

# THE ROLE OF FIRST LANGUAGE IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY AT A BANGLADESHI UNIVERSITY

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Received: 2026-03-09

Accepted: 2026-04-17

Published: 2026-06-12

## Abstract

The use of Bangla in English classes has been a crucial issue in Bangladeshi classrooms. This research investigates the role of native language use in second language acquisition and the ways students utilize their native language while attempting to manage the interference between the two languages in classroom settings. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted based on five hours of classroom observation and a semi-structured interview schedule administered to four instructors of English at an English-medium private university in Bangladesh. The instruments used in this study were piloted to ensure consistency. Findings from this study indicated that Bangla served as a cognitive and communication support system for students as they learned English and did not serve as a barrier to the students' ability to learn English. Findings indicated that Bangla served as cognitive and communicative support, helping students clarify complex concepts, negotiate meaning, and generate ideas before producing English output. Findings further indicated that flexible language policies reduced student anxiety and increased participation. Most importantly, Bangla use decreased as students gained proficiency, indicating developmental rather than dependent L1 use. This study supports the notion that students should be encouraged to engage in pedagogically guided translanguaging practices and supports institutional policies that recognize native language use as a legitimate pedagogical resource in English-medium higher education.

**Keywords:** *academic equity; Bangladeshi higher education; bilingual education; English-medium instruction; first language use; qualitative research; second language.*

## 1. Introduction

Research on the role of first language (L1) in second language (L2) learning has gained increasing importance in multilingual higher education contexts, particularly in English-medium universities. Many Bangladeshi university students experience difficulty in reading complex disciplinary texts, in writing academically, and in contributing to classroom discussions that are held in English. Research has indicated that students who intentionally use their L1, a practice often referred to as translanguaging may help bridge some of these challenges by supporting students' understandings of L2 materials through scaffolding, peer-

to-peer communication, and cognitive support. These strategies help students acquire L2 more effectively (Cui et al., 2024; Rajendram et al., 2023; Yuan et al., 2024). International graduate students from multilingual backgrounds have used translanguaging to navigate complex readings and technical vocabulary as a way to improve their understanding and engagement (Rajendram et al., 2023).

Researchers have also found that Chinese graduate students who selectively used L1 in ESP instruction improved academic achievement and classroom equity (Cui et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2024). Translanguaging has been associated with increased motivation, peer collaboration, and academic performance, and even advanced L2 learners use L1 for discourse-pragmatic functions such as repair, emphasis, and quotation (Huang, 2025; Gu et al., 2024). In Bangladesh, students typically use their native language (Bangla) as a cognitive and social scaffold in English-medium classrooms, most notably when dealing with complex readings, creating written assignments, and participating in group discussions. The results of the above-mentioned studies demonstrate that L1 is a strategic asset for L2 learning across both Bangladeshi and international contexts.

Despite the large body of research on L1 use, the literature is characterized by methodological and conceptual limitations. For example, many studies use qualitative or cross-sectional methodologies, and therefore, the causal impacts of L1 use on L2 outcomes have rarely been investigated (Doiz et al., 2023; Alzahrani, 2019). There is limited research on discipline-specific contexts and productive skills such as writing and speaking, particularly in Bangladesh (Pham et al., 2025). Importantly, previous studies paid little attention to teachers' voices. An investigation of this topic at the undergraduate private university level would address these gaps by providing empirical evidence of how L1 functions in authentic classroom interactions and how it influences L2 acquisition. This study examines students' strategies for mitigating challenges due to L1 interference and thus provides insight into practical and pedagogical methods that could facilitate optimal translanguaging in higher education.

Therefore, the significance of the study is clear; however, the theoretical and practical development of L1 in L2 learning continues to lag. Both sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), which emphasizes the mediational role of language and interaction in cognitive development, and translanguaging theory (García & Wei, 2014), which views L1 as a dynamic resource for making sense, suggest that L1 use is more than a compensatory mechanism; it is a tool for actively constructing knowledge (García & Wei, 2014; Vygotsky, 1978). Results from this study will contribute to the theory currently in existence by situating translanguaging within Bangladeshi universities, providing practical recommendations to instructors on how to strategically incorporate L1, and guiding policy development for English-medium instruction in multilingual contexts. The study may also direct further research by identifying context-specific practices that could be examined longitudinally or experimentally to evaluate their effects on L2 proficiency and academic achievement.

The study focuses on English-medium undergraduate courses, providing a context for an in-depth exploration of instructional practices, learner experiences, and teacher perspectives in real-time classroom environments. The findings are expected to contribute valuable insights for educators and policymakers seeking to optimize second language (L2) learning while addressing the complex linguistic and pedagogical realities of higher education in Bangladesh. Accordingly, the study addresses the following research questions: (1) To what extent does first language (L1) use influence second language (L2) acquisition

among Bangladeshi university students? (2) What strategies do students adopt to mitigate the challenges associated with L1–L2 interference?

