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TRANSLANGUAGING AS PEDAGOGICAL MEDIATION IN FRENCH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION: A COMPARATIVE CASE STUDY OF TWO NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Foreign language training in Nigerian higher education continues to be organised around monolingual pedagogical norms inherited from European teaching traditions, even though learners bring richly multilingual repertoires into the classroom. This article reports a comparative, convergent mixed-methods case study of translanguaging practice in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) instruction at two Nigerian tertiary institutions with contrasting profiles: the African Regional Institute for Geospatial Information Science and Technology (AFRIGIST), an international training institute, and Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU), a conventional public university. Drawing on structured classroom observation, a student questionnaire, semi-structured instructor interviews, and institutional achievement records including assessment scores, test and examination results, *f*rom four instructors and 120 learners, the study examines the forms translanguaging takes, how it is perceived by students and instructors, the institutional conditions that enable or constrain it, and its association with learner performance. Findings show that translanguaging was used systematically, though often informally, to mediate grammatical explanation, clarify task demands, and sustain participation, with French-English translanguaging dominant at AFRIGIST and a broader multilingual practice, including Yoruba, and sometimes Pidgin English, more common at OAU. Students associated translanguaging with improved comprehension, greater confidence, and lower anxiety, while teachers valued its support function, but expressed concern over institutional expectations favouring exclusive target-language use. Comparative analysis further indicated that, learners exposed to more systematic translanguaging performed better on comprehension-based and written tasks, though improvements in oral

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fluency were less consistent. The study argues that pedagogical translanguaging is a contextually responsive and cognitively enabling resource for FFL instruction and calls for its careful, but deliberate integration into curriculum design, instructor preparation, and assessment policy.

Key words: *Translanguaging; French as a Foreign Language; Multilingual Pedagogy; Pedagogical Mediation; Sociocultural Theory; Nigerian Higher Education; Mixed-Methods Case Study*

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INTRODUCTION

Nigeria's linguistic landscape is defined by extensive multilingualism, with learners typically moving between English, one or more indigenous languages, and, in academic settings, additional foreign languages over the course of a single day. Foreign language instruction, and French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in particular, has been comparatively slow to accommodate this reality. Much of the pedagogical approaches in use, including target-language-only conventions and the strict separation of languages during teaching, was developed within European contexts where such assumptions about linguistic homogeneity are themselves increasingly contested and challenged. Imported largely unmodified into Nigerian tertiary classrooms, these conventions treat learners' existing linguistic knowledge as a potential source of interference rather than as a cognitive and pedagogical resource. This produces a structural mismatch between how language policy frames the classroom and how language is actually used within it. Students entering FFL programmes arrive with functioning multilingual repertoires that they draw on, whether officially sanctioned or not, to process new material, convey meaning, and manage the cognitive load of learning an additional language. Where institutional policy insists on monolingual output, these everyday linguistic resources are pushed to the margins of the classroom rather than incorporated into its design, leaving instructors to reconcile policy expectations with the multilingual reality of their students largely on their own initiative. Translanguaging offers a theoretical and pedagogical alternative to this arrangement. Rather than treating a multilingual speaker's languages as separate, bounded systems, translanguaging theory conceptualises them as a single, integrated linguistic repertoire that speakers draw on flexibly for meaning-making (Wei, 2022). Applied pedagogically, this reframing licenses the strategic, intentional use of learners' full repertoires as a resource for accessing new content, rather than as a practice to be suppressed (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020). Understood this way, translanguaging is not a synonym for unplanned code-switching; it is a design principle for instruction.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Although translanguaging has attracted sustained international attention over the past decade, empirical documentation of how it is actually enacted in foreign language classrooms in Nigerian higher education remains limited, and comparative evidence across institutions

of different types is scarcer still. Existing Nigerian scholarship has examined translanguaging chiefly in primary education and in code-switching more broadly, leaving open the question of how translanguaging functions specifically in tertiary-level FFL instruction, where the cognitive and communicative demands placed on learners differ markedly from those of the primary classroom. The absence of institutionally comparative, mixed-methods evidence limits the extent to which policy and curriculum recommendations can be grounded in classroom reality rather than assumption.

