

# A Study on the Role of First Language in Acquiring English-Speaking Skills in a Bilingual Education System



A Dissertation submitted to the Department of English of Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Masters of Arts in English.

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# COMPLETION CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “A Study on the Role of First Language in Acquiring English-Speaking Skills in a Bilingual Education System” has been completed under the supervision of Sir Rituranjan Gogoi in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts in English at Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya, for the academic session 2023–2025.

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Sir Rituranjan Gogoi

(Signature of Head of Department)

Dr. Madhulina Choudhury

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENT**

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to our respected Head of Department, Dr. Madhulina Choudhury, guide, Sir Rituranjan Gogoi and Dr. Bibha Devi, for their constant support, insightful feedback, and valuable suggestions that guided this research from inception to completion. We are also thankful to the teachers and students of Rupnagar Nimna Buniyadi School, for their active participation and cooperation. Lastly, we extend our sincere thanks to our families and peers for their encouragement throughout this project.

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## **GUIDE CERTIFICATE**

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled “A Study on the Role of First Language in Acquiring English-Speaking Skills in a Bilingual Education System”, submitted by the Group-F - Aditi Kashyap (ENG 10/23), Ashna Yasmin (ENG 32/23), Barasha Borah (ENG 109/23), Bishal Jyoti Barman (ENG 43/23), Hainashree Hazowary (ENG 50/23), Khushbu Sultana (ENG 53/23), is the result of their own research carried on under my supervision in the Department of English, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya. The students have filled all the requirements for the award of the degree of Masters of English.

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Place:

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## **List of Abbreviations**

- NEP: National Education Policy
- L1: First Language
- L2: Second Language
- ELT: English Language Teaching
- ESP: English for Specific Purposes
- NLP: Needs-Based Language Pedagogy

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## **ABSTRACT**

This dissertation explores how a student's first language—Assamese in this case—shapes the way they learn to speak English in a bilingual classroom setting. In many parts of India, including Assam, students grow up using their mother tongue in everyday life, while English is introduced as a second language mostly in school. This creates an interesting situation where learners are constantly switching between two languages something that can help or hinder their progress, especially in speaking English. Our research was carried out at Rupnagar Nimna Buniyadi School in Guwahati, where we spent time with Class V students and their English teachers. Through a series of carefully designed classroom activities like self-introductions, storytelling, word games and object identification we observed how students use Assamese while trying to speak in English. We also spoke to their teachers and observed their teaching styles. What we found was that most students used their first language as a kind of support system something that helped them feel more confident or remember words but at the same time, this often led to grammatical errors or hesitation while speaking English.

To help address these issues, we designed and conducted five simple and engaging classroom sessions that focused on improving speaking skills without ignoring the students' L1. These classes encouraged students to use English in everyday contexts while also allowing them to fall back on Assamese when they needed clarity or comfort. The study draws on ideas from language education theorists like Hutchinson and Waters, Stephen Krashen, and David Nunan, who all highlight the importance of making learning meaningful and accessible. More importantly, this research supports the principles of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which promotes multilingual learning and encourages the use of the mother tongue in early education.

In the end, this project shows that when teachers understand how to use the first language in the right way, it can actually make students more confident and capable English speakers. It's not about replacing English it's about building a bridge to it.

## **Introduction**

Language is not just a subject in school it is the very medium through which learning happens, thoughts are shaped, and identities are expressed. In a multilingual country like India, where students often grow up speaking one language at home and are expected to learn and use another in school, this relationship becomes even more complex. English, often taught as a second or foreign language, holds immense academic and social value, but for many learners, especially in regional-medium schools, acquiring spoken English skills can feel intimidating, distant, and unnatural.

This study emerges from this very context: the bilingual classrooms of Assam, where students speak Assamese as their mother tongue but are taught English as part of the curriculum. Among the four core language skills listening, speaking, reading and writing speaking remains the least supported, despite being the most visible marker of communicative competence. Unlike reading or writing, speaking demands instant thinking, confidence, and fluency, all of which are shaped by the learner's first language (L1) and their level of comfort in switching between linguistic systems.

What sparked this research was a simple classroom observation: students who were otherwise bright and expressive in Assamese often fell silent or hesitant when asked to speak in English. Some translated directly from Assamese, some paused frequently, and others spoke with visible discomfort. These small yet significant signs revealed a larger need to understand the role that a learner's first language plays in developing their English-speaking abilities.

