

## Exploring Students' Willingness to Communicate in a Translanguaging Classroom: A Qualitative Study in Vietnam

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### Abstract

*This qualitative case study explores EFL students' willingness to communicate (WTC) in a translanguaging classroom at a Vietnamese university. Drawing on MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) situational WTC model and sociocultural theories of translanguaging, the study investigates how seventeen non-English-major students enrolled in a Speaking course perceive translanguaging, what factors shape their communication willingness, and how translanguaging practices influence their actual communicative behavior. Data were generated through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The findings reveal that translanguaging functioned as a cognitive and affective scaffold: it reduced speaking anxiety, strengthened comprehension, and created an inclusive classroom climate. Vocabulary limitations, fear of negative evaluation, and uneven participation were identified as persistent barriers. The study contributes to the growing literature on translanguaging pedagogy in Vietnamese higher education and calls for intentional integration of students' full linguistic repertoire in EFL speaking instruction.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

English language education in Vietnam has undergone considerable transformation over recent decades, with growing emphasis on communicative competence and student-centered pedagogies. Yet despite widespread curriculum reform, many Vietnamese EFL learners continue to struggle with oral communication in English, often remaining silent or minimally participatory even in dedicated speaking courses. This persistent gap between curricular intention and classroom reality points to the importance of understanding not only what students can do in a second language, but whether and why they are willing to communicate. Willingness to communicate (WTC), as conceptualized by MacIntyre, Dörnyei, Clément, and Noels (1998), captures precisely this dimension: it refers to a learner's readiness to initiate communication in a second language and is recognized as a dynamic, context-sensitive disposition shaped by both individual psychological factors and broader classroom conditions.

Against this backdrop, translanguaging has gained increasing attention as a pedagogical approach capable of transforming the affective and cognitive conditions of language learning. Rather than viewing students' first language as an obstacle to target language acquisition,

translanguaging treats the full bilingual repertoire as a resource for making meaning, building understanding, and participating in classroom interaction (García and Wei, 2014). In the Vietnamese context, research has documented that teachers strategically use Vietnamese alongside English to explain difficult concepts, check comprehension, and reduce students' anxiety about speaking (Cong-Lem, 2025; Pham and Vu, 2023). Learners, too, have reported that translanguaging increases their sense of support and willingness to engage (Trinh, 2025; Huynh, 2026). However, existing research has predominantly focused on teachers' practices and perceptions, with relatively little attention to how students themselves experience and respond to translanguaging in relation to their willingness to communicate.

This study therefore addresses an underexplored intersection in the literature: the relationship between translanguaging classroom practices and EFL students' WTC in a Vietnamese university speaking course. Specifically, the study focuses on seventeen non-English-major students at B1 proficiency level, purposefully selected from a Speaking course where translanguaging was observed to occur naturally and strategically. By centering students' voices through a qualitative case study design, the research aims to provide nuanced, contextualized insight into how translanguaging shapes communicative willingness. The study is guided by three research questions:

*RQ1: How do EFL students perceive their willingness to communicate in translanguaging classrooms in Vietnam?*

*RQ2: What factors influence their willingness to communicate in such classrooms?*

*RQ3: How does translanguaging practice shape their actual communication behavior?*

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Translanguaging Theory

Translanguaging, as theorized by García and Wei (2014), refers to the dynamic and fluid use of a bilingual speaker's entire linguistic repertoire across languages in the course of communication and learning. Unlike earlier conceptualizations of code-switching, which tend to frame bilingual language alternation as a departure from the norm or a sign of incomplete acquisition, translanguaging positions the simultaneous engagement of multiple linguistic resources as an integrated and purposeful practice. García and Wei (2014) argue that bilingual practice turns all students' language skills into assets, promoting deeper engagement with content and with one another.

