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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## Beyond Monolingual Strategies: Translanguaging as Dynamic Second Language Learning Strategies in Higher Education in Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

This study reconceptualises translanguaging as a dynamic extension of second language (L2) learning classroom strategies at universities in Pakistan. The current research challenges monolingual preferences in traditional language learning strategy structures. The study reveals that translanguaging can be a strategic resource in multilingual classrooms, where L1 and L2 are always problematic, and learners navigate a complex repertoire daily. Despite the scarcity of translanguaging in Second language classrooms at the university level, i.e., higher education, there is a need to explore how translanguaging can be a dynamic strategy for enhancing learners' language skills and cognitive engagement. The theoretical aspect of this study is based on Garcia's theory of translanguaging. While this study is contextualized in a Pakistani university, the research extracts classroom interactions, student narratives, and teacher perspectives to explore how learners strategically mobilise their full linguistic repertoires. For this purpose, the study employs interviews within a qualitative research framework. Findings direct that translanguaging acts as a metacognitive and socio-cognitive strategy that supports comprehension, identity negotiation, and participation. The study argues for an expanded conceptualisation of Language Learning Strategies (LLS) that incorporates multilingual practices, contributing to contemporary debates in applied linguistics and multilingual education

**KEYWORDS** Translanguaging, Language Learning Strategies, English as a Second Language Learning, Cognitive strategies, Meta-cognitive strategies, Socio-affective strategies

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### Introduction

English language teaching (ELT) in Pakistani higher education contexts is modeled by permanent tensions between institutional monolingual ideologies and learners' multilingual realities (Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022). Although English is officially promoted as the medium of instruction in universities (Rehman, 2002; Koonj, et al., 2026), classroom practices are followed by fluid movement across Urdu, Sindhi, and English. This reflects the linguistic repertoire of both teachers and students (Anand, 2019). This imbalance between pedagogical policy and practical implementation often results in an educational gap where students are anticipated to be mobilised within English-only frameworks that do not reflect their actual communicative and cognitive processes.

Current empirical studies have widely questioned monolingual norms in second language learning by foreground processing in translanguaging as a legitimate

pedagogical and cognitive supply. Translanguaging, as conceptualised by García, focuses on the dynamic use of an incorporated linguistic collection rather than the separation of named languages (García & Wei, 2015; García, 2020). In Pakistani higher education contexts, translanguaging has been shown to create an interactional environment that enhances meaning-making, participation, and comprehension in multilingual classrooms (Panezai et al., 2022; Atta, 2024).

Parallel to this, second language learning strategies (LLS), traditionally theorised by Oxford (1990, 2016), have presented a systematic understanding of cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective strategies utilized by learners. However, recent studies argue that these frameworks remain largely grounded in monolingual assumptions that overlook the strategic role of L1 and multilingual practices in learning processes (Oxford, 2018; Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). As a result, there is a growing need to reconceptualise LLS in ways that incorporate translanguaging as a dynamic and context-sensitive strategy.

Teachers need to improve language learning outcomes by adapting their pedagogical practices and incorporating effective Language Learning Strategies (LLS) that address the diverse linguistic and educational needs of learners (Mirza et al., 2021). Within this context, translanguaging has emerged as a significant pedagogical practice in Pakistani higher education classrooms, where multilingual learners use their linguistic resources to scaffold understanding, negotiate academic identity, and engage with complex disciplinary knowledge. Studies conducted in similar contexts indicate that translanguaging enhances learner participation and reduces cognitive barriers in English-Medium Instruction (EMI) settings (Mushtaq, 2023; Saleem et al., 2023). Despite its increasing presence and pedagogical value in multilingual classrooms, the potential of translanguaging as a formal second language learning strategy remains under-theorised.

Therefore, this study positions translanguaging not only as a communicative practice but as a strategic component of second language learning. It investigates how translanguaging functions within LLS frameworks in Pakistani higher education and how it can extend existing theoretical models in applied linguistics. Based on it, the literature review is disclosed in the following sections.

### **Language Learning Strategies and Monolingual Foundations**

Language learning strategies (LLS) have long been actively involved in learners' effective engagement in second language acquisition. The concept started with good learners and bad learners in ESL, and transformed into language learning strategies (LLS) (Cohen, 2011; Oxford, 1990).

