

Gendered Variations in Translanguaging Practices and Attitudes by EFL Teachers in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract—This qualitative study investigates gendered variations in translanguaging practices thoroughly among six Saudi secondary school EFL teachers (three males and three females). Using classroom observations followed by retrospective, semi-structured interviews, the study examines the frequency, functions, and underlying attitudes shaping the intended use of Arabic (L1) in English (L2) instruction. The findings reveal notable gender-related differences in translanguaging practices. Male teachers employed Arabic more frequently during instruction, primarily for direct explanation and comprehension checks, whereas female teachers used translanguaging more selectively for scaffolding and rapport-building, adjusting their use according to students' proficiency levels. Despite these differences, both groups maintained English-only instruction during productive skills assessments. The study highlights teacher gender as a significant variable in translanguaging research and advocates for gender-sensitive teacher education that legitimizes strategic L1 use as a culturally responsive pedagogical resource.

Index Terms—translanguaging, EFL instruction, teacher gender, bilingual education, classroom discourse

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English has experienced a significant paradigm shift from monolingual "English-only" ideologies toward embracing multilingual approaches that recognize the pedagogical value of students' full linguistic repertoires (Canagarajah, 2011; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Translanguaging has been recently recognized as an inclusive pedagogical practice that promotes language equality by validating learners' linguistic identities and challenging monolingual ideologies that marginalize minoritized languages in EFL classrooms (García & Wei, 2014; García et al., 2017). It refers to the intended integration of multiple linguistic resources that has emerged as both a purposeful pedagogical method and an instinctive communicative practice in diverse educational contexts (García & Otheguy, 2020). In Saudi Arabia, this shift aligns with the goals of Vision 2030, within which the Human Capability Development Program identifies English proficiency as a national priority (Almanea et al., 2024; Vision 2030, 2021). Recent research demonstrates that pedagogical translanguaging yields beneficial results in Saudi classrooms, notably in reducing student anxiety, enhancing comprehension, and strengthening newly bilingual learners (Alsagoafi, 2025). However, ongoing gaps persist between policy goals and classroom practices (Alqahtani, 2022), particularly due to earlier EFL teachers' education, which insisted on an English-only medium of instruction. Enduring concerns persist about potential restrictions on Arabic use for English proficiency development (Alzahrani & Althaqafi, 2023; Alasmari et al., 2022).

Despite widespread adoption of translanguaging in Saudi EFL classes, significant gaps remain in comprehending the influence of teacher gender on these linguistic practices. Although current studies have outlined general code-switching patterns and instructional roles among Saudi educators (Alshammari, 2011; Alsagoafi, 2025), essential questions remain: Do male and female teachers engage in translanguaging at different frequencies? Do they utilize Arabic for different educational objectives? Do they possess differing perspectives on L1 utilization in English instruction? These questions hold particular significance in Saudi educational settings, where gender-segregated classrooms may produce distinctly gendered translanguaging patterns. The Kingdom's distinctive sociolinguistic context—marked by changing gender norms, historically separated education, and differing societal expectations for male and female teachers—provides a substantial foundation for examining the influence of gender on translanguaging practices (Al-Rasheed, 2021).

This study addresses both theoretical and practical gaps by examining gendered patterns of translanguaging among Saudi EFL teachers, focusing on observed classroom practices and underlying attitudes toward L1 utilization in English instruction. Despite significant research on translanguaging in many educational contexts globally, the connection between these practices and gender is insufficiently explored, specifically in the Saudi context. Recent research has documented gender differences in perceptions of translanguaging among EFL teachers in a different context, with female

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teachers demonstrating more favorable attitudes toward multilingual pedagogical approaches (Ulum, 2024). Indeed, research on classroom interactions demonstrates that male and female teachers often adopt different communication styles, with female teachers engaging in more nurturing and collaborative approaches and male teachers adopting more authoritative communication patterns (Einarsson & Granström, 2002; Sadker et al., 2009). In a study by Alsagoafi (2025), strategic translanguaging, which improved student performance and self-esteem in secondary schools, required a shared linguistic grounding between teachers and students. This indicates that effective translanguaging practice depends upon contextual elements that remain inadequately investigated. As Saudi Arabia navigates the balance between tradition and modernization through Vision 2030 educational reforms (Al-Rasheed, 2021), comprehending these gendered linguistic practices is crucial for formulating culturally responsive pedagogies that recognize both multilingual realities and evolving national identity. Accordingly, this study addresses three interrelated questions:

1. What patterns of translanguaging between Arabic and English do male and female Saudi EFL teachers display in their classroom instruction?
2. How do the functions of translanguaging practices differ between male and female Saudi EFL teachers?
3. What attitudes do male and female Saudi EFL teachers hold toward the use of Arabic in English language classrooms?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Recent research in multilingual discussions has already shifted from focusing on 'natural' code-switching theories, which view bilingualism as the alternation between different language codes (Myers-Scotton, 1993), to 'intentional' translanguaging frameworks that acknowledge the integrated linguistic collections of multilingual speakers. Translanguaging refers to "the fluid, dynamic practices that transcend the boundaries between named languages, language varieties, and between language and other semiotic systems" (Li, 2018, p. 9), challenging traditional understandings of bilingual language use as the switching between separate codes. García and Otheguy (2020) further argue that multilingual individuals draw on their full linguistic repertoire in response to communicative requirements, rather than perceiving language use as alternating between separate structures. Cenoz and Gorter (2022) emphasize that this redefinition has significant educational consequences: translanguaging views students' full linguistic competencies as significant resources for comprehension and learning, rather than treating L1 use as a deviation from target-language norms (Vogel & García, 2021).

