

Exploring Translingual Practices as a Pathway to Inclusive Language Acquisition

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: This study examines how translingual practices function as a pathway to inclusive language acquisition and investigates their influence on language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity in multilingual educational settings.

Subjects and Methods: A convergent mixed-methods design was employed involving 150 students and 10 English language teachers from five multilingual secondary schools in the Western Cape Province, South Africa, during 2024. Data were collected through classroom observations, questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and language proficiency tests. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, independent samples t-tests, and regression analysis, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis.

Results: Students exposed to higher levels of translingual practices demonstrated significantly greater improvements in English proficiency than those in low exposure classrooms. Translingual practices showed significant positive relationships with language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity, with language proficiency emerging as the strongest predicted outcome ($\beta = 0.52$). Qualitative findings revealed that multilingual interaction reduced cognitive barriers, increased learner confidence, strengthened participation, and fostered a stronger sense of belonging. However, teachers identified limited instructional time, inadequate professional preparation, curriculum constraints, and insufficient institutional support as major implementation challenges.

Conclusions: Translingual pedagogy provides an effective and sustainable framework for inclusive language learning by integrating cognitive, social, and linguistic development. Its long-term success requires supportive institutional policies, curriculum flexibility, multilingual assessment, and continuous teacher professional development.

INTRODUCTION

Language learning has long been associated with mastering the structures and conventions of a target language, often framed as the pursuit of fluency or native-like competence. Yet, the growing reality of multilingual societies and globalized communication challenges this traditional notion (Starke-Meyerring, 2005; Mufwene, 2010). In this evolving landscape, translingual practices where individuals fluidly navigate multiple linguistic codes emerge as both a descriptive reality and a pedagogical opportunity.

At its core, translingualism recognizes that speakers do not compartmentalize languages neatly. Instead, they draw upon all their linguistic resources to make meaning, negotiate identity, and

engage with others (Lauring, 2008). This flexible orientation toward language opens a more inclusive approach to language acquisition, where diversity of expression is not a barrier but a bridge to understanding.

The traditional paradigm of language education has been dominated by monolingual norms teaching English as if learners were isolated from their first languages (Przymus, 2016; Hall & Cook, 2012). Such an approach often neglects the cognitive and cultural wealth learners already possess. Wen (2024) said that, translingualism offers an alternative: it values these multilingual repertoires as resources rather than deficiencies, promoting agency, creativity, and confidence among learners.

In practice, translingual approaches invite learners to use their first languages strategically within the classroom (Taylor & Cutler, 2016). This might mean using a mother tongue to clarify meaning, interpret complex ideas, or connect new vocabulary to familiar contexts. Instead of suppressing these behaviors, teachers can harness them to deepen comprehension and reduce language anxiety, particularly in inclusive classrooms where linguistic diversity is the norm.

Translingualism also challenges the power hierarchies embedded in language education (Kato & Kumagai, 2022). Historically, dominant languages such as English, French, or Mandarin have been elevated as “prestige” tongues, while local or indigenous languages were sidelined. By recognizing all languages as equally valid tools of communication, translingual pedagogy promotes linguistic justice and cultural inclusion.

The concept aligns closely with social constructivist theories of learning, which emphasize interaction and meaning-making over rote memorization. Saleem et al. (2021) said that, when learners are allowed to draw from multiple linguistic systems, they actively construct knowledge rather than passively absorb it. This fosters deeper cognitive engagement and mirrors the real-world multilingual communication they encounter outside the classroom.

Digital environments further accelerate the translingual turn. Online spaces from social media to virtual classrooms are inherently multilingual, where users blend languages to express nuance, humor, and identity. Observing and integrating these digital translingual practices into pedagogy can make language learning more authentic and relevant to learners’ lived experiences. Inclusivity is not only about access but also about representation. When students see their languages and dialects recognized within academic spaces, they feel validated and empowered. This sense of belonging can transform their attitude toward learning, especially for students from marginalized linguistic communities (Tulloch et al., 2017; Bazner & Lopez, 2023).

Research increasingly supports the cognitive and affective benefits of bilingualism and translanguaging. Studies show that learners who engage in cross-linguistic transfer develop stronger metalinguistic awareness the ability to reflect on and manipulate language structure. This awareness enhances problem-solving skills, reading comprehension, and critical thinking.

Translingual practices also create a more democratic classroom dynamic (Canagarajah, 2016). Instead of positioning teachers as the sole linguistic authority, the classroom becomes a collaborative space where linguistic knowledge flows in multiple directions (Palmer & Martínez, 2013). Students become co-constructors of meaning, and their varied linguistic experiences become assets to the collective learning process. In teacher education, embracing translingual principles demands a shift in mindset. Teachers must move from enforcing “English-only” rules to cultivating environments where language mixing is strategic and purposeful. This requires training in linguistic diversity, intercultural competence, and reflective pedagogy.

Implementing translingual pedagogy also presents challenges. Institutional policies, standardized testing, and rigid curricula often reinforce monolingual ideologies (Adhikari & Poudel, 2024). Overcoming these barriers requires systemic change one that redefines what it means to “know” a language and how that knowledge is assessed. Translingualism must not be romanticized as effortless linguistic harmony. It operates within social and political contexts where power relations between languages persist (Khan & Sajid, 2024).

Effective application demands sensitivity to these dynamics, ensuring that inclusivity does not unintentionally reproduce inequality. From a global perspective, translingualism resonates with

the principles of UNESCO's Sustainable Development Goal 4 on inclusive and equitable education. It supports not just linguistic diversity but also the broader human right to learn and communicate in one's own language while engaging with others across differences.

