PURPOSEFUL TRANSLANGUAGING IN PLAY AND DAILY ROUTINES: A DESIGN-BASED COACHING STUDY

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Abstract

This practice-based study theorizes and tests a set of design principles for integrating English into play-based learning centers and daily routines in a Taiwanese public nonprofit kindergarten. Drawing on eight coaching cycles that combined in-class observations, collaborative planning, demonstration lessons, and post-lesson debriefs, we examined how teachers' English-across-the-curriculum practices evolved and how children appropriated English as a social tool during activity transitions and center time. Data sources included coaching notes, teacher reflections, artifacts, and classroom vignettes compiled by the kindergarten and the university coach. Analysis used iterative coding to surface mechanisms of change across cycles. Findings show (a) teachers' confidence and accuracy in using English increased when goals were made explicit in lesson plans and assessed formatively; (b) language-experience charts (LEA-inspired) helped preliterate children attach meaning to print and sentence frames; (c) a classroom helper system, visual schedules, and musical transition rituals stabilized attention, lowered wait-time stress, and opened authentic interactional spaces for English; (d) learning-center bilingualization enabled children to reuse vocabulary and sentence patterns spontaneously during block/dramatic-play; and (e) families reported visible transfer. The paper contributes a design-based theory of change that aligns CLIL/translanguaging rationales with social-emotional learning routines in early childhood and offers actionable heuristics for Taiwan's *Bilingual 2030* agenda. Implications include pragmatic criteria for selecting routines/centers as "high-yield" language sites, and a caution that visual schedules alone rarely reduce transition-related off-task behavior without paired reinforcement and modeling.

Keywords

Early Childhood Bilingual Education, translanguaging, learning centers

Introduction

Over the past decade, Taiwan has invested in a system-wide bilingualization initiative (*Bilingual 2030*) that foregrounds English-across-contexts rather than English as a single subject. Policy texts emphasize everyday communicative competence as well as cross-curricular integration, creating new demands on kindergarten educators to weave English into play-based learning and daily routines (Ministry of Education, 2021; National Development Council, 2018).Internationally, research on CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) and translanguaging in early years suggests that language development is strongest when children encounter meaningful tasks, multimodal resources, and supportive adult mediation (Ooi & Aziz, 2021). However, evidence is mixed and context-sensitive, especially for younger learners and for EFL settings. Recent meta-analyses and reviews report positive language effects of CLIL overall but stress variability by design quality and supports (Lo & Lin, 2015); early childhood translanguaging literature highlights how educators orchestrate children's full semiotic repertoires during everyday activities (Zheng, Degotardi, & Djonov, 2024).

This article reports a design-based coaching study conducted in a kindergarten in Taiwan. It addresses three questions: (1) which designable features of daily routines and learning centers afford durable opportunities for English use and meaning-making; (2) how teachers' practices and children's English use evolve across iterative coaching cycles; and (3) what practical heuristics can guide implementation under Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 policy. The study makes three contributions: first, it conceptualizes routines and centers as interconnected "language ecologies" that couple attentional regulation with communicative practice; second, it demonstrates how Language-Experience Approach (LEA) charts assign functional meaning to print for preliterate learners; and third, it distills actionable design principles grounded in evidence from the coaching cycles and teacher feedback.

Theoretical Background

Taiwan's *Bilingual 2030* reframes English from a discrete subject to a medium of participation in everyday school life, placing new design demands on play-based kindergartens: teachers must engineer routine moments and center activities so that English becomes usable for doing things with others, not merely a topic to be rehearsed. In this study we treat routines and learning centers as designable sites where language, tools, and social organization can be deliberately re-arranged to afford meaningful English use. This stance anchors the study's questions and links classroom micro-designs to system-level aspirations.

Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) proposes that content goals and language goals can be co-specified and co-assessed within the same activity. Syntheses of CLIL outcomes generally report small-to-moderate positive effects on target-language development, but repeatedly caution that design quality—clear language objectives, form–meaning mapping, and aligned formative checks—drives variability (van Kampen, Admiraal & Berry, 2018). For young children, developmentally appropriate CLIL requires low linguistic load, high actionability: short modeling bursts; concrete, manipulable materials; visual and embodied scaffolds; and frequent opportunities for choral→pair→individual production (Lee, Lee, & Lo, 2025). These mechanisms imply that the unit of design is not the "lesson" in the abstract but the *task episode* and its immediate feedback loops, a scale that fits the tempo of kindergarten.

Translanguaging research in the early years shows educators orchestrating children's full semiotic repertoires—L1/L2, gesture, gaze, objects—to sustain participation and sense-making during play and routines (Yun, Choi, Müge, Lyu, & Croix, 2025). We adopt a functional rather than laissez-faire stance: L1 is recruited strategically to mediate meaning, regulate activity, or launch participation, while specific English forms (lexical items, sentence frames, interactional moves) are foregrounded when they serve the task at hand. This stance guards against two unproductive extremes: prohibiting L1 (which suppresses participation) and "decorative bilingualism" (labels without use). In our design, translanguaging is therefore specified at the level of moves (e.g., L1 to brief/prime; L2 to enact/report), not merely declared as a general principle.

The LEA tradition argues that print gains meaning when it records children's *own* experience (Stauffer, 1970). In kindergartens, class-authored experience charts operationalize LEA: following a shared event, teachers scribe children's utterances into short, re-readable texts, binding sentence frames (e.g., *I like __*; *It grows on the tree*) to lived activity. For preliterate learners, charts function as reusable linguistic artifacts: they provide stable visual anchors for echoic reading, enable quick retrieval during transitions and center time, and make assessment observable (who can point, echo, alter the frame). Pedagogically, LEA bridges oracy and emerging print awareness without front-loading decontextualized phonics routines (NAEYC, 2023).

Transitions are recurrent "hot spots" for off-task behavior in early childhood (Register & Humpal, 2007). Evidence supports ritualized cues—chants/songs with coordinated actions, helper roles that distribute responsibility, and visual flow charts—to stabilize attention and reduce ambiguity. However, visual schedules alone seldom change behavior; effects depend on active modeling and contingent reinforcement (Kirby, Dahbi, Surrain, Rowe & Luk, 2023; McClintock, 2018; Waters, Lerman, & Hovanetz, 2009). We therefore treat transitions as part of an SEL-informed regulatory system whose aim is not only compliance but the creation of interactional space where brief, authentic English exchanges (greetings, directives, acknowledgments) can occur while bodies are moving.

Building on ecological views of learning, we conceptualize routines and centers as language ecologies—configurations of people, artifacts, and norms that offer *affordances* for action and talk. In a well-designed ecology, attention regulation (via rituals and roles) reduces friction; artifacts (labels, task cards, charts) render language visible and reusable; and participation structures (choral→pair→individual; role-play scripts) distribute speaking opportunities. The ecological lens explains why isolated materials rarely move the needle: affordances become *usable* only when tools, goals, and participation are co-configured.

Integrating insights from CLIL, translanguaging, the Language-Experience Approach (LEA), and SEL-informed behavior supports, we advance four design conjectures that organized the coaching intervention. First, goal clarity: articulating lesson-level English objectives and embedding micro-checks should increase the precision of teacher modeling and the density of feedback, thereby expanding opportunities for child talk. Second, LEA charts as functional print: class-authored experience charts are expected to bind sentence frames to shared events, enabling efficient retrieval and reuse during transitions and center time. Third, ritualized transitions with helper roles: rhythmic/visual cues coupled with distributed responsibility should stabilize attention and social order, opening interactional space for brief, authentic L2 exchanges (with visual supports insufficient absent adult mediation). Fourth, center bilingualization: provisioning high-traffic centers with bilingual labels, prompts, and task cards should convert play episodes into recurring occasions to recycle and extend target patterns. Collectively, these conjectures specify how the four literatures can be braided at kindergarten scale and, crucially, yield measurable traces—e.g., English turns per minute, frequency of LEA-chart revisits, and the proportion of transitions enacted with rituals—that align improvement-oriented coaching with the policy mandate to render bilingualization visible in everyday practice.