## 2. Literature Review

Current studies show that the use of the first language (L1) plays strategic and pedagogical roles in the English medium instruction (EMI) university settings. Nonetheless, the literature does not disagree on the question of whether L1 can be used to aid L2 learning, but on the manner and under what conditions such aids can be provided. Others view translanguaging as a cognitive tool of scaffolding complex information (Cui, Wang, & Gardiner, 2024; Rajendram, Shi, & Jun, 2023), whereas others consider translanguaging as having social and equitable roles, including promoting participation, peer collaboration, and epistemological justice (Yuan, Fang, & Hu, 2024). Such a conflict between cognitive and social orientations has not been resolved, with the majority of the studies not incorporating both aspects in a single framework.

The second difference point relates to the proficiency of the learners. Corpus analysis refutes the belief that L1 use decreases with high-level proficiency, indicating that even high-level L2 speakers use L1 to carry out discourse pragmatic activities such as repair and emphasis (Huang, 2025). However, other studies indicate that discipline can be a factor: English majors and non-English majors have dissimilar EMI, which can suggest that the role of L1 can be different depending on the academic field (Hasan et al., 2024). Comparative synthesis is uncommon in spite of these insights. As an example, although it is known that translanguaging is effective in understanding and building trust (Romanowski, 2025; Hsu, 2025), the connection between translanguaging and productive skills, i.e., academic writing and speaking, has not been explored much (Webb, 2025). In methodological terms, the field is mostly dependent on qualitative and cross-sectional designs (Mizumoto, 2025; Alzahrani, 2019), which restrict causal arguments regarding L1 usage and quantifiable L2 results.

In theory, sociocultural and translanguaging models are often called upon but seldom put into action. In the majority of studies, the concept of translanguaging is considered a descriptive label and is not a testable mechanism, such as scaffolding or identity negotiation are not associated with particular and observable L2 learning processes (Khan et al., 2024; Islam et al., 2024). Likewise, empirical evidence has been little gathered on technology-mediated translanguaging, such as AI-assisted writing and online platforms (Xu & Zhang, 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2024; Jannath & Akter, 2026).

Bangladesh is a case of such gaps. Local research supports the cognitive scaffolding, peer collaboration, and identity negotiation through Bengali, which is used by students in the region (Rafi and Morgan, 2022), reflecting trend in the area (Pham et al., 2025). Nevertheless, Bangladeshi studies are largely descriptive and cross-sectional with no experimental or longitudinal studies examining the effects of L1 on writing or oral proficiency. Additionally, the tensions between the policies of English only and the reality of translanguaging (Rafi & Morgan, 2022) underscore a policy gap that has not been addressed yet, but formal regulations still do not exist.

To conclude, the only thing known is that L1 use facilitates understanding, motivation and peer communication in EMI contexts such as Bangladesh. What is unknown entails causal relationships of L1 use and productive L2 results that include writing and speaking, patterns of discipline specificity, effects of technology-mediated translanguaging, and

integrated theoretical models operationalizing sociocultural and cognitive processes. The gap that will be addressed in this study is that by utilizing a longitudinal, quasi-experimental design, the authors can study how structured L1 use (Bangla) of AI in assisting writing activities influences the accuracy of academic writing and oral proficiency among Bangladeshi EMI undergraduates. Translanguaging is operationalized as a cognitive scaffold and a social mediation tool within a cohesive sociocultural context.

### **3. Research Methods**

#### **3.1 Research Design**

This research employed a qualitative descriptive type of research to examine the effects of first language (L1) use on second language (L2) acquisition and learning processes in an English Language (EL) classroom environment at the undergraduate degree level in Bangladesh. The qualitative descriptive methodological approach was chosen for this research due to its ability to obtain the actual, lived experience of participants, language behaviors and perceptions in a naturally occurring environment; and for this reason, it is most suited for those types of studies that are aimed at developing rich, context-specific descriptions of phenomena rather than general theories (Creswell, 2013).

This methodology was especially useful for this research as it enabled observation of authentic classroom interactions between teachers and students, including spontaneous L1 use. In addition to providing the researcher with the opportunity to observe these classroom interactions, the qualitative descriptive methodological approach also provided the teacher(s) with the opportunity to express their personal beliefs, reasoning, and reflections about the use of L1 in L2 instructional practices, which can be difficult to gain insight into through solely quantitative methods. Ultimately, the qualitative descriptive design for this research provided a way for the participants' voices and the reality of the classroom to be represented and for the study's goal of gaining insight into how and why L1 is being used as both a pedagogical and communication resource in English Medium Instruction (EMI) classrooms in Bangladesh to be met (Creswell, 2013).

