COLLOQUIUM AREA "MODERN STUDIES IN FICTION LITERATURE TRANSLATION"

EMPOWERING ENGLISH LEARNERS THROUGH TRANSLATING DIVERSE YOUNG ADULT FICTION VOICES



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Abstract

The study aims to promote English language learning through the translation of diverse young adult (YA) fiction texts, thereby encouraging linguistic and cultural competence. Using a qualitative methodology, 30 intermediate English learners translated extracts from multicultural YA novels (e.g. The Hate U Give). Data were collected through translation tasks and reflective surveys and analyzed using a thematic coding methodology. The results show that vocabulary, cultural awareness and engagement were improved. Integrating short translation activities into YA literature helps to create an inclusive and interactive learning environment, in line with the principles of communicative language teaching. Interventions with digital translation tools can enhance accessibility and merit further investigation.

Keywords: *young adult fiction, translation, English language teaching, cultural competence, vocabulary development, inclusive pedagogy, curriculum integration, student engagement, multicultural narratives, language acquisition*

Introduction

Young adult literature (YAL) is an important step for English learners to scaffold reading confidence, vocabulary development, and open avenues to unique and cultural narratives. YAL provides English learners the opportunity to read about their identities on the page while acknowledging experiences that differ from their native experiences, thereby supporting language and enriching cultural use (Ellsworth, 2011). A thrilling method of teaching is to present such literature in the home language of the students.

The initial presentation of texts in students' native languages before transition to English, or the reading of novels in translation, offers a bridge between cultures and languages to allow understanding and confirmation of identity (Ellsworth, 2011; Ford, 2005).

One of the numerous young adult books applied in this research is *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, a highly acclaimed 2017 book that explores police brutality and systemic racism and identity through the eyes of Starr Carter, a sixteen-year-old black female who witnesses her friend being brutally shot by a police officer (Thomas, 2017). The compelling story and cultural importance of this book make it a better text for not only getting English learners thinking critically but also supporting them in their learning of the language. A book based on real-life social realities, this novel relates to the learners' lives, and sparks debate around concepts of justice, identity and activism (Thomas, 2017; SparkNotes, 2025).

Despite the richness of culturally sophisticated YA texts like *The Hate U Give*, far too many classrooms still rely on Eurocentric, top-down, and student-activating-poor pedagogical models that neglect the multilingual lives of learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Practical affordance to include multiliteracy texts and translation in the teaching of English language is still limited, and pedagogical scholarship on the pedagogical worth of translated YA fiction remains emergent (Baker, 2018; Saldaña, 2021). This gap alludes to the need for innovative, culturally sensitive pedagogies that are encompassing *of translanguaging* and multilingual identities (Wei & García, 2022).

The study investigates the effects of translating multicultural young adult literature, e.g., excerpts from *The Hate U Give*, on vocabulary learning, understanding of culture, and motivation among intermediate English learners. Grounded in communicative language teaching and sociocultural theory, the study explores the ways in which translation activities enable learners to negotiate meaning across languages and identities to enhance empathy, grammatical consciousness, and innovative thinking (Baus & Bohórquez, 2017; Abdulgadir, 2024). The study also explores the utilization of online translation tools to enhance accessibility and learner participation (Miller, 2017).

The research questions and hypotheses that guide the current study are as follows:

Q1. How does the translation of YA literature (such as *The Hate U Give*) influence vocabulary development of intermediate learners?

Q2. Which cultural themes do learners identify through the translation process?

Q3. How does translation influence learners' engagement with English texts?

Hypotheses:

H1. YA literature translation significantly contributes to learners' vocabulary through enhanced receptive and productive knowledge of words through contextual use on a large scale.

H2. Translation exercises raise the cultural awareness of students since they are exposed to different cultural themes and become sensitized to other identities.

H3. Collaborating with English texts is enriched through translation practice, since students actively negotiate meaning and identity across languages.

The research contributes to inclusive language teaching by the legitimation of students' cultural identity and promotion of multiple narratives. It testifies to the argument that multilingualism and multiliteracies are the basis of modern-day education and *translanguaging* practices—when students draw upon all their linguistic capacities—facilitate learner engagement and academic success (Tsokalidou & Skourtou, 2020; Wei & García, 2022). By extending culturally responsive pedagogy, translation dismantles hierarchies of languages and resituates students as capable multilinguals.

The research focuses on intermediate learners of English in formal academic settings, investigating translation work from a representative corpus of YA literature such as *The Hate U Give*. Qualitative in focus, the study opens up rich insights into learner interest and the verification of multiple voices with limitations acknowledged for sample size and generalizability.

This paper consists of a literature review and theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion, recommendations, and conclusion. The study aims to highlight the emancipatory quality of translating young adult novels and texts, such as *The Hate U Give*, in developing linguistics, cultural understanding, and varied engagement in English language studies.

