ISSN: 2243-7703

International Journal of Research Studies in

Education

2025 Volume 14 Number 13

Special Issue on Comparative Perspectives in Bilingual Education

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

International Journal of Research Studies in Education

Volume 14, Issue Number 13
2025
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- Language and identity: Bilingual education policy in Malaysian society
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- Bilingualism and the politics of recognition: A Taylorian view of cultural identity in Philippine language policy
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International Journal of Research Studies in Education

Volume 14, Issue Number 13
2025

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 1-6

Bridging cultures and policies: A preface to student studies on bilingual education reform

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Received: 13 May 2025
Revised: 18 June 2025
Accepted: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025
DOI: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25202

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Abstract

This preface introduces a collection of student-led research papers examining bilingual education as a lens for educational reform across diverse global contexts. Emerging from the English as a Medium of Instruction course "Global Comparative Educational Reform" at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan. The project brings together case studies on Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Chile, Argentina, and the Philippines. Each paper explores how bilingual or multilingual policies intersect with national identity, globalization, teacher capacity, and educational equity. Thematically, the studies reveal several recurring tensions between global competitiveness and local identity, between centralized policymaking and decentralized realities, and between the aspirational goals of bilingualism and the structural barriers to inclusive implementation. While some countries pursue bilingualism for economic and geopolitical positioning, others frame it as a response to linguistic diversity and Indigenous inclusion. Notably, the invited paper on the Philippines adds a philosophical lens through Charles Taylor's theory of the politics of recognition, arguing that language policy is a moral act with implications for cultural dignity, identity, and justice. Student groups employed a variety of methods, such as policy analysis, stakeholder interviews, comparative frameworks, and philosophical critique, to investigate how language reforms are formulated and lived. Together, their work moves beyond surface-level comparisons to explore how language functions as both a medium of learning and a mechanism of inclusion or exclusion. By bridging cultures and policies, and theory with practice, this project underscores how bilingual education reflects deeper societal questions about who speaks, who is heard, and who belongs in education systems undergoing transformation.

Keywords: bilingual education, language policy, educational reform, cultural identity, comparative education

Bridging cultures and policies: A preface to student studies on bilingual education reform

1. Introduction

Bilingual education stands at the intersection of language, identity, and reform (Hamman & Palmer, 2023). Across societies, decisions about what languages are taught have reveal deeper questions about cultural recognition, national aspirations, and educational priorities (Byram, 2008). Far from being neutral instructional tools, language policies carry social, political, and ethical weight (McGroarty, 2002). They can affirm identities and promote opportunity, or they can marginalize minority voices and reinforce inequality (Tikly, 2016). In this way, bilingual education is not merely a pedagogical practice; it is a reflection of how a society negotiates its past, responds to its present, and imagines its future (Alfaro, 2018).

This collection of student-led studies emerges from the course "Global Comparative Educational Reform" at National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan. Students were tasked with investigating bilingual or multilingual education reforms across diverse national contexts. Their country cases include Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, India, Chile, Argentina, and an invited case from the Philippines. Each study examines how language policies are constructed, implemented, and experienced by stakeholders, such as: teachers, students, families, and policymakers alike. What makes this collection distinctive is the range of comparative insights that emerge across seemingly different systems. While some countries adopt bilingual education to enhance economic competitiveness (e.g., Singapore, South Korea, Indonesia), others do so to preserve linguistic diversity and affirm Indigenous rights (e.g., Chile, Argentina, India). Taiwan and Thailand represent systems in active transition, facing both institutional and pedagogical challenges in implementing bilingual reforms. Meanwhile, the invited paper on the Philippines introduces a moral-philosophical lens, using Charles Taylor's (1994) theory of the politics of recognition to argue that privileging dominant languages may constitute a form of cultural misrecognition; undermining the dignity and identity of marginalized linguistic communities.

Throughout the project, students employed diverse methodologies, including policy analysis, interviews, classroom observations, and conceptual critique. Collectively, their work affirms a central insight in the field of comparative education: that language is never just a medium of instruction; it is a site of power, access, and belonging (May, 2012). The following sections explore these themes in greater depth, framing bilingual education not as a fixed model, but as an evolving space of negotiation shaped by global forces and local realities.

2. Why Bilingual Education?

Bilingual education has long been situated at the heart of educational reform debates, particularly in contexts marked by linguistic diversity, postcolonial legacies, or aspirations toward global competitiveness (Chimbutane, 2011; García, 2009). At its core, bilingual education refers to the structured use of two (or more) languages as mediums of instruction within a formal schooling context (Skutnabb-Kangas & McCarty, 2008). However, the why of bilingual education varies widely across countries and often reveals far more than pedagogical intent (Wright & Baker, 2016). It reflects how states manage cultural difference, distribute opportunity, and define what counts as national belonging. In some systems, such as Singapore, South Korea, and Indonesia, bilingualism is promoted primarily for its instrumental value (Sun & Rong, 2018; Tan & Ng, 2011).

English proficiency is framed as a gateway to economic advancement, global mobility, and national development (Lasanowski, 2011). This view aligns with what scholars have called the instrumentalist logic of language policy, where language is valued chiefly for its utility in the global marketplace (Park & Wee, 2012).

Yet this logic often overshadows other important dimensions, such as linguistic justice or cultural expression. In contrast, countries like Chile and Argentina promote bilingual or multilingual education as a form of recognition and redress; a means of validating Indigenous and minority languages historically excluded from formal schooling (Lopez, 2009). Here, language is not only a tool for communication, but rather as a symbol of dignity, identity, and historical memory (Joseph, 2016; McDowell, 2008). These models call attention to the ethical stakes of language policy, aligning closely with Charles Taylor's (1994) view that recognition is a fundamental human need.

