

## From Translation to Facilitation: Reimagining Mother Tongue Use in Indian L2 Classrooms

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**Abstract:** *The role of learners' first language (L1) in English language teaching remains a contested issue, particularly in contexts where English exposure is largely restricted to the classroom. This action research study examined how a teacher's use of L1 developed from immediate translation towards more facilitative and strategic use in a Grade 11 English classroom in India. The study was carried out for an entire academic year on thirty secondary school students in a multilingual classroom. The qualitative data used consisted of classroom observations, reflective notes from the teacher, lesson plans, audio recordings of class interaction, and informal responses of the students. The results showed that there was a gradual change in the way the teacher used discourse. Instead of translation into the first language of learners, the teacher used questions, context, prompts, clarifications, and selective use of the first language to facilitate meaning construction by learners in the target language. Strategic L1 use also appeared to support learner confidence and participation by providing temporary assistance without replacing English interaction. According to the study, the educational significance of L1 usage does not depend so much on its existence or frequency of usage but rather on the function it serves in the interaction process. Hence, reflective practice on the part of the teacher could facilitate this change.*

**Keywords:** ELT, Indian L2 Classrooms, L1 Use, Mother Tongue, Teacher Discourse, Translanguaging

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### 1. Introduction

The importance of the learners' first language (L1) in English language instruction has received much attention in second language (L2) education. For much of the twentieth century, popular theories of language instruction emphasised the maximisation of exposure to the target language and minimised the use of the native language of the learners. The rationale for this approach can be seen from the monolingual perspectives which considered the target language to be the main medium of instruction (Phillipson, 1992). Under this approach, L1 was generally perceived as a hindrance to communicative competence in English.

However, the realities of multilingual classrooms and differences in learners' levels of English have increasingly challenged the practicality of English-only approaches. Studies have shown that learners' L1 might help in the acquisition of another language rather than simply hinder the process (Cook, 2001; Hall & Cook, 2012). L1 might serve as an aid to comprehension, assist in class communication, and enable learners to interact with challenging concepts where their current level of English language skills is not enough. Instead of considering L1 as a problem, recent perspectives consider its potential uses in helping with comprehension, reducing learner anxiety, and supporting classroom interaction. As a result, the main issue has gradually become not about whether L1 should be used but how and why it should be done.

This issue is particularly relevant in the Indian educational context, where English is taught within highly diverse multilingual environments. In many regional-medium secondary schools, learners' primary linguistic resources exist outside English, while opportunities for English exposure may be largely restricted to classroom settings. According to Agnihotri (1995), multilingualism is one of the key features of Indian society and should be considered as a resource and not as a problem. Thus, the use of L1 to explain concepts, clarify meanings, give directions, and assist in comprehension is common practice. However, such practices are sometimes viewed negatively as evidence of ineffective English teaching or excessive dependence on translation.

The pedagogical relevance of using the learners' L1 in English classrooms seems to be related not only to whether it is used or how often it is used but also to its role in the classroom discourse. Cook (2001) argues that

learners' L1 can be deliberately incorporated into language teaching as linguistic resources, while Macaro (2009) emphasises the importance of teachers' awareness of the purposes underlying their language choices. From this perspective, strategic L1 use does not necessarily reduce learners' engagement with English. Instead, the timely provision of L1 assistance may help learners comprehend difficult information, engage in classroom discourse, and move back to English. Thus, strategic use of the mother tongue can support engagement with English rather than reduce exposure to it.

This aspect is especially relevant in terms of the role of teacher discourse. Teacher discourse does not serve merely as a tool for the transmission of information; it structures class interactions, creating conditions that learners will be exposed to. According to Walsh (2011), efficient class interactions depend not only on the quantity of teacher discourse but also on its pedagogical role in the process of creating learning opportunities. As a result, the use of L1 in teacher discourse determines how L1 discourse operates in terms of being used as a tool for translation or as scaffolding for learning. Immediate translation may make understanding easier in certain situations, but overreliance on it could restrict learners from negotiating meanings by themselves. On the other hand, using L1 through questioning, clarification, and prompting can help to engage learners and move towards learner autonomy.