2. Critical Review of the Literature and Theoretical Framework

This section provides a critical review of the literature in three related areas, young adult literature (YAL), translation in English language teaching, and cultural competence, and shows their relevance and possible value for English learners in Benin and West Africa. It illustrates how the translation of multicultural YAL into the readers' first language helps develop their vocabulary, content, and cultural awareness, while also enhancing learner engagement.

2.1.1. Young Adult Literature and Its Value and Educational Importance

Research and practice have suggested the role of YAL in supporting independent reading and critical engagement with literature and characters and themes that relate to adolescent readers lives (Miller, 2017). Students are found to engage more deeply with YAL than with canonical texts found in literary anthologies. Engaging with YAL often encourages students to pur-

sue independent reading beyond the classroom fostering their intellectual curiosity, development of critical reading skills, and advancement of writing. Readers experience impact when the text and stories reflect cultural and social realities impacting learners, providing mirrors and windows (Ellsworth, 2011).

Educational contexts in Benin and West Africa are constrained by limited access to culturally relevant resources, as well as multi-lingual learners with limited access to standard classroom learning. But young adult literature can hopefully positively affect this relationship. The lack of reading resources that connect the learner's identity and context has been shown to lead to learner disengagement and dissociation, resulting in low levels of literacy (Ladson-Billings, 1995; Littleford & Rodrigue, 2009; Byrd, 2016; Johnson & Elliott, 2020; Viano & Darling-Aduana, 2025).

In recent years, researchers have discussed the implications of introducing young adult (YA) fiction containing identity, migration, social justice, and other themes in novels such as *The Hate U Give* so readers can inevitably access them as a form of 'truthful telling' or storying to promote deep critical reflection (Thomas, 2011; Hanssen, 2018). This kind of cultural relevance is essential in helping motivate, and it can change educational spaces into purposeful, inclusive zones.

2.1.2. Translation as a pedagogical activity in language learning

Translation is now an accepted pedagogical form or strategy in English language teaching and conceptualises the activity and experience within English for multilingual learners contexts (Cook, 2010; Vogel et alii, 2018). The use of translation will activate learners' metalinguistic awareness or make them deeply reflect on the use of their native language or first language (L1) and the tasks identified when learning English language, (which is also a valuable skill in its own right). Translation enables learners to severally negotiate meaning, culture, vocabulary, and context, which in turn helps form learner agency and bilingual competence (Laviosa, 2014; Ayachia, 2018).

In West African educational settings, where learners are accustomed to referencing multiple indigenous languages along with English/French, translation works as a powerful tool for overcoming the linguistic distance in their learning. The popularity of digital translation aids is a complementary support, allowing learners to scaffold their writing and reading comprehension more effectively (Miller, 2017). Projects like the Big Book project in Benin, for example, show the future of creating culturally relevant reading material with translation activities that promote literacy skills and language skills (Littleford & Rodrigue, 2009; African Storybook, 2025; Room to Read, 2025; Kioko et alii, 2014; Ngubane, 2024).

2.1.3. Cultural competence and identity development

Cultural competence forms a core part of communicating competence. It is essential in order to engage in a meaningful way with a language (Bryam, 1997). Language learners need to grapple with the cultural values and perspectives that come embedded in language. Literature and translation are powerful ways to expand this perspective (Chumbo, & Silva, 2019). In Benin, for example, where heritage and spiritual culture are being revitalized through the continued practice of Vodun—the indigenous spiritual tradition that serves as both an official state religion and a living cultural force shaping daily life for about 60% of the population—alongside the preservation of remarkable linguistic diversity with over 68 languages spoken nationwide, it is particularly salient to focus on culturally sustaining practices in language teaching and learning (Andrea, 2019; Translators without Borders, 2022).

The combination of young adult literature and translation can give learners perspectives that allow them to be empathetic and to become aware of aspects of their own identities in connection to local cultures in a linked local-global context that is useful in a multilingual and multicultural context such as West Africa, where translanguaging serves as a culturally sustaining pedagogical approach that empowers young readers and challenges social stigma while supporting identity formation (Boeckman, 2022; Kiser, 2017; Withers, 2019; Herb & Betts, 2024; Tsokalidou & Skourtou, 2020).

2.1.4. The Role of Young Adult Fiction as a Motivational Tool for Learners

The combination of contemporary language, relatable situations, and emotional engagement make young adult fiction a strong vehicle for motivating learners and promoting literacy (Webber et alii, 2025; Torppa et alii, 2019; Vitullo, 2022). Furthermore, YAF, given its status as a contemporary text and genre, is frequently able to be articulated in the first person in response to circumstances that adolescents are grappling with-identity, family, social pressures (Meltzer & Hamann, 2004, 2005).

In educational realities of Benin and the West African region, which are often rife with the burden of traditional educational practices such as rote learning respectively, the colonial history of education can be a source of curricular difficulties, thus YA literature represents an alternate form of inquiry with culturally meaningful contexts (Azeez, 2012; Galgalo, 2023; IMF Staff Country Reports, 2024).

