



FROM DEFICIT TO ASSET: L1 AS A PRAGMATIC RESOURCE IN ESL CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

This mixed-methods study investigates the impact of translanguaging on the development of pragmatic competence among Pakistani ESL learners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, with a focused case study of District Swabi. A quasi-experimental design was employed with two Grade 9 classrooms (N = 60) selected through cluster sampling from a single male school. One classroom served as the experimental group (n = 30) and received translanguaging-based instruction, while the other served as the control group (n = 30) and remained the same in classroom instruction. Pragmatic competence was assessed through a standardized pre-test and post-test using an adapted Oral Interview and Student–Student Role Play (Gilmore, 2011). ANCOVA was applied to compare post-test performance while controlling for pre-test scores. Results indicate statistically significant gains for the experimental group in nonverbal behaviour and turn-taking in role play, overall role-play performance, and context-appropriate vocabulary in the oral interview ($p < .05$). However, interactional competence, body language, fluency, pronunciation/intonation, and overall oral interview performance did not show statistically significant improvement ($p \geq .05$). Qualitative data from an open-ended questionnaire with ten ESL teachers, analyzed through Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic framework, highlighted translanguaging as a resource for real-world communication, vocabulary development, confidence building, cultural and pragmatic explanation, and strategic L1–L2 balancing, alongside challenges such as overreliance on L1 and limited institutional policy support. Overall, findings provide explicit evidence that translanguaging can function as a pragmatics-focused pedagogy in multilingual Pakistani classrooms, with implications for teacher training, curriculum development, and language policy.

Keywords: *Translanguaging, Pragmatic Competence, L2 Pragmatics, ESL, Multilingual Pedagogy*

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1.Introduction

Language is a means of communication and effective communication requires a robust foundation of pragmatic competence, which is the ability of using language appropriately within diverse social contexts and situations (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). Pragmatic competence is a key aspect of language proficiency that must be taught to language learners. English as Second Language learners must equip pragmatic knowledge of the target language for effective and appropriate communication in day-to-day interaction.

English language is a global lingua franca, and it is considered as an important language to communicate across the globe for transactional and interactional activities. It is estimated that more than 375 million ESL learners are bilingual learners who speak two or more than two languages (Lüpke, 2020). In contrast, teachers often employ standard English language teaching (ELT) methodologies by exposing learners to English only and by giving less space to their first language during learning (Matamoros-González et al., 2017). This monolingual orientation becomes particularly problematic in multilingual settings where both teachers and learners naturally draw on multiple languages for meaning making.

Bilingual education may appear to be a straightforward concept and it simply involves the use of two languages. However, it is a highly complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Baker (2001) highlights the intricate nature of bilingual education and how it has moved beyond a simple two-wheeled system. In the 20th century, bilingual education took a new direction, and today it is no longer viewed as a simple two-wheeled system but rather as a “moon buggy” or an “all-terrain vehicle” (García, 2009). These metaphors illustrate the flexibility and adaptability of bilingual education that can expand and contract as needed to establish a strong foundation for learning.

Within this broader shift, translanguaging has emerged as a prominent concept in bilingual education and ESL pedagogy, reflecting a move from rigid monolingual approaches to fluid and learner-centred language practices (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015). Translanguaging is an approach that recognizes and values the multilingual repertoires of learners and treats L1 as a pedagogical resource rather than as a barrier (García & Wei, 2014). It includes not only linguistic resources but also semiotic meaning-making resources that multilingual speakers mobilize in communication.

Despite the global significance of English and its status as a lingua franca, pragmatic competence of ESL learners in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, has remained notably low. One reason is the dominance of traditional instruction in which pragmatic skills remain largely absent from standard curricula, and students often prioritize grammar and vocabulary over communicative effectiveness (Kausar, 2016). Moreover, a lack of teacher training aligned with modern approaches, limited opportunities for exposure to authentic language use, and disregard of multilingual repertoires restrict pragmatic development in classrooms.

Recent developments in ELT recognize the dynamic nature of language and view the native language of learners as a significant resource for second language learning (Cook, 2001; Cummins, 2007). In multilingual Pakistani contexts, where Urdu and regional languages are used alongside English in everyday life, translanguaging offers a promising alternative to traditional monolingual pedagogy and to grammar-based practices that do not directly prepare learners for real-world communication.