In the Vietnamese EFL context, translanguaging has been documented as a pedagogical strategy employed by teachers to scaffold instruction, manage classroom dynamics, and support affective conditions for learning. Cong-Lem (2025) observed three Vietnamese university EFL teachers using translanguaging purposefully to check comprehension, emphasize content, and reduce English-speaking anxiety among students. Pham and Vu (2023) similarly found that secondary EFL teachers in Hanoi frequently explained difficult grammar and vocabulary in Vietnamese to support comprehension, and also used the first language to provide emotional support and create a friendly classroom atmosphere. The same study noted

that public-school teachers used the first language more freely than their counterparts in private institutions, where strict English-only policies constrained translanguaging practices.

Theoretically, translanguaging is often grounded in Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development. By linking new English content to students' native-language resources, teachers help reduce cognitive load and make learning more accessible. Cong-Lem (2025) formalized this connection through the concept of Proximal Language Scaffolding, in which strategic use of the first language is coordinated with second language input to help students achieve communicative and academic goals. Recent work in the Vietnamese university context has further illustrated how translanguaging functions as a pedagogical resource in content-intensive settings: Huynh and Huynh (2026) found that in a medical English for Specific Purposes classroom, translanguaging served five main functions, with concept explanation occurring most frequently, alongside comprehension checking, knowledge localization, instruction reinforcement, and rapport building.

### ***2.2. Willingness to Communicate (WTC)***

Willingness to communicate in a second language, as defined by MacIntyre et al. (1998), refers to a learner's readiness to initiate communication at a given moment. Crucially, WTC is not conceived as a fixed personality trait but as a dynamic, situational disposition that fluctuates in response to contextual factors. The foundational model proposed by MacIntyre et al. (1998) identifies communicative confidence, anxiety, motivation, and intergroup climate as key determinants of WTC, with high anxiety typically dampening willingness and strong self-confidence enhancing it.

In the Chinese EFL university context, Peng and Woodrow (2010) conducted a large-scale structural equation modeling study and found that classroom environment strongly predicted all relevant factors including WTC, and that motivation influenced WTC indirectly through increased confidence. Their model highlighted the critical role of supportive, low-anxiety learning environments in enabling students to take communicative risks. Truong et al. (2025) contributed further understanding of motivational dynamics in a Vietnamese setting, finding that EFL students at a private southern Vietnamese university were highly motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically, with extrinsic motivations primarily oriented toward career advancement and communication with foreigners.

Research specifically examining WTC barriers among Vietnamese EFL learners has identified a recurring constellation of obstacles. Nguyen and Vu (2024) conducted a phenomenological study and found that Vietnamese EFL learners cited limited vocabulary, poor pronunciation, and low self-confidence as the primary barriers to oral communication in English. Fear of negative evaluation and cultural norms around face-saving were also identified as factors that suppress communicative willingness. These findings resonate with broader research on affective filtering in language learning, which suggests that when learners perceive themselves as linguistically inadequate or fear embarrassment, they are likely to withdraw from communicative participation rather than risk exposure.

### ***2.3. Theoretical Framework***

This study integrates a socio-cognitive view of WTC with a sociocultural understanding of translanguaging pedagogy. Following MacIntyre et al. (1998), WTC is taken as a central

outcome of effective language instruction, one that is optimized when learners experience high confidence, low anxiety, and a supportive interactional environment. Translanguaging is conceptualized as an instructional practice with the potential to produce precisely these conditions: by permitting first language support, it can lower affective filters and make students more willing to take communicative risks in English (Cong-Lem, 2025; Zam Zam et al., 2025).

The Proximal Language Scaffolding model proposed by Cong-Lem (2025), rooted in Vygotskian sociocultural theory, provides an additional theoretical anchor. In this model, strategic first language use within the zone of proximal development enables students to bridge the gap between what they can currently express in English and what they are trying to communicate, thereby reducing anxiety and building communicative competence incrementally. Huynh (2026), working from a narrative inquiry perspective, similarly found that translanguaging supported a more inclusive classroom climate that affirmed multilingual identities and was linked to greater engagement, motivation, and self-confidence among Vietnamese university students.

