguaging Structures Framework
(Tîrnovan, 2023, p. 19)



The nested layers of the TSF naturally allow for investigation of translanguaging from different *vantage points*. For instance, a teacher's vantage point on translanguaging may be primarily from inside the classroom (Microsystem), with lesser consideration of the structures within the school (Mesosystem) and minimal consideration of the influences from outside the school (Exosystem and beyond). Conversely, the vantage point of a school or district administrator on translanguaging may differ. For instance, a principal's vantage point may focus on translanguaging in the school (Mesosystem) in conjunction with district mandates (Exosystem), with less focus on each immediate classroom (Microsystem). The vantage point of a school district mathematics and

science supervisor may concentrate more on how district mandates (Exosystem) are enacted in classrooms (Microsystem), with schools (Mesosystem) being somewhat less relevant. Moving forward, rather than employing the TSF's formal nomenclature (e.g., Microsystem, Mesosystem, and Exosystem), we discuss vantage points more critically applied to our context, such as within the localized classroom, within the school, or beyond the school (typically at the district level).

Providing a comprehensive lens for examining how structures from inside and outside the classroom, as well as individuals' vantage points, affect translanguaging practices, the TSF examines the interconnected layers that shape and reshape educational structures, thereby influencing language use in educational settings. These layers range from reflecting historical language ideologies to representing day-to-day classroom interaction. The TSF identifies how dominant ideologies, societal and cultural resistance, institutional policies, and pedagogical practices can constrain or foster translanguaging. It positions translanguaging as a form of resistance to hegemonic language structures, challenging the systemic perpetuation of monolingual and deficit ideologies. It emphasizes the critical role of teachers in mediating systemic demands and their own beliefs about equity, identity, and language.

2.1 Integrating the TSF as an Analytical Lens for Examining Translanguaging Implementation

By mapping insights from the teacher's reflections during the autoethnographic workshops and the interviews with the administrators onto TSF's structural layers, we examine:

- **Structural Positioning:** How administrators and teachers position themselves, feel positioned, or are positioned by others within educational structures, and how their respective vantage points (i.e., inside versus outside of the classroom or school) shape their conceptualization of translanguaging.
- **Translanguaging Purpose:** The envisioning of translanguaging as either a pedagogical methodology through which multilingual students are supported or as a political act challenging deficit ideology, razing walls of linguistic inequalities, and catalyzing social justice (García & Leiva, 2014; Li, 2024).
- **Directional Patterns:** Whether translanguaging flows from top-down implementation (from district mandates) or bottom-up (grassroots, classroom transformation).
- **Agency Within Constraints:** How teachers and administrators employ their agency to navigate systemic constraints while creating translanguaging spaces.

- Tensions: Recognizing and navigating systemic barriers to translanguaging, including tensions between teachers and administrators.
- Structural Mobility: The extent to which teachers and administrators move across structural layers, connecting personal experiences to institutional policies and classroom practices.

This analytical application addresses García and Kleyn's (2016) call for examining translanguaging as a pedagogical approach and a practice embedded within complex power dynamics and institutional hierarchies.

2.2 TSF and the Social Justice Dimensions of Translanguaging

The TSF reveals constraints and possibilities for translanguaging as a liberation practice, reconnecting translanguaging to its roots in social justice. We employ this framework to illuminate how translanguaging might challenge monolingualistic ideologies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Rosa & Flores, 2017) that position the language practices of racialized communities as deficient. The TSF allows us to contextualize teacher agency in resisting institutional constraints, promoting linguistic equity, transforming dispositions toward the self, addressing systemic constraints, and creating a pathway toward justice and empowerment. In essence, this theoretical foundation supports translanguaging as an inherently political practice that challenges linguistic hegemony, fosters critical consciousness, and creates equitable educational environments (Flores, 2014), underscoring the profound potential of translanguaging to drive social transformation in education.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study's integration of different backgrounds and contexts (school administrator interviews and transcripts regarding teachers' workshop activities) necessitated novel resources for analysis and integration. As such, we ground translanguaging from a social justice perspective: teacher resistance and agency, being en comunidad, and identity. Together, these constructs inform our investigation of administrators' top-down expectations and teachers' bottom-up initiatives, arguing that translanguaging begins within the self and extends outward.

3.1 Translanguaging

García (2009) describes translanguaging as a critical sociolinguistic orientation to language that explains the linguistic practices of multilingual speakers and accounts for

the dynamic blending, borrowing, and innovation of features for communicative purposes that cross linguistic borders. This positions translanguaging as an act of resistance (García, 2009) against the “invention of language” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007) or the colonial construction of languages as bounded, separate entities serving nationalist agendas. As language is perpetually evolving with continuously inter-informing features (García, 2017), translanguaging denies language siloing and recognizes a speaker’s dynamic and continually mediated *unified linguistic repertoire* that evolves as new contextualized meanings and uses are acquired (García & Wei, 2014; Vogel & García, 2017).