Recent research demonstrates that strategic L1 use in language instruction yields modest yet consistent benefits across multiple dimensions, including content comprehension, metalinguistic awareness, and affective outcomes (Turnbull & Dailey-O'Cain, 2009). Macaro's (2024) comprehensive review confirms that cautious L1 use facilitates understanding of cognitively demanding content, particularly for lower-proficiency learners, without hindering target language vocabulary acquisition. Similarly, Cenoz and Gorter (2022) found that translanguaging-supportive educational environments enhanced students' metalinguistic awareness and fostered more positive attitudes toward minority languages compared to language-separated programs.

English education in Saudi Arabia is embedded in sophisticated sociolinguistic frameworks, where English primarily serves as an educational and professional tool, while Arabic dominates social and cultural domains (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). Alasmari et al. (2022) examined university-level EFL courses and found that instructors used Arabic with moderate frequency ($M = 3.50$ on a 5-point scale) across various classroom practices, primarily for explaining concepts, giving directions, and managing the classroom. However, most instructors expressed disapproval, describing the use of Arabic as necessary scaffolding that should ideally be reduced, reflecting persisting monolingual ideals despite practical situations. In a recent study, Alsagoafi (2025) found that secondary school teachers strategically employed translanguaging to scaffold, particularly during brainstorming and when addressing communication breakdowns, with reported improvements in student performance and self-esteem among lower-proficiency learners. EFL teachers utilized translanguaging across different pedagogical stages while teaching different skills. In writing classes, teachers emphasized translanguaging during brainstorming to ensure clarity of the task. In reading activities, teachers applied translanguaging through scaffolding to support comprehension, particularly with difficult vocabulary. Teachers reported that translanguaging made content more accessible and improved student engagement, especially for lower-proficiency learners. Critically, successful implementation occurred because teachers and students shared Arabic and English, enabling fluid language switching. Apparently, these previous studies generally disregard gender as a crucial variable, leaving essential questions unresolved about potential differences between male and female teachers' practices, particularly in Saudi Arabia's gender-separated educational system.

Teachers occupy distinctive positions as translanguaging agents, simultaneously constrained by institutional policies and empowered as decision-makers within classrooms. Their practices reflect pedagogical judgments, professional identities, and beliefs about effective teaching (Canagarajah, 2011). Alturki and Alharbi (2024) found that Saudi teachers construct professional identities differently by gender and career stage, thereby affecting their linguistic choices in classrooms. Saudi female teachers predominantly framed their roles in terms of caring metaphors (mothers and mentors), whereas male teachers emphasized knowledge transmission and achievement. These varying identity constructions reflect societal expectations and institutional positioning: teachers who view themselves primarily as language models may minimize L1 use, whereas those emphasizing mentoring roles may use translanguaging more frequently to build rapport.

In Saudi Arabia, gender intersects with religion, cultural traditions, and rapid social change, producing complex sociolinguistic patterns (Al-Wer et al., 2022). Recent research demonstrates that Arab women negotiate multiple, often conflicting expectations through strategic language use, with educated women frequently leading linguistic innovation while maintaining elements signaling cultural authenticity (Bassiouny, 2020). Tensions between traditional gender norms emphasizing family roles and contemporary aims for professional achievement significantly shape female teachers' professional practices (Al-Rasheed, 2010). In gender-segregated educational contexts, female teachers are expected to provide not only academic instruction but also moral guidance and emotional support, which may influence their linguistic choices. These expectations position women at the intersection of tradition and modernity, requiring strategic negotiation through language use (Al-Wer et al., 2022).

Emerging research suggests that gender may significantly influence how teachers implement translanguaging, yet systematic research on this topic remains limited. Studies across various bilingual contexts indicate that female teachers may use L1 more frequently for affective purposes, such as building rapport and managing anxiety, whereas male teachers tend to restrict L1 use primarily to content clarification (Litosseliti, 2006). These patterns may reflect broader gendered communication styles, with women engaging in more relational work and men focusing on transactional communication (Holmes & Schnurr, 2006). Critical approaches to translanguaging examine how power relations and institutional ideologies shape who engages in translanguaging, under what conditions, and with what forms of support, revealing important equity concerns in multilingual education (Paulsrud et al., 2017; Lin & He, 2022; Conteh & Brock, 2021).

Within Saudi contexts, Alharbi and Alqefari (2022) investigated university teachers' perceptions of translanguaging through surveys and semi-structured interviews with five professors, finding that teachers favored translanguaging because they shared linguistic and cultural backgrounds with students. However, their study did not systematically analyze gender differences despite including both male and female participants. Alsagoafi's (2025) recent study provides the most direct evidence concerning gender and translanguaging in Saudi EFL contexts. While the study collected data from equal numbers of male and female secondary teachers (five each) and conducted interviews with both groups (three women and three men), the published findings do not systematically compare gender differences. The study reports general patterns that teachers used translanguaging for scaffolding, to explain difficult words, to encourage student interaction, and to support lower-proficiency learners.