This concept may also be examined from the sociocultural viewpoint of language learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), the learning process was seen as a socially mediated one wherein the provision of appropriate help allowed the learner to develop beyond the level he could achieve by himself. This idea of using sociocultural viewpoints in L2 learning was then used by Lantolf (2000), whereby the concepts of mediation and scaffolding were seen as essential elements in acquiring language competence. Under this framework, the L1 can serve as a mediational device to help the learner achieve tasks and express ideas beyond what is possible for him in terms of his English language resources.

The contemporary multilingual approaches have gone even farther in questioning the premise that languages exist as distinct systems. The translanguaging research has illustrated how multilingual individuals make use of all their linguistic resources while constructing meaning and communication (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014). Recent findings from secondary EFL settings further stress the pedagogical significance of multilingual practices. Based on a systematic analysis of 25 empirical studies conducted between 2023 and 2025, Zakharova and Lasagabaster (2026) found the following main topics in translanguaging research in secondary EFL settings: pedagogical functions, cognitive and affective motivations, as well as learning outcomes. The authors pointed out the crucial role of teachers' development because teachers can become skilled at translanguaging regardless of institutional support and preparation. Although the present study focuses specifically on L1 use within teacher discourse rather than on translanguaging as a broad phenomenon, this perspective is useful in recognizing that learners' existing linguistic resources can form part of the process through which meaning is constructed, and participation is supported in multilingual classrooms.

Despite growing research on teachers' beliefs about L1, patterns of classroom code-switching, and the pedagogical functions of L1 (Hall & Cook, 2012; Macaro, 2009), recent research continues to identify teacher development and the practical implementation of pedagogical translanguaging as important areas of concern (Zakharova & Lasagabaster, 2026). Less has been done about how individual teachers could purposefully engage in changing their own L1-related discourse in the classroom by means of reflection. This type of inquiry is best explored through action research because the approach recognizes the teacher as a reflective practitioner who studies and changes their own practice (Burns, 2010).

The present study therefore explored the changing nature of teacher discourse in a Grade 11 English classroom at a lower-level English medium secondary school in India. Over the period of one academic year, the study explored the shift from L1 use for the purpose of translation to a more strategic use of language. Special emphasis was placed on the use of L1 by the teacher in assisting students' comprehension, engagement, and participation in English.

The research was based on the following questions:

1. How did the use of L1 by the teacher evolve in an academic year in an Indian secondary school English classroom?
2. What pedagogical functions did L1 perform within teacher discourse during classroom interaction?
3. What changes in learner involvement were observed following the shift from translation-based L1 use towards more facilitative use?

By examining the relationship between teacher discourse and multilingual classroom practice, the study argues that the pedagogical question surrounding L1 is not simply whether it is present or absent, but how teachers use it to facilitate engagement with English and support learners' participation in the language-learning process.

## **2. Materials and Methods**

### **2.1. Research Design**

Qualitative action research methodology was used to investigate how teacher discourse using the learners' first language (L1) could be changed from mainly translational activities into more facilitative L1 use in an English language classroom. Action research methodology was chosen because it allows the teacher to systematically investigate, reflect upon, and change their own classroom activities via a cycle of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting (Burns, 2010; Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988).

The study did not aim to increase or decrease the overall amount of L1 use in the classroom. Instead, the focus was on examining changes in the pedagogical function of L1 within teacher discourse. At the beginning of the study, L1 was often used to translate directly whenever students encountered difficulties in comprehending English. But through constant reflective practice, this became transformed by beginning with contextual clues, questions, examples, prompts, and minimal L1 before giving the direct translation.

Drawing upon sociocultural perspectives of learning, the study viewed language as a mediational tool through which learners develop understanding with appropriate support (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, 2000). Within this framework, the teacher reflected on existing classroom practices and gradually reshaped the use of L1 from a primarily translation-based practice towards a form of pedagogical scaffolding.

### **2.2. Context and Participants**

The study was conducted in a Grade 11 English class at a lower-level English medium secondary school in India. The class consisted of 30 students aged approximately 15–16 years who were studying English as a second language within the state-board educational system. The students' level of competence in English was at different levels, but for most of them, the confidence level of speaking in English was low.

There was diversity among the students in terms of languages too. Most of them spoke the same regional language, and a few spoke a different language as their native language but also spoke the language of the majority. English was used mainly in educational contexts, and there were limited opportunities to use English outside school. Therefore, the communication process in the classroom is often bilingual.

The teacher-researcher was the regular English teacher of the class and simultaneously conducted the action research. This dual role allowed the teacher to observe classroom interaction continuously and to reflect on the effects of changes in teacher discourse during normal teaching activities. The study therefore took place within the students' regular English lessons rather than through a separate intervention programme.