Translanguaging critically approaches language in society to enact social justice (García & Leiva, 2014), liberating students’ linguistic repertoires, languaging practices, and identities while disrupting norms, hierarchies, and inequities (Baker-Bell, 2020). Translanguaging disrupts language separation ideologies and practices through dispositional shifts or *translanguaging transformations*, recognizing students’ multilingualism as an inherent source of strength and engaging multilingualism for learning and meaning-making (García et al., 2017; Menken & Sánchez, 2019). It (re)affirms the positive self-dispositions of multilingual students, rejects deficit ideologies perpetuated by monoglossic classroom policies (Vogel & García, 2017), and promotes social justice for linguistically minoritized multilingual students (Baker-Bell, 2020, p. 7; García, 2009; Vogel & García, 2017).

Unfortunately, the criticality and focus on challenging systemic inequities of translanguaging are often minimized by an overemphasis on classroom applications (Flores & García, 2013), thereby neutralizing its ability to disrupt sociolinguistic oppression and inequitable practices (García, 2017; Pennycook, 2021). When translanguaging is positioned solely as linguistic pedagogy (García & Wei, 2014), mainstreamed as a methodology (Pennycook, 2021), or endorsed through strategic acceptability (Flores et al., 2020), its foundational goal to confront and overturn linguistic hegemony is diluted, robbing teachers of agency for dynamic empowerment (García & Wei, 2014; Pennycook, 2021). This dynamic is particularly evident when translanguaging is framed as a pedagogical safe space rather than as an act of resistance and linguistic transformation (Zhang et al., 2024). In this recognition, Li (2024) argues for a more radical positioning of translanguaging as inherently political. Revitalizing the political power of translanguaging requires attention to structural linguistic justice (García et al., 2019) and culturally sustaining pedagogies to investigate institutionalized linguistic hierarchies (Cioè-Peña, 2021).

A recent systematic analysis of U.S. translanguaging scholarship reveals persistent implementation challenges across various educational contexts (Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025). While translanguaging research has proliferated, with 111 empirical studies documented between 2009 and 2021, scholars have raised concerns about the “dilution of translanguaging’s more critical theoretical tenet” as the concept moves from theory to practice (Poza, 2017, p. 102). This dilution occurs particularly when translanguaging

implementations fail to address structural constraints that can render even well-intentioned practices ineffective within “inhospitable educational ecological” contexts (Allard, 2017, p. 127). However, existing scholarship has not systematically examined how different structural positions within educational hierarchies might function as complementary rather than competing resources for translanguaging implementation.

To depotentiate the ideological softening of translanguaging, we must empower teacher agency and reinvigorate sociopolitical linguistic resistance. We now consider the following dimensions.

3.2 Teacher Resistance and Agency

For teachers to implement and maintain translanguaging as a political act, they must differentiate *spaces of possibility* (Menken & García, 2020) or *sites of pedagogical innovation* (Palmer & Martínez, 2013) from opportunities of political resistance actively challenging languagelessness (i.e., the delegitimization of multilinguals’ language practices) (Rosa, 2019). García and Solorza (2023) recount how teachers use translanguaging to create spaces of *linguistic liberation* in opposition to English-only policies. García and Wei (2018) argue that teacher translanguaging agency involves *critical metalinguistic awareness* or an understanding of the interrelationship between language practices and power relations. Cervantes-Soon (2014) states that this awareness moves teachers beyond translanguaging pedagogies to challenging linguistic borders and hierarchies through *pedagogical border crossing*.

Teacher education should explicitly address language and speaker ideologies, shaping teachers’ perceptions of student language practices (Flores & Rosa, 2019). España et al. (2019) call for teacher candidates first to explore their language practices and journeys as they prepare to do the same with (future) students, thus investigating how language, power, and ideological beliefs impact their linguistic subjectivities and either disrupt or reproduce oppression for marginalized students in their classroom practice (Flores et al., 2020; Flores & Rosa, 2015). To this end, Murillo’s (2017) action research with prospective bilingual teacher candidates revealed the undoing of internalized deficit perspectives after personal engagement with translanguaging in research-based course assignments and readings.

By extension, translanguaging professional development must consider *political formation* before pedagogical training, including *archaeological work* or the excavation and examination of how teachers’ linguistic practices are formed by their beliefs, experiences, and histories (España & Herrera, 2020; Park et al., 2024). Suriel and Curran (2022) have similarly found that, through prolonged professional development engagement with translanguaging paradigms across an urban social justice teacher education program, teachers of multilingual learners may also encourage resistance to deficit ideologies regarding language and learning.

3.3 Learning en comunidad and Identity

Two interconnected concepts form critical foundations for translanguaging spaces: being *en comunidad* and *centering identity*. When multilingual learners and educators engage in learning en comunidad, they establish the psychological safety necessary for authentic linguistic exchange while validating students' complex linguistic identities and fostering collective solidarity. España and Herrera (2019) demonstrate how this communal approach transforms classroom dynamics into sites of co-constructed knowledge where multilingual practices become tools for critical inquiry and resistance. Centering Latinx students' multilingual practices en comunidad provides pathways toward critical consciousness, developing solidarity and decolonial perspectives that identify and heal linguistic harms perpetuated by monoglossic ideologies. Valenzuela (1999) shows how these communal translanguaging spaces enable students to challenge dominant language hierarchies while affirming their multilingual identities.

