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## A Study on the Role of Mother Tongue in English Language Acquisition among Rural Learners

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### ABSTRACT

The current article investigates the influence of the mother tongue in the acquisition of English as a second language for English rural learners. In particular, it analyzes the cognitive and cultural roles the first language plays in the learning of English systematically and discusses important theories of learning that support this. This paper analyzes the effects of the mother tongue in language learning on phonetics and phonology, grammar and vocabulary as well as literacy skills. This paper also advocates for inclusion of the mother tongue in English teaching and suggests policies that aim at multilingualism. This paper presents some proposals on rural English language teaching, grounded on theories offered in the paper, that call for the adaptation of a holistic and pragmatic rural reality.

**Keywords:** Mother Tongue, English Language Acquisition, Rural Learners, Second Language Learning, Language Transfer, Bilingual Education.

### 1. Introduction

In most of the developing countries, English is taught as a second or foreign language, particularly in rural settings where students lack opportunities to hear English beyond the classroom. So in the applied linguistics, there is an interplay between a learner's first language (L1) and second language (L2), has been a subject of extensive debate. As noted by Cummins (2001), the mother tongue is foundational in developing a person's cognitive skills, literacy, cultural identity, and in turn, second language learning. Due to English-only teaching methods, many rural learners are at a substantial disadvantage. As UNESCO (2025) cautions, education systems which ignore learners' mother languages foster higher dropout rates, lower participation, and worsen inequality. For this reason, the recognition and incorporation of L1 in teaching and learning, English is not only an educational imperative, but also it is a matter of fundamental human rights.

### 2. Scope and significance of the study

#### 2.1 Scope of the study:

This investigation concerns, the theoretical aspects of rural English learners, within the context of a multilingual setting, especially, the areas with limited access to English resources. It is based on the relevant theories and global case studies, to investigate the impact of the mother tongue on English skills acquisition, at the level of grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, literacy, and learner's identity. This study, even though it lacks primary data collection, builds a rich theoretical toolkit to guide future practical and empirical investigations in the classroom.

#### 2.2 Significance of the study:

The acquisition of English as a second language is poses some challenges, this study addresses especially for English language learners from rural communities. The study highlights that, the contribution of the mother tongue which captures the cognitive, emotional, and cultural benefits that L1 brings to learning. The literature is lacking research that centers on rural populations, which is the focus of this study. The results are important to instructional designers, educational planners, and range of other stakeholders involved in effective and inclusive bilingual education as they work towards policy formulation and revision.

### 3. Objectives of the study

- To analyze the impact and influence of the mother tongue on the English language learning of rural students.
- To investigate the impact of the first language linguistic, phonological, and syntactic components on learning English as a second language.

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- To examine the socio-cultural and cognitive theories and implications of the use of the mother tongue with regard to English teaching and learning.
- To critically assess the theoretical underpinnings of the use of the mother tongue, or first language, in English language teaching.
- To develop the educational and policy-oriented recommendations, aimed at enhancing English language education in rural areas.

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#### 4. Methodology of the study

This study mostly incorporating with the theoretical and conceptual approaches, by using secondary sources, such as published journal articles, books, reports, and case studies in the domains of language acquisition and bilingual education. This approach consists of a critical review and integration of foundational theories such as Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis, Odlin's Transfer Theory, and also the Garcia and Wei's Translanguaging framework. Relevance was the primary criteria in the selection of rural language learners' studies and reports on the mother tongue's impact on second language acquisition from institutions like UNESCO, Per Linguam, and arXiv. The intention is to construct a detailed, and evidence-based understanding for the role of L1 on L2 learning in rural and multilingual settings, guided by relevant literature. This methodology have a balanced breadth and depth of analysis while informing future empirical studies on the topic.

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#### 5. Theoretical Perspectives on the Role of Mother Tongue

##### 5.1 Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis:

Cummins (2001) suggested first language fluency facilitates the second language process and the function of both languages within the learner's brain is systematic. This is the interdependence hypothesis which explains the success of learners with strong literacy skills in their first language (L1). The upper level mental skills of thinking critically and idea formulation function uniformly across languages. This is the reason why L1 is often suppressed in classrooms. This hinders the learner's ability to develop L2 skills.

##### 5.2 Odlin's Theory of Language Transfer:

Odlin (1989) discussed the language transfer, the impact of first language (L1) structures on second language (L2) learning. This transfer can be positive through similarities, or it can be negative through interference. Positive interference is exemplified with Indian learners who often replace the /v/ and /w/ sounds (Jain et al., 2022). The negative effects of transfer are more problematic in rural areas with no access to formal English education.

