

# AI Support for Translanguaging in International School Classrooms

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**Abstract:** Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that utilizes multilingual learners' full linguistic repertoires, is especially relevant in linguistically diverse international school contexts. While translanguaging holds potential to improve academic outcomes and support students' linguistic identities, it remains difficult to implement due to language barriers. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can support translanguaging practices by providing in-the-moment language support and translations. This study explores the connections between international school teachers' beliefs and practices around translanguaging, multilingualism, technology and AI. We compare the survey responses from 105 international school teachers and 232 U.S.-based teachers, analyzing the correlation of scores derived from Likert-scale items. Our findings indicate that international school teachers' translanguaging beliefs and multilingual beliefs are significantly correlated with their reported translanguaging classroom practices, international school teachers' beliefs on decoloniality are significantly correlated with their beliefs on translanguaging, multilingualism and their translanguaging practices, and there were no significant correlations between teachers' AI attitudes and their other reported beliefs and practices. In contrast, U.S. teachers had no significant correlation between translanguaging beliefs and translanguaging practices and had a significant correlation between their translanguaging beliefs and their AI attitudes. We discuss how the structural and cultural contexts of international schools may enable more organic translanguaging, teachers' nuanced views on decoloniality and AI and how these contextual differences may impact the design of AI tools to support equitable, multilingual education through translanguaging.

**Keywords:** Translanguaging, Survey, Teacher Beliefs, Current Practices, AI

## 1. Introduction

Translanguaging is a theory from bilingual education that encourages students to utilize their entire linguistic repertoires (Garcia & Wei, 2014). This means going beyond socially and politically defined categories of languages (Otheguy, et. al., 2015) and moving fluidly between all languages in the classroom. Translanguaging is a natural practice in the daily lives of multilingual speakers, but has not been explicitly accepted in many educational contexts where stricter language separation may be the norm. This is documented in the case of U.S. classrooms, where research is being done on how students and teachers feel about translanguaging (Ticheloven, et. al., 2021) and education has historically been rooted in monoglossic ideologies (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Marsh, 2018;). Beyond the U.S., in the context of international schools or schools in different countries, there may be more factors at play which allow for translanguaging practices in the classroom.

In the case of international schools, educators may be following educational policies and structures that are influenced by Western perspectives that may not value students' natural multilingual abilities (Bettney Heidt & Nordmeyer, 2023) or there may be a focus on national languages in the curriculum that do not leave room for the complexities of their multilingual and multicultural student populations thus ignoring minority languages (Cenoz, 2017).

Translanguaging as a pedagogical framework aims to address these linguistic injustices in the classroom, by viewing students' nuanced multilingual abilities as an asset and making an active effort to bring these into the classroom. This can lead to better

academic outcomes where students are able to use their entire linguistic repertoires to support meaning making and communicate their understanding (Garcia & Wei, 2014) and support the development of students' linguistic identities thus increasing their self confidence and autonomy (Vogel & Garcia, 2017). Especially in international contexts, it would be beneficial to incorporate this framework into students' regular coursework to have their classroom practices reflect their daily lives as multilingual learners.

While translanguaging can be helpful for multilingual learners in theory, it can be difficult for teachers to put this theory into practice (Ticheloven, et. al., 2023). There may be school or national policies that prevent teachers from trying to incorporate translanguaging in their classrooms (Cenoz, 2017). Even if teachers are allowed to practice translanguaging, there may be logistical reasons that make this difficult to do - such as the linguistic diversity of the classroom or teachers' language backgrounds. If students speak different languages from each other and teachers are also not fluent in all of these languages, it can be challenging to allow and encourage multilingual learners to draw fluidly on their languages and to have these contributions be communicated and accepted by all participants in the classroom.

Although there may still be a need for deeper shifts around mindsets and policies about translanguaging, in terms of the logistical challenges, AI can be a helpful tool to facilitate translanguaging in classrooms where it may have been challenging in the past (Donley, 2024; Yang & Lin, 2025). Translation tools, generating text in different languages, and AI as a conversational partner are some of the ways in which AI, or Multilingual Large Language Models (MLLMs), can support teachers in encouraging students to utilize their entire linguistic repertoires.