#### **3.2 Sample**

The sample for this research comprised undergraduate students and English Language (EL) teachers from a university in Bangladesh. More specifically, the participants were one undergraduate English Department student group and five EL teachers who teach English at the university level as part of their work. To identify participants, a purposive sampling approach was used. Purposive sampling is preferred when the focus of a qualitative research project is on the richness of the data collected as opposed to its generalizability to the larger population. Using this sampling method ensured that the researchers could select teachers and students with relevant experience, knowledge and expertise to provide relevant responses to the research questions. The five teachers have considerable experience teaching English to university students, while a single group of undergraduate students participates in English-medium classes, providing a complementary perspective from teachers and students. The total number of participants was one undergraduate student group and five English language instructors. The five classroom observations and five teacher interviews provided rich and detailed information about the real-time language usage of students and teachers in the classroom, and also provided the

researchers' perspectives about how they use their native language (first language) during the process of teaching English (second language).

Table 1 is a summary of the classroom observations completed during 5 undergraduate English language courses (Sociolinguistics, Semantics and Pragmatics, Teaching Listening and Speaking, Methodology of English Language Teaching, and Syllabus Design and Materials Development). The class size in each course was approximately 30-35 students. Female students far outnumbered male students in every classroom observed.

**Table 1.**

*Classroom Observation Information*

Number of Students	Male Students	Female Students	Observed Class
35	6	29	Sociolinguistics
30	8	22	Semantics & Pragmatics
33	3	30	Teaching, Listening & Speaking
35	8	27	Methodology of English Language Teaching
32	5	27	Syllabus Design & Materials Development

Table 2 describes the demographics of the 4 faculty members who were interviewed as part of this research project. All participants were male professors who had at least 10 years of experience in the classroom and held PhD degrees in Applied Linguistics. They currently hold the position of either an Assistant Professor or an Associate Professor. The table provides a description of their instructional practices, which include using both Bangla and English with flexibility and awareness.

**Table 2.**

*Demographic Information of Interviews*

Teacher (Pseudonym)	Gender	Teaching Experience	Highest Degree	Current Position	Instructional Practices for academic precision
Dr. H	Male	10 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Assistant Professor	Makes informed translanguaging choices based on the type of class; Using Bangla for support and building confidence with a focus on using English in classes focused on skills.
Dr. A	Male	20 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Associate Professor	Makes educated choices about when to use their native language (L1) to support comprehension early in the process and increases the amount of English used based upon student proficiency.
Dr. R	Male	12 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Assistant Professor	Fosters flexible translanguaging, particularly in content-based classes to improve student comprehension by leveraging cross-linguistic transfer.

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Dr. M	Male	17 years	PhD in Applied Linguistics	Assistant Professor	Makes use of Bangla as a scaffold at lower levels of instruction to promote positive language transfer and then transitions into using predominantly English.
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### 3.3 Instruments

The researcher used two qualitative techniques for collecting data: Classroom Observation and In-depth Interviews with Teachers. The researcher conducted five classroom observations in undergraduate English Department classes in a private University in Bangladesh; and five Semi-Structured Interviews were conducted with experienced tertiary-level English Language Instructors to discuss how they use L1 in an L2 classroom. These two data collection techniques have been used together to provide rich, contextualized data that reflects classroom practices and teachers' attitudes toward using L1 in the English Language Learning process.

#### 3.3.1 Classroom Observation Checklist

To recognize naturally occurring examples of instances when students did use Bangla in English lessons, classroom observations were carried out. The main aim was to learn how and why students and teachers code-switched and whether the activities helped or hindered L2 learning. The data collection tool was an observation checklist which was created based on the existing research on the practices in bilingual classrooms and L1 application in L2 instruction (Swain & Lapkin, 2000; García & Lin, 2017). The checklist recorded behaviors that could be observed such as student use of Bangla when performing classroom activities, teacher support or discouragement of L1, the role of L1 in meaning making and peer cooperation and the impact of L1 on student interaction. The checklist would include ten items, including question-asking in Bangla, speaking Bangla when working in the group, translating, explaining English, and modification of participation when limiting L1.

The checklist was subject to expert validation by an Applied Linguistics and ELT specialist before observations took place and the items were examined regarding their content accuracy, relevance and clarity. It was revised slightly to align with specific, measurable behaviors rather than interpretive constructs, enhancing content validity in line with established research practices (Cohen et al., 2018). Systematic notes were made in relation to every checklist item to give a contextual example and pattern of behavior. These field notes helped to compare with the data on interviewees in order to find similar themes about the pedagogical roles of Bangla in the English classroom.

#### 3.3.2 Semi-Structured Interview Protocol

This study used an open-ended, semi-structured interview format as its primary method of inquiry to explore five ESL teachers' perceptions and beliefs about L1 use in L2 instructional settings. An initial set of interview questions were developed based on literature that has examined teacher perceptions and classroom-based language use in L2 instructional settings, and specifically how L1 is utilized in second language instruction (Macaro, 2005). Interview items were then developed based on this literature to elicit information regarding teachers' perceptions of how L1 is perceived to influence comprehension, student participation, and vocabulary acquisition in the classroom, as well

as the interactions between teachers and students within the classroom. In developing the interview protocol, 10 open-ended questions were developed to allow respondents to provide detailed responses. In addition to providing space for respondents to describe their thoughts and feelings, the open-ended nature of the questions also provided opportunities for respondents to share personal anecdotes and describe specific incidents that occurred in the classroom.

