

## **Self-Directed Learning for Nonnative English-Speaking Graduate Students Across Disciplines: Translanguaging Practices and Perspectives**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The influx of international students in U.S. colleges has resulted in linguistically diverse classrooms, raising attention to translanguaging practices. The purpose of this study is to examine the self-directed translanguaging practices and perspectives of nonnative English-speaking (NNES) graduate students in the U.S. university setting by using narrative stories, individual interviews, and focus group discussion. Twelve NNES graduate students from Asian countries participated in this research. These students demonstrated their self-management, motivation and persistence, and self-monitoring in their academic learning. Although they reported the difficulties from academic English language, they identified the value of translanguaging practices, and they developed some characteristics of autonomous learning due to “teacher-directed translanguaging” and “student-directed translanguaging.” Scaffolding and collaborative learning benefited and effectively engaged NNES graduate students in self-directed learning.

**Keywords:** higher education, nonnative English-speaking graduate student, self-directed learning, translanguaging

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Self-directed learning is “a process in which individuals take initiative, with or without the help of others, to diagnose their learning needs, formulate learning goals, identify resources for learning, select and implement learning strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes” (Knowles, 1975, p. 18). Self-directed learning

enables learners to become more independent and autonomous in how they think, learn, and behave even after they complete formal studies. Studies about self-directed learning have shown an increase in the consideration of cultural factors (e.g., Collier, 2011; Overzat, 2011), with some aspects of collectivist cultures appearing to be impediments to autonomous learning. In particular, Asian learners have often been associated with passive learning, rote learning, and being teacher-dependent and unable to engage in independent learning (Z. Fang, 2014; Kember, 2000). However, some research (e.g., Biggs & Watkins, 2001; Littlewood, 2001) has questioned the previous research and claimed that when these students were no longer told what to do but had to manage resources and time, make decisions, deal with problems, and communicate with people from other cultures, they could develop characteristics of autonomous learning. There is no agreement about nonnative English-speaking (NNES) learners' self-directedness. This study examined self-directed learning of NNES learners in the U.S. university setting.

With the increasing number of NNES students crossing the globe to gain international experience, the United States has been a popular place for NNES students to pursue college education. Students from Asian countries now represent approximately 69% of the total enrollment of NNES students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2019). Many universities in the United States have had to face questions about how to provide successful educational experiences for these students, given apparent differences between American and Asian cultures of learning (Ade-ojo, 2005; Jingnan, 2011). In the present study, the term "NNES student" refers to any student who self-reported that their first language was not English. They all learned English as a second or foreign language. Most NNES students are still developing their academic language proficiency (Biancarosa & Snow, 2004).

As for NNES students, they have the potential for translanguaging in the classroom with high linguistic diversity. Translanguaging is defined as the ability of multilingual speakers to shuttle between languages, treating the diverse languages that form their repertoire as an integrated system (Canagarajah, 2011). Translanguaging gives students agency in negotiating their linguistic repertoires (García et al., 2011). Jiménez et al. (2015) stated that translanguaging made learners strengthen important components of their reading comprehension tool kits, such as summarizing and understanding vocabulary. Translanguaging provides support for their self-esteem and thus for their motivation and persistence for learning (Middelborg, 2005; World Bank, 2005). In the present study, we frame students' strategic use of multiple languages or the practices associated with moving across languages and registers of speech to make meaning as translanguaging (García, 2009).

The purpose of this study is to identify NNES graduate students' self-directed learning in the U.S. university setting from the translanguaging perspective. The research on these students' self-directed learning not only contributes to their learning behaviors but also predicts their chances of continuing learning after completing their academic program requirements. It is paramount to help NNES graduate students address their self-directed learning and increase their feelings of self-direction. According to Pintrich (2004) and Zimmerman (2002), learners

