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English only or bilingual advantage? The effects of strategic translanguaging on EFL learners' grammatical development

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Abstract

This study explores whether strategic translanguaging offers any bilingual advantage in terms of grammatical development of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The study examines whether English-only grammar instruction is more effective than strategic translanguaging, in which Arabic is intentionally used to clarify grammatical concepts, contrast Arabic and English structures, explain terminology, assess comprehension, and address first-language-related difficulties. This study is based on the data obtained through a quantitative quasi-experimental pretest-post-test control-group design conducted with 35 Arabic speaking EFL learners from Abu Dhabi University. 18 participants took part in the English only instructional program and 17 participants participated in the strategic translanguaging instruction program. Before and after an 8-10 week intervention, 40 item grammar achievement test was administered. Independent-samples and paired-samples t-tests, as well as a 2 × 2 mixed-design ANOVA, were used to analyse the data. An ANCOVA was additionally conducted to compare post-test performance between the two instructional groups while controlling for pre-test scores. As a result, it was found that there was statistically significant growth in the grammatical knowledge of both groups of participants but the improvement of those who attended the strategic translanguaging class was significantly higher than the improvement of those who attended English only grammar classes. The significant difference in instructional conditions was found after controlling the initial level of grammatical knowledge with the help of ANCOVA and the effect size related to instructional condition was rather large.



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Introduction

Foreign language teaching has evolved from being analytically oriented towards one that emphasises function and communication (Celce-Murcia, 2001). The evolution is illustrated in the move from the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) method that emphasised grammar, translation, and written tasks to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that stresses communication and communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). CLT has become the dominant framework in English language teaching even though it is associated with the monolingual approach due to its target language use orientation. Monolingualism has been justified on the basis that English only lessons are appropriate since English classes should expose the learners as much as possible to English just like in the target language environment (Littlewood & Yu, 2011; Macaro, 2009).

The monolingual approach has increasingly been subject to scrutiny in studies regarding bilingualism and translanguaging. As stated by Garcia (2009), bilingualism is a process through which a learner is able to use his or her linguistic abilities instead of working through two distinct languages. Translanguaging builds upon this model in that it allows learners to utilise their linguistic repertoires in an active manner during the processes of learning and communication (Baker, 2011; Lewis et al., 2012; Wei, 2018). It is crucial to note that the use of translanguaging does not have to involve the replacement of English by the L1. Translanguaging's potential relevance in relation to grammatical learning deserves consideration specifically. Learning grammar involves understanding grammar knowledge and recognising the connections between form and meaning as well as producing grammatically correct sentences of the target language. Accessing an L1 in a strategic manner can offer more resources that can help establish those connections. However, there have been relatively few studies about translanguaging in terms of measuring grammatical acquisition (Galante, 2020; Rivera & Mazak, 2017; Sun & Lan, 2020; Vaish & Subhan, 2015). Also, very little research exists on the learning outcomes related to translanguaging (Nikula & Moore, 2019).

The present study addresses this gap by examining whether strategic translanguaging provides a bilingual advantage in EFL learners' grammatical development. Specifically, it compares English-only grammar instruction with instruction in which Arabic is deliberately incorporated for defined pedagogical purposes. The study involved Arabic-speaking undergraduate EFL learners in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, and employed a quantitative quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control-group design. By comparing grammatical development across the two instructional conditions, the

study seeks to determine whether strategically mobilising learners' Arabic linguistic resources can produce greater gains in English grammatical knowledge than an English-only approach.

Literature review

From English-only instruction to bilingual approaches in EFL

Foreign language teaching has progressively shifted from approaches centred primarily on analysing language towards approaches that emphasise its functional and communicative use (Celce-Murcia, 2001). This development is particularly evident in the movement from the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Although this shift broadened the objectives of language teaching, it also contributed to the continued dominance of monolingual approaches in foreign language classrooms. Monoglossic ideology, which conceptualises language proficiency according to monolingual norms, has traditionally positioned the target language as the preferred language of classroom instruction (Garcia, 2009). This position has partly been justified by the argument that foreign language classrooms may provide learners with their principal exposure to the target language and should therefore maximise opportunities for target-language use (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). As a result, monolingual teaching has become a dominant norm in foreign language education (Wang, 2019), and language classrooms have continued to demonstrate a monolingual bias (Hu & McKay, 2012).