The case of the Philippines synthesizes both of these tensions. While the Filipino–English bilingual policy has long been justified in terms of national unity and global relevance, it has also marginalized hundreds of regional and Indigenous languages. As the invited paper argues, this exclusion constitutes a form of misrecognition; a failure to affirm the cultural identity of linguistically diverse learners. Ultimately, bilingual education is never just about learning two languages. It is about whose languages are legitimized, whose voices are heard, and whose knowledge is included in the curriculum. It is a site of inclusion or exclusion, a platform for empowerment or erasure. For this reason, bilingual education is not only pedagogical; it is also political, cultural, and profoundly human.

3. Comparative Themes and Country Patterns

Despite their diverse regional, historical, and cultural contexts, the student studies in this volume reveal several shared patterns and tensions in how bilingual education is conceptualized and implemented. These themes illuminate the broader dynamics of educational reform, particularly as language policy becomes increasingly entangled with identity, globalization, and inequality. The following four themes emerged across cases:

Language, Identity, and the Politics of Recognition - In contexts such as Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan, and the Philippines, language is closely tied to political legitimacy and cultural identity. These cases illustrate how language education can serve as either a form of affirmation or exclusion. The Philippine paper, in particular, employs Charles Taylor's (1994) politics of recognition to argue that privileging dominant languages (Filipino and English) has marginalized regional and Indigenous linguistic identities; an ethical concern echoed in Hong Kong's marginalization of Cantonese and Taiwan's concerns over dialect preservation.

Equity and Access in Bilingual Reform - Many papers highlight the risks of bilingual education reinforcing social inequality. In Thailand, South Korea, and Argentina, access to quality bilingual programs is often stratified along socioeconomic lines, with rural and under-resourced communities left behind. The rise of international and English-medium schools in South Korea exemplifies how bilingualism, when privatized, becomes a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) accessible only to the elite.

Teacher Capacity and Policy Implementation Gaps - Reforms in Taiwan, India, Chile, and Malaysia reveal significant barriers in classroom implementation. Common challenges include teacher shortages, insufficient training, unclear curriculum guidance, and lack of collaboration with foreign-language teachers, more specifically within the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) settings (Coyle et al., 2010). These gaps point to a recurring lesson: policy vision without system-level support often fails to reach the learner.

Policy Models, Transfer, and Local Adaptation - The case of Singapore appears frequently as a reference point for successful bilingual policy. However, the comparative paper on Singapore and Taiwan raises critical questions about the transferability of technocratic, centralized models to more pluralistic or democratic systems. Similarly, Thailand draws on neighboring models, but its fragmented policy landscape and urban–rural disparities highlight the difficulty of adapting reforms without strong institutional coherence.

Altogether, these thematic patterns not only provide a lens for comparison, but also reveal how language education serves as a proxy for deeper societal debates about power, identity, and the distribution of opportunity.

Whether implemented in centralized or decentralized systems, bilingual reform requires careful attention to both structural capacity and cultural context (see Table 1 for the summary).

Table 1

Comparative Matrix of Country Patterns

Theme	Countries	Key Issues Highlighted
Identity and recognition	Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Taiwan	Misrecognition of minority languages; tensions between national unity and pluralism
Equity and access	South Korea, Thailand, Argentina, Indonesia	Urban-rural disparities; elite capture of international education
Teacher capacity and implementation	Taiwan, India, Chile, Malaysia	Lack of training; policy-practice gaps; CLIL resource challenges
Globalization and instrumentalism	Singapore, Indonesia, South Korea	English as economic capital; pressure to perform in globalized settings
Policy borrowing and local fit	Singapore → Taiwan; Thailand → Malaysia	Adaptation difficulties; mismatch of models and governance cultures
Indigenous and intercultural bilingualism	India, Chile, Argentina	Community-based models; teacher training for cultural inclusion

4. Reflections on Student Research and Methodologies

One of the most compelling features of this project is its grounding in student-led inquiry. Rather than approaching bilingual education from a purely theoretical or top-down policy lens, the student groups engaged directly with diverse sources of evidence, interpreted them through interdisciplinary frameworks, and explored real-world implications for learners, educators, and national communities. This methodological openness reflects the core spirit of comparative education: understanding difference not as a barrier, but as a generative space for reflection, critique, and transformation (Bray & Thomas, 1995). Importantly, the students employed a wide range of research strategies, tailored to the unique dynamics of their selected country cases. Several groups used qualitative methods, such as semi-structured interviews and classroom-based observations. For example, the Taiwan study combined student surveys with in-depth interviews with a mathematics teacher, offering a grounded view of how bilingual experimental classes under the Bilingual Nation 2030 policy are experienced on the ground. Other papers, such as those on Thailand, Malaysia, and India, focused on policy document analysis, tracing the evolution, objectives, and outcomes of bilingual education reforms through national education plans and government reports. Notably, the Philippines paper introduces a philosophical lens, drawing on Charles Taylor's (1994) theory of the politics of recognition to frame bilingualism as a moral and cultural issue. This conceptual approach extends the methodological diversity of the project and deepens the discussion on the ethical stakes of language policy.

In terms of comparative logic, some groups examined single-country cases in depth, while others, such as the Singapore–Taiwan paper and the Argentina–Chile–India study; employed cross-national comparisons, highlighting both shared trends and structural divergences. In doing so, students grappled with the challenges of policy transfer, contextualization, and local adaptation, a core concerns in comparative policy research. Across the board, the student work reflects critical engagement with themes of equity, cultural identity, governance, and pedagogy. Their inquiries move beyond surface-level descriptions and reflect a genuine attempt to understand how bilingual education plays out in specific historical, sociopolitical, and institutional contexts. These efforts not only fulfill the objectives of the course, but also demonstrate the value of student scholarship in contributing to broader conversations in education policy, multilingualism, and global reform movements.

