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TeachingEnglish

Leveraging L1 Use for Cultural Competence in Multilingual Classrooms

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Saturday 23 August 2025

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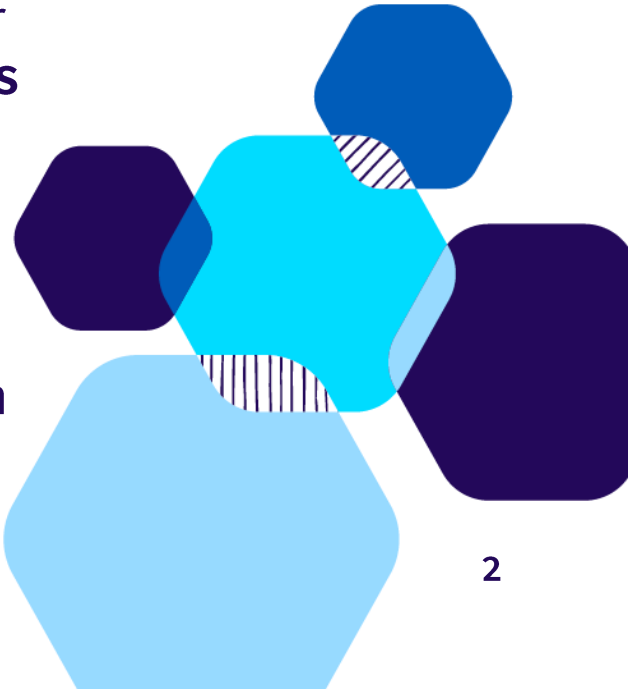

Housekeeping

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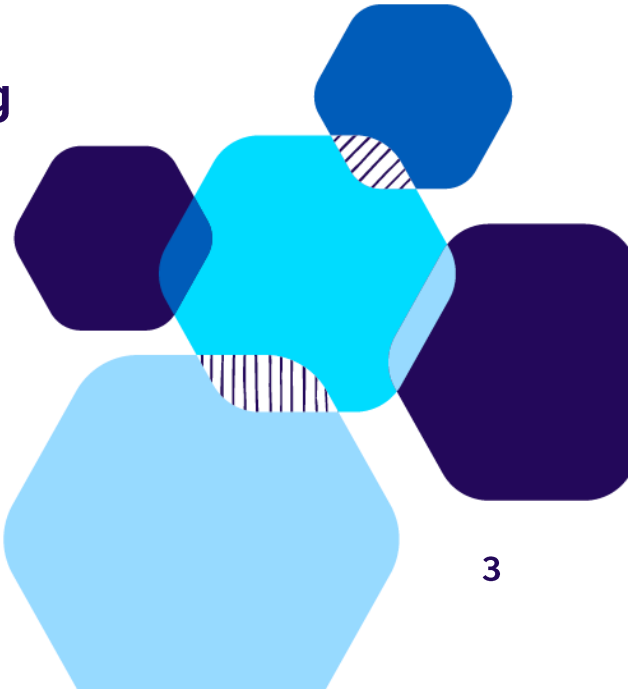


Pre-webinar polls in the Telegram group:

1/ Do you currently use students' first languages (L1) or regional lingua francas in your English language teaching?

A) Yes, regularly and strategically 36%

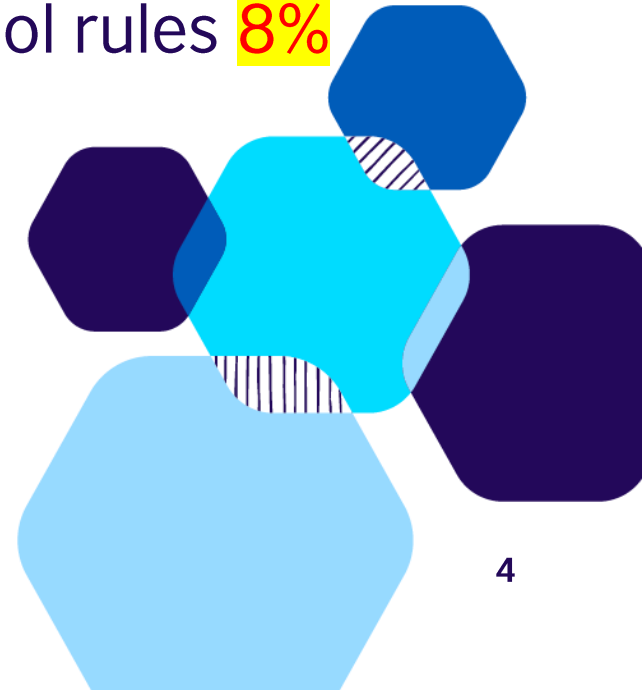
B) Yes, but I feel uncertain about it 9%