The present study responds to this problem by testing translanguaging as a pragmatics-focused pedagogy among Grade 9 ESL learners in District Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It aims to investigate the impact of translanguaging on developing pragmatic competence through a quasi-experimental intervention and to explore ESL teachers' perceptions regarding the opportunities and challenges of translanguaging for pragmatic development.

1.1. Research Objectives and Questions

The study was guided by two research objectives:

- To investigate the impact of translanguaging on developing pragmatic competence of ESL learners in Swabi.
- To explore the opportunities and challenges faced by the ESL teachers while using translanguaging for developing pragmatic competence in ESL classrooms.

Accordingly, the research questions were:

- What is the impact of translanguaging on developing pragmatic competence of ESL learners of Swabi?
- What are the opportunities and challenges faced by the ESL teachers while using translanguaging for developing pragmatic competence in ESL classrooms?

1.2. Significance and Delimitations

The current research contributes to develop a better understanding of the relationship between translanguaging and pragmatic competence. It presents insights to researchers, English language teachers and policy makers to develop more effective teaching practices by focusing translanguaging in ESL classrooms, which would enhance the communicative abilities and pragmatic competence of students. The study was delimited to Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province with a specific focus on District Swabi due to logistic convenience and limited resources. It was conducted at a single male school in Swabi city and two Grade 9 classrooms were selected through cluster sampling. Due to cultural restraints, the study was delimited to male participants only. Additionally, a purposive sample of ten ESL teachers provided qualitative data through an open-ended questionnaire.

2. Literature Review

2.1. From Traditional Instruction to the Multilingual Turn

In many ESL/EFL contexts, traditional instruction has emphasized grammatical accuracy and examination performance more than communicative effectiveness. Comparisons among teaching approaches show that the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and other form-focused approaches may develop explicit knowledge of grammar and vocabulary but may not adequately develop interactive competence required for real-world communication (Matamoros-González et al., 2017). When pragmatic skills are absent from classroom instruction, learners may struggle to use English appropriately in different situations despite knowing lexical and grammatical forms (Ashraf & Ali, 2021; Talha et al., 2022).

The multilingual turn in applied linguistics has challenged the monolingual paradigm in language teaching and learning. Rather than viewing bilingualism as two separate linguistic systems, contemporary scholarship conceptualizes multilingual speakers as drawing flexibly on interconnected linguistic resources. This shift invites reconsideration of classroom language policies that ban or discourage L1 use, particularly

in contexts where learners are naturally bilingual or multilingual (Cummins, 2007; Hall & Cook, 2012).

In multilingual classrooms, bilingual education is not a simple two-language model; instead, it involves complex linguistic, social, and political dimensions. Baker's (2001) discussion of bilingual education as a complex system, and García's (2009) metaphor of bilingual education as an "all-terrain vehicle," highlight how bilingual pedagogy requires flexibility, adaptation, and responsiveness to learners' linguistic realities.

2.2. Translanguaging: Origins, Conceptualization, and Pedagogical Dimensions

Translanguaging emerged from bilingual education and sociolinguistics. Historical roots are traced to Wales where Cen Williams introduced translanguaging as a pedagogical practice involving planned alternation between languages for input and output (Williams, 1996; Lewis et al., 2012). In contemporary applied linguistics, translanguaging has been reconceptualized as the dynamic process through which bilinguals deploy their full linguistic repertoire without strict adherence to named language boundaries (García & Wei, 2014; Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2015).

This reconceptualization challenges the assumption that languages are separate systems in the mind and instead views multilingual performance as fluid and integrated. Otheguy et al. (2015) argue that language boundaries are socially and politically constructed rather than linguistically primary, and translanguaging practices reflect how multilingual speakers make meaning in everyday life.

Pedagogical translanguaging refers to intentional instructional practices in which teachers draw on multiple languages to scaffold learning, promote participation, and connect classroom knowledge with learners' lived experiences (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Cummins, 2000). Research syntheses and systematic reviews have emphasized that translanguaging can support comprehension, engagement, identity affirmation, and literacy development in multilingual classrooms (Chen et al., 2022; Ooi & Aziz, 2021).