Ellis & Bochner (2011) define autoethnography as an autobiographical genre that engages one in exploring and understanding a social or cultural context. Autoethnography helps explore the “social and cultural aspects of [the] personal experience [and] looks inward, exposing the vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract, and resist cultural interpretation” (Ellis & Bochner, 2011, p. 739). Autoethnography guides the identification and undoing of internalized deficit ideologies, which help explore the impact of systemic and societal structures that can be minoritizing or dehumanizing (Murillo, 2017). Autoethnography enables participants to acknowledge, contest, and resist historicized deficit beliefs related to their language identities through the writing of counternarratives and testimonios (Ellis & Bochner, 2011; García & Wei, 2014).

When teacher candidates engage in identity exploration en comunidad, they interrogate their linguistic ideologies. Murillo (2017) reveals how language autobiographies lead educators to reject deficit perspectives and embrace translanguaging as both a pedagogical practice and a sociopolitical stance. Torres Carrillo (2023) and Clark (2024) further demonstrate how these identity-centered approaches transform educators' relationships with their entire linguistic repertoire.

From this background, the following research questions guide this investigation:

- 1) How do structural positions within educational hierarchies shape administrators' and teachers' conceptualizations of translanguaging's pedagogical and sociopolitical dimensions?
- 2) How do different structural positions create distinct pathways for translanguaging implementation, and what tensions emerge between top-down institutional approaches and bottom-up classroom practices?

By integrating and analyzing insights from administrators' interviews with teacher articulations in the autoethnographic workshops, along with their respective vantage

points, we illustrate how the critical edge of translanguaging can be dulled through institutional considerations or sharpened through classroom implementation. We also explore how an autoethnographic professional development workshop (Ellis & Bochner, 2011; Murillo, 2017) influences teachers' capacities to implement translanguaging practices that challenge sociopolitical oppressions within multilingual classrooms. Through these workshops, we reveal pathways for revitalization through bottom-up resistance and teacher agency. We now consider these two groups of participants and their respective vantage points regarding translanguaging and its school-wide and classroom practices.

4. METHODS

4.1 Participants

In this study, the district mathematics and science Supervisor worked in a multilingual and multicultural urban school district in New Jersey, and the Principal worked in a dual-language urban elementary school serving the same district (Țîrnovan, 2024). Both had over ten years of experience in their school district and were well-established in their positions. They were selected for the anticipated authority their positions held regarding shaping language policy and pedagogical implementation at both school and district levels. Each administrator participated in a one-hour-long semi-structured interview.

Additionally, our study also draws on insights from five teachers who participated in an autoethnographic workshop for PK-12 teachers working in multilingual learner programs in the Northeastern United States (Rivera Guerrero, 2025). In a virtual, synchronous, ten-hour (in five sessions) professional development workshop, the participants (pseudonyms used) learned about and engaged in the autoethnographic research process to investigate their linguistic identities using a translanguaging lens and raciolinguistic perspectives (Bochner & Ellis, 2016; García, 2017; Rosa & Flores, 2017; Sealey-Ruiz, 2020). In this work, the participants experientially considered identity mapping, autoethnographic interviews, deductive coding, and reflexive journaling to observe social phenomena and develop autoethnographic narratives.

4.2 Data Selection and Analysis

The administrators' semi-structured interviews were video-recorded and transcribed verbatim, enabling an in-depth exploration of their perspectives on the efficacy, implementation, and sustainability of translanguaging within their institutional contexts. The interview protocol probed administrators' understanding of translanguaging as both a theoretical framework and a pedagogical approach, their views on implementation challenges, and their perception of the support needed for

effective translanguaging practices. The recorded Zoom sessions of the teachers' five-part autoethnographic workshop were transcribed verbatim. We focused on interview segments that discussed administrators' perspectives on the implementation of translanguaging, its challenges, and its potential for social justice (Țîrnovan, 2024). We also selected workshop transcripts and autoethnographic narratives that showcased teachers' linguistic identity work and its influence on their capacity to implement translanguaging practices that challenge sociopolitical oppressions.

Data analysis proceeded through a systematic five-phase process that integrated the TSF with Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach to qualitative thematic analysis. In Phase 1 (Data Familiarization and Open Coding), all researchers independently read all transcripts and inductively generated initial open codes, focusing on participants' language choices, descriptions of experiences, and beliefs about translanguaging. More precisely, we examined how participants' language choices and shared views reflected and constructed broader ideologies about opportunities for translanguaging as a tool for social justice. We identified patterns that reveal tensions between institutional constraints and the transformative potential of translanguaging, particularly in terms of implementation, efficacy, and sustainability within urban educational contexts. This process yielded 248 initial codes from administrative data and 312 from teacher workshop data.

In Phase 2 (TSF Mapping), we then employed theoretical coding (Saldaña, 2021) to systematically map initial codes to the five structural levels of the TSF. Using NVivo 12 qualitative analysis software, we categorized each code according to its primary level and systematically compared how administrators and teachers engaged with each level. In Phase 3 (Structural Pattern Analysis), we analyzed patterns within and across structural layers of the data, focusing specifically on the following aspects: dominant levels (where most codes appeared), mobility (movement across layers), agency manifestations within structural constraints, and directional patterns (top-down vs. bottom-up conceptualizations). This analysis revealed distinct structural patterns between administrative and teacher data. Administrator codes clustered predominantly outside of the classroom and at the district level (63% of codes), with limited engagement across other structural layers. Teacher codes demonstrated more even distribution across all five levels of the TSF, with significant movement between layers.