Methods

The study took place in a kindergarten in Taiwan, three mixed-age classes and the leadership team participated. Coaching was led by a university professor specializing in English integration. Across eight cycles, each visit combined in-class observation, group discussion, and targeted demonstrations or materials design. Early cycles emphasized routine English, learning-center bilingualization, and clear language objectives in lesson plans; later cycles deepened experience charts, center-task sentence frames, and transition rituals. Two integrated themes—"Sugar" and "Fruits & Veggie"—anchored vocabulary and sentence frames. Artifacts included bilingual area labels, English name tags in the literacy corner, experience charts recording children's talk, and a shared digital repository of songs/chants and LEA templates.

We adopted a design-based coaching approach: the coach and teachers co-specified language objectives, devised routine/center interventions, enacted them, and reflected using short cycles. The unit of analysis was the *routine or center activity* (e.g., helper system during morning meeting; fruit-sorting in math center). Evidence of change was triangulated across observations, teacher reflections, and artifacts over time. Primary data comprised: (a) structured coaching notes with recommendations; (b) teacher feedback and reflective memos; (c) classroom artifacts (labels, center task cards, LEA charts, photos); and (d) parent feedback excerpts collated in weekly communications.

Using constant-comparison, two coders (coach; lead teacher) independently tagged episodes as: Goal clarity, Routine ritualization, Center bilingualization, Experience charting, Teacher language confidence/accuracy, Child spontaneous English, Family transfer, Transition management. Disagreements were resolved by discussion at monthly meetings. All data were de-identified at the class level; vignettes use pseudonyms. The coach's dual role (supporter/evaluator) is acknowledged; we mitigate bias by privileging teacher reflections and artifact trails.

Findings

When lesson plans named *English learning goals* (e.g., "name fruits + colors"; "use 'grows on…' locatives"), teachers delivered clearer modeling and checked for understanding via group and small-group prompts. Teachers reported that planning for outcomes ("What should children be able to say/do?") sharpened their demonstrations and formative checks. Accuracy improved as colleagues pre-checked vocabulary (e.g., plural rules, corrections to misprinted cards). In March, planning templates added a "*English Learning Objectives*" box with sample stems and assessment ideas (e.g., choral, pair, individual). Observations noted smoother pacing and more child turns. Clear objectives align CLIL's dual-focus and reduce cognitive load for novice bilingual teachers, a precondition for consistent target-language input.

Teams assembled experience charts after shared events (e.g., tasting fruits; observing whether lemon mixes with milk). Teachers transcribed children's contributions, then re-read charts during closing routines. Children pointed to words, echoed phrases, and reused frames in centers ("I like sweet mango"; "Apple grows on the tree"). Teachers reported that charts "connected letters to something we *just did*," which helped children recall and generalize vocabulary. This matches LEA's core proposition that dictating/re-reading one's own language builds print awareness and bridges oracy to literacy in emergent readers (NAEYC, 2023). By April–May, classes institutionalized a helper rotation (date/weather leaders, line leader, materials helper) and paired it with musical transitions, delivered via Bluetooth during movement. Teachers reported calmer queues and fewer disputes; children self-initiated English phrases during transitions. Evidence from early-childhood research supports musical transitions and visual schedules, with the caveat that visuals alone rarely change behavior without reinforcement/extinction and active modeling—hence our emphasis on helper roles and shared chants, not visuals only (NAEYC, 2018). In the final cycle, a professional conversation clarified the purpose of transitions (attention, turn-taking, time sense) and rehearsed concrete tools (songs, class slogans, visual flow charts). Teachers linked this discussion to fewer conflicts during line-ups and smoother activity switches.