5. Conclusion

Bilingual education, as explored through the diverse perspectives in this collection, emerges as a complex, contested, and deeply human site of educational reform. It is shaped not only by pedagogical goals but by

national ideologies, global pressures, sociolinguistic hierarchies, and the everyday realities of teachers and students. Across the cases, spanning Asia and Latin America, wherein bilingualism is shown to function simultaneously as a strategy for economic advancement, a tool for cultural affirmation, and a site of political struggle. The student studies in this volume offer a rich comparative lens into these tensions. Some countries, such as Singapore, have implemented long-term centralized policies to promote bilingualism as both a national identity project and a global competitiveness strategy. Others, such as Malaysia, Thailand, and Taiwan, illustrate how fragmented implementation, regional disparities, and unclear curricular visions can complicate reform, even when policy goals are ambitious. In contrast, countries like India, Chile, and Argentina frame bilingualism as a right; especially for Indigenous communities historically excluded from formal education systems.

Importantly, the Philippines paper reframes the entire conversation through a philosophical lens, challenging the dominant instrumentalist logic that reduces bilingualism to economic utility. By invoking Charles Taylor's (1994) theory of recognition, it positions language policy as a moral and political act; one that can either affirm or deny the cultural dignity of its learners. This ethical dimension runs beneath many of the cases, even when not made explicit. Collectively, the student papers show that bilingual education is not a one-size-fits-all solution. It must be understood within context, critically examined for its effects, and grounded in principles of equity, inclusion, and recognition. As this project demonstrates, meaningful reform begins not with imported models, but with informed, reflective inquiry of the kind these students have undertaken with thoughtfulness and care.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 7-21

Intercultural bilingual training for teachers and related policies: Comparative study of Argentina, Chile and India

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ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25203

Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of intercultural bilingual teacher training policies and practices in Argentina, Chile, and India. While the three countries differ in historical and policy contexts, they share a commitment to preserving Indigenous languages and promoting inclusive education through community-based and multilingual approaches. The study highlights common strengths, such as legal frameworks recognizing Indigenous rights and the involvement of local educators, alongside persistent challenges including fragmented implementation, undervaluation of Indigenous knowledge, and limited pedagogical integration. Drawing on qualitative document analysis, the paper explores how each country's experiences can inform more cohesive, culturally responsive teacher education systems that balance cultural preservation with the demands of competitive, standardized education.

Keywords: intercultural education, bilingual education, teachers' training, indigenous people, language, elementary education

Intercultural bilingual training for teachers and related policies: Comparative study of Argentina, Chile and India

1. Introduction

Intercultural education, as shaped by decades of theoretical development and classroom practice, is grounded in the premise that globalization must not equate to cultural homogenization (C. Rpanta & S. Trovão, 2021); instead, it should foster mutual understanding and respectful dialogue across diverse identities (Council of Europe, 2008; Portera, 2008). Recognizing culture as a dynamic, multilayered construct shaped through ongoing interactions (Holmes et al., 2015; Cope & Kalantzis, 2009), intercultural education aims to equip learners with the attitudes, knowledge, and skills to navigate and embrace diversity—not merely as a demographic fact but as a lived social complexity.

Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) in Latin America, particularly in countries like Argentina and Chile, emerged as part of broader efforts to recognize the linguistic and cultural rights of Indigenous peoples. IBE promotes the use of both Indigenous and dominant national languages (typically Spanish) in educational settings and is grounded in the principles of interculturality, cultural rights, and epistemic diversity. In this model, learning is not confined to the classroom but is rooted in the worldview (*cosmovisión*), values, and knowledge systems of Indigenous communities. (López, 2001). While Latin American IBE often involves reclaiming Indigenous languages as a second language for students whose **f**irst language is Spanish, in India, the situation is often reversed: students may speak Indigenous or tribal languages at home but are schooled primarily in dominant state or national languages. The experience of IBE in Latin America serves as a key motivation for our research, as it offers a compelling example of how educational systems can address linguistic diversity, promote cultural recognition, and integrate Indigenous knowledge. By examining IBE in Argentina and Chile alongside multilingual education efforts in India, we aim to explore how different national contexts approach the complex intersection of language, identity, and education.

Intercultural education can also be understood through the lens of migration, encompassing peoples from different parts of the world. However, for the purposes of this study, we deliberately narrowed our focus to native populations. This is a methodological decision: expanding the scope to include immigrant-centered perspectives—given their complex pedagogical, linguistic, and policy dimensions—would necessitate an entirely separate line of inquiry. Our emphasis thus remains on teachers training within Indigenous settings. Moreover, the term *bilingual education* might commonly evoke the teaching of English as a second language. This, however, is not the case in the contexts we examine—although in India, English is increasingly assuming that role. This approach also seeks to challenge and expand prevailing notions of "bilingual" education by highlighting its diverse forms in Indigenous contexts.

Building on this conceptual foundation, the present study examines how educators are prepared to navigate linguistic and cultural diversity. We aim to uncover both the challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing IBE policies. This approach allows for a deeper understanding of how intercultural education translates from theory into classroom practice, and how it can contribute to empowering Indigenous communities while fostering inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogy.

2. Research methodology

This study adopts a comparative qualitative research design to examine and contrast the training received by indigenous and non-indigenous teachers in multicultural and multilingual contexts in Chile, Argentina, and India, chosen for their diverse indigenous populations and distinct intercultural education policies. The aim is to understand how teacher training programs prepare educators to foster intercultural harmony in indigenous

communities, with a focus on historical context, training content, language focus, formalization, and challenges.