Existing Saudi research has not systematically analyzed potential gender differences in translanguaging practices. Moreover, the reviewed studies rely primarily on self-report data from questionnaires and interviews rather than systematic classroom observation. This study addresses this gap by (1) systematically analyzing gender as a primary variable rather than treating teachers as a homogeneous group, (2) integrating classroom observation with teacher interviews to examine alignment between practices and attitudes, and (3) investigating factors shaping gendered translanguaging patterns within Saudi Arabia's specific sociocultural context.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design to investigate gendered variations in translanguaging practices among Saudi EFL secondary school teachers. Data were collected through first classroom observations followed by in-depth semi-structured interviews. Then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase thematic analysis framework.

B. Participants

Six English language teachers (three females and three males) were purposefully selected from public secondary schools in Saudi Arabia. All participants held bachelor's degrees in English from Saudi universities. All six participants were experienced EFL teachers at the secondary level, with 4 to 11 years of experience (Ave.=8). Their ages ranged between 26-34 years old (Ave.=30.2). Their classes include around 33-38 students (Ave.=35). The textbook series is selected by the Saudi Ministry of Education and is taught in all Saudi Schools. It is called *Mega Goal* by McGraw Hill. Female participants were assigned codes FT1, FT2, and FT3, while male participants were coded MT1, MT2, and MT3 to maintain confidentiality.

C. Data Collection

Data were collected through two primary sources: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. This dual-method approach enabled triangulation, enhancing validity by comparing teachers' reported practices with observed classroom behaviors (Cohen et al., 2018). Classroom observations were conducted by the researchers and a male colleague. They documented naturally occurring translanguaging behaviors in authentic instructional settings. Each observation lasted 45 minutes (total=270 minutes) and employed a structured observation sheet (Appendix A) to systematically record (1) contextual information (teacher gender, grade level, lesson topic), (2) translanguaging functions using predetermined codes: INS (Instructional: explaining grammar, vocabulary, concepts), MGT (Management: organizing activities, giving directions, discipline), AFF (Affective: encouraging, praising, building rapport, humor), CHK (Checking comprehension), COR (Corrective feedback), PER (Personal/Off-topic), and (3) an observation log capturing what was said in Arabic, translanguaging triggers, and student responses. In addition to live observation, lessons were audio-recorded using the researchers' smart phones to allow for further analysis. The percentage of Arabic language

use in these classes was calculated by dividing the number of utterances in Arabic by the total number of utterances in the lesson.

Semi-structured interviews followed classroom observations and lasted 20-30 minutes (total=153 minutes). They were conducted face-to-face in English and audio-recorded to allow later analysis. They consisted of three sections: (1) teaching background and English proficiency, (2) translanguaging practices, including purposes for Arabic use (explaining grammar/vocabulary, managing behavior, giving instructions, building rapport, encouraging students), and (3) beliefs, attitudes, and personal teaching philosophies regarding L1 use in English instruction. The flexible interview format allowed participants to elaborate on issues while ensuring key topics were systematically explored (Cohen et al., 2018). Interviews were transcribed for analysis purposes.

D. Ethical Considerations

Institutional ethical approval was obtained before data collection. Additionally, participants provided informed consent prior to participation, having been fully informed of the study's purpose, research procedures, their rights, and confidentiality measures. The consent form assured protection of participants' privacy and personal data, clarified that participation was voluntary, and explained that participants could withdraw at any time without consequences. Anonymity was maintained using coded identifiers (FT1-FT3 for females; MT1-MT3 for males). All data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes.

E. Data Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2012) six-phase thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing with data through repeated reading/listening and documenting initial observations, (2) generating initial codes to identify meaningful data segments, (3) searching for patterns and clustering codes into broader categories, (4) reviewing and refining themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the final analytical narrative with illustrative examples. To enhance trustworthiness, multiple strategies were employed, including member checking to verify interpretations and triangulation between interview and observation data to strengthen credibility and confirmability (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Both researchers independently coded the data, and their inter-rater reliability was calculated using Cohen's Kappa ($K = 0.78$).

IV. RESULTS

A. Classroom Observation Results

Classroom observations revealed varying translanguaging patterns across the six participants. FT1 used Arabic minimally (approximately 10% of the lesson), primarily for giving specific instructions. The third-grade students' advanced English proficiency enabled them to understand the teacher's questions and instructions without requesting translation. The lesson focused on listening comprehension and oral discussion of the topic. Arabic served functional purposes such as clarifying instructions (codes INS, MGT, and COR; see Appendix B), with examples including "هذا الجدول مهم لفهم حل النشاط سجلوا هذه الملاحظات علشان ما تتكرر نفس" (*This table is important to understand the exercise*) and "Write down these notes so you do not make the same mistakes again".

During a reading class, FT2 used Arabic for approximately 40% of the lesson with second-grade students. Arabic was primarily used to support comprehension of new vocabulary. It was also used to explain structural distinctions between transitional sentences (TS), supporting sentences (SS), and concluding sentences (CS). Examples include "نفس المدونة، تعنى" *blog means ...* and "تعنى السياحة ...". The teacher consistently used the Arabic word "عادة" instead of "usually" throughout the class.

FT3 used Arabic for approximately 60% of the lesson with first-grade students during a speaking lesson titled "What do I need?" Despite this high level of translanguaging, all other aspects of instruction, including general classroom interactions, were conducted in English. Arabic was primarily used to explain new vocabulary and manage classroom activities (codes INS, GMT, and COR; see Appendix B), such as "ايش المشكلة عندك" (*what is your problem?*) and "يعنى" (*the household costs*). The average translanguaging frequency percentage by all female instructors is 36.6%.