In Phase 4 (Thematic Development Through Matrix Analysis), we employed matrix analysis (Miles et al., 2020) to develop themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) that captured the patterns identified in Phase 3. This involved creating a two-dimensional matrix with TSF structural layers on one axis and participant groups (administrators and teachers) on the other. We identified patterns, contradictions, and tensions across cells, forming the basis of thematic development. Through this process, some primary themes emerged that captured the structural dynamics of translanguaging: *structural positioning* (vantage points), *translanguaging purpose* (pedagogy versus a political

act), *directional patterns* (top-down versus bottom-up), *agency within constraints, tensions*, and *structural mobility* (connecting personal experiences).

Finally, in Phase 5 (Cross-Data Integration and Member Checking), we systematically compared patterns identified across the data to develop integrated themes that captured similarities, differences, and complementary insights between administrator and teacher perspectives. This involved creating comparison matrices where administrator patterns were mapped against teacher patterns for each structural level of the TSF. We identified three types of cross-data relationships: (1) convergent patterns where both groups showed similar responses, (2) divergent patterns where groups showed contrasting responses to similar structural elements, and (3) complementary patterns where different structural positions revealed different aspects of the same translanguaging phenomena. These comparative patterns formed the basis for our integrated thematic findings that present administrator and teacher perspectives in dialogue rather than isolation.

4.3 Analytical Rigor and Reflexivity

Our analytical approach strikes a balance between methodological rigor and interpretive flexibility (Bhattacharya, 2017; Maxwell, 2013). We triangulated across the data to examine views on translanguaging from complementary institutional perspectives. Team discussions helped us reflect on how our backgrounds in translanguaging scholarship shaped our interpretations (Christiansen & Tian, 2023). Rather than pursuing exhaustive validation protocols, we focused on maintaining analytical memos documenting our evolving understanding of key themes and theoretical connections (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Miles et al., 2020). This approach allowed us to remain responsive to emergent insights while ensuring our analysis represented a credible interpretation of how translanguaging operates across different structural positions within educational contexts. These strategies helped ensure that our analysis represented a trustworthy interpretation of the structural dynamics of translanguaging, as revealed through the perspectives of both administrators and teachers.

Our analysis examines how school administrators conceptualize the implementation of translanguaging and the oppositional structures that affect it. Additionally, we consider how an autoethnographic workshop for teachers of emergent multilingual students affects their professional linguistic identity, invites the challenging of monolingual and multi-monoglossal linguistic practices, and liberates the teachers' linguistic repertoires through translanguaging. We also juxtapose the administrators' and teachers' perspectives on structural tensions that oppose school and classroom translanguaging and how these perspectives relate to each other.

5. FINDINGS

This section presents findings organized in a thematic structure derived from the analysis, integrating insights from interviews with the two school administrators and the autoethnographic workshop with the five teachers, thereby weaving their perspectives together within each theme. While not fully discretized, the previously mentioned themes of structural positioning, translanguaging purpose, directional patterns, agency within constraints, tensions, and structural mobility shape our analysis and these findings.

5.1 Valuing Translanguaging (as a Classroom Practice and Not as a Political Stance)

Both school administrators expressed strong support for translanguaging as a classroom practice that enhances students' academic success and sense of inclusion. The Principal emphasized recognizing students' home languages and cultures in learning, explaining, "We want to value different cultures... Kids see this in their day-to-day experiences... We even need to help them value their cultures and languages." He observed informal language mixing among students, underscoring the need for intentional planning: "Even when we emphasized dual-language separation, the students would find opportunities to communicate in their languages... [We] realized that intentional translanguaging is key for students to learn content and make connections between languages." Similarly, the district Supervisor described translanguaging as fundamental rather than temporary: "way of being... children internalize ideas learning through it... Students naturally do it to some extent all the time. Translanguaging comes down to us letting them know that it is okay." She insisted on the academic necessity of students using their home languages: "If a lesson has a mathematical goal, we need to allow it in their language," emphasizing translanguaging's dual academic and emotional value: "It is not simply about them feeling represented. It is us recognizing how they think and valuing them. ... [Translanguaging is] simply how kids think."

Echoing administrators, teachers affirmed the academic benefits of translanguaging but expanded its significance beyond a classroom strategy. Rocio noted improved student confidence and performance: "Even with the [assessment] tasks... I saw a huge difference when [students] were able to use their first language to tackle the second language... I could see them taking the test feeling confident." Teachers' insights highlighted the role of translanguaging in linguistic healing and identity reclamation. Teachers saw translanguaging as critical for reclaiming cultural pride and addressing internalized linguistic shame. Elena described her linguistic journey as therapeutic: "We're looking inside and trying to figure out stuff... Spanish... [is the] strongest part of my identity," noting translanguaging's centrality to her teaching: "I realized I am doing exactly what I am meant to do... I feel [teaching] is my *ikigai*. I'm helping students find their voices in a multilingual world." Rocio similarly reflected on professional

transformation: “[I have grown] from seeing my bilingualism as a weakness... to this passionate educator who has been able to provide a very safe environment for her emergent bilingual students to grow and see their identity.” Teachers thus positioned translanguaging as a tool for reshaping personal and professional identity.