The study is structured around several key dimensions: historical and sociocultural context, (specifically whether the teachers are members of indigenous communities or outsiders, and how this positionality affects training and integration), the type of training they receive, the level of formalization (whether the training is regulated and officially documented or carried out at a local, informal level), the degree of focus on indigenous languages, the challenges teachers face in each context (such as those based on tribal differences in Chile and Argentina or regional-linguistic diversity in India), and the support mechanism available for teacher training. Data was collected through document analysis of teacher education curricula, education policies, and official reports from government and non-governmental institutions. Our analysis is organized according to the categories listed above, that allows us to compare and contrast how each country approaches the training of teachers in indigenous contexts. Finally, we apply our own measure of effectiveness: in the absence of teacher training in intercultural education, the effectiveness of these policies is open to question.

3. Intercultural bilingual education in Argentina: Historical and teacher training context and challenges

Historical Context and Policy Development - Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) in Argentina has emerged from a long-standing tension between assimilationist schooling and the recognition of Indigenous rights. Historically, Indigenous communities in Argentina were marginalized by a monolingual, Eurocentric educational system that prioritized Spanish and excluded Indigenous knowledge systems. During the 19th and 20th centuries, education functioned as a key instrument of state "*argentinization*", often portraying Indigenous peoples as uncivilized and in need of cultural replacement (Mamani, 2019). The inclusion of IBE in public policy gained momentum after the 1994 constitutional reform, which acknowledged the pre-existence of Indigenous peoples and their rights to preserve language, identity, and culture (Constitución Nacional Argentina, 1994, art. 75, inc. 17). Later, the National Education Law (Ley N° 26.206) passed in 2006 officially recognized IBE as a modality across initial, primary, and secondary levels, mandating the preservation and revitalization of Indigenous languages and worldviews (Unamuno, 2018). However, the dismantling of national IBE programs in 2017 highlighted the fragility of state commitment to intercultural principles (Mamani, 2019).

Teacher Identity: Insiders vs. Outsiders - One of our central concerns in the implementation of Intercultural Bilingual Education (IBE) is the identity of the teachers: are they Indigenous insiders or external educators? We believe that only individuals who are trained in the specific culture and language of a given Indigenous group can genuinely support students' learning and cultural development. This view is supported by Hecht (2006), who shows that Indigenous educators play a key role in negotiating between family-based knowledge systems and formal schooling, acting as cultural and linguistic mediators. In the case of Argentina, particularly in provinces like Salta and Chaco, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers are involved in IBE. The emergence of Indigenous teachers has been especially important in strengthening the cultural legitimacy of these programs. For example, in Chaco, Indigenous students are trained at institutions such as the Centro de Investigación y Formación para la Modalidad Aborigen (Research and Training Center for the Indigenous Modality), which requires communal endorsement for admission (Unamuno, 2018). Similarly, in Salta, teacher training institutions like the Profesorado en Educación Primaria con orientación en EIB (Primary Teacher Training Program with a Focus on Intercultural Bilingual Education) actively recruit students from local Indigenous communities (Mamani, 2019). Despite their central role, many Indigenous educators are still relegated to auxiliary or non-certified roles, and their knowledge is undervalued within formal systems. This exclusion limits their decision-making power and reinforces a hierarchy in which non-Indigenous teachers maintain administrative and pedagogical control (Hecht, 2006).

Teacher Training: Regulation, Language Focus, and Locality - Teacher training for IBE in Argentina is localized and fragmented. While some provinces like Chaco and Salta have developed specific institutions and curricula to train teachers in IBE, there is no national standard or coordinated policy framework. In Chaco, training programs such as those at the Centro de Educación Superior Bilingüe e Intercultural (Center for Bilingual and

Intercultural Higher Education) incorporate a language revitalization focus, recognizing Indigenous educators as key agents in preserving linguistic and cultural identity (Unamuno, 2018). However, such initiatives often exist outside of the mainstream tertiary education system and face challenges related to funding and institutional recognition. In terms of language focus, training is uneven. Some programs include courses in native languages, such as Wichí, Qom, or Guaraní, yet these are often introductory or optional. Moreover, there is a lack of standardized orthographies and didactic materials in Indigenous languages, making instruction difficult (Mamani, 2019; Hecht, 2006). The variability in program quality and content reflects broader regional disparities and a lack of sustained national commitment.

Key Challenges and Structural Limitations - Several challenges hinder the effective implementation of IBE in Argentina. First, the limited formal recognition of Indigenous educators—many of whom are trained in non-formal settings—undermines their status and impact in schools (Unamuno, 2018). Second, there is a persistent mismatch between national curricula and Indigenous pedagogical traditions. Content is rarely adapted to local cosmologies, languages, or community needs (Mamani, 2019). Third, while IBE is often framed as a right, in practice it is implemented as a compensatory or symbolic policy. This leads to superficial inclusion of cultural content without genuine transformation of teaching practices or institutional power dynamics (Hecht, 2006). Additionally, resource constraints, teacher shortages, and poor infrastructure in Indigenous regions further undermine the potential of IBE.

Reflections on Effectiveness: A Policy Without Support? A critical concern is whether IBE policies can be considered effective if the majority of teachers are not adequately trained in intercultural and bilingual methodologies. Without consistent professional development, pedagogical tools, and linguistic proficiency, teachers cannot fully implement the goals of IBE. As Hecht (2006) argues, the real work of intercultural negotiation often falls to teachers who must improvise amid institutional constraints, with little structural support. Therefore, measuring the effectiveness of IBE policies requires more than legal recognition or curriculum design—it demands an examination of the lived experiences of educators and students. If Indigenous teachers remain under-trained, under-recognized, or unsupported, then IBE remains a rhetorical gesture rather than a transformative educational model.