C) Rarely - I try to keep classes English-only 55%

D) Never - it's against my teaching philosophy 0%

2/ Using Languages other English in class is:

a. Helpful 75%
b. Confusing 17%
c. Time-wasting 0%
d. Against school rules 8%



About the speaker

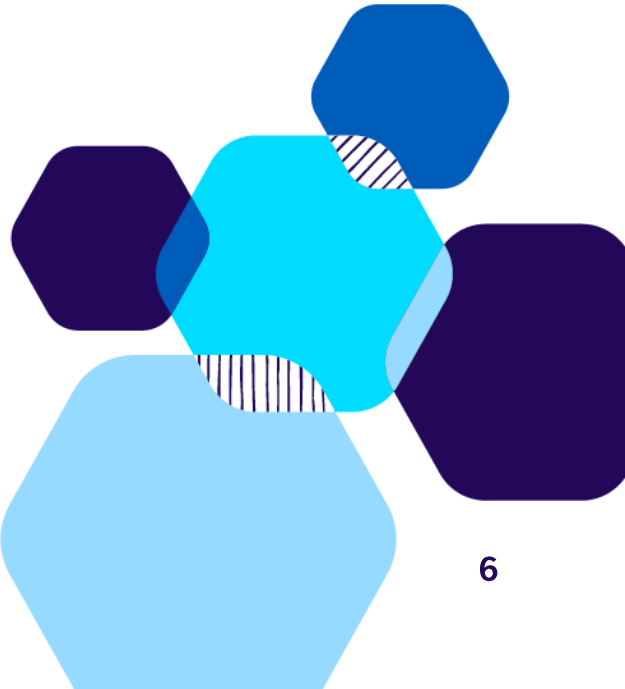
Salome Ikokoyo is a Nigerian educator with 20 years of teaching experience since graduation. She works as a teacher, trainer, administrator, and copy editor, and believes in teaching effectively rather than just teaching hard.
With 20 years in education and 14 years training other teachers, Salome currently heads the education unit at a private college of education. She also holds leadership positions in ELTAN (English Language Teachers Association of Nigeria). Salome particularly enjoys teaching literature and has recently started writing her own poems, short stories and drama. She has presented two webinars and participated as a co-presenter at the World Teachers Day 2024 webinar series.

Salome is committed to helping teachers discover smarter, more effective ways to reach their students.

Objectives

By the end of this webinar, we will be able to:

- Apply James Cummins' Linguistic Interdependence theory to support strategic L1 use
- Implement specific techniques using regional lingua francas like Nigerian Pidgin, Swahili or any other regional languages
- Design activities that build both English proficiency AND cultural competence
- Maintain effective balance between English and shared languages in your classroom



Theory of Linguistic Interdependence

In 1989, James Cummins introduced the Linguistic Interdependence Theory, and it is revolutionary for how we think about multilingual education.