PURPOSE OF STUDY AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS (RQ)

This study addresses that gap by examining translanguaging practice in FFL instruction at two institutions with contrasting profiles: AFRIGIST, an international training institute with a linguistically diverse, professionally oriented student body, and OAU, a conventional public university situated within a specific regional linguistic context, the South-West of Nigeria, dominated by Yoruba. The study was guided by four research questions:

RQ1: What forms does translanguaging take in FFL instruction at AFRIGIST and OAU?
RQ 2: How do students and instructors perceive the pedagogical role of translanguaging in FFL learning?
RQ3: What institutional factors enable or constrain translanguaging practice at each site?
RQ4: How does the extent of translanguaging practice relate to learner performance in comprehension-based and production-based tasks?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

By generating comparative, empirically grounded evidence on translanguaging in tertiary FFL instruction, the study contributes to a still-developing body of context-sensitive multilingual pedagogy scholarship in sub-Saharan Africa. Its findings are intended to inform curriculum design, instructor preparation, and assessment policy in institutions that, like AFRIGIST and OAU, serve linguistically diverse learner populations but currently lack an explicit institutional framework for multilingual training.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is framed by two complementary theoretical positions. The first is translanguaging theory, which departs from additive models of bilingualism by treating a multilingual individual's languages as one integrated linguistic system rather than as discrete codes that are switched between (Wei, 2022). From this position, moving between languages within a single utterance or lesson is not interference but a normal feature of multilingual cognition. Cenoz and Gorter's (2020) distinction between spontaneous translanguaging, which arises unplanned in interaction, and pedagogical translanguaging, which is deliberately built into instructional design, is used throughout this article to differentiate the intuitive classroom practices teachers described from the more systematic use the study associates with stronger learning outcomes.

The second is sociocultural theory, particularly Vygotsky's (1978) account of language as a psychological tool that mediates thought and learning. Read alongside translanguaging theory, sociocultural theory helps explain why access to a learner's full linguistic repertoire, rather than restriction to the target language alone, can support the negotiation of meaning within a learner's zone of proximal development (ZPD): the distance between what learners can accomplish independently and what they can achieve with appropriate guidance or collaboration. Together, these two frameworks position translanguaging not merely as a communicative convenience but as a cognitively mediating practice with pedagogical consequences. They provide the conceptual lens through which the study investigates the forms, functions, perceptions, and educational implications of translanguaging in French as a Foreign Language classrooms within the multilingual context of Nigerian higher education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Orientation

A significant body of recent studies has moved translanguaging from a descriptive account of bilingual speech toward a pedagogical orientation in its own right. This literature reframes multilingual repertoires as integrated rather than compartmentalized, challenging instructional models built on strict language separation (Wei, 2022). Several scholars situate translanguaging at the intersection of cognition, identity, and social interaction, arguing that it supports higher-order thinking by allowing learners to compare and reframe concepts across languages instead of suppressing prior linguistic knowledge. A recurring caution in this literature, however, is that translanguaging without instructional intentionality risks being mistaken for linguistic permissiveness; its pedagogical value depends on deliberate design rather than incidental occurrence (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020).

Translanguaging in Foreign Language and FFL Contexts

Within foreign language education specifically, translanguaging research has grown as a counterpoint to immersion approaches that prescribe exclusive target-language use. Evidence increasingly suggests that controlled, purposeful engagement with learners' other languages can support comprehension without impeding development of the target language. In French as a Foreign Language contexts, cross-linguistic comparison has been shown to help learners notice contrasts between French and previously acquired languages, supporting metalinguistic awareness and grammatical uptake rather than displacing it (Canagarajah, 2011). A further, well-documented strand of this literature concerns reveal that learners consistently report lower anxiety and greater willingness to participate when permitted to draw on familiar languages, a pattern with particular relevance to tertiary learners who must sustain extended, abstract discourse in the target language. At the same time, this literature notes that translanguaging in foreign language classrooms remains institutionally informal, undocumented and sometimes contested, often persisting as an unofficial practice even where it demonstrably supports learning.

Translanguaging in Nigerian and African Higher Education

Nigeria's entrenched multilingualism makes it a productive site for translanguaging research, and recent scholarship documents its routine use across academic settings regardless of formal language policy. Jegede's (2024) work on Nigerian primary classrooms and earlier research on code-switching in multilingual primary schools (Jegede, 2012) both indicate that translanguaging enhances participation and conceptual clarity in linguistically dense instructional contexts, consistent with sociocultural accounts of learning as mediated activity. Structural constraints, however, recur across this literature: assessment regimes that reward monolingual performance, teacher preparation programmes that give limited attention to multilingual pedagogy, and institutional cultures that equate proficiency with linguistic purity (Makoni & Pennycook, 2020). As a result, translanguaging in Nigerian higher education tends to remain under-theorised relative to its actual prevalence in classrooms.