This dissertation, therefore, focuses on how the first language (Assamese) supports or interferes with the acquisition of English-speaking skills in a bilingual education system. Grounded in a needs-based analysis and strengthened by real classroom interventions, the research moves beyond theory and into practice. It is built around the belief that learners' existing linguistic resources like their mother tongue should be embraced, not ignored, especially in the process of learning a new language.

Through direct engagement with Class V students and teachers at Rupnagar Nimna Buniyadi School, this study explores the challenges, strategies, and opportunities involved in teaching spoken English in an Assamese-medium environment. Drawing on influential language



learning theories and the principles of the National Education Policy, 2020 (Government of India, *NEP* 2020), it argues for a more balanced, inclusive, and context-sensitive approach to English Language Teaching (ELT).

This introduction is not just to a paper, but to a very real and ongoing conversation in Indian classrooms: How do we teach English without disconnecting students from who they are and the language they know best? This research is a small step toward answering that question with empathy, insight, and practical solutions.

## Project Objectives

- To design learner-centred speaking activities.  
Based on the insights from the needs analysis, the project aimed to create activities that matched the students' actual levels, interests, and language gaps particularly focusing on confidence, fluency, and vocabulary use.
- To implement a short-term intervention using bilingual support  
Conduct five targeted classes where Assamese is used strategically as a scaffold not as a substitute for English, but as a stepping stone toward it.
- To observe changes in students' spoken English performance  
Evaluate how students' participation, sentence formation, vocabulary usage, and willingness to speak in English change after the intervention.
- To assess the role of L1 in facilitating English speaking  
Reflect on how the first language helped learners during the activities.
- To measure the impact of interactive methods on speaking skills  
Track how students responded to non-traditional activities like storytelling, word games, and peer role-plays both in terms of enjoyment and learning outcomes.
- To collect feedback from teachers on the intervention approach  
Understand whether teachers found the bilingual and activity-based approach practical, and whether they are open to using such methods in their own teaching.
- To identify what kind of teacher training and resources are needed  
Based on classroom experiences, recommend the kind of materials or professional support that teachers in bilingual schools might benefit from.
- To demonstrate that L1-informed pedagogy aligns with NEP 2020  
Show that using the first language thoughtfully in English teaching doesn't violate but supports national policy goals like multilingualism, inclusion, and joyful learning.

## **Literature Review**

Language acquisition theories have long acknowledged the complex role of a learner's first language (L1) in the process of learning a second language (L2), especially English. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) distinguished between target needs (what the learner needs to do in the target language) and learning needs (what the learner needs to do to learn). Their model supports needs-based curriculum planning. David Nunan (1988) advocated for a learner centred curriculum, emphasizing the importance of tailoring learning experiences to student backgrounds, motivations, and abilities. Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) highlights the role of comprehensible input and proposes that L2 acquisition happens best when learners are exposed to language slightly above their current level. L1 can help bridge understanding and reduce anxiety (affective filter). These theories together suggest that instead of suppressing the first language, it can be effectively used as a scaffold to support L2 learning particularly speaking, which requires real-time processing, confidence, and practice.

## Methodology

### 1. Research Design

This study followed a qualitative, project-based action research design, grounded in classroom realities and focused on improving specific learning outcomes in this case, English-speaking skills. The approach was chosen because of its flexibility and its emphasis on learning through doing, reflection, and iterative improvement. Instead of beginning with fixed assumptions, the research evolved from direct classroom observations and learner needs. Based on these findings, five sessions were conducted as an intervention, using learner-friendly, L1-supported, and activity-based English speaking tasks.

Action research, as a methodology, made it possible to position the teacher as researcher, and the classroom as a dynamic space of inquiry. The aim was not only to study learners but to help them, and in doing so, learn how their first language (L1) could serve as a bridge rather than a barrier to English-speaking confidence.

### 2. Participants

The participants in this study were 28 students from Class V and 4 English language teachers from Rupnagar Nimna Buniyadi School, an Assamese-medium government primary school in Guwahati, Assam. The students were aged between 10 and 12 years, with varying levels of English proficiency. Most students came from Assamese-speaking households, and English was primarily encountered in school textbooks. Their speaking experience in English outside the classroom was minimal, which made them ideal participants for exploring the role of L1 in English language learning. The teachers had diverse teaching experiences ranging from 5 to 20 years. None of them had formal training in bilingual or multilingual teaching methods, but all were fluent in both Assamese and English.

