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From English Language Teaching to Epistemic Access at Lycée Bilingue De Sodiko Douala: Rethinking Pedagogy for Multilingual Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how English language pedagogy at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko Douala mediates or constrains epistemic access for multilingual learners in Cameroon's bilingual secondary education system. Through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with 15 teachers and 48 students, and analysis of student reflective journals, the research reveals persistent monolingual norms that position English as gatekeeping mechanism rather than epistemic resource. Despite official bilingualism and the school's substantial Anglophone section serving 823 students within a broader population of 2,108, English instruction prioritises standardised accuracy over meaning-making, effectively excluding students' full linguistic repertoires from academic engagement. However, instances of spontaneous translanguaging demonstrate how strategic multilingual practices enhance conceptual understanding and student confidence. The study argues for reconceptualising English pedagogy as epistemic mediation within multilingual learning ecosystems, supported by institutional policies and professional development that legitimise translanguaging practices. These findings contribute to broader debates on linguistic justice and inclusive secondary education in multilingual African contexts, with particular relevance for Cameroon's ongoing negotiation of linguistic identity and educational equity.

Résumé

Cette étude examine comment la pédagogie de l'anglais au Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko Douala influence, positivement ou négativement, l'accès épistémique des élèves multilingues au sein du système d'enseignement secondaire bilingue du Cameroun. À travers des observations en classe, des entretiens semi-directifs avec 15 enseignants et 48 élèves, et l'analyse des journaux de bord des élèves, la recherche révèle des normes monolingues persistantes qui font de l'anglais un mécanisme de contrôle plutôt qu'une ressource épistémique. Malgré le bilinguisme officiel et l'importante section anglophone de l'établissement (823 élèves sur un total de 2 108), l'enseignement de l'anglais privilégie la précision standardisée au détriment de la construction du sens, excluant de fait l'ensemble des répertoires linguistiques des élèves de l'engagement académique. Cependant, des exemples de translangage spontané démontrent comment des pratiques multilingues stratégiques enrichissent la compréhension conceptuelle et renforcent la confiance des élèves. Cette étude plaide pour une redéfinition de la pédagogie de l'anglais comme médiation épistémique au sein d'écosystèmes d'apprentissage multilingues, soutenue par des politiques institutionnelles et un développement professionnel qui légitiment les pratiques de translangage. Ces résultats alimentent les débats plus larges sur la justice linguistique et l'éducation secondaire inclusive dans les contextes africains multilingues, et revêtent une importance particulière pour le Cameroun, qui poursuit sa réflexion sur l'identité linguistique et l'équité éducative.

INTRODUCTION

English language teaching in Cameroonian secondary schools operates within complex sociolinguistic terrain where colonial linguistic hierarchies persist alongside constitutional commitments to bilingualism and practical multilingualism. At Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko Douala, a public secondary school established in 1994 as a Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire and transformed into a lycée in 2011, English functions simultaneously as academic subject, medium of instruction for the Anglophone section, and symbolic marker of educational achievement and global mobility. Yet this multifaceted role of English raises critical questions about whose knowledge counts, which linguistic resources are legitimised in academic spaces, and how language policies and pedagogical practices enable or constrain what scholars' term epistemic access: the capacity to engage meaningfully with disciplinary knowledge and participate fully in academic discourse (Morrow, 2009).

Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko serves a remarkably diverse student population of 2,108 learners, of whom 823 study in the Anglophone section. The school employs 92 teachers, with 31 identified as Anglophone educators responsible for instruction in English-medium classrooms. Students come from varied linguistic backgrounds: Francophone students who completed primary education through French-medium instruction constitute the majority, Anglophone students from Northwest and Southwest regions bring competencies in Cameroon English and Cameroon Pidgin English, whilst many students speak indigenous languages including Duala, Ewondo, Bamileke varieties, and Fulfulde at home. This linguistic diversity represents substantial cognitive and cultural capital, yet institutional practices frequently treat

multilingualism as deficit requiring remediation rather than resource enabling enriched learning.

Current English pedagogy at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko predominantly follows what scholars characterise as monoglossic ideology: the assumption that legitimate academic communication occurs through a single standardised language variety, preferably approximating British or American academic English norms (García & Wei, 2014). Teachers emphasise grammatical accuracy, formal register, and conformity with Anglo-American rhetorical conventions. Assessment criteria typically penalise code-switching, local expressions, and non-standard varieties. Students who could potentially leverage their full linguistic repertoires for deeper conceptual understanding instead find themselves constrained by narrow expectations that position English proficiency as prerequisite for demonstrating disciplinary knowledge.

This pedagogical approach generates what education scholars identify as epistemic exclusion: situations where learners cannot access or express academic knowledge because the medium of instruction disconnects from their cognitive and cultural resources (Bowden & Barrett, 2025). Students may comprehend concepts when explained in French or indigenous languages but struggle to demonstrate understanding through English-only assessments. They may possess locally grounded insights relevant to course content but lack confidence to articulate these perspectives within formal academic English constraints. Consequently, rather than facilitating epistemic access, current English pedagogy often functions as gatekeeping mechanism that privileges students already familiar with formal English registers whilst marginalising those who bring different but equally valuable linguistic competencies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Epistemic Access and Linguistic Justice in Secondary Education

The concept of epistemic access extends beyond physical school admission or course enrolment to encompass students' capacity for meaningful intellectual engagement with disciplinary knowledge. Morrow (2009) distinguishes between formal access, denoting institutional entry, and epistemic access, referring to genuine participation in knowledge practices and academic discourse communities. Students may gain formal school admission yet remain epistemically excluded if teaching practices, assessment requirements, and linguistic norms presuppose cultural and linguistic capital they do not possess.

In multilingual African contexts, language policies and pedagogical practices significantly shape epistemic access. When schools adopt European languages as exclusive media of instruction without recognising students' home languages as legitimate knowledge resources, they effectively reproduce colonial hierarchies positioning European epistemologies as superior whilst marginalising indigenous knowledge systems (Prah, 2009). This linguistic exclusion operates not merely through overt policy but through subtle everyday practices: teachers who discourage code-switching, assessment rubrics penalising non-standard varieties, curricula privileging Anglo-American references whilst ignoring local scholarship, and institutional cultures treating multilingualism as problem requiring remediation rather than asset enabling enriched learning.

Recent scholarship increasingly frames linguistic inclusion in secondary education as justice issue. Students from wealthy urban families often attend English-medium private schools, gaining linguistic capital translating to academic success. Rural students, those from marginalised regions, or those educated in under-resourced public schools arrive with substantial intellectual capacity and cultural knowledge yet lacking the specific English proficiency that current pedagogies demand. This linguistic stratification intersects with class, region, and ethnicity to compound existing inequalities.

Epistemic justice in multilingual schools therefore requires reconceptualising legitimate academic language beyond narrow monolingual standards. Rather than treating students' home languages as obstacles to overcome, inclusive pedagogy positions multilingual competence as cognitive advantage enabling multiple perspectives and deeper conceptual understanding. Research demonstrates that bilingual and multilingual learners possess enhanced metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and capacity for complex problem-solving (García & Wei, 2014). Yet these advantages materialise only when educational environments legitimise and actively engage learners' full linguistic repertoires rather than demanding they operate exclusively through second or third languages.