### **2.3. Action Research Process**

The action research was conducted throughout one academic year within the students' regular daily English classes. Rather than introducing a separate experimental programme, the research involved an ongoing process of reflection and modification of existing classroom practices.

Observations made at the start of the experiment showed that L1 was mainly used as a translation device. The teacher used L1 translations in cases when the learners had problems comprehending some English phrases to understand the meaning quickly and not lose pace with the class.

Over the academic year, the teacher slowly adapted classroom communication by altering the role of L1. While previously serving as a translator of input, the use of L1 was transformed into an attempt to first make sense of the information in L2 using context clues, examples, questions, and interaction with other members of the class. The transformation can be summarised as follows:

| Translation-Oriented Practice                | Facilitative L1 Use                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Immediate translation of unfamiliar language | Encouraging learners to infer meaning before receiving direct support |
| Teacher provides meanings directly           | Teacher guides learners through questions, examples and prompts       |
| L1 replaces English explanation              | L1 supports comprehension and continued English interaction           |
| Students wait for teacher explanations       | Students are encouraged to negotiate and formulate meaning            |
| L1 resolves communication difficulties       | L1 functions as temporary scaffolding for English use                 |

**Table 1: Transformation from Translation-Oriented to Facilitative L1 Use in Teacher Discourse**

This approach reflects multilingual perspectives that recognise learners complete linguistic resources as valuable tools for meaning making and learning (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014).

## 2.4. Data Collection

Multiple qualitative sources were used to examine changes in teacher discourse and learner participation. These included classroom observations, teacher reflective notes, lesson plans, selected recorded classroom interactions, written records of classroom dialogue, and informal conversations with students.

Classroom observations were conducted throughout the academic year as part of the teacher's regular teaching practice. Special attention was given to students who faced problems in comprehending and communication in English, and the teacher's reactions to those problems.

Reflective notes by the teacher regarding what happened in class, the teaching decisions made, student reactions, and changes and improvisations made in the teacher's own teaching practices were kept. Lesson plans were also examined to provide contextual information about classroom activities and the instructional purposes associated with interactions.

Some classroom interactions were recorded and subsequently written down for closer examination. The audio recordings offered samples of language teacher-student and student-student interactions in which the use of L1 took place for the purposes of translating, clarifying, eliciting, scaffolding, and steering the conversation back to English. Student feedback and conversations that were not recorded on audio became part of the reflections of the teacher. The use of multiple qualitative sources allowed classroom observations to be considered alongside teacher reflections, documented interactions, and learners' informal responses.

## 2.5. Data Analysis

The qualitative data were analysed thematically following the general procedures described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initial coding focused on the pedagogical functions of L1 within classroom discourse. Codes included direct translation, clarification, prompting, questioning, encouragement, scaffolding, classroom support, and redirection towards English.

The initial codes were subsequently compared across the different data sources and organised into broader themes representing changes in the role of L1 during the academic year. Attention was given to the distinction between translation-oriented and facilitative teacher discourse and to changes in learner participation associated with these practices.

The analysis therefore focused not simply on the frequency of L1 use but on how its function changed over time. Classroom dialogue excerpts were selected where they clearly illustrated the patterns identified during the

analysis. The findings were interpreted in relation to the study's research questions and relevant literature on L1 use, teacher discourse, scaffolding, and multilingual classroom interaction.

| Initial codes                                                     | Pedagogical function of L1                                                          | Emerging theme                                                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Direct translation of vocabulary or phrases                       | Provides immediate meaning when learners encounter unfamiliar language              | From translator to facilitator: transforming teacher discourse |
| Direct translation of grammatical or conceptual information       | Resolves immediate comprehension difficulties                                       | From translator to facilitator: transforming teacher discourse |
| Clarification in L1 after attempted L2 explanation                | Supports comprehension when English-only explanation is insufficient                | L as scaffolding for meaning making                            |
| Questioning before L1 support                                     | Encourages learners to infer meaning from context and examples                      | From translator to facilitator: transforming teacher discourse |
| Prompting learners to formulate ideas                             | Helps learners develop responses before expressing them in English                  | L1 as scaffolding for meaning making                           |
| Brief L1 acknowledgement of learner difficulty                    | Recognises learners' concerns and provides affective support                        | Developing learner confidence and participation                |
| Encouragement following L1-supported attempts                     | Reduces hesitation and encourages continued participation in English                | Developing learner confidence and participation                |
| Peer-supported use of L1                                          | Enables learners to clarify or formulate meaning collaboratively                    | L1 as scaffolding for meaning making                           |
| Redirection from L1 towards English                               | Uses L1 as temporary support while maintaining English as the target of interaction | Developing learner confidence and participation                |
| Reduced dependence on immediate teacher translation               | Encourages learners to attempt meaning making independently                         | Developing learner confidence and participation                |
| Repeated use of context, examples, and prompts before translation | Shifts teacher discourse from providing answers to facilitating learner engagement  | From translator to facilitator: transforming teacher discourse |