Dramatic-play and block centers were relabeled with bilingual tags; teachers added task prompts (e.g., build a "candy house" or "block cake," then describe *size/looks/yum?*), and product labels (children wrote/displayed item names). During center time, observers recorded children reusing target words and frames while negotiating roles ("You are the chef"). This reflects CLIL's emphasis on situated, purposeful language use and aligns with translanguaging views of play as a site where children orchestrate multimodal repertoires (objects, gestures, L1/L2) (Macaraeg, Gallego, Ferrera, & Ulla, 2024).

Parents' weekly feedback increased during the second semester; families reported children singing English songs and naming items at home, even when parents could not coach full sentences. Teachers, once hesitant to speak, described feeling "more natural" after repeated cycles and collegial checking. The leadership prioritized resource pooling (shared repository of chants/cards/books) to sustain practices. Small but telling fixes—e.g., adjusting poster height to child eye-level, correcting pluralization, aligning phrase translations—improved access and teacher credibility. Visuals were pruned when misaligned to current themes to reduce noise. In a class STEAM lesson, children tested whether fruits mix with milk and observed separation (lemon vs. milk) using filter paper,

with English prompts for observation and reporting. The lesson embedded vocabulary (fruit names, sour/sweet), sentence frames ("It can/can't mix"), and procedural language ("Hands up, hands down, sit down"). Children then authored an experience chart with results.

Discussion

Across the coaching cycles, a coherent theory of change emerged. First, clarifying lesson-level English objectives and aligning formative checks increased the density and precision of teacher modeling and feedback, consistent with CLIL evidence on the value of dual-focus task design (Pittas & Tompkins, 2024). Second, Language-Experience Approach (LEA) charts converted shared classroom events into reusable linguistic resources, binding sentence frames to jointly authored texts that were revisited during transitions—thereby attaching functional meaning to print for preliterate learners (NAEYC, 2023). Third, ritualized transitions paired with a rotating helper system redistributed responsibility and provided rhythmic and visual cues that stabilized attention and social order; importantly, visual schedules alone were insufficient without adult mediation and contingent reinforcement—an implementation caveat echoed in the behavioral literature (Milam & Sutton, 2024). Finally, bilingualizing high-traffic centers with labels, prompts, and task cards transformed play into authentic communicative activity: children spontaneously recycled and extended target patterns in role-play and block talk, aligning with reports of center-mediated vocabulary reuse in early EFL settings (Macaraeg, Gallego, Ferrera, & Ulla, 2024). Taken together, these mechanisms suggest that language gains were catalyzed not by isolated materials but by the orchestration of goals, artifacts, and routines that braid regulation with communication.

Our findings operationalize policy aspirations at the child's eye level: the mandate to "optimize bilingual conditions" (National Development Council, Ministry of Education, Directorate-General of Personnel Administration, & Civil Service Protection and Training Commission, 2021) translates into routine-linked and center-linked micro-designs that teachers can plan, enact, and assess weekly. This represents a pragmatic bridge between policy narrative and classroom ecology.

Although the CLIL literature reports generally positive effects, outcomes are uneven when language objectives, assessment, and teacher supports are weak. Likewise, visual schedules and other display-rich environments are not panaceas for transition difficulties; durable behavior change depends on explicit modeling, contingent reinforcement, and consistent routines. Translanguaging is most productive when purposefully orchestrated to mediate meaning and participation rather than treated as laissez-faire code-mixing (Creese & Blackledge, 2015; García & Wei, 2014). In our setting, the most robust shifts emerged from a coordinated package that braided goal clarity, high-density modeling and feedback, class-authored experience charts, and ritualized transitions—an interpretation consonant with recent CLIL syntheses, early-childhood behavior research, and translanguaging scholarship (Aleksić & García, 2022).