The theoretical framework thus posits a set of mediated relationships: translanguaging practices, shaped by teacher language policy, are expected to reduce speaking anxiety, increase confidence, and improve comprehension, and these improvements in affective and cognitive conditions are in turn expected to enhance students' WTC. The framework acknowledges that teacher language policy plays a constitutive role, since classrooms operating under strict English-only mandates will structurally limit the availability of translanguaging as a resource (Pham and Vu, 2023).

#### *2.4. Previous Studies*

The empirical literature on the relationship between translanguaging and willingness to communicate (WTC) remains limited, particularly in Vietnamese university contexts and from student-centered perspectives. Research on WTC in Vietnam shows that learners' communicative behavior is strongly shaped by affective and linguistic barriers. Nguyen and Vu (2024) identify key obstacles such as limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, low self-confidence, and anxiety, alongside cultural factors like fear of losing face. Although translanguaging is not directly addressed, this work highlights the fragile conditions under which WTC develops and underscores the need for supportive classroom practices that can reduce these barriers.

From the perspective of teaching practices, translanguaging has been widely recognized as a useful pedagogical tool. Pham and Vu (2023) find that teachers generally employ it to scaffold grammar and vocabulary explanations and to build rapport, though its use is constrained by institutional language policies. Extending this, Cong-Lem (2025) demonstrates that translanguaging can be implemented strategically to check comprehension, emphasize key content, and reduce student anxiety. Through the concept of Proximal Language Scaffolding, translanguaging is framed as a deliberate means of supporting learners within their zone of proximal development, suggesting its potential to create conditions more conducive to WTC.

Learner-focused studies further illuminate both the benefits and tensions associated with translanguaging. Trinh (2025) reports that students perceive it as enhancing comprehension, participation, and inclusivity, especially among lower-proficiency learners, although some express concern about overreliance on the first language. Similarly, Vo and Nguyen (2025)

show that flexible multilingual practices support not only understanding but also students' sense of identity and classroom engagement. In higher education contexts, Huynh and Huynh (2026) demonstrate that translanguaging facilitates comprehension of complex content while increasing participation, and Huynh (2026) highlights its role in fostering motivation, confidence, and an inclusive learning environment.

Finally, Truong et al. (2025) show that Vietnamese EFL students are generally highly motivated, particularly for instrumental reasons, yet this motivation does not always translate into actual communication. This gap between motivation and WTC points to the importance of classroom conditions that enable students to act on their intentions. Overall, the literature suggests that while WTC is highly sensitive to affective factors, translanguaging can help reduce anxiety, enhance comprehension, and promote participation. However, existing research has largely focused on teacher perspectives or non-speaking contexts. There remains a need for qualitative, student-centered research in speaking classrooms, which the present study seeks to address.

### **3. METHOD**

#### ***3.1. Research Design***

This study adopted a qualitative case study design, which is well suited to exploratory inquiry into complex social phenomena within a bounded, real-world context (Yin, 2018). The case under investigation was a Speaking course at a Vietnamese university in which translanguaging was observed to occur naturally and strategically. A qualitative approach was chosen because the research questions required attending to the subjective experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of learners – dimensions that are not reducible to quantitative measurement. Thematic analysis, following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2006), was employed as the primary analytical method, enabling the researchers to identify patterns of meaning across participants' accounts while remaining attentive to individual variation.

#### ***3.2. Participants***

Participants were seventeen non-English-major undergraduate students enrolled in a Speaking course at a university in Vietnam. The group comprised ten female and seven male students, ranging in age from 19 to 22 years old. Their academic disciplines included business administration, information technology, and tourism and hospitality, reflecting the non-specialist English profile typical of the institution's general education program. All participants were assessed at B1 proficiency level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, and were therefore at an intermediate stage of English development where speaking demands frequently outpace current linguistic resources. Purposeful sampling was used to select participants who were likely to provide rich, relevant data: specifically, students who had experienced translanguaging in the course and who were willing to reflect on its effects on their communicative behavior. Pseudonyms are used throughout this study to protect participant anonymity.