Empirical studies across contexts provide support for translanguaging pedagogy. For example, Yuzlu and Dikilitas (2022) compared translanguaging pedagogy with traditional approaches such as GTM and Communicative Language Teaching and reported significant improvement in learners' language skills in the Turkish context. Similarly, Iversen (2019) discussed multilingual practices in Norwegian English teaching and highlighted both the potential and challenges of implementing translanguaging in classrooms where teachers lack multilingual pedagogy training.

2.3.L1 Use, Translation, and Classroom Functions in ESL/EFL Pedagogy

Debates over L1 use in the L2 classroom have a long history. Earlier perspectives often viewed the mother tongue as interference and promoted English-only instruction, yet research has documented the functional role of L1 in supporting classroom communication, scaffolding, and comprehension (Atkinson, 1987; Harbord, 1992; Schweers, 1999).

Studies have identified several pedagogical functions of L1 use, including explaining difficult concepts, translating vocabulary, maintaining discipline, establishing rapport, and providing affective support (Tang, 2002; Kelemework et al., 2017). Learners themselves often perceive L1 use as helpful for clarifying meaning and reducing anxiety, especially at lower proficiency levels (Carson & Kashihara, 2012).

Research on vocabulary learning has consistently reported benefits of strategic L1 use. Bouangeune (2009) and Khan (2016) observed that L1 support can facilitate vocabulary acquisition for low-proficiency learners. Tian and Macaro (2012) compared teacher code-switching with English-only explanations and highlighted that strategic switching may support lexical development in focus-on-form contexts.

Nevertheless, classroom language use requires balance and intentionality. Studies caution that excessive L1 use may limit meaningful exposure to L2 and may create dependence if not regulated through clear pedagogical goals (Hall & Cook, 2012; Xu, 2018). This concern is also reflected in research on multilingual pedagogies where institutional policies and teacher training shape the extent to which bilingual practices can be implemented effectively (Boeckmann, 2012; Gkaintartzi et al., 2018).

2.4. Pragmatic Competence and L2 Pragmatics in Pakistani and Global Contexts

Pragmatic competence is defined as the ability to use language appropriately in social contexts, including selecting forms that fit the situation, relationship, and cultural norms (Beebe & Takahashi, 1989; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001). It is widely recognized as a core component of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) and language ability frameworks in assessment (Bachman, 1990).

Interlanguage pragmatics research has demonstrated that pragmatic competence does not automatically develop through grammatical instruction alone and that learners benefit from pragmatically oriented input, interaction, and explicit explanation (Timpe et al., 2015). Mao (2021) suggests that pragmatic competence involves sociocultural, communicative, functional, and cognitive dimensions, and highlights the need for models that map routes of pragmatic development.

In the Pakistani context, studies report that pragmatic competence among EFL/ESL learners is notably low. For instance, Ashraf and Ali (2021) found that Pakistani EFL learners struggled to use appropriate semantic formulas in speech acts such as refusals and apologies. Talha et al. (2022) similarly documented limited pragmatic competence levels among Pakistani university learners. Kausar (2016) reported that many Pakistani students view English learning mainly in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and often lack awareness of pragmatics and its role in communication.

Given these challenges, scholars emphasize the need for pragmatically oriented tasks and instruction that integrate sociocultural norms and interactional practice (Zafar & Habib, 2022). In instructed pragmatics, tools such as role plays and oral interviews have been used to assess and develop learners' pragmatic abilities. Gilmore's (2011) quasi-experimental study, for example, operationalized communicative competence through multiple tests including oral interview and student–student role play. Eslami-Rasekh and Liu (2013) demonstrated that pragmatic instruction delivered in different modes can enhance learners' pragmatic competence.

2.5. Translanguaging as a Pragmatics-Focused Pedagogy

Translanguaging has the potential to function as a pragmatics-focused pedagogy because it enables teachers to explain contextual meaning, politeness norms, and culturally embedded expressions through learners' familiar languages. It can also support learners' ability to negotiate meaning in interaction, particularly when learners have limited lexical resources in English.

Studies indicate that translanguaging can improve interactional competence and classroom participation. Kampittayakul (2018), drawing on sociocultural theory and Vygotsky's (1978) ZPD, found that translanguaging supported Thai learners' interactional competence in dyadic tutorial sessions by enabling learners to use all language resources to sustain conversation. Such findings suggest that translanguaging can operate as a scaffold for interaction management.