Positioning of the Present Study

Two gaps stand out from this review. First, empirical work on translanguaging in Nigerian higher education has concentrated on primary and general code-switching contexts, leaving foreign language instruction, and FFL in particular, comparatively under-examined at the tertiary level. Second, the literature offers few institutionally comparative studies capable of showing how translanguaging practice varies across different types of tertiary institution operating under different linguistic and administrative conditions. By examining FFL teaching at an internationally oriented institute and a conventional public university within a single mixed-methods design, this study addresses both gaps and provides a basis for institution-sensitive recommendations rather than a single generalised account.

METHOD OF STUDY

Research Design

The study adopted a convergent mixed-methods case-study design, in which qualitative and quantitative data were collected concurrently, analysed separately, and then integrated during interpretation. This design was selected because the research questions required both a fine-grained account of how translanguaging is enacted and perceived, which is best captured qualitatively, and a broader assessment of its association with measurable learning outcomes, which required quantitative data. Convergent integration allowed classroom-observation and interview findings to be read against questionnaire and achievement data, strengthening the credibility of conclusions that neither strand could support on its own.

Study Context

Two sites were purposively selected for their contrasting institutional profiles. AFRIGIST is a specialised, internationally oriented training institute whose FFL learners are typically

working professionals drawn from across Anglophone and Francophone Africa, producing linguistically heterogeneous classrooms in which French and English function as the principal working languages, even though Anglophone students focus on the Use of French Language. OAU is a conventional public university whose FFL learners are largely undergraduate students from within Nigeria, many sharing Yoruba, the dominant indigenous language in the South-West as a common first language, for the non-Yoruba students, Pidgin English, widely used by the youths to eliminate social distance and establish closeness, as additional language alongside English. This contrast was treated as a deliberate design feature rather than a limitation, allowing the study to examine how institutional type and student linguistic composition shape translanguaging practice.

Population and Sampling

Participants comprised the full complement of four FFL instructors teaching at the two sites during the study period, recruited through purposive sampling on the basis that they were the population directly relevant to the research questions, and 120 students enrolled in their FFL courses, recruited through a combination of purposive and convenience sampling from class groups at each institution. This combined approach was considered appropriate for the naturalistic setting of the study and consistent with the methodological principles of comparative case study research. Consequently, the findings are intended to provide analytical rather than statistical generalisations, offering insights that may be transferable to other tertiary institutions with comparable multilingual and pedagogical characteristics.

INSTRUMENTS

Four instruments generated the study's data. A structured classroom observation protocol, adapted from established frameworks for documenting bilingual and multilingual classroom interaction, combined a coded checklist of translanguaging functions (grammatical explanation, task clarification, classroom management, participation scaffolding) with space for open field notes on interactional context. A student questionnaire combined Likert-scale items measuring perceived comprehension, confidence, and anxiety with open-ended items inviting learners to describe specific instances of translanguaging they found helpful or unhelpful. A semi-structured interview guide was used with instructors to elicit their pedagogical reasoning, their perception of institutional constraints, and the extent to which their use of translanguaging was planned versus intuitive. Finally, institutional continuous-assessment, test and examination records provided quantitative achievement data for the performance categories, disaggregated by comprehension-based tasks such as listening, reading, instruction-following, and grammar comprehension; and production-based task types such as speaking, writing, translation, and oral presentation.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Classroom observations were conducted across a full instructional term at each site, with the observation protocol applied to a representative sample of sessions per instructor to capture

variation across lesson types (grammar-focused, communicative, and assessment-preparation sessions). The student questionnaire was administered toward the end of the observation period, once learners had accumulated sufficient exposure to the instructor's characteristic classroom practice to respond meaningfully. Instructor interviews, each lasting approximately forty-five minutes, were conducted individually after the completion of classroom observations to avoid priming instructors' in-class behaviour, audio-recorded with consent, and transcribed verbatim. Achievement records were obtained following the conclusion of the term.

