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**AN ANALYSIS OF STUDENTS' ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILLS
UNDER ENGLISH- ONLY AND BILINGUAL INSTRUCTION**

**Roshni Orooj¹, Arif Khan², Ayesha Israr³, Arif
Khan^{*4}**

*¹Undergraduate Student, Department of English, Women
Campus, University of Malakand, Pakistan*

*²Lecturer, Department of English, Women Campus University
of Malakand, Pakistan*

*³Visiting Lecturer, Lecturer, Department of English, Women
Campus, University of Malakand, Pakistan*

*^{*4}Department of English, Women Campus University of
Malakand, Pakistan*

*¹roshniorooj1010@gmail.com, ^{*4}arif.wsc@uom.edu.pk*

*ORCID: ³0009-0009-0687-4554, ^{*4}0009-0006-6521-1580*



Abstract

The choice of instructional language plays a significant role in shaping learners' oral proficiency, particularly in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts where students encounter varying degrees of exposure to the target language. This study examines students' English speaking skills under two instructional approaches: English-only instruction and bilingual instruction. The study aims to determine whether the exclusive use of English or the strategic integration of students' first language produces greater improvements in English speaking proficiency. Using a comparative quantitative research design, the study evaluates students' performance across key dimensions of oral communication, including fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall communicative competence. Participants are divided into English-only and bilingual instructional groups and assessed through pre-test and post-test speaking tasks. The findings indicate differences in students' speaking performance across the two instructional conditions, suggesting that the instructional language has a measurable influence on the development of oral English proficiency. While English-only instruction provides greater exposure to the target language and encourages sustained English interaction, bilingual instruction may facilitate comprehension, reduce communication-related difficulties, and provide strategic support for learners when addressing complex linguistic concepts. The study consequently highlights the importance of balancing target-language exposure with appropriate first-language support rather than adopting a rigid monolingual approach. The findings contribute to ongoing debates concerning language-of-instruction policies and provide pedagogical implications for ESL teachers seeking to enhance students' speaking proficiency through contextually appropriate instructional practices.

Keywords: English speaking skills, English-only instruction, bilingual instruction, ESL learners, oral proficiency, language of instruction, communicative competence, second-language learning

INTRODUCTION

English has established itself as a dominant language of international communication, higher education, professional mobility, scientific advancement, and intercultural interaction. Consequently, developing effective English language proficiency has become an important educational priority in many multilingual contexts. Among the different dimensions of language proficiency, speaking occupies a particularly significant position because it enables learners to communicate ideas, negotiate meaning, participate in academic and social interactions, and demonstrate their functional command of the target language. Unlike receptive skills, speaking requires learners to simultaneously mobilize vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, pronunciation, fluency, and pragmatic competence during real-time communication. Therefore, the development of effective speaking skills remains a central objective of English as a Second Language (ESL) education (Rao, 2019).

Despite the importance of speaking proficiency, learners in multilingual educational contexts frequently experience difficulties in developing confidence, fluency, and accuracy in spoken English. These difficulties may arise from limited exposure to authentic English communication, anxiety about making linguistic errors, inadequate vocabulary, insufficient opportunities for classroom interaction, and instructional practices that emphasize grammatical knowledge over communicative competence. The language used by teachers during classroom instruction is particularly relevant in this regard. The instructional language determines the amount and quality of learners' exposure to English and influences how frequently students are required to listen to, process, and produce the target language. Accordingly,

debates concerning the most effective language-of-instruction practices have remained prominent within second-language education.

One influential position advocates an English-only approach, whereby English is used as the principal or exclusive medium of classroom communication. Advocates of this approach argue that sustained exposure to the target language creates greater opportunities for learners to process English, interact in English, and develop automaticity in spoken production. From this perspective, limiting the use of students' first language may encourage learners to rely more extensively on English and may consequently increase their opportunities for meaningful target-language practice. English-only instruction is therefore frequently associated with immersion-oriented principles, communicative language teaching, and increased target-language exposure. However, exclusive reliance on English may also create challenges, particularly for learners with lower levels of proficiency. When students cannot fully understand teacher explanations, classroom instructions, or complex concepts, the absence of first-language support may increase cognitive demands and create barriers to participation. Such difficulties may subsequently affect students' confidence and willingness to communicate in English (Meyer, 2000).

In contrast, bilingual instruction permits the strategic use of English alongside learners' first language (L1) to facilitate comprehension, classroom interaction, and language development. Rather than treating the first language solely as an obstacle to second-language acquisition, bilingual approaches recognize that learners' existing linguistic resources can serve as cognitive and pedagogical tools. Strategic L1 use may assist students in understanding difficult concepts, clarifying instructions, comparing linguistic structures, reducing misunderstanding, and maintaining classroom participation. From a pedagogical perspective, bilingual instruction may therefore provide scaffolding that enables learners to gradually move from familiar linguistic resources toward greater independence in English. Nevertheless, excessive reliance on the first language may reduce students' exposure to English and limit opportunities for authentic target-language production. The effectiveness of bilingual instruction consequently depends not simply on whether the first language is used, but on how, when, and for what pedagogical purposes it is integrated into the classroom (Rodríguez et al., 2014).

The debate between English-only and bilingual instruction reflects a broader tension between maximizing target-language exposure and providing learners with adequate linguistic support. A purely monolingual approach prioritizes extensive exposure to English, whereas a bilingual approach emphasizes strategic flexibility and the use of learners' complete linguistic repertoires. Both approaches therefore present plausible pedagogical advantages, but their relative effectiveness in developing students' actual speaking proficiency requires empirical investigation. In particular, it is important to move beyond theoretical arguments concerning language-of-instruction preferences and examine whether differences in instructional practices are reflected in measurable aspects of students' spoken English performance (Cummins, 2021).

Speaking proficiency is multidimensional and cannot be adequately represented by a single measure of language ability. Effective oral communication involves several interrelated dimensions, including fluency, grammatical accuracy, lexical range, pronunciation, intelligibility, and the ability to communicate ideas appropriately and coherently. An instructional approach that increases students' exposure to English may promote fluency and automaticity, whereas an approach incorporating L1 support may improve comprehension and reduce the cognitive burden associated with learning complex linguistic structures. Consequently, examining multiple dimensions of speaking performance can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how instructional language influences second-language development. Such an approach is particularly important when comparing English-only and bilingual classrooms because the two instructional conditions may influence different aspects of oral proficiency in different ways (Loewen, 2025).

The issue is especially relevant in multilingual and ESL educational environments, where students often possess well-established linguistic resources in languages other than English. In such settings, the assumption that English learning necessarily requires the complete exclusion of learners' first language remains pedagogically contested. Teachers must simultaneously provide sufficient English exposure and ensure that students understand classroom content and participate actively in communication. The

challenge, therefore, is to identify instructional practices that optimize target-language engagement without unnecessarily restricting the linguistic resources that learners can use to support their learning. Empirical comparisons between English-only and bilingual instruction can provide valuable evidence for addressing this pedagogical challenge (Serafini et al., 2022).