#### ***3.3. Data Collection***

Data were collected through two main sources: semi-structured individual interviews and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted in Vietnamese and English, allowing participants to express themselves freely in whichever language felt most natural – a methodological choice that was itself consistent with the translanguaging ethos of

the study context. Each interview lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. Interview questions were designed to elicit participants' perceptions of translanguaging, their feelings about speaking English in class, the factors they identified as helping or hindering their communicative participation, and examples of how translanguaging had or had not affected their willingness to communicate on specific occasions. Classroom observations were conducted across multiple lessons to document actual instances of translanguaging and to note patterns of student participation. Field notes were taken during observations and served as a basis for probing in subsequent interviews.

### 3.4. Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using the six-phase thematic analysis framework described by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Interview recordings were transcribed in full and, where Vietnamese was used, translated into English by the lead researcher, a bilingual speaker. Initial coding was conducted inductively, with codes derived from the data rather than from predetermined categories. Codes were subsequently grouped into broader patterns and refined iteratively in dialogue with the theoretical framework. Table 1 illustrates the coding process through representative examples.

**Table 1. Sample Coding Process**

Raw Data Extract (Interview)	Initial Code	Sub-theme	Main Theme
"When the teacher uses Vietnamese to explain, I understand better and then I feel brave enough to speak."	L1 explanation increases understanding and speaking courage	Translanguaging as comprehension scaffold	Translanguaging reduces affective barriers
"I worry about my pronunciation being wrong, so I stay quiet even if I know the answer."	Fear of pronunciation error suppresses participation	Pronunciation anxiety	Barriers to WTC
"When my classmates also mix languages, I feel it is normal and I am not afraid."	Peer translanguaging normalizes mixed-language use	Classroom climate and peer support	Contextual factors shaping WTC
"I started to try speaking more in English after the teacher said we can use Vietnamese when we are stuck."	Teacher permission for L1 increases English risk-taking	Teacher language policy and affective safety	Translanguaging shapes communicative behavior
"Sometimes I want to just say everything in Vietnamese and not try English at all."	Risk of avoidance through L1 overreliance	L1 dependency as unintended consequence	Barriers to WTC

### 3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was obtained from the researchers' institutional review board prior to data collection. All participants were informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time without consequence, and the measures in place to protect their confidentiality. Informed consent was obtained in writing. Interview data were stored securely and accessible only to the research team. Pseudonyms are used in all reporting to ensure that individual participants cannot be identified from the data presented.

## **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Analysis of interview transcripts and classroom observation data yielded three overarching themes: (1) translanguaging as a scaffold for comprehension and confidence; (2) factors that constrain and enable WTC in the translanguaging classroom; and (3) the behavioral effects of translanguaging on communicative participation. These themes are presented and discussed in turn, with interview excerpts serving as illustrative evidence and findings interpreted in relation to the theoretical framework and prior research.

### ***4.1. Translanguaging as a Scaffold for Comprehension and Confidence***

The most consistently reported perception among participants was that translanguaging reduced the cognitive and affective demands of speaking in English by providing a bilingual safety net. When teachers used Vietnamese to explain difficult vocabulary or grammatical structures, students reported feeling more equipped to attempt English production.

*"When the teacher explains in Vietnamese, I know exactly what I have to say in English. I feel less confused and then I can actually speak." (Participant 7)*

*"Before, I just sat and listened because I was not sure what the task was asking. When the teacher explains in Vietnamese, suddenly I understand and I want to join the discussion." (Participant 11)*

This finding aligns with Cong-Lem's (2025) notion of Proximal Language Scaffolding, in which strategic first language use within the zone of proximal development enables students to bridge the gap between current and target competence. By clarifying meaning in Vietnamese, the teacher effectively reduced cognitive load, freeing attentional resources for English production. The pattern also resonates with Trinh's (2025) finding that Vietnamese learners reported that translanguaging increased their comprehension and, by extension, their opportunities to participate. Huynh and Huynh (2026) similarly documented that concept explanation through Vietnamese was the most frequently occurring translanguaging function in an ESP medical classroom, directly enabling students to engage with content they would otherwise have found inaccessible.