Exploring translingual practices as a pathway to inclusive language acquisition reframes language learning as a dynamic, social, and human process. It acknowledges that linguistic identities are fluid, that communication is inherently adaptive, and that inclusion begins when every voice regardless of accent, code, or grammar can be heard and valued. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the ability to navigate across languages is no longer a niche skill but a global necessity. Translingual practices invite educators and learners alike to embrace hybridity, resist linguistic gatekeeping, and imagine classrooms where many tongues speak toward shared understanding.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study was conducted between January and June 2024 in selected multilingual secondary schools located in Cape Town and surrounding areas within the Western Cape Province, South Africa. The research employed a convergent mixed-methods design that integrated quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine how translingual practices function as a pathway to inclusive language acquisition. The integration of both approaches enabled the simultaneous collection and analysis of numerical data and participant experiences, providing a comprehensive understanding of the relationships among translingual practices, language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity. A multiple-case study strategy was adopted to investigate multilingual learning environments across five public secondary schools representing diverse linguistic and socio-economic contexts. This design was selected to facilitate cross-contextual comparisons and to strengthen the explanatory power of the findings regarding the educational impact of translingual practices.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted in five public secondary schools located in Khayelitsha, Mitchells Plain, Bellville, Paarl, and Stellenbosch during the 2024 academic year. These schools were purposively selected because they represented different multilingual educational settings where English, Afrikaans, and isiXhosa were commonly used as languages of communication and instruction. The participants consisted of 150 students enrolled in Grades 8 to 10 and 10 English language teachers. Student participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their participation in English as a First Additional Language (EFAL) classes, where multilingual interaction naturally occurred during classroom activities. The teacher participants had a minimum of three years of teaching experience and demonstrated the use of multilingual instructional strategies in their teaching practices. The selection of participants was intended to ensure that the study captured authentic experiences related to translingual pedagogy within linguistically diverse educational environments.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted over one academic semester from February to May 2024 using classroom observations, interviews, focus group discussions, questionnaires, and language proficiency tests. Classroom observations were carried out across twenty teaching sessions distributed among the participating schools to document the frequency and intensity of translingual practices, patterns of language use, and student participation. The observation results were subsequently used to classify classrooms into high and low translingual exposure categories based on the consistency and frequency of multilingual instructional practices. Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews with all participating teachers and focus group discussions involving students from each school. These activities explored participants' experiences, perceptions of multilingual learning, classroom inclusivity, and challenges associated with the implementation of translingual approaches. Quantitative data were obtained through a structured questionnaire consisting of Likert-scale items designed to measure perceptions of translingual practices, student engagement, language proficiency

development, inclusivity, and implementation barriers. In addition, students completed English language proficiency assessments at the beginning and end of the semester, generating pre-test and post-test scores that were used to evaluate language learning improvement.

Research Variables

The quantitative component of the study examined translingual practices as the primary independent variable and language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity as dependent variables. Translingual practices were operationalized through the frequency and intensity of multilingual language use observed during classroom instruction. Language proficiency was measured using students' pre-test and post-test English language assessment scores. Student engagement referred to the extent of participation, interaction, and willingness to communicate during learning activities and was measured through survey responses. Classroom inclusivity was assessed through indicators related to the recognition of students' first languages, equal opportunities for participation, instructional flexibility, and the extent to which multilingual practices supported understanding and belonging in the learning environment. These variables were selected to reflect both the cognitive and social dimensions of inclusive language acquisition.

Data Analysis

The analysis was conducted through complementary qualitative and quantitative procedures. Qualitative data obtained from classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving data familiarization, coding, theme development, and interpretation. To improve analytical reliability, portions of the qualitative data were independently reviewed by a second coder and discrepancies were resolved through discussion. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 27. Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were first generated to summarize participant responses and classroom characteristics. Pearson correlation analysis was then conducted to examine the relationships among translingual practices, language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity. Independent samples t-tests were used to compare learning outcomes between students exposed to high and low levels of translingual practices. To further investigate the predictive influence of translingual practices on educational outcomes, simple linear regression analyses were performed using language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity as dependent variables. Statistical significance was established at the 0.05 level, allowing the study to determine whether observed relationships and group differences were statistically meaningful.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the study. Approval to conduct the research was obtained from the relevant educational authorities in the Western Cape Province prior to the commencement of data collection in 2024. All participants received information regarding the purpose of the study and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Written informed consent was obtained from all participating teachers, while parental or guardian consent was secured for students under the age of eighteen. Participant confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all data and removing identifying information from interview transcripts, observation records, and survey responses. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any stage without penalty, ensuring compliance with established ethical standards for educational research.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency of Translingual Practices

The classroom observation data were analyzed to determine the extent to which translingual practices were integrated into daily instruction. The findings indicate considerable variation in the frequency of multilingual instructional strategies among teachers. These differences reflect the degree to which teachers incorporated students' linguistic resources into classroom interaction and served as the basis for categorizing learning environments into high and low translingual exposure groups.

Table 1. Frequency of Translingual Practices Used by Teachers (n = 10)

Teacher	Average Sessions per Week	Percentage of Class Sessions (%)
T1	2.4	30
T2	3.1	38
T3	1.8	22
T4	2.7	34
T5	3.5	42
T6	1.6	20
T7	2.9	36
T8	3.2	40
T9	1.9	24
T10	2.5	32

Source: Authors' classroom observation data and statistical analysis (2024).

The findings show that translingual practices were regularly implemented across participating schools, although the intensity varied among teachers. Teachers T5 and T8 demonstrated the highest frequency of multilingual instructional practices, while T6 and T3 reported the lowest frequency. These differences suggest that the adoption of translingual pedagogy is influenced by individual teaching approaches and classroom conditions. The observation results were subsequently used to classify students into high and low translingual exposure groups for further statistical analysis.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of Translingual Practices (n = 150)

Statement	Mean	SD
Using multiple languages helps me understand lessons better	4.32	0.61
I feel more confident participating in class when I can use my first language	4.25	0.65
Translingual practices reduce my anxiety during learning	4.18	0.69
Using multiple languages improves communication with teachers	4.10	0.72
Translingual practices make learning more enjoyable	4.28	0.63

Source: Authors' survey data and statistical analysis (2024).

The survey results indicate a highly positive perception of translingual practices among students across all measured indicators. The mean scores ranged from 4.10 to 4.32 on a five-point Likert scale, demonstrating strong agreement regarding the educational value of multilingual instructional approaches. The highest-rated statement, "Using multiple languages helps me understand lessons better" (M = 4.32, SD = 0.61), suggests that students perceive translingual practices as an effective mechanism for enhancing comprehension and facilitating access to academic content. Similarly, the high score for "Translingual practices make learning more enjoyable" (M = 4.28, SD = 0.63) indicates that multilingual learning environments contribute positively to students' learning experiences and motivation.