TRUSTWORTHINESS, VALIDITY, AND RELIABILITY

To enhance the methodological rigour of the study, several procedures were implemented to ensure the trustworthiness, validity, and reliability of the research instruments and findings. Given the mixed-methods comparative case study design, both quantitative and qualitative quality assurance strategies were employed to strengthen the credibility and robustness of the results. The questionnaire and observation protocol were piloted with a small group of learners and one instructor outside the main sample, and items were revised for clarity and internal consistency before full administration. Two researchers independently coded a subset of observation records and interview transcripts, with coding discrepancies resolved through discussion to strengthen inter-rater reliability. Triangulation across observation, questionnaire, interview, and achievement data was used throughout analysis to corroborate findings across sources rather than relying on any single data stream, and preliminary interpretations were shared with participating instructors for member checking prior to finalisation. Collectively, these procedures contributed to the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study, thereby ensuring that the findings constitute a trustworthy and methodologically sound account of the role of translanguaging as a pedagogical mediation strategy in French as a Foreign Language instruction within the selected Nigerian tertiary institutions.

DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data from field notes, open-ended questionnaire items, and interview transcripts were analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis procedure, involving familiarisation, initial coding, theme development, and iterative review against the full dataset. Quantitative questionnaire and achievement data were analysed descriptively, using frequencies and percentages to summarise perception items and to compare performance patterns across comprehension-based and production-based tasks. Consistent with the convergent design, qualitative themes and quantitative summaries were integrated during interpretation to build a combined account of each research question rather than reported as separate, unrelated findings.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Instructor and student participation was voluntary and based on informed consent, with participants informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without academic consequence. Interview and questionnaire data were anonymised prior to analysis, and reporting throughout this article avoids identifying individual instructors or students.

RESULTS

Results are organised by research question, drawing on the integrated qualitative and quantitative data described above.

i. Forms of Translanguaging Observed (Research Question 1)

Classroom observations revealed that translanguaging constituted a regular and pedagogically significant feature of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) instruction in both participating institutions. Although its use was generally intuitive rather than formally planned, instructors consistently mobilised learners' full linguistic repertoires to facilitate teaching and learning. Translanguaging was observed across a range of instructional functions, including the explanation of grammatical concepts, clarification of task instructions, management of classroom interaction, provision of feedback, scaffolding of learner participation, and support for students during cognitively demanding communicative activities. These findings suggest that translanguaging functioned as an important mediational strategy through which instructors enhanced learners' access to instructional content and promoted active classroom engagement.

While the pedagogical functions of translanguaging were broadly similar across the two institutions, the linguistic resources employed reflected their distinct sociolinguistic contexts. At the African Regional Institute for Geospatial Information Science and Technology (AFRIGIST), translanguaging occurred predominantly between French and English. This pattern can be attributed to the institution's international and multilingual student population, for whom English serves as the principal language of academic communication and a common lingua franca among learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds. In this context, English functioned as the primary mediating language through which complex linguistic concepts and instructional content were negotiated.

In contrast, classroom interactions at Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) exhibited a broader multilingual repertoire. In addition to French and English, instructors and students occasionally incorporated Yoruba and, in some instances, Nigerian Pidgin during classroom discourse. These languages were employed primarily in informal explanatory episodes, particularly when simplifying abstract grammatical concepts, clarifying culturally embedded expressions, reinforcing classroom instructions, or establishing interpersonal rapport with students. The use of Yoruba and Nigerian Pidgin reflected the shared regional linguistic ecology of the institution and illustrates how translanguaging practices are shaped by the sociocultural and linguistic resources available within specific educational contexts.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that translanguaging in the two institutions was not a random alternation between languages but a context-sensitive pedagogical strategy that drew upon the multilingual resources of teachers and learners to mediate understanding, facilitate communication, and sustain participation in the FFL classroom. The observed differences between the two institutions further underscore the adaptive nature of translanguaging, highlighting its responsiveness to local sociolinguistic realities while serving a common instructional purpose of enhancing language learning.

ii. Student Perceptions of Translanguaging (Research Question 2)

Analysis of the questionnaire data revealed an overwhelmingly positive perception of translanguaging among the participating students. More than 80% of the respondents reported that the strategic use of multiple languages during French as a Foreign Language (FFL) instruction had a positive influence on their learning experiences. These findings indicate that students generally perceived translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical resource that enhanced both their cognitive engagement and affective well-being in the language classroom.