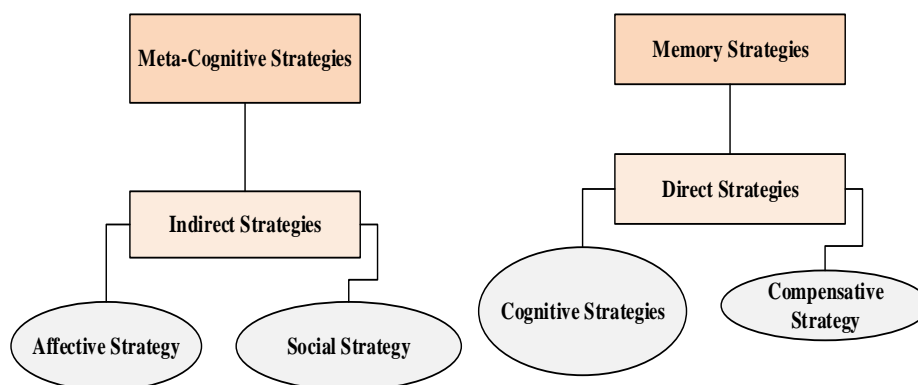


Figure 1 Language Learning Strategies Adopted from Oxford (1990)

The influential taxonomy developed by Oxford categorises strategies into cognitive, metacognitive, memory, compensation, and socio-affective dimensions, providing a structured model for learner autonomy and strategic learning (Oxford, 1990; Oxford, 2016).

However, recent critiques suggest that traditional LLS frameworks are indirectly monolingual. It treats L1 use as a mandatory rather than constitutive learning resource. This limitation restricts the ability of LLS theory to fully account for multilingual learning certainties, particularly in Global South contexts where multiple languages are actively mobilised in academic learning processes (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021).

### Translanguaging as a Multilingual Theory of Second Language Learning

Translanguaging, developed by García, challenges the notion of bounded languages and instead conceptualises language use as an integrated and dynamic repertoire (García, O., & Seltzer, K., 2016). From this perspective, multilingual learners draw on all available linguistic resources to construct meaning, engage in learning, and express identity.

Empirical studies in higher education contexts demonstrate that translanguaging facilitates deeper comprehension, scaffolds academic discourse, and promotes epistemic access in EMI environments (Gu, M. M., Ou, A. W., & Lee, C. K. J., 2026). For example, research in Pakistani universities shows that translanguaging creates interactional spaces that enhance understanding and classroom participation (Panzai et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2023). Similarly, recent studies report that both teachers and students perceive translanguaging as improving clarity and engagement in multilingual classrooms (Atta, 2024).

### Translanguaging and Language Learning Strategies

An emerging strand of research links translanguaging with second language acquisition and learning strategy use. Studies indicate that strategic L1 use enhances metalinguistic awareness, reduces cognitive overload, and improves comprehension in L2 learning contexts (Cenoz & Gorter, 2021). In addition, translanguaging has been

associated with increased learner confidence, reduced anxiety, and improved participation in classroom discourse (Mushtaq, 2023).

Despite these findings, translanguaging has not yet been systematically incorporated into established LLS frameworks (Leung, C., & Valdés, G., 2019). Most strategy-based models continue to operate within monolingual paradigms, thereby overlooking the fluid multilingual practices that characterise real classroom environments.

### **Multilingual Higher Education in Pakistan**

In Pakistan, English functions as the dominant medium of instruction in higher education, particularly in professional and scientific disciplines (Khan, H. I., 2013). However, students often come from linguistically diverse backgrounds and rely on Urdu, Sindhi, and regional languages for cognitive processing and academic understanding (Mahboob, A., 2017). Research shows that translanguaging is a common and functional practice in Pakistani EMI classrooms, enabling learners to bridge gaps in comprehension and participation (Panzai et al., 2022; Saleem et al., 2023).

Nevertheless, institutional policies often continue to promote English-only ideologies, framing L1 use as pedagogically inappropriate. This creates tension between policy expectations and classroom realities, highlighting the need for more inclusive and context-sensitive theoretical frameworks (Yang, J., & Jang, I. C., 2022).

### **Material and Methods**

#### **Research Design**

The study adopts a qualitative interpretivist research design. Following the semi-structured interview. The study is conducted in multilingual settings, i.e., multilingual university classrooms. An interpretivist approach is appropriate because the study helps in exploring participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and meaning-making practices in naturally occurring educational contexts.

The research falls in the applied linguistics discipline, drawing on a constructivist epistemology approach, where knowledge is considered as socially constructed through interaction and discourse. This design enables an in-depth exploration of how learners and teachers negotiate language use and strategically mobilise linguistic resources in English-medium instruction (EMI) settings.