### 3. Instruments

To collect relevant data and insights for the study, the following tools and materials used:

#### i. Student Activities:

- a. Self-introduction prompts
- b. Visual storytelling (using “The Thirsty Crow”)
- c. Object identification cards
- d. Word games: word chains and shuffled word cards

These helped assess fluency, vocabulary, and confidence levels.

## ii. Teacher Questionnaire:

- A simple open-ended questionnaire with 5 key questions to understand teachers' views on L1 use and speaking challenges among students.

## iii. Observation Checklist:

- Used to record real-time behaviors such as language switching, hesitations, peer support, and error patterns.

## iv. Audio/Video Recording:

- Smartphones were used with teacher permission to capture class interactions and student responses for review and analysis.

## 4. Procedures

The study was conducted in two main phases:

### a. Phase 1: Needs Analysis

Students took part in low-pressure, interactive activities designed to observe how they responded to English-speaking tasks with and without L1 support. Teachers were interviewed informally and asked to complete questionnaires about their students' speaking difficulties and their own teaching strategies. Observations were made across different periods to ensure a broader understanding of classroom patterns.

### b. Phase 2: Teaching Intervention (5 Classes)

Based on the needs identified in Phase 1, five classes were designed using a bilingual, activity-based approach. Each class had a focused goal: building confidence, improving vocabulary, and encouraging sentence formation. Activities included storytelling, role-play, vocabulary games, and guided speaking using visuals and prompts. Assamese (L1) was used selectively to explain instructions or scaffold complex content. The entire process from needs analysis to intervention was conducted over a span of three weeks.

## 5. Limitations

While the project provided valuable insights, it was not without its limitations:

**Limited sample size:** With only 28 students and one school involved, the findings cannot be generalized to all bilingual classrooms. **Time constraints:** Five classes offered a short window to observe deeper language development. A longer intervention would have allowed for clearer progress tracking. **Environmental factors:** Since students come from varying home backgrounds, their exposure to English outside school differed, which may have affected their performance. **Observer effect:** Some students may have altered their

natural behaviour due to the presence of the researcher or the camera, especially during early sessions. Teacher training gap: Teachers were open to using bilingual strategies but lacked prior experience or resources, which could have influenced the effectiveness of follow-up teaching. Despite these limitations, the study offers practical insights and a foundation for future research into bilingual classroom strategies and L1-informed English instruction.

#### 6. Ethical Considerations

All necessary permissions were obtained from the school principal and English faculty before beginning the study. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed (in age-appropriate language) that the activities were part of a language improvement initiative, not an exam. Names of participants were kept anonymous in documentation. Care was taken to ensure that no student felt pressured, embarrassed, or excluded. Mistakes were treated as natural steps in the learning process, and classroom culture was kept supportive and error-tolerant. Additionally, any photographs or recordings used for observation were stored securely and not shared publicly without permission.

## Language Needs Analysis

A detailed needs analysis was conducted to assess both learner challenges and teaching strategies currently used in the classroom.

### 1. Activities Conducted:

- **Self-Introduction:** Students introduced themselves in both Assamese and English. The goal was to assess fluency, vocabulary, and sentence construction. Many students could express themselves confidently in Assamese but showed hesitation, incomplete sentences, or errors in English.
- **Storytelling:** The story of The Thirsty Crow was narrated using picture prompts. Students were familiar with the story in Assamese. When asked to retell it in English, they often translated directly from L1 or used sentence fragments.
- **Object Identification:** Everyday classroom objects were shown (chalk, bottle, duster, notebook, mobile phone, chair and pen), and students were asked to name them in both languages. Most could identify the items in Assamese, but hesitated or code-switched while trying to recall English terms.
- **Teacher Questionnaire:** Teachers responded to open-ended questions about student difficulties and their use of L1 in the classroom. Most teachers admitted they use Assamese to explain difficult English concepts but lacked formal strategies to do so effectively.
- **Observation:** Informal class observation highlighted students' preference for peer discussion in Assamese and limited spontaneous English use.