In order to effectively implement these technological solutions, it is important to collaborate with teachers and consider their current perceptions and practices. Teacher perception has a significant impact on how technology is used in the classroom and what effect it has on the students (Farjon, et. al., 2017). In this paper, we focus on international school teachers' beliefs on translanguaging, multilingualism, their technology and translanguaging practices, their attitudes on AI, and how all of these might relate to each other. This information can be used as a basis for future work on AI implementation to support translanguaging in international classrooms. We will be exploring the following research questions:

1. *What are the connections between international school teachers' reported beliefs and practices about translanguaging, multilingualism, technology, and AI?*
2. *How do their beliefs and practices compare with U.S.-based teachers?*

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1 Survey Design and Development**

We designed a survey on translanguaging and AI inspired from past surveys on these topics (Samperio, 2017; Leonet, et. al., 2020; Dockrell, et. al., 2022) and relevant literature to fill in the gaps (Garcia & Wei, 2014; Vogel & Garcia, 2017; Alharbi, 2023). We conducted four think-alouds with current or past teachers of multilingual learners and two expert reviews with experts in education for multilingual learners and refined the survey further based on feedback from these. The survey took around 25 - 30 minutes to complete.

The Qualtrics survey was distributed via Prolific and University of Wisconsin-Madison's mailing list of teachers in June 2024. We received 232 complete responses to this survey from teachers of multilingual learners across the U.S. teaching a range of grade levels, with different years of experience, and teaching various subjects.

This survey was then adapted for teachers in an international school context. There were eight Likert items on decoloniality added that were relevant to language pedagogies and translanguaging especially in an international context. We drew from literature on multilingual practices and decoloniality (Bettney Heidt 2024, Bettney Heidt & Nordmeyer 2023) to develop these Likert items. Some examples are '*I would like to encourage the use of minority languages (e.g., Quechua, Sami) in my classroom*', '*It is important for students to*

*become proficient in standard and accepted English*'. We also modified other Likert items from the U.S. survey to account for the difference in context - this included changing terms (e.g., bi/multilingual learners to multilingual learners) and considering the language dynamics in international schools compared to local schools in the U.S.. We conducted three teacher think alouds with current international school teachers and one review with an expert in international education to check for any questions that would not translate to this context and any missing elements that might be particular to international schools. Many changes were made to the demographic section to consider teachers' backgrounds and their school and classroom contexts.

## 2.2 Survey Distribution

The survey was distributed in collaboration with the Multilingual Learning Research Center's (MLRC), a research center within the UW-Madison School of Education. The MLRC collaborates with over 100 international schools worldwide through the MLRC School Network, a research-practice partnership focused on exploring common problems of practice in teaching multilingual learners. The MLRC distributed the survey through its mailing list and social media accounts. This intentional sampling allowed for a focus on international school teachers which matched our participation requirements but it is important to note it may contribute to sampling bias, as the teachers in this network may have different beliefs and practices than the general international school teacher population.

We received 105 complete responses: 55% of the teachers' schools were based in Asia (including China, Singapore, India etc.), 14% from European countries (including the Netherlands, Germany, UK etc.), 11% from North America (all of these were based in the U.S.), 11% from South America (including Brazil, Guatemala etc.) and the few remaining respondents were teaching in Morocco, Mozambique or Dubai. 70% of the teachers were from MLRC schools and the rest were from other international schools. The majority were from teachers with more than 5 years of experience working in international education (11 or more years: 56; 6 to 10 years: 32; 3 to 5 years: 13; 1 to 2 years: 2; Less than 1 year: 2), most reported having more than 50% multilingual students in their classroom (More than 50%: 85; Around 50%: 17; Less than 30% : 3), and they taught a variety of age groups (2 to 4 years: 6; 5 to 10 years: 54; 11 to 13 years: 55; 14 to 16 years: 46; 17 to 19 years: 24).

## 2.3 Data Analysis and Score Curation

We curated scores to approximate teachers' perceptions and practices based on their responses to the relevant Likert scale questions in the survey. This allowed us to find patterns across teachers and search for any relevant correlations, using Pearson's correlation analysis on these calculated scores.

For the scores determining their alignment with theories of translanguaging, decoloniality, beliefs on multilingualism, and attitudes on AI - we first assigned a positive and negative valence to each Likert item in the relevant section of the survey. The scores for each respondent were calculated based on their Likert scale response by adding a value between -2 and +2 for each item based on the valence and relevant theory. Figure 1 provides examples of positive and negative valence items for the translanguaging score and how they would be added to the final score for each respondent. These scores were used to aggregate information from respondents allowing us to analyze teachers' overall perceptions of these theories and how they might relate to one another as well as their classroom practices.