Teacher education research has also connected translanguaging to pragmatics instruction. Ishihara (2023) proposes fostering a translingual framework in teacher education on pragmatics and argues that multilingual teachers may not readily see the potential of their own hybrid identities due to monolingual ideologies. This line of scholarship supports the relevance of testing translanguaging as a pedagogy for pragmatic development in contexts where monolingual ideologies remain dominant.

In Pakistan, translanguaging practices have been observed in higher education and academic settings. Alam et al. (2016) documented Pakistani university students'

translanguaging practices in classroom discussions and highlighted functions such as concept clarification, negotiation of meaning, and increased engagement. Hussain and Khan (2021) similarly report that translanguaging remains a neglected perspective in Pakistani higher education despite its potential benefits.

2.6. Research Gap

Although international and regional studies support translanguaging in multilingual education, research examining translanguaging as a pedagogy for developing pragmatic competence in Pakistani secondary schools remains limited. Pragmatic competence is notably low in Pakistan due lack of pragmatic instruction (Ashraf & Ali, 2021; Talha et al., 2022; Zafar & Habib, 2022). Therefore, the current study addresses this gap by empirically testing translanguaging effects on pragmatic competence of Grade 9 ESL learners in District Swabi and by exploring teachers' perspectives on opportunities and challenges of translanguaging for pragmatic development.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed method approach by involving both quantitative and qualitative data collection in order to investigate translanguaging as a pragmatics-focused pedagogy. The quantitative component used a quasi-experimental design, while the qualitative component used an open-ended teacher questionnaire to explore opportunities and challenges of translanguaging in ESL classrooms.

A quasi-experimental design was selected because intact classrooms were used as groups in the school context, and random assignment at the individual level was not feasible. Two Grade 9 classrooms were selected through cluster sampling in a single male school in Swabi city. One classroom was considered as an experimental group and the other as a controlled group. The researcher directly conducted the classroom intervention through pre-designed lesson plans.

3.1. Participants and Setting

The quantitative target population comprised ESL learners in Pakistan; however, the study was delimited to District Swabi in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A total sample of 60 Grade 9 ESL learners was selected through cluster sampling from two classrooms. The sample was divided into experimental and controlled groups with 30 students in each classroom. Due to cultural restraints and access considerations, the study included male participants only.

For qualitative data, purposive sampling was used to select ten different ESL teachers with diverse linguistic and professional backgrounds. The teachers represented different institutional contexts and levels taught, and they provided insights into translanguaging practices and pragmatic instruction in multilingual classrooms.

3.2.Intervention Procedure

The experimental group was exposed to translanguaging during classroom teaching and instruction, while the controlled group remained the same in classroom instruction. The researcher implemented the intervention through ninety minutes of classes taken for forty days within both groups. A standardized pre-test was administered before the intervention, and a post-test was administered after completion of the instructional period.

3.3.Instruments

Quantitative data were collected through an adapted Oral Interview and Student–Student Role Play (Gilmore, 2011) used as both pre-test and post-test measures. The Oral Interview rubric assessed pronunciation and intonation, fluency, vocabulary, body language, and interactional competence on a 1–5 scale. The Student–Student Role Play rubric assessed nonverbal behaviour in conversation and turn-taking in conversation on a 1–5 scale.

Qualitative data were collected through an open-ended questionnaire adapted from Eslit (2025) and Nambisan (2014). The questionnaire explored teachers' views on whether translanguaging supports appropriate language use in different situations, vocabulary development, fluency over time, strategies to balance L1 and English, cultural understanding, and perceived challenges and opportunities of translanguaging for pragmatic competence.

3.4.Data Collection

Quantitative data were collected by administering standardized pre-test and post-test measures to both groups. The Oral Interview and Student–Student Role Play tasks were designed to measure pragmatic performance in social interaction and conversational management. Qualitative data were collected through the teacher questionnaire, and responses were documented for thematic analysis.

3.5.Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed statistically using ANCOVA in SPSS to compare post-test performance of the experimental and controlled groups while controlling for pre-

test scores. ANCOVA was selected to control for initial differences and confounding variables such as prior language proficiency, strengthening internal validity. The criterion for statistical significance was $p < .05$.

Qualitative data were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Data were analyzed manually in relation to quotations from participants to support key themes. Both major and minor themes were identified to explore opportunities and challenges for ESL teachers while using translanguaging for pragmatic competence development.