MT1 used Arabic for approximately 45% of the lesson with first-grade students during a grammar lesson. Translanguaging most frequently occurred after each question. The teacher employed Arabic selectively to clarify students' responses and reinforce understanding, while the remainder of the lesson was conducted in English. It appeared that the students needed additional practice answering questions without Arabic support. Examples of Arabic usage include "استمع الي النص و ناقش الأسئلة التالية" (*listen to the audio and discuss the following questions*) and "نستخدم الفعل المناسب" (*we use the appropriate verb*) (codes INS, COR, MGT; see Appendix B). Translanguaging also helped relieve time pressure and supported positive teacher-student relationships, particularly when explaining complex grammar points.

MT2 used Arabic for approximately 70% of the lesson with second-grade students during a reading lesson about geographical directions. Students were unable to answer most questions without Arabic translation and struggled to understand the teacher's English instructions. Arabic was extensively used to introduce new vocabulary, clarify grammar points, and manage classroom activities. Examples include "احفظ الصورة و أشر عليها" (*memorize the sign and point to it*) and "ما هي الجهات الأساسية في البوصلة بالعربي" (*what are the primary directions in the Compass in Arabic?*) (codes INS, GMT; see

Appendix B). MT2's strategic use of Arabic humor to create rapport "شكلكم نايمين اليوم مو حاضرين الدرس" (*Are you sleeping, not attending?*) made them smile and relax.

MT3 used Arabic for approximately 78% of the lesson with third-grade students during a grammar lesson explaining adjectives. During the observation, it seemed that students felt comfortable only when the teacher used Arabic. The teacher relied heavily on Arabic to clarify vocabulary, explain complex grammatical rules, and manage classroom activities. Saudi colloquial Arabic was frequently used, such as "ايش تتذكرون من كلمات تدل على ظرف مكاني" (*what words do you remember that refer to place adverbials?*) and "وين مكان الماوس و الكيبورد في الصورة" (*where is the place of the mouse and the keyboard in the picture?*) (codes INS, MGT; see Appendix B). MT3 used Arabic for clarity, immediately rephrasing confusing instructions in Arabic. The average translanguaging frequency percentage by male instructors is 64.3%. Overall, male EFL teachers used translanguaging remarkably more than female teachers.

Table 1 below summarizes the results of the class observations regarding translanguaging frequency. It varied according to teacher gender, grade level, and lesson topic. Both male and female teachers employ higher percentages of translanguaging, particularly with low-proficiency students. It is observed that translanguaging frequency generally rises as students' English proficiency decreases. Grade level interacts with this trend: female teachers reduce translanguaging with higher grades, while male teachers' usage is more dependent on proficiency than on grade level. Lesson content also influences translanguaging frequency, with grammar and reading lessons showing higher percentages than speaking and listening lessons, especially with advanced learners.

TABLE 1
PERCENTAGES OF TRANSLANGUAGING IN THE ATTENDED LESSONS

Gender	Secondary School Grade level	Topic of Lesson	Translanguaging percentage %	Average translanguaging percentage
FT1	3 rd grade	Listening and Discussion	10%	35.6%
FT2	2 nd grade	Reading	40%	
FT3	1 st grade	Discussion	60%	
MT1	1 st grade	Grammar Review	45%	64.3%
MT2	2 nd grade	Reading: Geographical Directions	70%	
MT3	3 rd grade	Grammar: Adjectives	78%	

B. Interview Results

Interviews were coded into themes and subthemes. Table 2 in Appendix C presents the major themes and their interpretations, along with the subthemes for each theme and their interpretations.

Emerging Themes from Interviews

The results revealed five emerging themes. The following sections discuss these themes, supported by illustrative quotations.

(a) Theme 1: Areas of Translanguaging Practices Within Classrooms

Teachers used translanguaging across several instructional and relational domains. Participants reported frequent use of Arabic to clarify grammar and explain new vocabulary. FT1 stated, "When explaining tenses like present perfect, I say 'هو يشبه الماضي لكن مرتبط بالحاضر' "*it resembles the past but is related to the present*" to help them relate it to Arabic structure. Translanguaging shortens explanation time." FT2 noted, "For passive voice, I use Arabic to contrast sentence order. For example, 'في العربية الفاعل يأتي أولاً، لكن هنا المفعول هو الأساس' "*In Arabic, the subject comes first, but here the object is more important.*" It makes it clearer for visual learners." Regarding vocabulary, FT1 said, "Selectively, I translate abstract words like 'justice العدالة' when there is no context clue." FT2 noted, "I translate idioms or cultural expressions like 'break a leg' (بالتوفيق) to help students understand cultural meaning." However, FT3 pointed out, "I prefer using pictures, synonyms, or examples. Only in rare cases do I provide the Arabic meaning, such as 'honest صادق'".

MT1 reported using translanguaging to explain grammar, "Because I believe it will be easier for me to explain the grammatical rule and structures in Arabic than in English, as my students are not very competent in the English language." MT2 noted, "Sometimes Arabic helps clarify complex tenses like present perfect or conditionals. It saves time and ensures comprehension." MT3 noted, "I teach grammar directly. In a recent lesson about self-introductions, students needed to understand the verb 'to be' and how to use pronouns like 'I' and 'my' before they could practice".