Translanguaging Theory and Multilingual Pedagogy

Translanguaging theory provides conceptual framework for understanding and implementing inclusive multilingual pedagogy. García and Wei (2014) define translanguaging as the dynamic process whereby multilingual speakers deploy their full linguistic repertoires fluidly across traditionally defined language boundaries to make meaning. Unlike code-switching, which suggests alternation between distinct languages, translanguaging conceptualises multilingual competence as integrated communicative repertoire wherein speakers draw strategically on diverse linguistic resources to achieve communicative goals.

Educational applications of translanguaging challenge monolingual instructional norms. Translanguaging pedagogy deliberately creates spaces for students to use all their linguistic resources in learning activities: discussing concepts in home languages before writing in academic English, translating key terminology to enhance comprehension, incorporating local examples that require switching between languages, and producing multilingual

outputs demonstrating disciplinary understanding. Research across diverse contexts demonstrates translanguaging's pedagogical benefits. Studies in Wales show that encouraging students to discuss content in Welsh before writing English essays improves both conceptual understanding and English expression. Research in United States multilingual classrooms reveals that translanguaging practices enhance student engagement, confidence, and academic achievement whilst validating diverse linguistic identities.

In African education contexts, Makalela's scholarship demonstrates translanguaging's potential for epistemic inclusion. His research documents how deliberately incorporating indigenous languages alongside English or Afrikaans in teaching materials and classroom discussions enhances reading comprehension and enables students to connect academic concepts with local knowledge systems (Makalela, 2015, 2023). Makalela argues that translanguaging functions as vehicle for epistemic access by legitimising students' full meaning-making resources rather than constraining them to operate through partial linguistic competencies in English alone. His work shows that students who engage academically through translanguaging demonstrate deeper conceptual understanding and produce more sophisticated analyses than those restricted to monolingual expression.

Translanguaging pedagogy also addresses power dynamics in multilingual classrooms. By validating indigenous languages as legitimate academic resources, it challenges linguistic hierarchies positioning European languages as superior. Students whose home languages receive recognition in academic spaces develop stronger academic identities and increased confidence to contribute local perspectives to scholarly discussions. This validation proves particularly significant in African contexts where colonial education systems historically denigrated indigenous languages and knowledge systems. Translanguaging thus serves not merely as pedagogical technique but as decolonial practice asserting linguistic and epistemic plurality against monolingual colonial legacies.

However, implementing translanguaging pedagogy faces substantial challenges. Many teachers lack training in multilingual teaching approaches, having themselves experienced monolingual education. Institutional policies often explicitly or implicitly discourage code-switching and require English-only assessment. Examination systems designed for monolingual evaluation cannot easily accommodate multilingual outputs. Furthermore, concerns arise about whether translanguaging adequately develops English proficiency required for national examinations and further education. These practical and ideological constraints mean that despite translanguaging's demonstrated benefits, it remains uncommon in many African schools, including in Cameroon.

Multilingual Education and Language Policy in Cameroon

Cameroon's linguistic landscape reflects complex colonial and postcolonial history. German colonisation ended with World War I, after which League of Nations mandates divided Cameroon between French and British administration. Following independence in 1960 and reunification in 1961, the constitution established French and English as official languages, creating formally bilingual state. In practice, however, Francophone dominance characterises national institutions, with Anglophone regions experiencing persistent marginalisation manifesting in political, economic, and educational spheres. This marginalisation intensified into violent conflict beginning in 2016, with Anglophone regions demanding greater autonomy or independence.

Official language policy in education mandates bilingualism, requiring students to study both French and English. However, implementation varies dramatically by region and school level. Francophone regions conduct primary and secondary education predominantly through French, with English taught as subject. Anglophone regions formerly operated through English, though Francophone teacher appointments and French-language materials increasingly appear in Anglophone schools, generating protests and resistance. Indigenous languages remain largely excluded from formal education despite their prevalence in homes and communities, used informally by students and sometimes by teachers but rarely legitimised in curricula or assessment.

Research on language practices in Cameroonian classrooms reveals persistent tensions between policy and practice. Agbor Tabe's (2024) work documents how English and French serve as languages of instruction and assessment whilst indigenous languages and Cameroon Pidgin English function as unofficial but crucial resources for student sense-making, peer collaboration, and informal explanation. Teachers often employ translanguaging spontaneously to clarify difficult concepts, yet simultaneously enforce language-of-instruction-only rules and penalise code-switching in student work. This contradiction reflects broader ideological tensions between recognising linguistic diversity as resource versus treating it as deficit requiring elimination.

In secondary education, language policy remains particularly ambiguous. Schools in Francophone regions typically operate predominantly through French but increasingly establish Anglophone sections in response to perceived market demand for English proficiency. However, these Anglophone sections often face challenges including insufficient qualified English-medium teachers, limited English-language materials, and unclear policies regarding whether and when French or indigenous languages may legitimately support learning. Systematic policies supporting multilingual pedagogy or translanguaging practices remain absent. Teachers receive no professional development in teaching linguistically diverse students, and institutional expectations implicitly or explicitly favour monolingual instruction in either French or English depending on designated section.

This policy vacuum means that pedagogical practices regarding language diversity depend largely on individual teacher beliefs and practices. Some teachers strictly enforce language-of-instruction-only rules, viewing code-switching as unprofessional or academically inappropriate. Others spontaneously employ translanguaging when sensing student confusion, switching to French or occasionally indigenous languages to clarify concepts before returning to English. Still others encourage students to discuss ideas in any language during group work whilst requiring English for formal presentations and writing. These varied practices reflect absence of institutional guidance regarding how to navigate multilingual realities in pursuit of epistemic access for all students.

Recent scholarship calls for more deliberate multilingual policies in Cameroonian secondary education. Walter's (2022) research on translanguaging in secondary English classrooms demonstrates its effectiveness for enhancing comprehension and student engagement. Milesi and Milligan's (2023) ethnographic work documents how students strategically employ multilingual resources to navigate officially monolingual classroom spaces, arguing that pedagogical practices should legitimise rather than suppress these productive translanguaging strategies. However, translation from research recommendations to policy implementation and pedagogical transformation remains limited, leaving substantial gap between scholarly understanding of multilingual pedagogy's benefits and actual teaching practices in schools.

Statement of the Problem

Despite Cameroon's official bilingualism and the significant linguistic diversity at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko Douala, where 823 students receive English-medium instruction within a total population of 2,108, current pedagogical practices may produce epistemic exclusion rather than epistemic access. Monolingual English-only norms constrain multilingual students from demonstrating knowledge accessible through French or indigenous languages, whilst teachers—lacking professional development in multilingual pedagogy—struggle to balance English proficiency development with ensuring meaningful disciplinary engagement. This gatekeeping function reproduces educational inequalities based on region, socioeconomic status, and linguistic background, privileging students with prior English exposure whilst marginalising those whose linguistic resources centre on French or indigenous languages. The resulting epistemic exclusion has significant implications for educational equity and social justice in Cameroon's bilingual education system.

Research Questions

This study addresses three interconnected research questions:

RQ1: How do English teachers at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko conceptualise and enact pedagogy in multilingual classrooms, and what beliefs, practices, and institutional constraints shape their approaches to linguistic diversity?

RQ2: How do students at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko experience and negotiate epistemic access in English-medium instruction, and what multilingual strategies do they employ to comprehend course content and demonstrate knowledge?

RQ3: What pedagogical practices and institutional policies might transform English teaching at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko from gatekeeping mechanism to epistemic mediation that supports multilingual learning whilst developing English proficiency?