Furthermore, teachers viewed translanguaging as a form of resistance to social marginalization. Salma offered a poetic reflection: “In the corridors of my mind, memories intertwine with languages spoken, shaping my narrative... It all comes to be able to face the future with tools.” Here, translanguaging emerges as a means of empowerment against marginalization. Rocio’s experience similarly transitioned from validation, “Someone is saying it’s okay to speak both languages,” to transformative educational practice, “[It brings an] identity to students, that they are genius [and affirms the inherent value of their languages].” Translanguaging thus serves as both a personal affirmation and a collective empowerment. While both groups valued translanguaging, their structural positions created different understandings of implementation barriers and possibilities.

5.2 Navigating Tensions Between Structural Constraints and Aspirational Values

Despite administrators’ vocal support, they acknowledged systemic obstacles that limit the implementation of translanguaging. The Principal highlighted the role of the dual-language programs in avoiding stigma, as they are designed to ensure students “don’t feel isolated... or stigmatized.” The Supervisor, noting the varied needs of multilingual students, subtly implied a remedial approach rather than an asset-based one. Both administrators identified significant barriers, including staffing and ineffective translations. The Principal described translation difficulties: “Your initial thought is... if you just translated into Spanish, it’ll be fine... [Sometimes the translated questions] make no sense for a Spanish speaker.” Translanguaging remained misunderstood, with insufficient training prioritized within broader initiatives.

Teachers responded critically, situating these structural challenges within historical and social contexts. Erica linked multilingual marginalization to colonial legacies, stating, “Colonization wasn’t just about land. It was about controlling language and education to maintain power,” succinctly capturing the historical linguistic oppression. Elena reinforced power dynamics within groups: “In every social group, there’s gonna be the majority... once you are part of the majority, you [can]... become the bully.” Salma similarly noted majority dominance as pervasive: “Maybe the bigger group is always gonna take over, or try to.” Teachers thus identified translanguaging as a form of resistance to persistent hierarchies.

Teachers also grappled with identity tensions and institutional barriers directly impacting their professional lives. Rocio’s introspection following a student’s remark

("You're too white to be Latina.") highlighted the complexities of cultural belonging. Elena explained identity fluidity: "There are layers and stages... traits of our personality take the lead, depending on the people, the language, and the context." Practically, teachers confronted restrictive licensing and assessment systems. Salma critiqued discriminatory licensing exams: "These tests keep capable multilingual teachers out of the profession," and Rocio criticized labeling students through English-only assessments: "[It] goes back to this system... What are they really proving [with this test]?" Teachers' responses underscored their efforts to affirm multilingualism in the face of institutional constraints. These contrasting responses to systemic barriers reveal how structural positioning shapes not only problem identification but also perceived solutions and agency for implementation.

5.3 Top-Down Implementation and Limited Administrative Agency

Administrators maintained that effective translanguaging practices required systemic mandates. The Supervisor clearly stated, "[Unless I make translanguaging a requirement], ... nothing happens," and the Principal recognized his advocacy limitations, conceding higher-level decisions ultimately shaped outcomes: "Those above me have the final say." Administrators thus viewed translanguaging's future as contingent on systemic prioritization. In contrast, teachers emphasized grassroots, collective agency. Salma described informal support networks as essential: "How we survive." During collaborative workshops, teachers developed culturally relevant curricula, exemplified by Elena's proposal for collective storytelling. Rocio humorously shared anxieties about writing in Spanish, fostering supportive community interactions that extended beyond workshops, including informal channels like WhatsApp.

Teachers also engaged in broader advocacy efforts. Salma described addressing a school board in two languages, emphasizing community advocacy over personal recognition. Elena highlighted the contrasts between restrictive workplaces and empowering workshop experiences: "Because where I work, I can't speak Spanish," affirming her commitment to guiding students toward bilingual futures. Erica transitioned from perceiving language mixing negatively to embracing translanguaging as empowering: "It's important... for our students to... know there's nothing wrong with them... It's a way to break those systems." Teachers' proactive advocacy demonstrated how grassroots action can challenge institutional inertia. The divergent approaches to agency and implementation directionality demonstrated across our data illuminate fundamental differences in how structural positioning shapes translanguaging conceptualization. Moreover, the workshop environment demonstrated how professional development focused on translanguaging implementation could amplify teacher agency as participants moved from individual reflection to collective advocacy both during and beyond the formal sessions.

5.4 Conclusion: Bridging Structural Gaps Through Ground-Level Innovation

Across all themes, tensions between institutional caution and teacher-driven innovation were evident. Administrators emphasized systemic constraints, while teachers modeled proactive, transformative practices. Thus, we illustrate that sustainable change often originates from educators’ grassroots efforts, underscoring the need for the structural integration of translanguaging practices. Through the TSF lens, the tensions identified across our four themes demonstrate how administrators primarily operate at institutional and policy levels while teachers simultaneously navigate multiple structural layers, from classroom practice to community advocacy. These findings reveal that implementing sustainable translanguaging requires coordination across structural positions, rather than relying on uniform top-down or bottom-up approaches. We argue that embracing translanguaging as a foundational rather than supplementary approach positions it as a transformative educational method.