The development of grammar teaching provides an important background to this debate. The Grammar Translation Method, which remained dominant until the mid-twentieth century, emphasised grammatical rules, vocabulary memorisation, translation, and written exercises, with grammatical competence as a central goal (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). However, GTM was criticised for providing insufficient opportunities for learners to develop fluency and use language communicatively (Newson, 1998). In response, CLT emerged during the 1970s and subsequently became a dominant approach to English language teaching (Thompson, 1996). Drawing on Hymes's (1972) concept of communicative competence, CLT emphasises the development of language skills through meaningful and functional communication activities (Littlewood, 1981).

Despite its contribution to communicative language teaching, CLT has also been criticised, particularly regarding its linguistic content and the pedagogical treatment of grammatical forms (Celce-Murcia et al., 1997). This issue is relevant to the present study because a strong emphasis on communication does not necessarily resolve the question of how grammar should be taught. Moreover, the communicative orientation has frequently been accompanied by the assumption that classroom interaction should occur primarily through the target language. In EFL settings, learners' first languages have therefore often been restricted or discouraged on the premise that classrooms should reproduce the target-language environment and maximise exposure to English (Macaro, 2009). The resulting English-only orientation represents an important issue for grammar instruction. If learners are expected to understand and manipulate grammatical forms exclusively through English, opportunities to draw on existing linguistic knowledge may be constrained. Conversely, allowing learners to access their full linguistic repertoires may provide additional resources for understanding grammatical concepts, identifying relationships between languages, and constructing meaning. This possibility has contributed to growing interest in bilingual approaches such as translanguaging.

Bilingualism and translanguaging in language learning

The traditional binary categorization of languages is now increasingly questioned through new interpretations of bilingualism and multilingualism. Garcia (2009) offers an alternative interpretation of bilingualism as a dynamic approach to language use as opposed to having two distinct and equally weighted linguistic systems. The all-terrain vehicle metaphor allows us to understand how bilingual individuals adjust, expand and remix the linguistic system in accordance with communication and learning demands. It provides theoretical basis for translanguaging, which views learner's languages as a connected resource pool. The concept of translanguaging was first used in the field of bilingual education as a pedagogic tool by Williams, a Welsh linguist, in 1996, followed by explanations from other researchers such as Baker (2011) and Wei (2011). As far as translanguaging is concerned as a pedagogic approach, it allows learners to use more than one language for both input and output. Learners can interact with the information using reading and discussion in one language and then write their outputs in another language (Baker, 2011; Wei, 2011). It should be noted that this does not mean replacing English with the first language. This is particularly important when considering strategic translanguaging. According to Lewis et al. (2012), there are some differences between

translanguaging and other activities, such as code-switching and translation. While the latter two involve language transitions, translanguaging focuses on the process through which learners participate in the production of meanings. Garcia (2009) similarly argues that translanguaging extends beyond code-switching while encompassing it and other forms of bilingual language use. Consequently, translanguaging can be understood not simply as alternating between languages, but as drawing strategically on an integrated linguistic repertoire to support learning. From this perspective, translanguaging challenges the assumption that effective second-language instruction requires a rigid separation of languages. Mazak (2017) argues that translanguaging in formal classrooms challenges traditional theories of second-language acquisition that attach importance to maintaining separate linguistic systems. Similarly, traditional approaches have often positioned L2-only instruction as the preferred model and treated alternative practices as deficient or inadequate (Mitchell, 1988). Translanguaging instead recognises that learners enter the classroom with linguistic knowledge that can potentially contribute to additional-language learning.

Translanguaging and grammatical development

The potential relevance of translanguaging to grammatical development lies in its capacity to provide learners with multiple linguistic resources when processing and producing the target language. Garcia (2009) argues that using both languages can create a more dynamic learning environment in which learners can draw on their stronger language and developing language for different but overlapping pedagogical purposes. In an EFL grammar classroom, this may allow learners to use their existing linguistic knowledge to understand grammatical explanations, compare linguistic structures, clarify meaning, and subsequently apply grammatical forms in English. This perspective is also consistent with the conceptualisation of translanguaging as a practical theory of language, in which language is understood as a multilingual, multi-semiotic, and multi-modal resource (Wei, 2018). Rather than treating bilingual competence as two independent language systems, this approach corresponds with the notion of holistic multi-competence (Cook & Wei, 2016) and Bakhtin's (1981) concept of heteroglossia. From this perspective, learners' existing linguistic resources can be considered part of the learning process rather than interference that must be excluded from English instruction.