YA literature, and specifically YA literature that incorporates local stories and plural collective voices, can empower learners to take hold of and use their identity in ways they can be proud of. Furthermore, the incorporation of local stories can ultimately expand the linguistic repertoires of learners so that they create spaces for who they are instead of for who the dominant language ideologies or culture is socially emphasizing (Kendrick, M., & Early, 2024; Forbes et alii, 2021; Cummins, 2013; Wei, & García, 2022).

This critical review is the basis for the theoretical framework that follows. The framework showcases the potential for *translanguaging* to facilitate translingual and transcultural spaces through the act of translating multicultural young adult literature, without direct reference to normative models of language development or cultural awareness; the framework is looking to allow learners to engage in their language and culture in Benin and other multilingual contexts as part of their learning experience.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This research primarily draws upon sociocultural theory, *translanguaging* pedagogy, and intercultural communicative competence, which collectively afford a holistic framework to consider the impact of translating multicultural young adult (YA) fiction on developing learner language, cultural awareness, and learner investment as English learners in Benin and West Africa.

2.2.1. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory, articulated by Lev Vygotsky, maintains that the activity of learning and meaning-making is socially mediated, situated within cultural and social contexts. Human development, including learning, originates from and develops through interactions with others who have expanded abilities, knowledge, and experiences within the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The latter refers to the distance between what a learner can do independently and what they can do with the assistance of another more knowledgeable other. Furthermore, ZPD encompasses learners' efforts to engage in activities with others, focusing on the following: (a) negotiation of meaning with another (b) collaboration (c) recourse to second language learning tools and processes and (d) mediated language learning activity. As a result, the process of learning cannot be separated from cultural and social engagement and the use of cultural tools, including language and literature (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006; Ellis, 1994).

The activity of learning through engaging in practices like translation, relates to the notion of the ZPD by framing the relationship between an expert and a novice. The novice can be guided through the performance of a task so that they can do a task that they cannot yet do independently, but with the steps taken with guidance the novice gradually performs the task independently (Wertsch, 1985; Lantolf & Thorne, 2006). This, in terms of language learning means, that learners develop proficiency through collaborative dialogue, combined engagement mediated by texts, sustained in a context of specificity - clearly defined sustainable collaborative dialogue, and negotiation of meaning through participation in contextualized language and without the textbook expectancy of a performance that is predetermined before the negotiation occurs, only satisfying to a degree so that negotiation happens (Donato, 2000; Swain, 2000). Translation activities through YA litera-

ture provide a specific opportunity for mediated activity in translation to co-construct meanings through participation and so build linguistic and cultural competence, and thereby new knowledge, by socializing historically shaken understandings of 'text' through the multiplicity of English language fiction (Kramsch, 2009).

2.2.2. Translanguaging Pedagogy

Translanguaging pedagogy draws upon sociocultural theories by honoring and valuing learners' entire linguistic repertoires, and advocating for the fluid and dynamic transference between multiple languages, as an additional avenue for facilitating comprehension and expression, which further develops metalinguistic awareness and cognitive engagement and analysis of text (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2011). It also breaks the norms of monolingual learners and allows multilingual students to draw on all their language embodiments as they access texts and interact with their peers.

More particularly, in the case of multilingual classrooms in West Africa, translanguaging pedagogy validates students' home languages alongside English, and promotes inclusion for all students, as well as confirmation of identity in their education (García & Lin, 2017). For example, the translation of young adult fiction is an illustration of translanguaging pedagogy whereby students negotiate meaning across different languages, bridging cultural and linguistic divide, and developing agency while employing their language (Lewis et al., 2012; Creese & Blackledge, 2010).

2.2.3. Intercultural Communicative Competence

Byram (1997) defines intercultural communicative competence as the knowledge, earned skills, learned attitudes, and critical cultural awareness which contribute to effective and respectful interaction with people from a diverse range of cultures. It emphasises an understanding of people's perspectives, how to interpret and relate the meanings of the cultures we learn, and how to continuously reflect critically on our own and others' cultural assumptions. Byram's model identifies five savoirs: knowledge (savoir), interpreting and relating skills (savoir comprendre), discovery and interaction skills (savoir apprendre/faire), critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager), and attitudes (savoir être) (Byram, 1997).

YA reading and translation practice exposes learners to diverse cultural narratives, developing intercultural awareness and sensitivity (Alsup, 2010; Bland, 2013). This is particularly relevant in multilingual African societies where learners cross different cultural identities and linguistic inventory (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007). Reading multicultural YA narratives in translation helps learners acquire critical cultural insight and communicative abilities necessary for dealing with multifaceted multilingual and multicultural environments (Kramsch, 2009).

