

## The Role of Bilingualism in Teaching English

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**Abstract.** This study explores the multifaceted role of bilingualism in English language teaching within the multilingual context of Uzbekistan. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative data, the research investigates how bilingual strategies—specifically code-switching and translation—impact cognitive development, pedagogical effectiveness, and sociocultural inclusivity in the EFL classroom. Sixty participants (40 students and 20 teachers) from two higher education institutions were involved in surveys, classroom observations, interviews, and assessments. The findings indicate that bilingual approaches significantly enhance vocabulary acquisition (82%), speaking fluency (75%), and student engagement (88%) compared to monolingual instruction. From a cognitive perspective, the strategic use of students' first language (Uzbek) supports metalinguistic awareness and problem-solving. Pedagogically, bilingual strategies help clarify complex structures and reduce learner anxiety, while socioculturally, they validate students' linguistic identities. However, over-reliance on L1 remains a challenge, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach. The study recommends integrating bilingual methods into teacher training and curriculum design, with gradual transitions toward English-only instruction as learners' proficiency improves.

**Key words:** bilingualism, English language teaching, code-switching, translation, cognitive flexibility, sociocultural competence, multilingual education.

**Introduction.** Bilingualism, the ability to use two languages proficiently, plays a significant role in the teaching and learning of English as a second or foreign language (ESL/EFL) (Cummins, 2000). In multilingual contexts, such as Uzbekistan, where learners often speak their native language (e.g., Uzbek) alongside other languages (e.g., Russian), bilingualism offers unique opportunities to enhance English acquisition. Bilingual approaches, such as code-switching and translation, leverage students' existing linguistic knowledge to facilitate comprehension and engagement (Baker, 2011). These strategies are particularly relevant in settings where English is taught as a foreign language, as they bridge linguistic and cultural gaps between the learners' native language and English.

The cognitive benefits of bilingualism, including enhanced problem-solving skills and metalinguistic awareness, have been widely documented (Bialystok, 2001). Pedagogically, bilingualism allows teachers to draw on students' first language (L1) to clarify complex English structures, thereby reducing anxiety and increasing motivation (Cook, 2001). Socioculturally, bilingualism fosters an inclusive learning environment by valuing students' linguistic identities, which is critical in multicultural classrooms (García & Wei, 2014). However, challenges such as over-reliance on L1 or inconsistent application of bilingual strategies can hinder progress.

This article examines the role of bilingualism in teaching English, focusing on its cognitive, pedagogical, and sociocultural impacts. The study addresses the following research questions:

**Literature review and methodology.** Bilingualism, particularly in the context of English language teaching, has received considerable scholarly attention for its cognitive, pedagogical, and sociocultural benefits. Cummins' (2000) interdependence hypothesis serves as a foundational theory in this field, suggesting that proficiency in a learner's first language (L1) provides a strong cognitive foundation for acquiring a second language (L2). This theoretical framework supports the inclusion of bilingual strategies, such as code-switching and translation, in the EFL classroom to scaffold complex linguistic concepts and foster comprehension.

Bialystok (2001) highlights the cognitive advantages of bilingualism, including enhanced problem-solving, increased metalinguistic awareness, and improved executive control. These cognitive skills are crucial for EFL learners when navigating unfamiliar grammar structures and lexical items in English. Similarly, Cook (2001) advocates for the pedagogical utility of L1 in foreign language instruction, arguing that strategic use of learners' native language reduces anxiety and supports the internalization of L2 structures. In practice, this may include the use of L1 to explain grammar rules or translate idiomatic expressions that lack direct equivalents in English.

García and Wei (2014) introduce the concept of translanguaging, a sociocultural approach that views bilingualism as an integrated linguistic repertoire rather than a separation of two distinct language systems. This view promotes inclusivity by recognizing and leveraging students' full linguistic resources. Within multicultural classrooms, valuing students' native languages can enhance motivation, identity formation, and cultural understanding.

Baker (2011) provides a comprehensive overview of bilingual education models, highlighting how bilingual strategies can be implemented effectively in multilingual societies. His work underlines the importance of context-sensitive pedagogy and cautions against rigid monolingual approaches, especially in environments where learners have rich linguistic backgrounds.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of bilingualism in English teaching.

The research was conducted at two higher education institutions in Uzbekistan, involving 60 participants: 40 students (20 studying English at B1 level and 20 at B2 level, based on CEFR standards) and 20 English language teachers with an average of 8 years of teaching experience. The student group consisted of 60% female and 40% male participants, with an average age of 20 years.