The potential pedagogical value of translanguageing is also reflected in the broader literature. Studies have reported benefits associated with translanguageing practices (Moore & Nikula, 2016), while In-bar-Lourie (2010) has criticised language pedagogy for overlooking or suppressing bilingual and multilingual possibilities through predominantly monolingual policies. Translanguageing allows purposeful movement between languages across spoken and written as well as receptive and productive modes (Baker, 2011). Such flexibility may be particularly relevant to grammar learning, where learners need to understand explicit explanations, recognise grammatical patterns, process form-meaning relationships, and produce accurate target-language forms. However, the empirical evidence concerning the effects of translanguageing on specific language outcomes remains relatively limited. Existing research has examined its relationship with speaking and listening (Galante, 2020), writing (Sun & Lan, 2020), reading (Vaish & Subhan, 2015), and learners' perceptions (Rivera & Mazak, 2017). Although these studies provide evidence for the pedagogical potential of translanguageing, relatively few investigations have directly examined its effects on language learners' learning outcomes (Nikula & Moore, 2019). This gap is especially relevant to grammatical development, as much of the translanguageing literature has focused more broadly on communication, participation, and learner perceptions than on measurable gains in grammatical knowledge.

The need for context-specific research in EFL classrooms

Need for further empirical research is particularly acute in situations where English is being taught as a foreign language. While there has been extensive research about translanguageing in many educational environments, the number of studies focusing on its impact on the language acquisition of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students in specific environments have been limited. For example, empirical research in Turkey has begun to generate practice-based evidence on the topic of translanguageing (Karabulut, 2019). Another important context for studying this matter is that of the United Arab Emirates, given that English is used along with the other languages known to the learners. In this multilingual environment of teaching English as a foreign language, the fundamental issue is whether English should be taught as the only language or whether the use of other languages would also serve to the advantage of the learners. Instead of considering bilingualism to be opposed to the learning of English, translanguageing offers a theoretical perspective where learners' languages are consciously utilised in the teaching process. Therefore, the key question is not only if the students

need to make use of English or another language in their studies, but also when and how more languages may be used to help in learning English. This difference is important, as not all kinds of translanguaging involve the use of another language without any restriction. Strategic translanguaging implies purposeful decision-making about when, why and how the resources of bilinguals will be used for the achievement of certain aims. One of these strategies might be the use of learners' other language for the explanation of grammar points.

There is an observable movement from grammar-based teaching to communicative methodologies, followed by growing awareness that there is no need for CLT to be solely monolingual in approach. While GTM made grammatical accuracy one of the key targets in language instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014), a narrow scope of application to communicative language use was a reason for the emergence of CLT methodology (Newson, 1998; Thompson, 1996). However, growing opposition to the English-only approach comes from findings on bilingualism and translanguaging (Garcia, 2009; Inbar-Lourie, 2010; Mazak, 2017). Translanguaging theory views students' linguistic abilities in terms of their interconnection and potential value in language acquisition, with research findings pointing to advantages in several linguistic areas (Galante, 2020; Sun & Lan, 2020; Vaish & Subhan, 2015). Nevertheless, there remains limited evidence concerning whether strategically incorporating learners' other linguistic resources can produce measurable improvements in grammatical development, particularly in EFL contexts. This gap provides the rationale for the present study, which examines whether strategic translanguaging can offer a bilingual advantage. The study is sought to answer the following questions:

RQ1. *Do EFL learners demonstrate significant improvement in grammatical knowledge from pre-test to post-test following the instructional intervention?*

RQ2. *Is the improvement in grammatical knowledge significantly greater for students receiving strategic translanguaging instruction than for students receiving English-only instruction?*

The research questions were translated into the following testable hypotheses to examine both within-group changes in grammatical knowledge and the relative effectiveness of the two instructional approaches:

H1

There will be a significant improvement in grammatical knowledge from pre-test to post-test among students receiving strategic translanguaging instruction.

H2

There will be a significant improvement in grammatical knowledge from pre-test to post-test among students receiving English-only instruction.