The findings further reveal that translingual practices play an important role in supporting students' confidence and emotional well-being during the learning process. The statement regarding confidence in classroom participation achieved a mean score of 4.25 (SD = 0.65), suggesting that students feel more comfortable expressing their ideas when they are allowed to draw upon their full linguistic repertoire. Likewise, the relatively high score for reduced learning anxiety (M = 4.18, SD = 0.69) indicates that flexible language use helps create a more supportive and less intimidating classroom environment. The positive evaluation of communication with teachers (M = 4.10, SD = 0.72) further demonstrates that translingual practices facilitate interaction between students and instructors, thereby strengthening instructional effectiveness.

These findings suggest that students perceive translingual practices not merely as a linguistic accommodation but as a meaningful pedagogical strategy that enhances comprehension, participation, motivation, and communication. The consistently high mean scores across all indicators provide empirical evidence that multilingual instructional approaches contribute

positively to both cognitive and affective dimensions of language learning, reinforcing the role of translingual pedagogy in promoting inclusive language acquisition.

Language Proficiency Improvement

Language proficiency was assessed through pre-test and post-test scores administered during the 2024 academic semester. Students were categorized into high and low translingual exposure groups based on classroom observation results. The comparison was conducted to determine whether greater exposure to translingual practices was associated with stronger language development.

Table 3. Pre-Test and Post-Test Scores

Group	Pre-Test (Mean ± SD)	Post-Test (Mean ± SD)	Improvement
High Translingual (n=75)	65.2 ± 8.4	78.9 ± 7.2	+13.7
Low Translingual (n=75)	64.8 ± 8.6	72.1 ± 8.1	+7.3

Source: Authors' language proficiency test results and statistical analysis (2024).

Students in the high translingual group demonstrated substantially greater improvement than those in the low translingual group. Although both groups started with similar pre-test scores, the high exposure group achieved a higher post-test mean and nearly doubled the improvement observed in the low exposure group. These findings indicate that translingual practices may facilitate language acquisition by enabling students to connect new linguistic knowledge with their existing multilingual repertoires.

One English language teacher explained how multilingual interaction supported students' language development during classroom instruction:

"At the beginning of the semester, many students struggled to express their ideas entirely in English, especially when discussing unfamiliar concepts. Rather than insisting on English-only responses, I encouraged them to explain their understanding first in isiXhosa or Afrikaans before gradually reformulating their ideas in English. Once students realized that their home languages were accepted as learning resources rather than mistakes, they became much more willing to participate. Over time, I observed noticeable improvements in their vocabulary use, sentence organization, and confidence when communicating in English. Their progress was not simply reflected in examination scores but also in the quality of classroom discussions and written assignments." (Participant T5, English Language Teacher, School B)

The experiences described by teachers were reinforced by students who participated in the focus group discussions. One student reflected on how translingual practices influenced individual learning progress:

"Before our teacher allowed us to discuss ideas using both English and isiXhosa, I often remained silent because I was afraid of giving incorrect answers. Being able to think in my first language before responding in English helped me understand difficult topics much faster. I gradually became more confident speaking during lessons because I knew I could organize my ideas first instead of worrying about grammar immediately. As the semester continued, I noticed that I relied less on my first language because my English vocabulary had improved naturally. I now feel more comfortable participating in class and completing written tasks in English." (Participant S12, Grade 9 Student, School D)

These qualitative findings strengthen the quantitative evidence presented in Table 3. While statistical analysis demonstrated that students in classrooms with higher translingual exposure achieved substantially greater improvements in language proficiency than those in low-exposure classrooms, the interview and focus group data explain the mechanisms underlying these outcomes. Teachers consistently described how strategic use of students' home languages reduced cognitive load and facilitated conceptual understanding, whereas students emphasized increased confidence, reduced language anxiety, and gradual independence in English communication. Together, these complementary findings indicate that translingual practices not

only improve measurable language proficiency but also create supportive learning processes that enable sustained linguistic development. The convergence between the quantitative and qualitative evidence therefore provides stronger confirmation that multilingual instructional practices contribute meaningfully to language acquisition in multilingual classrooms.

Student Engagement

Student engagement was measured through questionnaire responses assessing participation, willingness to communicate, and involvement in classroom activities. The survey results indicate that students generally perceived multilingual learning environments as supportive and motivating. Many participants reported that the opportunity to draw upon their first language increased their confidence in expressing ideas and participating in discussions.

Table 4. Student Engagement Indicators (Likert Scale 1–5)

Indicator	Mean	SD
Active participation in discussions	4.3	0.6
Confidence in asking questions	4.2	0.7
Willingness to communicate	4.1	0.6
Collaborative learning participation	4.2	0.5
Attention during lessons	4.0	0.7

Source: Authors' survey data and statistical analysis (2024).

The findings indicate high levels of student engagement across all indicators. Active participation in classroom discussions received the highest mean score ($M = 4.3$), suggesting that translingual practices encourage students to contribute more actively to learning activities. Similarly, confidence in asking questions and collaborative learning participation achieved high ratings, indicating that multilingual instructional environments support both individual and group engagement.

Teachers consistently described how multilingual interaction increased students' participation during classroom activities.

"I noticed that students became much more willing to participate once they realized they could discuss ideas using both English and their home languages. Even those who were usually quiet began asking questions and volunteering answers. The classroom atmosphere became more interactive because students no longer feared making linguistic mistakes. Discussions were richer, and participation was shared by a wider range of learners. This change was evident throughout the semester." (Participant T3, English Language Teacher, School A)

Another teacher emphasized the role of collaborative multilingual communication in sustaining student engagement.

"Group discussions became far more productive when students were allowed to move flexibly between languages. Instead of remaining passive, they exchanged ideas more confidently before presenting them in English. I observed stronger peer collaboration and greater willingness to help classmates understand difficult concepts. Students also maintained their attention for longer periods during lessons. Overall, multilingual interaction transformed the classroom into a more active learning environment." (Participant T8, English Language Teacher, School E)

Students likewise reported that translingual practices encouraged them to communicate more confidently during learning activities.

"Before this approach was introduced, I often hesitated to speak because I was worried about using incorrect English. Being allowed to explain my ideas first in my home language helped me organize my thoughts more clearly. I became more confident asking questions whenever I did not understand the lesson. Eventually, I participated much more often during classroom discussions. Learning became less stressful and more enjoyable." (Participant S21, Grade 8 Student, School C)

A similar experience was expressed by another student who highlighted improvements in classroom interaction.