**Table 2: Coding framework and emergent themes**

## 2.6. Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles of classroom-based research were followed throughout the study. Students were informed that classroom observations and reflections were being conducted to examine and improve teaching practice. Confidentiality was maintained in the analysis and reporting of classroom experiences, and students were identified using numerical labels rather than names. The study focused on classroom processes and pedagogical practices rather than evaluating individual students' abilities or performance.

## 3. Results

Analysis of classroom observations, teacher reflective notes, lesson accounts, documented classroom interactions, and informal student feedback revealed a gradual change in the function of L1 within classroom discourse over the academic year. At the beginning of the study, L1 was frequently used as an immediate solution to problems of comprehension. As the teacher reflected on this practice, however, the sequence of classroom support gradually changed. Students were encouraged to make sense of things, form responses, and try English even before getting help in L1.

Three interrelated themes came out during analysis:

(1) the change in teacher talk from that of translator to facilitator, (2) the employment of L1 as scaffolding in making meaning, and (3) the change in the confidence level of learners.

### 3.1. From Translator to Facilitator

The only one that remained constant throughout the study was the attitude of the teacher towards students' problems. In the beginning of the school year, whenever there was some new vocabulary, grammar, or concept

presented, L1 explanations immediately followed. This practice allowed lessons to proceed efficiently, but classroom observations indicated that students could become dependent on the teacher providing the meaning.

As the action research progressed, the teacher increasingly delayed direct translation and first attempted to help students construct meaning through context, examples, questions, and prompts. The change therefore did not involve eliminating L1 from classroom interaction. Instead, the sequence and function of teacher support changed.

For example, during a speaking activity, a lower-ability student initially expressed difficulty speaking in English:

**Student 1:** Sir, He topic hi a harsa ka ti. English a sawi dan ka thiam lo.

(Sir, this topic seems difficult to me. I can't speak in English.)

**Teacher:** It is fine to think it's difficult. I don't mind you making mistakes. Give me a simple thing you did yesterday; maybe you played football?

**Student 1:** Yes... play football.

**Teacher:** That's it! Extend that into a sentence. With whom did you play?

**Student 1:** I played football with my friends.

**Teacher:** Right! We don't even have to translate. Now we can add a time element to your sentence.

Instead of translating what the student had said in his first attempt or even offering a full English answer, the teacher asked questions and offered cues that eventually led the learner to give an English answer. In this way, L1 did not become the immediate answer to the problem faced by the learner but gave him time to use existing knowledge and produce English.

A similar pattern occurred when students requested direct translation of unfamiliar vocabulary. In one reading activity, a student asked for the L1 meaning of exhausted:

**Student 2:** Sir, this word "exhausted"—does it mean 'chau' (getting tired)? Can you just tell me the Mizo meaning for the whole sentence?

**Teacher:** 'Chau' tih nen chuan in zawm na nei e, aw! (It is related to being tired, yes). But let's look at the character in the story. He ran three kilometres under the hot sun without stopping. How would your body feel after that?

**Student 2:** Very... very tired. Heavy body.

**Teacher:** Yes, you are more than tired when you're 'exhausted'. It means that you are absolutely drained. Now, can you make a sentence using "exhausted" about your sports practice yesterday?

**Student 2:** After football practice, I was exhausted.

The interaction illustrates the increasing use of contextual questioning before direct explanation. The student was able to infer meaning from the context and then use the new words in an English sentence.