Methodology

Theoretical framework

The present study is theoretically grounded in the concept of translanguaging, which views bilingual learners' linguistic resources as an integrated repertoire that can be strategically mobilised to support learning rather than treating the first language (L1) and the target language as completely separate systems. In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), this perspective challenges English-only approaches by recognising that learners may draw on their existing linguistic resources to develop their understanding of English. The experiment incorporates the strategic translanguaging approach, which involves purposefully using the L1 for educational reasons. Therefore, the use of Arabic in the experimental condition is not unlimited or random. English continues to be the main language of instruction, but the L1 is purposefully used to help in understanding grammar rules, in explaining grammar terms, in drawing comparisons between English and Arabic, in ensuring comprehension, and in solving common L1 grammar problems. The theoretical rationale for the study is that bilingual learners may benefit from making connections between their existing linguistic knowledge and new grammatical knowledge in English. Strategic comparison of Arabic and English grammatical structures may enable learners to recognise similarities and differences between the two languages and develop a clearer understanding of target-language forms. The study therefore examines whether purposeful integration of Arabic into grammar instruction can support greater grammatical development than an English-only instructional approach. The theoretical framework is consequently reflected directly in the experimental design. The instructional condition constitutes the independent variable, with English-only instruction representing the control condition and strategic translanguaging representing the experimental condition. Grammatical knowledge constitutes the principal dependent variable, operationalised through learners' performance on the grammar pre-

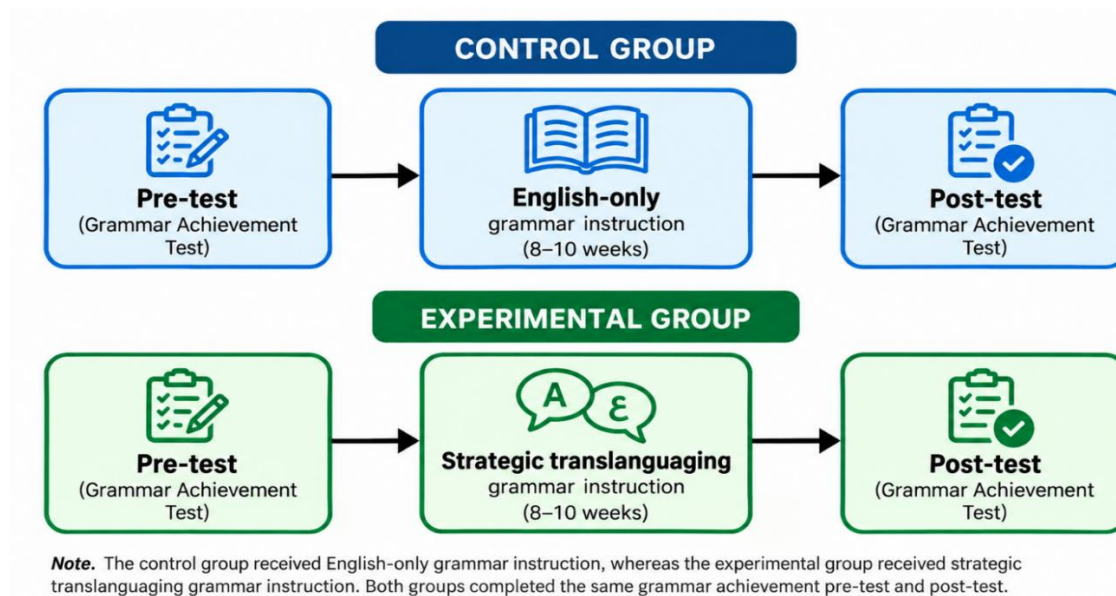
test and post-test. Pre-test grammatical knowledge is considered an important baseline variable because learners may enter the intervention with different levels of existing grammatical knowledge.

Research design

The study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control-group design. A quasi-experimental design was appropriate because the participants were drawn from existing classes and were therefore not randomly assigned individually to the two conditions. The design consisted of two instructional groups: an English-only control group and a strategic translanguageing experimental group. While the control group underwent grammar instruction in English only, the experimental group underwent the same grammar instructions but with the planned use of Arabic for certain educational purposes, see Figure 1. Both control and experimental groups were required to undertake a pre-intervention grammar test as well as a post-intervention test of grammar.

Figure 1

Research design of the study



The main objective of the study was to determine whether the learners that were taught through strategic translanguageing showed more development in their grammar skills compared to the learners that were taught in English alone. In addition, conducting the pre-test helped the researchers determine the equivalence of the two groups at the beginning of the study.

