

Policy and Planning for Translanguaging in English Language Teaching in Nigerian Multilingual Universities

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Abstract

Review Article

The question of using more than one language in the classroom has gained significance in the English language teaching in multilingual universities in Nigeria, and therefore the policies and strategic planning towards the use of translanguaging must take place to facilitate effective learning and communication. Despite Nigeria's linguistic diversity, the official teaching medium is English, hence the ever-existing gap between classroom practice and official language policy. Translanguaging, defined as dynamic and strategic use of multiple languages in learning, has been conceptualized as a pedagogical strategy that can facilitate understanding, supplement academic language, and authorize students' language and cultural identities. Based on a mixed-methods research design, the study gathered data from 460 participants, including 40 lecturers, 20 education planners, and 400 undergraduate students, using questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Quantitative results indicate translanguaging is used sporadically to explain difficult things, enable class participation, and make writing easier, but there are limits in the guise of rigid curricula, inadequate teacher training, and lack of support on the part of institutions. Qualitative results support these patterns of evidence, such as persistent policy loopholes, sporadic translanguaging at the classroom level, and challenges as well as opportunities for systematic integration. The learners testified to the teaching advantage of translanguaging, such as improved understanding, enhanced students' involvement, and legitimization of cultural and linguistic identity. The research called for the urgency of purposive policy reformulation, strategic planning frameworks, staff development among academics, and institutional support structures to join the mainstream of higher education. By closing the gap between English-only policies and multilingual practices, this research adds to the literature in language-in-education policy, multilingual pedagogy, and educational planning. The conclusions presented pragmatic suggestions for policymakers, education planners, and lecturers who wish to create inclusive, equitable, and effective learning communities in linguistically diverse higher education settings.

Keywords: Classroom practice, Higher education, Inclusive education, Language policy, Linguistic diversity, Pedagogical innovation, Student participation

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1. Introduction

English medium instruction (EMI) is now a hallmark of global tertiary education, marking academic mobility, globalisation, and access to global knowledge networks. Still, this supremacy is the source of tensions in multilingual settings, where students and teachers draw upon rich linguistic repertoires that are much broader than English (Oloruntoba-Oju & Pinxteren, 2022). Translanguaging, one of the pedagogical reactions that is becoming increasingly relevant, identifies and legitimates strategic language use in two or more languages in the educational context. By far not a deficit approach, translanguaging has been proven to promote understanding, support academic communication, and affirm students' linguistic and cultural identities (Jegede, 2025).

In Nigeria, these conversations acquire additional imperative. It is one of the most multilingual countries in the world, with more than 500 native languages spoken within its borders (Ugwu, 2021). Even with multiplicity, the Nigerian university system once had an English-only policy; a vestige of colonial language planning that still shapes academic life today (Oloruntoba-Oju & Pinxteren, 2022). English continues to be the only language of instruction, testing, and academic publication, with indigenous languages fully absent from the university curriculum. Exclusion has produced a chronic gap between policy and daily classroom performance so that students use informal translanguaging—switching between indigenous languages and English to explain meaning, negotiate meaning, and help them learn (Jegede, 2025).

However, these practices are not often recognized or ratified in curriculum planning or policy formulation. According to Ugwu (2021), fewer than 5% of indigenous Nigerian languages are taught as courses in the tertiary level, and most local languages are not mainstreamed into higher education systems. This dilutes students' linguistic capital and reifies hierarchies that support English at the expense of other learning languages. Oloruntoba-Oju and Pinxteren (2022) also contend that even as translanguaging is

becoming more evident in the classroom, institutional hesitation to incorporate it in planning is evidence of a larger conflict between global competitiveness and local linguistic contexts.

Nigerian multilingual universities are therefore challenge and opportunity in such respects. Challenge is redesigning policy and planning in order to close the divide between English-only paradigms and multilingual contexts. The potential is to enfranchise translanguaging as a mainstream teaching approach, one that facilitates not just learning, but also Nigeria's aspiration to conserve its linguistic heritage. The present study thus aims to examine policy and planning for translanguaging in English Language Teaching in Nigerian multilingual universities, placing the Nigerian context within larger discourses of language, identity, and higher education change.