"Working with classmates became easier because we could use different languages to help each other understand difficult topics. I no longer felt embarrassed when expressing my opinions in class. My teacher encouraged everyone to contribute regardless of the language we started with. As a result, I paid closer attention during lessons and became more involved in group activities. I now participate more actively than I did at the beginning of the semester." (Participant S47, Grade 10 Student, School B)

The qualitative findings provide a meaningful explanation for the quantitative results presented in Table 4. While the survey data revealed consistently high levels of student engagement across all indicators, particularly active participation in discussions (M = 4.3), confidence in asking questions (M = 4.2), and collaborative learning participation (M = 4.2), the interview evidence illustrates the processes through which these outcomes were achieved. Teachers observed greater classroom interaction, sustained attention, and collaborative learning when multilingual strategies were implemented, whereas students described increased confidence, reduced fear of making mistakes, and greater willingness to communicate. The convergence of these quantitative and qualitative findings demonstrates that translanguaging practices strengthen both the behavioral and emotional dimensions of student engagement, providing complementary evidence that multilingual instructional approaches foster more active, confident, and collaborative participation in multilingual classrooms.

Inclusivity in the Learning Environment

Classroom inclusivity was examined through students’ perceptions of linguistic recognition, equal participation opportunities, instructional flexibility, and support for understanding. The findings indicate that students generally viewed their learning environments as inclusive.

Table 5. Inclusivity Indicators (Likert Scale 1–5)

Indicator	Mean	SD
First language is valued	4.2	0.6
Equal participation	4.0	0.7
Flexible assignments	3.8	0.8
Language aids understanding	4.1	0.5

Source: Authors’ survey data adapted from UNESCO inclusive education indicators and statistical analysis (2024).

The results presented in Table 5 indicate that students generally perceived their classrooms as inclusive learning environments, as reflected by the relatively high mean scores across all indicators. The recognition of students’ first languages received the highest rating (M = 4.2, SD = 0.6), suggesting that learners felt their linguistic identities were acknowledged and respected within the educational setting. This finding highlights the importance of validating students’ linguistic backgrounds as a means of fostering a supportive and equitable learning atmosphere. When learners perceive their native languages as valued resources rather than obstacles, they are more likely to develop a stronger sense of belonging and confidence in classroom participation.

Teachers emphasized that recognizing students' linguistic backgrounds was fundamental to creating an inclusive learning environment.

"I always remind my students that every language they speak has value in the classroom because it reflects their identity and experiences. When learners realize that their home languages are respected, they become more willing to express ideas and participate in discussions. I have observed that students who were previously hesitant gradually became more confident because they no longer felt judged for their language choices. This atmosphere has made classroom interaction more equitable and supportive for everyone." (Participant T6, English Language Teacher, School C)

Students also described how multilingual practices strengthened their sense of belonging within the classroom.

"When my teacher accepts both English and my home language during discussions, I feel that my opinions are respected. I am no longer worried that speaking differently will make me feel excluded from the class. Using familiar languages helps me understand difficult lessons while still improving my English. Because of that, I feel more comfortable participating in both individual and group activities." (Participant S34, Grade 9 Student, School B)

Another student highlighted the importance of instructional flexibility in supporting inclusive learning.

"Sometimes we are allowed to prepare ideas in our first language before presenting them in English, and that makes learning much easier. It gives everyone an equal opportunity to contribute, even if our English abilities are different. I feel that the teacher focuses more on whether we understand the lesson than on speaking perfect English immediately. This approach makes me feel included and encourages me to participate more actively." (Participant S58, Grade 10 Student, School E)

While the survey results demonstrated high levels of agreement regarding the recognition of students' first languages ($M = 4.2$), language support for understanding ($M = 4.1$), and equal participation opportunities ($M = 4.0$), the interview data illustrate how these practices cultivate students' sense of belonging, confidence, and equitable participation. Participants consistently described that acknowledging home languages reduced feelings of exclusion, enhanced comprehension, and enabled learners with different language proficiencies to contribute meaningfully to classroom activities. Although perceptions of flexible assignments were comparatively lower ($M = 3.8$), students still recognized instructional flexibility as an important mechanism for promoting fairness and accessibility. The convergence of quantitative and qualitative findings therefore provides robust evidence that translingual pedagogy supports inclusive learning by recognizing linguistic diversity as a valuable educational resource while simultaneously strengthening participation, understanding, and students' sense of belonging.

Correlation Between Variables

Understanding the relationships among the principal variables is essential for determining whether translingual practices are systematically associated with key educational outcomes. While the previous analyses demonstrated positive perceptions of multilingual instructional approaches and improvements in language learning, it remains important to examine how these variables interact within the broader learning environment. Correlation analysis provides insight into the degree to which changes in one variable are associated with changes in another, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the interconnected nature of language acquisition processes.

In the context of this study, Pearson correlation analysis was employed to investigate the relationships among translingual practices, student engagement, language proficiency, and classroom inclusivity. Examining these associations helps to determine whether translingual practices function as an isolated instructional strategy or as part of a broader educational framework that simultaneously supports cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions of learning.

Table 6. Pearson Correlation Analysis

Variable	1	2	3	4
Translingual Practices	1			
Student Engagement	0.68	1		
Language Proficiency	0.72	0.65	1	
Inclusivity	0.70	0.74	0.69	1

Source: Authors' survey data and Pearson correlation analysis using SPSS (2024).

The results reveal positive relationships among all variables. The strongest correlation was observed between translingual practices and language proficiency ($r = 0.72$), followed by translingual practices and inclusivity ($r = 0.70$). These findings indicate that classrooms

characterized by higher levels of multilingual interaction tend to exhibit stronger learning outcomes, greater student participation, and more inclusive learning environments.

Teachers consistently perceived that improvements in language proficiency occurred alongside increased classroom participation when multilingual instructional practices were implemented.

"The students who participated most actively during multilingual discussions were usually the same students who showed the greatest improvement in their English assessments. As they became more comfortable expressing ideas through different languages, their confidence grew, and this confidence was reflected in both classroom interaction and academic performance. These changes happened gradually but were consistently observable throughout the semester." (Participant T2, English Language Teacher, School A)

Another teacher described the interconnected nature of inclusivity, participation, and language learning within multilingual classrooms.