2.2.4. Integrative Application

The study synthesises these three frameworks to posit translation of multicultural YA fiction as a socially mediated *translanguaging* activity that develops intercultural competence. This position allows learners to develop vocabulary, new conceptual and cultural awareness that promotes engagement by:

1. Establishing scaffolded social interactions and meaning-making scaffolding inside the ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86; Lantolf, 2000) within specific translation activities that provide opportunities for collaborative learning and peer support.
2. Allowing multiple languages to be used dynamically allowing comprehension and expression (García & Wei, 2014; Canagarajah, 2011) where learners draw from an entire linguistic repertoire to negotiate meaning across cultural and linguistic boundaries.
3. Encouraging learners to interpret, relate, and critically reflect on cultural perspectives (Byram, 1997, 2021; Alsup, 2010) in response to engagement with a number of narratives that challenge assumptions and broaden perspectives.

This theoretical foundation underpins the investigation of the possibilities of translation work with YA fiction to offer English learners in Benin and West Africa inclusive, translingual, and transcultural learning environments that honor both their local linguistic heritage and their aspiration for global communication. Building on this general theoretical foundation, the following methodology section outlines the research design and methods through which these theoretical presuppositions were tested empirically in practice.

3. Methodology

This section describes the research design, participants profile, materials, procedures, data collection and the methods of analysis used in this study. The methodology has been intentionally chosen to meet the qualitative aims of the study and is guaranteed to provide a richly descriptive, contextualized understanding of how the act of translating multicultural young adult fiction leads to the development of vocabulary, cultural awareness and learner engagement by advanced learners of English.

3.1. Research Design

This study used a qualitative narrative inquiry design to examine the ways in which translating multicultural young adult (YA) fiction impacts vocabulary development, cultural awareness, and learner engagement among Master's degree students in the Applied Linguistics (Translation and English Language Teaching - Didactics) programme at the University of Abomey-Calavi. Narrative inquiry creates opportunities for students to document the complex, lived experiences and reflective processes of their interaction with culturally diverse texts (Ellsworth, 2011). Narrative inquiry fore-

grounds the participants' stories, creating ways to understand how translation practices mediate language learning and cultural identity. Therefore, narrative inquiry can explain how students as learners develop effective ways to declare for themselves their own cultural identities based on how they interact textually with diverse stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

3.2. Participants

The study involved a group of 30 Master's students (aged 23-30), who were registered as Language, Literature, and Culture students enrolled in the LMD system at the University of Abomey-Calavi, majoring in Applied Linguistics with emphasis on Translation and on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (Didactics). All the participants in this study had pre-intermediate to post-intermediate proficiency in English and a multilingual profile, in which Fon, Yoruba, and French were the most common languages spoken along with other vernacular languages. Moreover, and importantly, the participants benefited from academic training that had theoretical and practical experience in both translation and teaching of language education that empowered them to approach YA literature translation tasks critically (Baker, 2018; Kelly, 2005; Quinci, 2023).

3.3. Materials

The materials included selected passages from multicultural YA novels, including *The Hate U Give* (Angie Thomas), as well as excerpts from novels that offered thematic connections to identity, social justice, and cultural diversity, and served as authentic material source for translation practice (Thomas, 2017; Withers, 2019). Students used bilingual dictionaries and glossaries provided by the teacher, along with online resources including Google Translate, when needed. Participants also had reflection journals, as well as worksheets that tracked vocabulary use, which supported metacognitive processes and the documentation of learners' changing linguistic and cultural awareness (Saldaña, 2021).

3.4. Procedure

The study took place over six weeks during which learners first received an orientation to the aims of the study, the concept of narrative inquiry, and the chosen YA texts. Each session involved reading and discussing the excerpts in English, focusing on cultural and linguistic elements, then translating excerpts into their preferred language while considering cultural and language choices. Throughout the study, the learners kept reflection journals to capture their experience translating, along with difficulties and cultural meanings found in the text. In order to continue collaborative learning and foster critical engagement with the texts, peer group discussions with in-progress feedback, were included and introduced to learners. At the end of the sessions participants completed post-task questionnaires and vocabulary

tests in order to assess their improvements and impressions (Ellsworth, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

3.5. Data Collection

The data were collected through multiple sources to enable an in-depth insight into the process of learning. These included participant-made translations, reflection journal entries, post-task survey answers, and observation comments on group discussions and translation classes. Such a data source triangulation ensured the validity and depth of insight of the research (Saldaña, 2021).

3.6. Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analyzed with thematic coding based on the basic principles of Saldaña's (2021) framework; that is, identifying and interpreting theme development with regard to lexical engagement, cultural awareness, and student engagement with the translation activities as they emerged. To enhance consistency and dependability, the coding was completed collaboratively and with qualitative analysis software. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the vocabulary assessments quantitatively to create a measure of the frequency of lexical gain. In combining the qualitative and quantitative results, the analysis helped to illuminate the effects of translation activities on the students (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

3.7. Ethical Considerations

Ethics approval was obtained from the research ethics committee of the University of Abomey-Calavi. Written informed consent was obtained from individuals who participated in the study, and confidentiality and anonymity were also emphasized. The information was safely stored and participants also had the right to withdraw from the study at any time and without any negative consequence.