### 3.2. L1 as Scaffolding for Meaning-Making

The analysis also showed that L1 continued to play an important role after the teacher began reducing immediate translation. Rather than disappearing from classroom interaction, L1 acquired additional functions, including meaning clarification, helping learners formulate ideas, acknowledging difficulties, and supporting movement back towards English. In several interactions, students used L1 when they lacked the English resources necessary to express an idea. The teacher did not always translate the complete message into English. Instead, L1 was sometimes used as an intermediate resource before the learner attempted an English formulation.

This pattern was evident during a picture-based activity involving two students:

**Student 3:** (To Student 4 in the regional language) Enga tinge heng ho hian kawngpui ah bawlhhlawh an paih le? (Tell him why these people are throwing garbage on the road.)

**Student 4:** Sir, he wants to know why people throw waste on the streets.

**Teacher:** Brilliant! How will we ask this question in English? Instead of saying "throw waste on street," a better way of saying it is "Why do people litter on the street?" Now repeat after me, Student 3.

**Student 3:** Why do people litter on the street?

**Teacher:** How are you going to respond to that question in English? You don't have to get it perfect; just try your best.

The previously established linguistic framework of the students allowed them to state their ideas, and then that was translated into English by the teacher.

L1 was also selectively used to show the students' immediate situation before directing them back to English. For instance, when a student tried to explain his inability to complete his homework in L1, the teacher gave him a quick response in his language before putting him on the right track of using English:

**Student 5:** Sir, Nizân-ah current a awm lo a, chuvangin homework ka ti thei lo a ni.

(Sir, there was no electricity last night, that's why I could not do my homework.)

**Teacher:** Current kan nei lo keini pawhin, ka hrethiam alawm

(We didn't have power either, I understand.) We should learn how to say that in English. How will you say "Nizân-ah current a awm lo a, chuvangin homework ka ti thei lo a ni" in English?

**Student 5:** Um... No light yesterday, so no homework?

**Teacher:** Nice idea. Repeat after me, "There was a power cut yesterday, so I couldn't finish my homework."

**Student 5:** There was a power cut yesterday, so I couldn't finish my homework.

The L1 contribution in this interaction was brief and supportive. It acknowledged the student's meaning while the teacher maintained the expectation that the interaction should return to English.

Another example occurred when a student requested the English equivalent of a regional-language word during a picture activity:

**Student 6:** Sir, bazar ah mipui an tam lutuk. "mipui" hi English in engtia sawi tur nge?

(Sir, there were many crowds in the market. How do we say 'mipui' in English?)

**Teacher:** Now observe the market. Do these people stand far apart from each other or very close to one another?

**Student 6:** They kept moving, but they are close to each other.

**Teacher:** Exactly, and that is called a crowd, or we could say the market was crowded. We can make a sentence using that.

**Student 6:** The local market was very crowded on Saturday morning.

Once again, the shift in the order of scaffolding was observed here, where the student's native language was validated, but the teacher focused on encouraging students to observe and describe before presenting the target vocabulary.

### 3.3. Learner Confidence and Participation

Theme three was about the transformation of learners' readiness to engage in English. The initial observations in class revealed that some learners did not feel willing to give an answer when they were unsure of the right form of English to use. In some cases, the learners seemed to wait for a translation or explanation before trying to answer.

With the facilitation of the teachers' discourse, students tried to build answers without first seeking help in the L1 language. They also appeared more willing to produce incomplete or imperfect English and subsequently accept correction or reformulation.

Informal conversations with students provided additional evidence of this change. One student reflected after a communicative activity:

**Student 7:** Sir, today I spoke three sentences without asking my friend for Mizo meaning.

**Teacher:** That is a huge win! How did it feel when you explained your thoughts directly in English?

**Student 7:** A little scary at first, but then I felt confident because I was understood.

The student's comment illustrates two aspects of the observed change. First, the learner recognised greater independence from immediate translation. Second, the learner associated the teacher's supportive response with increased confidence in attempting English.

The classroom observations also indicated that strategic L1 use did not result in the disappearance of English from classroom interaction. Instead, L1 was increasingly followed by an attempt to return to English. Students used L1 when they encountered difficulty, but the teacher's response increasingly encouraged them to continue the interaction in English rather than ending the task through translation.

Across the academic year, therefore, the evidence indicated a gradual change in the interactional pattern surrounding L1. The teacher moved from providing immediate translations towards using questions, contextual clues, examples, brief L1 clarification, and reformulation. Correspondingly, students were increasingly encouraged to attempt meaning-making and English production before receiving complete answers from the teacher.

