

Negotiating the “Monolingual Mindset”: Intercultural Dynamics and Translingual Practices in a Kenyan University French Classroom

By

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Abstract

Despite the inherent multilingualism of the Kenyan educational landscape, French language instruction often adheres to rigid monolingual immersion policies that may inhibit rather than facilitate intercultural competence. This empirical study investigates how undergraduate students and instructors navigate these linguistic tensions within the Bachelor of Arts in French program at Moi University. Based on a mixed-methods design involving 100 undergraduate students across four years of study, the research triangulates data from classroom observations, curriculum document analysis, and semi-structured interviews. The findings reveal a significant disconnect between institutional policy and classroom reality. While official curriculum documents mandate a “French-only” pedagogical approach, classroom observations indicate that 65% of successful peer-to-peer scaffolding involves strategic code-switching between French, English, and Kiswahili. Specifically, in foundational courses like FRE 111 and FRE 122, students struggle to map French grammatical concepts onto their existing linguistic repertoires due to prohibited cross-linguistic comparison. However, in advanced translation units like FRE 321, where translanguaging is legitimized, students demonstrate superior semantic negotiation and intercultural insight. The study concludes that current immersion models inadvertently marginalize students’ linguistic identities and proposes a “Structured Translanguaging Framework” for Kenyan universities. This framework argues that leveraging students’ L1 and L2 (Kiswahili/English) is not a deficiency but a necessary resource for mastering French intercultural semantics.

Keywords: French as a Foreign Language (FLE), Translanguaging, Intercultural Competence, Higher Education in Kenya, Code-Switching, Monolingual Ideologies.