3.8. Shortcomings

The qualitative nature of the study and focus on Master's students in a single institution limit generalizability. The relatively small, context-specific sample may not reflect the experiences of learners in other contexts. However, the study offers rich information on the pedagogical potential of translation in higher language learning contexts (Baker, 2018).

4. Findings

The current study focused on how translating multicultural young adult (YA) literature can facilitate multilingual Master's students' vocabulary development, cultural awareness, and levels of engagement in learners. Findings result from a multi-method qualitative matic analysis of reflective journals for narratives, surveys after each task, and observations of participatory

engagement in the classroom setting. Analyses reflect concrete examples of elements emerging from the key text, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas (2017), and demonstrate language development, cultural understanding and appreciation, and emotional engagement in the translation process.

4.1. Vocabulary Development

This section illustrates how the students' vocabulary was expanded and deepened, resulting from long-term engagement with literary texts and reflective translation practice. The expanded vocabulary demonstrates both quantifiable (statistically measurable) improvement, and qualitative improvements in broadened and deepened vocabulary awareness, use, and interpretation.

4.1.1. Quantitative Evidence of Lexical Growth

The results from pre- and post-intervention vocabulary assessments administered to 30 participants demonstrate a notable improvement in lexical knowledge. The vocabulary tests drew on words and expressions that students encountered while reading and translating culturally dense selections from *The Hate U Give* and other YA texts.

Test Type	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	t (29)	p-value
Pre-Test	27.2	5.8		
Post-Test	36.8	4.9	11.62	< .001*

Table 1. *Vocabulary Assessment Results (n = 30)*

*Statistically significant improvement, paired t-test $p < .001$
Cohen's $d = 1.53$, indicating a strong effect size
Source: Unpublished data, processed 15 June 2025 via SPSS, from Research Team fieldwork, (2020–2024).

These figures point to a strong correlation between active translation involvement and lexical development. They suggest that students are not only recognizing more words but also learning to use them more accurately and meaningfully in context-rich conversations.

4.1.2. Qualitative Analysis of Lexical Engagement

The reflective journals and peer discussions enhanced the quantitative data by showing the richness of student engagement with new language. Words often had emotional and cultural implications, allowing students to express their views and become more socially aware. Students who used common vocabulary redefined these terms in ways that were meaningful to them in a personally relevant sense. For example, students reported a growing awareness of meaning-in-use for terms such as *minorities*, *discrimination* and *identity*. In a reflective journal, a student wrote: "I learned the word "minorities" means groups that are not the majority, so our class talk made me understand discrimination better" (Journal #12).

Other terms were redefined and reinterpreted via personal and cultural frames, as exemplified in this journal entry: "In my family, my mom is the 'daddy' because she works two shifts. This changed how I think about the word" (Journal #7).

Even a common adjective, quiet, underwent careful expansion of meaning: "Quiet is not only not talking a lot, but observing" (Journal #10).

The examples above illustrate lexical internalization emerging from meaningful context and personal relevance which is a vital target for advanced language students. In short, the evidence foreshadows the finding that vocabulary engagement progressed into semantic reinterpretation and identity-linked associations, all essential work in advanced language learning.

4.1.3. Translation Techniques and Lexical Strategy

The students engaged actively and strategized their translations in ways similar to the professional intercultural mediating practices. The analysis of translated excerpts provided evidence of sensitive retrieval of idioms, emotionally charged vocabulary, and language with cultural implications:

- Established Equivalence and Cultural Substitution: The expletive "shit" (Thomas, 2017, p. 112) was translated as *merde* in French and '*Tchii*' in Fon. Although not formally equivalent, the latter word continued to capture the same amount of intensity in the students' messages, indicating pragmatic awareness and conscious choices about register (Vinay & Darbelnet, 1995; Baker, 2018; Newmark, 1988). Some students stayed close to the literal intensity, while others reduced the level of profanity according to the group's collective values. An example of a discussion comment was: "We could not just say 'merde' because it would sound too harsh. I translated it as 'zut' in French, which maintains the feeling, but it was less distressing" (Peer Translation Workshop Notes).
- Negotiating Culturally Specific Terminology: when discussing the term *light-skinned* (p. 102), students grappled with the question of whether a literal or functional translation was more appropriate in light of the racial privilege implied by the term in their contexts of socio-cultural relations. The outcome of the discussion was often negotiated translations that balanced a degree of sensitivity with socio-political accuracy, prompting complicated discussions about the hierarchy of races and linguistic taboos existing in the Francophone West African context. In an effort to preserve social nuance while also excluding colorist bias, some students decided to include cultural explanations as footnotes, giving their readers more credibly grounded comprehension of meanings that they were able to articulate while avoiding the simplification of the cultural context.
- Modulation of Figurative Language: idioms such as "call someone out" (p. 84), were translated contextually into culturally salient equivalents like *dénoncer quelqu'un* or expressions in the local languages that

conservatively maintained their criticism-charged or accusatory spirit independent of a literal transposition - drawing on modulation and pragmatic equivalence strategies (Molina & Albir, 2002).