Participants

The study involved 35 undergraduate EFL learners enrolled at a higher education institution in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. The participants were Arabic-speaking learners studying English as a foreign language. The sample consisted of 18 students in the control group and 17 students in the experimental group. The participants were members of intact instructional groups, and their allocation to the two conditions was therefore based on the existing class structure rather than individual random assignment. This characteristic provided the basis for treating the investigation as quasi-experimental rather than as a true experimental study.

The participants were selected from learners enrolled in English language instruction and were expected to have broadly comparable levels of English proficiency. Where available, information concerning participants' age, gender, academic programme, year of study, and English proficiency was recorded to describe the sample. The comparability of the two groups in terms of their initial grammatical knowledge was examined using the pre-test results before the main intervention effects were evaluated. Participation in the study was voluntary, and students were informed that participation would not affect their course grades or academic standing.

Instructional intervention

The intervention focused on English grammar and was designed so that the two groups received comparable instructional content. The principal difference between the conditions was the language pedagogy employed during grammar instruction. The control group received English-only instruction. English was used as the language of explanation, classroom interaction, grammatical clarification, practice activities, and learner production. No systematic use of Arabic was incorporated into the instructional procedure. The experimental group received instruction based on strategic translanguaging. English remained the primary instructional language; however, Arabic was deliberately incorporated when its use served a specific pedagogical purpose. Strategic uses of Arabic included explaining difficult grammatical concepts, contrasting Arabic and English grammatical structures, clarifying grammatical terminology, checking learners' comprehension, discussing common L1-related errors, and allowing brief bilingual discussion before learners returned to English production. Most significantly, the experimental condition was not one that involved the replacement of

English by Arabic. Rather, the Arabic language functioned as an auxiliary instructional aid and was subsequently followed up by English usage in practice and testing.

For the purpose of ensuring the similarity of the two groups, instructional material, objectives, materials, activities, instructor, instructional time, and procedures of assessment were as much similar as possible. The key difference between the two groups was that of the use of Arabic language in the experimental group. The intervention was designed to last approximately 8–10 weeks, allowing learners sufficient exposure to the target grammatical structures before the post-test was administered.

Research instrument

The grammatical development was measured using an English grammar achievement test composed of 40 items. The test instrument tapped the grammatical structures that were highlighted in the instruction program. One point was awarded per correct answer for a total of 40 points. This test was conducted both before and after the instruction program. The pre-test provided information about the grammatical proficiency of the participants prior to the treatment, whereas the post-test gave data on the performance of the participants after the treatment. Since the grammar test was made by the researchers, it was assessed in terms of content validity and reliability. These characteristics were achieved through alignment with the instruction program, review of the test items by experts, and pilot testing whenever possible. The internal consistency of the test was estimated through Cronbach's alpha.

Procedure

The experiment involved three main phases: pre-intervention testing, intervention, and post-intervention testing. Firstly, the participants were briefed on the experiment and asked to give their consent to participate in it. Some demographic information was obtained, and the participants completed the grammar pre-test. Where applicable, the independent measure of English proficiency was taken to describe the overall level of proficiency in the sample. After the completion of the pre-test, the intervention phase started, which took around 8-10 weeks. The tasks performed by both groups during the intervention were similar, including the grammatical content and learning outcomes.

In the implementation process, the instructor was able to ensure consistency in the instructional content, instructional material, activities, instructional time, and assessment. In the experimental group, the introduction of the Arabic language was done selectively and intentionally as opposed to using it all throughout the lesson. For example, where learners would find it difficult to differentiate between two specific grammatical features, the instructor would elaborate on that feature in Arabic language, compare the features in Arabic and English, and then continue with English examples and exercises. Arabic could also be used to clarify the understanding of the learners or to highlight the problem they are having concerning a grammar feature.

After the intervention, all subjects were given the post-test for grammar. The post-test was conducted under similar conditions for both groups and aimed at establishing if the performance of the learners in terms of their grammar had been altered after the intervention process. The gap between pretest and post-test results was an indication of development in grammar, while comparison helped establish if translanguaging strategy worked better.

Ethical considerations

The research conducted adhered to ethical guidelines. Before collecting data, it was first approved by the research ethics committee of that institution. The participants were briefed on the purpose of the research and the procedure of the research. The consent form was signed by each participant before taking part in the experiment. It was stated that the participants could leave the experiment at any time and that there would be no consequences regarding their grades or any association with the university or lecturer. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained during this research. Participants were marked using numbers instead of their names in the dataset, and individuals could not be recognised when results were reported. Data gathered was used solely for research and kept in safe places. Attention was paid to the question of how to make conditions equal for both instructional groups. Both groups were offered identical grammatical material, educational goals, teaching hours, materials, and methodology. What was special about the experimental group was that Arabic was intentionally introduced as one more pedagogical tool. In this case, research does not deprive the control group of the usual English curriculum.