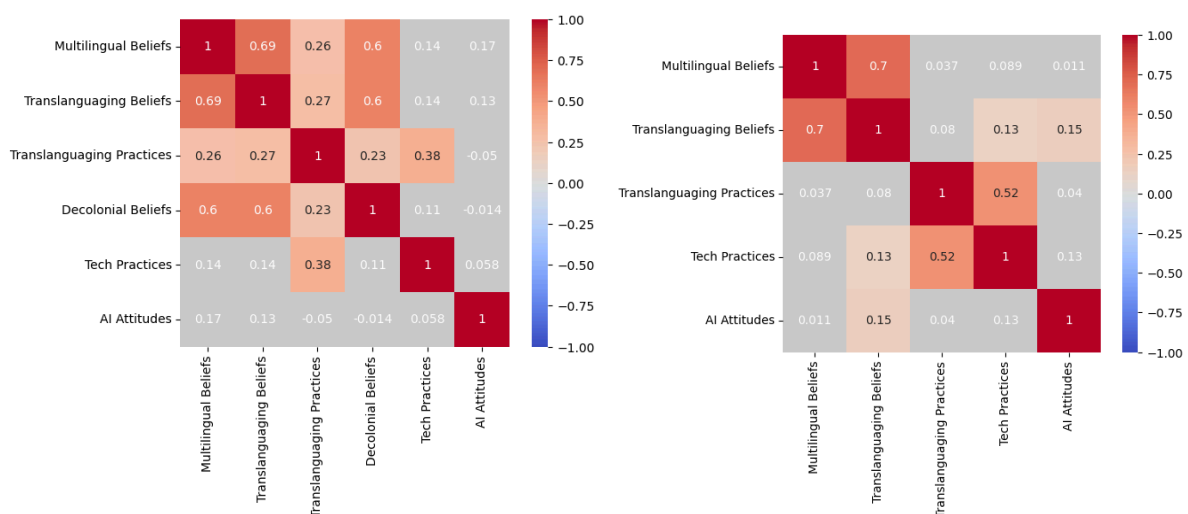
<b>ML (+)</b>	Item: Speaking more than one language is an advantage for learning at school
<b>ML (-)</b>	Item: Teaching students in more than one language (e.g., English and Spanish) results in language confusion
<b>TL (+)</b>	Item: I would feel comfortable if my students switched between their language(s) in my classroom
<b>TL (-)</b>	Item: It is best to keep languages separate when teaching

*Figure 1.* Sample Likert items and valences assigned. ML = Beliefs about multilingualism. TL = Beliefs about translanguageing.

For the score calculating the reported frequency of translanguageing practices and technology practices amongst students in the classroom, we used the questions that addressed this directly. There were five Likert items on allowing students to translanguage in different contexts, these were added up to determine a score between 0 to 20. There were 11 Likert items on the same scale on teachers' reported use of technology in different contexts and these were added up to determine a score between 0 and 44.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1 *RQ1: What are the connections between international school teachers' reported beliefs and practices about translanguageing, multilingualism, technology and AI?*



*Figure 2.* Correlation heatmap of constructed beliefs and practices of teachers from international (*left*; n = 105) and U.S.-based (*right*; n = 232) schools. Gray values are not significant (p > 0.05).

We found a significant positive correlation between teachers' beliefs about translanguageing and multilingualism (0.69,  $p < 0.01$ ). This was expected, given that both theories reflect asset-based understandings of students' linguistic abilities.

We also found a significant positive correlation between teachers' beliefs about translanguageing and their reported translanguageing practices (0.27,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as a significant positive correlation between teachers' beliefs about multilingualism and reported translanguageing practices (0.26,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that teachers' classroom practices may be slightly aligned with their own theoretical or pedagogical beliefs, such that teachers that have positive views towards translanguageing and multilingualism may report higher frequencies of translanguageing practices in their classrooms.

There were significant correlations across different beliefs and practices with teachers' reported beliefs on decoloniality. There was a significant positive correlation between teachers' beliefs on decoloniality and their beliefs on translanguageing (0.6,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as with their beliefs on multilingualism (0.6,  $p < 0.01$ ). This indicates that teachers that have positive views on these theories also tend to adopt critical views on coloniality in the context of international education. There was a significant positive correlation between teachers' beliefs on decoloniality and their translanguageing practices (0.23,  $p < 0.01$ ), showing that teachers' anti-colonial views might also have an effect on students' language practices in the classroom.

There was a significant positive correlation between teachers' reported translanguaging practices and their technology practices (0.38,  $p < 0.01$ ). Some hypotheses for this correlation may be a shared open-mindedness - where teachers are willing to adopt both new technologies and new pedagogies - or it may be an increased use of translation tools that accounts for the positive correlation - where teachers that have a lot of students translanguaging need to use technology more often in order to communicate.