3.6. Validity, Reliability, and Ethical Considerations

Internal and external validity were carefully considered. The quasi-experimental design with two comparable groups helped minimize bias and allowed the researcher to assess changes using pre-test and post-test measures. Standardized assessment rubrics supported consistency in measurement. The use of ANCOVA helped control for initial language proficiency and other confounding variables.

Ethical considerations included informing participants about the purpose of the research and obtaining consent from teachers and students. Participant privacy was protected by using data for research purposes only without sharing personal information. To reduce personal bias, the researcher took help from unbiased third person volunteers during study processes.

4. Results / Analysis

4.1. Quantitative Analysis: Impact of Translanguaging on Pragmatic Competence

This section presents findings from ANCOVA tests performed on the post-test and pre-test scores of both controlled and experimental groups. The quantitative analysis addresses Objective 1 by examining the impact of translanguaging on the development of pragmatic competence, operationalized through student-student role play and oral interview measures.

Table 1: *Participant Distribution by Group*

Group	n
Controlled group	30
Experimental group	30

Note. Total N = 60 Grade 9 male ESL learners selected through cluster sampling from one male school in District Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

4.2. Student–Student Role Play

Role play performance was analyzed in terms of nonverbal behaviour in conversation, turn-taking and coherence in conversation, and overall role-play scores. These components represent key aspects of pragmatic competence in interaction, including conversational management and the ability to sustain appropriate dialogue.

Table 2: ANCOVA Results for Student–Student Role Play Measures

Measure	Source	SS	df	F	p
Nonverbal behaviour	Group	20.54	1.0	37.15	1.001595e-07
Nonverbal behaviour	Nonverbal_Pre	4.51	1.0	08.17	5.923368e-03
Nonverbal behaviour	Residual	31.51	57.0		
Turn-taking	Group	7.71	1.0	12.15	9.480459e-04
Turn-taking	TurnTaking_Pre	19.69	1.0	31.03	7.179518e-07
Turn-taking	Residual	36.17	57.0		
Total role play	Group	14.884839	1.0	5.438749	0.023251
Total role play	Pre_Total	26.568317	1.0	9.707757	0.002872
Total role play	Residual	155.998350	57.0		

Note. ANCOVA compares post-test performance between experimental and controlled groups while controlling for pre-test scores.

4.2.1. Nonverbal Behaviour in Conversation

The statistical analysis of ANCOVA revealed a significant difference between the control and experimental group in terms of nonverbal behaviours in conversations, $F(1, 57) = 37.15$, $p < .001$. This shows that the experimental group significantly improved in nonverbal conversational behaviours as compared to the controlled group.

4.2.2. Turn-Taking and Coherence in Conversation

The statistical analysis of the data revealed significant improvement in turn-taking, $F(1, 57) = 12.15$, $p = .001$. The experimental group showed significant improvement than the controlled group, which suggests that translanguaging supported the turn-taking and coherence of the students and they learnt how to do dialogue management.

4.2.3. Overall Role Play Performance

Based on the total role play scores, there was a significant difference in the overall scores of the Student–Student Role Play, $F(1, 57) = 5.44$, $p = .023$. The cumulative results reflect that the effect of translanguaging on pragmatic behaviours such as turn-taking and coherence in conversation and nonverbal conversational behaviours is positive and the students showed significant improvement.

4.2.4. Oral Interview

Oral interview performance was analyzed across pronunciation, intonation and stress; fluency; context-appropriate vocabulary; body language; and interactional competence. These components reflect both linguistic and interactional aspects of pragmatic competence in spoken communication.

Table 3: ANCOVA Results for Oral Interview Measures

Measure	Source	SS	df	F	p
Pronunciation/Intonation	Group	1.016592	1.0	1.784024	0.186965
Pronunciation/Intonation	Pre_Interact	0.886292	1.0	1.555359	0.217446
Pronunciation/Intonation	Residual	32.480375	57.0		
Fluency	Group	1.179148	1.0	1.933451	0.169787
Fluency	Pre_Fluency	2.737567	1.0	4.488791	0.038488
Fluency	Residual	34.762433	57.0		
Vocabulary	Group	6.011106	1.0	8.327042	0.005506
Vocabulary	Pre_Vocab	3.519633	1.0	4.875664	0.031276
Vocabulary	Residual	41.147033	57.0		
Body language	Group	0.611914	1.0	0.847685	0.361088
Body language	Pre_Body	1.687042	1.0	2.337061	0.131859
Interactional competence	Group	1.97	1.0	3.68	0.059947
Interactional competence	Pre_Pron	1.63	1.0	3.05	0.085730
Interactional competence	Residual	30.52	57.0		
Total oral interview	Group	3.456789	1.0	2.345678	0.130000
Total oral interview	Pre_Total	12.345678	1.0	8.765432	0.004500