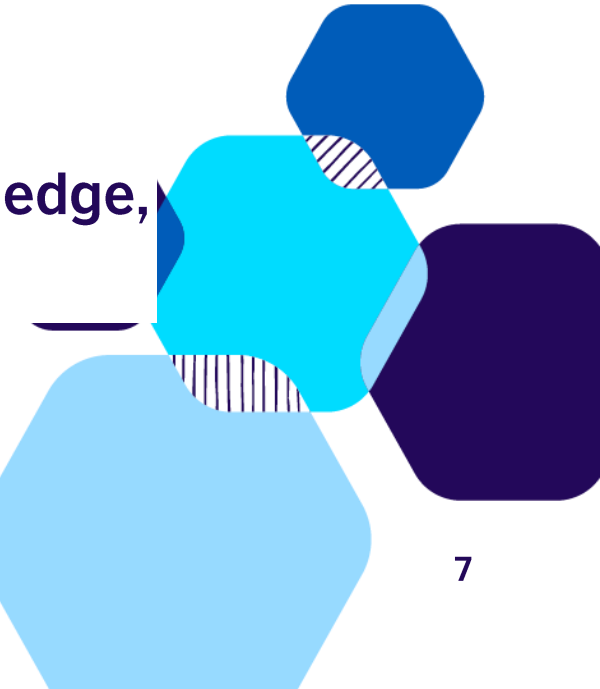
The Core Principle:

Languages in a multilingual person's mind are not separate containers - they're interconnected systems that support each other.

Key Concepts:

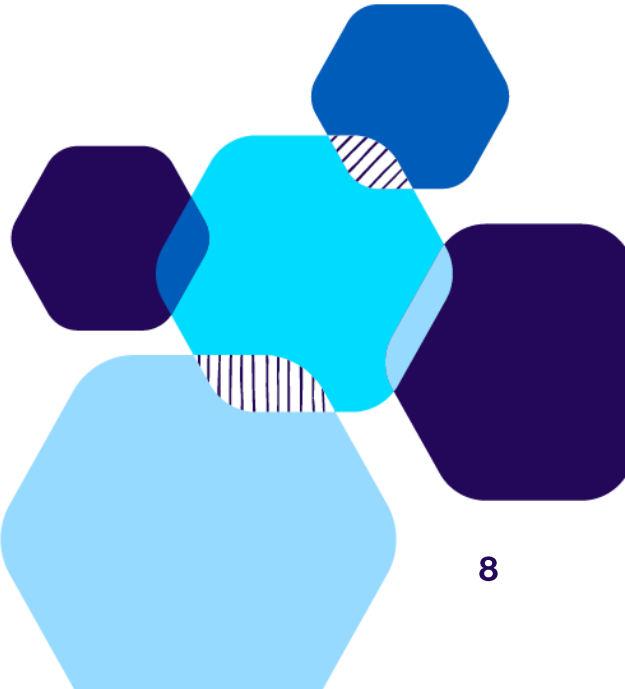
- Skills and knowledge developed in one language transfer to others
- While vocabulary and grammar differ, thinking skills, cultural knowledge, and learning strategies transfer
- Students need strong foundation in L1 to develop strong L2

Why does all this matter?



Why this matters:

- Cognitive Advantages
- Cultural Competence Benefits
- Metalinguistic awareness
- Emotional Support and Anxiety Reduction
- Efficient Complex Grammar Explanation
- Inclusive Classroom Environment