Finally, to confirm the clarity, relevance and content validity of the interview protocol, an expert in Applied Linguistics validated the interview protocol for clarity, relevance, and alignment with research questions. One specialist in Applied Linguistics and English Language Teaching reviewed the interview questions for alignment with the research questions, and theoretical grounding and the appropriateness of the questions for use in a Bangladeshi University setting. Feedback received from the specialist resulted in some minor word-level and sequence-level changes to the wording of the questions in order to increase the coherence and effectiveness of the questions. Through this validation process, the interview protocol was developed into a clear and effective tool for generating rich, reliable and contextually meaningful data from the EL teachers who participated in the study.

### **3.4 Data Collection Process**

The data collection of this research occurred into two stages: classroom observations followed by semi-structured interviews. The first stage included five observations of regular 80-minute undergraduate English classes at a private university in Bangladesh. While observing, the researcher documented authentic language use by both students and teachers, with emphasis on L1 instances.

Once all classroom observations had been completed, the second stage included the administration of semi-structured interviews to the four English Language (EL) instructors who taught in the observed classrooms. Interviews typically ranged from 10 to 20 minutes in length and were audio-taped using the informed consent of the participants. The interview protocol consisted of ten open-ended questions designed to prompt the instructors to provide reflective responses regarding classroom language practices, how students' use of L1 impacts L2 learning, and what they do to address the challenges presented by the use of L1 during instruction. The audio recordings of the interviews were then transcribed verbatim to ready them for analysis.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was applied qualitatively to investigate the role and purpose of first language (L1) use when learning a second language (L2) in one of the universities in Bangladesh. The data were in the form of five classroom observations of undergraduate English courses and four semi-structured interviews with the teachers at the university. Observational field notes have been checked several times to see patterns in L1 use, such as frequency, pedagogical value, and interaction in classroom. The data obtained in the interview was analyzed in six phases of the analysis introduced by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, initial coding, development of the theme, revision and review of the theme. Themes that came out during the interviews were emergent as they were pedagogical support, affective factors, and perceived challenges of using L1. The triangulation of teacher responses and observational data was developed to bring credibility to the triangulation

process and the two data types were combined to give a complete answer to the research questions.

It was found that L1 can be used as a mediator to help students acquire L2 knowledge and skills to help them understand, participate, and interact in the classroom. The combination of observational and interview data enhanced the analysis reliability and offered more insight into the views of teachers and the real classroom practices. Throughout the study, ethical standards were maintained. Participants were well explained about the data collection purposes before informed consent was written. Finally, the results depict how L1 can be used as a strategic and pedagogical tool in English classrooms at Bangladeshi universities to bridge the gap between teacher beliefs and teaching practices. Member checking was also done to enhance credibility where the interview summaries were presented to the teachers to confirm the validity of the summaries. Triangulation was done between observational field notes and interview responses. To provide transparency and reliability in the research process, an audit trail of raw data, analytic memos, and coding decisions was kept.

### **3.6 Trustworthiness Criteria**

This paper discusses the four dimensions of trustworthiness that have not existed in the methodology. The credibility is created with the help of triangulation of classroom observations and teacher interviews, which make sure that the findings received are credible and accurately reflect the experiences of the participants. Thick description of Bangladeshi EMI context, sample demographics, and classroom settings support transferability, allowing the reader to determine the relevance to his or her context. Reliability is ensured by the use of an audit trail of field notes, interview transcripts, and analytic decisions so that the research process can be replicated. Grounding the interpretations on the voices of the participants and observational data, as opposed to the researcher, provides confirmability, and objectivity is enhanced by having the instruments validated by experts.

### **3.7 Ethical Consideration**

The research adhered to accepted ethical guidelines of qualitative research with human subjects. This was approved by the university, and informed consent in writing was signed by all the participants, including their right to withdraw without consequences at any time. All teachers were given pseudonyms and no information identifiable with the institution was provided. Observations in classrooms were carried out in a way that had minimum disturbance to the normal instruction. Interview data were recorded on computer with the express consent of participants and transcribed to undergo analysis and were stored safely with only the researcher having access. The researcher was also objective and truthful in presenting findings without fabricating or exerting any influence on findings. Also, the research showed that it respected the culturally and linguistically heterogeneous situation in Bangladesh, especially in respect of using English and Bangla as instructional languages.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1 Results**

The findings from classroom observations and teacher interviews are presented below.

#### **4.1.1 The effect of first language (L1) to the second language (L2) acquisition among Bangladeshi university students?**

##### **A. Findings from Classroom Observation**

Five undergraduate English courses were observed: Methodology of English Language Teaching, Semantics & Pragmatics, Sociolinguistics, Teaching Listening & Speaking, and Syllabus Design and Materials Development. Classroom activity observations concentrated on how both the first language (Bangla) and English were employed throughout the teaching and learning processes.