#### **Sampling**

A purposive sampling strategy is employed to select participants who could provide rich data in a multilingual classroom setting. Total 25 participants were involved in semi-structured interviews. They were enrolled in graduate and postgraduate programs and in English-medium courses. The interviews were also conducted by 10 university teachers, having at least 2 to 3 years of teaching experience. All participants were selected based on three selected criteria of this study. First, experience in multilingual classrooms. Second is their regular engagement in EMI. Third is participants' willingness to participate in interviews.

#### **Data Analysis Technique**

The data were analysed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2023). This approach allows for systematic identification, analysis, and interpretation of patterns within qualitative data.

The analysis follows these steps:

1. **Familiarisation:** it is made with the data through repeated reading
2. **Initial coding:** It is the coding of meaningful units
3. **Generation of themes:** It is related to translanguaging practices
4. **Reviewing and refining themes:** The data is reviewed again and again for themes and data coding in it.
5. **Defining and naming themes:** Themes are named according to the research questions and analysis
6. **Producing the final narrative:** It involves the interpretation of the data and coding findings.

The analysis focused on detecting how translanguaging directs: a cognitive strategy, a meta-cognitive strategy, and a socio-cognitive strategy, including meaning making, comprehension learning, planning, monitoring learning, participation, and confidence

### **Ethical Consideration**

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review body (IRB/ORIC). Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their rights, including the right to voluntary participation and the option to withdraw at any time.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by using pseudonyms, securely storing data, and restricting access to research materials.

Informed consent was obtained before data collection, and all procedures adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants

### **Results and Discussion**

This section reveals the findings from the thematic analysis of semi-structured interviews. Following the framework of Braun and Clarke (2023), the data were coded inductively and organised into three overarching themes aligned with the research questions: (1) translanguaging as a cognitive strategy, (2) translanguaging as a metacognitive strategy, and (3) translanguaging as a socio-affective strategy.

#### ***Theme 1: Translanguaging as Cognitive Strategy***

The findings indicate that translanguaging plays a central role in facilitating comprehension and meaning-making in English language teaching classrooms. Participants reported frequently shifting between English, Urdu, and Sindhi to process complex academic content. This practice enabled them to bridge gaps in understanding and engage more deeply with subject matter.

For instance, one student noted:

*“When the teacher delivers a lecture, and it is difficult, I first understand it in Urdu in my mind, then I try to explain it in English.”*

Such responses suggest that translanguaging functions as a cognitive scaffolding mechanism. It allows learners to reduce processing burden and construct meaning through familiar linguistic resources in their local languages. The statement also highlights: Rather than hindering L2 acquisition, the use of L1 supports conceptual clarity and enhances comprehension. This finding is undergoing the theoretical aspect of this study. Garcia’s conceptualisation of translanguaging as dynamic bilingualism, where bilinguals are not viewed as using two separate linguistic systems but as drawing flexibly from a unitary linguistic repertoire (García, 2009; García & Wei, 2014). From this viewpoint, L1 is not a barrier to L2 acquisition.

These findings challenge traditional assumptions and the teaching system in second language pedagogy that views L1 use as interference. Instead, they position translanguaging as an integral part of cognitive strategy use in multilingual learning environments.

### ***Theme 2: Translanguaging as Meta-cognitive Strategy***

Beyond immediate comprehension, translanguaging was also found to support metacognitive regulation of learning. Participants described using multiple languages to plan, monitor, and evaluate their learning processes.

Students reported strategies such as mentally translating difficult concepts before responding, planning answers in L1, and producing them in L2, and reflecting on their language use during classroom participation

A participant explained:

*“Before speaking in class, I think in Sindhi or Urdu, organise my ideas, and then speak in English.”*

This indicates that translanguaging facilitates strategic planning and self-regulation, aligning with metacognitive dimensions of LLS. Learners are not passively switching languages; rather, they are actively managing their linguistic resources to optimise performance.

Such findings extend existing LLS frameworks by demonstrating that multilingual practices are embedded within metacognitive strategy use, rather than external to it.

### ***Theme 3: Translanguaging as Socio-affective Strategy***

The data further reveal that translanguaging contributes significantly to the socio-affective dimensions of learning, particularly by reducing anxiety and enhancing participation. Many students expressed that strict English-only environments create hesitation and fear of making mistakes.

In contrast, translanguaging allowed them to: participate more confidently in discussions, seek clarification from peers, and express complex ideas without linguistic restriction.

One student said:

*“If I am allowed to mix languages, I feel more confident to speak. Otherwise, I remain silent.”*

Teachers also acknowledged that translanguaging fosters a more inclusive classroom environment. It enables learners with varying proficiency levels to engage meaningfully, thereby promoting collaborative learning.