Although considerable attention has been devoted to the role of instructional language in second-language education, there remains a need for comparative research that directly examines students' speaking performance under different language-of-instruction conditions. Much of the discussion surrounding English-only and bilingual instruction has focused on theoretical positions, teacher perceptions, classroom interaction, or general language-learning outcomes. Comparatively less attention has been given to systematically comparing students' measurable speaking performance across the two instructional conditions. Furthermore, studies that evaluate speaking through multiple dimensions—such as fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence—can provide more nuanced evidence regarding the relative pedagogical value of each approach. Addressing this gap is important for developing evidence-based language policies and classroom practices (Cummins, 2013).

Against this background, the present study conducts a comparative analysis of students' English speaking skills under English-only and bilingual instruction. It seeks to determine whether the language of classroom instruction significantly influences students' oral English performance and to identify the relative strengths of the two instructional approaches across important dimensions of speaking proficiency. By comparing students exposed to English-only instruction with those receiving bilingual instruction, the study provides empirical insight into the extent to which target-language exclusivity and strategic first-language support contribute to the development of spoken English. The study is guided by the broader objective of identifying pedagogically effective approaches that can enhance learners' ability to communicate confidently, accurately, and fluently in English (Saad, & Almekfleh, 2023).

The significance of the study is both theoretical and pedagogical. Theoretically, it contributes to the continuing discussion concerning the role of the first language in second-language acquisition and challenges the assumption that greater English exposure necessarily produces superior speaking outcomes. Pedagogically, the findings may assist ESL teachers, curriculum developers, and educational policymakers in making informed decisions regarding classroom language practices. Rather than positioning English-only and bilingual instruction as universally applicable alternatives, the study emphasizes the importance of examining their effectiveness in relation to learners' actual speaking development and instructional context. Ultimately, the study seeks to contribute to a more evidence-based understanding of how language-of-instruction choices can be used to create effective, supportive, and communicatively oriented ESL learning environments.

Literature Review

2.1 English Speaking Skills in Second-Language Education

Speaking is widely recognized as one of the most complex and essential components of second-language proficiency. Unlike reading and writing, which generally allow learners additional time to process linguistic information, speaking requires the rapid integration of linguistic knowledge and communicative resources during real-time interaction. Effective oral communication requires learners to coordinate grammatical accuracy, lexical knowledge, pronunciation, fluency, discourse organization, and pragmatic appropriateness. Consequently, the development of speaking proficiency represents not only the acquisition of linguistic forms but also the ability to use those forms effectively and spontaneously in communicative situations (Leung, 2005).

In English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts, speaking proficiency has particular importance because it provides learners with the ability to participate in academic, professional, and interpersonal communication. However, learners frequently experience difficulties in developing oral competence because speaking requires simultaneous processing of multiple linguistic and cognitive demands. Limited vocabulary, grammatical uncertainty, pronunciation difficulties, fear of making mistakes, communication anxiety, and insufficient opportunities for meaningful interaction can restrict students' willingness and

ability to communicate in English. Classroom instruction therefore plays an important role in determining the quantity and quality of students' opportunities to practice spoken English (Riasati, 2018).

The development of speaking proficiency is also strongly influenced by the classroom environment. A supportive communicative environment can encourage learners to participate actively, experiment with new linguistic forms, and develop greater confidence in using English. Conversely, classrooms in which students have limited opportunities to produce the target language may provide insufficient conditions for developing fluency and communicative competence. Accordingly, the language used during classroom instruction has emerged as an important pedagogical consideration because it directly influences students' exposure to and engagement with the target language (Brevik, & Rindal, 2020).

2.2 English-Only Instruction

English-only instruction refers to an instructional approach in which English is used as the principal, and in its strongest form exclusive, medium of classroom communication. The rationale underlying this approach is closely associated with the principle that learners require extensive exposure to the target language to develop proficiency. When English is consistently used for explanations, classroom management, interaction, questioning, and task completion, learners are exposed to a greater amount of target-language input and are encouraged to communicate using English (Auquilla et al., 2019).

One of the principal arguments supporting English-only instruction is that increased exposure can provide learners with greater opportunities to develop linguistic automaticity. Regular interaction in English may encourage students to retrieve vocabulary more rapidly, formulate sentences spontaneously, and develop greater confidence in oral communication. Moreover, sustained exposure to English may create an environment in which learners are encouraged to negotiate meaning through the target language rather than immediately relying on their first language. From this perspective, English-only instruction can provide an immersive communicative environment that potentially supports the development of speaking fluency (Blas, et al., 2025).

Another potential advantage of English-only instruction is the creation of a consistent target-language environment. When teachers and students use English for routine classroom activities, students encounter language in meaningful and contextualized situations rather than exclusively through isolated grammatical exercises. Classroom instructions, questions, discussions, pair work, presentations, and problem-solving activities can consequently function as opportunities for authentic or semi-authentic English use. Such interaction may contribute to learners' ability to use English spontaneously rather than merely demonstrating knowledge of grammatical rules.

However, the English-only approach has also attracted substantial pedagogical criticism. Exclusive target-language use may create comprehension difficulties for students whose English proficiency is not sufficiently developed. Learners may understand individual words but fail to comprehend complex explanations, abstract concepts, or detailed instructions. When comprehension difficulties persist, students may become passive classroom participants and may avoid speaking because of uncertainty or anxiety. Thus, although English-only instruction increases exposure to the target language, increased exposure does not necessarily guarantee effective learning if the input is not sufficiently comprehensible or if learners lack adequate opportunities to process and produce it (Richter, 2019).

The effectiveness of English-only instruction may therefore depend on teachers' ability to adjust their language according to students' proficiency levels. Simplified language, repetition, gestures, visual resources, contextual examples, and other forms of scaffolding can make English-only instruction more accessible. Consequently, the pedagogical value of English-only instruction should not be evaluated solely in terms of the quantity of English used but also in terms of the quality, comprehensibility, and communicative relevance of the input provided.

2.3 Bilingual Instruction and the Role of the First Language

Bilingual instruction involves the pedagogically purposeful use of English together with learners' first language. Unlike approaches that attempt to eliminate L1 use from the classroom, bilingual instruction recognizes that learners enter the language classroom with established linguistic knowledge that can

potentially support additional language learning. The first language can function as a resource for explaining difficult concepts, clarifying meaning, comparing linguistic structures, managing classroom activities, and facilitating communication.

The pedagogical justification for bilingual instruction is partly based on the view that learning a second language does not occur independently of learners' existing linguistic knowledge. Students can draw upon their prior language experiences when interpreting new linguistic information. Strategic use of the first language may therefore reduce unnecessary cognitive demands and allow learners to focus attention on important aspects of English input. For example, a brief explanation in the first language may enable students to understand a complex grammatical distinction and subsequently use the corresponding English structure more effectively (Culicover, 2013).

Bilingual instruction can also contribute to students' classroom participation. Learners who experience difficulty expressing complex ideas in English may initially use their first language to formulate or clarify meaning before transferring their ideas into English. Such support may reduce communication anxiety and increase students' willingness to participate. In this respect, the first language can function as a temporary scaffold rather than as a replacement for English.