### 2. Findings from Needs Analysis:

- Students rely heavily on Assamese to process and recall English vocabulary.
- Code-switching is frequent and mostly uncontrolled.
- Teachers use L1 as a support tool but without structured methodology.
- Confidence in speaking English is low, particularly among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

## Implementations and Results

Based on the findings of the needs analysis, we designed and executed five focused language teaching sessions targeting the key problem areas: fluency, vocabulary, sentence formation, and confidence in speaking English.

### 1. Description of Activities

#### Class 1: Confidence-Building Through Self-Introduction

In this activity, we conducted a session focused on teaching students how to introduce themselves effectively. The session began with Bishal introducing himself in Assamese:

"নমস্কাৰ, মোৰ নাম শ্ৰী বিশাল জ্যোতি বৰ্মন, মই মহাপুৰুষ শ্ৰীমন্ত শংকৰদেৱ বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ত পঢ়ি আছো, মোৰ ঘৰ বাকসা জিলাৰ মুছলপুৰত, মই গান গাই ভাল পাওঁ।"

Followed by Ashna introducing herself in English:

"Hello everyone, My Name is Ashna Yasmin. I live in Guwahati. I am studying at Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Vishwavidyalaya and I like listening to music and watching K-drama ."

They then engaged the students by asking which language they were more comfortable with, how many understood English, and how many did not. It was observed that while some students were comfortable with English, others faced difficulties in understanding it, as their mother tongue was Assamese and other and they took more time to comprehend English. To address this, Bishal explained the key elements of giving a proper introduction, emphasizing structure and clarity. Ashna followed by teaching the students how to introduce themselves in English. To aid understanding, they distributed handouts containing a short sample introduction, giving one copy to each bench. The students were then asked to fill it and try reading it out loud.

Ashna then walked the students through the basics of self-introduction in English. A few students were invited to introduce themselves first in Assamese. Ashna then guided them on how to translate and present their introductions in English, correcting their vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence structure. The introductions were repeated multiple times to help the students improve in these areas through practice and reinforcement.

On the following day, the introduction activity was briefly revised. Ashna and Bishal asked the students if they remembered what was taught previously. Then, one by one, students were invited to the front to introduce themselves in English. This time, noticeable improvements were observed. A larger number of students were able to introduce themselves confidently, with better sentence structure and clearer pronunciation compared to the previous day.



## Class 2: Storytelling in English with Visual Aids

In this activity we began with a warm introduction: “Good morning everyone! Today we will learn an interesting and smart story.” Barsha started by narrating the story in Assamese. The students were excited and listened attentively. Since Assamese is their first language, they were more comfortable and could understand the story better. When Barsha asked them questions in Assamese, they responded quickly and confidently, showing high engagement. After that, Hainashree explained the same story, ‘The Thirsty Crow’, in English. The students were curious and interested but found some English words like pot, thirsty, and beak difficult to understand. Hainashree supported them by writing these words on the blackboard, explaining their meanings, and encouraging the children to read them aloud. At the end of the session, students were asked some simple questions to check comprehension and promote communication:

- What was the crow looking for on the hot day?
- What did the crow find?
- Was the crow smart? What did he do?

This bilingual storytelling approach helped students feel more involved. Listening to the story in Assamese made them more interactive, while the English version helped them learn new vocabulary and build confidence in speaking. The activity not only improved their language skills but also encouraged active participation. We also provided the students with puzzled scrapes of the story in picture format and asked them to arrange it in sequence in order to keep them engaged, making the class interesting for them.

## Class 3: Vocabulary Through Object Identification

This activity conducted by Aditi helped in pronunciations, vocabulary building and simple sentence construction. This activity is not only an interactive one but is visual too. It aims to help students learn to name and describe familiar classroom objects in English, while gradually moving from L1 support to L2 independence.

**Activity Setup:** For this activity, real classroom objects and a few props were gathered and placed at the front of the class. The objects included: a water bottle, a chair, a pen, a skeleton model (often found in science corners), a duster, a piece of chalk, a notebook, a mobile phone (used by the teacher as a prop). Each item was held up or passed around the room for the students to touch and observe. For visual learners, this tactile element helped reinforce vocabulary meaningfully.

**Step-by-Step Procedure:**

1. Introduction in L1 (Assamese): Aditi first asked students to name the objects in Assamese to establish familiarity and comfort. Most students responded eagerly.