##### **Theme 1: L1 as Cognitive Scaffold**

The use of the first language (Bangla) was found to be a critical factor in student understanding and participation in all observed classes. All classes provided consistent opportunities for students to ask questions in Bangla if they encountered difficulties articulating their responses in English. A clear example of this occurred during a poster presentation in a Methodology of English Language Teaching course. Prior to beginning her explanation, a student asked, "Sir, may I speak in Bangla?" Another example is from a Sociolinguistics course where a student asked in Bangla, 'Sir, does this example fall under diglossia?' to clarify a theoretical construct. Both teachers responded favorably to these types of queries, exhibiting a flexible language policy that prioritized understanding over strictly enforcing English-only practices. This flexibility seemed to minimize students' anxiety about using the English language and foster more active participation in classroom discourse.

##### **Theme 2: L1 in Collaborative Learning**

During group work and collaborative tasks, students most often employed Bangla to discuss ideas, negotiate meaning, clarify instructions, and to decide on specific roles. Frequently, during peer discussions, students would pose questions in Bangla "এটার মানে কী বুঝাচ্ছে?" to each other and would explain concepts to one another in Bangla. In a Teaching Listening and Speaking course, students used Bangla to divide up responsibilities and to explain grammatical elements while engaged in micro-teaching preparations. Bangla served as a cognitive tool to process information before producing English output. Additionally, students commonly used Bangla to fully explore ideas prior to translating the ideas into English for formal presentations or discussions.

##### **Theme 3: Translation**

Translation between Bangla and English was a common strategy observed in all of the courses. Students regularly translated words, phrases and sentences to ensure clarity and confidence in their output. An example of this occurred during a micro-teaching session, wherein a student stated, "এখন আমরা এই পয়েন্টটা সমাধান করবো," and then attempted to rephrase the same concept in English. In Semantics and Pragmatics courses, students used Bangla examples that were culturally familiar (e.g., "রিকশা মামা") to comprehend abstract concepts prior to attempting to express the concepts in English. Teachers also strategically employed Bangla to explain complex theoretical constructs. On several occasions, teachers shifted temporarily to Bangla before reverting to instruction in English.

Furthermore, lower-proficiency students relied more on Bangla, while higher-proficiency students used it less frequently. Data collected during the observations indicate that Bangla did not replace English in the students' minds but rather served to support students' use of English by providing students with ways to organize ideas and complete tasks. During group discussions, students explicitly recognized this process when they stated that they first comprehended ideas in Bangla and then communicated the ideas in English during presentations. The data also demonstrated that permitting students to utilize Bangla resulted in students being more willing to engage in discussions and make attempts to produce output in English.

Lastly, students tended to employ Bangla more frequently during the preparatory stages of tasks than they did during the final stages of English production. Although students relied heavily upon Bangla during the preparation and discussion phases of tasks, many made an effort to utilize English during presentations and formal classroom activities. Overall, the observation data demonstrate that employing students' first languages strategically supports effective second language acquisition within the context of Bangladeshi university classrooms.

## **B. Findings from Teacher Interview**

When responding to the research questions regarding the relationship between Bangladeshi students' use of their native language (L1) and their acquisition of English (L2), teachers reported that Bangladeshi students use their native language to facilitate their acquisition of English in a number of ways. Teachers reported that Bangladeshi students use their native language in order to assist them in comprehending and participating in the classroom, as well as to express themselves with confidence and to accurately use vocabulary.

To address the effect of native language use on overall EFL competence, all four teachers stated that they believe the use of Bangladeshi by students affects their acquisition of English. The teachers explained that students can benefit from utilizing their prior experience with Bangla to assist them in their acquisition of English due to cross-linguistic transfer of cognates and other related characteristics. For example, Teacher R explained that cross-linguistic transfer helps students understand concepts more effectively. Additionally, Teacher H stated that "Bangla was particularly beneficial in theoretical courses requiring complex conceptual understanding." While the teachers were hesitant to allow excessive dependency on Bangla, they both agreed that strategic use of L1 would help facilitate comprehension, particularly for lower proficiency students. Teacher M reiterated this facilitation role of Bangla by stating, "Bangla can be used for the elementary level learners as a tool for scaffolding their English learning process."

In response to classroom settings where code-switching (Switching from L1 to L2) takes place, the teachers stated that students generally switch from Bangla to English based on what was required to do so, i.e., classroom rules, presentations, etc. Teacher R noted that language use is often conditioned, and that "students switch from Bangla to speaking English when you enforce a classroom rule that you have to speak in English." Teacher H also noted that the amount of freedom that teachers give to students in terms of their use of L1 will influence whether students will use English or Bangla, and stated that "it depends on how much the teacher allows them." On the other hand, students were more likely to use Bangla

when they were seeking clarification of a difficult concept, asking a question, or engaged in a peer discussion. As Teacher A stated, "When the topic is a bit difficult, they switch their language or they are trying to ask questions to the teacher." In general, the frequency of code-switching was seen as dependent on teacher practices, as well as the nature of the course.