##### 5.3 Translanguaging as a Pedagogical Tool:

Translanguaging is a theory and an instructional practice which fosters the use of all language resources and all modes of communication within the learning processes (García & Wei, 2014). Rather than compartmentalizing languages, translanguaging considers them to be cohesive. In rural classrooms where learners switch between languages with ease, translanguaging serves to build comprehension, expression, and bolster learner confidence.

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#### 6. Linguistic Dimensions of the Mother Tongue Influence

##### 6.1 Phonological Influence:

There is always, an L1 (First Language) phonological influence, when the learners are speak in English. So In the Telugu speaking rural regions, retroflex consonants influence English phonetics leading to substitution (Jain et al., 2022) and mispronunciation. Such patterns are not simply "errors" but phonological transfers based on the learner's linguistic history.

##### 6.2 Syntactic and Grammatical Structures:

The English Sentences Construction is often interfered by the syntax of the mother tongue. Many Indian languages possess SOV (Subject-Object-Verb) structure, which is in contrast to English's SVO (Subject-Verb-Object) configuration. This often results in incorrect formations. According to Asad (2025) reported that the similar results of syntactic interference, with arabic speaking learners where they persistently struggled with the use of articles, verbs, and plural forms.

##### 6.3 Vocabulary and Semantic Mapping:

The learning of vocabulary is siphoned through the prism of L1, which is not always benignant. English words which do not possess a cultural or linguistic counterpart in the L1 are easily misinterpreted or misused. Such a phenomenon came to be with rural Vietnamese learners when English words were interpreted through local semantic systems (Nguyen & Khanh, 2025).

#### **6.4 Literacy Development:**

As Cummins (2001) highlights, skills in reading and writing achieved in one's first language (L1) can aid in reading and writing in a second language (L2). Aboriginal students from rural areas are unable to accomplish abstract English reading and writing tasks due to a lack of L1 literacy skills. On the other hand, the students with strong first-language, reading skills are more comfortable, with the English literacy tasks (UNESCO, 2025).

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### **7. The Sociocultural Dimensions**

#### **7.1 Identity and Confidence:**

The Languages are serves as a marker of identity. So students feel appreciated and validated when they are allowed to use their L1. For García and Wei (2014), empowerment through language not only enables learners but also supports their identity.

#### **7.2 Community and Family Involvement:**

In rural areas, some community members might not have a good command of English. Teaching exclusively in English disconnects the whole community from the education. Motseke (2020) documented that some rural South African parents felt cut off from participating in their children's education as a result of English-only teaching. Using L1 instruction helps to enhance family participation in education.

#### **7.3 Educational Equity:**

L2 proficiency is often prioritized at the expense of L1, which deepens the inequities within education systems. Students from urban areas are advantaged because they have greater exposure to English. English-speaking rural students are neglected. UNESCO (2025) argues that supportive education is best provided through a dual language model where L1 helps to strengthen L2.

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### **8. Educational Implications and Policy Proposals**

#### **8.1 Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE):**

This is a model that is supported globally, and it begins with instruction in a learner's first language, progressively integrating second languages. It aids developing early literacy skills, boosts learner's confidence, and eases the acquisition of a second language (L2). The UNESCO (2025) endorses the MTB-MLE in linguistically rich diverse and rural communities, for facilitate equitable access to quality education.

#### **8.2 The Teacher Education and Instructional Material Development:**

The present educators are need appropriate training on bilingual instruction, contrastive grammar, culture-responsive materials, and translanguaging. And also the Instructional materials need to capture the linguistic realities of rural learners, and mostly their mother tongue should be incorporated into instruction and assessment wise (Nguyen & Khanh, 2025).

#### **8.3 Non-Traditional Assessment:**

Standardized assessments in English usually disadvantage learners with an L1 influence. Assessments that focus on bilingual skills and accurately evaluate learners' conceptual knowledge present a more balanced assessment system. Bilingualism is embraced as a strength instead of a deficit in this assessment model (García & Wei, 2014).

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### **9. Conclusion:**

The mother tongue significantly influences English language acquisition among rural learners. The theoretical frameworks, such as Cummins' interdependence hypothesis, Odlin's transfer theory, and translanguaging, are highlighting that how L1 supports cognitive and linguistic development. The educators must recognize the benefits of integrating mother tongue into English instruction to create equitable, effective, and culturally responsive classrooms. As the world moves toward inclusive education, respecting and leveraging learners' native languages becomes not just important, but also essential.

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