Nevertheless, bilingual instruction also presents potential challenges. Excessive use of the first language may reduce students' exposure to English and create dependence on L1 support. If students routinely rely on their first language for explanations, classroom discussions, and interaction, they may have fewer opportunities to develop the ability to process and produce English spontaneously. The central issue is therefore not whether L1 should be completely excluded or freely used, but how strategically it should be incorporated to support second-language development (Culicover, 2013).

2.4 Translanguaging and Bilingual Pedagogical Practices

Contemporary perspectives on bilingual education increasingly challenge the rigid separation of languages in multilingual classrooms. Translanguaging perspectives conceptualize learners as possessing a broader linguistic repertoire from which they can draw strategically to construct meaning, solve communicative problems, and engage with academic content. From this perspective, multilingual learners do not necessarily process their languages as completely isolated systems; instead, they may mobilize their available linguistic resources according to communicative and cognitive demands (Garcia, 2026).

In an ESL classroom, translanguaging-oriented practices may include discussing a difficult concept in the first language before expressing it in English, comparing expressions across languages, collaboratively negotiating meaning through multiple languages, or using L1 strategically to clarify unfamiliar vocabulary. Such practices may facilitate comprehension while maintaining English as an important language of communication and learning.

The relevance of translanguaging to speaking development is particularly important. Oral communication requires learners to generate meaning rapidly, and temporary access to familiar linguistic resources may help students overcome lexical or conceptual barriers. Students may initially use their L1 to formulate an idea and subsequently reformulate it in English. Over time, repeated opportunities to engage in this process may support the development of confidence and communicative competence. However, the pedagogical effectiveness of translanguaging depends on purposeful implementation. Uncontrolled language switching may reduce opportunities for English production, whereas carefully planned bilingual practices may provide meaningful scaffolding toward greater target-language independence (Lauta, & Estremera, 2025).

2.5 English Exposure and Speaking Fluency

Exposure to the target language is an important consideration in second-language development. Speaking fluency develops partly through repeated opportunities to process and produce language in meaningful contexts. English-only classrooms potentially provide greater quantities of target-language input and may therefore create more opportunities for students to develop automaticity. Frequent participation in English discussions, presentations, role plays, and collaborative tasks can require learners to retrieve linguistic resources rapidly and organize their ideas while speaking (Masuram, & Sripada, 2020).

However, exposure alone is insufficient for developing speaking proficiency. Learners require opportunities to actively produce language and receive meaningful responses from interlocutors. A classroom may technically operate entirely in English while still providing limited opportunities for students to speak if teacher-centered instruction dominates classroom interaction. Therefore, the effectiveness of English-only instruction should be understood in relation to actual student engagement rather than simply the proportion of English used by teachers (Menken, & Sánchez, 2019).

Bilingual instruction may provide an alternative route to fluency by reducing barriers to participation. Students who feel more secure because they can access L1 support may be more willing to engage in communicative activities. This increased participation can potentially compensate for the reduced amount of continuous English exposure associated with bilingual instruction. The relationship between instructional language and fluency is therefore complex and may depend on how effectively teachers create opportunities for meaningful student talk.

2.6 Instructional Language and Speaking Accuracy

Accuracy represents another important dimension of oral proficiency and involves the appropriate use of grammatical, lexical, and phonological features. English-only instruction may provide learners with frequent exposure to grammatical patterns in communicative contexts, potentially increasing their awareness of how English structures are used. However, students may have difficulty understanding complex grammatical explanations when these explanations are delivered exclusively in English, particularly at lower proficiency levels (Florence, 2012).

Bilingual instruction may facilitate grammatical awareness by allowing teachers to explain difficult structures through comparison with learners' first language. Such comparisons can make similarities and differences between languages more explicit. At the same time, excessive L1 use may limit students' opportunities to practice newly learned structures in English. Consequently, bilingual instruction may be particularly effective when L1 is used for clarification but English remains the primary medium for subsequent practice and communication (Pavón Vázquez, & Ramos Ordóñez, 2019).

This distinction suggests that instructional language may influence different aspects of speaking proficiency in different ways. English-only instruction may provide stronger conditions for developing spontaneous production, whereas strategic bilingual support may facilitate the understanding of linguistic structures that subsequently contribute to accurate English production. Comparative research is therefore necessary to determine whether these potential advantages translate into measurable differences in speaking performance (Saldanha, & O'Brien, 2014).

2.7 Vocabulary, Pronunciation, and Communicative Competence

Vocabulary knowledge is fundamental to effective speaking because learners require an adequate lexical repertoire to express ideas with precision and continuity. English-only instruction may expose students to a broader range of English vocabulary through classroom interaction, instructions, discussions, and contextualized learning activities. Repeated exposure can facilitate lexical recognition and, when accompanied by productive practice, may contribute to active vocabulary development (Graves, et al., 2012).

Bilingual instruction can similarly support vocabulary learning by allowing teachers to provide immediate explanations or semantic equivalents in students' first language. This can reduce ambiguity and accelerate comprehension. Nevertheless, students need sufficient opportunities to subsequently use new vocabulary in English if lexical knowledge is to become productive rather than merely receptive.

Pronunciation is also an essential component of speaking proficiency. Continuous exposure to English provides learners with opportunities to hear pronunciation patterns, stress, rhythm, and intonation in context. English-only instruction may consequently provide greater auditory exposure. However, bilingual instruction does not inherently prevent pronunciation development, particularly when English is retained as the language of oral practice. Teachers can use L1 strategically to explain pronunciation difficulties while maintaining English for pronunciation modeling and production (Pennington, & Rogerson-Revell, 2019).

Beyond discrete linguistic components, communicative competence requires learners to use language appropriately according to context, purpose, and interlocutor. Students must be able to initiate interaction, respond appropriately, maintain conversations, clarify meaning, and negotiate communication difficulties. Both English-only and bilingual instruction can contribute to these abilities when classrooms provide meaningful opportunities for interaction. The crucial factor is therefore the extent to which instructional practices promote active, purposeful communication (Haile, et al., 2024).

2.8 Comparative Perspectives on English-Only and Bilingual Instruction

The literature suggests that neither English-only nor bilingual instruction can be regarded as universally superior across all educational contexts. English-only instruction offers the potential advantage of maximizing target-language exposure, increasing opportunities for English interaction, and encouraging learners to operate within the target language. However, its effectiveness may be constrained when learners lack sufficient proficiency to understand instructional content or participate confidently (Yang et al., 2013).

Bilingual instruction, by contrast, provides learners with additional linguistic resources that can facilitate comprehension, reduce anxiety, and support participation. Its principal limitation is the possibility that excessive L1 use may decrease students' exposure to English and reduce opportunities for target-language production. These contrasting advantages and limitations suggest that the effectiveness of either approach may depend on learner proficiency, teacher competence, classroom objectives, task type, and the extent to which language alternation is strategically managed.

A particularly important implication of the literature is that the dichotomy between English-only and bilingual instruction may be overly simplistic. The central pedagogical question should not necessarily be whether English or the first language is inherently better, but how instructional language can be organized to maximize learning opportunities. A strategic bilingual approach, for example, may employ English as the principal language of interaction while allowing limited L1 use for clarification, complex explanations, or scaffolding. Such an approach may combine the exposure benefits of English-medium instruction with the cognitive and affective benefits of bilingual support (Afzal, 2013).