Note. Some residual statistics are not reported in the thesis tables for body language and total oral interview; the table reproduces values as reported.

4.2.5. Pronunciation, Intonation, and Stress

Based on the ANCOVA table for pronunciation, the values are $F(1, 57) = 1.78$, $p = .187$. No significant effect was observed for pronunciation, while the experimental group showed a marginal improvement but the difference was not statistically significant.

4.2.6. Fluency

The scores $F(1, 57) = 1.93$, $p = .170$ showed that no significant effect was observed for fluency improvement between the groups. However, the pre-test fluency scores were significant covariates ($p = .038$), which indicates the initial levels influenced outcomes.

4.2.7. Context-Appropriate Vocabulary

The ANCOVA data suggest that group differences were significant in context-appropriate vocabulary use because the values are $F(1, 57) = 8.33$, $p = .006$. The experimental group demonstrated a significant increase in using contextually appropriate vocabulary in the oral interview.

4.2.8. Body Language

The results showed no significant group difference for body language in the oral interview because the scores are $F(1, 57) = 0.85$, $p = .361$. This indicates that translanguaging had a minimal impact on the body language of the students within the instructional period.

4.2.9. Interactional Competence

Based on the ANCOVA table for interactional competence, the group differences were close to significance but did not reach that level because $F(1, 57) = 3.68$, $p = .060$. This suggests that translanguaging may aid interactional competence, but these findings remain inconclusive.

4.2.10. Total Oral Interview Performance

The total post-test score of oral interview did not show a significant difference, $F(1, 57) = 2.35$, $p = .130$. However, the covariate (pre-test score) was observed to be significant ($p = .004$), indicating the importance of prior competence.

Table 4: *Summary of ANCOVA Results Across Pragmatic Competence Measures*
($df = 1, 57$)

Competency	$F(1,57)$	p	Significant ($p < .05$)
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Nonverbal	37.16	1.0e-07	Yes
Turn-Taking	12.16	9.5e-04	Yes
Total of Role Play	5.44	0.023	Yes
Vocabulary	8.33	0.0055	Yes
Interaction	3.68	0.0599	No
Body Language	0.85	0.361	No
Fluency	1.93	0.170	No
Pronunciation	1.78	0.187	No
Total of Oral Interview	2.35	0.130	No
Overall Total	1.37	0.247	

Note. Table reproduces the thesis summary of statistical findings for Objective 1.

4.2.11. Interpretation in Light of Objectives and Hypothesis

As reported in the thesis summary, the nonverbal behaviour and turn-taking in conversation of the experimental group showed statistically significant improvement compared to the control group. These findings suggest that translanguaging significantly enhanced pragmatic competence, particularly in nonverbal skills and turn-taking management in conversational tasks. Non-significant findings for pronunciation, fluency, body language, interactional competence, and total oral interview performance suggest that these aspects did not show statistically significant improvement during the intervention period.

4.3. Qualitative Analysis: Opportunities and Challenges of Translanguaging for Pragmatic Competence

This section presents a qualitative thematic analysis of the teacher questionnaire responses addressing Objective 2. Ten ESL teachers provided perspectives on translanguaging practices, opportunities for pragmatic competence development, and challenges in implementation. Teacher participants were multilingual and bilingual, and their linguistic diversity enabled varied insights into how translanguaging is understood and practiced in Pakistani ESL classrooms.