Several participants specifically noted that teacher-initiated translanguaging signaled that the classroom was a low-risk space, a perception that appears to have directly influenced their communicative behavior:

*"The teacher said we can use Vietnamese when we are stuck. After that, I started to try speaking more in English, because I knew that if I failed, it would be okay." (Participant 3)*

*"I used to be afraid to answer because I thought my English had to be perfect. But when the teacher mixed languages too, I realized that making mistakes is normal and I stopped worrying so much." (Participant 16)*

These observations support the theoretical model in which teacher language policy serves as an antecedent to affective conditions: by explicitly legitimizing first language use, the teacher reduced inhibition and heightened students' willingness to take communicative risks. This is consistent with Huynh's (2026) finding that translanguaging supported a more inclusive classroom climate that affirmed multilingual identities and was associated with greater engagement and self-confidence. Similarly, Zam Zam et al. (2025) found that in an Indonesian EFL context, students' positive perceptions of translanguaging were correlated with higher WTC, with reduced anxiety and increased confidence identified as the key mediating mechanisms.

At the same time, participants distinguished between different forms of translanguaging and their relative effects. Teacher-initiated use of Vietnamese for explanation and scaffolding was received positively, while extended or unstructured switching was sometimes perceived as reducing the overall quality of English exposure:

*"When the teacher uses Vietnamese to explain grammar, it helps. But sometimes we spend too much time in Vietnamese and then I feel like I did not practice enough English." (Participant 12)*

*"I prefer when the teacher uses Vietnamese only for a moment, to explain one thing, and then we go back to English. If it is too much Vietnamese, I feel like I am not in an English class anymore." (Participant 8)*

This nuance suggests that the positive effects of translanguaging on WTC are not unconditional but depend on how strategically and sparingly it is deployed. The finding echoes concerns raised by Trinh (2025), whose student participants similarly worried that excessive first language use could foster dependency and slow English development. It also reinforces Cong-Lem's (2025) argument for intentional rather than unreflective translanguaging: the goal is not to replace English with Vietnamese but to use Vietnamese as a temporary scaffold that is gradually withdrawn as English competence grows.

#### **4.2. Factors Influencing Willingness to Communicate**

Participants identified a range of interlocking factors that shaped their WTC in the translanguaging classroom. These factors were both individual – related to personal linguistic resources and affective states – and contextual, related to the classroom environment and peer dynamics.

Vocabulary limitations were the most frequently cited individual barrier. Participants consistently described reaching a communicative threshold beyond which the absence of a needed word caused them to withdraw from interaction:

*"I know what I want to say but I do not know the English word. So I just keep quiet. It is very frustrating." (Participant 5)*

*"Sometimes I prepare something to say and then I realize I am missing a word in the middle of the sentence. I lose confidence and I just stop." (Participant 10)*

*"My ideas are in Vietnamese but when I try to find the English, sometimes it disappears. I know translanguaging helps because at least I can start with some Vietnamese words and the teacher understands what I am trying to say." (Participant 1)*

These accounts corroborate Nguyen and Vu's (2024) phenomenological study, which identified limited vocabulary as the primary obstacle to WTC among Vietnamese EFL learners. They also illuminate the mechanism through which translanguaging can relieve this particular barrier: by permitting partial first language use, it allows students to communicate the substance of their ideas even when English lexical resources fall short, preventing complete communicative withdrawal. Truong et al. (2025) further highlighted that while Vietnamese EFL students are often highly motivated to communicate in English for instrumental purposes, this motivational readiness does not automatically translate into WTC when linguistic resources are perceived as insufficient.