Regarding vocabulary, MT1 said, "Every new vocabulary we have in each lesson, I translate it to Arabic." MT2 commented that he uses translanguaging "only when the word has no clear context or visual support. For abstract words like 'envy,' I translate quickly to Arabic, but for concrete nouns, I prefer pictures or examples." MT3 stated, "I focus on high-frequency verbs and vocabulary relevant to their field of study, which is tourism in this case".

Translanguaging also played a key role in managing classroom behavior, giving instructions, and handling difficult situations. FT1 affirmed, "When students are noisy, Arabic works better: 'خلونا نركز شوي' (Girls, let's concentrate a bit). It sounds natural and serious in Arabic." FT3 commented, "I sometimes start in English but end up switching if it is urgent: 'Stop talking... خلاص وقفو كلام'." For giving instructions, FT1 stated, "I usually say it in English first, then repeat key points in Arabic if students seem lost, e.g., 'Work in pairs... يعني اشتغلوا كل ثنتين سوا'." FT2 noted, "I use Arabic when instructions are complex: 'اقرأوا القطعة أول بعدين جاوبوا الأسئلة' (Read the passage first, then answer the questions). However, FT3 disagreed, saying, "I demonstrate instead of translating. I show them how to do the task rather than saying it in Arabic." MT1 commented that he employed translanguaging "to make it easy for the students to understand and react

immediately." MT2 reported, "When I need quick control, Arabic works better; saying 'اجلسو بسرعة يا شباب' gets attention immediately, while English commands sometimes take longer." He added, "I give instructions (Guys sit down quickly) mainly in English but repeat key points in Arabic if students look confused, especially before exams or group tasks." MT3 added, "I make sure my instructions are clear. If a student seems confused and says, 'The question is not clear,' I immediately rephrase it, often in Arabic".

Participants also used translanguaging to offer positive feedback and encourage and praise students. FT1 said, "I often mix languages: 'Excellent, mashallah!'" FT2 affirmed using Arabic expressions like "يعطيك العافية ما شاء الله تبارك الله يا سارة" and added, "I mostly use the English phrase 'Good work, proud of you!' but sometimes add Arabic to make it personal: 'ممتاز جدا اليوم'" Additionally, participants used Arabic to build rapport and encourage students. FT1 stated, "Arabic jokes make the atmosphere friendly. I might say, 'مو لأنكم شاطرين، بس لأن جو الحصة حلو'. They laugh and feel connected." (We are not having homework today, not because you were good, but because it was a nice lesson!) FT2 noted, "I use light humor in Arabic to lower anxiety. For example, when a student forgets homework, I say 'ولانتني نسيتي؟' 'الكتاب الي نساك؟' (Did you forget the book? Or did the book forget you?). FT3 reported, "Sometimes I mix languages: 'Good job, wallah, you did amazing!' Students enjoy the blend." MT2 said, "Arabic humor builds a friendly atmosphere. For example, when students are sleepy early in the morning, I might joke in Arabic. That makes them smile and relax." He added, "I mix both languages. I might say 'Excellent work, mashallah!' or 'Great effort, ya Mohammed!' Using Arabic expressions like 'mashallah' feels more personal and culturally natural." MT3 commented that employing translanguaging for joking or building rapport "is an area I am working on. I can be detached from my students, but I see how my colleagues use humor to create a positive classroom atmosphere, and I am trying to adopt similar strategies".

Participants also used translanguaging to support students who were introverted and shy. FT1 said, "For shy students, I switch to Arabic briefly to make them comfortable: 'ما في مشكلة، خذي وقتك' (never mind, take your time) FT2 affirmed that Arabic helps calm anxious students: "لا تتوترى، احنا نتعلم مع بعض" (don't worry, we are together). MT2 said, "I often switch to Arabic with shy or weak students to reduce pressure. It helps them express what they do not understand without feeling embarrassed. For example, I might say 'ما شاء الله رائع بس، حاول مرة ثانية' (Great mashallah, but try again).

These responses reveal that participants employ translanguaging as a multifunctional tool. Arabic is used purposefully to enhance comprehension, manage classroom dynamics, and support instructional clarity. Additionally, translanguaging serves a relational function, helping teachers build rapport, motivate students, and create a positive learning environment.

(b) Theme 2: Situations Where Participants Refuse to Use Arabic

Despite recognizing the benefits of translanguaging, participants identified specific situations in which they intentionally avoided Arabic to preserve English immersion. Participants reported refraining from Arabic during speaking tests, writing lessons, reading introductions, discussion tasks, and listening activities, noting that these contexts require sustained exposure to the target language. Some also avoided Arabic with low-proficiency learners to encourage gradual independence. FT1 reported, "During speaking exams or conversation classes, I insist on English only to build real communication." FT2 said she avoids Arabic in writing lessons. I tell them, 'Think in English.' Switching to Arabic breaks their focus." FT3 noted avoiding Arabic "when I introduce reading passages. I want students to guess meanings in context first before translating".

MT1 stressed not using Arabic specifically for "answering the questions, especially speaking and discussion tasks, because it is essential in practicing the language as an authentic practice." MT2 reported not allowing students to speak in Arabic "during speaking or listening activities," adding, "I insist on using only English. For example, in oral presentations or debates, I tell them, 'English only, please.' It is important to create an English environment to build fluency and confidence." In contrast, MT3 commented, "My current approach is to use Arabic to ensure student comprehension. If I used only English, many students would not be able to understand the lesson. In an ideal situation, using only English would be highly beneficial for their language acquisition, as the classroom is their primary environment to practice. However, this is very difficult to implement effectively when the students' proficiency level is low".