Significance of the Study

This research emerges from recognition that secondary school language pedagogy must evolve beyond colonial monolingual assumptions towards approaches honouring linguistic diversity as pedagogical asset. Recent scholarship on translanguaging in multilingual education contexts demonstrates how strategic deployment of learners' full linguistic repertoires enhances comprehension, critical thinking, and academic engagement (Makalela, 2015). Studies from South African schools show that deliberately incorporating students' home languages alongside English as medium of instruction produces more equitable learning outcomes and validates diverse knowledge systems. However, such multilingual pedagogical innovations remain uncommon in Cameroonian secondary education, where policy ambiguity and limited professional development constrain teachers' capacity to implement inclusive language practices.

By examining English language pedagogy at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko through the analytical lens of epistemic access, this study contributes to both theoretical understanding and practical improvement of multilingual education in Cameroon. Theoretically, it extends epistemic access scholarship—which has primarily focused on higher education—to secondary school contexts where foundational academic competencies develop. Practically, it provides evidence-based insights that can inform professional development, curriculum design, and language policy at school and national levels. Given Cameroon's ongoing tensions regarding linguistic rights and the marginalisation of Anglophone regions, research demonstrating how to create more equitable and inclusive language practices in bilingual schools has particular urgency and relevance.

The school's specific demographics—823 Anglophone students within total population of 2,108, taught by 31 Anglophone teachers within staff of 92—create conditions where multilingual pedagogy responds to practical necessity as much as to theoretical ideals. With many students and some teachers possessing stronger French than English competencies, monolingual English-only instruction proves not merely inequitable but pedagogically ineffective. Translanguaging approaches offer

pragmatic solutions to immediate teaching and learning challenges whilst simultaneously advancing broader goals of linguistic justice and inclusive education.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design and Theoretical Framework

This study adopts qualitative interpretive methodology grounded in critical applied linguistics and translanguaging theory. The research seeks to understand how language practices in English-medium secondary school classes enable or constrain epistemic access for multilingual learners. Rather than measuring language proficiency or learning outcomes quantitatively, the study investigates meaning-making processes, student experiences, and pedagogical practices through naturalistic observation and participant perspectives. This interpretive approach acknowledges that epistemic access emerges through complex interactions among institutional policies, teacher beliefs and practices, student linguistic repertoires, and broader sociopolitical contexts shaping language ideologies.

The theoretical framework integrates three perspectives. First, epistemic access theory provides analytical lens for examining how language practices mediate students' capacity to engage meaningfully with disciplinary knowledge. Second, translanguaging theory enables recognition of multilingual practices as legitimate and potentially pedagogically valuable rather than as deviations from monolingual norms. Third, critical applied linguistics directs attention to power relations embedded in language policies and pedagogical practices, revealing how seemingly neutral institutional norms reproduce linguistic hierarchies and educational inequalities.

Research Context and Participants

Research was conducted at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko Douala during the 2024-2025 academic year. The school, established in 1994 as a Collège d'Enseignement Secondaire and transformed into a lycée in 2011, serves 2,108 students across both Francophone and Anglophone sections. The Anglophone section enrols 823 students taught by 31 Anglophone teachers within a total teaching staff of 92. Located in Douala's Sodiko neighbourhood in the Littoral Region, the school attracts students from diverse socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds, creating a linguistically heterogeneous student population representative of urban Cameroonian education contexts. The study focused on the Anglophone section where English plays central instructional role across subjects including English Language, Literature in English, History, Geography, and other content areas taught in English-medium.

Participants comprised 15 English teachers and 48 students from the Anglophone section. Teachers were selected through purposive sampling identifying individuals with minimum three years' teaching experience at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko, ensuring participants possessed substantial familiarity with institutional practices and student populations. The teacher sample included nine women and six men, ranging from recently qualified teachers to senior educators with over fifteen years' experience. Eleven identified as Anglophone Cameroonians, four as Francophone Cameroonians teaching in the Anglophone section. All possessed teaching qualifications through Écoles Normales Supérieures or university education programmes, with several holding advanced degrees in English language teaching, linguistics, literature, or education.

Student participants were recruited through announcements in Form 3, Form 4, Lower Sixth, and Upper Sixth classes, with selection ensuring representation across demographic categories. Of 48 students, 19 identified as Francophone background studying in the Anglophone section, 24 as Anglophone background from Northwest or Southwest regions, and five as having grown up speaking indigenous languages at home with French or English as school languages. Gender distribution included 28 girls and 20 boys, reflecting the school's student population. Academic levels ranged from Form 3 through Upper Sixth. Students represented diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and home regions, though the majority came from Douala and surrounding areas given the school's urban location.

Data Collection Methods

Three complementary data collection methods were employed over one academic term (approximately twelve weeks) to enable triangulation and comprehensive understanding of language practices and epistemic access experiences.

Classroom observations comprised 24 sessions across different subjects taught in English within the Anglophone section. Observations included eight English Language lessons, six Literature in English lessons, five History lessons, and five Geography lessons taught by the 15 participating teachers. Observations focused on language practices, including teacher language choices, student participation patterns, instances of translanguaging or code-switching, teacher responses to multilingual practices, and interactions revealing students' epistemic engagement or exclusion. Field notes documented verbal exchanges, classroom dynamics, and researcher reflexive observations. Particular attention focused on moments where language appeared to enable or constrain meaning-making: instances where students expressed confusion or comprehension, teacher explanations and clarifications, assessment interactions, and informal peer discussions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 15 teachers and 24 purposively selected students representing diverse linguistic backgrounds and academic performance levels. Teacher interviews explored pedagogical beliefs regarding language diversity, practices for addressing multilingual classrooms, assessment approaches, institutional

constraints, and perspectives on translanguaging. Questions included: How do you approach teaching students from diverse linguistic backgrounds in the Anglophone section? What challenges do you observe regarding language and learning in your classes? What role, if any, do students' other languages play in your teaching? How do school policies shape your language practices? What do you think about allowing students to use French or other languages when learning content taught in English?

Student interviews investigated experiences of learning through English, strategies for negotiating linguistic challenges, perceptions of which languages are legitimised or delegitimised in academic spaces, and instances where multilingual resources aided or impeded learning. Questions included: Describe your experience learning through English at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko. What challenges do you face regarding language in your classes? Do you use languages other than English when studying? How do teachers respond when you or peers use French or other languages in class? Can you describe a time when using multiple languages helped you understand course content?

Reflective journals provided additional data source capturing student experiences across the term. The 48 participating students-maintained journals documenting instances where language facilitated or constrained their learning, recording specific examples of multilingual sense-making strategies, challenges expressing ideas in English, and perceptions of epistemic inclusion or exclusion. Journal prompts encouraged reflection on language practices and learning experiences whilst allowing students freedom to record issues they found significant. Journals were written in students' preferred languages, with many opting for French, some for English, and several incorporating multiple languages within entries.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed iterative thematic process combining deductive coding based on theoretical framework and inductive coding allowing emergent themes. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and translated journal entries were analysed using NVivo qualitative software to manage and organise data whilst enabling both systematic coding and interpretive analysis.

Initial coding identified passages relevant to research questions, marking instances of: monolingual or multilingual pedagogical practices, student multilingual strategies, expressions of epistemic access or exclusion, teacher beliefs about language diversity, institutional constraints, and translanguaging episodes. Subsequent focused coding organised data into thematic categories: gatekeeping functions of English-only pedagogy, spontaneous translanguaging practices, student epistemic negotiations, and contextual factors shaping language practices.