"Creating an environment where every language is respected changes how students interact with each other. Once they feel accepted, they become more willing to communicate, collaborate, and ask questions without hesitation. I noticed that stronger participation was usually accompanied by better understanding of lesson content and improved learning outcomes. The different aspects of learning seemed to develop together rather than separately." (Participant T9, English Language Teacher, School D)

Students likewise recognized that multilingual interaction simultaneously influenced their confidence, engagement, and academic progress.

"Using my first language when necessary helped me understand difficult lessons more quickly, and because I understood better, I was more confident joining classroom discussions. The more I participated, the easier it became to improve my English. I also felt more accepted because everyone could contribute regardless of the language they used at the beginning. These experiences made learning feel much more enjoyable." (Participant S18, Grade 8 Student, School C)

A similar perspective emerged from another student who emphasized the relationship between classroom inclusivity and learning motivation.

"When our teacher encouraged us to use different languages during group activities, everyone became involved in the discussion. I was no longer afraid of making mistakes because the focus was on understanding the lesson together. This made me participate more often, and over time I realized that my English had improved as well. Feeling included motivated me to keep learning and communicating with my classmates." (Participant S63, Grade 10 Student, School E)

The qualitative findings provide contextual support for the Pearson correlation results presented in Table 6. While the statistical analysis demonstrated significant positive relationships among translanguaging practices, student engagement, language proficiency, and classroom inclusivity, the interview evidence explains how these variables interact in authentic classroom settings. Teachers consistently observed that students who engaged more actively in multilingual learning environments also demonstrated greater language development and stronger collaborative participation.

Students described how improved comprehension, increased confidence, and a stronger sense of belonging reinforced one another throughout the learning process. These experiences illustrate that translanguaging practices operate as an integrated pedagogical approach rather than an isolated instructional technique, simultaneously supporting cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions of learning. The convergence between the quantitative correlations and the qualitative accounts therefore strengthens the validity of the findings by demonstrating that the observed statistical relationships are reflected in participants' lived educational experiences.

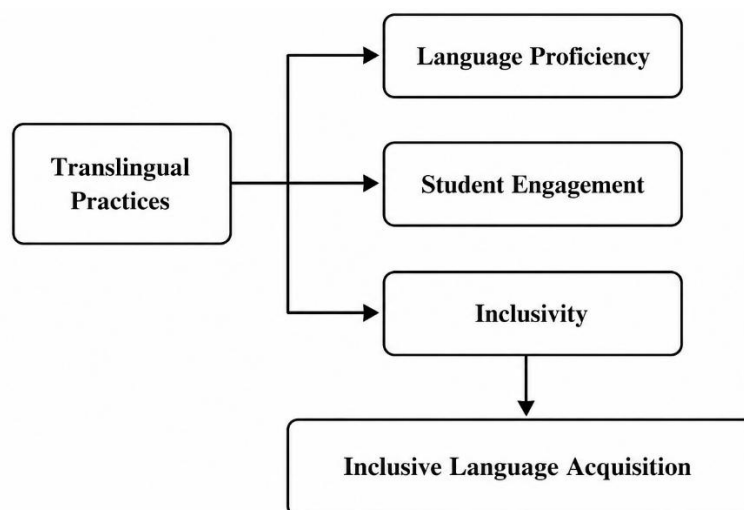


Figure 1. Conceptual Relationship Among Study Variables

The interconnected relationships among the principal variables examined in this study. The model highlights the central role of translingual practices in promoting language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity, all of which contribute to inclusive language acquisition.

Independent Samples t-Test

To determine whether differences between high and low translingual exposure groups were statistically significant, independent samples t-tests were performed.

Table 7. Independent Samples t-Test Results

Variable	Group	Mean	t-value	Sig. (p)
Language Proficiency	High Translingual	78.9	3.87	0.000
	Low Translingual	72.1		
Student Engagement	High Translingual	4.3	3.45	0.001
	Low Translingual	3.7		

Source: Calculated from primary research data using independent samples t-test in SPSS Version 27 (2024).

The findings demonstrate statistically significant differences between groups for both language proficiency and student engagement. Students exposed to higher levels of translingual practices achieved significantly better learning outcomes and reported higher engagement than students in low exposure classrooms. These results provide empirical evidence that translingual instructional strategies contribute positively to both academic and participatory dimensions of learning.

Regression Analysis

Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether translingual practices significantly predicted language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity.

Table 8. Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	Sig.
Translingual Practices → Language Proficiency	0.52	6.12	0.000
Translingual Practices → Engagement	0.48	5.44	0.000
Translingual Practices → Inclusivity	0.50	5.87	0.000

Source: Calculated from primary research data using linear regression analysis in SPSS Version 27 (2024).

The regression results indicate that translingual practices significantly predict all three educational outcomes. The strongest effect was observed on language proficiency ($\beta = 0.52$), followed by classroom inclusivity ($\beta = 0.50$) and student engagement ($\beta = 0.48$). The model explained approximately 62% of the variance in the dependent variables, indicating substantial explanatory power. These findings suggest that the implementation of multilingual instructional strategies contributes directly to both cognitive and social aspects of learning.

Table 9. Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Std. Error
Translingual Practices Model	0.787	0.620	0.614	0.428

Source: Authors’ regression analysis using SPSS Version 27 (2024).

The regression model demonstrated strong explanatory power, accounting for approximately 62.0% of the variance in language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity. The relatively high coefficient of determination suggests that translingual practices represent a substantial predictor of educational outcomes within multilingual learning environments.

Barriers to Implementation

Despite the positive outcomes associated with translingual practices, teachers identified several challenges affecting implementation.