## 4. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that the principal change during the action research was not a simple reduction in the amount of L1 used, but a transformation in its pedagogical function within teacher discourse. At the beginning of the academic year, L1 frequently operated as a direct translation mechanism through which comprehension difficulties were resolved quickly. Gradually, the use of L1 by the teacher became more selective and combined with techniques such as questions, context, prompts, and reformulations. This implies that the importance of L1 from a pedagogic point of view lies more in the way it was integrated in classroom interaction than in its actual existence.

### 4.1. From Translation to Facilitation

The transition from immediate translation to facilitative discourse supports the argument that the central question surrounding L1 use should concern its purpose and function. Cook (2001) argues that learners' first languages can be treated as linguistic resources rather than simply as sources of interference. Similarly, Macaro (2009) emphasises that teachers need to make informed decisions about when and why L1 is used rather than attempting to maximise or minimise it without regard to pedagogical purpose.

The present findings provide a classroom-based illustration of this distinction. During the early stage of the study, direct translation often resolved comprehension problems efficiently. However, reflection on this practice led the teacher to introduce an additional stage between the learner's difficulty and the provision of an answer. Students were first encouraged to infer meaning, respond to contextual clues, formulate partial answers, or interact with peers. L1 was then available when these forms of support were insufficient.

The move is in line with Walsh's (2011) claim that teacher talk serves an important function in the construction of learning opportunities. These findings imply that despite the unchanged nature of the linguistic content in teacher talk, the change in the interaction sequence creates learning opportunities. When the teacher offers the answer right away, there is closure of a meaning-making sequence. On the other hand, when the teacher asks questions, then the opportunities for the learner to construct meaning are provided.

The significance of this finding is therefore not that translation was eliminated. Rather, translation became one possible resource within a broader repertoire of pedagogical strategies. The teacher's reflective process transformed L1 from an automatic response to difficulty into a more deliberate form of support.

## **4.2. L1 as Mediation Scaffolding**

The second finding concerns the role of L1 as scaffolding. It is clear from the classroom discourse analysis that students resorted to their native language for forming meanings, which they did not possess the ability to form in English. Instead of blocking English use, this temporary resort to the native language could be accompanied by reformulation, prompting, or recasting and thus enabling students to proceed in English.

This research finding can be interpreted using a sociocultural approach to learning. According to Vygotsky (1978), learning is a socially mediated activity wherein learners can accomplish tasks better than their current ability permits. Lantolf (2000) similarly emphasises mediation in L2 development. From this perspective, the use of L1 can be understood as one of the resources available within the interaction through which learners move towards greater control of the target language.

The present study does not demonstrate that L1 directly caused language acquisition or improved proficiency. Instead, the evidence gathered in the classroom showed that L1 could act as an aid that helped learners maintain their participation in communicative practices despite their lack of English means. The significance of making this difference is that it prevents treating L1 as either good or bad in principle.

This evidence also supports the notion of multilingualism and translanguaging, where there are no clear-cut boundaries between various languages and individuals who speak more than one language are seen as people who have a greater linguistic repertoire, which they can use to create meaning (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014). Rather, they made use of their linguistic resources to express their thoughts. However, the teacher's role remained important in directing this multilingual activity towards English production.

## **4.3. Participation, Confidence, and Learner Agency**

The third finding relates to learner participation. Initially, there were some learners who would refuse to use the English language if they did not have confidence in the vocabulary and grammatical knowledge that they should possess. The act of translation might have inadvertently perpetuated this process since the teacher was going to provide the meaning. As the teacher began delaying direct translation and providing guided support instead, students were increasingly encouraged to attempt responses before receiving complete explanations.

Similar findings have been reported in recent secondary-school EFL research in Asia. Apriyanti et al. (2026), in a qualitative study of translanguaging in an Indonesian secondary school, found that the use of learners' multilingual resources supported comprehension, communication, classroom participation, and learner confidence. These findings are broadly consistent with the present study, in which students became increasingly willing to participate in English when L1 was available as a form of strategic support. However, the present study extends this perspective by focusing not simply on the presence or frequency of translanguaging, but on the teacher's gradual transformation of L1 use from immediate translation towards facilitative discourse.

This pattern is consistent with Auerbach's (1993) argument that excluding learners' first language is not necessarily a prerequisite for greater classroom participation, particularly where learners have limited opportunities to encounter English beyond the classroom. The present findings suggest that strategic L1 support may help create a psychologically supportive environment in which learners are willing to attempt English despite uncertainty.