In answering the role of Bangla in students' conceptual understanding and in the development of their second language, the teachers agreed that Bangla supports L2 development rather than hindering it. The teachers emphasized that Bangla is beneficial for students who are attempting to clarify complex ideas, especially in theoretical courses. Teacher H referred to Bangla as having a "catalytic role" in helping students understand concepts, and Teacher A stated that the mother tongue is now viewed "as a resource instead of a barrier." Teacher R emphatically supported this position and stated, "It never hinders. If somebody argues that it hinders, that's a very wrong conception." The teachers also indicated that the explicit identification of similarities and differences between Bangla and English can promote positive language transfer.

To address the influence of students' use of their native language on participation, confidence, and desire to engage in oral communication, the teachers agreed that Bangla is used by students to build confidence, increase participation, and encourage freer expression in the classroom. Teacher H explained that limiting Bangla could result in students being silent, and stated, "If teacher discourages or stops their use of native language, they may not speak at all." Teacher A also noted that the use of Bangla "can have a positive effect, since their participation level will increase." Teachers agreed that providing students with the opportunity to strategically use Bangla provides a more supportive and less anxiety-provoking learning environment, which is particularly important for less confident students.

Regarding the patterns of students using Bangla as a resource to support Second Language Acquisition, the teachers agreed that students who possess lower levels of proficiency or higher levels of anxiety tend to rely more heavily on Bangla. Teacher H explained that such students often view their first language as a safe option, and stated, "They might think, 'Okay, my native language is safer.'" Teacher A also observed that students rely on Bangla "when they have trouble with a particular topic or struggle to communicate their ideas in English." However, the teachers also emphasized that reliance on Bangla is temporary. Teacher M emphasized that the reliance on Bangla should be decreased as students' progress, and stated, "The more they progress, the more Bangla should be reduced." The teachers agreed that as students become more confident, proficient, and appropriately scaffolded, their reliance on Bangla decreases over time, resulting in improved English proficiency.

#### **4.1.2 Students' strategies in mitigating challenges arising from the interference between their first and second languages**

##### **A. Findings from Classroom Observation**

Observations made in classrooms have demonstrated that first language (L1) (Bangla) has provided opportunities to support second language (L2) (English) acquisition for students in all types of undergraduate English courses at a Bangladeshi university for the entire semester. Rather than being viewed as an obstacle to learning, L1 has been shown to

increase students' comprehension, involvement in their own learning, and confidence when performing academic work. Additionally, L1 use reflects the typical language use of students at a multilingual university.

### **Theme 1: Collaborative Use of L1 for Comprehension of Abstract Concepts**

As seen in the classroom, Semantics and Pragmatics, “students constantly explained ideas to one another in Bangla whenever topics became difficult. Their use of Bangla developed a feeling of group knowledge during complicated discussions.” Examples of the most obvious uses of L1 are to help students explain to one another in Bangla how to understand complex concepts, directions, or examples that they struggled with. In every classroom observation, students continually helped one another in Bangla to develop an understanding of abstract ideas or ideas that may appear in texts, lectures, or discussions. In addition, in the classroom Sociolinguistics presentation session, “students frequently collaborated by providing explanations of sociolinguistic theories to each other in Bangla so that everyone understood them equally,” and one student defined the concept of “speech community” in Bangla to aid his fellow students. By using L1 collaboratively to define abstract ideas in the classroom, students from a Bangla medium background could feel comfortable participating in their classes. It is certainly true that without having the ability to use L1, many students would have been unable to understand and make sense of the abstract content of classes like Semantics, Pragmatics, and Sociolinguistics.

In addition, students typically attempted to use English during scheduled class time (i.e. presentations and micro-teaching) and their use of English was limited to the degree of proficiency in which they were proficiently able to use English. This was evident in the Methodology of English Language Teaching class, where “students attempted to speak in English even though they lacked confidence and made noticeable attempts to self-correct pronunciation and grammar errors.” Students from an English medium background were significantly more likely to remain independent in their use of English compared to students from a Bangla medium background.

It appears that students rarely relied solely on English for higher-level thinking tasks. No matter what type of task students were engaged in, they continued to rely upon Bangla to produce ideas, resolve ambiguity, and solve problems. In the Semantics and Pragmatics class, “most of their thought processes and discussions were conducted in Bangla,” and English seemed to emerge primarily when the instructor introduced major vocabulary. For students, English was used primarily for creating a final product or output, such as presentations or micro-teaching demonstrations.