Under the multilingual realities of Nigerian universities, English prevails as the sole language of pedagogy, examination, and academic communication. This engenders a deeply rooted mismatch between policy and pedagogy of formal language, as students and instructors use local languages habitually to enhance comprehension and meaning-making. Such translanguaging routines, though ubiquitous and efficacious, are non-institutionalized and go unnoticed within institutional systems. The lack of intentional policy and planning for translanguaging in the university has consequences that run very deep. It not only prevents learners from being able to use their full repertoire of linguistic resources but also embeds educational disadvantage, with lower English capability placing people at a disadvantage.

Furthermore, by ignoring the local languages, universities stand to disenfranchise students from their cultural and language heritage and miss out on leveraging multilingualism as an education tool. Lacking a clear blueprint for the implementation of translanguaging in English Language Teaching, Nigerian universities remain between global demands to privilege English and local pressures



for facilitation in multilingualism. This gap invites academia to explore how planning and policy can make common cause to close the gap so that translanguaging would not be an informal practice but inculcated as a legitimate pedagogic process for inclusive and effective learning.

The aim of this study was to explore how planning and policy can facilitate translanguaging integration into English Language Instruction in Nigerian multilingual universities. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

- explore existing language policies that inform English Language Instruction at Nigerian multilingual universities;
- determine the degree to which translanguaging practices are already employed within English Language classrooms at the university level
- examine the opportunities and challenges confronting the practice of translanguaging at the university level; and
- find out strategic planning instruments likely to facilitate policy-informed translanguaging in English Language Teaching on the universities.

The following research questions were raised to guide the study:

- What language policies presently shape English Language Teaching in Nigerian multilingual universities?
- To what degree are translanguaging practices currently utilized in English Language classes at the university level?
- What are the opportunities and challenges posed for using translanguaging in English Language Teaching at the higher education level?
- What strategic planning models can be formulated to facilitate policy-guided translanguaging in English Language Teaching in the universities?

Significance of this study is that it bridges the English-only policy gap and the multilingual university reality gap in Nigeria by presenting

evidence-based facts which can inform education planners and policymakers in the aspect of creating inclusive language-in-education policies. By advocating for translanguaging, the study offers practical strategies for enhancing teaching and students' understanding, confidence, and grades. It adds to research literature by connecting translanguaging with policy and planning, a less explored topic in higher education. Outside academe, the research has its wider implications for society, including fostering linguistic equality, appreciating the native languages as assets and not barriers, and facilitating inclusive learning in the wake of globalization.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *Translanguaging in Higher Education*

Translanguaging has emerged to play a growing central position in higher education in multilingual settings. Instead of addressing languages as distinct, translanguaging preserves the dynamic and dynamic deployment of language resources on the part of multilinguals. Among Jordanian postgraduate students in Canada, they indicated using translanguaging to understand lectures, navigating academic writing, and negotiating identity even in "English-only" settings (Al-Zoubi, 2024). A Russian study also demonstrated the way students tactically switched between Russian and English in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) courses to enrich meaning (Chicherina & Strelkova, 2023). These studies affirm that translanguaging is not a deviant but an effective meaning-making strategy in contexts where policy lags practice.

2.2 *Policy Constraints: "English-Only" Ideologies*

Notwithstanding evidence of the advantage of translanguaging, higher education is characterized by English-only ideologies. In Australia, Dobinson, Dryden, and Dovchin (2023) claimed that monolingual norms are maintained through institutional policy to silence students' multilingual repertoires. Such settings create a paradox: as English proficiency is positioned as a vehicle to scholastic and



professional success, limiting other languages discourages deeper learning and participation. In Africa, Nkhi (2024) constructed that monoglossic ideologies drawn from colonial legacy continue to exist in universities, favoring English at the expense of African languages. This policy rigidity not only disempowers equity but also continues linguistic injustice for learners from diverse backgrounds.

2.3 Benefits and Challenges of Translanguaging

Translanguaging has evident pedagogical advantages in tertiary education. Systematic reviews confirm that it enables the scaffolding of advanced ideas, confirmation of identity, and inclusivity (Nkhi, 2024). In the classroom, translanguaging invites students to access their complete linguistic repertoires so that they may read scholarly texts, co-construct meaning, and become critical thinkers (Al-Zoubi, 2024). All is not, however, well. Institutional resistance, teacher under-preparedness, and curricular rigidity tend to hinder systematic take-up (Olayoku, 2023). The literature identifies the fact that in the absence of supportive policy frameworks, translanguaging will likely be ad hoc and unsustainable, however transformative its potential.