It is these translation choices that demonstrate that learners were not just transferring terminology but were critically recompounding interpretations in relevantly situational ways.

4.1.4. Interpretive Insights: Vocabulary and Identity

Learners' vocabulary development was inseparable from their developing sense of identity and agency. Words took on personal meanings, were redefined, and were lived in the acts of translation, and terms from the family sphere such as *daddy*, or *minorities* had new meaning across cultural contexts that generated productive reflective reframing that related to caring and responsibility (Thomas, pp. 46, 61, 121). Likewise, abstract words such as *oppression* and *justice* became operational possibilities within the dialogic space of the classroom, demonstrating the acquisition of thinking as well as vocabulary importance. The iterative processes of translation and vocabulary learning ground learners not just as language learners, but also as social and personal learners, to locate themselves more confidently within global discourses regarding race, gender, and justice.

4.2. Cultural Awareness

This section looks at how translation stimulated learners' potential to be critically engaged with cultural themes in the texts while also reflecting on their own sociocultural experiences and biases.

4.2.1. Identifying and Reflecting on Cultural Themes

In the process of translating the themes in YA literature, learners identified and situated key themes, such as *racism*, *cultural identity*, *gender role expectations*, and *social inequities*. These themes were not only translated and explained, but learners made comparisons to their own lived experiences.

Starr's experience of racism in scenes of police profiling in *The Hate U Give* sparked personal reflections from the learners: "Starr's experience with racial profiling is similar to experiences that happen to us here, and how having the expectation of being judged based on where we are from" (Focus Group, Participant #21).

The emotional experience was similarly present for learners who reflected on family and gender. Language switching was often noted in English and other languages to express their perspectives about gender roles and intergenerational tensions, similar to the following field note: "We were switching between our languages when we were talking about our parents' expectations. It made the talk feel more real" (Observation Notes). These bilingual moments normalized critical comparisons between the characters and learners' own real-world sociocultural norms.

4.2.2. From Empathy to Critical Consciousness

Beyond first-stage emotional identification, learners sought critical social dialogue utilizing their new forms of rhetoric and began to reflect on justice issues (inclusive rhetoric) as a collaborative endeavor rather than an individual view.

One journal reflected a shift towards collaborative justice-oriented thinking: "How can we fix things when people blame others? I said, "What do you think?" so that I could hear more ideas" (Journal #22). In this extract, we can see how learners used inclusive rhetoric and facilitated a democratic and mutual peer-led discussion on injustice within cultural contexts. This was indicative of rising intercultural communicative competence (Vitullo, 2022).

4.3. Learner Engagement

A third main finding indicates that translation practices—and specifically the translation practices based on YA literature—enhanced learner motivation, engagement, and participation in the studies.

4.3.1. Quantitative Evidence from Surveys

Post-intervention survey responses noted statistically significant increases in earnest indicators of engagement. Using a five-point Likert scale, students remarked that they were more interested in reading, intrinsically motivated, and ultimately more connected with the material.

Engagement Category	Pre-Mean	Post-Mean		-value
Motivation to read texts that reflect my world	3.2	4.5	1.3	.01
Enjoyment of collaborative translation tasks	3.5	4.6	1.1	.01
Emotional investment in characters/themes	3.1	4.4	1.3	.01

Table 2: *Learner Engagement Survey Results (n = 30)*

Source: Unpublished data, processed 15 June 2025 via SPSS, from Research Team fieldwork, (2020–2024).

The post-intervention survey data in Table 2 demonstrates significant engagement enhancements for 30 students, with pre- to post-mean score increases of +1.3 (from 3.2 to 4.5, $p < .01$) for motivation to read texts reflecting their world, +1.1 (from 3.5 to 4.6, $p < .01$) for enjoyment of collaborative translation tasks, and +1.3 (from 3.1 to 4.4, $p < .01$) for emotional investment in characters/themes. These results, processed imply a robust positive effect of the intervention, suggesting that culturally relevant texts and collaborative activities significantly boosted students' intrinsic motivation, enjoyment, and emotional connection to the learning material.

4.3.2. Qualitative Evidence of Affective Engagement

Students repeatedly mentioned, both in writing and in interviews, that connection with characters and stories was a significant motivating factor: "Reading *The Hate U Give* helped me understand my own family and struggles" (Journal #5).

Allowing students to choose the texts and determine themes of their translations increased their investment: "Picking stories that represent social issues I care about made me definitely want to read/translate" (Interview, Participant #14).

Observational data also confirmed this pattern; the instructors recorded many more occasions of peer-to-peer engagement, spontaneous peer support when students were struggling with translation, and lively engagement with emotionally charged or controversial moments. Their engagement surpassed language learning and into identity negotiation and social thinker development.

4.4. Mediation of Emotional and Cultural Meaning

This subsection illustrated how translation became a space for emotional literacy and cross-cultural interpretation and was illustrated quite clearly through selected text excerpts.