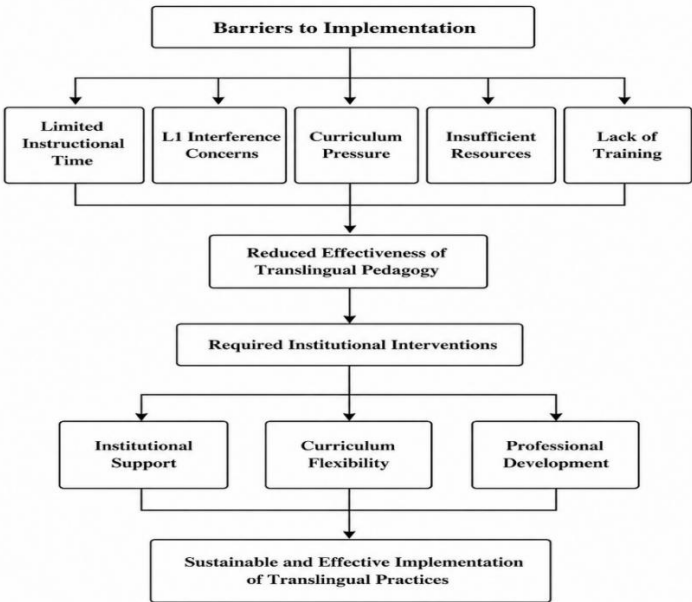


Figure 2. Barriers and Institutional Responses for Effective Implementation of Translingual Pedagogy

The most frequently reported challenge was limited instructional time, followed by concerns regarding first-language interference with second-language acquisition. Additional barriers included curriculum pressures, insufficient resources, and lack of professional training. These findings suggest that successful implementation of translingual pedagogy requires institutional support, curriculum flexibility, and professional development opportunities. Addressing these constraints may enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of multilingual instructional practices across diverse educational settings.

Discussion

Translingual Practices as a Pedagogical Resource in Multilingual Classrooms

The findings demonstrate that translingual practices functioned as intentional pedagogical resources that enhanced comprehension, reduced communication barriers, and promoted meaningful classroom participation. Rather than serving as simple translation techniques,

teachers strategically drew on students' multilingual repertoires to scaffold learning while maintaining English as the primary instructional language. The convergence of classroom observations, survey responses, and interview data indicates that multilingual interaction became an integral component of teaching and learning, enabling students to negotiate meaning through flexible language use. These findings are consistent with Canagarajah's translingual perspective and sociocultural theory, both of which emphasize that learning is strengthened when learners can mobilize their full linguistic resources during social interaction. Teachers encouraged students to use English alongside isiXhosa and Afrikaans to explain concepts, clarify misunderstandings, and collaboratively construct knowledge. This approach demonstrates that multilingualism supports rather than impedes English language development by reducing cognitive barriers and increasing learner engagement.

The positive student perceptions also align with recent translanguaging research, which argues that activating learners' complete linguistic repertoires enhances conceptual understanding, learner agency, and classroom participation. Similar to previous studies, students in this research reported greater comprehension, confidence, and enjoyment when multilingual communication was incorporated into everyday classroom practices instead of being treated as an occasional accommodation. A major contribution of this study lies in its convergent mixed methods design, which integrates classroom observations, language proficiency assessments, questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions.

The consistency of findings across multiple data sources strengthens the evidence that students' favorable perceptions resulted from sustained pedagogical experiences rather than isolated classroom events, providing a more comprehensive understanding of how translingual pedagogy supports cognitive, affective, and interactional aspects of learning. The findings challenge traditional monolingual teaching ideologies by demonstrating that strategic multilingual practices can coexist with strong English language learning objectives (Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022; Deroo & Ponzio, 2019; Chang-Bacon, 2022; Uysal & Sah, 2024). Rather than replacing English instruction, translingual pedagogy expands teachers' instructional resources, fostering greater comprehension, confidence, and participation while recognizing students' linguistic diversity as a valuable educational asset. These results contribute to multilingual education by providing empirical evidence that translingual pedagogy offers an effective and inclusive framework for language learning in linguistically diverse secondary school classrooms.

Translingual Practices as a Catalyst for Language Proficiency Development

The present study demonstrates that students exposed to higher levels of translingual practices achieved substantially greater improvements in English language proficiency than their counterparts in low-exposure classrooms. Although both groups began the semester with comparable pre-test scores, the high-translingual group nearly doubled the magnitude of improvement observed in the low-translingual group, indicating that the differences cannot be attributed solely to initial language competence but rather to variations in instructional experiences. The regression analysis further strengthens this interpretation by identifying translingual practices as the strongest predictor of educational outcomes in the study ($\beta = 0.52$), exceeding its predictive effects on student engagement and classroom inclusivity. This pattern suggests that multilingual instructional practices exert their most immediate influence on cognitive aspects of language learning before generating broader social and affective benefits. The qualitative findings reinforce this explanation, as both teachers and students consistently described how flexible multilingual interaction enabled learners to understand unfamiliar concepts, organize ideas more effectively, and gradually express those ideas in English with increasing independence.

These findings can be interpreted through the perspective of cross-linguistic transfer, which proposes that linguistic knowledge acquired in one language facilitates learning in another when learners are encouraged to establish meaningful connections across their linguistic repertoires. Rather than treating English, isiXhosa, and Afrikaans as isolated systems, students in the present study appeared to activate previously acquired linguistic knowledge to interpret new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and academic concepts. Such interaction allows existing conceptual representations developed in the first language to support second-language acquisition, thereby

accelerating learning without diminishing the importance of English proficiency. Similar conclusions have been reported by Omer & Moh (2024), who found that activating learners' existing linguistic knowledge promotes deeper conceptual processing and more efficient foreign language learning. Wen (2024) likewise argued that multilingual learners demonstrate stronger cognitive flexibility and richer meaning construction when instructional practices encourage the strategic use of multiple languages rather than restricting learners to a single linguistic code. The present findings extend this evidence by showing that cross-linguistic transfer is reflected not only in students' perceptions but also in measurable gains in language proficiency.

The observed improvement may also be explained through Cognitive Load Theory, which emphasizes that learning is optimized when unnecessary cognitive demands are minimized, allowing working memory to focus on processing new information. In multilingual classrooms, requiring learners to interpret unfamiliar academic content exclusively through a second language can substantially increase extraneous cognitive load, particularly for students with developing English proficiency. The strategic incorporation of students' home languages appears to reduce this unnecessary processing burden by enabling learners to access prior knowledge before transferring newly acquired understanding into English. As a result, cognitive resources can be allocated more efficiently to higher-order learning processes such as comprehension, reasoning, and language production. The interview findings support this interpretation, as students repeatedly described that explaining concepts initially in their first language enabled them to understand lessons more quickly and gradually reduced their dependence on multilingual support as their English competence improved. These experiences indicate that translingual pedagogy functions not as a shortcut that bypasses English learning but as a cognitive bridge that facilitates progressively more independent second-language performance.