In sum, while Argentina has made significant strides in recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples through Intercultural Bilingual Education policies, the implementation of these policies remains fragmented and uneven. The existence of locally driven training programs and the involvement of Indigenous educators represent meaningful progress. However, systemic challenges, such as limited institutional recognition, inadequate teacher preparation, and insufficient linguistic resources; undermine the transformative potential of IBE. To move beyond symbolic inclusion, there must be sustained investment in teacher training, greater integration of Indigenous voices in policy-making, and structural reforms that reposition IBE as a central—not marginal—pillar of Argentina's educational system. Only then can Intercultural Bilingual Education fulfill its promise as a tool for equity, cultural revitalization, and genuine intercultural dialogue.

4. Intercultural teacher training in Chile: Policy, practice, and pedagogical challenges

Introduction to Intercultural Education in Chile - Intercultural education has become increasingly relevant in Chile due to rising cultural diversity driven by both the historical marginalization of Indigenous communities and recent patterns of migration (Reuse et al., 2024). In this circumstance, teacher education programs are expected to prepare future educators to address the complexities of cultural difference in the classroom. Intercultural teacher education assumes a dual configuration: one led by formal higher education institutions such as the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (Pontifical Catholic University of Chile, PUC), and another driven by Indigenous communities through the role of Traditional Educators. Together, these approaches highlight the opportunities and limitations within current intercultural bilingual education (IBE) policy and practice. The legal initiative for the implementation of public policies governing Intercultural Bilingual Education

by the State of Chile began in the 1990s with the ratification of the UNICEF Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990 and the enactment of Indigenous Law 19.253 in 1993. Both legal instruments set forth the right of Indigenous children to speak their language. (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019).

Intercultural Education in Chile: Policies - The development of intercultural bilingual education (IBE) policy in Chile shows a slow but meaningful shift towards recognizing Indigenous linguistic and cultural rights within the national education system. An important improvement was the introduction of Decree No. 280 in 2009, which established 'Sector de Lengua Indígena' (Indigenous Language Sector) as an official part of the primary education curriculum. Under this policy, schools with 20% or more Indigenous students were required to introduce Indigenous language instruction from Grades 1 through 8. Decree 280 promotes a co-teaching model that includes community recognized Traditional Educators together with formally trained teachers, thus allowing for the preservation of Indigenous knowledge systems through culturally relevant teaching methods (Ministerio de Educación, 2009; Becerra-Lubies, Gallardo, & Contreras, 2019). This policy strengthens earlier frameworks such as Law No. 19.253 (1993), which recognized the cultural rights of Indigenous people, and was further supported by Chile's ratification of ILO Convention 169 in 2008, ensuring that the state promotes and preserves Indigenous languages in the education system (ILO, 1989/2008; Ley Indígena N° 19.253, 1993).

In order to put these commitments into practice, the Programa de Educación Intercultural Bilingüe (PIBE) was established and is still overseen by the Ministry of Education in partnership with CONADI. PIBE provides curricular guidelines, pedagogical resources, and advisory services to support the successful application of intercultural education practices in more than 1,400 schools throughout Chile (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019). Recently, the Chilean government, in partnership with UNESCO, has introduced programs such as Koneltun (2023–2024), a program which aims to strengthen the language and teaching skills of traditional educators in regions areas like Biobío, Araucanía, and Los Ríos (UNESCO, 2023). All of these reflect a change in policy from superficial inclusion to meaningful integration of Indigenous point of view in both curriculum design and teacher training. Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including the lack of adequate training for Indigenous teachers, financial instability, and uneven application of intercultural educational policies. (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019; UNESCO, 2023).

University-Based Teacher Education: Curricular Approaches to Interculturality in Formal Training Institutions - Chile´s formal institutions such as Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC), have incorporated intercultural dimensions into their curriculum. The Primary School Teaching program has 10 semesters in total, including both general and subject-specific training. This program offers two courses key to intercultural education which are: *Diversity and Inclusion (Semester 4)* which focuses on heterogeneous classrooms, *and Curriculum in Primary Education (Semester 2),* this course encourages critical reading of curriculum and context-sensitive decision making. These introduce student-teachers to theoretical concepts like cultural identity, exclusion, and the role of positionality in pedagogical design. These courses also encourage critical commitment with curricular tools and promote inclusive planning based on local school contexts (Reuse et al., 2024).

Conceptual Gaps in Pedagogical Preparation: Disconnection Between Theory and Practice in Teacher Training - Graduates of these programs obtain conceptual knowledge related to interculturality, like critical reflection, awareness of positionality, and recognition of systemic inequalities. However, these capacities are often developed in isolation, and have limited pedagogical application. The curriculum is compartmentalized, treating interculturality as a standalone issue rather than embedding it across courses or within practice-based training experiences (Reuse et al., 2024). This segmentation restricts the development of holistic intercultural competence, defined as the affective, cognitive, and behavioral ability to navigate diverse cultural settings (Zhang & Zhou, 2019; cited in Reuse et al., 2024). Furthermore, despite Chile's official commitment to intercultural values, teacher education is still influenced by Eurocentric epistemologies. Indigenous worldviews, pedagogical approaches, and local knowledge systems are scarcely integrated into the main teacher education curriculum. This epistemic exclusion limits future teachers' ability to connect with Indigenous students and communities in meaningful,

culturally supporting ways. These educators want deeper training but are restrained by emotional suppression, conceptual confusion, and institutional silence. However, this desire is a sign of an opportunity for transformation if supported by systemic reform and collective practice.