Data analysis

Descriptive statistics revealed that both groups showed improvement in their grammatical performance between the pre-test and post-test stages. In particular, the English-only group improved from $M = 21.00$ to $M = 24.28$, resulting in a gain of 3.28 points. The strategic translanguaging group improved from $M = 20.82$ to $M = 27.82$, resulting in a gain of 7.00 points. Quantitative statistical analysis was used in analysing the obtained data. First, descriptive statistics, such as means, standard deviations, minimum, and maximum scores, were calculated based on the pre-test and post-test scores of both groups. This allowed obtaining information about the grammatical performance of learners prior to and following the intervention. Secondly, the reliability of the grammar test was assessed via Cronbach's alpha to measure the internal consistency of test items. Thirdly, an independent-samples t-test was conducted to investigate if there were any significant differences between the two groups in terms of pre-test grammatical performance. Such an analysis is critical to ensure that the difference in post-test performance is related not to any existing differences but to the intervention itself. Fourth, paired-samples t-tests were conducted separately for the control and experimental groups to determine whether grammatical performance changed significantly from pre-test to post-test within each instructional condition. This analysis established whether each group demonstrated significant grammatical development during the intervention.

Fifth, a 2×2 mixed-design analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine changes in grammatical knowledge across time and between instructional conditions. Time (pre-test and post-test) was treated as the within-subjects factor, while instructional condition (English-only and strategic translanguaging) was treated as the between-subjects factor. The principal effect of interest was the Time $\times$ Group interaction, which examined whether the magnitude of change from pre-test to post-test differed significantly between the two instructional conditions. Partial eta squared (η^2) was reported as a measure of effect size.

Table 1

Tests of Within-Subjects Effects

Measure: MEASURE_1

Source		Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Squared	Eta
Time	Sphericity Assumed	291.550	1	291.550	70.099	.000	.680	
	Greenhouse-Geisser	291.550	1.000	291.550	70.099	.000	.680	
	Huynh-Feldt	291.550	1.000	291.550	70.099	.000	.680	
	Lower-bound	291.550	1.000	291.550	70.099	.000	.680	
Time * Group	Sphericity Assumed	64.236	1	64.236	15.445	.000	.319	
	Greenhouse-Geisser	64.236	1.000	64.236	15.445	.000	.319	
	Huynh-Feldt	64.236	1.000	64.236	15.445	.000	.319	
	Lower-bound	64.236	1.000	64.236	15.445	.000	.319	
Error(Time)	Sphericity Assumed	137.250	33	4.159				
	Greenhouse-Geisser	137.250	33.000	4.159				
	Huynh-Feldt	137.250	33.000	4.159				
	Lower-bound	137.250	33.000	4.159				

Effect sizes were reported alongside statistical significance. Partial eta squared (η^2) was used to indicate the magnitude of the instructional-group effect in the mixed-design ANOVA, while Cohen's d was used where appropriate to describe the magnitude of pre-test to post-test changes. Before conducting the mixed-design ANOVA, the relevant statistical assumptions were examined, including normality, homogeneity of variance, linearity between the covariate and dependent variable, independence of observations, and the homogeneity of regression slopes assumption. The latter was particularly important because mixed-design ANOVA requires the relationship between pre-test and post-test performance to be comparable across the instructional groups. A statistical significance level of $\alpha = .05$ was adopted for the inferential analyses. The combination of within-group and between-group analyses allowed the study to determine whether both instructional conditions produced

grammatical development and, more importantly, whether strategic translanguageing produced greater gains than English-only instruction.