2. Introducing English Vocabulary: One by one, Aditi introduced the English names of each object, repeating them clearly and using them in short phrases. For example:

- “This is a water bottle.”
- “A pen is used to write.”
- “This is a skeleton—it shows bones.”

3. Interactive Circle Time: Students sat or stood in a circle. Each student picked up or was handed one object and had to say its name in English. Later, they had to say a sentence using it. For example:

- “This is a chair. I sit on a chair.”
- “This is a mobile phone. We talk on a mobile phone.”

Sample Student Responses (Realistic Examples):

- “This is a notebook. I write homework.”
- “This is chalk. Teacher writes in blackboard.”
- “Mobile phone is for call.”
- “This pen colour is blue.”
- “Skeleton is... for science!” (with a smile)
- “Chair... we sit.”

These responses showed a mix of correct attempts, L1-influenced structure, and joyful trial-and-error learning—which was exactly the goal.

Then while pronouncing the objects they initially got “water bottle” as “waatar bottol”, “chair” as “sair”, “pen” as “pain”, “skeleton” as “sekeleton”, “duster” as “daaster”, “chalk” as “sok”, “notebook” as “nootbook” or “mobile phone” as “mubile phoon”. Gradually when Aditi repeatedly asked them to utter the correct pronunciation, the students were able to grasp at least a bit of it.

Reflections & Observations:

- Students were visually engaged and actively participating.
- Many enjoyed handling the objects—they were less afraid to speak when they had something in their hands.
- Errors like missing articles (“This is pen”) or incorrect verbs (“I sit in chair”) were common but reduced with modeling.

- Shy students were more willing to try speaking when they saw their peers attempt first.

This activity wasn't just about learning new words. It gave students a reason to speak, to describe, explain, and connect English to their everyday world. By anchoring the language in familiar objects, it built confidence, encouraged fluency, and allowed teachers to gently shift from L1 to L2 without pressure.

#### Class 4: Word Game Interactions

In one of the more interactive sessions, Aditi introduced a word chain game designed to strengthen vocabulary, pronunciation, and spontaneous thinking. The rule was simple: one student says an English word aloud, and the next student has to say another word that starts with the last letter of the previous one. For example, if the first word was “pen”, the next student might say “net”, followed by “table”, and so on. Aditi began by explaining the instructions in Assamese to ensure every child felt comfortable with the rules. She gave a few examples using common classroom-related words, which instantly helped the students catch on. The game started slowly, with some students hesitating or defaulting to Assamese words, but as the game progressed, confidence grew. The children began laughing, helping each other, and even challenging one another playfully. Aditi gently guided pronunciation correcting words like “elefant” to “elephant” without breaking the students’ flow. When a student got stuck, she encouraged group support, turning mistakes into learning moments. The activity not only helped students recall words they already knew but also encouraged active listening and faster language processing, as they had to stay alert to continue the chain. It was evident by the end of the session that students who had been previously shy were now raising their hands, eager to participate. The word game, though simple in design, created a classroom atmosphere that was energetic, low-pressure, and entirely student-driven exactly the kind of environment that supports spoken English development in bilingual learners.

#### Class 5: Word Shuffle Activity

In this activity, conducted by Khushbu Sultana using both L1 (Assamese) and L2 (English), she prepares strips or cards with words. Each words is cut into seperate cards and mixed up (shuffled). The content level is matched to the students language proficiency.

After that, using both L1 and L2 she started giving instructions. She begins in Assamese (L1) : "আজি আমি এটা ধৰণৰ খেল খেলিম। মই কিছু শব্দ দিম, সেইবোৰৰ সঠিক ব্যৱস্থা কৰি এটা ইংৰাজী বাক্য বনাব লাগিব।" Then she repeats in English (L2):

“You will get some English words. You have to arrange them in the correct order to make a sentence.”

In activity time, students came and receives a card, students try to guess the word both in Assamese and English language, some of the students are able to guess the word and some finds difficult to understand the word. Then, she writes the words on the blackboard and clarified in both Assamese and English language. She also teaches the pronunciation of the words correctly.

Example: rose, owl, pomegranate, penguin, cauliflower, tulip, etc. The students are excited and enjoy the activity. They are very supportive and engaged with excitement. They feel proud when they able to pronounce the words correctly. Some of the students may struggle with grammar or vocabulary. Some of depends too much on L1 (Assamese). A few hesitate to speak in English.