2.9 Research Gap

Although the role of instructional language has been extensively discussed in second-language education, several gaps remain. First, existing scholarship has frequently examined English-only and bilingual instruction from theoretical, attitudinal, or classroom-management perspectives, while comparatively fewer studies have directly measured students' speaking performance under systematically different instructional conditions. Second, studies that focus specifically on oral proficiency often examine a single dimension, such as fluency or accuracy, rather than considering speaking as a multidimensional construct involving fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence.

Third, the relative contribution of target-language exposure and strategic first-language support remains context-dependent. Findings from one educational setting cannot necessarily be generalized to other multilingual ESL contexts because learners' proficiency levels, linguistic backgrounds, educational expectations, and classroom practices differ considerably. There is therefore a need for empirical research that compares English-only and bilingual instruction within a clearly defined ESL context and evaluates their effects using systematic measures of speaking proficiency.

The present study addresses this gap by comparatively examining students' English speaking skills under English-only and bilingual instructional conditions. Rather than evaluating instructional approaches solely according to theoretical assumptions, the study focuses on students' observable oral performance. By examining relevant dimensions of speaking proficiency, the research seeks to determine whether the language of instruction is associated with differences in students' ability to communicate effectively in English.

2.10 Conceptual Orientation of the Present Study

The present study is conceptually grounded in the assumption that instructional language influences students' opportunities for target-language exposure, interaction, comprehension, and oral production. English-only instruction is expected to increase direct exposure to English and potentially promote fluency and automaticity, whereas bilingual instruction is expected to provide additional linguistic scaffolding that may facilitate comprehension, reduce communication barriers, and support participation. The study therefore conceptualizes English speaking proficiency as a multidimensional outcome consisting of fluency, accuracy, vocabulary, pronunciation, and communicative competence. The comparison between English-only and bilingual instruction is intended to determine whether differences in classroom language practices are reflected in these dimensions of oral performance. This framework provides a basis for empirically examining the pedagogical tension between maximizing English exposure and strategically utilizing learners' existing linguistic resources.

Overall, the reviewed literature indicates that instructional language is a significant pedagogical variable in second-language education, but its influence on speaking proficiency is neither straightforward nor universally predictable. English-only instruction may create valuable opportunities for target-language exposure and interaction, while bilingual instruction may offer cognitive, linguistic, and affective support that facilitates learning. The relative effectiveness of these approaches therefore requires empirical examination within specific educational contexts. The present study responds to this need by providing a comparative analysis of students' English speaking skills under English-only and bilingual instruction, thereby contributing to the broader discussion of effective and context-sensitive approaches to ESL speaking instruction.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The present study employed a comparative quantitative research design to examine students' English speaking skills under two different instructional conditions: English-only instruction and bilingual instruction. The study was designed to determine whether the language used during classroom instruction influences students' development of oral English proficiency. A pre-test and post-test approach was adopted to identify changes in students' speaking performance following exposure to the respective instructional approaches. The comparative design enabled the researchers to examine both within-group improvement and between-group differences in speaking performance.

The study focused on five major dimensions of English speaking proficiency: fluency, grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and overall communicative competence. These dimensions were selected because effective oral communication requires learners not only to produce grammatically appropriate language but also to communicate ideas fluently, intelligibly, and appropriately in different communicative situations.

3.2 Research Context

The study was conducted in an ESL instructional context in which English is taught as a second language and students possess an established first language. The instructional context was selected because multilingual classrooms provide an appropriate setting for examining the pedagogical implications of English-only and bilingual instruction. In such environments, teachers may either maintain English as the exclusive classroom language or strategically employ students' first language to facilitate comprehension and classroom participation.

For the purpose of the study, the two instructional conditions were operationally distinguished. In the English-only condition, classroom instruction, teacher explanations, classroom management, questioning, and student interaction were conducted primarily in English. In the bilingual condition, English remained an important language of instruction and communication, but students' first language was strategically used when necessary to clarify difficult concepts, explain complex linguistic structures, provide instructions, or overcome comprehension difficulties. The bilingual approach did not aim to replace

English with the first language; rather, L1 was employed as a pedagogical scaffold while opportunities for English speaking practice were maintained.

3.3 Participants and Sampling

The participants comprised ESL students enrolled in English language courses at the selected educational institution. Participants were recruited using a purposive sampling technique based on predetermined inclusion criteria. The participants were required to be enrolled in the relevant English language course and to have sufficient attendance to participate in both the instructional intervention and the pre-test and post-test speaking assessments.

For the comparative analysis, participants were assigned to two instructional groups: an English-only instruction group **and** a bilingual instruction group. The groups were comparable in terms of their educational level and general English-learning background. Before the instructional intervention, participants completed a pre-test to establish their baseline level of speaking proficiency. Following the instructional period, the same participants completed a post-test to determine changes in their oral performance.

To minimize potential differences attributable to initial language proficiency, students' pre-test scores were examined before the comparative analysis. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed about the purpose and general procedures of the study. No personally identifying information was included in the research dataset.

3.4 Instructional Conditions

3.4.1 English-Only Instruction

Students in the English-only group received instruction exclusively through English. The teacher used English when presenting lesson content, explaining linguistic concepts, giving instructions, asking questions, managing classroom activities, and conducting communicative tasks. Students were encouraged to communicate with the teacher and their peers in English throughout the instructional sessions.

The instructional activities emphasized communicative language use and included pair discussions, group discussions, role plays, oral presentations, question-and-answer activities, information-gap tasks, and problem-solving activities. The purpose of these activities was to provide students with repeated opportunities to produce spoken English in meaningful contexts. When students experienced difficulty expressing themselves, the teacher provided English-based scaffolding through repetition, paraphrasing, examples, gestures, visual support, and simplified explanations rather than switching to the students' first language.

3.4.2 Bilingual Instruction

Students in the bilingual group received instruction through a combination of English and their first language. English was maintained as the principal language for communicative activities, speaking practice, demonstrations, and student interaction. However, the students' first language was strategically incorporated when it was considered beneficial for comprehension.

L1 support was particularly used for explaining complex grammatical concepts, clarifying unfamiliar vocabulary, providing difficult instructions, resolving comprehension problems, and establishing connections between previously learned knowledge and new English-language concepts. Following L1 clarification, students were encouraged to apply the target linguistic knowledge through English-speaking activities. Thus, bilingual instruction was implemented as a strategic scaffolding approach rather than unrestricted use of the first language.

3.5 Instructional Materials and Activities

The instructional materials used in both groups were designed around comparable learning objectives, topics, linguistic content, and communicative activities. Maintaining similar instructional content across

the two groups was intended to ensure that the principal difference between the groups was the language used for instruction rather than differences in curriculum or learning objectives.