(c) Theme 3: Participants' Strategies for Managing Students' Use of Arabic

Participants described a range of strategies for managing students' spontaneous use of Arabic. Many adopted a selective translanguaging approach by responding partially in Arabic, using brief Arabic reassurance, or resorting to Arabic only in difficult situations. Others used simplified English rephrasing or explicitly encouraged students to speak English. Overall, participants emphasized a flexible, context-sensitive approach that balances immersion with comprehension. FT1 said, "I usually respond in English, but show understanding. If the student struggles, I rephrase the question in simple English." FT2 added, "It depends. If it is a grammar or vocabulary question, I might reply partly in Arabic; however, for casual talk, I gently remind them, 'let us try to say it in English.'" FT3 commented, "I reply in English most of the time. If I sense frustration, I use short Arabic reassurance like 'تمام، فهمت عليك' (ok I got you) then continue in English".

MT1 said he speaks in Arabic with students because, "if they know how to speak in English, they will do it, but when they speak in Arabic, I know that they need me to interact with them in Arabic also to be understandable and clear for them." MT2 reported that using Arabic depends on the situation: "If the question is about meaning or clarification, I might respond briefly in Arabic. However, if it is part of an activity or discussion, I answer in English to model the language. Sometimes I gently remind them: 'Try to say it in English.'" MT3 noted, "My approach is flexible. If the question is simple, I do my best to answer in English first and then repeat the answer in Arabic to confirm understanding. Whether a student

expects a translation depends on their individual level. Some more proficient students understand my English responses, but the majority wait for the Arabic translation to feel secure".

(d) Theme 4: Personal Teaching Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Translanguaging

Participants expressed diverse yet generally positive beliefs about the pedagogical role of Arabic. Many saw Arabic as a helpful support tool and a bridge rather than a problem. While some preferred minimizing Arabic to maintain English immersion, others believed all teachers should use Arabic strategically. Across interviews, participants consistently emphasized that Arabic is beneficial when used purposefully. FT1 stated, *"I believe Arabic can be helpful, but only as a support tool. Students feel safer and more confident when they know I understand their first language. However, my main goal is still immersion."* FT2 said, *"Arabic use is natural and realistic. It helps explain culture and reduces anxiety. I see it as a bridge, not a problem."* In contrast, FT3 noted, *"I prefer minimizing Arabic. English must surround students to think in it."* However, she added, *"But I understand sometimes we need Arabic for connection or clarification."* FT1 and FT3 reported flexible views about translanguaging, noting that they used to use *"English only"* but now *"see balance works better."* FT3 commented, *"After teaching mixed-ability classes, I now tolerate limited Arabic."* FT2 affirmed, *"I have always believed in bilingual flexibility"*.

MT2 said, *"I believe using Arabic strategically is beneficial. Complete avoidance makes students feel lost, especially at lower levels. However, overusing it makes them lazy. A balanced approach works best—Arabic for clarification, English for practice."* He noted, *"My opinion changed over time. When I was a new teacher, I tried to use only English, but I realised it was not realistic in our Saudi context. Arabic is helpful if used wisely. It supports comprehension, builds trust, and saves time. Before, I believed Arabic should never be used. "Now I see it as a tool, not an obstacle," MT3 commented, adding that using Arabic "is helpful, but strategically." Teachers should use Arabic to support learning, especially at beginner levels. The goal, however, should be a gradual shift towards using more English as the students' skills improve."* He elaborated that he changed his attitude: *"Using Arabic prevents students from feeling overwhelmed and lost in a completely English-language environment, which can demotivate them. It provides a crucial sense of security and comprehension"*.

(e) Theme 5: Participants' Perceptions of Their Comfort in Using Arabic During English Instruction

Participants reported feeling comfortable using Arabic during English instruction, noting that it feels natural and helps build trust. They highlighted that using Arabic reflects their identity, strengthening cultural alignment and allowing teachers to form emotional connections. Participants also emphasized practical advantages, explaining that Arabic simplifies explanations, saves time, and prevents instructional confusion. FT1 said, *"It feels natural and builds trust. Students see me as approachable."* She added, *"It is good to reflect on how we mix languages; it shows our teaching reality."* FT2 noted, *"I feel bilingual teaching reflects our Saudi identity; both languages belong in the classroom."* FT3 said, *"Somewhat comfortable. I prefer English, but I know Arabic helps make emotional connections with students."* However, she added, *"Translanguaging is part of who we are as bilingual educators; it deserves more recognition."*

MT1 emphasized feeling comfortable when Arabic is used. MT2 pointed out, *"I feel comfortable because it reflects my identity and connection with my students. It creates a supportive atmosphere. However, I always remind myself not to overuse it. The goal is to help students move gradually toward English independence."* MT3 commented, *"Without a doubt, using Arabic is easier for both my students and me. It simplifies explanation, saves time, and ensures that key concepts are understood without confusion"*.

V. DISCUSSION

This study investigated gendered patterns of *translanguaging* practices and attitudes among six Saudi secondary school EFL teachers through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The integration of classroom observation with interviews addressed an earlier limitation in existing research's reliance on self-report data (Alharbi & Alqefari, 2023). The findings reveal complex, context-dependent practices shaped by teacher gender, student proficiency, pedagogical beliefs, and institutional contexts.