Discussion

The present study examined whether strategic translanguageing could provide a bilingual advantage in EFL learners' grammatical development when compared with English-only instruction. The findings provide support for this possibility. Although both the English-only control group and the strategic translanguageing group demonstrated significant improvement in grammatical performance following the instructional intervention, the magnitude of improvement was considerably greater among learners who received strategic translanguageing instruction. This pattern is particularly noteworthy because the two groups began the intervention with comparable levels of grammatical knowledge. Taken together, the findings suggest that the pedagogical value of translanguageing may extend beyond facilitating general classroom communication and may also contribute to measurable development in grammatical knowledge. The absence of a significant difference between the groups at pre-test is an important starting point for interpreting these findings. The control group obtained a mean pre-test score of 21.00, while the translanguageing group obtained a mean of 20.82. The independent-samples t test indicated that this difference was not statistically significant, $t(33) = 0.20$, $p = .842$. Thus, the groups were broadly comparable in their initial grammatical knowledge. This baseline similarity strengthens the interpretation of the subsequent differences because the substantially higher post-intervention performance of the translanguageing group is less likely to be attributable simply to a pre-existing advantage in grammar. This is particularly relevant given the quasi-experimental design, in which participants were drawn from intact classes rather than randomly assigned individually.

Both groups nevertheless demonstrated significant grammatical development. The English-only group increased from a mean of 21.00 at pre-test to 24.28 at post-test, representing an average gain of 3.28 points. This improvement was statistically significant, $t(17) = 3.27$, $p = .005$, $d = 0.77$, indicating a large within-group effect. This finding is important because it indicates that English-only grammar instruction was not ineffective. Learners were able to develop their grammatical knowledge through instruction conducted exclusively in English. Such a finding is consistent with the long-

standing rationale underlying target-language-oriented approaches, which emphasise maximising learners' exposure to and use of English (Littlewood & Yu, 2011). It also accords with the communicative orientation of CLT, which prioritises meaningful engagement with the target language (Hymes, 1972; Littlewood, 1981). However, the improvement observed in the English-only group should not be interpreted as evidence that exclusive use of English is necessarily the most advantageous approach for grammatical learning. The translanguaging group demonstrated a substantially larger increase, from a mean of 20.82 at pre-test to 27.82 at post-test, corresponding to an average gain of 7.00 points. The within-group improvement was highly significant, $t(16) = 8.36$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.03$, indicating a very large within-group effect. More importantly, the mixed-design ANOVA revealed a significant Time $\times$ Group interaction, $F(1, 33) = 15.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .32$, indicating that the strategic translanguaging group demonstrated significantly greater improvement in grammatical knowledge than the English-only group. The size of this effect suggests that the difference between the instructional conditions was not merely statistically detectable but pedagogically meaningful. The findings therefore provide evidence in support of the proposition that strategic translanguaging can offer an advantage over English-only instruction in developing EFL learners' grammatical knowledge. The findings of this study are consistent with the theory developed by Garcia (2009), where bilingualism is viewed as a dynamic phenomenon wherein the learners use their repertoire of languages to cater to their learning requirements. Under this theory, Arabic does not need to be treated as a competing system, and hence it should not be considered when teaching English. Instead, the learners' previous knowledge of languages can be used as another source of information for acquiring knowledge of the new language.

These findings have a lot in common with the strategy of strategic translanguaging adopted in this research. The Arabic language was not used as an alternative for English; its usage was controlled and regulated. In this way, English was still used as the main medium of instruction, while Arabic was used only to explain certain difficult grammatical aspects, provide explanations for terminology, compare structures in Arabic and English, ensure comprehension of what was learned, and solve some typical grammatical problems in L1. This is important to remember because these findings do not prove the fact that increased usage of L1 leads to better results in terms of grammar learning.

This way of thinking agrees with the definition provided by Lewis et al. (2012) of translanguaging versus simple code-switching or translation. Translanguaging involves meaning creation using language resources by learners and not mere changes in language. In the current case, Arabic was related to grammatical goals in the learning process. The association between these two may have helped learners create form-meaning associations, increase their knowledge of grammatical terms, and make them more aware of the differences between Arabic and English grammars before using the target forms in English. Therefore, the results support the theory that translanguaging can be considered a pedagogical resource. These results add to the academic discussion about instruction exclusively in English. Earlier work has questioned the idea that a separation between languages is required for successful subsequent language learning (Mazak, 2017). Similarly, Inbar-Lourie (2010) highlights a trend in language education of silencing bilingual abilities with the implementation of mostly monolingual policies, and Macaro (2009) considers the aspects related to how and when teachers are supposed to make use of the first language of their students. The current results provide an insight into the grammatical aspect of this discussion. Instead of just proving that translanguaging is helpful for class activities and student engagement, they reveal that using Arabic could be more beneficial.