Thematic analysis of the open-ended questionnaire responses identified three recurrent benefits of translanguaging, namely improved comprehension, increased confidence in classroom participation, and reduced language-learning anxiety (Table 1). The convergence of these themes across participants suggests a high degree of consistency in learners' experiences irrespective of institutional context.

With respect to comprehension, students consistently reported that grammatical explanations, unfamiliar vocabulary, and complex classroom instructions became more accessible when instructors related them to English or, where appropriate, to a familiar indigenous language. Rather than replacing French, translanguaging functioned as a mediational tool that enabled learners to bridge conceptual gaps and construct meaning before engaging with the target language. These findings reinforce the view that multilingual resources can facilitate deeper conceptual understanding in foreign language learning.

Participants also indicated that translanguaging enhanced their confidence to participate actively in classroom activities. Many respondents explained that they felt more willing to contribute to discussions, answer questions, and attempt written or spoken tasks when they were allowed to organise their ideas through a familiar language before expressing them in French. This suggests that translanguaging served as a form of pedagogical scaffolding, gradually supporting learners as they moved towards greater independence in the target language.

A third recurring theme concerned the reduction of language anxiety. Numerous students reported that the opportunity to process ideas initially in English or another familiar language reduced their fear of making grammatical or lexical errors in French. By lowering the affective barriers associated with foreign language learning, translanguaging appeared to create a more supportive classroom environment that encouraged risk-taking and sustained learner participation.

Importantly, several respondents described translanguaging not merely as a means of translation but as a cognitive strategy that enabled them to organise, analyse, and internalise new linguistic concepts before producing them in French. As one participant explained, translanguaging allowed them to "think through the idea first before trying to say it in French." Such responses suggest that translanguaging functioned as a mechanism of cognitive mediation rather than simply an affective support strategy. This finding aligns closely with the theoretical framework underpinning the study, which conceptualises translanguaging as a dynamic meaning-making process through which multilingual learners mobilise their entire linguistic repertoire to facilitate learning, problem-solving, and communication.

Table 1. *Recurring student-reported benefits of translanguaging derived from thematic analysis of open-ended questionnaire responses.*

Reported Benefit	Illustrative Pattern in Student Responses
Improved comprehension	Grammatical explanations, unfamiliar vocabulary, and classroom instructions were described as easier to understand when connected to English or a familiar indigenous language.
Increased confidence	Students reported greater willingness to participate in oral and written classroom activities when translanguaging was permitted during the planning or preparation stage.
Reduced anxiety	Learners indicated that processing ideas through a familiar language before expressing them in French reduced their fear of making mistakes and increased their willingness to communicate.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that students perceived translanguaging as an effective pedagogical strategy that simultaneously supported comprehension, promoted active participation, and reduced language anxiety. Beyond these affective benefits, learners' accounts also reveal the important cognitive role of translanguaging in facilitating conceptual understanding and meaning-making, thereby reinforcing its value as a pedagogical mediation strategy in multilingual French language classrooms.

iii. Instructor Perspectives on Translanguaging (Research Question 3)

The semi-structured interviews provided valuable insights into instructors' pedagogical philosophies, their understanding of translanguaging, and the factors influencing its implementation in French as a Foreign Language (FFL) classrooms. Across both institutions, instructors consistently emphasised that their primary pedagogical objective was to develop learners' ability to communicate confidently and effectively in French beyond the classroom. They viewed language teaching not merely as the transmission of grammatical knowledge but as the facilitation of meaningful communication and the gradual development of communicative competence. Consequently, fostering learner comprehension, encouraging

active participation, and creating an environment conducive to language learning emerged as central features of their instructional philosophy.

When invited to define translanguaging within the context of French language instruction, participants generally distinguished it from both code-switching and translation. While code-switching was commonly described as the alternation between two languages during communication and translation as the direct transfer of meaning from one language to another, translanguaging was perceived as the strategic mobilisation of learners' entire linguistic repertoire to facilitate understanding and learning. Interestingly, several instructors acknowledged that they had employed translanguaging for many years without being familiar with the terminology or its theoretical foundations. This finding suggests that translanguaging already exists as an established pedagogical practice in Nigerian FFL classrooms, even in the absence of explicit conceptual awareness or formal professional training.