Learning Outcomes: Better understanding of English sentence structure. Practical use of grammar concepts. Increased vocabulary retention. Encourages code-switching awareness when and how to switch between L1 and L2 effectively.

## **2. Classroom Procedures**

Each session followed this general structure:

- Brief warm-up in L1
- Introduction of task with modeling in English
- Group or pair practice
- Individual responses
- Feedback and reinforcement

The sessions took place over two weeks, with 1–2 sessions per week depending on school timetable and availability.

### **3. Differentiation and Support Strategies**

- Peer learning: Students worked in pairs so stronger speakers could model for quieter ones.
- Sentence starters: Provided to reduce anxiety about how to begin.
- Flexible response time: Students were given time to think and respond at their pace.
- Encouragement over correction: Mistakes were accepted without interruption, and corrections were given privately or after the activity.

### **4. Outcomes of the Intervention**

After the five sessions, noticeable improvements were seen in:

- Fluency: Students were more willing to speak in full sentences.
- Vocabulary use: Words introduced during activities began appearing in natural conversations.
- Confidence: Even shy learners began volunteering to speak.
- L1 awareness: Some students asked for English equivalents of Assamese words, a sign of cross-linguistic awareness.

### **5. Learner Engagement and Confidence**

Students were more engaged when the activity:

- Was game-like (e.g., word chain)
- Involved visuals (e.g., storytelling)
- Felt relevant to their lives (e.g., objects from their classroom)

### **6. Challenges Encountered**

- Time constraints: Regular school periods were short and disrupted by other academic demands.
- Mixed proficiency levels: Some students needed much more support than others.
- Over-dependence on L1: Some students relied too much on Assamese and were reluctant to try full sentences in English at first.

## **7. Comparison with Literature**

The results echoed what Krashen (1982) argued that comprehensible input delivered in a low-anxiety environment leads to real language acquisition. It also aligned with Nunan's belief in the power of learner-centred, task-based learning, and Hutchinson & Waters' call for teaching based on what learners actually need, not just what the curriculum prescribes. Most importantly, the intervention reflected NEP 2020's vision of classrooms that are multilingual, participatory, and joyfully rooted in real communication.

## **8. Project Findings**

From our teaching sessions, teacher interviews, and classroom observations, several key insights emerged:

- L1 is a critical support tool, especially for beginner learners. It enables better understanding and reduces learner anxiety.
- Code-switching was common among students but often lacked control or awareness.
- Speaking confidence improved when students were not penalized for small mistakes and were allowed structured use of L1 for understanding.
- Teachers need structured strategies to integrate L1 rather than relying on intuition.
- Learner engagement increased when activities were interactive, visual, and culturally relevant.

## **Discussion, Impact and Recommendations**

### **1. Project Impact**

The intervention led to measurable improvements in student participation and willingness to speak in English. Specific impacts included:

- Greater student willingness to attempt English sentences.
- Increased use of learned vocabulary during non-academic classroom exchanges.
- Teacher confidence in implementing bilingual strategies improved.
- Highlighted the need for language policy at the school level to balance both L1 and L2 instruction.

This aligns with NEP 2020, which advocates for multilingualism and inclusive, engaging education.

### **2. Impact on Learners and Teachers**

The intervention brought to light something often overlooked in language classrooms students want to speak, they just don't always know how to begin. The structured, bilingual, and activity-based sessions gave them both the tools and the confidence to try.

For Learners:

- Students who had previously hesitated to say even a single English word were forming full, meaningful sentences by the fifth session.
- Vocabulary retention improved significantly when words were introduced through interaction and games rather than textbook memorisation.
- Most importantly, the fear of making mistakes in English visibly decreased. Learners began seeing English not as something “difficult” or “foreign”, but as something they could play with, explore, and use.

For Teachers:

- The teachers involved expressed a new appreciation for how L1 can be used constructively instead of being seen as an interference.
- They also felt more equipped to plan activity-based speaking lessons, even within their limited time and resources.
- As one teacher said, “When they feel confident, they want to speak more. I didn't realise using Assamese could help so much.”

### **3. Feedback from Stakeholders**

From Teachers:

The responses gathered through teacher questionnaires and informal interviews revealed the following:

- Teachers support L1 usage, particularly when teaching complex ideas or instructions.
- One teacher said, “When I explain grammar in Assamese, they understand much faster.”
- Teachers admitted they had no formal training on when and how to use L1 in ELT settings.