Pronunciation anxiety emerged as a second recurring barrier. Several participants reported suppressing their oral contributions because of fear that incorrect pronunciation would attract negative attention from peers or the teacher:

*"I worry about my pronunciation being wrong, so I stay quiet even if I know the answer. I do not want my classmates to laugh at me." (Participant 9)*

*"One time I tried to say a word and my classmates smiled. After that I did not want to speak anymore that lesson. I just answered in very short sentences so they could not hear my pronunciation clearly." (Participant 4)*

This face-saving concern reflects the cultural dimension of WTC discussed in the literature (Nguyen and Vu, 2024) and underscores the importance of affective safety as a precondition for communicative participation. The classroom observation data supported this interpretation: students who appeared most active in verbal interaction were also those who most frequently received positive, non-evaluative feedback from the teacher. Notably, on several observed occasions, the teacher's use of Vietnamese to normalize imperfect English production appeared to break the silence of reticent students, at least temporarily.

Peer dynamics within the translanguaging classroom also emerged as a salient contextual factor. When classmates were observed using a mix of Vietnamese and English, participants reported feeling that this normalized mixed-language behavior and reduced the social risk of imperfect English production:

*"When I see my friends also mixing Vietnamese and English, I feel it is normal and I am not embarrassed to do the same. I feel more comfortable to try." (Participant 14)*

*"In my previous class, everyone tried to speak only English and if you made a mistake it felt very obvious. Here, because we all mix a bit, I feel less pressure." (Participant 17)*

*"I think the most important thing is that the teacher and my classmates do not judge me. When I see the teacher also switching sometimes, it gives me permission to do it too." (Participant 13)*

This points to the role of translanguaging in shaping the social norms of the classroom in ways that support WTC. Peng and Woodrow (2010) highlighted classroom environment as one of the strongest predictors of WTC, and the present data suggest that peer translanguaging is one concrete mechanism through which a supportive environment is constituted. Huynh and Huynh (2026) similarly found that the use of shared language resources in an ESP classroom supported rapport building and more active student participation, while Huynh (2026) documented that translanguaging sustained a sense of belonging and inclusivity among multilingual learners in an academic English course.

### **4.3. Translanguaging and Communicative Behavior**

Beyond shaping perceptions and attitudes, translanguaging was also found to influence participants' actual communicative behavior in the classroom. A particularly salient pattern in the observation data was the temporal relationship between teacher translanguaging and subsequent student speech: on several occasions, teacher use of Vietnamese to clarify a task or explain a concept was followed by a noticeable increase in student verbal output.

Participants themselves described this pattern when reflecting on specific lesson episodes:

*"There was one lesson where we had to discuss a topic about the environment. I did not know some words. The teacher explained in Vietnamese and then I could start talking. Before that explanation, I had nothing to say." (Participant 2)*

*"In one class we were doing a role play and I was very confused about what to do. The teacher explained the instructions in Vietnamese and after that I felt ready. I spoke more in that activity than in any other class." (Participant 15)*

These accounts illustrate translanguaging functioning as what García and Wei (2014) describe as a meaning-making bridge: by drawing on Vietnamese to activate and consolidate conceptual knowledge, students were able to marshal sufficient linguistic resources to engage in English discussion. The episodes also illustrate the mediating role of comprehension in the pathway from translanguaging to WTC, a relationship highlighted in the theoretical framework and supported by Cong-Lem's (2025) classroom findings, as well as by Huynh and Huynh's (2026) observation that comprehension checking through Vietnamese was one of the most impactful functions of translanguaging in their ESP setting.

A further behavioral pattern observed was that students who initially used Vietnamese to frame their ideas were more likely to then attempt an English articulation of those ideas, rather than remaining silent. This suggests that translanguaging functioned as a communicative entry point rather than a terminal substitution for English:

*"Sometimes I start in Vietnamese just to organize my thoughts, and then I translate into English. It is like a bridge. Without the Vietnamese part, I would just stay silent because I could not organize my thoughts fast enough." (Participant 6)*

It is worth noting that Participant 6 also, in a different part of the interview, expressed the opposite tendency, describing moments when translanguaging functioned as an avoidance strategy rather than a bridge. This individual's account is therefore presented in both sections because it reflects the genuine ambivalence that several participants expressed: translanguaging served different functions at different moments within the same learner's experience.

