



# The Role of Bilingualism in Enhancing English Language Teaching

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## Abstract

This research examines how bilingualism contributes to teaching English as a foreign language and explores its application by teachers during instruction, along with its influence on student engagement. A qualitative approach using an interpretive framework was employed, incorporating classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings demonstrate that bilingualism plays a crucial role in developing students' communicative competence and enhancing teachers' instructional strategies. In conclusion, integrating bilingualism significantly supports teaching and learning English as a second language (L2) at the junior high school level.

**Keywords:** *Bilingualism, English as a Foreign Language, Language Teaching Strategies, Communicative Competence, Code-Switching*

## INTRODUCTION

The field of language teaching has seen significant shifts, bringing advancements in techniques and tools, especially in teaching English as a foreign language (EFL). However, many classrooms still struggle with uninspired instruction due to an overreliance on the first language (L1), which limits students' ability to understand content delivered in English (L2). This creates a need for teaching strategies that effectively bridge the gap between L1 and L2, making language learning more engaging and efficient.

Bilingualism presents a practical and impactful solution by allowing teachers to switch between L1 and L2, improving student comprehension and engagement. It functions both on individual and societal levels, helping learners grasp meaning in communication while also fostering cognitive and linguistic development. Studies have shown that students who receive foundational instruction in their first language before transitioning to the second language perform better academically. Additionally, learners who continue to develop their first language demonstrate cognitive advantages over their peers who use only the second language. Research further links bilingualism to improved linguistic abilities, cognitive flexibility, and academic progress when both languages are actively nurtured.

This study draws on these perspectives to examine the role of bilingualism in enhancing English language teaching. By focusing on its use as a teaching tool in junior high school classrooms, this research aims to highlight how bilingualism can improve instructional effectiveness, foster communicative competence, and support students in mastering the target language.

### Methodology:

In line with the objectives of this study, a qualitative research design with an interpretive approach was adopted. The methodology involved classroom observations and semi-structured interviews to gather comprehensive insights. Classroom observations were conducted to analyze how bilingualism influenced student engagement during instructional activities. Additionally, semi-structured interviews were used to explore teachers' perspectives on the role of bilingualism in English language teaching.

The participants of the study included four English language teachers from Palakkad district in Kerala. Data collection focused on various instructional practices, such as providing instructions, explaining vocabulary, clarifying grammatical concepts, and creating an engaging classroom environment. The data were analyzed to understand how bilingualism supports teaching effectiveness and enhances students' comprehension of English. These findings helped to draw relevant conclusions about the impact of bilingualism on teaching and learning processes

Findings and Discussion

## Classroom Observation Results

Observations gathered from students—Anuvindh, Nayana, Vishnu, and Aakash—provided valuable insights into how bilingualism was used in their classrooms and its impact on their learning experiences. According to their reflections, teachers frequently used a mix of their native language (L1) and English (L2) when giving instructions, explaining grammatical concepts, introducing new vocabulary, and making lessons engaging. The students noted that L1 was often used more prominently, which helped clarify complex ideas and made the learning process smoother.

Anuvindh observed that using L1 for instructions made it easier for him to follow classroom activities, as switching between languages minimized confusion. Nayana appreciated the use of L1 when learning grammar rules, explaining that it provided clarity and helped her understand abstract structures in English. Vishnu found that bilingual explanations of vocabulary connected familiar words in L1 with new terms in English, enhancing his ability to remember meanings. Aakash shared that using a blend of languages created a fun, interactive learning environment, keeping him more motivated and attentive during lessons.

Collectively, these student observations highlighted the significant role of bilingualism in making English lessons more accessible and engaging. Although the reliance on L1 was noticeable, they recognized that using both languages together strengthened their communicative skills and built their confidence in learning English. This suggests that bilingual teaching approaches effectively bridge the gap between familiar and new linguistic concepts, supporting more effective language acquisition.

### Interview Insights:

The interviews conducted with four English teachers—Miss Remya K, Mr. Nikhil V, Miss Anupama Murali, and Miss Thahsin Z Hussain—provided comprehensive insights into how bilingualism influences English language teaching and the strategies teachers employ to facilitate effective learning. The conversations explored their use of bilingual methods, their perceptions of its impact on students' comprehension and engagement, and how it addresses common classroom challenges.

Miss Remya K described how bilingualism serves as a bridge for students to grasp challenging concepts. She highlighted the importance of using students' first language (L1) to explain abstract terms and complex ideas before transitioning to English (L2). According to her, translating difficult concepts into L1 significantly reduces student confusion, allowing them to develop a clearer understanding of the content. She emphasized that students who struggle with direct English instruction benefit greatly from this approach, as it builds their foundational knowledge and confidence to use English more independently over time.

Mr. Nikhil V stressed the effectiveness of bilingualism in teaching grammatical rules. He explained that while English grammar can be challenging for students, providing explanations in L1 clarifies structural patterns and reduces errors in usage. He shared that using familiar language to illustrate grammatical constructs not only saves time but also helps students internalize rules more effectively. Additionally, Mr. Nikhil pointed out that the strategic use of bilingual explanations keeps students engaged and minimizes the frustration they often feel when solely exposed to English.

Miss Anupama Murali highlighted the role of bilingualism in vocabulary instruction. She observed that connecting new English words with their L1 equivalents helps students remember meanings more effectively. She described how introducing a word in English, followed by an explanation in L1, allows students to relate the term to their existing knowledge, making the learning process smoother. Miss Anupama also emphasized that bilingualism creates a supportive classroom environment where students feel more confident participating in discussions and asking questions. According to her, this approach reduces language anxiety and encourages active engagement.

Miss Thahsin Hussain reflected on the broader benefits of bilingualism for both students and teachers. She noted that bilingual teaching strategies provide solutions to common challenges, such as students' difficulty in following instructions or grasping abstract content. By blending L1 and L2 in a structured manner, teachers can maintain student interest while ensuring comprehension. Miss Thahsin also highlighted that bilingualism fosters a positive learning atmosphere, motivating students to take a more enthusiastic approach to learning English. She shared specific examples where students demonstrated improved performance and participation after receiving bilingual instruction.

Collectively, the insights from these teachers illustrate that bilingualism is a valuable pedagogical tool for English language teaching.

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