should apply strategies proactively in a self-directive style in which they plan, monitor, and regulate their learning throughout academic activities. But can all NNES graduate students plan, monitor, and regulate their learning appropriately? Fewer studies in international student literature explore the Asian NNES graduate students' self-directed learning. Moreover, up to now, not much has been heard of students' views of their actual language choices and effective instructional practices. This study thus intends to bridge the gap. The research question is as follows: What instructional strategies support NNES graduate students' self-directed learning from the perspective of translanguaging? In order to explore this question, 12 NNES graduate students from Asian countries participated in the study. This article presents the situation of self-directed learning of these Asian NNES graduate students and how these students perceive translanguaging practices.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A large body of research focuses on the issues that NNES students confront at the postsecondary level (e.g., Casanave, 2005; Erichsen & Bolliger, 2011). NNES graduate students have to learn advanced literacy in specific academic disciplines (Casanave & Li, 2008). NNES graduate students need to perform in-depth reading of course materials; complete understanding of content knowledge, classroom culture, and norms; and interact with peers and professors in order to participate competently (Kim, 2012). They have to become competent or qualified to prepare to enter the profession in a related academic field after graduation. However, in the process of becoming academically competent, it has been found that these NNES students have confronted lack of autonomy, limited mentoring, and insufficient familiarity with English academic vocabulary (Ariza, 2010; Braine, 2010; Cheung, 2010; Lim, 2017). Ade-ojo (2005) found that English speakers of other languages (ESOL) college students preferred an instructor-driven curriculum, and because of sociocultural and psychological factors, students were hesitant to work independently. Issues Asian NNES students confront include classroom participation patterns (reluctance to participate or nonparticipation, lack of questioning, no indications of understanding), lack of initiative or critical thinking, dependency in student–teacher relations, and lack of autonomy in study practices (Z. Fang, 2014; Kember, 2000).

However, Jingnan (2011) found that NNES students were conscious that learning was their own responsibility, but few learners had the necessary knowledge and skills to undertake classwork totally independently. Learners either lack information and resources or the ability to use available resources effectively in their self-directed learning (McKinney et al., 2004). These barriers have brought challenges for learners' autonomy and caused difficulties for these students in participating in group work or discussion activities (Hailu & Ku, 2014; Mukminin & McMahan, 2013; Xue, 2013). Most NNES students identified that it was difficult for them to become independent learners without guidance from teachers, and they expected teachers to help them in using learning strategies, selecting resources, and establishing class environment for autonomous learning

(F. M. Fang & Zhang, 2012; Z. Fang, 2014). Did NNES students in this study also confront these problems in their academic learning? If yes, how did they deal with these issues?

Braine (2010) stressed that it was essential for teachers or faculty advisors to aid NNES graduate students with advanced academic literacy to socialize into a new academic community. Effective instruction strategies for college NNES students have been reported in previous studies (e.g., Bista, 2015; Samimy et al., 2011). Hornberger and Link (2012) argued that translanguaging and transnational literacies in classrooms were necessary and desirable educational practices. Marshall and Moore (2018) and Martínez-Álvarez and Ghiso (2017) referred to translanguaging as a means of enacting bilinguals' agency. According to García's (2009) concept of translanguaging, linguistic resources (i.e., knowledge of multiple languages and dialects) are part of a single language system that an NNES student uses to create meaning and accomplish goals. Students' linguistic resources have tremendous pedagogical, psychological, and cognitive functions in classrooms (Lee & Macaro, 2013; Lin, 2015; Moore, 2013). Translanguaging enables self-directed and small group learning, which at least in the early years of a strictly second language (L2)-medium education, is almost impossible to accomplish (Clegg & Simpson, 2016). Cummins (2000) stated that knowledge and abilities acquired in one language were potentially available for the development of another because of a common underlying proficiency. Translanguaging can enhance cognitive, language, and literacy abilities (W. G. Lewis, 2008; W. Li, 2009). A translanguaging perspective has been regarded as meaningful linguistic innovation for NNES students (Wei, 2020). Students valued translanguaging strategies while developing their proficiency through a dialogical pedagogy (Canagarajah, 2011). Lin (2015) discussed benefits of translanguaging in content- and language-integrated learning and claimed that translanguaging helped to distinguish instructional practices from monolingual L2 immersion education models by becoming more flexible and balanced about the role of the primary language. Translanguaging facilitates academic meaning making, and it is student-centered and helps to acknowledge students' input and the importance of rapport among all classroom participants.