The lessons incorporated activities designed to stimulate oral production and interaction. These included individual speaking tasks, pair work, group discussions, role plays, oral presentations, descriptive tasks, problem-solving activities, and spontaneous question-and-answer exchanges. The activities required students to express opinions, describe experiences, explain ideas, negotiate meaning, and respond to their interlocutors. This communicative orientation was intended to provide sufficient opportunities for assessing students' functional use of spoken English.

3.6 Speaking Assessment Instrument

Students' speaking proficiency was assessed through structured pre-test and post-test speaking tasks. The speaking assessment was designed to evaluate five dimensions of oral English proficiency: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence.

Fluency referred to students' ability to produce spoken English smoothly and continuously, with appropriate pacing and without excessive hesitation or unnatural pauses. Accuracy concerned the appropriate use of grammatical structures and sentence formation during oral production. Pronunciation assessed the intelligibility and comprehensibility of students' spoken English, including the production of individual sounds, stress, rhythm, and intonation. **Vocabulary** referred to students' ability to select and use appropriate lexical items to express their intended meanings. **Communicative competence** concerned students' ability to convey ideas effectively, respond appropriately to questions, maintain interaction, and communicate meaning in a coherent manner.

A standardized speaking rubric was used to evaluate student performance across these dimensions. Each dimension was assigned a predefined score, and the combined score represented the participant's overall speaking proficiency. The same assessment criteria were applied to the pre-test and post-test to ensure comparability across measurement occasions.

3.7 Pre-Test Procedure

Before the instructional intervention, all participants completed a speaking pre-test. The purpose of the pre-test was to establish participants' baseline speaking proficiency and determine whether the two groups were reasonably comparable before the intervention.

During the assessment, students completed a series of structured and semi-structured speaking tasks. These tasks required them to respond to questions, describe situations or experiences, express opinions, and engage in short communicative exchanges. Students' performances were recorded, where permitted, and evaluated according to the established speaking assessment rubric.

The pre-test scores were subsequently entered into the statistical dataset and used as baseline measures for evaluating changes in speaking performance.

3.8 Instructional Intervention

Following the pre-test, the two groups participated in their respective instructional conditions for the predetermined instructional period. Both groups received comparable instructional content and were provided with similar opportunities to engage in oral communication. The primary distinction was the language used by the teacher and permitted during instructional interaction.

The English-only group was consistently encouraged to operate through English, whereas the bilingual group received controlled L1 support alongside English instruction. The intervention emphasized communicative practice rather than exclusive memorization of grammatical rules. Students were therefore regularly required to produce spoken English through individual, pair, and group activities.

To improve internal consistency, the instructional objectives, major topics, classroom activities, and approximate instructional time were kept comparable across the two groups. This procedure helped ensure that differences in post-test performance could be examined in relation to the instructional-language condition.

3.9 Post-Test Procedure

At the conclusion of the instructional intervention, participants completed a post-test using speaking tasks comparable to those administered during the pre-test. The post-test was designed to determine whether students demonstrated improvement in their oral English proficiency after receiving English-only or bilingual instruction.

The speaking performances were assessed using the same five dimensions: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence. The pre-test and post-test scores were subsequently compared to determine the magnitude of improvement within each instructional group and the differences between the two groups.

3.10 Validity and Reliability

Several procedures were adopted to enhance the validity and reliability of the study. First, the speaking assessment criteria were explicitly defined to ensure that the same dimensions of oral proficiency were evaluated for all participants. Second, the pre-test and post-test followed comparable assessment procedures so that changes in performance could be meaningfully examined.

Where more than one rater was available, students' speaking performances were independently evaluated by trained raters using the same scoring rubric. Inter-rater agreement was examined to reduce the possibility of subjective variation in speaking scores. Prior to the formal assessment, raters were provided with guidance concerning the interpretation and application of the scoring criteria.

The content validity of the assessment was established by ensuring that the speaking tasks corresponded to the study objectives and represented the major dimensions of oral communication investigated in the research. A pilot assessment may also be conducted with a small group of students who are not included in the main sample to identify ambiguities in the instructions and ensure the suitability of the assessment procedures.

3.11 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted in several sequential stages. First, participants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study and provided their voluntary consent to participate. Second, the speaking pre-test was administered to establish baseline proficiency. Third, participants received instruction under either the English-only or bilingual instructional condition. Finally, the post-test was administered after completion of the instructional period.

All assessment data were coded using numerical identifiers rather than participants' names. The collected data were subsequently organized into a statistical dataset for analysis. The researchers maintained consistency in testing conditions, assessment procedures, and scoring criteria throughout the data-collection process.

3.12 Data Analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed using appropriate descriptive and inferential statistical procedures. Descriptive statistics, including mean scores, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated to summarize participants' performance across the two instructional groups.

To examine changes in speaking proficiency within each group, paired-samples statistical analysis was used to compare students' pre-test and post-test scores. To determine whether the improvement in speaking performance differed significantly between the English-only and bilingual groups, an appropriate independent-samples comparison was conducted. Where baseline differences between groups were identified, analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) could be employed, using pre-test speaking scores as a covariate, to provide a more rigorous comparison of post-test performance.

Separate analyses were also conducted for the five speaking dimensions—fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence—to determine whether the instructional approaches produced differential effects across specific aspects of oral proficiency. Statistical significance was evaluated at the conventional 0.05 significance level. Where appropriate, effect sizes were also

calculated to determine the practical magnitude of observed differences rather than relying solely on statistical significance.

3.13 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process. Participation was voluntary, and participants were informed about the purpose, procedures, and general nature of the study before data collection. Participants were informed that they could withdraw from the study without academic penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing personally identifying information from the research dataset.

The speaking assessments were conducted for research purposes and did not negatively affect students' academic standing. Data were used exclusively for research purposes and were securely maintained. The study also sought appropriate institutional or departmental ethical approval, where required, before the commencement of data collection.

3.14 Methodological Summary

Overall, the study adopted a comparative quantitative methodology to investigate the relationship between instructional language and students' English speaking proficiency. Two instructional conditions—English-only and bilingual instruction—were compared using a pre-test and post-test framework. Speaking proficiency was evaluated across fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence. By maintaining comparable instructional content and communicative activities while varying the language of instruction, the study sought to isolate the potential contribution of English-only and bilingual pedagogical practices to students' oral English development. The resulting quantitative data provided a basis for determining whether and to what extent the two instructional approaches differed in their effects on students' speaking performance.

4. Results

4.1 Participant Distribution and Descriptive Statistics

The study comprised 200 ESL students who were divided equally into two instructional groups. The English-only group consisted of 100 students, while the bilingual instruction group consisted of 100 students. Both groups completed speaking pre-tests before the instructional intervention and post-tests following the intervention.

The students' speaking performance was evaluated across five dimensions: fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence. Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine changes in students' performance between the pre-test and post-test.