From Students:

While formal interviews were not conducted due to time constraints, informal classroom comments spoke volumes:

- “Madam, we want to play the English game again.”
- “Now I remember the story in English too.”

### **4. Sustainability and Potential for Replication**

This study did not require fancy tools or major curriculum changes. What it needed and successfully demonstrated was:

- An understanding of learner needs
- A willingness to scaffold English learning with L1
- A creative, patient, and flexible approach to teaching

Because the approach is low-cost, inclusive, and adaptable, it can easily be replicated in other rural or regional-medium schools. Teachers can be trained to use this model and design their own five-day speaking modules based on their classroom needs.



## **5. Pedagogical Recommendations**

Based on the project's success, the following teaching strategies are recommended:

- Use L1 strategically not excessively

Start with L1 to build understanding, then shift to English through repetition and practice.

- Make speaking joyful and pressure-free

Activities like storytelling, games, role-plays, and object-based discussions make students forget they're "learning" and just enjoy communicating.

- Include sentence starters and visual aids

These small tools make a big difference in helping students begin speaking and stay on track.

- Prioritise fluency before accuracy

Let students talk, even if their grammar isn't perfect. Accuracy improves with confidence and exposure.

- Promote peer learning

When students explain words or help each other in a mixed-language environment, they both reinforce their understanding.

## **6. Suggestions for Policy and Practice**

This project echoes and supports the multilingual, inclusive vision of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which recommends:

- Mother tongue-based instruction at least till Grade 5
- Promoting multilingual learning, rather than forcing one language over another
- Shifting from rote memorisation to experiential, joyful learning

Suggested policy actions:

- Train teachers in bilingual teaching methodology through in-service workshops

- Include more oral-based tasks in English syllabi at the primary level
- Encourage assessment of speaking skills through performance tasks, not just written tests
- Develop teacher guides and story-based resources in both English and the regional language for easy classroom use

## **7. Recommendations**

Based on the project's findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Strategic Bilingual Teaching: Use L1 at the beginning stages for explanation and scaffolding, and gradually reduce its use to encourage L2 independence.
- Speaking-Oriented Curriculum: Prioritize oral tasks in class, such as storytelling, interviews, and daily life dialogues.
- Teacher Training: Train teachers in bilingual methodology and needs analysis-based lesson planning.
- Interactive Visual Aids: Incorporate flashcards, real-life objects, and picture stories into language teaching.
- Assessment Reform: Evaluate speaking skills not only for accuracy but also for fluency and confidence.

## Conclusion

This study affirms that the first language (Assamese) plays a complex yet constructive role in acquiring English-speaking skills in a bilingual classroom. When used deliberately and pedagogically, L1 can enhance comprehension, reduce learner anxiety, and scaffold fluency.

Our needs analysis revealed significant gaps between the learners' English speaking aspirations and their current performance. The five intervention classes demonstrated that learner-centred, bilingual, and activity-based teaching strategies can bridge that gap.

Ultimately, this project calls for a balanced approach, where L1 is not excluded but wisely integrated. This supports the broader vision of NEP 2020, which seeks to empower both learners and teachers through multilingual, inclusive education. This study set out to explore the role of the first language (L1), specifically Assamese, in helping students develop English-speaking skills within a bilingual education setting. Through a detailed needs analysis and the implementation of a five-session intervention, the research demonstrated that when thoughtfully used, L1 does not hinder English acquisition it supports and enhances it.

Students who were previously hesitant began to express themselves in simple English sentences. Teachers who had once relied on Assamese without structure saw the benefit of using it as a scaffold rather than a substitute. The classroom, once quiet during English periods, began to hum with curiosity, laughter, and learning.

This project also reinforced the principles laid out in the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 particularly the value of mother tongue-based instruction, multilingual learning, and activity-based, joyful classrooms.

In the end, the project's biggest success was not just improved language skills it was the creation of a space where students felt seen, heard, and supported in both their languages.