Additionally, studies have found that postsecondary NNES students' perceived autonomous support predicts emotional well-being and achievement (Hall & Webb, 2014; Sawtelle et al., 2012). The autonomous support can be scaffolding that helps to move students progressively toward stronger understanding and, ultimately, greater independence in the learning process. NNES students' English language was relatively limited, and therefore they were more likely to resort to other languages for scaffolding. Effective scaffolding strategies also include peer group discussion or interactions, clear directions and explanations, peer revision, and timely feedback (Davis & Miyake, 2004; Rojas-Drummond & Mercer, 2003). To sum up, the previous classroom-based research has explored translanguaging practices and analyzed how teachers and students behave with multiple languages in different contexts (e.g., Clegg & Simpson, 2016; Gu, 2014; Palfreyman & Al-Bataineh, 2018; Wang, 2019). However, there are few studies on NNES students in graduate-level settings directly linking

effective instruction practices to self-directed learning in U.S. colleges from the perspective of translanguaging, and this study contributes to this field.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Translanguaging can be extended as a conceptual framework to interpret hybridity and creativity of language use in classrooms, where the high degree of diversity of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds means that they can draw on huge linguistic resources (Wang, 2019). As García (2011) pointed out, translanguaging encourages flexible concurrent language use rather than continuing to keep students' linguistic knowledge separate or treating prior languages as nonexistent or purely negative influences. According to G. Lewis et al. (2012) and García and Li (2014), there are two types of translanguaging strategies: (a) teacher-directed translanguaging to give voice and clarity, manage the classroom, and ask questions, and (b) student-directed translanguaging to participate, elaborate ideas, and raise questions. Both types of strategies complement each other. These strategies are vital especially for NNES graduate students since they have to autonomously participate in academic work, perform in-depth understanding of content, and interact with peers and professors in professional field competently. The current study examined both teacher-directed and student-directed translanguaging from NNES graduate students' perspectives.

Different scholars have proposed various models to understand self-directed learning (e.g., Brockett & Hiemstra, 1991; Candy, 1991; Garrison, 1997). Apart from translanguaging, Candy's and Garrison's models were selected for further analysis, as they seem to be appropriate and comprehensive representations of self-directed learning in this context.

Candy (1991) considered self-directed learning as a goal as well as a process. He proposed a four-dimensional model, that is:

“Self-direction” as a personal attribute (personal autonomy); “self-direction” as the willingness and capacity to conduct one's own education (self-management); “self-direction” as a mode of organizing instruction in formal settings (learner-control); and “self-direction” as the individual, non-institutional pursuit of learning opportunities in the “natural societal setting” (autodidaxy). (p. 23)

Personal autonomy is a series of attributes that include students' independence and freedom of choice. Self-management refers to a learner's willingness and ability or competence to manage their own learning, with competence including research skills, time management, goal setting, and critical thinking. With competence, one is able to exercise control effectively in a certain situation. Learner control of instruction is vital for effective learning strategies (Entwistle & Peterson, 2004). Garrison (1997) had a similar discussion about self-directed learning from three interacting dimensions: self-management, which involves learners' use of resources to achieve objectives in a given context; self-monitoring; and motivation. Self-directed learning recognizes the significance of motivation in initiating and maintaining NNES graduate students' efforts.

Students need to collaborate and interact with others in the process of self-management, assessment, and self-reflection. This model is appropriate to support the analysis of NNES students' self-directed learning in this study.

## **METHOD**

This study used a qualitative research methodology to explore instructional strategies that support NNES graduate students' self-directed learning from the perspective of translanguaging. It also described the self-directed learning and perceptions of translanguaging experienced by NNES graduate students across disciplines.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 12 NNES graduate students who were enrolled at a major university in the Southeastern United States. The interviews were administered to a convenience sampling, which is recommended by Cohen et al. (2013) as a suitable recruitment strategy for a study that does not aim to study a representative sample. These 12 participants were selected because their native language was not English, and they majored in different fields. Participants also had passed the Test of English as a Foreign Language and matriculated to university graduate level courses. Furthermore, these participants did not receive any support services, nor were they enrolled in remediation courses or courses designed to improve their English skills. Data were collected confidentially. Student responses are presented using pseudonyms. Four of the students, Xi, Ziaul, Seong, and Jang, were pursuing master's degrees, while the other eight students were pursuing doctoral degrees. Participants majored in different academic areas: agricultural economics, applied economics, business, chemistry, consumer science, electric engineering, English for speakers of other languages, geology, higher education, mechanical engineering, and statistics. Seven of them were from the STEM field and five of them were in non-STEM disciplines. They were all NNES students whose primary languages were not English and who were acquiring English and were not proficient in the language. There were six male and six female students. The length of time they were in the United States ranged from 1 to 3.5 years, and all of them had never lived in an English-speaking country besides the United States. All of them, except participants Xi, Juan, and Jang who rated their English level as "fair", rated their overall English proficiency as "good." This rating is self-reported, and participants chose from "excellent", "good" "fair", or "poor" to rate their English proficiency. The following table provides more detailed background information about all the participants in this study.

**Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants**

Participant	Age	Gender	Country of origin	Major	Length of time in US (yrs)	Self-perceptions of English proficiency
Bala	26	M	India	Mechanical Engineering	3	Good
Xi	24	F	China	Statistics	1	Fair
Asuka	28	F	Japan	Geology	3.5	Good
Ziaul	27	M	Bangladesh	Applied Economics	1.5	Good
Ashraff	32	M	Malaysia	Higher Education	3.5	Good
Seong	24	F	Korea	Consumer Science	1	Good
Juan	29	F	China	Chemistry	2.5	Fair
Sanuwar	33	M	Bangladesh	Geology	2	Good
Wei	29	F	China	Agricultural Economics	3.5	Good
Pei	32	F	China	English for Speakers of Other Languages	1	Good
Trivedi	27	M	India	Electrical Engineering	2	Good
Jang	25	M	Korea	Business	2	Fair

### **Procedures**

Data were collected from three sources: (a) narrative stories, (b) transcriptions of audiotaped interviews with each student, and (c) transcriptions of audiotaped focus group discussions. The data collection methods are based on methodologic triangulation. Triangulation is the combination of two or more data sources, methodologic approaches, or theoretical perspectives (Kimchi et al., 1991) in the same study. By using multiple methods, the researcher aims to create innovative ways of understanding a phenomenon, reveal unique findings, increase confidence in research data, decrease the “deficiencies and biases that stem from any single method” (Mitchell, 1986, p. 19), and provide a clearer understanding of the problem (Jick, 1979). In order to have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of NNES graduate students’ self-directed learning from the perspective of translanguaging, the three data collection methods were used in this study.

I collected narrative stories from all the participants. I asked participants to write narrative stories or reflections about their self-directed learning. I also gave

rubrics for the reflections to all the participants. The rubrics included describing self-directed learning experience in the home country as well as in the United States; discussing English learning processes and experiences; discussing problems encountered, strategies used, and supports received in self-directed learning; and, if possible, providing reflections about the whole self-directed learning process. I performed a content analysis of the narrative stories, and major themes of comments emerged from repeated data analysis of two researchers from the field of adult education. The analysis provided further information for individual interviews and focus group discussion.

I interviewed participants individually with open-ended questions related to their self-directed learning in U.S. university classrooms and translanguaging experience, such as use of knowledge of multiple languages and dialects, code-switching, or concurrent language use. I developed the questions based on the literature in the area. Each interview lasted about 40 minutes. I asked the interview questions in English, and participants answered in English. I recorded and transcribed the interviews. The participants read the transcriptions to verify their own words and comments. I then analyzed the transcriptions of interviews and two researchers in the field of adult education coded the interviews using a qualitative analysis software package, Atlasti, with a specific focus on the research questions of the present study. After coding the data, the two researchers reviewed, compared, and analyzed the major themes to establish the reliability of interpretations. I used the emerging themes from interviews to develop the focus group discussion topics and then facilitated the interview. The focus group generated in-depth discussions among participants and created a more elaborate picture of the perspectives of NNES graduate students. Quotations are drawn from narrative stories, the audiotaped interviews, and focus group discussions.

## **RESULTS**

After coding and analysis, four major themes emerged: (a) self-management and translanguaging, (b) motivation and persistence, (c) self-monitoring and translanguaging, and (d) effective instructional strategies.