The Role of Traditional Educators - Alongside university-trained teachers, Chile's IBE policy framework formally introduced the figure of the Traditional Educator through Decree 280 (2009), who can work together with the classroom teacher. This role is designed to reduce the cultural and linguistic gaps in schools. The teaching of indigenous languages and cultures began in 2010 in a new class denominated Indigenous Language Class (in Spanish *Sector Lengua Indígena*), created by Decree 280 (enacted in 2009 by the Chilean Ministry of Education). Schools with more than 20% of enrolled indigenous students must mandatorily implement the Indigenous Language Class (1400 schools in Chile). (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019). A Traditional Educator is an indigenous person with linguistic and cultural competences necessary for teaching an indigenous language in a school context, but they typically lack formal pedagogical training. There is little knowledge of the languages and cultures of indigenous peoples in schools, with the exception of Traditional Educators. The Ministry of Education considers Traditional Educators to be teachers accepted by the communities, with a role of mediator and facilitator for intercultural integration, being key stakeholders for the communities and the school system. (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019).

Challenges Faced by Traditional Educators: Isolation, Lack of Support, and Institutional Undervaluation - Some scholars in Chile and Latin America brought up the importance of intercultural and bilingual education being a system, a web. This has also been stated in public policy documents recommending that community members, such as Traditional Educators, should work in networks. (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019). While these educators are valued in public policy documents, they work in isolation. There is a lack of support for Traditional Educators in schools by families, teachers and local communities, together with the lack of communication between Traditional Educators and students. Some even report discriminatory attitudes from teachers and administrators, with little collaboration in the co-teaching structures pictured by policy. Additional challenges include a lack of support for professional development, lack of culturally relevant teaching materials, and poor compensation. These educators often work in pedagogical isolation, with few opportunities to share knowledge or take part in collaborative planning. They also struggle with the classroom management and methodological demands of formal education, especially when teaching classrooms with various grades or linguistically diverse classrooms. (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019).

Structural Limitations in the Implementation of Intercultural Bilingual Education - Even with the advances in the implementation of intercultural bilingual education (IBE) in Chile, there are still limitations in how educators, both formally trained and community-based, are prepared to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts. These limitations weaken the transformation of intercultural education. One of the most critical limitations is the fragmented implementation of policy frameworks. While national policies such as Decree 280 (2009) mandate the inclusion of Indigenous language instruction through the Indigenous Language Class (*Sector Lengua Indígena*), there is a disconnection between these mandates and the actual support systems provided for educators. In particular, Traditional Educators are assigned with implementing complex linguistic and cultural curricula without sufficient material resources, pedagogical training, or institutional support. (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019). Schools do not provide collaborative environments or professional development ways, resulting in isolation and inconsistency in practice. In addition, financial instability is a continual issue. Traditional Educators report low and irregular salaries. This not only demoralizes them but also reflects the broader patterns of institutional undervaluation of Indigenous knowledge (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019). This limits the sustainability of intercultural programs in schools.

Disconnection Between Schools and Indigenous Communities - The limited involvement of Indigenous communities in the implementation of intercultural education continues to undermine its effectiveness. As Becerra (2016) points out, Intercultural Bilingual Education (EIB) is not consistently implemented across all Chilean schools; for instance, the municipality of La Pintana has developed its own localized approach,

underscoring the fragmented and uneven nature of such initiatives. These disparities reveal a deeper disconnect between schools and the sociocultural realities of Indigenous families, often leaving intercultural efforts isolated and unsupported. Moreover, the pedagogical strategies emphasized in teacher training programs frequently fall short in equipping educators to navigate these challenges. Many Traditional Educators express uncertainty about how to engage students across different age groups and levels of interest, or how to meaningfully integrate oral traditions within rigid classroom structures. This lack of methodological support further discourages the effective inclusion of Indigenous languages in educational settings (Becerra-Lubies et al., 2019).

5. Intercultural teacher training in India: Policy, teacher training, and limitations

Policy Foundations of Teacher Training Reform in India - India's education system is currently shaped by a strong policy commitment to inclusion, cultural diversity, and multilingualism, anchored by two major framework–the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018). NEP 2020 presents a transformative vision aiming for universal, equitable, and quality education, and directly aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 4 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). It places the teacher at the center of reform, promoting a four-year integrated B.Ed., multidisciplinary training, and at least 50 hours of annual Continuous Professional Development (CPD). While the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan, launched in 2018, merges earlier schemes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA) to establish a holistic, pre–primary to senior secondary education framework (Ministry of Education & Department of School Education and Literacy, 2022). Samagra Shiksha actively supports NEP 2020 goals–especially in early childhood care (ECCE), teacher capacity-building, and promotion of inclusion for Scheduled Tribes and linguistic minorities. Both policies strongly promote multilingual and culturally responsive education, encouraging home-language instruction in early grades as a key strategy.However, while these policies are comprehensive and optimistic, they often place a heavy burden on individual teachers–expecting them to implement complex, resource-intensive reforms in diverse, under-resourced classrooms, often without sufficient systemic support. This underscores the critical role of teacher education programmes in translating lofty policy goals into practical classroom practices that address India's linguistic and cultural diversity.