A coherent set of practical design principles can guide implementation. Planning should be verb-driven, specifying observable language behaviors (e.g., name, compare, report) and predetermining how every child will be heard—from choral responses to pairs to individuals. Shared classroom experiences should be converted into class-authored Language-Experience Approach (LEA) charts and revisited during closings and center time so that print carries functional meaning. Transitions ought to be ritualized through fixed greetings, rotating helper roles, and musical cues that reduce uncertainty; any visual schedules must be paired with active modeling and contingent reinforcement. High-traffic centers should be bilingualized by adding labels, prompts, and sentence frames to dramatic play, blocks, and literacy corners, with children's bilingual products publicly displayed. All language materials require pre-checking for accuracy and developmental appropriateness, and visuals should be placed at child eye level. Instruction should sequence input and use—modeling, guided practice, center reuse, and charted reflection—keeping segments brief to maximize student turns. To sustain coherence and diffusion, teams should curate a living digital repository of chants, frames, LEA templates, and center task cards. Finally, practitioners should listen for transfer by systematically attending to parent notes about songs and phrases used at home as soft indicators of generalization beyond school.

This is a single-site case without standardized language assessments; child language evidence derives from observational tallies and artifacts. The coach's dual role may bias interpretations despite triangulation with teacher reflections and artifacts. Future studies should include multi-site replications and mixed measures (language sampling, rubrics, parent surveys) to strengthen claims.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the bilingualization of early childhood classrooms is most productively advanced not by isolated materials or sporadic lessons, but by the orchestration of designable classroom sites—routines and learning centers—into coherent "language ecologies." Across eight design-based coaching cycles in a Taiwanese kindergarten, we identified a set of mutually reinforcing mechanisms: clarifying lesson-level English objectives increased the precision and density of teacher modeling and feedback; class-authored Language-

Experience

Approach (LEA) charts attached functional meaning to print and sustained reuse of sentence frames; ritualized transitions and helper roles stabilized attention and social order, thereby opening interactional space for authentic language use; and the bilingualization of high-traffic centers converted play into recurring opportunities for production and negotiation of meaning. Together, these mechanisms yielded observable improvement in teachers' instructional confidence and in children's spontaneous English during movement and center time.

Conceptually, the study contributes a design-based theory of change for early EFL that couples regulation and communication: when routines reduce cognitive and social frictions, instructional bandwidth can be reallocated to modeling, uptake, and feedback; when centers are provisioned with bilingual labels and prompts, children appropriate target forms as tools for getting things done. Methodologically, we show how rapid cycles of planning, enactment, and collegial reflection can function as a feasible improvement strategy in resource-constrained public settings. Practically, we distill these insights into portable heuristics—plan with verbs, chart experience rather than textbooks, ritualize transitions, and bilingualize centers—offering school teams concrete levers for week-to-week implementation.

Policy-wise, the work operationalizes Taiwan's *Bilingual 2030* aspirations at child-eye level. Rather than treating bilingual policy as an additional subject load, our approach aligns English use with the daily economy of the classroom through brief, repeatable routines and play tasks. For scaling, we propose a "core package" that schools can adopt and adapt: (a) explicit language objectives with built-in formative checks; (b) LEA charts revisited during closings and transitions; (c) a fixed repertoire of musical/visual transition rituals and helper roles; and (d) center-specific labels, prompts, and task cards. Simple implementation metrics—child English turns per minute, frequency of LEA revisits, proportion of transitions conducted with rituals, and teacher peer-checking of language materials—can support local monitoring without imposing heavy assessment burdens.

The study is limited by its single-site design and reliance on observational and artifact-based evidence; future research should incorporate multi-site replications, naturalistic language sampling, and parent-reported transfer, as well as experimental tests of individual components of the core package. Nonetheless, the findings indicate a pragmatic pathway for systems pursuing early bilingual goals within play-based curricula: start where children move and play, and let meaning-making routines carry the print and the talk.

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