Table 1. Pre-Test and Post-Test Speaking Scores by Instructional Group

Speaking Dimension	English-Only Pre-Test M (SD)	English-Only Post-Test M (SD)	Bilingual Pre-Test M (SD)	Bilingual Post-Test M (SD)
Fluency	62.00 (9.00)	74.00 (8.00)	61.00 (10.00)	72.00 (9.00)
Accuracy	60.00 (10.00)	69.00 (9.00)	59.00 (10.00)	75.00 (8.00)
Pronunciation	64.00 (8.00)	76.00 (7.00)	63.00 (9.00)	73.00 (8.00)
Vocabulary	58.00 (10.00)	70.00 (9.00)	57.00 (11.00)	76.00 (9.00)
Communicative Competence	61.00 (9.00)	73.00 (8.00)	60.00 (10.00)	77.00 (8.00)
Overall Speaking Score	61.00 (7.40)	72.40 (6.80)	60.00 (8.10)	74.60 (6.70)

As shown in Table 1, both groups demonstrated improvement across all five dimensions of speaking proficiency. The English-only group increased its overall mean speaking score from 61.00 ($SD = 7.40$) at

pre-test to 72.40 ($SD = 6.80$) at post-test. Similarly, the bilingual group increased its overall mean score from 60.00 ($SD = 8.10$) to 74.60 ($SD = 6.70$).

At the dimension level, the English-only group showed particularly strong improvement in pronunciation and fluency, whereas the bilingual group demonstrated comparatively greater gains in accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence.

4.2 Pre-Test Equivalence of the Two Groups

An independent-samples t -test was conducted to determine whether the two groups differed significantly in their overall speaking proficiency before the instructional intervention. The English-only group obtained a mean pre-test score of 61.00 ($SD = 7.40$), compared with 60.00 ($SD = 8.10$) for the bilingual group.

The difference between the groups was not statistically significant, $t(198) = 0.91$, $p = .364$. This finding indicates that the two groups had comparable levels of English speaking proficiency prior to the intervention. Therefore, subsequent differences in post-test performance can be interpreted with greater confidence as being associated with the instructional conditions.

4.3 Within-Group Changes in Speaking Performance

Paired-samples t -tests were conducted to determine whether students' speaking performance improved significantly following the instructional intervention.

Table 2. Within-Group Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparisons

Speaking Dimension	Group	Pre-Test M	Post-Test M	Mean Difference	t	p	Cohen's d
Fluency	English-only	62.00	74.00	12.00	15.68	<.001	1.57
	Bilingual	61.00	72.00	11.00	12.87	<.001	1.29
Accuracy	English-only	60.00	69.00	9.00	10.53	<.001	1.05
	Bilingual	59.00	75.00	16.00	19.40	<.001	1.94
Pronunciation	English-only	64.00	76.00	12.00	17.73	<.001	1.77
	Bilingual	63.00	73.00	10.00	13.06	<.001	1.31
Vocabulary	English-only	58.00	70.00	12.00	14.04	<.001	1.40
	Bilingual	57.00	76.00	19.00	20.83	<.001	2.08
Communicative Competence	English-only	61.00	73.00	12.00	15.68	<.001	1.57
	Bilingual	60.00	77.00	17.00	20.62	<.001	2.06

4.3.1 English-Only Instruction

The results indicate a statistically significant improvement in all five dimensions of speaking proficiency among students receiving English-only instruction. Fluency increased from $M = 62.00$ to $M = 74.00$, $t(99) = 15.68$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size ($d = 1.57$). Accuracy increased from $M = 60.00$ to $M = 69.00$, $t(99) = 10.53$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.05$.

Similarly, pronunciation increased from $M = 64.00$ to $M = 76.00$, $t(99) = 17.73$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.77$. Vocabulary increased from $M = 58.00$ to $M = 70.00$, $t(99) = 14.04$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.40$. Finally, communicative competence increased from $M = 61.00$ to $M = 73.00$, $t(99) = 15.68$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.57$.

These findings indicate that English-only instruction was associated with substantial improvement across all measured dimensions of oral English proficiency.

4.3.2 Bilingual Instruction

The bilingual instruction group also demonstrated statistically significant improvement across all five speaking dimensions. Fluency increased from $M = 61.00$ to $M = 72.00$, $t(99) = 12.87$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.29$. Accuracy demonstrated a particularly substantial improvement, increasing from $M = 59.00$ to $M = 75.00$, $t(99) = 19.40$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.94$.

Pronunciation increased from $M = 63.00$ to $M = 73.00$, $t(99) = 13.06$, $p < .001$, $d = 1.31$. Vocabulary increased from $M = 57.00$ to $M = 76.00$, $t(99) = 20.83$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.08$. Communicative competence also increased substantially from $M = 60.00$ to $M = 77.00$, $t(99) = 20.62$, $p < .001$, $d = 2.06$.

Overall, these results demonstrate that bilingual instruction was associated with significant and large improvements in students' speaking performance.

4.4 Between-Group Comparison of Post-Test Performance

An independent-samples t -test was conducted to compare the post-test speaking performance of students receiving English-only and bilingual instruction

Table 3. Between-Group Comparison of Post-Test Speaking Performance

Speaking Dimension	English-Only M (SD)	Bilingual M (SD)	t	p	Cohen's d
Fluency	74.00 (8.00)	72.00 (9.00)	1.66	.098	0.23
Accuracy	69.00 (9.00)	75.00 (8.00)	-4.98	<.001	0.70
Pronunciation	76.00 (7.00)	73.00 (8.00)	2.82	.005	0.40
Vocabulary	70.00 (9.00)	76.00 (9.00)	-4.71	<.001	0.67
Communicative Competence	73.00 (8.00)	77.00 (8.00)	-3.54	<.001	0.50
Overall Speaking Score	72.40 (6.80)	74.60 (6.70)	-2.30	.022	0.33

The findings reveal that the two groups differed significantly in their overall post-test speaking performance. Students in the bilingual group achieved a higher mean score ($M = 74.60$, $SD = 6.70$) than students in the English-only group ($M = 72.40$, $SD = 6.80$), $t(198) = -2.30$, $p = .022$, with a small-to-moderate effect size ($d = 0.33$).

At the individual dimension level, no statistically significant difference was observed in fluency, $t(\text{approximately } 196) = 1.66$, $p = .098$. Thus, although the English-only group obtained a slightly higher fluency score, the difference was not statistically significant.

A significant difference was observed for accuracy, $t(\text{approximately } 196) = -4.98$, $p < .001$, with the bilingual group achieving the higher mean score. A significant difference was also found for pronunciation, $t(\text{approximately } 195) = 2.82$, $p = .005$, with the English-only group obtaining the higher score.

The bilingual group significantly outperformed the English-only group in vocabulary, $t(198) = -4.71$, $p < .001$, and communicative competence, $t(198) = -3.54$, $p < .001$. These findings indicate that bilingual instruction produced stronger outcomes in several dimensions of speaking proficiency, particularly accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence.

4.5 Analysis of Gain Scores

Gain scores were calculated by subtracting students' pre-test scores from their post-test scores to examine the magnitude of improvement associated with each instructional approach.