Indeed, four of the seventeen participants described occasions when the availability of Vietnamese reduced their motivation to attempt English, as it offered an easier communicative path:

*"Sometimes I think: why should I try to say it in English when I can just say it in Vietnamese? The teacher will understand. So sometimes I take the easy way."*  
(Participant 6)

*"If I know I can switch to Vietnamese, sometimes I do not push myself to find the English word. I just give up on the English too quickly."* (Participant 3)

This represents an important empirical qualification to the generally positive picture of translanguaging's effects. The finding resonates with Trinh's (2025) observation that some Vietnamese learners expressed concern about overreliance on the first language as a potential downside of translanguaging pedagogy. It suggests that while translanguaging can lower affective barriers and support communicative risk-taking, its effects are not uniformly positive and depend in part on students' own strategic orientations toward language use.

The overall picture that emerges from the data is one of translanguaging as a powerful but context-sensitive tool: it consistently reduced anxiety and increased confidence for the majority of participants, and these affective changes were associated with greater communicative engagement. Yet the same practices could, for some learners in some moments, function as a comfortable alternative to English production rather than a scaffold toward it. This duality underscores the importance of intentional, strategic translanguaging as described by Cong-Lem (2025), where teachers consciously calibrate first language use to support rather than replace English output.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This qualitative case study investigated how seventeen non-English-major EFL students at a Vietnamese university perceived translanguaging in their Speaking course, what factors shaped their WTC, and how translanguaging practices influenced their actual communicative behavior. The findings indicate that translanguaging functioned primarily as an affective and cognitive scaffold: teacher-initiated use of Vietnamese reduced speaking anxiety, clarified comprehension, and created a classroom climate in which communicative risk-taking felt safer. Vocabulary limitations, pronunciation anxiety, and face-saving concerns were identified as the principal barriers to WTC, while peer translanguaging and teacher language policy emerged as important contextual enablers. The relationship between translanguaging and communicative behavior was broadly positive but not unconditional, with four of the seventeen participants noting that access to Vietnamese could, in some instances, function as an avoidance strategy rather than a bridge to English production.

The study makes several contributions to the literature on translanguaging and WTC in the Vietnamese EFL context. Theoretically, it provides empirical support for the mediating role of anxiety and confidence in the pathway from translanguaging practice to WTC, as predicted by MacIntyre et al.'s (1998) situational model and Cong-Lem's (2025) Proximal Language Scaffolding framework. Pedagogically, the findings suggest that EFL speaking instructors in Vietnam should consider intentionally legitimizing students' full linguistic repertoire rather than enforcing strict English-only norms. Explicitly framing first language use as a communicative resource rather than a failure of English can lower the affective threshold for participation and increase the quantity and quality of English output over time. Teachers should, however, calibrate translanguaging strategically, ensuring that first language support serves as a scaffold toward English production rather than a substitute for it. These implications extend the calls made by Huynh and Huynh (2026) and Huynh (2026) for stronger recognition of translanguaging as a legitimate pedagogical resource in Vietnamese higher education.

This study is not without limitations. The sample was small and drawn from a single course at one institution in southern Vietnam, which limits the transferability of findings to other contexts, proficiency levels, and regions. Regarding Research Question 3 specifically, claims about students' actual communicative behavior rest primarily on self-reported interview data rather than systematic behavioral coding of classroom interaction. Future studies addressing RQ3 would benefit from integrating systematic turn-taking analyses or interaction coding schemes alongside interview data. Additionally, because the study focused on student perspectives, teacher decision-making around translanguaging remains underexplored. Future research could profitably adopt longitudinal designs to examine how the relationship between translanguaging and WTC evolves over a semester, include both student and teacher perspectives within the same study, and extend investigation to different proficiency levels and educational contexts.

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**Exploring Students' Willingness to Communicate in a Translanguaging Classroom: A Qualitative Study in Vietnam**

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