This outcome is consistent with previous empirical studies that have highlighted the potential use of translanguaging for language learning in different areas. Translanguaging has been explored in terms of speaking and listening (Galante, 2020), writing (Sun & Lan, 2020), and reading (Vaish & Subhan, 2015). Moreover, Rivera and Mazak (2017) conducted a study about the perceptions of students regarding translanguaging. According to Moore and Nikula (2016), there is a possibility to use translanguaging in a pedagogical way in multilingual classes. Yet, the current study distinguishes itself from the existing literature since the study pays special attention to the role of translanguaging in grammar learning. Such attention is justified since Nikula and Moore (2019) note that there is relatively few research that has examined the effects of translanguaging on learning outcomes.

The findings can also be interpreted in relation to the conceptualisation of translanguaging as a practical theory of language (Wei, 2018). From this perspective, learners' linguistic resources constitute an integrated repertoire rather than two completely independent systems. The stronger performance of the translanguaging group may therefore indicate that allowing learners to activate their existing Arabic linguistic knowledge helped them process and organise new English grammatical

knowledge more effectively. This interpretation is also compatible with the notion of linguistic multi-competence proposed by Cook and Wei (2016), whereby additional-language learning does not simply involve adding a completely separate language system but contributes to an individual's broader linguistic repertoire. Bakhtin's (1981) notion of heteroglossia further supports a view of language learning that recognises the interaction of multiple linguistic resources rather than privileging a single homogeneous linguistic norm.

These results must be understood carefully. Due to the use of complete classes, it is impossible for this experiment to achieve the same level of causality as a complete randomised experiment. Although the two groups were statistically equivalent prior to the test, other variables related to being in the class might also play a part in the differences observed. However, the small sample size involved consists of 35 students who speak Arabic and learn English in Abu Dhabi, which means that generalization should not be made from these results to all EFL students or all educational institutions in the UAE. The fact that there is an important between group effect justifies further research. From the analysis of the results, it becomes apparent that teaching in 'English only' can help with grammatical development, as demonstrated by the significant gain achieved by the control group. However, the use of translanguaging strategies led to much greater gains even when adjusted for pre-existing knowledge of grammar. This shows that it does not matter whether the English-only strategy is replaced by an Arabic-only one, but rather that Arabic is used strategically to make English grammar easier to learn while still using English as the main language of practice and production. In such a way, the results oppose the strict English-only strategy and promote a more flexible understanding of the process of teaching grammar in the EFL environment of the UAE.

Conclusion

The current study attempted to find out whether strategic use of translanguaging might result in giving a bilingual advantage to the development of grammatical competence in Arabic-speaking learners of English in the UAE. The findings reveal that there is a significant relationship between both the English-only approach and strategic use of translanguaging and improved grammatical competence of the learners. However, the difference between the improvements in the two groups was much more pronounced for the group of learners that used strategic translanguaging. It should

be noted that the two groups did not significantly differ in terms of initial grammatical knowledge. The findings have significant implications on the current debate on the use of English-only grammar teaching. As shown by the improvement in the control group, it shows that English-only grammar teaching does lead to improvement and therefore, cannot be classified as a method that does not work. However, the fact that the translanguaging group showed greater improvement suggests that sticking strictly to English as the language of instruction may not be the best way to go for all aspects of EFL acquisition. The findings are consistent with the conceptualisation of translanguaging as the purposeful mobilisation of an integrated linguistic repertoire (Garcia, 2009; Lewis et al., 2012; Wei, 2018). In the present study, Arabic was not used as a substitute for English or as an unrestricted classroom language. Its use was deliberately connected to grammatical learning through explanation, structural comparison, clarification, comprehension checking, and attention to L1-related difficulties. This suggests that the observed bilingual advantage may derive from the strategic function of Arabic rather than simply from increased L1 use. The findings therefore complement previous research reporting pedagogical benefits of translanguaging across different language skills (Galante, 2020; Moore & Nikula, 2016; Sun & Lan, 2020; Vaish & Subhan, 2015), while extending this work by focusing specifically on measurable grammatical development.

The study also contributes context-specific evidence from the UAE, where Arabic-speaking learners acquire English within a multilingual educational environment. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously because the study employed intact classes and a relatively small sample. Further research with larger and more diverse samples, longer interventions, and different proficiency levels would help establish the consistency of these findings. Overall, the evidence suggests that the choice need not be framed as English only versus Arabic. Rather, a strategically bilingual approach may enable learners to draw on their existing linguistic knowledge while continuing to develop accurate English grammatical knowledge.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest related to the research, authorship, or publication of this study.

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