Comparative analysis examined patterns across participant categories and contexts. Teacher perspectives were compared with student experiences to identify convergences and divergences. Practices observed in classrooms were triangulated with interview accounts and journal reflections. Attention focused on understanding how structural factors (institutional policies, assessment requirements, linguistic ideologies) interacted with agentive practices (teacher pedagogical choices, student multilingual strategies) to produce patterns of epistemic access or exclusion.

Throughout analysis, reflexive attention was maintained regarding researcher positionality. As Cameroonian scholar positioned within similar education context, I brought insider understanding of institutional dynamics and linguistic complexities whilst also maintaining analytical distance necessary for critical examination. Regular reflexive memoing documented analytical decisions and interpretive reasoning.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Research received approval and authorisation from the authorities of Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko. All participants provided written informed consent after receiving information about research purposes, procedures, and their rights. Participation was voluntary with no connection to grades or teacher evaluations. Pseudonyms protect participant confidentiality in reporting findings. Classroom observations obtained both teacher and student consent, with observers positioned unobtrusively. Interview and journal data were stored securely with access limited to research team members.

FINDINGS

Analysis reveals complex patterns in how English language pedagogy at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko mediates epistemic access for multilingual learners. Three interconnected themes emerged: persistent monolingual norms positioning English as gatekeeping mechanism, spontaneous translanguaging practices demonstrating alternative possibilities, and student strategic negotiations of linguistic constraints. These themes are explored below with supporting evidence from observations, interviews, and journals.

English Pedagogy as Epistemic Gatekeeping

Dominant patterns in observed English instruction reflected monoglossic ideology treating standardised English as exclusive legitimate medium for academic work. Teachers typically conducted entire sessions through English, explicitly or implicitly discouraging code-switching and expecting English-only student contributions. This monolingual norm manifested through several interconnected practices that functioned to gate-keep epistemic access rather than facilitate it.

Assessment criteria consistently prioritised English language accuracy over conceptual understanding or critical analysis. Examination rubrics for English Language and Literature in English allocated substantial weighting to grammar, vocabulary, and formal register, with relatively less emphasis on

argument quality or disciplinary insight. One Form 4 Literature examination rubric observed during data collection specified 35 per cent of marks for "language quality" encompassing grammar, spelling, and appropriate register, 35 per cent for "content knowledge" regarding texts studied, and 30 per cent for "critical analysis." Students expressed frustration that strong conceptual understanding could be overshadowed by linguistic errors. As one Francophone Form 5 student noted in her journal: "I understand the novels deeply. I see how characters reflect our society, how Achebe shows colonialism's damage. But when I write, my English mistakes make the teacher think I do not understand. My ideas are strong but my English is not perfect, so I lose marks."

Classroom discourse patterns reinforced English dominance whilst marginalising other linguistic resources. During observed sessions, teachers rarely acknowledged students' multilingual repertoires or created opportunities for translanguaging. Instructions typically specified "we will discuss in English" or implicitly assumed English-only participation. When students occasionally code-switched during discussions, incorporating French words or phrases, teachers typically responded by restating the point in English without acknowledging the multilingual expression. In one observed Form 4 History lesson on European colonisation of Africa, a student attempted to explain the concept of exploitation using both French and English: "The colonisers wanted les matières premières, you know, the raw materials from Africa like rubber and ivory." The teacher, responded, "Yes, they wanted raw materials for their industries," effectively erasing the translanguaging whilst extracting the content. Such responses, whilst perhaps unintentional, communicated that multilingual expression was academically inappropriate despite its facilitating role in the student's meaning-making.

Several teachers explicitly articulated beliefs positioning English proficiency as prerequisite for disciplinary learning rather than as resource developed through disciplinary engagement. In interviews, they framed students' linguistic diversity as pedagogical challenge requiring remediation. An experienced Literature teacher with twelve years at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko, stated: "The main problem I face is that students lack adequate English. They struggle to express ideas because their English is weak. I spend considerable time correcting language errors rather than focusing on literary analysis. If their English were better, we could explore the texts more deeply, discuss themes and symbolism properly." This perspective positions students' multilingualism as deficit, locating the "problem" in students rather than in pedagogical approaches demanding monolingual performance from multilingual learners.

A Form 3 English Language teacher, similarly expressed frustration with linguistic diversity: "These Francophone students in the Anglophone section, they think in French and try to translate into English. This creates problems because English and French have different structures. I tell them they must think in English, not translate, but many cannot do this. It would be easier if they came with stronger English foundation." Such comments reveal underlying assumption that students' French linguistic resources interfere with English learning rather than potentially supporting it.

Textbook selection and curricular materials further reinforced Anglo-American norms whilst marginalising local contexts and knowledge. Literature courses predominantly assigned British and American texts: Shakespeare, Dickens, and contemporary British writers featured prominently, with African literature limited to Anglophone writers such as Achebe, Asong, Soyinka, and Ngugi writing in English. Works in French by African authors like Sembène Ousmane or Mariama Bâ rarely appeared even when thematically relevant to colonial and postcolonial experiences being studied. History and Geography courses similarly privileged Anglo-American sources and perspectives. This curricular Anglocentrism positioned English not merely as medium but as gateway to legitimate knowledge, implying that insights expressed in French or indigenous languages lacked academic value.

The cumulative effect of these practices produced what students described as epistemic exclusion: situations where their intellectual capacities and cultural knowledge became inaccessible to academic evaluation because expression required linguistic proficiency they had not developed. Students reported self-censoring contributions during discussions, choosing not to share ideas they could articulate in French or indigenous languages but struggled to express in English. One Form 3 student explained in interview: "Sometimes I have good ideas about the poems we study, connections to our lives in Cameroon. But I cannot say them properly in English. The words do not come. So I stay quiet. Other students think I do not know the answer, but I do know. I just cannot speak it in English." Another student noted: "In History, when we discuss colonialism, I want to talk about what my grandmother told me, her experiences. But this is in Duala, and I cannot translate it well into English. So the teacher never hears these stories, never knows what I could contribute."

Assessment anxiety focused more on linguistic performance than conceptual understanding, with several students noting they focused on grammatical correctness rather than analytical depth when writing essays. A Form 5 student explained: "When I write Literature essays, I spend more time worrying about grammar and vocabulary than about analysing the text. I choose simple sentences because I know I can write them correctly, even though more complex sentences would better express my ideas. So my essays sound basic, not because my thinking is basic, but because I am afraid of making English mistakes."

Spontaneous Translanguaging: Glimpses of Alternative Practice

Despite dominant monolingual norms, classroom observations revealed instances where teachers spontaneously employed translanguaging strategies that appeared to enhance student engagement and conceptual understanding. These moments, though relatively infrequent, demonstrated alternative

pedagogical possibilities and students' positive responses when their full linguistic repertoires received recognition.

In an observed Form 5 History lesson on the causes of the First World War, the teacher frequently switched between English and French when explaining the complex alliance system. After introducing the concept in English and observing students' confused expressions, she elaborated in French: "Bon, écoutez. C'est comme si vous avez deux groupes d'amis qui ne s'aiment pas. Si quelqu'un attaque votre ami, vous devez le défendre, même si vous ne voulez pas vous battre. C'est ça, l'alliance. Compris?" (Right, listen. It is like you have two groups of friends who do not like each other. If someone attacks your friend, you must defend them, even if you do not want to fight. That is the alliance. Understood?) Students nodded with evident comprehension, and when discussion resumed in English, their contributions showed stronger engagement with the concept. Several students used the alliance analogy the teacher had provided in French to explain how the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand triggered wider conflict.