Male teachers generally used Arabic more frequently than female teachers during English lessons. Among females, FT1 used Arabic the least (10%, mainly for instructions), while FT3 used it most (60%, for vocabulary and classroom management). Among males, MT1 used Arabic the least (45%, most often after asking questions), while MT3 used it most (78%, extensively for vocabulary, grammar, and classroom management).

Overall, gender influences translanguaging use in Saudi English classrooms.

As shown in Table 2, the themes and subthemes indicate that participants strategically employed translanguaging, balancing student comprehension with English immersion goals. While Arabic is frequently used to clarify content, manage the classroom, and build rapport, participants maintain clear boundaries where English-only instruction is essential. These findings provide a comprehensive understanding of how teachers navigate translanguaging as a purposeful, context-dependent practice.

Patterns of Translanguaging: Gender, Frequency, and Context

RQ1: What patterns of translanguaging between Arabic and English do male and Saudi female EFL teachers display in their classroom instruction?

The findings reveal substantial gender-related differences in translanguaging frequency. Male teachers employed Arabic more extensively (45-78% of instructional time) than female teachers (10-60%). MT3 demonstrated the highest

frequency (78%), while FT1 exhibited the lowest (10%), representing a 68-percentage-point difference. Male teachers generally employ more translanguaging, especially with low-proficiency students, to support understanding and engagement. Female teachers tend to adjust their use more according to students' grade level and English proficiency, increasing translanguaging with less proficient learners. Male teachers rely more consistently on translanguaging, while female teachers use it more selectively, reflecting different pedagogical approaches. This adaptive pattern suggests that female teachers view translanguaging as temporary scaffolding to be gradually reduced, consistent with Cenoz and Gorter's (2022) framework of flexible language boundaries that facilitate learning while maintaining target-language goals. Male teachers maintained higher translanguaging frequencies even with advanced students, suggesting they view Arabic as a legitimate, ongoing component of bilingual instruction rather than temporary scaffolding. MT3's extensive use (78%) with third-grade students challenges the assumption that translanguaging should decrease with proficiency, supporting García and Otheguy's (2020) conceptualization of drawing on students' complete linguistic repertoires.

These patterns may reflect different constructions of professional identity. Alturki and Alharbi (2024) found that Saudi female teachers frame their roles using nurturing metaphors emphasizing development and progression, whereas male teachers emphasize knowledge transmission and comprehension. Female teachers' translanguaging approach aligns with developmental scaffolding, whereas male teachers' consistent use reflects transmission-oriented approaches that prioritize immediate comprehension. This result recalls Almanea's (2025) findings on the importance of offering positive feedback to EFL learners and adds that providing feedback in L1 can be rewarding. Additionally, these results support Holmes and Schnurr's (2006) research, which demonstrates that women more frequently use language for relational purposes, while men focus on transactional communication. Female teachers' strategic modulation across proficiency levels may reflect relational approaches that adjust to student needs, whereas male teachers' consistent translanguaging reflects a transactional focus on content delivery.

However, these patterns should not be interpreted through essentialist frameworks. As Cameron (2005) emphasizes, gender operates performatively within specific contexts. In Saudi Arabia's gender-segregated system, female teachers work exclusively with female EFL learners, providing academic instruction, moral guidance, and emotional support (Al-Rasheed, 2021). Male teachers may experience different expectations emphasizing content mastery and achievement, potentially encouraging comprehensive translanguaging to ensure comprehension. Furthermore, observational data revealed additional nuances: female teachers primarily used Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), whereas male teachers frequently employed Saudi colloquial Arabic. This dialectal variation may serve different functions: MSA signals academic formality, whereas colloquial Arabic builds rapport and creates a relaxed atmosphere (Bassiouney, 2020).

Among the important findings of this study, gender is not the sole determinant of translanguaging's frequency and practices. Instead, gender differences interact substantially with contextual factors. The highest female translanguaging frequency (FT3: 60%) exceeded the lowest male frequency (MT1: 45%), indicating individual variation operates alongside gender patterns. Student proficiency emerged as the strongest predictor across both genders, supporting Macaro's (2024) evidence that strategic L1 use particularly benefits lower-proficiency learners. These findings directly address the gap in Alsagoafi's (2025) research, which documented strategic translanguaging use among Saudi secondary teachers but did not analyze gender differences despite collecting data from equal numbers of male and female teachers. The present study demonstrates that such differences are substantial and systematic, aligning with research indicating that gender shapes professional linguistic performances within specific institutional contexts (Cameron, 2005; Holmes & Schnurr, 2006).

Functions and Purposes: Gendered Pedagogical Priorities

RQ2: How do the functions and purposes of translanguaging differ between male and female Saudi EFL teachers?

Thematic analysis revealed that both genders employed translanguaging across multiple domains: teaching grammar, teaching vocabulary, classroom management, rapport-building, and supporting struggling students. Female teachers employed Arabic for contrastive analysis in grammar instruction, leveraging L1 grammatical knowledge as cognitive bridges to L2 structures and raising metalinguistic awareness. Male teachers used Arabic more extensively for direct explanation. These differences align with research suggesting that women employ scaffolding strategies that encourage independent problem-solving, whereas men favor direct information provision (Holmes & Schnurr, 2006). Regarding vocabulary, female teachers demonstrated selective translanguaging, preferentially translating abstract terms while encouraging contextual guessing for concrete vocabulary. Male teachers showed more systematic translanguaging, with one teacher reporting translating every new vocabulary item.