There were no significant correlations between teachers' AI attitudes and any of the other scores. Whether teachers have positive or negative views on translanguaging, multilingualism, and decoloniality do not seem to imply positive or negative views on AI, as there was a wide variety of qualitative responses. For example, some teachers who showed positive attitudes about translanguaging and multilingualism had concerns about AI. One teacher said, "When translating some words or expressions with specific cultural connotations, [AI] may not be able to accurately convey their meanings, leading to misunderstandings among multilingual students..." On the other hand, there were teachers who had positive attitudes about translanguaging and multilingualism and positive AI attitudes: "I do see that, when we gave students access to a bot to help them improve their writing, several students who are quieter made significant use of it to get feedback, which was great to see."

Connected to the decoloniality perspective, some respondents had a negative attitude toward AI while they stressed the importance of multilingual and multicultural backgrounds. They viewed AI as a tool that contains bias and is linguistically and culturally colonized. One teacher said "AI systems trained on data primarily from Western cultures may exhibit biases towards "WEIRD" (Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, Democratic) perspectives, neglecting the views and experiences of minority groups, women, and underprivileged communities." Another teacher wrote, "There could be a lack of cultural sensitivity in AI-generated content, which may mislead or offend multilingual students."

AI attitudes did not have any significant correlation with reported technology practices (i.e., use of laptops, iPads, translation tools, Google search, classroom management systems, etc.). Teachers had more nuanced views on AI (i.e., chatbots, AI used for students' writing, creating class materials for teachers, etc.) that do not necessarily apply to their reported technology practices, implying teachers view these technologies as fundamentally different from AI.

### 3.2 *RQ2: How do their beliefs and practices compare with U.S.-based teachers?*

Teachers in the U.S. and international teachers had a significant positive correlation between their multilingual beliefs and translanguaging beliefs. However in the U.S. survey, there was no significant correlation between their translanguaging beliefs and their translanguaging practices, and no significant correlation between their multilingual beliefs and their translanguaging practices either. This indicates that there is a discrepancy between U.S. teachers' views on translanguaging and whether they are able to enact these views through practices in their own classrooms. Thus it is notable that for international school teachers there is a significant positive correlation between teachers' beliefs and their practices. This might indicate that translanguaging happens more naturally in international classrooms, as reported by teachers. Potential hypotheses for why international school teachers might be able to translate their beliefs to practices while U.S. teachers may find this more challenging could be because of the naturally multilingual nature of international classrooms or because teachers have more autonomy and are not constricted by school policy. When asked about their school policy, several teachers mentioned a positive attitude towards informal translanguaging - "English as the main teaching language. Bilingual communication is encouraged in daily interactions," or "primarily uses English as the language of instruction but we encourage the use of any language that assists in learning."

U.S. teachers' responses showed a significant positive correlation between their translanguaging practices and their technology practices (0.52,  $p < 0.01$ ). International school teachers had a similar correlation, though it was not as strong (0.38,  $p < 0.01$ ). International school teachers had no other significant correlations with their reported

technology practices nor their attitudes on AI. Whereas U.S. teachers had a correlation with their translanguaging beliefs and technology practices (0.13,  $p < 0.05$ ) and their translanguaging beliefs and AI attitudes (0.15,  $p < 0.05$ ).

## 4. Discussion

We compared survey results for international school teachers and U.S. school teachers and found that international school teachers are able to translate their translanguaging beliefs into classroom practices, teachers' translanguaging beliefs and practices are correlated with their beliefs on decoloniality, and their attitudes towards AI had no significant correlations with any of the beliefs or practices. This can help inform future AI developments to support multilingual learners in international schools: by considering teachers' beliefs and current practices AI design can be better aligned with classroom realities.

### 4.1 *International school teachers' translanguaging beliefs are positively correlated with their reported translanguaging practices*

In consideration of the stronger correlation between translanguaging beliefs and practices amongst international school teachers compared to U.S. teachers, we suggest this may be related to the higher levels of autonomy available to international school teachers. In contrast to national public schools, which are influenced by multiple layers of national or regional governance, international schools typically function with a degree of independence from local educational authorities. This autonomy frequently results in policy compression, as international schools develop and implement their own programs and policies (Bettney Heidt & Nordmeyer, 2021). Within this context, international school teachers may be able to implement translanguaging practices aligned with their beliefs in ways that are not possible in a more policy-constricted space within the U.S.