Textual Reflection: "Accept and Keep Going".

In translating this powerful statement from *The Hate U Give* (p. 121): "*Sometimes you can do everything right, and it will still go wrong. The key is learning to accept that and keep going*". Students encountered challenges conveying the strength behind "accept" and the continuation behind "keep going". One learner said: "I had a hard time finding words in my language that show 'accept' as strength, not giving up. This helped me to understand resilience in the story and my life" (Journal #18).

Whether it was a heightened awareness of metalinguistic resources or not, this represents a case where students were able to gain not only linguistic proficiency but also emotional and moral awareness through translation—asset-affirming translation as a pedagogical resource.

4.5. Summary of Key Findings

Integration of culturally meaningful YA literature into translation-focused pedagogy provided powerful layered learning outcomes:

- Vocabulary development that is situated in social-emotional and cultural relevance;
- Cultural understandings regarding empathy, critical comparisons, and reflective storytelling;
- Sustained student motivation because of content aligned to their identities and collaborative groups in the classroom;
- Communicative competence enhanced through rhetorical performance, intercultural dialogue, and emotional reflectivity.

These findings collectively indicate that translation is not only a linguistic act but rather a transformative pedagogical learning encounter from the perspective of the learner. Translation engages young learners with language based on authentic social narratives that motivate learning. The outcome is that learners experience growth in language skill development, personal identity, and intercultural practice.

5. Discussion of the Findings

This study addressed the influence of translational multicultural young adult (YA) literature, specifically, *The Hate U Give* by Angie Thomas, on vocabulary development, cultural awareness, and learner engagement for intermediate English learners in a Master's program at the University of Abomey-Calavi. The findings validated all three hypotheses of the study and are supportive of the guiding theoretical frameworks, sociocultural theory, *translanguaging* pedagogy, intercultural communicative competence. Translation practices in the classroom supported both linguistic capacity development and identity construction, critical thinking, and cultural sensitivity in a multilingual academic setting. Moreover, translation practices supported not only linguistic development, but also identity construction, critical thinking abilities, and cultural understanding in multilingual academic contexts.

5.1. Vocabulary Development

This research provides strong support for Hypothesis 1, which purports that translating YA literature contributes to vocabulary acquisition because of the contextualized and meaningful usage of words. The quantitative data revealed a statistically significant increase in the number of vocabulary test scores, pre-test mean of 27.2, post-test mean of 36.8 ($p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.53$). This implies that learners had opportunities to be repeatedly exposed to new vocabulary items within context in their translation tasks.

From a sociocultural viewpoint, the translation processes occurred as socially mediated learning processes in the learners' Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Following Vygotsky's theories (1978) and Lantolf and Thorne's (2006) rendering of them, students were able to internalize vocabulary through peer-to-peer interaction, collaborative dialogue, and teacher scaffolding. Translation processes provided a space for students to actively negotiate meaning and develop preferences for this active meaning crafting, which resulted in a deeper awareness of lexical subtleties when selecting their translations.

Qualitative indicators of learning found in reflective journals further point to the students not only adopting words, but creating personal meanings and reconceptualizing them. For example, one participant took the word "minorities," through classroom dialogue about minorities in the classroom context, and interpreted it in the nuances of local exclusion and

social categorizations. Another example concerned the word "quiet." The participants clearly expanded the word to mean not simply an absence of sound, but also included observation and the silence that arises through active attentiveness. The reinterpretations show how the students made meaning through their multilingual and sociocultural tools for communication and translation processes as important indicators of the principles of *translanguaging* pedagogy (García and Wei, 2014).

Students also used translation strategies such as equivalence, modulation and cultural substitution, following Vinay and Darbelnet (1995) and Baker (2018). The strategies equipped them to transpose terms such as "shit" or "light-skinned" into something appropriate to local equivalents in French, Fon, or Yoruba. All of this entailed an awareness of sociolinguistic realities and exhibited students' pragmatic competence, which is a hallmark of advanced language proficiency. The translation of the terms sent them into rich and critical discussions around profanity, racial hierarchies, and register demonstrating how we could engage in a translation process as a reflexive linguistic activity.

5.2. Cultural awareness

The second hypothesis stated that translation promoted cultural awareness by engaging learners with a range of stories and challenging them to reflect on cultural differences and similarities. The thematic analysis of reflective journals and focus group comments supports this hypothesis in that students clearly had a heightened awareness of how to identify, interpret, and critique themes related to racism, cultural identity, gender norms, and social justice.

One particularly telling example was how learners identified Starr's experience of racial profiling in *The Hate U Give* with their own experiences of regional or ethnic bias in Benin. This dimension of critical reflection supports Byram's (1997) concept of intercultural communicative competence (ICC): especially the dimensions of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre) and critical cultural awareness (savoir s'engager). Students were not simply transferring information from one language to another; they were analyzing cultural assumptions, comparing sociocultural dynamics and questioning dominant narratives.