## **Project Team**

This dissertation was collaboratively carried out by the following group members from the Department of English, Mahapurusha Srimanta Sankaradeva Viswavidyalaya:

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- Ashna Yasmin (ENG 32/23)
- Barasha Borah (ENG 109/23)
- Bishal Jyoti Barman (ENG 43/23)
- Hainashree Hazowary (ENG 50/23)
- Khushbu Sultana (ENG 53/23)

Each member participated in planning, classroom observation, conducting the needs analysis, intervention lessons, and writing different sections of this dissertation under the supervision of Sir Rituranjan Gogoi.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Teacher Questionnaire

- What are the most common difficulties students face while speaking in English?
- How often do students rely on Assamese while trying to speak in English?
- Do you encourage the use of Assamese to support English learning? If yes, how?
- What strategies do you use to improve students' English-speaking skills?
- In your opinion, how does the use of Assamese help or hinder students in learning to speak English?

### Appendix B: Sample Student Responses

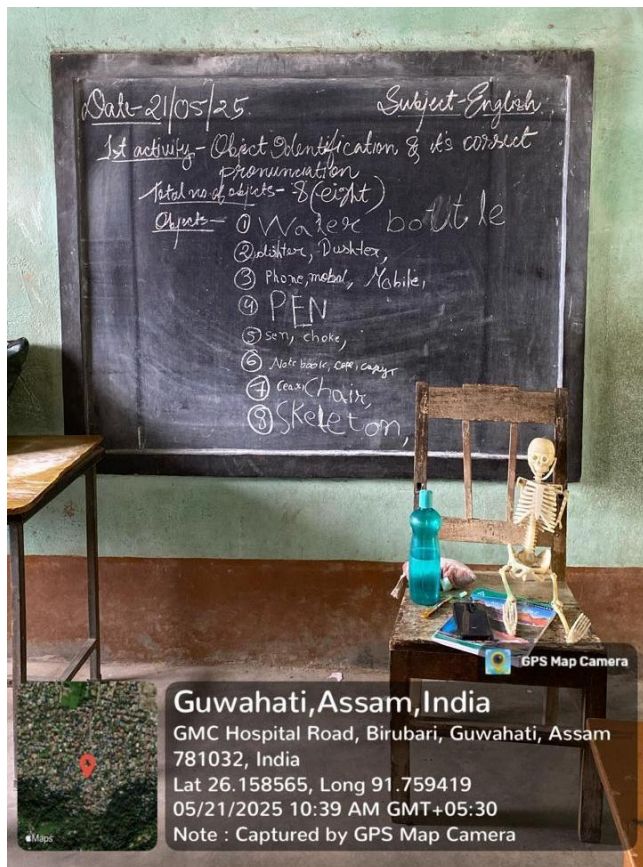
- “My name is Sanjay Das. Me in class five. My hobby is sports.”
- “My class five.”
- “My favourite food is rice and potato fry.”

### Appendix C: Class Activity Outline

- Day 1: Self-Introduction
- Day 2: Storytelling (The Thirsty Crow)
- Day 3: Object Identification
- Day 4: Word Game
- Day 5: Word Shuffle

### Appendix D: Intervention Lesson Overview

Session	Activity	Focus Area	Tools Used
Class 1	Self-Introduction	Confidence, sentence order	Sentence starters, pair work
Class 2	Story Telling	Sequencing, vocabulary	Picture cards, group narration
Class 3	Object Identification	Vocabulary, usage	Real objects, flash cards
Class 4	Word Chain Game	Spontaneous speech, recall	Oral participation
Class 5	Word Shuffling	Sentence building, grammar	Word cards, peer interaction



### Let me introduce myself

- Hi, my name is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I am \_\_\_\_\_ years old. <https://whatistheurl.com>
- My birthday is on \_\_\_\_\_.
- I am from \_\_\_\_\_.(country)
- I live in \_\_\_\_\_.(city)
- There are \_\_\_\_\_ people in my family.
- They are \_\_\_\_\_.
- My father is a/an \_\_\_\_\_.
- My mother is a/an \_\_\_\_\_.
- I am a student at \_\_\_\_\_.
- My favorite subject is \_\_\_\_\_.
- My favorite sport is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I want to become a \_\_\_\_\_.
- My hobby is \_\_\_\_\_.
- My favorite food is \_\_\_\_\_.
- My favorite drink is \_\_\_\_\_.
- My favorite day of the week is \_\_\_\_\_.
- I like \_\_\_\_\_ movies.
- My favorite month is \_\_\_\_\_.
- The most beautiful place in my country is \_\_\_\_\_.

<https://whatistheurl.com> <https://whatistheurl.com/>