#### Data Collection Methods

**Survey:** A 20-question survey was administered to students and teachers to assess perceptions of bilingual strategies (e.g., code-switching, translation) in English teaching. The survey used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

**Classroom Observations:** Twelve English lessons (six per institution) were observed to analyze the use of bilingual strategies. Observations followed a structured protocol, noting instances of code-switching, translation, and student engagement.

**Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 10 teachers to explore their experiences and challenges with bilingual approaches.

**Student Assessments:** Pre- and post-intervention assessments (vocabulary tests and speaking tasks) were conducted to measure the impact of bilingual strategies on learning outcomes.

**Data Analysis.** Quantitative data from surveys and assessments were analyzed using SPSS software, calculating means, standard deviations, and Pearson's correlation coefficients to identify relationships between bilingual strategies and learning outcomes. Qualitative data from observations and interviews were coded thematically, focusing on cognitive, pedagogical, and sociocultural themes. The analysis drew on Cummins' (2000) interdependence hypothesis and García's (2014) translanguaging framework to interpret findings.

**Results and discussion.** The study revealed significant insights into the role of bilingualism in English teaching, as summarized below:

## Impact of Bilingual Strategies on English Learning Outcomes

Metric | Bilingual Group (%) | Monolingual Group (%)

Vocabulary Acquisition | 82 | 65

Speaking Fluency | 75 | 60

Student Engagement | 88 | 70

Confidence in Learning | 80 | 62

**Cognitive Benefits:** Students in the bilingual group (using code-switching and translation) outperformed the monolingual group in vocabulary acquisition (82% vs. 65%) and speaking fluency (75% vs. 60%). Survey results indicated a strong positive correlation ( $r = 0.78$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ) between bilingual strategies and cognitive flexibility, as students reported improved understanding of English grammar when explained in their L1 (Uzbek).

**Pedagogical Advantages:** Observations showed that teachers used code-switching in 70% of lessons to clarify complex concepts (e.g., English tenses) and translation in 60% of lessons to teach vocabulary. Students rated bilingual strategies as highly effective (mean = 4.3/5), noting reduced anxiety and increased participation. However, 30% of teachers reported challenges, such as over-reliance on L1, which occasionally limited English exposure.

**Sociocultural Impact:** Interviews revealed that bilingual approaches fostered inclusivity, as students felt their linguistic identities were valued. For example, using Uzbek to explain cultural nuances in English texts (e.g., idioms like “raining cats and dogs”) enhanced comprehension (mean = 4.5/5). However, some students (15%) expressed concerns about dependency on L1, which could hinder fluency development.

The findings highlight the multifaceted role of bilingualism in English teaching. Cognitively, bilingual strategies leverage students’ L1 to enhance metalinguistic awareness, aligning with Cummins’ (2000) interdependence hypothesis, which posits that proficiency in L1 supports L2 acquisition. For instance, explaining English prepositions (e.g., “on” vs. “in”) using Uzbek equivalents improved students’ accuracy, as evidenced by assessment results. This supports Bialystok’s (2001) claim that bilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility, enabling learners to navigate complex linguistic structures.

Pedagogically, code-switching and translation proved effective in multilingual contexts, corroborating Cook’s (2001) advocacy for L1 use in EFL classrooms. For example, teachers used code-switching to scaffold difficult topics, such as reported speech, which increased student engagement (88% in bilingual group vs. 70% in monolingual group). However, challenges like over-reliance on L1 suggest the need for balanced approaches, as excessive L1 use may reduce English immersion (García & Wei, 2014).

Socioculturally, bilingualism promotes inclusivity by validating students’ cultural and linguistic identities. In Uzbekistan, where Uzbek and Russian are widely spoken, using L1 to explain English cultural references (e.g., proverbs) bridged cultural gaps, enhancing comprehension. However, the risk of L1 dependency highlights the importance of gradually increasing English-only instruction as proficiency improves.

**Teacher Training:** Train English teachers in strategic code-switching and translation techniques to maximize benefits while minimizing L1 dependency.

**Curriculum Design:** Integrate bilingual strategies into English curricula, particularly for beginner and intermediate learners, to scaffold complex linguistic concepts.

**Balanced Approach:** Encourage a gradual shift from bilingual to monolingual instruction as students’ proficiency increases to ensure fluency development.

**Conclusion.** Bilingualism plays a pivotal role in English language teaching by enhancing cognitive flexibility, improving pedagogical outcomes, and fostering sociocultural inclusivity. The study

demonstrates that strategic use of code-switching and translation significantly improves vocabulary acquisition, speaking fluency, and student engagement in multilingual contexts like Uzbekistan. Future research could explore the long-term effects of bilingual strategies across diverse linguistic settings and proficiency levels.

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