Introduction of IBE in India -

India has a long and rich tradition of knowledge and learning, which continues to influence its education policies today. As stated in the National Education Policy, teachers play a central role in bringing meaningful changes to the education system (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). One way India shows its commitment to intercultural education is through different teacher training programmes. It's important to understand that teacher's intercultural training should be bidirectional, not only focusing on preparing teachers for tribal[1] communities, but also ensuring that all teachers receive those training in a general setting. If basic teacher education does not include intercultural understanding, can we truly say a country is committed to improve education for all? This leads us to look for existing training that helps teachers understand language and culture to adapt their teaching methods in general school settings. We can get insights by comparing both tribal-focused areas and those for general schools intercultural education. These programmes are supported by various government organizations such as the District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), State Councils of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT), and the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL). In addition, some programmes are intended for in-service teachers, and others for pre-service teachers. Although these programmes may seem complex or interconnected, they share a common goal: to prepare teachers to work effectively in India's diverse and multilingual classrooms.

[1] Given the complexity of official and self-identifying terminologies in India, this report will primarily use the term **"tribal"** to refer to communities officially recognized as Scheduled Tribes-groups that exist outside the traditional caste system and are acknowledged in Indian policy and legal frameworks. Although the term **"indigenous"** is commonly used in global discourse to describe communities native to specific regions-as seen in comparative contexts like Argentina and Chile-the Indian government maintains that all Indians are indigenous to the land. Therefore, while the term **"indigenous"** may be used when drawing international comparisons, this report adopts **"tribal"** as the main term to maintain consistency with Indian academic and policy usage, while still recognizing the broader international implications of indigeneity.

Teacher Training Programs and Effectiveness for IBE - In the following section, we will explore programmes designed for both tribal-dominated education and general elementary education, with a focus on their goals and effectiveness. It is important to note that the distinction between tribal and non-tribal education in this context is based on the regional setting, not on the existence of two separate types of public schools. In other words, India's education system does not operate two distinct school systems for tribal and non-tribal communities. Instead, the term "tribal-dominated" refers to schools located in areas where the majority of the population belongs to tribal communities and where tribal languages are commonly spoken, such as in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha. These schools function within the same public education framework but face unique cultural and linguistic challenges due to their regional context (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020; Ministry of Education & Department of School Education and Literacy, 2022).

Teacher preparation in tribal-dominated elementary schools

Multilingual Education (MLE) and MLE+ Programme - The MLE is designed to bridge the linguistic and cultural gap that is often encountered in the formal education system. It aims to ensure early learning of children by using children's mother tongues (L1), gradually transitioning to the state majority language (L2) and English (Panda 2014). Its core is to develop appropriate cognitive and reasoning skills, enabling children to perform equally in their native, state, and national languages, starting with the mother tongue. This approach not only helps in building foundational cognitive and reasoning skills but also supports learners in navigating multiple languages–tribal, regional, and national–while preserving their cultural and linguistic heritage. The NEP 2020 recommends mother-tongue-based education at least until Grade 5, preferably up to Grade 8, showing positive impacts in enhancing literacy, numeracy, and overall cognitive development. These programs were implemented in Andhra Pradesh and Odisha in 2004 and 2006 respectively, due to the largest tribal populations and diverse linguistic background in these states.

On the foundation of MLE, the MLE+ programme (Panda 2014) not only emphasizes language instruction but also actively integrates local cultural knowledge systems into classroom teaching. It is philosophically grounded in Vygotsky's Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT), MLE+ links everyday cultural practices with formal academic concepts in subjects such as science, mathematics, language, and history. Ethnographic data is used to develop localized learning materials, ensuring that school knowledge emerges from students' lived experiences. For instance, the Odisha MLE+ program develops reading and learning resource centres (libraries and activity sites) in which the oral tradition (storytelling, songs and rhymes in the community) is linked to written texts (Panda 2014). According to the Ministry of Tribal Affairs (n.d.), teacher training components include specific modules such as a 10-day induction training, attitudinal training, class-wise training modules, primary/early-grade modules and 3-day training modules for educational administrators.

Although it shows significant improvement upon children's classroom achievements, several challenges affect the effectiveness of MLE teacher preparation. Panda (2014) highlights that training is often too fixed and "packaged," making classroom teaching feel routine and focused on memorization rather than real understanding, making it hard for them to adjust their teaching to different situations. Even though familiar cultural materials are used, it needs a large amount of time and resources to interpret tribal languages and cultures into words, and these practices are not easily generalizable across different tribal communities, each with unique languages and customs. As Panda (2014) stated, the success of such programmes depends not on creating ideal conditions but on proving their effectiveness under real-world educational settings.

Multicultural School Placement Programme (MCPP) - The MCPP, implemented through Regional Institutes of Education (RIE) like Ajmer, Bhopal, Bhubaneswar, Mysuru, and Shillong, is designed to provide student-teachers, who are in the final year of B.Ed.[2] or integrated B.A.B.Ed/B.Sc.B.Ed[3] programs as an

[2] The **B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education)** is a two-year professional degree program for graduates aiming to become secondary school teachers. It includes components such as school exposure and multicultural placements to help student-teachers understand diverse educational settings.

[3] The **B.A. B.Ed.** and **B.Sc. B.Ed.** are four-year integrated programs combining academic study in arts or science with professional teacher

internship with essential field experience and practical exposure across diverse school settings, including urban, rural, and tribal schools. It aims to enable student-teachers to apply their theoretical knowledge in foundation courses, academic subjects, curriculum transaction techniques, or classroom management in real school situations (Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar [NCERT], 2022). They also seek to develop core teaching skills, understanding of day-to-day school practices, provide opportunities for practical teaching, encourage respect for cultural diversity through meaningful engagement with urban, rural, and tribal student populations (Mishra & Paramanik, 2019).

The MCPP is structured into three phases (Mishra & Paramanik, 2019): a 2-day pre-conference held at the institute, a 15-day multicultural placement where student-teachers are rotate in three types of schools (Urban, Rural, and Tribal), and a half-day post-conference back at the institute. During the placement phase, student-teachers are required to do several tasks, for example, to observe corporate teachers' teaching processes, taking substitute classes, preparing and using teaching-learning materials (TLMs), conducting case studies, engaging in peer observation, actively participating in various school activities and so on.