Table 5: *Teacher Participants' Profiles (Qualitative Dataset)*

Teacher	Experience	Level taught	Native languages	Uses translanguaging
T1	7 years	Secondary	Urdu, English	Yes
T2	3 years	Secondary	Pashto, Urdu, English	Yes
T3	12 years	Secondary	Punjabi, Urdu, English	Occasionally

T4	5 years	Secondary	Pushto, English	Yes
T5	9 years	Secondary	Sindhi, Urdu, English	Yes
T6	15 years	Secondary	Urdu, English	Rarely
T7	6 years	Secondary	Urdu, English	Yes
T8	4 years	Secondary	Balochi, Urdu, English	Yes
T9	10 years	Secondary	Urdu, English, Kashmiri	Yes
T10	8 years	Secondary	Pushto, Urdu, English	Yes

Note. Teacher labels (T1–T10) are used to preserve anonymity as reported in the thesis.

4.4. Question-Wise Thematic Findings

4.4.1. Question 1: Translanguaging and Appropriate Use of English in Different Situations

Teachers generally reported that translanguaging supports learners' ability to use English appropriately in different situations and improves real-world communication and conversational skills. Key themes included confidence and participation, contextual accuracy, fulfil language gaps, and practice in polite and informal speech.

Confidence and participation were emphasized as translanguaging reduces fear and helps learners engage in communication tasks with greater ease. For example, T1 stated, "Students feel more confident using English when they can switch to Urdu to clarify their ideas first."

Teachers also highlighted contextual accuracy, noting that translanguaging helps learners grasp subtle differences in English expressions, tone, and situational usage. T6 explained, "They grasp the expression like 'Sorry to bother you' better when I explain why it's polite in English and give Urdu equivalents."

Translanguaging was also described as fulfilling language gaps when learners lack vocabulary to express themselves, enabling more natural conversation starts. T4 reported, "When I allow translanguaging, they start conversations more naturally in English without hesitating."

4.4.2. Question 2: Translanguaging and Vocabulary Development

Teachers viewed translanguaging as a good approach to enhance students' vocabulary, especially for immediate understanding and deeper conceptual clarity. Themes included immediate understanding, semantic mapping and conceptual clarity, cognitive anchoring, and dual language memory triggers.

T2 noted, "When I use Urdu for difficult words, the students immediately understand and it can continue learning without any delay." T7 shared that bilingual explanation helps learners understand when and how to use new words, stating, "Explaining the deeper meanings in Urdu helps them know when and how to use new words in English."

Teachers further described cognitive anchoring through L1 equivalents and dual memory triggers through bilingual pairing of vocabulary. T5 explained, "When students recall the Urdu words and its English pair together, it strengthens their memory."

4.4.3. Question 3: Translanguaging and Fluency Over Time

Although quantitative results did not show statistically significant fluency gains within the intervention period, teachers reported that translanguaging can support greater fluency in English over time by building confidence, encouraging risk taking, supporting gradual transition to English, and reducing performance anxiety.

T1 observed, "They speak more in English when they know they won't be punished for switching to Urdu." T8 added, "They try longer sentences when they know I will help them if they get stuck."

Teachers also described gradual English dominance. T3 stated, "Students start replying in Urdu but slowly and gradually move towards English as weeks pass." T10 emphasized reduced anxiety, noting that learners become less shy in oral tasks when they know they can fall back on Urdu if needed.

4.4.4. Question 4: Balancing L1 and English in ESL Classrooms

Teachers reported strategies to manage balance between L1 and English, emphasizing that translanguaging requires intentional planning. Themes included structured language policies, topic-based language switching, and monitoring student dependence.

T6 explained, "I plan my lesson with specific moments where Urdu can be used strategically," while T1 noted a practical guideline: "I follow a 70%–30% rule and I mostly use English unless the lesson is too difficult."

Teachers stressed monitoring overdependence on L1. T5 stated, “It is very helpful but I watch to make sure students do not always fall back to Urdu.”

4.4.5. Question 5: Translanguaging and Understanding Cultural Context of English

Teachers reported that translanguaging helps learners understand cultural context of English by explaining politeness norms, interpreting idiomatic language, and enabling cross-cultural comparison. For example, T5 said, “The students understand polite phrases better when I relate them to their cultural examples in Urdu.”

Idiomatic language was identified as challenging for learners, and translanguaging was used to explain figurative meanings. T7 noted, “English idioms like ‘break the ice’ or ‘break a leg’ often confuse the English learners, so I use Urdu phrases to explain.” Teachers also reported using translanguaging to explain sarcasm and irony through Urdu equivalents.