Another contributing factor may be that in recent years, there has been a noted increase in linguistic diversity within international schools which may contribute to the necessity for international school teachers to enact translanguaging practices within their classrooms. Recent research proposes that international schools serve mainly students who do not come from English-speaking schools (Tanu 2018, Crisfield 2023). We suggest international school teachers translanguaging beliefs and practices may be more aligned because of the necessity to find ways to support their multilingual students on a daily basis.

### 4.2 *International school teachers' beliefs on decoloniality are correlated with their positive beliefs on translanguaging and multilingualism and their translanguaging practices*

Our results demonstrate a positive correlation between beliefs about decoloniality, translanguaging and multilingualism. While we do not have comparative data from the U.S. study for this correlation, there is some evidence to suggest an emerging relationship between decolonization and critical understandings of language in international schools. Bettney Heidt and Nordmeyer (2023) link international school educators' growing awareness of critical approaches, such as decolonization, to shifts from monolingual to multilingual mindsets, including embracing translanguaging. However, these changes are not yet widespread, as shown in Bettney Heidt's (2023) case study of a Colombian international school, where beliefs ranged from maintaining English's perceived superiority to critically addressing colonial mindsets, often in shifting and contradictory ways. Our study extends this work by connecting beliefs about decoloniality with critical understandings of languages.

A weaker positive correlation also existed between decoloniality and translanguaging practices themselves. López (2017) notes, "Conceptually there are numerous contributions regarding decolonization and its emancipatory potential in multicultural and multilingual contexts. Notwithstanding, the field is practically virgin regarding recommendations for action and particularly concerning the school and the classroom" (p. 302). Further research is

required to examine how teachers may or may not enact their beliefs about decoloniality through their classroom practices.

#### 4.3 *There is no significant correlation between teachers' AI attitudes and their translanguaging, multilingualism beliefs and technology practices*

No significant correlation was found between international school teachers' attitudes toward AI and any of the other category scores in beliefs and practices of translanguaging, multilingualism, decoloniality and technology practice, which may reflect the diverse and complex nature of teachers' perceptions of AI.

Teachers who hold positive attitudes toward AI in these categories may also be more open to transformative theoretical approaches, such as translanguaging, multilingualism, and decoloniality, suggesting that openness to innovative theory may align with openness to emerging technologies. Conversely, teachers who had negative attitudes toward AI could also have positive attitudes toward translanguaging and multilingual beliefs. This phenomenon could be explained through a decolonial perspective: when AI is perceived as a colonial artifact that can perpetuate colonial power structures (Mohamed et al., 2020; Godwin-Jones, 2025). Teachers' attitude toward AI may be negative even when they are positive about multilingualism and translanguaging.

Moreover, teachers' AI attitudes were not related to their technology practice in general. While AI attitudes did not correlate with translanguaging and multilingual beliefs, there was a significant positive correlation between general technology practice use and translanguaging practices. This may be because technology practice was broadly interpreted to include everyday classroom tools like computers and iPads, which often involve practical functions such as translation apps to address language barriers. Even though such tools involve AI (e.g., Google Translate), teachers may not associate them with the more colloquial notion of AI often represented by chatbots or autonomous systems. Teachers exhibited concerns about using AI in the classrooms due to lack of AI education for students and teachers. This suggests that there is a need for more AI education and research about AI in international school contexts to better support multilingual students.

#### 4.4 *Limitations and Future Work*

This survey is a start to understand what might be the areas of support for international teachers of multilingual learners to encourage translanguaging in their classrooms. Individual interviews may be necessary to understand these findings in more depth. International schools are not homogenous - future studies will need to recognize the contextual differences of different schools such as the country they are in, their educational policies and curriculum, the student body composition etc. as well as the contextual differences within the classroom and the teacher - the number of years they have worked, their language background, their classroom strength and subject. Our quantitative analysis attempts to identify higher-level patterns across survey respondents to get a sense of trends that may be common across these different contexts. It would be necessary to do further qualitative analysis of open-ended responses and analyze responses to individual survey items to understand these trends better.

Additionally, as noted previously, for this pilot study of the international survey, respondents were primarily recruited through the MLRC mailing list and social media accounts. It may be likely that individuals who have chosen to be in contact with the MLRC, whether as members or not, may have been more exposed to translanguaging theories and practices than the general international school teacher population. Hence, our results may not be generalizable for international schools more broadly. In future studies, we may employ more diverse recruitment strategies to explore whether this correlation between translanguaging beliefs and practices is reflective of the general international school teacher population or whether it was more a reflection of particular beliefs and practices of the people who received the survey in the first place.

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