Interview data further revealed that instructors routinely combined French with English, and, depending on the institutional context, with Yoruba and occasionally Nigerian Pidgin to facilitate classroom communication. At Obafemi Awolowo University, Yoruba was frequently employed because of its status as the dominant regional language, while Nigerian Pidgin was sometimes used to accommodate students from non-Yoruba linguistic backgrounds. At AFRIGIST, however, English functioned as the principal mediating language owing to the institution's multilingual and international student population. Across both institutions, translanguaging was used in a wide range of pedagogical situations, including explaining grammatical concepts, introducing new vocabulary, teaching pronunciation, facilitating listening and reading comprehension, supporting speaking and writing activities, clarifying classroom instructions, managing classroom interaction, preparing students for examinations, correcting learner errors, and motivating students to participate actively in learning activities.

Participants unanimously perceived translanguaging as an effective pedagogical scaffold that enhanced learners' comprehension of complex linguistic concepts and encouraged greater classroom participation. According to the instructors, allowing students to draw upon familiar linguistic resources increased their confidence when attempting to communicate orally in French and reduced learners' hesitation to engage with classroom tasks. These perceptions closely mirror the views expressed by students and reinforce the argument that translanguaging serves both cognitive and affective functions in the foreign language classroom.

The interviews also revealed important differences in the extent to which translanguaging was intentionally planned. Several instructors described their classroom language choices as largely intuitive and responsive to immediate learner needs rather than the result of explicit lesson planning. This pattern is consistent with the distinction proposed by Cenoz and Gorter (2020) between spontaneous translanguaging, which emerges naturally during classroom interaction, and pedagogical translanguaging, which is deliberately integrated into instructional design. In contrast, other participants reported adopting a more systematic

approach in which translanguaging was intentionally planned according to learners' proficiency levels and instructional objectives. Such instructors explained that translanguaging was used more extensively in lower-level classes (100 and 200 Levels), where students often required additional linguistic support to comprehend new concepts, while its use was progressively reduced in higher-level classes (300 and 400 Levels) as learners developed greater proficiency and autonomy in French. This gradual withdrawal of multilingual support reflects the pedagogical principle of scaffolding, whereby instructional assistance is reduced as learners become increasingly capable of independent performance.

Despite their overwhelmingly positive perceptions of translanguaging, instructors consistently expressed concern about its compatibility with prevailing institutional expectations that privilege exclusive use of the target language in foreign language instruction. The tension between actual classroom practice and institutional norms emerged as the most recurrent theme across the interviews and was reported by participants from both institutions. The consistency of this finding suggests that the issue is not institution-specific but rather reflects a broader characteristic of language education policy and pedagogical culture within Nigerian tertiary education.

Finally, a noteworthy finding of the study is that none of the participating instructors had received formal professional training in multilingual pedagogy or translanguaging. Their classroom practices had therefore evolved primarily through personal teaching experience, intuition, and responsiveness to learners' needs rather than through structured pedagogical preparation. This lack of specialised training highlights an important gap in teacher education and professional development programmes. It also underscores the need for universities and teacher-training institutions to incorporate multilingual pedagogies into both pre-service and in-service professional development initiatives so that instructors can implement translanguaging in a theoretically informed, systematic, and pedagogically purposeful manner.

iv. Translanguaging and Learner Performance (Research Question 4)

Analysis of students' academic records, considered alongside classroom observations and questionnaire responses, suggests a positive relationship between the pedagogical use of translanguaging and learners' academic performance in French as a Foreign Language (FFL). In particular, students whose instructors employed translanguaging in a more systematic and pedagogically purposeful manner generally demonstrated stronger performance on comprehension-oriented tasks and written assessments than those whose exposure to translanguaging was more limited or incidental. These findings indicate that translanguaging can serve as an effective mediational resource that facilitates conceptual understanding and supports learners' ability to process and communicate academic content in the target language.

The observed improvement in academic performance appears to be closely associated with enhanced comprehension. When learners clearly understood grammatical concepts, lexical items, and classroom instructions through carefully mediated multilingual explanations, they

were better able to apply this knowledge in reading comprehension activities, written exercises, and other cognitively demanding tasks. These findings reinforce the view that translanguaging functions as a form of pedagogical scaffolding that enables learners to bridge linguistic and conceptual gaps before progressively engaging with the target language more independently.

Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that the positive effects of translanguaging were not equally evident across all dimensions of language proficiency. While improvements were more consistently observed in comprehension-based and written production tasks, gains in spontaneous oral communication were comparatively less pronounced and varied across learners and classroom contexts. This suggests that although translanguaging effectively supports the development of conceptual understanding and written language production, oral fluency may depend on additional factors such as the quantity and quality of exposure to French, opportunities for authentic communicative interaction, learners' motivation, confidence, and individual differences in language learning.

It is important to emphasise that the relationship identified in this study should not be interpreted as evidence that translanguaging alone determines students' academic achievement. Language learning outcomes are influenced by a complex interplay of variables, including learners' prior proficiency, motivation, learning strategies, instructional quality, classroom environment, assessment practices, and the availability of learning resources. Consequently, the improved performance observed among students exposed to more systematic translanguaging should be understood as an association rather than a direct causal effect.

Furthermore, because both the achievement data and the observations of translanguaging practices were collected within a single academic term and under natural classroom conditions, without experimental manipulation or control of extraneous variables, the study does not permit definitive causal conclusions. Instead, the findings provide suggestive evidence that pedagogically planned translanguaging may contribute positively to learners' comprehension and academic achievement in FFL classrooms. Future longitudinal and quasi-experimental studies are therefore needed to establish more robust causal evidence regarding the long-term impact of translanguaging on different dimensions of foreign language proficiency.

DISCUSSION CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

i. DISCUSSION

Read together, these findings support the study's theoretical framing of translanguaging as a cognitively mediating, sociocultural resource rather than a mere communicative convenience. The consistency with which students linked translanguaging to comprehension and to being able to think through ideas before producing them in French is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) account of language as a tool for mediating thought, and it extends that account into a specifically multilingual classroom setting where the mediating tool available to learners is not a single language but an integrated repertoire (Wei, 2022).

The comparative dimension of the study also clarifies how institutional context shapes translanguaging practice without displacing its core pedagogical functions. AFRIGIST's internationally composed classrooms produced a French–English pattern of translanguaging, while OAU's more regionally homogeneous student body extended this to include Yoruba and Pidgin, particularly in informal explanatory exchanges. This variation supports Cenoz and Gorter's (2020) argument that pedagogical translanguaging is adaptable to local linguistic ecologies rather than following a single fixed template, and it suggests that institution-level recommendations arising from this study should specify which languages are relevant to a given context rather than assuming a uniform bilingual pattern across Nigerian higher education.

The most consistent finding across both sites, and the one with the clearest implications for policy, is the gap between instructors' favourable view of translanguaging's pedagogical value and the absence of institutional frameworks that formally recognise it. Instructors' description of their own practice as intuitive rather than planned echoes earlier Nigerian scholarship on the informal, under-theorised status of translanguaging relative to its classroom prevalence (Jegede, 2024; Makoni & Pennycook, 2020). Left unaddressed, this gap constrains translanguaging to remain a tacit workaround rather than a resource that curriculum and assessment design can build on deliberately, which in turn limits the systematic, learning-outcome-linked use of translanguaging that this study associates with stronger comprehension and written performance.

The differential pattern in learning outcomes, with comprehension and written production benefiting more consistently than oral fluency, is worth situating carefully within the wider FFL literature. Cross-linguistic comparison has been shown to support noticing and metalinguistic awareness (Canagarajah, 2011), processes more directly implicated in comprehension and written accuracy than in the real-time production demands of spoken fluency. This suggests that pedagogical translanguaging may need to be paired with target-language-dominant oral practice, rather than treated as a general-purpose substitute for it, if institutions wish to develop both dimensions of learner competence.

Like all empirical investigations, this study is subject to certain limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings.

First, the study was conducted in only two Nigerian tertiary institutions offering French as a Foreign Language (FFL). Although the selected institutions provided contrasting institutional contexts that enriched the comparative analysis, the findings cannot be assumed to represent all Nigerian tertiary institutions or other multilingual educational settings. Consequently, caution should be exercised in generalising the results beyond institutions with similar characteristics.

Second, part of the data was derived from students' self-reported perceptions of comprehension, confidence, and language anxiety. While self-report instruments offer valuable insights into learners' experiences and attitudes, they are inherently susceptible to response biases, including social desirability, acquiescence, and recall bias. As a result,

participants' responses may not always correspond precisely to their actual classroom experiences or behaviours.