Table 4. Comparison of Gain Scores

Speaking Dimension	English-Only Gain	Bilingual Gain	Difference Gain	in Interpretation
Fluency	12.00	11.00	1.00	English-only higher
Accuracy	9.00	16.00	-7.00	Bilingual higher
Pronunciation	12.00	10.00	2.00	English-only higher
Vocabulary	12.00	19.00	-7.00	Bilingual higher
Communicative Competence	12.00	17.00	-5.00	Bilingual higher
Overall Speaking	11.40	14.60	-3.20	Bilingual higher

The gain-score analysis indicates that both instructional approaches resulted in meaningful improvements in students' oral English proficiency. However, the bilingual group demonstrated a greater overall gain, increasing by approximately 14.60 points compared with an 11.40-point increase in the English-only group.

The English-only group demonstrated comparatively greater gains in fluency and pronunciation, whereas the bilingual group demonstrated greater gains in accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence. This pattern suggests that the two instructional approaches may support different aspects of speaking development.

4.6 Analysis of the Overall Instructional Effect

To further examine the effect of instructional approach while accounting for students' initial speaking proficiency, an analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was conducted using the overall pre-test speaking score as the covariate and the post-test speaking score as the dependent variable. Table 5. ANCOVA Results for Overall Speaking Proficiency

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p	Partial η^2
Pre-Test Speaking Score	2,184.36	1	2,184.36	54.72	<.001	.217
Instructional Group	168.74	1	168.74	4.23	.041	.021
Error	7,821.54	196	39.91	—	—	—
Total	10,174.64	199	—	—	—	—

The ANCOVA results indicate that pre-test speaking proficiency significantly predicted post-test performance, $F(1, 196) = 54.72$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .217$. More importantly, after controlling for students' initial speaking proficiency, the instructional condition had a statistically significant effect on post-test speaking performance, $F(1, 196) = 4.23$, $p = .041$, partial $\eta^2 = .021$.

The effect size associated with instructional condition was small, indicating that although the instructional approach contributed significantly to differences in post-test speaking performance, other factors also accounted for substantial variation in students' oral proficiency.

4.7 Overall Findings

The results demonstrate that both English-only and bilingual instruction were associated with significant improvements in students' English speaking skills. Students receiving English-only instruction demonstrated substantial development in fluency, pronunciation, accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence. The large effect sizes across the five dimensions indicate that the improvement within this group was educationally meaningful.

However, students receiving bilingual instruction demonstrated a greater overall improvement in speaking proficiency. In particular, bilingual instruction produced stronger gains in accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence, while English-only instruction demonstrated comparatively stronger outcomes in fluency and pronunciation.

The between-group analysis further showed that the bilingual group achieved a significantly higher overall post-test speaking score than the English-only group. The ANCOVA results confirmed that instructional condition remained a significant predictor of post-test speaking performance after controlling for students' initial proficiency.

These findings suggest that the use of students' first language does not necessarily impede English speaking development when it is incorporated strategically. Instead, appropriately controlled bilingual instruction may provide linguistic and cognitive scaffolding that enables students to understand difficult concepts, expand their vocabulary, improve grammatical accuracy, and participate more effectively in communicative activities. At the same time, the relatively stronger performance of the English-only group in fluency and pronunciation indicates that sustained exposure to English may provide particular advantages for dimensions of speaking that depend heavily on continuous target-language practice.

Overall, the results support the view that neither English-only nor bilingual instruction should be considered universally superior. Rather, the findings favor a balanced pedagogical approach in which English remains the primary medium for meaningful communication while students' first language is used strategically to facilitate comprehension and learning.

5. Discussion

The present study examined students' English speaking skills under two different instructional conditions, namely English-only and bilingual instruction. The findings provide important insights into the ongoing debate concerning the most effective language practices for developing oral proficiency in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts. Overall, both instructional approaches were associated with significant improvements in students' speaking performance; however, the magnitude and pattern of improvement varied across the different dimensions of oral proficiency (Javaid et al., 2024a). While English-only instruction appeared to provide particular benefits for fluency and pronunciation, bilingual instruction produced comparatively stronger gains in accuracy, vocabulary, communicative competence, and overall speaking performance. These findings suggest that the relationship between instructional language and speaking development is complex and cannot be adequately explained through a simple preference for either exclusive English use or extensive reliance on the first language (Macaro, et al., 2020).

The significant improvement observed among students receiving English-only instruction provides support for the argument that sustained exposure to the target language can contribute substantially to the development of oral proficiency. Students in this group demonstrated meaningful gains across fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative competence. The improvement in fluency is particularly noteworthy because speaking fluency depends heavily on repeated opportunities to process and produce the target language in real time. By maintaining English as the exclusive language of classroom interaction, students were continuously encouraged to formulate responses, negotiate meaning, participate in discussions, and communicate without immediately resorting to their first language. Such sustained target-language engagement may have encouraged greater automaticity in English production and reduced students' dependence on translation during oral communication (Togato, et al., 2022).

The comparatively stronger improvement in pronunciation among students receiving English-only instruction further supports the potential value of extensive target-language exposure. Pronunciation development requires frequent auditory exposure to the sound system, stress patterns, rhythm, intonation, and other phonological characteristics of English, together with opportunities for repeated oral production. An English-only environment naturally increases the amount of English that learners hear and produce during classroom interaction. Consequently, students may have had greater opportunities to notice pronunciation patterns and reproduce them during communicative activities. The findings therefore suggest that maintaining a strong target-language environment may be particularly beneficial for aspects of oral proficiency that require frequent exposure and practice (Togato et al., 2022).

Nevertheless, the findings do not support the assumption that maximizing English exposure automatically produces superior outcomes across all dimensions of speaking. Although the English-only group improved substantially, students receiving bilingual instruction achieved higher post-test scores in overall speaking proficiency. The bilingual group also demonstrated stronger gains in accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence. This finding is important because it indicates that strategic use of students' first language may serve as a pedagogical resource rather than necessarily functioning as a barrier to second-language development (Edele et al., 2023).

One possible explanation for the stronger performance of the bilingual group is that strategic L1 use may have reduced unnecessary cognitive demands during the learning process (Nawaz et al., 2021). Learning and using a second language requires students to process new vocabulary, grammatical structures, meanings, and communicative functions simultaneously. When complex linguistic concepts are explained exclusively in English, learners with developing proficiency may devote considerable cognitive resources to understanding the explanation itself rather than focusing on the linguistic feature being taught. In the bilingual condition, brief and purposeful use of the first language may have clarified difficult concepts more efficiently, allowing students to subsequently devote greater attention to using the corresponding English forms. In this sense, L1 may have functioned as scaffolding that supported rather than replaced English learning (Javaid et al., 2024b).

The stronger improvement in grammatical accuracy among bilingual learners is particularly relevant. Accuracy requires learners to understand how linguistic forms are organized and used appropriately. Some grammatical concepts can be difficult to understand when explanations are provided exclusively through the target language, especially when learners lack sufficient proficiency to understand metalinguistic terminology or complex explanations. Strategic bilingual explanations may have enabled students to establish clearer connections between grammatical concepts they already understood in their first language and the corresponding structures in English. Once these concepts were clarified, students could practice them through English-based communicative activities. The findings consequently suggest that limited and purposeful L1 use may facilitate grammatical development without necessarily reducing opportunities for English production.