When interviewed about this practice, she explained: "I see when students do not understand. Their faces tell me everything. If I continue in English only when they are lost, I lose them completely. So I switch to French to clarify the concept, make it concrete with examples they can visualise. Then we continue in English and suddenly they can participate, they understand. I know we are supposed to use only English in the Anglophone section. The policy says English-medium instruction. But learning is more important than rigid language rules. If students do not understand, what is the point of teaching?"

A particularly striking example occurred in a Form 4 Geography lesson on urbanisation and informal settlements. When discussing factors driving informal settlement development in African cities, one student began explaining in English but incorporated Cameroon Pidgin English: "Poor people dem no get money for buy house for town. Land for Bonapriso or Akwa too cost. So dem go build small-small house for bush side, for Makepe or New Bell, where land dey cheap. Na so informal settlement dey start. Government no like am, but people must live somewhere." Rather than correcting this translanguaging or insisting on standard English, the teacher responded enthusiastically: "Exactly! Economic factors drive informal settlement development. People cannot afford formal housing so they create alternative solutions. Can others give examples from neighbourhoods you know in Douala?"

This validation prompted several other students to contribute using similar translanguaging strategies, mixing English, French, and Pidgin English as they discussed specific Douala neighbourhoods and their development patterns. The discussion became notably more animated and substantively richer than typical English-only sessions, with students drawing on detailed local knowledge about housing, land tenure, infrastructure, and community organisation. One Anglophone student explained: "For New Bell, the problem na say the houses dem build without proper plan. No good road, no drainage. When rain fall, everywhere dey flood." A Francophone student added: "C'est pareil à Makepe. Les maisons sont construites sans autorisation, donc il n'y a pas d'infrastructure officielle. Same problem like he said."

When groups subsequently presented their analyses to the whole class, the teacher required presentations in English, but the earlier multilingual discussion had enabled students to develop sophisticated understandings they could then translate into English presentation. Their contributions demonstrated connections between academic concepts (urbanisation, informal settlement, infrastructure deficit) and concrete local realities in ways that previous monolingual sessions on urban geography had not achieved.

Another observed translanguaging practice involved allowing students to brainstorm and discuss ideas in groups using any languages before presenting conclusions in English. In a Form 5 Literature lesson analysing Linus Asong's "Crown of thorns," the teacher instructed: "In your groups, outline the caracter traits of Ngobefuo and how it helps in the development of the text. Use whatever language helps you understand the themes deeply. French, English, Pidgin, whatever works for your thinking. Then we will share your insights in English so everyone can learn from each group's analysis."

Student journals documented appreciation for these translanguaging moments. One Form 3 student wrote: "When the teacher explained the alliance system in both English and French, I finally understood. I had been confused for several lessons. Using both languages helped me see what the concept means, how countries were connected. I wish all teachers would do this because it makes learning easier." Another student noted: "I felt respected when the teacher did not correct our Pidgin in Geography class. He treated our language as valid for academic discussion. It made me more confident to participate because I could express ideas in the language that comes naturally, not struggling to find perfect English words."

When groups subsequently presented their analyses in English, their contributions demonstrated sophisticated understanding and made connections between the novel's representation of cultural collision and contemporary Cameroonian experiences of cultural change that had been absent in previous monolingual Literature discussions. One group drew parallels between Igbo traditional society's response to colonialism and contemporary tensions between traditional authority and modern governance in Cameroon, analysis that clearly emerged from their multilingual group discussion.

A Form 5 student reflected: "The Literature lesson where we could discuss in any language before presenting in English was excellent. Our group spoke mostly French when analysing Ngobefuo's character because we could think more deeply in French. Then translating our ideas into English for presentation helped us practice English whilst still showing we understood the novel. This is better than trying to think and speak only in English from the beginning."

However, these translanguaging practices remained exceptional rather than systematic. Most teachers maintained strict English-only norms, and even those who spontaneously code-switched often expressed ambivalence during interviews, viewing it as necessary compromise rather than legitimate pedagogical strategy. The teacher, despite effectively employing translanguaging, stated: "I know I should not use French in English-medium classes. The Anglophone section is supposed to be English-only. But sometimes I must choose between students understanding or following language policy strictly. I choose understanding, but I am not certain if this is professionally appropriate. Other teachers might criticise me for using French, saying I am weakening students' English."

Another teacher similarly expressed uncertainty: "When I allow Pidgin in discussions, I worry that I am not maintaining standards. The examiners for GCE will not accept Pidgin in written examinations. So am I helping students by allowing it in class, or am I setting them up for failure? I do not know. But I see that they engage more, understand concepts better when they can use all their languages. So I continue doing it, even though I have doubts."

This ambivalence reflects absence of institutional support and professional discourse positioning translanguaging as pedagogically legitimate rather than as rule-breaking. Teachers who intuitively recognise multilingual practices' benefits nonetheless lack confidence that these approaches align with professional expectations or institutional policies. The result is that translanguaging occurs sporadically, inconsistently, and often covertly rather than being embraced as systematic pedagogical strategy.

Students' Epistemic Negotiations and Multilingual Strategies

Student interviews and journals revealed sophisticated multilingual strategies for negotiating linguistic constraints and facilitating their own epistemic access. Despite institutional and pedagogical pressures toward English-only performance, students strategically deployed their full linguistic repertoires to comprehend course content, develop arguments, and prepare academic outputs. These practices occurred largely invisibly to teachers, in students' private study and peer collaboration, yet proved crucial for learning.

Many students reported routine practice of translating course concepts into French or indigenous languages to enhance understanding before attempting English-medium academic work. One Form 5 student explained in interview: "When I read English textbooks for History or Geography, I translate key ideas into French in my mind. This helps me truly understand, not just recognise English words without grasping meaning. Then when I write essays or answer questions, I think through my argument structure in French first, making sure the logic is sound. Only then do I translate into English for submission." This student described maintaining two parallel notebooks for some subjects: one with notes in French for her own understanding, another with English notes for submission and revision before examinations.

Another student described translating academic concepts into Duala to connect with cultural knowledge: "Words like 'community' or 'kinship' or 'traditional authority' make more sense when I think about them in Duala, relating to how we actually organise our families and communities, how chiefs and elders function. Then I can write about these concepts in English with real understanding, not just repeating textbook definitions. The English words get meaning from my Duala understanding." This practice of grounding abstract English terminology in concrete cultural knowledge expressed through indigenous languages appeared particularly common when students studied African history, geography, or literature dealing with traditional societies and cultural practices.

Peer study groups functioned as multilingual epistemic communities where students collectively made sense of course material through translanguaging. Observations of informal study sessions during break times and after school revealed animated discussions moving fluidly across French, English, Pidgin English, and occasionally indigenous languages as students explained concepts to one another, debated interpretations, and prepared for examinations. One study group preparing for a Literature examination alternated between French and English when analysing poems from their anthology, with Francophone students explaining difficult English vocabulary and syntax in French whilst Anglophone students helped with poetic analysis and interpretation in English. Each language enabled different analytical insights: French facilitated discussion of themes and emotions, English enabled close reading of specific lines and literary devices, whilst Pidgin English provided evaluative commentary on poems' relevance to Cameroonian contexts.