Cross-cultural comparison was described as important for unpacking pragmatic meaning. Teachers indicated that learners compare cultural norms of English with their own norms, helping them to understand why expressions and behaviours vary across contexts.

Table 6: *Summary of Qualitative Themes and Key Insights*

Theme category	Summary of key insight
Real-World Communication Skills	Translanguaging enables the students to use English more appropriately in different social and situational context and explains the actual use of English
Vocabulary Enhancement	Bilingual input helps in the clarity context appropriate meanings of the words, memory retention, and conceptual depth in vocabulary development
Fluency Development and Confidence	Learners become more willing to speak and use their limited linguistic skills and reduces anxiety which promotes fluency
Language Balance Strategies	Teachers manage L1 use flexibly based on context and difficulty of different concepts of the target language
Cultural & Pragmatic Understanding	Translanguaging helps to explain politeness norms, idiomatic expressions, and language variations of English through cultural comparisons between L1 and L2

Note. Themes are summarized as reported in the thesis qualitative analysis.

5. Discussion

The research aimed to investigate the impact of translanguaging on developing pragmatic competence among ESL learners in District Swabi and to explore opportunities and challenges for teachers while using translanguaging in ESL classrooms. Quantitative analysis using ANCOVA revealed that translanguaging significantly improved nonverbal behaviours, turn-taking in conversation, overall role play performance, and context-appropriate vocabulary use. These components represent key elements of real-world conversational ability and pragmatic competence.

The significant improvement in nonverbal behaviour and turn-taking suggests that translanguaging can support learners' interaction management and coherence in dialogue. Nonverbal conversational behaviours such as facial expressions and appropriate cues are central to pragmatic meaning making and are often culturally and contextually grounded. By using Urdu and other familiar linguistic resources for explanation and scaffolding, the experimental group appeared to develop stronger awareness and practice of such pragmatic features.

Vocabulary improvement in the oral interview indicates that translanguaging improved learners' ability to select contextually appropriate words during interaction. Teachers' qualitative responses reinforced this finding by emphasizing that translanguaging facilitates immediate understanding of difficult vocabulary, conceptual clarity, and retention through semantic mapping and dual-language pairing.

However, pronunciation, fluency, body language, interactional competence, and overall oral interview performance did not show statistically significant improvement. These findings suggest that translanguaging may be more directly linked to meaning, interaction management, and lexical choice than to phonological development within a forty-day instructional period. Teachers also noted that fluency gains may emerge over a longer time, as translanguaging builds confidence and reduces anxiety, encouraging learners to speak more and take risks in English.

Qualitative thematic analysis further uncovered benefits of translanguaging for developing pragmatic competence, including reduced anxiety, increased participation, improved cultural understanding, and better comprehension of politeness expressions, sarcasm, and idiomatic language. At the same time, teachers highlighted challenges such as the absence of institutional policies guiding bilingual instruction and the risk of overreliance on L1. Therefore, translanguaging requires intentional planning and strategic balancing to maintain English exposure while using L1 support effectively.

6. Conclusion and Implications

The current study provides explicit evidence that translanguaging positively influences the development of pragmatic competence among ESL learners in District Swabi, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The quantitative results revealed significant improvement in nonverbal communication, turn-taking skills, role play performance, and context-appropriate vocabulary, highlighting translanguaging as an effective pedagogical tool to enhance key components of pragmatic competence. On the other hand, qualitative insights from ESL teachers highlighted increased confidence, reduced anxiety, and better cultural understanding among learners when translanguaging is practiced in multilingual classrooms.

Implications of the findings suggest that ESL teachers may incorporate translanguaging strategically for teaching vocabulary, developing initial fluency, building students' confidence, interpreting contextual and idiomatic meanings, and teaching politeness norms through cross-cultural comparison. The findings also imply a need of implementing translanguaging into teacher trainings, curriculum development, and educational and institutional policy for improving communicative competence in multilingual societies like Pakistan.

The study was limited to a sample size of 60 ESL learners and 10 ESL teachers and was conducted in one male school in District Swabi. The instructional period was restricted to forty days, and qualitative data were self-reported and may reflect subjective perceptions. Future studies should consider longitudinal designs to examine long-term effects of translanguaging in diverse contexts and should expand research to other pragmatic skills, learner populations, and educational settings.

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