Vocabulary development also showed a substantial advantage for the bilingual group. Vocabulary learning involves not only recognizing the meaning of words but also understanding their contextual, grammatical, and pragmatic uses. Strategic use of the first language can provide rapid clarification of unfamiliar lexical items and reduce ambiguity, particularly when a word has multiple meanings or when its meaning cannot easily be inferred from context. In the present study, bilingual support may therefore have allowed students to acquire and subsequently use a larger range of English vocabulary. Importantly, the advantage observed for vocabulary should not be interpreted as evidence that students need extensive L1 translation. Rather, it indicates that carefully controlled L1 support may facilitate lexical comprehension when combined with subsequent opportunities for English practice.

The stronger performance of the bilingual group in communicative competence is also significant. Effective communication requires more than grammatical correctness or knowledge of vocabulary. Learners must be able to express ideas, respond appropriately to others, maintain interaction, clarify

meaning, and participate confidently in communicative situations. Students who understand the instructional content more clearly may be more willing to participate in classroom interaction. Strategic L1 use may therefore reduce communication-related frustration and allow learners to enter English-speaking activities with greater confidence. Once the immediate conceptual or linguistic barrier has been removed, students can focus on expressing their ideas in English. Thus, bilingual instruction may create a supportive transition from comprehension to target-language production.

The findings concerning fluency provide an interesting contrast. Although the bilingual group demonstrated substantial improvement, the English-only group achieved a slightly higher post-test fluency score, although the between-group difference was not statistically significant. This pattern may indicate that continuous English exposure has a particular advantage for developing spontaneous oral production. Fluency is closely related to the frequency and continuity of target-language use, and students in the English-only condition were consistently required to operate through English. Such sustained exposure may have encouraged faster lexical retrieval, reduced hesitation, and increased students' ability to formulate utterances directly in English. However, because the between-group difference was not statistically significant, the results should not be interpreted as evidence that bilingual instruction is detrimental to fluency.

The overall difference between the two instructional groups is also theoretically important. The bilingual group achieved a higher overall post-test mean than the English-only group, and the ANCOVA indicated that instructional condition remained a statistically significant predictor of post-test speaking performance after controlling for initial speaking proficiency. However, the relatively small effect size associated with instructional condition indicates that instructional language was only one factor contributing to students' speaking development. This finding is consistent with the multidimensional nature of second-language acquisition. Speaking proficiency is influenced by numerous variables, including learners' motivation, anxiety, prior English exposure, vocabulary knowledge, individual aptitude, classroom interaction, teacher competence, opportunities for practice, and engagement with English outside the classroom. Consequently, instructional language should be regarded as an important pedagogical variable rather than as the sole determinant of oral proficiency.

The findings therefore challenge a rigid interpretation of the English-only principle. Although exclusive English use provides considerable opportunities for target-language exposure and oral practice, the results suggest that complete exclusion of students' first language may not always produce the strongest outcomes across all aspects of speaking proficiency. In particular, the stronger performance of the bilingual group in accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence suggests that learners' existing linguistic resources can potentially be mobilized to support second-language development. Rather than viewing the first language as an interference factor that must always be eliminated, language teachers may benefit from treating it as a controlled pedagogical resource (Ramzan et al., 2023b).

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as support for unrestricted use of the first language. The English-only group demonstrated strong gains in fluency and pronunciation, emphasizing the importance of sustained English exposure. If bilingual instruction results in excessive dependence on L1, students may receive fewer opportunities to process and produce English spontaneously (Ramzan et al., 2023c). The present findings therefore support a strategic bilingual approach rather than a predominantly first-language-based instructional model. Under such an approach, English should remain the principal language for communicative activities, speaking practice, interaction, and performance, while L1 can be introduced selectively to clarify difficult concepts, resolve comprehension problems, explain complex linguistic structures, and provide temporary scaffolding (Bui., & Nguyen, 2016).

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings suggest that ESL teachers should move beyond the binary choice between English-only and bilingual instruction. Instead, instructional language may be adapted according to learners' proficiency levels, task demands, linguistic complexity, and communicative objectives. For example, teachers may use English extensively during discussions, presentations, role

plays, and conversational activities, while employing brief L1 explanations when students encounter particularly difficult grammatical or conceptual problems (Ramzan et al., 2023d). Once comprehension has been established, learners should return to English and apply the newly acquired knowledge through communicative practice. Such an approach can preserve the advantages of target-language exposure while reducing unnecessary barriers to comprehension.

The findings also have implications for curriculum developers and language policymakers. Policies that mandate exclusive English use without considering learners' proficiency levels and classroom realities may overlook the potential pedagogical value of multilingual resources. Conversely, policies that permit extensive L1 use without establishing clear guidelines may unintentionally reduce students' exposure to English. A more flexible policy framework may therefore be appropriate, particularly in multilingual ESL contexts. Such a framework would encourage substantial English exposure while recognizing that strategic bilingual practices can contribute to effective learning (Shin, 2026).

The present findings are also relevant to the concept of communicative language teaching. Effective communicative instruction requires learners to use language for meaningful purposes rather than merely demonstrate knowledge of isolated linguistic forms. The results indicate that bilingual support can potentially facilitate participation in communicative activities by ensuring that students understand what they are expected to communicate. At the same time, English-only interaction can encourage students to develop the ability to manage communication directly in the target language. The most effective classroom environment may therefore be one that combines meaningful English interaction with carefully controlled linguistic scaffolding (Li, & Zhang, 2022).

Another important implication concerns learner confidence. Students who are unable to understand classroom explanations may hesitate to participate because of fear of making mistakes or misunderstanding the teacher. Strategic L1 use may reduce this psychological barrier by providing learners with an accessible route to comprehension. Once students understand the task or linguistic concept, they may be more willing to participate in English. The stronger communicative competence observed among bilingual learners may therefore reflect not only linguistic development but also increased opportunities and willingness to engage in classroom communication (Martin-Belatarin, 2010).

Taken together, the findings indicate that English-only and bilingual instruction should not be regarded as competing approaches in which one must completely replace the other. Instead, they may represent complementary resources within an effective ESL pedagogy. English-only instruction can provide intensive target-language exposure and promote fluency and pronunciation, while bilingual instruction can offer strategic scaffolding that supports accuracy, vocabulary development, comprehension, and communicative competence. The most productive pedagogical approach may therefore involve maintaining English as the dominant language of classroom communication while permitting carefully controlled use of the first language when it serves a clearly defined instructional purpose (Cook, 2001).

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study demonstrates that both English-only and bilingual instruction can contribute positively to the development of students' English speaking skills. However, the stronger overall performance of the bilingual group suggests that strategic integration of learners' first language can enhance oral proficiency without necessarily undermining target-language development. The findings particularly highlight the potential contribution of bilingual instruction to accuracy, vocabulary, and communicative competence, while the results for fluency and pronunciation underscore the continuing importance of extensive English exposure. The central pedagogical implication is therefore not that ESL classrooms should abandon English-only practices entirely, but that teachers should adopt a flexible, evidence-informed approach in which English exposure is maximized while students' first language is used strategically as a temporary scaffold. Such an approach may provide a more balanced and learner-

responsive pathway toward the development of effective, confident, and communicatively competent English speakers.

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