The effectiveness of translingual practices is equally consistent with the concept of instructional scaffolding derived from sociocultural theory. Scaffolding refers to temporary instructional support that enables learners to accomplish tasks beyond their current level of independent performance until they gradually internalize new knowledge and skills. In the participating classrooms, multilingual interaction served as a scaffold through which teachers guided students from familiar linguistic resources toward increasingly sophisticated English communication (Davila, 2020; Pacheco et al., 2021; Wagner, 2021; Hyun et al., 2022). The qualitative evidence illustrates that teachers encouraged students to formulate ideas in isiXhosa or Afrikaans before reconstructing those ideas in English, allowing conceptual understanding to develop before linguistic accuracy became the primary focus. Comparable findings were reported by Tripp & Waight (2024), who observed that multilingual scaffolding strengthened both academic understanding and learner confidence in inclusive secondary school environments. Adhikari & Poudel (2024) similarly argued that strategically integrating learners' home languages into classroom instruction promotes deeper conceptual engagement while counteracting the limitations imposed by English-only pedagogical practices. The consistency between these studies and the present findings suggests that scaffolding through multilingual interaction represents an effective mechanism for promoting sustainable language development across diverse educational contexts.

The regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.52$), representing the strongest predictive effect identified in this study, carries important theoretical implications because it indicates that language proficiency is the educational outcome most directly influenced by translingual pedagogy. Improvements in student engagement and classroom inclusivity remain essential consequences of multilingual instruction, yet these dimensions appear to emerge alongside the cognitive mechanisms that initially support language acquisition. The combination of stronger post-test gains, robust positive correlations, and the highest standardized regression coefficient suggests that translingual practices primarily enhance learning by strengthening comprehension, facilitating conceptual transfer, and reducing barriers to linguistic processing. These cognitive advantages subsequently create conditions in which learners participate more actively and experience greater confidence within multilingual classrooms. The present study therefore contributes to multilingual education research by demonstrating that translingual pedagogy should be understood not only as an inclusive educational philosophy but also as an evidence-based instructional strategy capable of producing substantial improvements in language proficiency.

through interconnected processes of cross-linguistic transfer, cognitive load reduction, and pedagogical scaffolding.

Fostering Student Engagement and Inclusive Learning Through Translingual Pedagogy

The findings indicate that student engagement and classroom inclusivity are closely interconnected outcomes of translingual pedagogy. Quantitative analyses revealed high levels of behavioral engagement and positive perceptions of classroom inclusivity, while the strong correlation between these variables ($r = 0.74$) suggests that students who experienced linguistically inclusive classrooms were more likely to participate actively in learning. Qualitative evidence further confirmed that acceptance of students' linguistic identities reduced communication anxiety and encouraged greater classroom participation.

The increased engagement observed in this study appears to result from the removal of linguistic barriers commonly associated with English-only instruction. By allowing students to strategically use their home languages, teachers shifted the emphasis from linguistic accuracy to meaning making, enabling learners to ask questions, contribute to discussions, and collaborate more confidently. This finding is consistent with previous research showing that multilingual pedagogical environments enhance participation by reducing linguistic insecurity and promoting meaningful academic dialogue.

According to Pinto et al. (2024), Rangvid (2018), Thacker et al. (2022), Korpershoek et al. (2020) The findings also demonstrate that inclusivity contributes to students' emotional engagement and sense of belonging. Students reported that recognition of their home languages increased their confidence, reduced fear of making mistakes, and encouraged more active participation during lessons. These experiences support earlier studies indicating that validating learners' linguistic identities strengthens both classroom belonging and educational participation, suggesting that psychological inclusion is an important foundation for sustained engagement.

Collaborative learning emerged as another important mechanism through which translingual pedagogy promoted inclusive education. Teachers encouraged students to negotiate meaning collectively by drawing on multiple linguistic resources during discussions and problem-solving activities, transforming linguistic diversity into a resource for peer learning rather than a barrier (Mbirimi-Hungwe & McCabe, 2020; Martin-Beltrán et al., 2017; Zhao, 2023; Yen & Thao, 2024). This collaborative process strengthened learner agency, interpersonal interaction, and recognition of students' linguistic identities within the classroom.

The combined evidence suggests that translingual pedagogy promotes a sequential process in which multilingual interaction increases engagement, sustained engagement strengthens students' sense of belonging, and inclusive learning environments create more favorable conditions for language acquisition. Thus, engagement and inclusivity function as complementary mechanisms that mediate the educational benefits of multilingual instruction rather than as independent outcomes.

This study contributes to multilingual education by demonstrating that effective language learning depends not only on linguistic competence but also on learning environments that value students' linguistic identities and encourage equitable participation. The integrated quantitative and qualitative findings provide empirical support for translingual pedagogy as an inclusive instructional approach capable of enhancing engagement, fostering belonging, and supporting successful language acquisition in multilingual secondary school classrooms.

Interrelationships Among Language Proficiency, Student Engagement, and Classroom Inclusivity

The findings suggest that language proficiency, student engagement, and classroom inclusivity form an interconnected educational system rather than functioning as isolated learning outcomes. The positive correlations observed among all three variables indicate that improvements in one dimension are consistently accompanied by improvements in the others, reflecting the reciprocal nature of learning in multilingual classrooms. Translingual practices appear to initiate this process by reducing linguistic barriers that often constrain participation,

thereby encouraging learners to engage more actively in classroom interaction. Increased participation provides greater opportunities for practicing English, negotiating meaning, and receiving immediate feedback from teachers and peers, which subsequently strengthens language proficiency. At the same time, students who experience academic success develop stronger confidence in their linguistic abilities, making them increasingly willing to participate in future learning activities. These findings support the view that language learning evolves through continuous interactions among cognitive, behavioral, and social processes rather than through isolated linguistic instruction.

The relationship between engagement and language proficiency can be understood through the reciprocal influence of classroom participation and language development (Noels et al., 2019; Ramadan & Jember, 2024; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2022). Students who actively ask questions, engage in discussions, and collaborate with peers encounter substantially more opportunities to practice productive and receptive language skills than students who remain passive during instruction. Frequent interaction exposes learners to diverse linguistic input while simultaneously requiring them to formulate and communicate their own ideas, thereby accelerating language acquisition through authentic communicative experiences. As language proficiency improves, learners become increasingly capable of expressing themselves accurately and fluently, which further enhances confidence and encourages continued participation. This cyclical relationship has been reported in recent multilingual education research, where active classroom engagement has consistently been associated with sustained improvements in second-language development. The present findings extend this evidence by demonstrating that translingual pedagogy strengthens this reciprocal relationship through the strategic use of learners' multilingual resources, allowing engagement and language proficiency to reinforce one another throughout the learning process.