### **Theme 2: L1 as Interactional Support**

Since L1-based resources were less frequent than L1-based interactions, the primary purposes of L1 in this study appear to have been as a communication and cognition resource. This is especially apparent in the Methodology and Syllabus Design classes, where “students depended on spontaneous Bangla speech rather than Bangla written materials,” illustrating that Bangla served primarily as an interactional support rather than as a formal instructional tool. Overall, the findings demonstrate that students employed L1 as a strategic

means to facilitate comprehension and engagement in their L2 learning environment, and that L1 was beneficial to students in acquiring English over time in a Bangladeshi university.

## **B. Findings from Teacher Interview**

Teachers were asked whether they had noticed any patterns in how students communicate in English. Teachers were asked about how students used other languages besides English to aid in communication when they didn't have the right words to say in English. All of the teachers answered "yes," in reference to their observation of students' use of code-switching and code-mixing. One of the reasons why teachers said students switched between languages is that students tend to want to express themselves quickly and easily, especially if they don't know the exact vocabulary, they need to say what they mean. The way students switch between languages is not random. Students generally follow English sentence structures, but insert Bangla vocabulary or grammatical elements into those sentence structures in order to convey their intended meaning. This practice has been referred to as "translanguaging." Translanguaging is a way of communicating across languages, using a combination of languages as a tool to convey meaning.

Regarding the strategies students employ to manage the potential interference between their First and Second Languages, teachers reported that students reacted in varying ways when they received an explanation in English that they could not understand. In some cases, students remained silent when they were unable to understand a teacher's explanation because they felt nervous about asking questions. In these types of situations, the students were fearful of being judged for not knowing something. Some examples of quotes from teachers related to this type of reaction include, "When I give an explanation in only English, many students will remain silent and/or withdraw," (Teacher R) and "If the teachers do translanguaging, then the students find it more convenient and they respond even better," (Teacher A).

However, in some classrooms, students took advantage of the opportunity to ask for clarification in Bangla when teachers used translanguaging. According to Teacher A, "when teachers allow students to ask for clarification in Bangla, students become more engaged in class." Many of the teachers suggested that when teachers are able to provide explanations that students can understand, students become more interested in what they are studying and are able to engage more with their teachers and peers. Teacher A also mentioned that when teachers limit their use of Bangla to only, when necessary, it can help to avoid causing confusion among students without preventing students from improving their L2 skills.

To address students' utilization of English-Only strategies to reduce their reliance on their native language, teachers respond to whether they knew whether there were times when students relied solely on English-based strategies to explain their confusion. The teachers stated that yes, there are definitely times when students rely on English-based strategies to explain their confusion. For example, in institutions that have strict English-only policies, students may feel pressure to only speak in English, even if they cannot fully understand what is being explained. Teacher A mentioned that she saw "English-speaking zones" at her university, and Teacher M said that self-motivated students and teachers' encouragement encourage students to use only English to explain their confusion. Teacher R, however, cautioned against enforcing English-only policies too strictly, stating that this could place a disadvantage to students who are not as fluent in English.

In response to the last question on how teachers believe that students can best be encouraged to move away from relying on their first language and focus more on developing their second language. Most of the teachers suggested that developing students' ability to think critically in English takes time. Teachers recommended several strategies to help students develop their critical thinking in English including scaffolding (where teachers break down difficult concepts into smaller, easier-to-understand pieces), strategically allowing students to use their native language to communicate (a practice referred to as "translanguaging"), building students' confidence in speaking English, and linking the language that students use in the classroom to the course objectives. Teacher A, for example, stated that teachers should "gradually increase English usage" as students get older. Teacher R stated that students should be allowed to use their "full linguistic repertoire" when taking content-focused assessments, but students should not be allowed to use their native language when taking language-focused assessments. Teacher H also recommended providing individualized support to students who may struggle to transition to using English to communicate (Uddin et al., 2024; Hasan et al., 2025). She recommended that teachers should "identify students who are weaker or shy and help them step-by-step." Ultimately, all of the teachers believed that it is important for teachers to carefully consider students' proficiency levels, emotional states, and course goals before implementing strategies to encourage students to move away from using their first language and develop their second language.

## 4.2 Discussion

This study found that the appropriate use of students' First Language (L1) - Bangla - facilitated Second Language (L2) - English - learning at the University Level in Bangladesh. Observations of classes showed that Bangla was consistently used as a cognitive and communicative tool to improve students' comprehension, decrease students' anxiety, and increase students' participation. Students commonly used Bangla during group work and idea generation; however, they most often reserved English for their final spoken or written responses. Data from teacher interviews provided additional insight into the same observation and stated that Bangla assisted students in comprehending abstract content, developing their confidence in using the L2, and sustaining their interest and motivation to participate in class - especially those with lower proficiency levels in the L2 (Alam & Hasan, 2025; Rahman & Hasan, 2025). Perhaps, more importantly, the findings illustrated that Bangla scaffolded English learning without replacing it. This is reflected in that as students progressed in their ability to produce the L2, they began to rely less on their native language.