Female teachers employed relational management, using Arabic to build connections while redirecting behavior. Male teachers used more direct commands. Moreover, female teachers emphasized emotional connection and anxiety reduction through Arabic use in humor and encouragement. Male teachers showed variable approaches. Some used humor strategically, while others acknowledged that they do not use it for that purpose. These differences reflect gendered expectations for emotional labor in education, with female teachers expected to provide extensive relational care alongside instruction. Nevertheless, both genders extensively employed translanguaging to support shy or struggling students. This consistency suggests that supporting struggling students is a core professional responsibility transcending gender. This aligns with research demonstrating that translanguaging enhances engagement and reduces anxiety (Alsagoafi, 2025; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022).

Attitudes: Ideological Positioning and Professional Beliefs

RQ3: What attitudes do male and female Saudi EFL teachers hold toward the use of Arabic in English language classrooms?

Analysis revealed generally positive attitudes across both genders, representing a shift from traditional English-only ideologies toward acceptance of strategic Arabic use as pedagogically legitimate and culturally appropriate. These attitudes align with García and Otheguy's (2020) translanguaging theory, which views students' complete repertoires as valuable resources. Several participants reported significant attitudinal shifts over their careers. FT1 and FT3 noted they "used to use 'English only'" but "see balance works better" after teaching mixed-ability classes. MT2 reported: "*When I was a new teacher, I tried to use only English, but I realized it was not realistic in our Saudi context.*" These shifts suggest classroom experience drives pedagogical adaptation, overcoming initial monolingual ideologies (Rajendram & Thorne, 2022). MT3's evolution is particularly noteworthy: "*Using Arabic prevents students from feeling overwhelmed and lost in a completely English-language environment, which can demotivate them. It provides a crucial sense of security and comprehension.*"

Despite positive attitudes, all participants identified specific contexts where they intentionally avoided Arabic. Both genders restricted Arabic during speaking practice and productive activities. According to them, it is important to create an English environment to build fluency and confidence. This selective restriction demonstrates sophisticated pedagogical reasoning, distinguishing supportive translanguaging for comprehension from complete immersion for skill development (Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). Indeed, teachers' comfort with translanguaging was linked to cultural identity. FT2 characterized "*bilingual teaching reflects our Saudi identity—both languages belong in the classroom.*" MT2 affirmed: "*I feel comfortable because it reflects my identity and connection with my students.*" This positions translanguaging as culturally authentic rather than pedagogically compromised, challenging deficit perspectives and aligning with arguments that multilingual pedagogies must be culturally grounded (Pennycook & Makoni, 2019).

Overall, the results of the present study extend translanguaging research by demonstrating that gender operates as a significant analytical variable that should not be subsumed within homogeneous "teacher" categories, while revealing that differences are not absolute but interact with multiple contextual factors. This aligns with contemporary sociolinguistics, which emphasizes gender as performatively enacted within specific contexts (Cameron, 2005), intersecting with student proficiency, lesson content, professional identities, and institutional expectations.

VI. CONCLUSION

This qualitative study investigated gendered variations in translanguaging practices and attitudes among six Saudi secondary EFL teachers through interviews and classroom observations, addressing how teacher gender influences translanguaging in Saudi Arabia's gender-separated educational system. Results showed that male teachers employed Arabic more extensively than female teachers. Female teachers demonstrated greater responsiveness to proficiency levels, substantially increasing translanguaging with beginners while maintaining minimal use with advanced learners. Male teachers maintained consistent translanguaging across levels, viewing Arabic as an ongoing component of bilingual instruction. Nevertheless, both genders employed translanguaging across multiple domains. Female teachers used contrastive grammar instruction and selective vocabulary translanguaging; male teachers employed more extensive direct explanation in Arabic. Female teachers emphasized relational management and affective connection; male teachers used directive commands and efficiency-focused translanguaging. Both genders expressed positive attitudes toward translanguaging in EFL classrooms, reflecting shifts from English-only ideologies toward the acceptance of strategic Arabic use. However, all maintained selective English-only instruction during productive activities, demonstrating sophisticated pedagogical reasoning.

Despite its contributions, this study has some limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the small, purposefully selected sample of six secondary school EFL teachers limits the generalizability of the findings beyond similar Saudi contexts. The study was also confined to public secondary schools and did not include primary or tertiary levels, where translanguaging practices and gendered expectations may differ. In addition, although classroom observations and interviews provided rich qualitative insights, the study focused exclusively on teachers' practices and perceptions, without examining students' perspectives or learning outcomes. Future research could therefore adopt larger and more diverse samples across educational levels and institutional contexts, incorporate students' voices, and employ mixed or longitudinal designs to examine how gendered translanguaging practices evolve over time and impact language development. Further studies may also explore the interaction between teacher gender and other variables such as teaching experience, regional dialect use, or institutional language policies to develop a more comprehensive understanding of translanguaging in Saudi EFL classrooms.

APPENDIX A

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1sEDPJ1uPZ03VceHSrXr_4pyJhVoSzme4/edit

APPENDIX B

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1INXVQ9lyjJL3A10KXtOxov18RQFo0qdi/edit>

APPENDIX C

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/10Kn6ixTZLfw6ZieQAAZ0eIT819AJBu3k/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=105201631064797173537&rtopof=true&sd=true>

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