### **Self-Management and Translanguaging**

Self-management involves learners' willingness and capacity to conduct their own education and their use of resources to achieve objectives in a given context. Participants stated that they tried to "transfer knowledge across languages," "plan class work," and "seek more resources" to facilitate their academic courses learning and English learning. For example,

I always try to seek opportunities to ask questions and communicate with peers. When I have paper work, I always try to search books in library, and seek information online, information in English and in my own language. I try to use all resources to help me to finish the work successfully. —*Ashraff*

I know I have some language problems, so I always preview the class content with the help of the related materials in my language (Korean) before the class. Then, I can transfer the knowledge, and it really make my academic course learning easier, then I can have more confidence.  
—*Jang*

This shows that these participants had attributes as well as willingness to conduct and manage their own learning. They showed their behavior of shuttling between languages. In their narrative stories, participants further reported that they used strategies in their academic course learning, such as searching reference literature in their home languages, previewing/reviewing lecture materials by translating, and asking native peers for clarity. This reveals the translanguaging strategy “student-directed translanguaging”—to participate, to elaborate ideas, and to raise questions. Participants identified the value of group work and participation in classroom discourse in the United States, which is one of the characteristics of self-directed learning. Students can use groups to develop their own learning processes and achieve learning goals. For instance, they noted in the focus group discussion:

In group work you have to convey yourself and make yourself understood and you learn how to communicate with others and how to finish class work. —*Ashraff*

Group presentation is the most exciting activity. I feel less stressful. We can work in a group, communicate with natives and make friends with others. —*Pei*

Peer-support was initiated by teachers and students. Participants reported that they often interacted with each other using multiple languages to translate questions raised by teachers. Some also mentioned that they often confirmed with each other the homework requirements through their individual primary languages.

Additionally, students were willing to conduct their own learning and also tended to take responsibility for their own learning in a translanguaging-friendly environment. For instance, one participant wrote in his narrative story:

The most important role for the teacher is a facilitator for me. To teach a person to fish is better than to give the person a fish. If the professor can teach us how to learn, and create a context where I have freedom to interact and resources, materials or dialects to use to improve my comprehension, it is better than he just give us some knowledge. —*Jang*

It seemed that participants valued and developed the awareness of self-directed learning with the help of translanguaging strategies. When they encountered difficulties, they were more likely to use strategies and seek assistance and resources to solve problems and achieve learning goals. Meanwhile, participants reported in interviews that teachers in the U.S. classrooms encouraged self-directed learning in ways such as:

Professors give much freedom...they give the basic introduction and support you to find the answer. I can ask peers to help me. In the class, teachers don't force us to speak English and encourage us to interact and use all resources or background knowledge. —*Pei*

It showed that “teacher-directed translanguaging” strategy was used to give voice, clarity, and reinforcement, and to manage the classroom. Participants valued teacher support for their self-directed learning development with translanguaging practices. Furthermore, two participants from STEM fields stated in the focus group discussion as well as their narrative stories that there were not many various activities in their classrooms, such as class discussion or group projects. For these graduate students, most of their time was spent in labs. Professors from STEM fields may choose to focus on students’ research abilities and the curriculum instead of classroom activities. The two participants added that, “we try to improve our research ability by using all resources.”

### **Motivation and Persistence**

Self-directed learners are reflective and self-aware, demonstrate motivation, and are persistent and responsible (Candy, 1991). Self-directed learning recognizes the significance of agency in maintaining learners’ efforts. NNES students in this study were found to be persistent in their academic courses as well as in English language learning. One participant showed high persistence in the academic learning in the focus group discussion by stating:

I want to be a college teacher when I return to my home country. I have enough freedom to use all resources to overcome the difficulties. I use my background knowledge to comprehend class content and communicate with my natives. Because of these possible ways I can learn more advanced knowledge and skills to be qualified as a college teacher in the future. —*Ashraff*

When students have more agencies in their academic learning, they are more likely to persist in their learning. One participant continued to note:

As a graduate student if I want to make success in the research I have to keep on studying, doing research and writing papers and make a lot of efforts. As an international student, I have more language difficulties, but luckily I can use my prior knowledge to make meaning and have an open mind to communicate to make up for my shortcomings compared with native speakers. —*Xi*

### **Self-Monitoring and Translanguaging**

Participants developed the attribute and ability of self-monitoring. They were willing to adjust their behavior and readily and easily modified their behavior in response to the demands of the situation. Participants commented, “The situation is totally different for me, and I tried to seek resources and assistance from

natives”; “I like classmates’ comments and it is useful for me, and I would like to change my behavior in classes”; and “If my classmates cannot understand me, I try to make change and modify my speech or words to make me understood.”