6. DISCUSSION

This discussion considers additional elements in the administrators’ interviews and the teachers’ autoethnographic workshop transcripts, as informed by the Translanguaging Structures Framework (TSF; Tîrnovan, 2023). Our findings reveal four key patterns in how structural positioning influences the implementation of translanguaging. The following analysis examines these patterns through the TSF lens to understand how different institutional positions create distinct but interconnected approaches to translanguaging. Before doing so, Table 1 represents several complementary dimensions contextualized in translanguaging between the administrators’ and teachers’ perspectives. These dimensions include perceived agency, conceptualization of barriers, temporal framing, translanguaging knowledge, and power dynamics (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Direct Comparison of Administrators’ and Teachers’ Perspectives

Direct Comparison of Administrators’ and Teachers’ Perspectives		
Dimensions	Administrators	Teachers
Perceived Agency	Limited; dependent on top-down initiatives	High; immediate classroom-level enactment
Barrier Conceptualization	Barriers require systemic, institutional changes	Barriers navigable through immediate action
Temporal Framing	Long-term institutional processes	Immediate, present-focused transformation

Translanguaging Knowledge	Specialized knowledge requiring formal training	Lived, grassroots, experiential knowledge
Power Dynamics	Formal power but limited practical agency	Less formal power but significant practical agency

The following section discusses some of these dimensions, as well as others not captured in the table. As with the previous findings, the following discussions incorporate elements of the themes: structural positioning, translanguaging purpose, directional patterns, agency within constraints, tensions, and structural mobility, which shape our analysis and these findings. Again, these themes will not be precisely discretized, and several are intertwined with the others.

6.1 Vantage Points

The findings of this study reveal a nuanced tension between administrators’ and teachers’ perspectives on translanguaging, rooted in their distinct positions within the school system. When the Principal stated that translanguaging requires ‘cohesive district-wide plans’ while teachers in the workshop immediately implemented translanguaging through classroom practices, these contrasting responses reveal how structural positioning fundamentally shapes translanguaging conceptualization. Drawing on our TSF analysis, administrators positioned at the institutional level (outside the classroom but within the school or district structure) often support the *idea* of translanguaging in principle but frame it through the lens of policy, curriculum standards, and school-wide outcomes. The Supervisor’s assertion that “unless I make translanguaging a requirement, nothing happens” exemplifies this policy-mediated perspective. Seen through the lens of the TSF, the administrators are positioned within a set of competing societal and systemic structures outside of the classroom. However, the Principal is in the school, and the Supervisor is at the district level. From these vantage points, they perceive their agency for implementing classroom-level translanguaging as muted.

Teachers positioned at the classroom level exhibit practice-mediated conceptualization and tend to view translanguaging as an *immediate, situational strategy* for inclusive instruction and student engagement. They see firsthand how allowing students to use their full linguistic repertoire can facilitate understanding, validate cultural identities, and promote equity. Rocio’s reflection that she grew ‘from seeing my bilingualism as a weakness to this passionate educator’ demonstrates how classroom proximity enables identity-driven translanguaging conceptualization. Situated within the TSF, findings demonstrate how teachers positioned at the nexus of competing societal and systemic structures can develop agency by examining how these structures have shaped their

linguistic identities. At the classroom level, teachers may implement translanguaging in ways that subvert monolingual ideologies without requiring changes to school and district policies. They can also build a collective agency with a professional community to navigate and transform constraints imposed by the district and ideological structures.

This difference in vantage point means that what teachers embrace as a flexible, student-centered practice can be perceived by administrators as something requiring careful top-down planning or alignment with official programs. As a result, a gap emerges: while translanguaging is championed as a day-to-day, bottom-up solution by teachers, administrators struggle to incorporate it into existing structures.

The paradox of positional authority is evident across the data: administrators with formal power experience greater perceived constraints on their agency regarding the implementation of translanguaging, whereas teachers with less formal authority demonstrate greater freedom to innovate when given the space in which to explore these moves. This inverted power dynamic reveals how translanguaging's sociopolitical dimensions are more readily accessible to those operating from less institutionally powerful positions, suggesting that translanguaging's potential for resistance is inherently bottom-up rather than top-down and invites potential research into both vantage points independently and together. These distinct vantage points (administrators viewing translanguaging through policy frameworks while teachers approach it through classroom practice) lead directly to the divergent understandings of agency documented in our findings.

6.2 Agency

A key insight from our data is the role of agency in implementing translanguaging. In practice, translanguaging has largely been enacted as a *bottom-up*, teacher-driven innovation in classrooms (García et al., 2016), reflecting significant teacher agency (Putra, 2024). We observed how teachers frequently employed translanguaging to meet students' needs, even in the absence of explicit directives, sometimes in defiance of English-only norms or standardized curricula. This grassroots implementation highlights that teachers are not merely following preordained policies but actively shaping language pedagogy on the ground to create more inclusive and effective learning environments (Putra, 2024). This reveals a paradox of agency, which arises when examining specific responses to identical constraints. As documented in our findings, both groups identified inadequate resources and assessment pressures as barriers; however, their responses diverged. Administrators perceived these as requiring systemic intervention before implementation, while teachers navigated around constraints through immediate practice adaptation.