Students reported that these multilingual study groups generated deeper understanding than they achieved through individual English-only study. A Form 4 student explained: "When I study alone in English only, I understand maybe 60 or 70 per cent. But when I study with friends and we can explain things to each other in French, English, and Pidgin, mixing the languages naturally, then I understand maybe 90 per cent. We can say things in different ways until everyone really gets it."

Several students developed systematic multilingual study strategies involving multiple languages at different stages of learning processes. One high-achieving Francophone Form 5 student described her elaborate approach: "First, I read course materials in English, marking parts I do not fully understand with question marks. Then I search for explanations in French, either from French textbooks I borrow from the Francophone section or from French websites and videos online. This helps me grasp concepts properly. Next, I discuss difficult topics with classmates, and we usually mix French and English together in these discussions. Finally, when I write essays or prepare for examinations, I outline my arguments in French to organise my ideas clearly,

making sure the structure is logical. Only then do I write in English. This process takes much longer than just working in English, but it produces much better work. My marks improved significantly when I started doing this."

A Lower Sixth student described using his phone to access learning materials in multiple languages: "For difficult topics in History or Literature, I watch YouTube videos in English first, then I search for videos in French about the same topic. Hearing explanations in both languages helps me understand fully. Sometimes the French videos explain things more clearly, or they give different perspectives. Then I combine information from both languages when I prepare my notes."

However, students also reported frustration that their multilingual competencies received no academic recognition or credit. Because assessment required English-only outputs and never incorporated students' other languages, the sophisticated multilingual work enabling their learning remained invisible and unvalued. One student expressed this tension: "I work in three languages to understand my courses: French for deep thinking, English for examination preparation, Pidgin for discussing with friends. But the school only sees my English. All the thinking I do in French and the collaborative work in Pidgin does not count. It is as if that intellectual work does not exist. This seems unfair and wasteful. My multilingualism should be an asset, but instead it is treated as a problem."

The invisibility of students' multilingual epistemic work also meant they received no institutional support or guidance for developing effective translanguaging strategies. Students invented these approaches individually or learned them from peers, with varying degrees of effectiveness. Some students employed highly productive translanguaging strategies that enhanced learning, whilst others struggled unnecessarily because they lacked explicit instruction in how to leverage multilingual resources academically.

Several students noted they had been told throughout their education that mixing languages indicated confusion or lack of proficiency, leading them to view their own translanguaging as evidence of inadequacy rather than as sophisticated meaning-making strategy. A Form 3 student explained: "Teachers always say we must not mix languages, that mixing shows we do not properly know either language. So when I catch myself thinking in French whilst trying to write in English, I feel like I am failing. But actually, using both languages helps me understand better. I wish teachers would explain that using multiple languages can be good for learning, not always bad."

This internalisation of deficit ideologies about multilingualism appeared particularly pronounced among younger students and those newer to the Anglophone section. More experienced students, especially high achievers, had developed confidence in their multilingual strategies despite institutional messages discouraging translanguaging. However, many students continued struggling with linguistic self-doubt, questioning whether their need to use French or indigenous languages indicated intellectual inadequacy rather than recognising it as strategic deployment of available cognitive resources.

DISCUSSION

Monolingual Norms and Epistemic Exclusion

Findings demonstrate that dominant English pedagogy at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko operates through monoglossic ideology that constrains rather than enables epistemic access for multilingual learners. By positioning standardised English as exclusive legitimate medium for academic work, current practices effectively gate-keep disciplinary knowledge, privileging students who possess particular English proficiency whilst marginalising those who bring different but equally valuable linguistic competencies.

This gatekeeping function operates through what might be termed linguistic fetishism: the treatment of English language form as more significant than conceptual content or analytical sophistication. When assessment rubrics allocate 35 per cent of marks to language quality, they communicate that how students express ideas matters as much as or more than the ideas themselves. This priority inverts what should be epistemic access's central concern: enabling students to engage meaningfully with disciplinary knowledge. Students who could demonstrate sophisticated understanding if permitted to draw on their full linguistic repertoires instead find themselves epistemically excluded, their intellectual capacities rendered invisible by linguistic constraints.

The assessment practices documented here resonate with broader critiques of language testing in multilingual education contexts. Scholars argue that when linguistic accuracy overshadows conceptual understanding in evaluation, education systems reproduce social inequalities by advantaging students from privileged backgrounds who access English outside school whilst disadvantaging those whose linguistic resources comprise different languages (Prah, 2009). In Cameroon's context, this dynamic intersects with regional and socioeconomic stratification. Anglophone students from Northwest and Southwest regions and wealthy urban students who attended English-medium private primary schools possess linguistic advantages unrelated to their intellectual abilities or disciplinary aptitude. Conversely, Francophone students from public primary schools and those from rural or marginalised regions face linguistic barriers that obscure their capabilities.

Teachers' framing of students' linguistic diversity as deficit requiring remediation reflects what García and Wei (2014) term monoglossic ideology: the assumption that legitimate speakers possess complete competence in standardised language varieties and that mixing or alternating languages indicates incomplete acquisition. This ideology misrecognises the reality that multilingual competence typically involves varying proficiencies across languages and domains, with speakers strategically deploying different linguistic resources for different purposes. By

demanding English-only performance, teachers effectively require students to operate through potentially their weakest language whilst prohibiting access to their strongest meaning-making resources.

The curricular Anglocentrism observed in textbook selection and course content compounds linguistic exclusion with epistemic colonialism. By privileging Anglo-American texts, theories, and references whilst marginalising African scholarship, particularly work published in French or indigenous languages, curricula communicate that legitimate knowledge originates in Anglophone contexts (Bowden & Barrett, 2025). This positioning disconnects course content from students' lived experiences and local knowledge systems, making academic learning feel irrelevant or foreign. Students struggle not merely with English language but with curricula that do not recognise their cultural contexts as valid sources of knowledge.

The case of Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko illustrates broader tensions in Cameroon's bilingual education system. With 823 students in the Anglophone section within a school of 2,108, and only 31 Anglophone teachers among 92 total staff, the institution faces structural challenges in providing truly equitable bilingual education. The numerical dominance of Francophone students and teachers creates linguistic ecology where French could potentially serve as bridge language facilitating understanding, yet official policies and professional norms discourage its pedagogical use. This structural reality, combined with monolingual pedagogical ideologies, produces systematic disadvantage for students whose strongest linguistic resources lie outside standard English.

Translanguaging as Epistemic Mediation

The spontaneous translanguaging practices documented in observations, though infrequent, demonstrate alternative pedagogical possibilities that enhance epistemic access. When teachers permitted or encouraged students to draw on their full linguistic repertoires, several positive outcomes emerged: increased student comprehension of complex concepts, greater confidence in participation, more sophisticated analytical contributions, and stronger connections between academic knowledge and local contexts.

These findings align with substantial research evidence demonstrating translanguaging's pedagogical benefits (Makalela, 2015, 2023; Walter, 2022). By validating students' home languages as legitimate academic resources, teachers communicate respect for diverse knowledge systems whilst enabling students to leverage their strongest meaning-making capacities. The Geography lesson where Pidgin English received validation produced notably richer discussion than typical English-only sessions precisely because students could draw on linguistic resources most closely connected to their cultural knowledge and everyday experiences of urban life in Douala.

The practice of allowing multilingual group discussion before English presentation represents particularly promising pedagogical approach. This strategy acknowledges English's role as academic language whilst recognising that deepest conceptual understanding may develop through home languages. Students can think through complex ideas using whichever linguistic resources enable clearest reasoning, then practice translating these understandings into English for broader communication. This approach develops both disciplinary knowledge and English proficiency simultaneously, treating them as complementary rather than competing priorities.