Participants also reported they faced difficulties and challenges from academic languages in making adjustment in their self-monitoring. All participants except for Bala reported challenges from academic English language. These students were simultaneously learning the language of instruction as well as the vocabulary and content of different subjects. They made statements such as:

Professors try to explain very well in class, but the problem is I don’t know the exactly English meaning. It makes me feel difficult to learn by myself in the class and after class. —*Juan*

I don’t know technically what the words mean when I study the reference literature after class. —*Ziaul*

Final exam is very stressful. Although I know the answer of the question, I could not remember the correct English academic vocabulary. If I want to continue my study, I have to make more efforts to learn outside of classroom, and I have to overcome this problem. —*Jang*

These statements show that the participants faced challenges from English academic language, especially its vocabulary in their self-directed learning. English academic language can be a barrier for these students to engage in interactions with others and make adjustments in their self-monitoring. Since they were all graduate students, their study and classwork was filled with professional terms and formal language of study. These students had to learn not only interpersonal communication language and skills but also the content of different subjects and all of the associated complex and abstract vocabulary and technical terms.

Juan further stated in the interview:

Sometimes, when teachers give us tasks or assignments, I cannot understand, I write it down with my [native] language. When I do the work, I go back and read what I write down and I understand what the teacher want me to do.

Additionally, in the face of challenges from academic language, Asuka showed her learning autonomy by saying:

I go search each [academic English] word online and make a translated database of the course for myself.

But one participant (Bala) expressed or referred to conflicting attitudes toward this code-switching in the focus group. He reported code-switching as a result of linguistic deficit or compensation strategy used and related to the inability to remember English vocabulary.

Furthermore, participants reported the differences of classroom practices between their home country and the United States in their narrative stories. In their home countries there was not too much freedom for students to decide by themselves. Students' voice was not valued. It seemed that there was no evidence to suggest that self-directed learning was part of classroom practice in the colleges in these participants' home countries. For example, one participant noted:

In my home country, we don't have many opportunities to discuss in a class. The major way of teachers' instruction is lecture...In my English language class, we just follow teachers' English words and even when we don't understand we don't often question teachers in the class. —*Xi*

All participants in this study had been in the United States for at least 1 year. They reported that in their home countries, they were more likely to be in teacher-centered classrooms and were taught what to do step by step, but when they came to the U.S. classroom setting, and when they were no longer told what to do but had to manage resources, make decisions, and deal with problems, they could develop some characteristics of autonomous learning.

### **Effective Instructional Strategies**

Scaffolding increases learners' independence and helps learners to know not only "what to think and do, but how to think and do," so that new skills and understandings can be applied in new contexts (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005, p. 10). Participants reported favorably on the role the teacher played in helping and supporting them. Scaffolding provided by teachers was perceived as effective instructional strategies that support these students' self-directed learning. They identified "models or examples," "activating or connection to background knowledge," and "interactions" as effective strategies for them to make progress in their self-directed learning. For example, participants noted:

When I wrote paper or assignment, the professor will provide some examples, peer's projects and sometimes materials written in different countries and languages to let us understand how to write every section for a paper work. —*Ashraff*

When the professor talked about one topic, he always asked me the situation that happened in China, and I can speak more about the topic. —*Pei*

My professor provided simple example that is similar to our projects. I can use the similar method to solve my problem. Although the procedure may not be exactly the same, but it's helpful for me to familiar with the process and the knowledge that I should learn. —*Juan*

I interacted and discussed a lot in the class and teachers provided a lot of opportunities for us to communicate with peers. —*Pei*