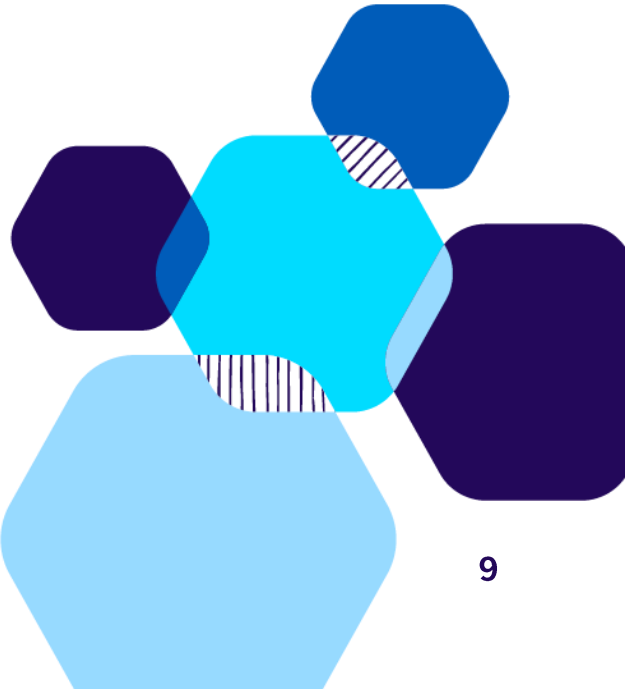
True or False – please say in the chat

A. L1 use creates dependence

B. L1 use in class confuses students

C. Parents expect English-only in English classes

D. L1 use reduces English exposure time



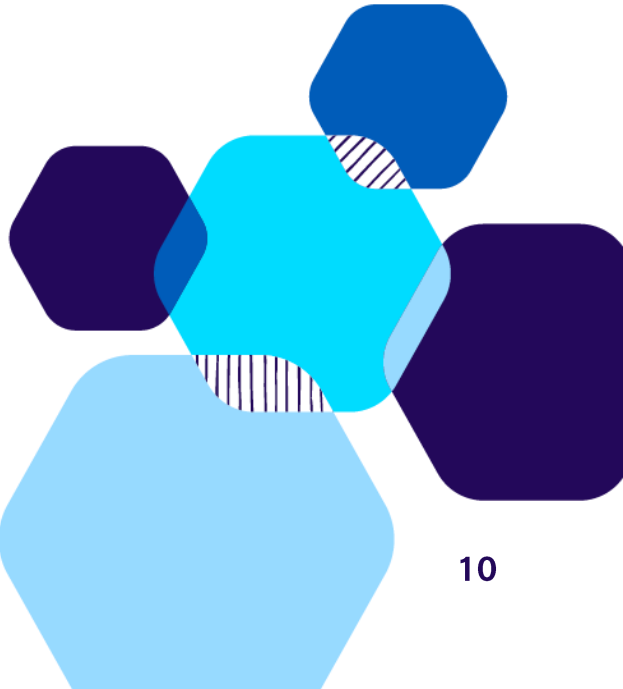
Common Myths

Myth 1:
L1 use creates dependence

Reality: Research shows *strategic* L1 use accelerates L2 development
Example:
Students who discuss complex topics in Hausa first write better English essays
- Why: They develop ideas in their strongest language, then transfer linguistic resources

Myth 2:
It confuses students

Reality: Students are natural code-switchers - they're already managing multiple languages
Example: A student in Abuja might use English for school, Hausa for market, Igbo for family
-Classroom application: We're simply making their natural multilingual skills visible and strategic.



Common Myths

Myth 3: Parents expect English-only

Reality: Parents want their children to be successful multilinguals

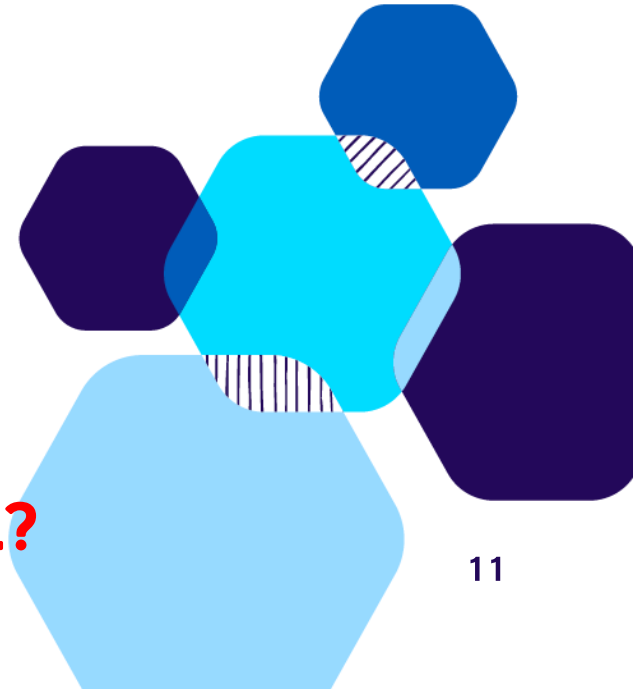
Communication strategy: Explain how L1 use builds stronger English skills

Show results: Students with strong L1 foundation develop better English proficiency