The teacher's use of French to explain the First World War alliance system demonstrates how strategic translanguaging can function as conceptual scaffolding. By first establishing understanding through French explanation with concrete analogies, she created cognitive foundation upon which English-language discussion could build. Students' subsequent English contributions showed they had grasped the concept sufficiently to apply it analytically, suggesting that the French-language scaffolding enhanced rather than impeded English-medium learning.

However, the tentativeness with which even sympathetic teachers approached translanguaging reflects absence of institutional support and professional discourse legitimising these practices. Teachers ambivalence about translanguaging—despite its evident effectiveness—indicates that such practices remain positioned as rule-breaking rather than as pedagogically sound strategies. This positioning discourages systematic implementation and limits translanguaging to occasional spontaneous moments rather than deliberate pedagogical design.

For translanguaging to function as genuine epistemic mediation rather than exceptional accommodation, several conditions require attention at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko and similar institutions. First, teachers need professional development exploring multilingual pedagogy's theoretical foundations and practical strategies. Understanding translanguaging as legitimate pedagogical approach rather than as linguistic deficiency would enable more confident, systematic implementation. The school could organise workshops where the 31 Anglophone teachers collectively examine research on translanguaging, share experiences, and develop shared understanding of when and how to incorporate students' multiple languages productively.

Second, assessment practices must evolve to recognise multilingual competence. This might involve allowing students to incorporate French explanations in examinations with English summaries, accepting multilingual outputs with appropriate framing, or evaluating conceptual understanding separately from linguistic accuracy. Whilst national GCE examinations require English-only responses, internal school assessments possess flexibility to experiment with multilingual approaches that could better capture students' actual understanding whilst still developing the English competencies needed for external examinations.

Third, curricular materials should reflect linguistic diversity, incorporating scholarship from

multiple language traditions and validating local knowledge systems alongside international references. Literature courses could include African works in French translation, History courses could reference French-language African historiography, and Geography courses could draw on locally-produced research regardless of publication language. Such curricular diversification would signal that knowledge exists across languages, not exclusively in English.

Student Agency and Multilingual Capital

Student accounts reveal remarkable agency in developing multilingual learning strategies despite institutional constraints. The sophisticated translanguaging practices students employ—translating concepts across languages, engaging in multilingual peer discussion, outlining in one language before writing in another, accessing learning materials in multiple languages—demonstrate that many students intuitively recognise their multilingual repertoires as cognitive assets enabling enhanced learning.

This finding challenges deficit perspectives positioning multilingual students as linguistically disadvantaged. Rather than lacking English proficiency, these students possess expanded linguistic repertoires enabling multiple pathways to understanding. Their challenge lies not in individual linguistic deficiency but in institutional norms that fail to recognise or leverage their multilingual capital. When students report working through three languages to understand course material yet receiving credit only for English output, they describe not personal inadequacy but systematic failure to validate legitimate intellectual labour.

The invisibility of students' multilingual epistemic work represents missed pedagogical opportunity. If teachers could observe and engage with the multilingual meaning-making processes students employ privately, they might better support learning by incorporating these strategies into formal instruction. For instance, knowing that students routinely translate key concepts into French or indigenous languages suggests that explicit instruction in productive translation strategies might enhance learning. Understanding that students generate insights through multilingual peer discussion indicates potential for legitimising such practices in formal classroom activities.

The multilingual study groups students organise independently demonstrate collaborative learning's potential in multilingual contexts. These groups function as communities of practice where students collectively construct knowledge through strategic deployment of their combined linguistic resources. Francophone students offer French explanations, Anglophone students provide English vocabulary and syntax support, and all members contribute cultural knowledge through indigenous languages or Pidgin English. This collaborative translanguaging produces learning outcomes superior to individual monolingual study, yet occurs entirely outside formal pedagogy because institutional norms do not recognise its value.

However, students' resourcefulness should not excuse institutional inaction. Whilst impressive that students develop effective multilingual learning strategies independently, they should not have to. Placing full responsibility for navigating linguistic complexities on students whilst institutions maintain monolingual norms perpetuates inequitable burden distribution. Students expend substantial cognitive and temporal resources managing linguistic constraints that more inclusive pedagogies might eliminate. This additional labour disadvantages them relative to peers who possess greater English proficiency, effectively penalising them for institutional rigidity rather than for any intellectual inadequacy.

Moreover, without explicit instruction and institutional validation, not all students develop effective multilingual strategies. Some students internalise deficit ideologies, viewing their translanguaging as evidence of inadequate English rather than as sophisticated meaning-making. Others lack awareness of productive multilingual study approaches and struggle unnecessarily as they attempt to operate exclusively through English. The Form 3 student who felt her need to think in French whilst writing English indicated failure exemplifies how deficit discourses about multilingualism can undermine students' confidence and obstruct learning.

Systematic multilingual pedagogy would provide all students with explicit strategies for leveraging their linguistic resources effectively, reducing inequality between those who intuitively develop such approaches and those who do not. Teachers could model effective translanguaging strategies, demonstrate how to move productively between languages for different cognitive tasks, and validate students' multilingual processes whilst still developing English competencies needed for examinations and further education.

Institutional and Policy Implications for Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko

Transforming English pedagogy at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko from gatekeeping mechanism to epistemic mediation requires changes at multiple institutional levels: professional development for the 31 Anglophone teachers, revised assessment practices within the school's internal evaluation system, explicit language policies clarifying expectations, and broader recognition of multilingual pedagogy's value.

Professional development programmes should expose teachers to research demonstrating translanguaging's pedagogical benefits and provide practical strategies for implementation tailored to Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko's specific context. The school administration could allocate time during pedagogical days for Anglophone section teachers to collaboratively explore multilingual pedagogy theories, share successful translanguaging practices they have already employed spontaneously, and develop curricular materials incorporating multilingual approaches. Such professional development need not require external consultants; rather, it could emerge

through facilitated teacher inquiry examining their own practices and students' learning experiences.

These sessions might address practical questions: When should teachers use French or Pidgin English to scaffold understanding? How can group work be structured to maximise productive multilingual discussion whilst ensuring English-language learning objectives are met? What assessment formats can capture students' conceptual understanding whilst still developing English competencies required for GCE examinations? How can teachers validate students' home languages without abandoning responsibility to develop English proficiency?

Assessment reform represents crucial leverage point for pedagogical transformation at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko. Whilst teachers cannot modify external GCE examination requirements, they possess full control over internal continuous assessment constituting significant portion of students' overall grades. Current practices prioritising linguistic accuracy over conceptual understanding in these internal assessments incentivise both teachers and students to focus on English form rather than disciplinary substance.

Alternative approaches might separate language and content evaluation in internal assessments, allowing students to demonstrate disciplinary knowledge through various linguistic means whilst providing targeted support for English development. For instance, History or Geography examinations could allocate marks separately for historical/geographical understanding and for English expression, with majority of marks awarded for content. This would enable students with strong disciplinary knowledge but developing English skills to receive recognition for their understanding whilst still receiving feedback on areas where English improvement is needed.

Literature and English Language courses might experiment with multilingual portfolios where students submit some work in English as required but also include supplementary materials in French or other languages demonstrating their full analytical capabilities. For example, students might write critical essays in English as examination preparation but also maintain reading journals where they respond to texts in any language, capturing initial responses and interpretations that might be lost if English-only response were required from the outset. Teachers could evaluate these multilingual materials to gain fuller picture of students' literary understanding whilst still requiring English-medium final products.