## DISCUSSION

The findings of the study speak to a growing body of research literature (e.g., Lee & Macaro, 2013; W. Li, 2009; Lin, 2015) that reveals learners' translanguaging strategies and functions. Based on the evidence detailed in the Results section, a commonality across these NNES graduate students was their desire to autonomously learn English in academic courses while using and maintaining their native languages. Most of them valued the use of native languages in meaning making and self-direction. They considered translanguaging as functional and used different strategies to improve their English language ability and academic course learning. Languages were mixed in many contexts through which subject content was learned. Translanguaging pedagogical practices were productive in supporting students' academic development such as translanguaging-encouraging classwork and class environment. Translanguaging strategy use, including "teacher-directed translanguaging" and "student-directed translanguaging" could increase students' independence and promote students' ability of learning inside and outside of classroom. In the content area classes, mastery of content is most important, and if students need to make meaning in their native language, this should be encouraged (García et al., 2011). Even though one participant who had a more positive self-perception of his English proficiency mentioned languages other than English should not be valued in content area classrooms, other students used and valued multiple languages in their thoughts, writing, and speech. It is consistent with studies that show the benefits of translanguaging in developing learners' agency (Marshall & Moore, 2018; Martínez-Álvarez & Ghiso, 2017). Participants in the study demonstrated their self-management, motivation and persistence, and self-monitoring in their academic learning. When they encountered difficulties, they were more likely to persist in their learning, maintain their efforts, seek assistance and resources to solve problems, and achieve learning goals.

Students reported challenges from English academic language in their self-directed learning. Academic language requires greater mastery of the English language for NNES students (Bifuh-Ambe, 2009). These students may lack the linguistic and cultural background and experiences that are taken for granted by teachers. This mismatched expectation could be detrimental to these students' self-directed learning and academic performance. The barrier for these NNES graduate students' self-directed learning development may be related to the lack of language knowledge and linguistic resources. Translanguaging and its related practices could enhance classroom communication, respond to discourse and sense-making needs, and give freedom to students for meaning negotiation, which can be embedded in subject-matter content where communication is meaningful (García et al., 2011).

Translanguaging strategies reported in this study include searching reference literature in students' home languages, previewing/reviewing lecture materials by translating, and asking native peers for clarity, etc. Frequent peer support and teacher support were considered effective in negotiating meaning in particular. Students with more linguistic resources and stronger proficiency were more

inclined to help their peers. Students spoke home languages for the purposes of learning English or academic course content. Anything useful to achieve the primary goal could be strategically employed. Switching was not an aim in itself, but a process or a strategy to facilitate communication or to get ideas across. Translanguaging is timesaving and when students are involved in communication, especially with native peers, they utter the word that first comes to mind and avoid thinking about its equivalent in English. It confirms the findings of Clegg and Simpson (2016) that translanguaging enables self-directed and group learning which in a strictly L2-medium education is almost impossible to accomplish in L2. But this study contributes more to the related research since it examined self-directed learning from the translanguaging perspective comprehensively, both from teacher-directed and student-directed translanguaging. Students reported translanguaging individually and collaboratively. Not all students or even the teacher may be able to read all these multiple languages, but having them available in a classroom conveys a strong message that all languages are valuable. Establishing a translanguaging-friendly environment is important and it creates a classroom where students' voices and inputs are legitimate and valued (García, 2011).

Moreover, some participants reported that they lacked self-directed learning experience in their home country classroom. The classroom participation patterns in these students' home countries were different from those in the United States. In their home countries, they lacked questioning experience, initiative, and critical or independent thinking. NNES students may lack the necessary information, resources, knowledge, skills, and confidence to undertake tasks totally independently (Braine, 2010; Cheung, 2010). However, when they are given opportunity, freedom, and are told how to perform, students can develop characteristics of self-directed learning, which may contrast with the conventional beliefs found by Z. Fang (2014) that Asians were less likely to be autonomous than Westerners. Participants reported they valued interactive classroom activities in the U.S. college, which encouraged students to take responsibility for their own learning. Students agreed that they benefitted from teacher and peer support in their self-directed learning development. Teachers allowed students to utilize translanguaging and transliteracy to clarify meaning and make personal applications to their own experiences. Clearly the focus here is on communication rather than the linguistic code itself. The findings provide evidence to support the assertion of Biggs and Watkins (2001), Jingnan (2011), and Littlewood (2001). Students need to feel that they have some control over what is being taught, and when they feel autonomous, they are more likely to be motivated and to persist in what they are learning.

