

Are We Teaching or Just Translating?

Adelyn L. Tonaleta, SOE Guidance Coordinator

School of Engineering, Biliran Province State University, Naval, Biliran 6560, Philippines

Corresponding email: adelyn.tonaleta@bipsu.edu.ph

Across many classrooms in the Philippines, a silent struggle is taking place, one that is rarely discussed but deeply felt. Teachers, driven by the desire to help their students understand lessons written in English, often fall into the habit of simply translating content into Filipino or the local dialect. While this method seems helpful on the surface, it reflects a deeper issue in the country's education system which is the growing gap between real teaching and mere delivery of information (Gatil, 2021).

Translation does not always equal comprehension. When a teacher translates a paragraph or math problem word for word, the core concept is often lost. The nuances, the real-life applications, and the deeper meaning of the lesson are stripped away. Students may remember the terms or mimic the answers, but without context or connection, genuine learning is unlikely to happen. This practice has led to classrooms where performance appears acceptable on paper, but in reality, learners struggle to apply what they've memorized. According to Reyes (2024), translanguaging in multilingual classrooms, while potentially beneficial, must be guided by intentional pedagogical choices, otherwise, it risks becoming mechanical and ineffective.

This problem is not the teachers' fault. Many of them are forced to teach subjects outside their expertise due to staffing shortages. A teacher trained in Filipino may be assigned to teach Science or Math, two subjects that demand content mastery and specialized vocabulary. Without enough preparation or support, these educators fall back on the easiest strategy: translation just to get through the lesson. But doing so turns learning into passive absorption rather than active understanding. As Parba (2018) pointed out, shifting language ideologies among teachers can be seen as survival strategies rather than structured instruction, especially when there is little institutional support in place.

Addressing this issue requires a shift in how teacher support and training are approached. The Department of Education must expand in-service training programs that focus not just on what to teach, but how to teach concepts effectively in multilingual classrooms. Teachers need more than guidelines, they need demonstration lessons, coaching, and time to collaborate with peers. Peer mentoring systems within schools, where teachers learn from one another's strengths, can uplift struggling educators without judgment. Miranda and Gervacio (2023) emphasized the importance of peer collaboration and reflection in strengthening teachers' beliefs and practices surrounding translanguaging, especially in language-sensitive content areas.

Curriculum reform is also necessary. When teachers are pressured to cover a long list of competencies in a short period, the quality of teaching suffers. DepEd must allow more flexible pacing and reduce content overload. Instead of rushing through chapters, teachers should be encouraged to focus on depth, not just coverage. Learning must become meaningful, not mechanical. As Reyes (2025) noted, even in the age of technological advancement and artificial intelligence, the success of

multilingual classroom practices still depends largely on how supported and equipped teachers are to respond to students' real linguistic needs. Additionally, Local governments and NGOs can contribute by creating training hubs and teaching fellowships that bring experts into public school settings. Organizations such as Teach for the Philippines and PBEed can be tapped to deliver supplemental training, especially in underserved areas. These partnerships must be encouraged and expanded.

The role of a teacher is not to translate, but to enlighten. for learners to thrive, they must be taught to think, not just repeat. A strong education system requires educators who are confident, capable, and supported. If the Philippines wants to raise thinkers and not just test-takers, it must begin by changing how classrooms operate and how teaching itself is defined. Real learning only happens when ideas are not just said, but truly understood.

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