Meanwhile, the administrators' agency takes a significantly different form. Their support for translanguaging tends to be indirect or cautious, as they perceive their

agency and ability to facilitate the necessary changes for classroom implementation of translanguaging as hindered by top-down directives or the lack thereof. While they valued translanguaging in support of multilingual students' learning, they noted oppositional district barriers, including insufficient guidelines, monolingual mandated testing, and a lack of prioritization. Thus, translanguaging presently thrives more as a grassroots practice than an institutional initiative, aligning with García's (2009) notion that transformative language pedagogies build on the actual practices of multilingual communities from the ground up (Wiley & Garcia, 2016). We view this as an invitation to celebrate what teachers do in their classrooms and invite administrators to witness and participate in these efforts.

While both groups recognize the same systemic barriers, they also conceptualize agency differently within these constraints. While administrators see these barriers as requiring top-down intervention before action can be taken, teachers perceive them as conditions to be navigated through immediate action. This fundamentally different orientation toward identical structural constraints reveals how translanguaging's sociopolitical potential is more so activated or neutralized through perceptions of agency rather than through removing barriers. This agency paradox addresses concerns raised by translanguaging scholars regarding the maintenance of critical orientations during implementation. Research has documented how "Shifts from theorization to implementation" can dilute translanguaging's transformative potential (Jaspers, 2018, as cited in Hamman-Ortiz et al., 2025). Our findings suggest that this dilution may result not from the implementation itself but from relying exclusively on top-down approaches that constrain rather than leverage the structural proximity teachers have to the critical dimensions of translanguaging. We now consider the nature and interrelationship between the top-down and bottom-up perspectives in more detail.

6.3 Bottom-Up versus Top-Down

The contrast between *bottom-up* and *top-down* orientations in our findings highlights the tension present in educational change. Teachers' bottom-up translanguaging practices demonstrate how pedagogical innovation can originate from those closest to students, driven by on-the-spot needs and a commitment to equity. For example, Elena's statement, 'Where I work, I can't speak Spanish,' followed by her commitment to 'guiding students toward bilingual futures,' exemplifies transforming a constraint into an opportunity for resistance. Administrators' top-down perspective, on the other hand, illuminates the structural forces that can both enable and constrain such innovations. For instance, even well-intentioned administrators may focus on school-wide consistency or test performance, inadvertently limiting teachers' flexibility. Principal's acknowledgment that 'those above me have the final say' illustrates how formal authority paradoxically constrains transformative action. In our study, this dynamic manifested as a negotiation. While teachers often implemented translanguaging informally and shared success stories anecdotally, administrators deliberated on how to

reconcile these grassroots successes with official policy. Each group's vantage points influenced their perspectives on translanguaging. Teachers felt the urgency of serving multilingual learners daily, whereas administrators felt responsible for broader institutional outcomes. Notably, both groups ultimately valued students' multilingual resources, but they approached implementation in different ways. This suggests that bridging the gap will require dialogues that connect teachers' classroom-level insights with administrators' district-level planning. Our findings thereby underscore how institutional hierarchies shape pedagogical change: translanguaging flourishes in classrooms as a justice-driven practice, even when not fully codified by top-down policy.

Administrators and teachers mobilize translanguaging knowledge in different ways. Administrators position translanguaging as specialized knowledge requiring formal training, while teachers approach it as lived experiences that can be expanded upon en comunidad. Additionally, administrators conceptualize the implementation of translanguaging through extended institutional timelines, positioning meaningful change as distant and dependent on sequenced initiatives. In contrast, teachers demonstrate immediate enactment in their practices and discourse during the workshop. This temporal distinction reveals how institutional framing can indefinitely defer the sociopolitical potential of translanguaging while grassroots approaches actualize it in the present moment. Understanding how these directional patterns might be reconciled requires examining the specific mechanisms through which professional development can bridge structural gaps.

6.4 Returning to the Workshop

Repositioning the findings regarding teachers' views and translanguaging practices within the context of the autoethnographic workshop is necessary to observe cause and effect. The teachers' perspectives as change agents who challenge linguistic norms through translanguaging as a sociopolitical, anti-hegemonic disruptor of deficit positioning of language-minoritized communities and a catalyst of social justice may not have evolved without the teachers participating in the workshop (Kohli et al., 2022).

During the workshop, teachers engaged extensively in metatranslanguaging (i.e., discussing translanguaging). They considered aspects of social justice, criticality, and raciolinguistic oppression, with discussions regarding the implementation of translanguaging in the classroom as secondary. Philosophical metatranslanguaging engagement led to the minimization of pragmatic issues that opposed the implementation of translanguaging and emphasized pathways for actualizing translanguaging in their classrooms.

This leads to two associated notions. First, while metatranslanguaging is valuable, the substance of such may be more beneficial. While the administrators' metatranslanguaging involved considering how to quickly and effectively integrate the

practice of translanguaging, this did not necessarily lead to advancing translanguaging in the school or classrooms. However, the workshop participants considered what they intended translanguaging to accomplish for themselves and their students, immediately leading to the creation of translanguaging spaces in their classrooms. Thus, metatranslanguaging may take different forms, consider various aspects, and yield different results. Second, the teachers in the autoethnographic workshop implicitly argued that a deeply personal, bottom-up investigation of linguistic identity must precede efforts to engage in systemic transformation toward translanguaging.