Myth 4: It reduces English exposure time

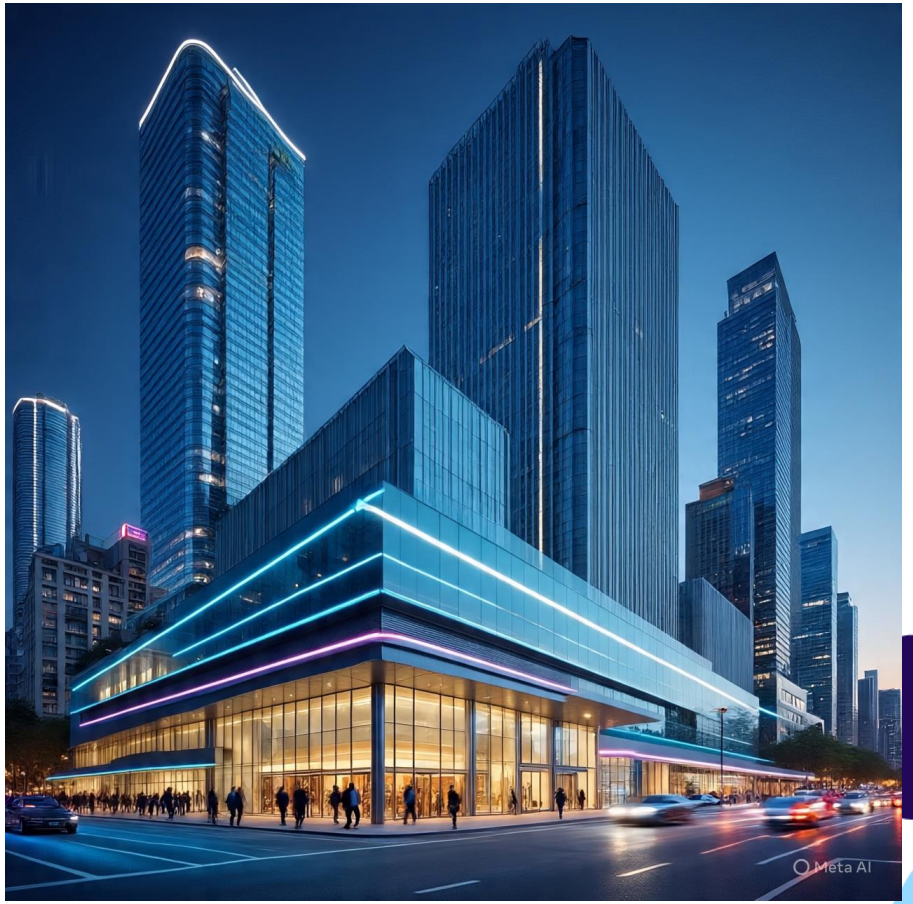
Reality: Strategic L1 use makes English time more effective

Quality over quantity: **5 minutes** of meaningful English discussion after L1 scaffolding beats 30 minutes of confused silence



Can you add one myth or benefit of L1/RL?

When should L1/RL (regional language) be used?



Scaffolds

Images created by meta Ai

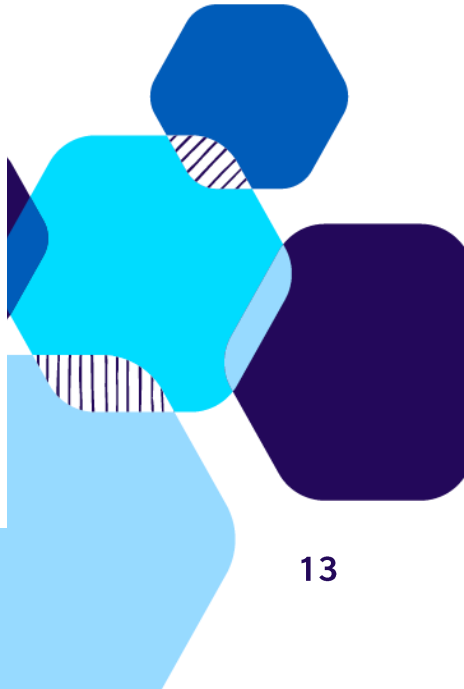
When should L1/RL be used?

a) Concept introduction
b) Comprehension checks
c) Phonetic scaffolding
d) Cultural bridging
e) Error analysis
f) Emotional support
g) Metacognitive reflection
h) Complex instructions
i) Vocabulary expansion
j) Cultural translation practice

Key principle: STRATEGIC USE

L1/RL use should always have a clear pedagogical purpose and lead back to English Language production or deeper English Language understanding.