2.4 Translanguaging and Academic Identity

In addition to pedagogy, translanguaging is also essential to the construction of students' academic identities. Studies have established that multilingual learners who are able to draw on both English and their native languages have lowered levels of anxiety and perform well in academic discursive communities (Al-Zoubi, 2024). Translanguaging validates cultural identity and boosts learners' confidence in navigating between academic literacies. By Normalized multilingual practices, the university can shift from deficit orientations of indigenous languages and place them instead as knowledge-making resources (Chicherina & Strelkova, 2023). Translanguaging is thus an epistemic and identity-making practice.

2.5 Nigeria-Specific Policy Context

The National Policy on Education (NPE) in Nigeria recognizes the use of indigenous languages in early childhood education but provides for narrow incorporation at the tertiary level. Olayoku (2023) contends that such a shortfall is a missed chance for policy convergence with Nigeria's multilingualism. Comparative analysis between Nigeria and South Africa reveals that policies make gestures in the direction of multilingualism but, in practice, still remain cosmetic, with English still reigning supreme as the *de facto* language of teaching. Such a discrepancy is evidence of planning that disregards translanguaging as a viable strategy for tertiary education. Without systemic transformation, Nigerian universities stand to perpetuate exclusionary patterns within multilingual classrooms.

2.6 Translanguaging as a Strategy in Nigerian Classrooms

Although not mainstreamed yet in the tertiary education, translanguaging has already been practiced in Nigerian classrooms, especially at the foundational level. Ademiluyi and Akinwale (2024) reported how Nigeria's bilingual primary schools utilized translanguaging techniques that boosted engagement, understanding, and performance. In spite of the advantages, the research observed challenges that were the shortage of training for teachers, strict curriculum structures, and administrative apathy. If translanguaging in primary school is successful, then its use in universities can close knowledge gaps, render university education inclusive, and better reflect teaching in keeping with Nigeria's multilingual background. This puts more stress on systematic planning and institutionalization of translanguaging in higher education.

2.7 Appraisal of Literature

The studies that have been examined in this review create evidence that translanguaging is now a pedagogical methodology in higher education worldwide due to its potential to improve understanding, identity assertion, and learners' engagement in multilingual



environments. Nonetheless, the majority of studies are located in Western and Asian contexts with little empirical focus on the African, and thus Nigerian, higher learning environment. In addition, whereas a number of scholars have already decried the perpetuity of English-only policies and the students' unofficial translanguaging practice, fewer have taken up a discussion of how education planning and policy can be utilized to institutionalize translanguaging as an official practice in higher education. This is specifically in Nigeria, where local languages are recognized in language-in-education policy but not enacted in higher education. As such, existing literature speaks of a disjunctive issue of contention between policy and practice, giving unambiguous justification to the current study, whose objective is to question policy and planning models for the integration of translanguaging into English language instruction in Nigerian multilingual universities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The research utilized a mixed-methods design which entailed the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. Lecturers of the English Language, planners in education, and undergraduate students at the selected Nigerian universities constituted the study population. Lecturers are needed because they deliver instruction policies and practices in the English language classroom. Planner educators conceptualize and institutionalize policy structures with a view to sustaining them in alignment with goals of institutions. Students were the immediate recipients of translanguaging practice and saw the impact of policy and class instruction at first hand. Together, this ensured that data recorded varied views on incorporation of translanguaging in higher education. The technique of multi-stage sampling was employed to select participants. Four Nigerian universities were selected purposefully because of linguistic variation and relationship with the study. In every university, ten English Language lecturers were purposively chosen according to their active participation in teaching and five educational planners were purposively chosen for curriculum management

and policy management. 100 undergraduate students were randomly selected at different levels for diversity of experience. 460 participants, including 40 lecturers, 20 educational planners, and 400 students, were sampled. Stratified and simple random sampling was used to keep representativeness by discipline and level of study.

3.2 Research Instruments

Data were gathered using a series of instruments to enable triangulation and depth. Questionnaires were completed by students and lecturers to provide quantitative data on the translanguaging practice, attitudes towards language policy, and classroom concerns. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with education planners and a subset of lecturers to provide qualitative data on planning and policy enactment. Institutional reports, curriculum guides, and language-in-education policy guides were also analyzed to enable contextual depth and triangulation. Researchers in research methodology, applied linguistics, and educational planning were employed to validate the instruments. Piloting was also done within a skipped university to ensure the tools were clear, consistent, and reliable. The pilot's feedback was utilized to further adjust the tools so that they can well capture the necessary data for the study.