Classroom inclusivity represents another critical component within this interconnected framework because it creates the social conditions necessary for meaningful participation. The findings indicate that students who perceived their linguistic identities as respected also reported greater willingness to communicate, stronger collaboration with peers, and higher confidence during classroom activities (Tan et al., 2018; Baran-Łucarz, 2014; Kayi-Aydar, 2014). Recognition of students' home languages appears to foster a sense of belonging that reduces fear of making mistakes and encourages learners to contribute more openly to academic discussions. Such experiences are consistent with the work of Bazner & Lopez (2023), who emphasized that linguistic recognition strengthens students' educational participation by reinforcing their sense of belonging, and with Tripp & Waight (2024), who demonstrated that inclusive multilingual environments enhance both social connectedness and academic engagement. The present study builds upon these findings by illustrating that inclusivity functions not only as a desirable educational outcome but also as an enabling condition through which engagement and language development can flourish simultaneously.

The integrated pattern identified in this study suggests a conceptual pathway in which translingual practices promote classroom inclusivity, inclusivity strengthens student engagement, engagement enhances language proficiency, and improved language proficiency subsequently reinforces learners' confidence and participation, creating a continuous cycle of educational development. This interpretation helps explain why all variables demonstrated significant positive correlations and why translingual practices exhibited substantial predictive effects across cognitive and social outcomes. Rather than producing independent improvements in different aspects of learning, multilingual instructional practices appear to activate a mutually reinforcing process in which cognitive achievement, emotional security, and active participation develop concurrently. This interconnected perspective represents an important contribution of the present study because it extends existing multilingual education research beyond simple bivariate relationships, offering empirical support for a comprehensive model of inclusive language acquisition in which linguistic diversity serves as the foundation for sustained academic engagement, social inclusion, and long-term language development.

Institutional Support for Sustainable Translingual Pedagogy

The findings indicate that the sustainability of translingual pedagogy depends not only on classroom implementation but also on strong institutional support. Although teachers acknowledged the benefits of multilingual instruction, they identified limited instructional time, curriculum demands, insufficient resources, and inadequate professional preparation as major barriers. These challenges demonstrate that successful implementation requires coordinated institutional efforts rather than relying solely on individual teacher initiatives. Curriculum design, instructional policies, teacher development, and assessment systems must be aligned to support multilingual teaching (Faltis & Valdés, 2016; Tuimebayeva et al., 2024; Gempeso & Mendez, 2021; Gorter & Cenoz, 2017). Consequently, translingual pedagogy should be viewed as a comprehensive educational framework that promotes equitable language learning across diverse school contexts.

Teacher readiness emerged as a key factor in sustaining translingual pedagogy. While teachers generally supported multilingual practices, many were uncertain about balancing first language use with English language development. This finding reflects broader challenges reported in multilingual education, where teachers often receive limited practical preparation for implementing multilingual instruction. Effective professional development should therefore emphasize multilingual scaffolding, collaborative learning, formative assessment, and culturally responsive teaching. Strengthening these competencies will enable teachers to translate theoretical knowledge into effective classroom practice. The findings also highlight the need for curriculum flexibility and multilingual assessment systems. English only curricula and standardized assessments often discourage teachers from applying multilingual strategies despite their proven benefits for learning.

Curriculum frameworks should therefore provide greater flexibility for integrating multilingual activities while maintaining clear English learning objectives. Similarly, assessment should evaluate not only grammatical accuracy but also students' ability to construct meaning, collaborate, and transfer knowledge across languages. Such reforms would better reflect the developmental nature of multilingual competence. Institutional commitment must also be reflected in school policies that recognize linguistic diversity as an educational resource rather than a barrier. Schools should encourage strategic multilingual interaction, provide appropriate instructional resources, and promote collaboration among teachers working in linguistically diverse classrooms (Prasad & Lory, 2020; Dover & Rodriguez-Valls, 2018; Ntelioglou et al., 2014; Heineke et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2018). Supportive language policies strengthen teachers' pedagogical autonomy while affirming students' linguistic identities. By fostering inclusive learning environments, schools can improve both academic participation and educational equity.

These findings demonstrate that sustainable translingual pedagogy requires the integration of teacher readiness, curriculum flexibility, multilingual assessment, supportive school leadership, and coherent language policies. This institutional approach is closely aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 4, which promotes inclusive and equitable quality education. When these elements operate together, translingual pedagogy becomes a sustainable strategy for improving language acquisition while advancing broader educational goals related to equity, participation, and high-quality learning in multilingual societies.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrate that translingual pedagogy serves as an effective instructional approach by strategically integrating students' multilingual repertoires to enhance comprehension, reduce communication barriers, and promote meaningful classroom participation while maintaining English as the primary language of instruction. Students exposed to higher levels of translingual practices achieved significantly greater improvements in English language proficiency, and regression analysis identified translingual practices as the strongest predictor of language development, highlighting their role in facilitating conceptual understanding through cross-linguistic transfer, reduced cognitive load, and instructional scaffolding. The study also demonstrates that student engagement and classroom inclusivity are mutually reinforcing outcomes of translingual pedagogy. By recognizing students' linguistic identities and encouraging

flexible multilingual interaction, teachers fostered greater confidence, active participation, collaborative learning, and a stronger sense of belonging. These outcomes were supported by strong positive correlations among translanguaging practices, language proficiency, engagement, and inclusivity, indicating that improvements in one dimension were accompanied by gains in the others. The findings highlight that the long-term success of translanguaging pedagogy depends on institutional support, including teacher professional development, curriculum flexibility, multilingual assessment, and supportive language policies. Collectively, the convergent quantitative and qualitative evidence confirms that translanguaging pedagogy provides an inclusive and sustainable framework for language learning by simultaneously enhancing cognitive, behavioral, and social dimensions of education while positioning linguistic diversity as a valuable resource for meaningful language acquisition in multilingual secondary school classrooms.

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