These findings highlight translanguaging as a socio-affective that supports emotional engagement, confidence, and classroom interaction.

### **Teachers’ Perspective on Translanguaging.**

Teachers’ responses during an interview reflected a nuanced understanding of translanguaging practices. While some initially believed it was a deviation from formal English learning, many recognised its pedagogical value in facilitating comprehension and engagement.

A teacher noted:

*“Sometimes, when I explain in Urdu or Sindhi, students understand better. Then they can respond in English.”*

However, concerns were also raised regarding over-reliance on L1, indicating a tension between institutional expectations and classroom realities. This reflects the broader influence of monolingual ideologies in higher education policy.

### **Discussion**

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the role of translanguaging as a dynamic second language learning strategy in multilingual higher education contexts. By situating translanguaging within the framework of LLS, the study contributes to a reconceptualisation of strategic language learning beyond monolingual assumptions.

Other than that, while highlighting the teachers’ responsibilities and their responses are also points of discussion. Teachers’ responses during the interviews showed a layered and sometimes shifting understanding of translanguaging. At first, a few teachers managed to view it as something that moves away from “proper” English instruction, almost as if using more than one language in the classroom might weaken students’ accuracy. However, as the discussion unfolded, many of them began to see translanguaging in a more positive light, especially in terms of helping students understand complex ideas, stay engaged, and participate more confidently in class.

Still, even within this more accepting view, there was a noticeable preference for native like English, particularly when it came to accent, fluency, and pronunciation. Success in English learning was often quietly measured against how close students sounded to a native speaker. This reflects how deeply the idea of “standard” or “native” English is still embedded in classroom thinking, even when teachers are trying to be more flexible in their practice.

At the same time, some comments hinted at a more subtle concern: that using the first language might suggest weaker English ability. In a few cases, students' dependence on their first language (L1) was interpreted less as a learning strategy and more as a limitation. This kind of thinking can unintentionally position multilingual learners in a "deficit" frame, where their linguistic resources are seen as a problem rather than a strength.

On the other hand, many teachers also acknowledged the practical benefits of translanguaging. They noted that it creates space for students to express themselves more freely, understand difficult concepts more easily, and reduce the anxiety that often comes with learning in a strict English-only environment. In this way, translanguaging was seen as opening opportunities for students who might otherwise remain silent or struggle to keep up.

Overall, the interviews reveal a kind of tension: while there is growing appreciation for translanguaging as a supportive classroom practice, traditional beliefs about native-like English and assumptions about "good" language learners are still present beneath the surface.

### ***Reframing Language Learning Strategies In Multilingual Context***

Traditional language learning strategy models, particularly those developed earlier, conceptualise strategies as discrete cognitive and behavioural processes. However, the present findings demonstrate that these processes are inherently multilingual in practice.

Translanguaging emerges as a cross-cutting strategy that operates simultaneously across cognitive, metacognitive, and socio-affective domains. This suggests that LLS frameworks need to be expanded to account for the fluid and integrated nature of multilingual learning.

### ***Translanguaging as Meaning-making Resource***

Consistent with the translanguaging theory proposed by Ofelia García, the study confirms that learners draw on their full linguistic repertoires to construct meaning. The use of Urdu and Sindhi alongside English enables deeper conceptual understanding and supports academic engagement.

This challenges deficit perspectives that frame L1 use as a barrier to L2 learning. Instead, translanguaging should be viewed as a resource for epistemic access, particularly in EMI contexts where linguistic demands are high.

### ***Strategic Self-Regulation and Agency***

The findings also highlight the role of translanguaging in fostering learner agency and self-regulation. By strategically managing their linguistic resources, learners actively control their learning processes. This aligns with contemporary perspectives on self-regulated learning and strategic competence in language acquisition.

### ***Implications For Higher Education in Pakistan***

In the Pakistani context, where English-medium instruction dominates, the findings underscore the need for pedagogical flexibility. Rigid English-only policies

may limit participation and hinder learning, particularly for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Integrating translanguaging into classroom practices can:

- enhance comprehension and academic performance
- promote inclusive and participatory learning environments
- bridge the gap between policy and classroom realities

### **Conclusion**

Overall, the study demonstrates that translanguaging is not merely a communicative practice but a dynamic, strategic, and multidimensional component of second language learning. Recognising its role within LLS frameworks offers a more accurate and inclusive understanding of how learners navigate multilingual educational contexts.

This study contributes to applied linguistics by extending language learning strategies (LLS) frameworks to include multilingual strategies, positioning translanguaging as a key strategic resource rather than a peripheral practice, and bridging the gap between translanguaging theory and language learning strategy research.

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