The bilingual environment of the classroom supported this reflective process. Students shifted back and forth between English, French, Fon, and Yoruba and created what García and Lin (2017) describe as a *translanguaging* space. In this space, learners were able to access their entire linguistic repertoire and construct deeper cultural comparisons. For example, when they were in the process of translating legally sensitive language (for example, "light-skinned"), learners had dynamic conversations about how to balance literal - and functional accuracy - often including explanatory footnotes, in

order to retain a level of nuance. These actions demonstrate culturally sustaining pedagogy, and also show learners engaged in learning cultural empathy and awareness (Tsokalidou and Skourtou, 2020).

5.3. Learner Engagement

The third hypothesis stated that translation enhances learners' engagement with English texts. Both quantitative and qualitative data affirm this claim. The post-intervention survey showed statistically significant increases across all categories of engagement. Motivation to read culturally relevant texts increased by 1.3 points, enjoyment of collaborative translation tasks increased by 1.1 points, and emotional investment in characters and themes also rose by 1.3 points (all with $p < .01$). These findings also show that students not only were more engaged with the text but had a greater emotional connection with the text.

Student journal reflections and observations in the classroom also support this finding. Many of the students stated that the themes reflected in The Hate U Give provided a personal connection to their lives. One student noted that reading about Starr's struggles helped them to recognize their own family's dynamics. Others noted that when they chose the texts and themes relevant to their own social concerns, they were more focused and committed to the translation assignments. This is consistent with Canagarajah's (2011) notion of agency in translanguaging pedagogy, in which learners are provided opportunities to use their own linguistic and cultural experiences in shaping their processes of learning.

Collaborative translation activities, peer feedback, and reflective dialogue created community in the classroom and, as Donato (2000) notes, social interaction like this cultivates engagement in the student's ZPD. Peer support and student-to-student discourse were apparent as students often supported peers, discussed problematic passages, and debated how culturally loaded terms could be shared. Therefore, this level of engagement contends that translation could be not only a language learning task but could also be a transformative process of social transformation and identity-making.

5.4. Pedagogical Implications

The findings suggest that the integration of multicultural YA fiction translation into English language instruction holds significant pedagogical value. This model taps into students' internalized linguistic repertoire, promotes critical engagement with relevant texts with cultural resonance, and reimagines language classes as open and reflexive spaces. In West African settings such as Benin, where students usually operate in multilingual and multicultural environments, this model offers a context-sensitive solution that promotes both linguistic and cultural competence.

The study also determines the role of technological tools, such as Google Translate and bilingual dictionaries, in enabling translation processes. Such

technological tools enabled greater accessibility, particularly for unfamiliar or idiomatic words, and supported independent learning. The application of technology in language acquisition is especially valuable in resource-poor areas, as noted by Miller (2017).

However, the study's limitations must be recorded. The study employed a comparatively homogeneous and small sample of Master's students at one university. While the outcomes offer very intriguing results, they are not generalizable to all student groups or learning contexts. The study can be replicated in the future with diverse populations, longitudinal designs, and examining the application of more advanced digital translation programs.

Overall, the conclusion drawn by these findings is that translation of multicultural YA literature, such as *The Hate U Give*, possesses potential powers to promote vocabulary building, cultural awareness, and learner engagement among English learners in multilingual settings. By situating language learning in authentic narratives filled with cultural intertextuality and by allowing the full linguistic repertoires of the learners to come into play, translation ceases to be merely an instructional method and becomes a tool of empowerment, negotiation of identities, and intercultural dialogue. The results are in line with the call for more inclusive, *translanguaging*-based language instruction that takes into consideration the realities of learners in West Africa and elsewhere.

Conclusion

This study focused on the influence of translation on the multicultural young adult fiction, *The Hate U Give*, vocabulary development, cultural understanding, and learner engagement among intermediate learners of English at the University of Abomey-Calavi. Based on sociocultural theory and *translanguaging* pedagogy, this study also explored how translation could benefit as a culturally sensitive empowering approach in the field of English language education.

A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data from 30 students of Master's students in English using vocabulary assessments, translation tasks, personal reflective journals, questionnaires, and classroom observations. The thematic and statistical analyses revealed that translation significantly improved students' vocabulary, motivated them culturally, and increased emotional engagement. They learned to reinterpret language through personal and cultural lenses, negotiate meaning across languages, and actively participate in constructing knowledge.

The findings thus advocate the integration of translation-based activities and culturally relevant young adult literature in English language teaching within multilingual contexts such as Benin. Those tools were useful in scaffold learning and improve accessibility.

The future of research on adaptation programs should focus on larger, heterogeneous, and diverse cross-sections of educational institutions, adopting a longitudinal design to investigate lasting effects. The role of AI and advanced translation technologies in promoting autonomy, cultural awareness, and multilingual competence needs to be further examined.

To summarize these findings, the most promising pedagogical approaches to fostering students' language proficiency, intercultural understanding, and agency in a multilingual context are translating young adult fiction.

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