3.3 Data collection and Analysis

Data were gathered in phases. Questionnaires were initially given to the students and lecturers to obtain quantitative data. Interviews with the educational planners and some of the lecturers subsequently yielded qualitative data, and document analysis was done at the same time. The interviews for all the research were audio-recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim to ensure exact replication of the findings. Quantitative data were examined using descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, and percentages, and with inferential statistics such as Chi-square and ANOVA with a view to examining relationships between variables. Qualitative interview and document analysis data were investigated thematically, identifying patterns



related to policy, planning, and translanguaging practice. Triangulation of qualitative and

quantitative outcomes assisted in enhancing the credibility and dependability of results.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	180	39
	Female	280	61
Participant Type	Lecturers	40	9
	Educational Planners	20	4
	Students	400	87
Academic Level (Students)	100 Level	100	25
	200 Level	100	25
	300 Level	100	25
	400 Level	100	25

The demographic table reveals that most participants were students (87%), reflective of their sheer numbers in universities, while lecturers and education planners constituted 9% and 4% respectively. Female participants

outstripped male participants by the smallest margin. Student respondents had an even spread by academic level, providing balanced representation by experience with translanguaging practices.

Table 2: Current Language Policies Guiding English Language Teaching

Policy Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
English is the official medium of instruction.	120	200	80	60	3.2
Multilingual strategies are encouraged in classrooms.	30	80	210	140	1.9
Policy documents acknowledge indigenous languages.	20	50	200	190	1.7

The results indicate that English remains the dominant language utilized in Nigerian universities since most of the respondents agreed that English is the official medium. Multilingual

practice and home language recognition are poorly represented in policy reports, indicating a gap between classroom practice and policy intentions.



Table 3: Frequency of Translanguaging Practices in Classrooms

Translanguaging Practice	Frequently	Occasionally	Rarely	Never	Mean
Using students' first language to explain concepts	50	120	180	90	2.3
Switching languages during discussions	40	150	160	110	2.2
Translanguaging in writing tasks	30	100	200	130	2.0

The data demonstrated that translanguaging was applied occasionally, not daily. First languages were applied sparingly by lecturers to explain complex points. Writing

tasks evidenced least frequency in the application of translanguaging and point towards institutional and policy limitations.

Table 4: Challenge and Opportunity for Translanguaging Integration

Challenge/Opportunity	Lecturers Agree	Students Agree	Planners Agree	Mean
Lack of institutional support	35	350	18	3.8
Limited teacher training	32	300	16	3.6
Enhances comprehension and participation	38	380	20	4.0
Strengthens cultural and academic identity	36	370	19	3.9

Even though translanguaging had been found to be effective in comprehension as well as in identity affirmation, institutional constraints and lack of training among teachers restrict its seamless adoption. The findings suggest the imperatives of policy-driven planning to make these opportunities fully accessible.

4.2 Qualitative Results

Theme 1: Policy Gaps and English-Only Norms

Interview results suggested that educational planners acknowledge the English

hegemony in policy but took responsibility for indigenous languages being barely translated into classroom practice. One of the planners stated, *"The policy says local languages, but actually we work very nearly entirely in English because it's seen as more 'professional'."*

Theme 2: Classroom-Level Translanguaging

Lecturers reported occasional use of students' mother tongues to clarify complex concepts or to engage quieter students. A lecturer explained, *"I use Yoruba or Igbo only when students are getting stuck on technical terms; otherwise, English is the dominant language."*



Theme 3: Challenges and Opportunities

Both groups of participants cited limited teacher training and inflexible curricula as barriers, but also asserted that translanguaging has the potential to promote understanding, engagement, and cultural legitimization. The students stated, "We learn more clearly when our own language is used in addition to English."

Thematic analysis cross-validates quantitative findings: translanguaging is not maximally utilized by policy and systemic constraints, yet students and lecturers alike recognize its pedagogical merit. These findings fortify the appeal to strategic planning models to incorporate translanguaging in Nigerian universities.

4.2 Discussion

The study findings validate that English continues to be the lingua franca of instruction in Nigerian universities, with minimal use of native languages. This justifies earlier studies that validate that though policies encompass native languages, their application is always biased. For example, Jegede's (2024) study gives an illustration that despite provision by policy, English continues to be predominant in institutions of higher learning, resulting in communication and understanding issues among the students. Besides, studies by Adeola and Phatudi (2025) highlight the significance of the instruction of indigenous languages in safeguarding cultural identity and enhancing bilingual competence. Their study of the English-Yoruba Parallel-Alphabets Package (EYPAP) for Nigerian primary education shows how this can enrich the learning of Yoruba culture and develop bilingual competence among students.