Third, the relationship between translanguaging practices and students' academic performance was examined over the course of a single academic term within a natural classroom setting. Given the non-experimental design of the study, it was not possible to control for all extraneous variables that may have influenced learners' achievement, such as prior language proficiency, learner motivation, teaching experience, instructional resources, and classroom dynamics. Accordingly, the findings demonstrate associations rather than definitive causal relationships between translanguaging and learning outcomes.

Finally, although the study included all French language instructors available in the two participating institutions during the period of data collection, the overall number of instructors was relatively small. While this census approach strengthened the internal validity of the institutional case studies, it limits the extent to which instructor-level findings can be statistically generalised to the wider population of French language teachers in Nigerian tertiary education.

Despite these limitations, the study employed a mixed-methods comparative case study design that integrated classroom observations, student questionnaires, instructor interviews, and academic performance records. This triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced the credibility, dependability, and overall trustworthiness of the findings, providing a robust basis for understanding the pedagogical role of translanguaging in French as a Foreign Language instruction within the selected institutional contexts.

ii. Conclusion

This study investigated the enactment, perceptions, and pedagogical implications of translanguaging in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FFL) in two Nigerian tertiary institutions with contrasting institutional contexts. Drawing on classroom observations, student questionnaires, instructor interviews, and learners' academic performance records, the findings demonstrate that translanguaging is already an integral, albeit largely informal, component of classroom practice in both institutions. Both instructors and students perceive translanguaging as a valuable pedagogical resource that facilitates comprehension, enhances classroom participation, reduces learners' anxiety, and supports meaningful engagement with instructional content. Furthermore, the findings suggest that the systematic use of translanguaging is associated with improved learner comprehension and stronger performance in written tasks, although its influence on oral proficiency appears to be less consistent and warrants further investigation.

A major finding of the study is the discrepancy between instructors' generally positive attitudes toward translanguaging and the absence of explicit institutional policies or pedagogical guidelines governing its use. While many instructors employ translanguaging intuitively to mediate learning, the lack of formal recognition and institutional support limits its effective and consistent implementation. This gap underscores the need to reconceptualise translanguaging not as an incidental classroom practice but as a legitimate pedagogical strategy capable of enhancing foreign language learning in multilingual educational contexts.

The study also reveals that an exclusive reliance on French as the sole medium of instruction may hinder learning, particularly among beginning and intermediate learners who possess limited proficiency in the target language. Within the Nigerian multilingual context, carefully planned translanguaging serves as an effective form of pedagogical mediation by enabling learners to construct meaning, bridge linguistic gaps, and progressively develop competence in French. However, the findings equally caution against the indiscriminate or excessive use of translanguaging. If overused, it may reduce learners' opportunities for meaningful exposure to French and limit the development of communicative competence. Consequently, translanguaging should function as a temporary scaffold that facilitates comprehension while gradually encouraging learners to engage more confidently and independently in the target language. Students should be encouraged to communicate in French, even when their production contains linguistic errors, as such errors constitute a natural and essential part of the language learning process and provide opportunities for constructive feedback and continuous improvement.

iii. Recommendations

Based on these findings, the study recommends that tertiary institutions offering French as a Foreign Language formally integrate translanguaging principles into curriculum design, course syllabi, and instructional policies, rather than leaving their implementation solely to the discretion of individual instructors. Teacher education programmes, both pre-service and in-service, should incorporate training on multilingual pedagogies, with particular emphasis on the theoretical foundations and practical application of translanguaging in foreign language classrooms. In addition, educational policymakers and curriculum developers should review existing assessment practices to ensure that they recognise and support multilingual meaning-making processes that facilitate language learning without compromising the ultimate goal of developing learners' proficiency in French.

Finally, further research is recommended to expand this comparative investigation to a larger number of Nigerian and African tertiary institutions in order to enhance the generalizability of the findings. Longitudinal, mixed-methods, and quasi-experimental studies are also needed to examine the long-term effects of systematically implemented translanguaging practices on different dimensions of language proficiency, including listening, speaking, reading, writing, and intercultural communicative competence. Such research would provide stronger empirical evidence to inform language policy, curriculum development, and pedagogical practice in multilingual higher education contexts.

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