Which of these (a – k) do you already do and which would you like to try? Please say in the chat



EXAMPLES

Grammar - Conditional Sentences

"Ti mo ba ni owo, ma ra oko" (If I have money, I will buy a car)

- Pattern Recognition: Student grasps the if-then relationship in their L1

- Transfer to English: Student can now understand "If I had money, I would buy a car"

- Result: Student understands both the grammatical structure AND the cultural contexts where conditionals are used

Vocabulary - Academic Language

"Analysis mean say you dey break something small small to understand am well well"

- Conceptual foundation: Student understands the concept of breaking down complex ideas
- Academic English: Student can now use terms like "analyze," "examine," "evaluate" with confidence
- Transfer: Student applies analytical thinking to both L1 and English contexts

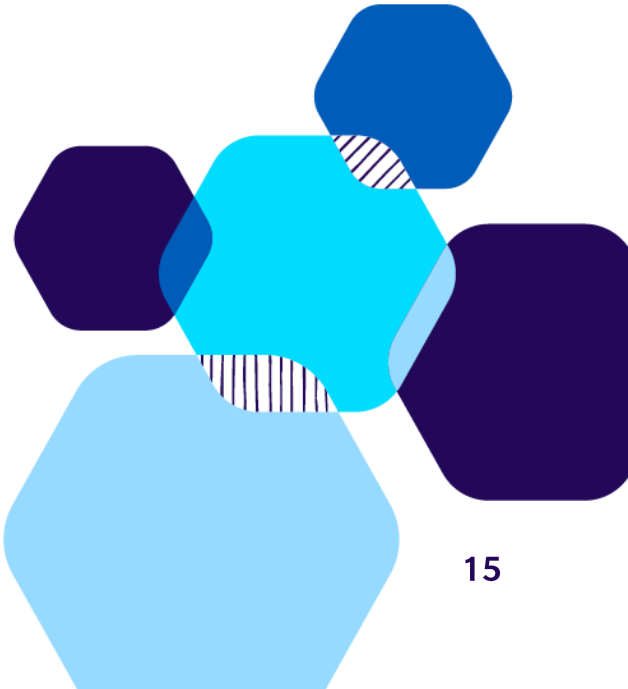
Can you share other examples with us?

Recent Academic Support (2017)

Norbahira Mohamad Nor & Radzuwan Ab Rashid conclude

"There is no one solid linguistic theory which can provide the ultimate explanation of L1 acquisition and L2 learning as there are many interrelated factors that influence the success of language acquisition or language learning. The implication is that teachers should base their classroom management practices and pedagogical techniques on several theories rather than a single theory as learners learn and acquire language differently."

Therefore: Flexible, multi-theoretical approaches work because they adapt to how students actually learn.

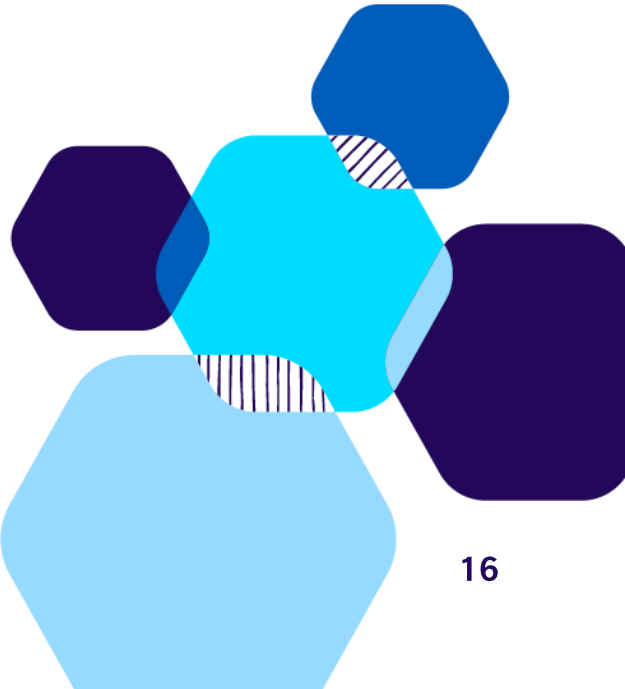


Conclusion

"If the learner has not learned, then teaching has not taken place."