Scaffolding was reported as an effective instructional strategy by most NNES graduate students in this study. Scaffolding is designed to "provide the assistance necessary to enable learners to accomplish tasks and develop understandings that they would not be able to manage on their own" (Hammond & Gibbons, 2005, p. 9). Teachers should scaffold learning to promote language acquisition and academic success (Maxwell et al., 2011). These effective guidance and

instructional strategies help learners to become actually self-directed even after learners finish their formal studies.

Participants also identified the value of group work and participation in classroom discourse in the United States. This kind of class activity is crucial for NNES students, especially students from nonscience and nonengineering fields that usually require more oral classroom participation and thus may require more advanced English listening and speaking skills (Ferris, 1998). Students could learn more and explore and yield new ideas and valuable insights during groupwork or discussions with peers. In particular, the qualities and skills that are essential for graduate students to do research cannot be developed just from textbooks; development also requires advisors' guidance and communicating with others through research tasks. Teachers need to pay attention to the group size in arranging groups. Lohman and Finkelstein (2000) identified higher self-directed learning in small and medium groups but lower self-directed learning in large groups.

Additionally, students from STEM fields reported fewer classroom activities or discussions used by teachers. It seems true especially for NNES students in STEM fields since as Morrison and Anglin (2006) stated, the most common way of class delivery for NNES students in STEM fields was lecture, and STEM classes required hands-on experimentation in laboratory settings. The process of trial and error is an important part of science (Morrison & Anglin, 2006), thus less attention was paid to various class activities. In this case, translanguaging strategies may focus on enhancing academic literacy or abilities.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION**

This study identified that the participants valued self-directed learning and translanguaging practices in the U.S. university setting, and they developed the awareness and capability of self-management, motivation and persistence, and self-monitoring in their academic learning. Meanwhile, with the help of teacher support and peer support, students adopted different translanguaging strategies and sought resources to assist their English language and academic course learning. Two types of translanguaging strategies including teacher-directed and student-directed translanguaging were reported. Students translanguaged individually and collaboratively. The effective instructional strategies include scaffolding and collaborative learning.

Based on these findings, I suggest that teachers implement translanguaging pedagogies that encourage the development of the full range of students' linguistic resources and make the efforts necessary to get to know their students. Teachers may help students to feel more comfortable to translanguage across linguistic proficiency levels and devote themselves to creating a trusting, respectful, and collaborative context to make students enjoy a high degree of autonomy to achieve academic success. Making translanguaging a norm in classrooms would support student learning, and designing multimodal and multilingual projects enables students to share their stories and experiences. I also suggest that teachers help students to recognize the great linguistic resources they have and facilitate

students' discussion through student-led activities. Teachers can recognize these practices as common across their multilingual students and help students value these practices. It is emphasized that through these practices, students' linguistic proficiencies and perspectives can be revealed, which in turn can lead to instructional shifts that responsively support them in self-directed and lifelong learning.

This study also implies that teachers should pay attention to the language they use in and out of class to ensure that NNES students can understand the class content completely. Teachers can provide cognitive or metalinguistic scaffolding for meaning making to accommodate students' needs; model learning strategies such as questioning and clarifying; engage students in the learning of content knowledge; enhance their responsibility for participation; and help them use English academic language appropriately in classroom work.

In particular, college administrators should also work closely with international organizations within NNES graduate students' communities to provide services for NNES graduate students to achieve identity, integrate into local communities, and minimize the influence of limited language proficiency on their academic success. I want to emphasize the importance of collaboration between students, teachers, and related organizations in the process of students becoming self-directed learners and proficient as lifelong learners.

The study has some limitations. First, this study discusses findings from 12 Asian NNES graduate students, and the findings are limited to one U.S. university context. Given the potentially varying scope and levels of linguistic diversity among different universities, the findings cannot be generalized to other contexts. In addition, as the study drew on interview data and some relevant documents, its findings may not be able to fully capture the participants' self-directed learning and translanguaging in real practice. Furthermore, further research is still needed for how to facilitate self-direction and how a self-directed learner becomes motivated in a given context where they do not have a great deal of power. The teacher perspective could be explored together with students' perspectives in classrooms to further meet the needs of NNES graduate students. Teachers' roles in shaping the quality of students' experiences should be examined to analyze teachers' influence on students' affective, cognitive, and behavioral abilities. Studies could further find ways to use students' varied home language practices as scaffolds for the development of NNES students' English and academic literacy.

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