The informal student feedback provides particularly useful evidence in this regard. The student's observation that speaking several sentences without requesting an L1 translation felt "a little scary at first" but subsequently increased confidence suggests that participation involved a gradual movement from dependence on translation towards greater willingness to take risks in English. Nevertheless, these kinds of observation can neither be seen as quantitative proof of the reduction of anxiety nor the increase in competence. The results indicate, however, that learner agency may be facilitated not by eliminating L1 from the classroom, but by modifying the kind of support that the teacher offers.

Since the use of L1 becomes automatic, the learners will rely on the teacher's intervention to make the meanings clear. When L1 is used strategically after opportunities for inference, questioning, and attempted production, learners may be encouraged to take greater responsibility for meaning making.

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#### **4.4. Implications for L1 Use in English Classrooms**

Together, the evidence seems to indicate that the dichotomy of "English-only" vs. "L1 use" is a simple one for multilingual secondary schools. The more pedagogically useful distinction is between different ways of using L1. Direct translation can be efficient and may be appropriate in circumstances, but it need not be the default response to every comprehension difficulty. The strategic use of L1 can instead be part of a larger process of contextualization, questions, learner attempt, clarification, and English use.

To teachers teaching in situations where learners do not get much exposure to English outside the classroom, this is an important difference. Rather than trying to keep learners from using L1, teachers might profit from considering the function of the language use they are engaging in. Is it helping learners understand? Encouraging learner participation? Or is it just giving an answer?

The action-research process itself is also significant. The change documented in this study did not result from introducing a fixed teaching method. It emerged through sustained observation and reflection on ordinary classroom interaction. This suggests that action research can provide teachers with a practical framework for examining the consequences of their own discourse choices and gradually modifying classroom practice.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted within the limits of the study. The research involved one Grade 11 classroom, one teacher-researcher, and a single academic year. Qualitative data gives an understanding of how classroom interaction has changed but does not prove any causality regarding language proficiency or that such a change would take place in other educational environments. Future research could include more classrooms, teachers and learner populations to see whether a similar shift takes place in teacher discourse related to the use of L1 in different multilingual environments.

Generally, the results of the study show that the usefulness of L1 for pedagogy depends not on the amount of L1 used in class, but on how L1 is incorporated in classroom interaction. The transition from translation to facilitation seen in this study shows how reflective change in teacher discourse transforms L1 from the automatic replacement of English to a useful instrument for working with English.

#### **5. Conclusion**

The present action research explored how the use of L1 by a teacher evolved over an academic year in a class of Grade 11 English students in India. It was observed through the course of this study that the pedagogic significance of the first language has more to do with the reasons behind its use rather than the frequency of its usage. Through a process of self-reflection on classroom discourse, the teacher made a shift from a purely translation-based use of L1 to a facilitative one.

From the findings, it becomes clear that L1 use strategically does not always limit the availability of opportunities for interacting with English. Indeed, if used selectively along with English, L1 can become a temporary tool that would allow learners to interact with language above their current proficiency level. Here,

L1 is not seen as an alternative to English but rather as a mediating tool that allows learners to take part in English classroom activities.

One important conclusion drawn from the analysis is the importance of teachers' understanding of multilingual English classrooms. Rather than viewing the use of L1 in a positive or negative light, the educator needs to consider the benefits that L1 brings to the process of learning. The shift that is observed in this research shows how reflective practice may assist educators in rethinking the discourse patterns and using the learners' linguistic repertoires in a more meaningful way.

The study was limited to one teacher and one Grade 11 class and therefore does not seek to make generalizable claims about L1 use in Indian secondary education. Nonetheless, it illustrates the possibilities of conducting action research in the classroom to explore and transform teacher talk in a multilingual context. Subsequent research that would involve more than one teacher, more than one class, and different contexts can determine whether changes in teacher talk have similar effects on learner engagement and participation.

The study also indicates that productive use of L1 in English classrooms is not an either-or phenomenon of English-only teaching and translation. A more useful distinction is between unreflective translation and purposeful facilitation. When teachers use L1 deliberately as a temporary scaffold while maintaining English as the principal medium of interaction, the learners' existing linguistic resources can become a means of supporting rather than restricting their engagement with English.

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