Some internal examinations could allow students to include key concepts or quotations in French with English translations or explanations, signalling institutional recognition that thinking across languages constitutes legitimate academic practice. This mirrors practices in some European universities where students in international programmes may incorporate their first languages strategically whilst producing work primarily in the programme's official language.

Explicit institutional language policies clarifying expectations and legitimising multilingual practices would address current ambiguity wherein teachers' uncertainty about whether translanguaging is permitted constrains pedagogical innovation. Rather than implicit English-only assumptions derived from the designation "Anglophone section," policies could affirm multilingualism as institutional asset whilst providing guidance on appropriate practices across different contexts.

Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko administration could develop written language policy for the Anglophone section through consultative process engaging the 31 Anglophone teachers, student representatives, and parents. Such policy might specify: English remains primary language of instruction and assessment in alignment with Cameroonian education system requirements. Teachers may strategically employ French, Pidgin English, or indigenous languages to scaffold understanding, clarify concepts, and validate students' full linguistic repertoires. Students are encouraged to use all their linguistic resources during learning processes whilst developing English competencies required for examinations and further education. Assessment practices will distinguish between linguistic development and disciplinary understanding, ensuring students receive recognition for conceptual knowledge even whilst English proficiency continues developing.

This policy approach positions multilingual pedagogy not as abandonment of English-medium instruction but as more effective pathway toward both English proficiency and disciplinary learning. It provides teachers with institutional authorisation to employ translanguaging strategies currently used only tentatively or covertly, potentially leading to more systematic and confident implementation.

However, institutional transformation at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko cannot occur in isolation from broader sociopolitical contexts. Cameroon's ongoing Anglophone crisis reflects deep grievances regarding linguistic marginalisation and centralised Francophone dominance. Within this context, language practices in schools carry heavy symbolic weight beyond their immediate pedagogical implications. Anglophone teachers and students may view English-only policies as important assertions of linguistic rights and resistance to Francophone encroachment. Conversely, incorporating French into Anglophone section instruction might be perceived as conceding to Francophone dominance or weakening Anglophone linguistic identity.

Any language policy reforms at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko must navigate these sensitivities carefully. The goal should not be privileging French over English or vice versa, but rather recognising all students' right to epistemic access through their full linguistic repertoires. Translanguaging pedagogy, properly framed, serves this goal by validating each student's linguistic resources—whether Anglophone, Francophone, or indigenous—whilst developing competencies in both English and French as Cameroon's official languages.

Furthermore, Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko's particular demographics shape implementation possibilities. With 823 Anglophone students among

2,108 total students, and only 31 Anglophone teachers among 92 staff, the school operates in predominantly Francophone environment. This reality differs from schools in Northwest or Southwest Anglophone regions where English dominates demographically and linguistically. Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko's multilingual pedagogy must acknowledge that many students and even some teachers in the Anglophone section possess stronger French than English competencies. Rather than viewing this as problem, pedagogy could leverage it as resource, using students' French knowledge as foundation for developing English whilst validating French as legitimate tool for thinking and learning.

CONCLUSION

This study reveals persistent tensions between linguistic diversity and monolingual pedagogical norms at Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko Douala, documenting how current English language teaching practices constrain rather than enable epistemic access for multilingual learners. Despite students' sophisticated multilingual competencies and demonstrable benefits of translanguaging for conceptual understanding, dominant practices treat standardised English as gatekeeping mechanism determining academic success largely independent of disciplinary knowledge or analytical capacity.

The findings regarding three research questions illuminate these dynamics comprehensively. Regarding how teachers conceptualise and enact pedagogy (RQ1), the study documents that most teachers operate within monoglossic ideological framework positioning English proficiency as prerequisite for learning rather than as outcome of learning. Teachers frame linguistic diversity as deficit and implement assessment practices prioritising English accuracy over conceptual understanding, thereby producing epistemic exclusion. However, some teachers spontaneously employ translanguaging when pedagogical effectiveness demands it, suggesting intuitive recognition of multilingual practices' value even without institutional support or professional legitimation.

Regarding how students experience and negotiate epistemic access (RQ2), findings reveal that students experience significant epistemic exclusion through English-only norms yet demonstrate remarkable agency in developing sophisticated multilingual learning strategies. Students strategically translate concepts across languages, organise multilingual study groups, and employ multiple languages at different stages of learning processes. However, this multilingual intellectual labour remains invisible and unvalued by institutional assessment systems that recognise only English-medium outputs, creating situation where students' actual learning processes bear little resemblance to what formal pedagogy acknowledges or supports.

Regarding pedagogical practices and policies that might transform English teaching into epistemic mediation (RQ3), the study identifies promising translanguaging approaches already occurring spontaneously that could be systematised through professional development, assessment reform, and explicit language policies. These include using French or Pidgin English to scaffold understanding before English-medium discussion, allowing multilingual group work before English presentations, incorporating diverse language materials in curricula, and developing assessment formats that distinguish disciplinary understanding from English proficiency whilst supporting development of both.

However, findings also illuminate pathways towards more equitable, inclusive pedagogy. Observed instances of spontaneous translanguaging demonstrate alternative possibilities wherein students' full linguistic repertoires receive recognition as legitimate academic resources. Student accounts reveal remarkable agency in developing multilingual learning strategies that could, with institutional support, enhance teaching and learning more systematically. These glimpses of translanguaging practice, though currently exceptional, suggest that transformation towards multilingual epistemic mediation remains achievable rather than merely aspirational.

Realising this transformation requires reconceptualising English pedagogy's fundamental purpose at institutions like Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko. Rather than viewing English instruction primarily as language teaching aimed at proficiency development, the field might reframe English courses as spaces for epistemic mediation wherein English functions as one resource among many enabling students to engage meaningfully with disciplinary knowledge. This reframing positions linguistic development not as prerequisite for learning but as dimension of learning occurring through disciplinary engagement. Students develop English competence precisely by using it purposefully for knowledge work, supplemented by strategic deployment of their other linguistic resources when these enable clearer thinking or richer analysis.

Such reconceptualisation aligns with broader movements towards linguistic justice in African education. Scholars increasingly argue that decolonising schools requires not merely diversifying curriculum content but transforming linguistic practices that perpetuate colonial hierarchies (Prah, 2009). By validating indigenous languages and multilingual competencies as legitimate academic resources, institutions can challenge monolingual colonial legacies whilst better serving students' intellectual development. Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko, positioned in linguistically diverse Douala with both official languages represented in its student and staff populations, possesses particular opportunity and responsibility to model such transformation within Cameroon's secondary education system.

Ultimately, this study demonstrates that achieving epistemic access for all students in multilingual secondary schools requires moving beyond monolingual assumptions inherited from colonial education systems. By reconceptualising English pedagogy as epistemic mediation within multilingual learning ecosystems, Lycée Bilingue de Sodiko can better serve students' intellectual

development whilst honouring Cameroon's linguistic diversity as educational asset rather than obstacle. Such transformation demands institutional commitment, professional development, policy reform, and sustained dialogue among teachers, students, administrators, and broader school community. Yet the alternative—continuing practices that systematically disadvantage multilingual learners—proves neither educationally sound nor socially just. The path towards inclusive multilingual secondary education, whilst challenging, offers promise of more equitable institutions that genuinely enable epistemic access for all.

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