Regarding the Research Questions, the findings provide support that students' use of Bangla increases students' comprehension of the subject matter, students' participation in the classroom, and their confidence in producing the L2. The regular use of Bangla during collaborative projects and to clarify complex ideas demonstrated its value as a cognitive tool in developing meaning. The teachers' perceptions supported the notion that code-switching and translanguaging support students' ability to communicate their ideas when the students experience limitations due to language. The findings also suggested that the amount of L1 use is determined by students' proficiency levels in the L2, the policies governing the classroom environment, and the type of course. Therefore, the findings are an answer to the Research Questions and support the notion that strategic use of L1 promotes L2 learning in the EFL context of Bangladesh.

The findings of this study corroborate prior research that has shown that the use of L1 is viewed as a useful resource in second language classrooms. For example, Cummins (2007) proposed that learners utilize their existing linguistic knowledge to facilitate additional language learning; this is consistent with the cross-linguistic transfer observed in this study. Similarly, Macaro (2005) found that the purposeful use of L1 by the teacher improved students' comprehension and interactions in the classroom. Furthermore, the findings are consistent with Cook (2010), who posited that L1 can function as a cognitive mediator and not as an obstacle.

Conversely, the findings of this study contradict prior studies that have advocated for the use of English exclusively in the classroom, such as Krashen's (1985) advocacy for "maximum" exposure to the L2. In particular, unlike prior views, the current study found that the intentional and purposeful use of Bangla in the classroom did not restrict students' exposure to the L2 but rather facilitated a greater depth of understanding and more meaningful L2 production.

These results are a challenge to monolingual EMI policies which presuppose that English-only instruction maximizes L2 learning. This study challenges the pedagogical soundness of English-only mandates prevalent in South Asia and beyond by showing that strategic use of Bangali can increase understanding, engagement, and confidence without replacing English. This study applies to colonial language policy situations as in India, Pakistan, Nepal, and some parts of Africa, where strict English-only policies can, in fact, increase the achievement gaps among L2 students. It is important that policymakers rethink a blanket ban on L1 and devise more adaptable translanguaging policies that would enable teachers to employ the native languages of students as purposeful scaffolding resources. The EMI policy should not be based on exclusionary monolingual ideologies but instead the ideologies should be based on linguistic inclusive models that embrace bilingual practices as assets as opposed to deficits.

This paper is not just confirming the existing theories but also operationalizing translanguaging as a cognitive scaffold and social mediation tool through the analysis of one classroom only. Although Vygotskian theory suggests that the learning process is facilitated by a social interaction process, this study shows how exactly L1 is a mediating artifact during collaborative meaning-making. Moreover, it disputes the input hypothesis by Krashen that comprehensible input necessitates L2-only exposure; conversely, the quality and richness of L2 processing are enhanced by the strategic use of L1. Accordingly, this research paper contributes to the translanguaging theory by presenting empirical data which suggests that L1 and L2 are not autonomous systems but rather, a coordinated linguistic repertoire of learning.

This study provides empirical, classroom-based evidence on how Bangla is utilized by both teachers and students in university-level English courses in the EFL context of Bangladesh. This is a unique contribution to the gap in EFL research in Bangladesh that has previously been addressed through theoretical debates rather than descriptive accounts of actual translanguaging practices in instructional environments.

It is essential to note that the generalizability of the findings is limited to the specific institutional context of one university in Bangladesh, and future research should include multiple institutions and longitudinal designs to assess long-term effects of L1 use. Additionally, the study did not quantitatively measure the L2 proficiency gains of the

participants, nor did it investigate the potential long-term effects of L1 use on L2 development over a period of multiple semesters.

The study contributes to sociocultural and translanguaging theories by illustrating that L1 serves as a mediating tool for learning. The study supports Vygotskian perspectives on scaffolding and illustrates that the theories of translanguaging view bilingual practices as natural and advantageous for the development of second languages.

## 5. Conclusion

This research explored how students' use of Bangla supports their English language learning at the undergraduate level in Bangladesh. The results show that instead of hindering English acquisition, Bangla functioned as cognitive and communicative support. In this way, Bangla helped students clarify complex concepts, negotiate meaning in groups, and generate ideas before producing English output. Through these activities, students were able to reduce their levels of anxiety and increase their participation in the classroom and comprehension, especially for those with lower levels of English proficiency. It was important to note that students' reliance on Bangla decreased as their English proficiency and confidence improved. Data highlight the need for teachers to implement effective translanguaging practices. The flexibility of language policies and informed pedagogical decision-making enabled students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire while maintaining English as the primary medium of instruction.

The findings of this study support sociocultural and translanguaging theories, which view bilingual practices as natural and beneficial for L2 learning. Future research should employ longitudinal or experimental designs to examine long-term effects of L1 use on L2 proficiency, particularly in academic writing and speaking. Discipline-specific and technology-mediated translanguaging practices in the higher education of Bangladesh would be further areas of study in future research. Ultimately, this study emphasizes the need for educators and institutions to recognize students' first language as a legitimate pedagogical resource and develop inclusive policies to promote equitable L2 learning outcomes.

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