Our priority should be teaching in ways that ensure students actually learn.

Personal Story: I came from an 'ICI, RIEN QUE LE FRANÇAIS' background - French only, no exceptions. Twenty-two students were admitted to our programme. Only four of us graduated. Sixteen dropped out in the first year. The others, before the final year



Take-away tips to try before our Telegram discussion:

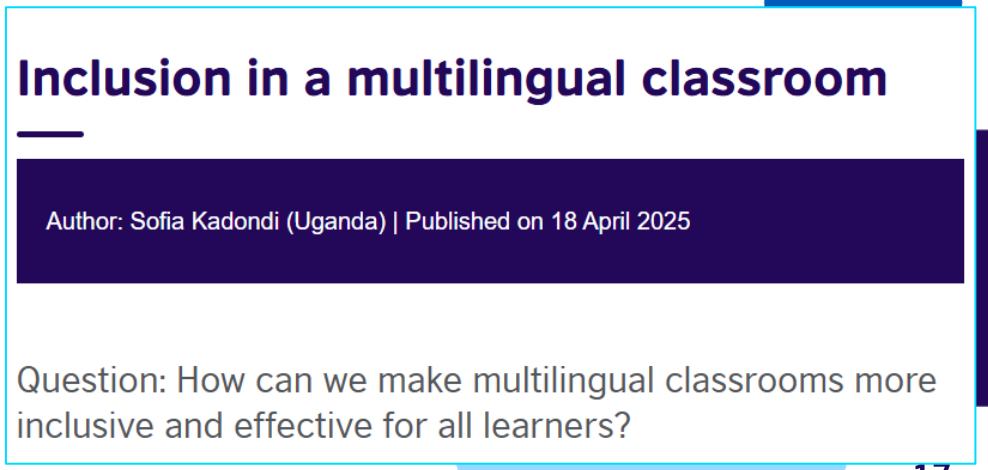
Read this research:

https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/managing-lesson/articles/mother-tongue-other-tongue

or this:

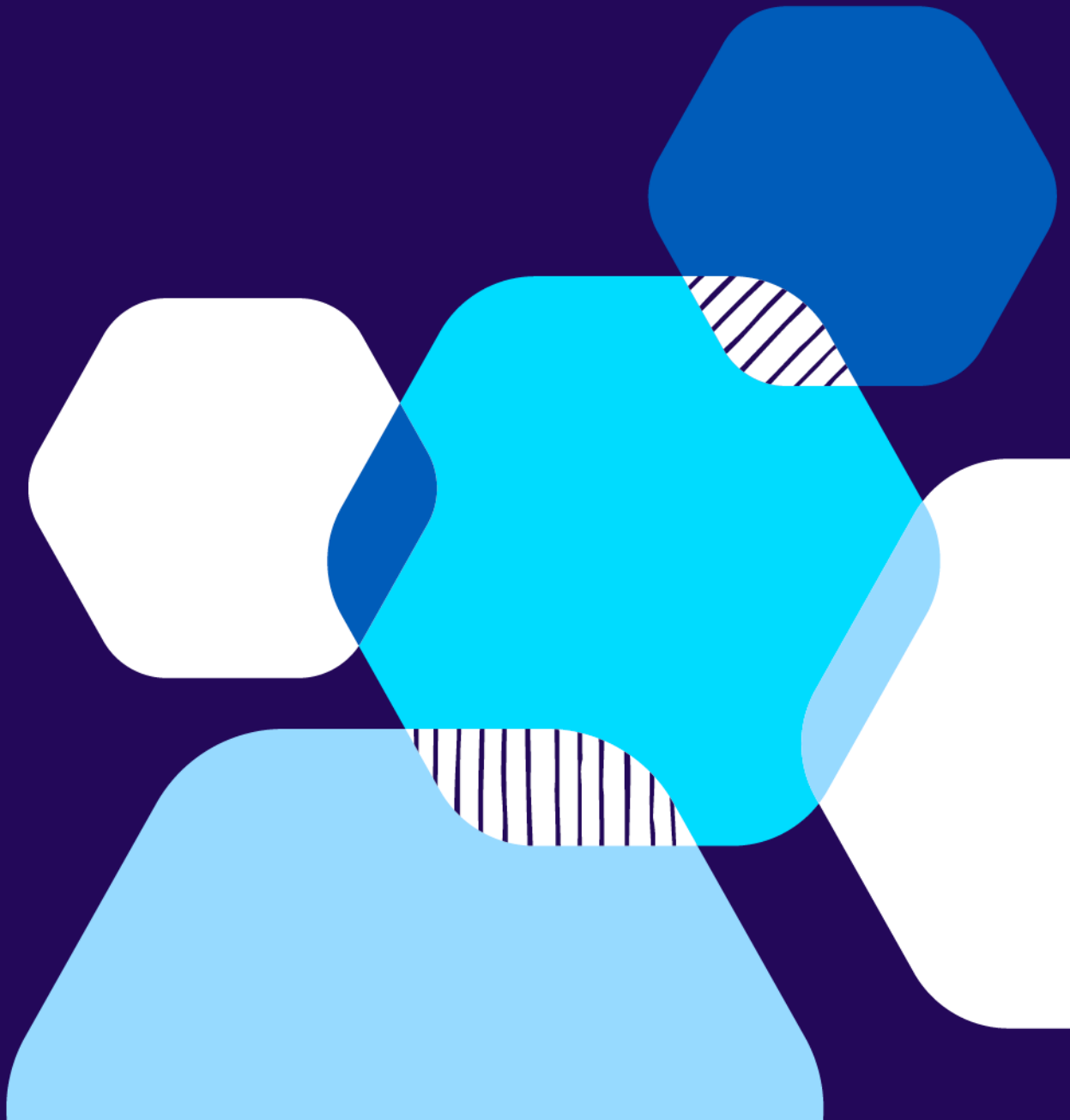
https://africa.teachingenglish.org.uk/skills/tips/inclusion-multilingual-classroom

and experiment with using L1 in class



Thank you!

Any questions?



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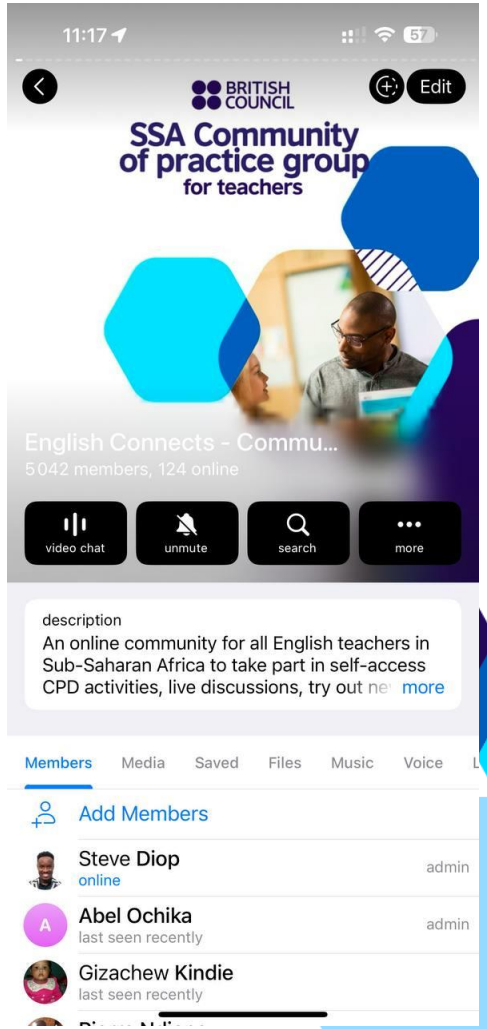

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Date: Saturday 6 September 2025

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