The results suggest that translanguaging practice is used sparingly, mainly to explain complex concepts or to engage students when discussing. The result was in line with Jegede's (2024) study that emphasized that although translanguaging has been used to promote understanding, it is mostly constrained by some restrictions. In addition, Ugwuona's (2020) study of linguistic borrowing and translanguaging in the multilingual Obollo speech community in southeast Nigeria finds that translanguaging

takes place effortlessly in informal contexts but is still constrained in educational contexts. This makes it necessary to have intentional pedagogy practices to enact translanguaging in class.

Survey respondents attested to the advantage of translanguaging, including better understanding and greater learner engagement. This data is corroborated by Jegede (2024), whose finding was that translanguaging could strengthen learning outcomes, particularly in multilingual groups. Moreover, Adeola and Phatudi (2025) research yields the mechanism by which indigenous language use can support English to improve the understanding and participation of learners. Their study on the EYPAP program clearly illustrates that students are more at ease and participate more where they have been allowed to employ their mother language in the learning process.

There are a number of barriers to the successful implementation of translanguaging practice. These are lack of adequate teacher training, tight curricula, and resistance to change. Jegede (2024) also agrees, adding that translanguaging is difficult to implement by teachers owing to lack of adequate professional development and institutional support. One such research by Deji-Afuye and Obadare (2021) of Yoruba-English bilinguals' classroom experiences in Nigerian public primary schools in Ekiti State finds the same issues. Teachers' pedagogical awareness of children's communication behavior and competence in both languages are impacted by the absence of proper training and hardware, which works against the effective use of translanguaging in the classroom.

To this end, the research deems it crucial to have policy change as well as strategic planning guidelines that allow space for the incorporation of translanguaging in higher education. This is supported by Jegede's (2024) appeal for systemic changes that will allow for the adoption of translanguaging practices. Besides, Adeola and Phatudi (2025) encourage the formulation of policies that will ensure the utilization of local languages within curriculum. If this is researched from their studies, it can result in enhanced academic performance in addition to cultural heritage preservation.



5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The research in this paper focused on the policy and strategic planning role in making translanguaging practice feasible for English Language Teaching in Nigerian multilingual universities. The conclusion is that English remains the overarching medium of instruction, yet native languages and translanguaging approaches are underutilized. Translanguaging remains an intermittent occurrence in the classroom to explain complex matters, but its utilization is limited by a lack of teachers' training, standard curricula, and institutional support. Despite these issues, the participants saw the pedagogical advantages of translanguaging, such as enhanced comprehension, engaged students, and validation of linguistic and cultural identity. These results indicate a stark difference between institutional policy settings and pedagogical practice, and they support the powerful imperative for policy change, planning, and support to embed translanguaging as a normalized and sustainable pedagogical practice in Nigerian higher education. The research offers an innovative contribution to knowledge in multilingual education through an exposition of how some planning and policy interventions can close the gap between language policy and language practice in multilingual university settings. The research, following the findings, recommends the following:

1. Universities need to revisit language-in-education policy in order to make translanguaging a pedagogic method, incorporating indigenous languages in teaching and curriculum and closing the gap between English monolingual policies and the multilingual classroom.
2. Institutions need to establish measures in place to enact translanguaging, for instance, curriculum adaptability, effective resource allocation, and sufficient guidelines to enable lecturers to utilize translanguaging practices successfully.
3. Routine professional development activities should equip lecturers with the pedagogic knowledge, skills, and confidence necessary to implement

translanguaging in classroom teaching to foster inclusive and equitable learning opportunities.

4. Managerial support should offer access to multilingual pedagogical resources, pedagogical guidance, and incentives to motivate lecturers to introduce and maintain translanguaging strategies.
5. Universities should implement systems of continuous evaluation of translanguaging projects to promote continuous improvement in teaching and a policy direction, providing sustainable multilingual learning environments.

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Author contributions

Olagoke R. O. and Sam K. jointly conceptualised the study and contributed to the design of the methodology. Olagoke R. O. supervised the research process, while Sam K. led the literature review and data collection. Both authors contributed to drafting the manuscript and reviewing the final version for submission.