7. IMPLICATIONS

This study's insights contribute to the growing body of literature on translanguaging as a vehicle for promoting social justice in education. By highlighting the effectiveness of bottom-up approaches, such as autoethnographic professional development workshops, this investigation provides a valuable counterpoint to the dominant narrative of top-down policy and institutional constraints. Doing so opens new possibilities for reimagining translanguaging implementation as a grassroots effort driven by educators committed to challenging sociopolitical oppressions and promoting linguistic equity in their classrooms and communities.

This study has several implications. First, while constrained within systemic structures, teachers must resist ideological practices based on deficit beliefs and advocate for systemic transformation. However, embracing translanguaging as a justice-oriented praxis requires that teachers have the appropriate tools, experiences, and environments. For instance, when teachers participated in an autoethnography workshop centered on linguistic identity and self-revelation, discourse disrupted historicized narratives, policies, and systems of oppression, fostering resistance to these and creating pathways to social justice (Rivera Guerrero, 2025). They demonstrated that personal agency exceeds external elements (e.g., positive or negative policies and resources). How can teachers fully endorse and support translanguaging from a social justice perspective if they do not first investigate their identities and histories (España et al., 2019)? Can teachers possess the necessary *critical metalinguistic awareness* (Wei, 2018) to lead to social justice through translanguaging if they have not had such experience? The workshop's successes argue in favor of the future of these elements and their wider dissemination.

Second, preservice teaching programs and in-service professional development should explicitly support translanguaging as a critical practice rather than a compliance strategy. In the long term, iterative programs grounded in identity, criticality, and cultural responsiveness are crucial for ensuring lasting change. Teachers should experience transformation through learning en comunidad, self-revelation, and discourse surrounding the disruption of narratives, policies, and systems of oppression, as well as resistance that leads to translanguaging for social justice. Sustainable

practices should include ongoing reflective opportunities for educators to examine their biases, regular collaboration to share translanguaging strategies, and institutional commitment to providing resources that support multilingual classrooms (Park et al., 2024; Yaşar Yüzlü & Dikilitaş, 2024). These initiatives may transform translanguaging from a marginal practice into an integral component of equitable education. Last, this study may suggest that school and district administrators reconsider their ideological purposes for implementing translanguaging in the classroom. As Mendoza et al. (2023) suggest, it is time to put away apolitical views of translanguaging.

8. CONCLUSION AND CALL TO ACTION

This study reaffirms the transformative potential of translanguaging when positioned as a critical practice rooted in social justice. The findings suggest that while systemic reform is necessary, the most profound transformations begin at the grassroots level, with educators leveraging their structural proximity to students to implement translanguaging practices that challenge institutional constraints (García & Solorza, 2023; Palmer & Martínez, 2013). The juxtaposition of administrator interviews and the teachers' autoethnographic workshop illuminates the multifaceted dynamics of translanguaging implementation. It holistically unifies translanguaging, highlighting the tensions between institutional limitations and the liberatory potential of translanguaging practices in the classroom. The administrator interviews reveal top-down structural barriers, including inadequate resources, policy constraints, and systemic resistance to linguistic equity. In contrast, the workshop provides bottom-up insights, demonstrating how grassroots efforts and teacher agency can foster transformative practices. This dual perspective underscores the interdependence of systemic reform and individual initiative, illustrating the mutual importance of institutional support and empowering educators as change agents.

The teachers' workshop demonstrated how translanguaging functions simultaneously as personal transformation and structural resistance. Through identity exploration, educators confronted internalized deficit ideologies, reimagining their linguistic repertoires as strengths rather than limitations (Murillo, 2017). Self-reflection allowed educators to confront and deconstruct internalized biases and deficit ideologies, enabling them to reimagine their linguistic identities as strengths rather than liabilities. This process revealed the multidimensional impact of translanguaging, extending beyond classroom pedagogy to become a relational practice that transforms both educators and students while challenging inequitable structures across institutional boundaries (Creese & Blackledge, 2015).

Looking forward, schools and communities must collaborate to create inclusive environments where linguistic diversity is celebrated and all students feel valued (DeNicolo, 2019; García & Wei, 2014). Altogether, the results of this study lead to a call to action:

- 1) Educational administrators should collaborate to enact and implement pro-translanguaging policies, allocate resources equitably, and provide training for translanguaging pedagogies to dismantle monoglossic norms in education.
- 2) Teacher educators and professional development leaders should consider identity and critical reflection to prepare educators as advocates for linguistic justice.
- 3) PK-12 schools need to cultivate learning en comunidad to foster inclusivity, empowering faculty, staff, and students to use their full linguistic repertoires for and as a result of learning.
- 4) Researchers should explore the outcomes of translanguaging across diverse contexts, emphasizing its potential to disrupt systemic inequities and promote equity for historically marginalized learners
- 5) Teachers and students must be encouraged and equipped to challenge deficit ideologies and practices, transforming classrooms into sites of affirmation and resistance

Ultimately, this study underscores the pivotal role of teacher agency and bottom-up initiatives in fostering translanguaging as a transformative practice in multilingual classrooms. It serves as a clarion call for all educational stakeholders to prioritize the empowerment of teachers, recognizing their instrumental role in the fight for linguistic justice and educational equity.

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