Mishra and Paramanik (2019) reported several limitations that hinder intercultural education. Many student-teachers show a lack of interest and critical observation, often treating the MCPP casually due to insufficient guidance and lack of serious monitoring from cooperating teachers and supervisors beyond the program coordinator. However, the major shortcoming is student-teachers fail to fully grasp the cultural diversity within and outside the classroom, often emphasizing on generic pedagogy rather than culture-specific pedagogy. In practice, no schools were actually located in tribal areas, which directly contradicts the programme's intended aim of cultural immersion. Many additional problems are addressed, including language barriers, especially for non-Odia speaking student-teachers placed in Odia medium schools, poor operational issues and administrative support, such as confusion during pre-conference sessions, irregular presence and perfunctory feedback of supervisors, coupled with misusing student-teachers for substitute classes by cooperate teachers instead of guiding them, inconsistent implementation of MPCC across districts. Besides, Cooperate teachers have also suggested that the MCPP's timing is inappropriate because it often occurs when the syllabus is already completed, leading to poor engagement of students.

Teacher preparation in general elementary schools

Language Training Programme (LTP) - LTP is initiated by the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL), established in 1969 under the Ministry of Education, Government of India (MoE India), aimed at promoting multilingualism, cultural integration, and social harmony (Central Institute of Indian Languages, 2025). The programme was developed to support the implementation of India's Three-Language Formula and to build language proficiency among prospective teachers, research scholars, and the general public, including in less widely spoken Indian languages. Regional Language Centres (RLCs) were set up in multiple Indian states, including Karnataka, Odisha, Punjab, Maharashtra, Himachal Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Assam.

According to the CIIL (2025) prospectus, LTP is structured into three levels: Basic Training (4 months), Intermediate Training (3 months), and Advanced Training (3 months), a total of 1085 hours of instruction, including a mandatory two-week "Language Environment Tour," which allows trainees to engage directly with the language community, observe their local customs, beliefs, culture, and practice immersive, real-world communication. During the training, financial incentives and stipends will be given to eligible trainees (Rs.5,000 per month (Rupees Five Thousand only) for prospective teachers and research scholars, while Rs.800 per month for all trainees). In-service teachers will be awarded a diploma certificate as they succeed in the course. In addition, teachers are encouraged to to teach the learned language as a third language in schools.If they teach for at least three periods per week to ten students over a year, they will receive a monthly cash allowance of Rs.70, along with opportunities for refresher courses, national integration camps, and support for setting up book corners in their

training. These integrated degrees aim to develop future teachers with strong subject expertise alongside pedagogical skills and are designed to support a multidisciplinary approach to education.

schools.

While the program's structure is well-defined, it faced several challenges. First, there is no standardized system for evaluating the real-world impact of the training on classroom teaching, making it difficult to assess its effectiveness in improving teacher competence. Besides, it gives less attention to pedagogical methods for early-grade learners, especially in multilingual or tribal classrooms. Moreover, the two-week immersive Language Environment Tour, is too brief to prepare teachers in multilingual teaching, as languages are deeply tied to local knowledge and community culture (Hrivíková, 2020). Furthermore, while incentive during training may be attractive, the post teaching incentive is insufficient in motivating teachers to adopt and sustain teaching in tribal languages, which often require additional effort in contextual and linguistic adaptation from educators.

6-months bridge course (Professional Development Programme for Elementary Teachers - PDPET) - The newly implemented 6-months bridge course, also known as the Professional Development Programme for Elementary Teachers (PDPET), targets in-service teachers with B.Ed. qualification in teaching Classes 1–5 (National Council for Teacher Education, 2025). Its goal is to build pedagogical knowledge, child psychology awareness, and early-grade teaching skills relevant to foundational literacy and numeracy (National Institute of Open Schooling, n.d.). While the course is designed by NCTE, the National Institute of Open Schooling (NIOS) is the primary agency to run teacher's education. Teachers can take the course online or in person. It became a mandatory course as of the Supreme Court on April 8, 2024, teachers who were appointed before August 11, 2023, must complete the bridge course within one year (NCTE 2025), or else teachers are disqualified in teaching elementary students. While it covers important pedagogical subjects and practical training, its curriculum titles do not highlight a direct focus on intercultural education or multicultural awareness beyond general elementary pedagogy. Detailed information about course structure and reports are limited, which may not be currently accessible.

NISHTHA (National Initiative for School Heads' and Teachers' Holistic Advancement) 3.0 - NISHTHA is India's first standardized national-level training module launched by the NCERT on September 7, 2021 (Press Information Bureau, 2022), aimed at developing professional competencies among all elementary school teachers and principals across the country (National Portal of India, 2021). NISHTHA 3.0 focuses specifically on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN). This is a part of the broader NIPUN Bharat Mission, whose goal is ensuring all children attain basic reading, understanding, and numeracy skills by Grade 3 (National Portal of India, 2024). The training is delivered online through the DIKSHA platform, targeting about 2.5 million (25 lakh) teachers and school heads who are teaching from pre-primary to Grade 5 across all Indian states and union territories. According to the Department of School Education and Literacy (n.d.), the course structure are as follows:

- Introduction to Foundational Literacy and Numeracy Mission
- Shifting Towards Competency-Based Education
- Understanding Learners: How Children Learn?
- Involvement of Parents and Communities for FLN
- Understanding 'Vidya Pravesh' and 'Balvatika
- Foundational Language and Literacy
- Multilingual Education in Primary Grades
- Learning Assessment
- Foundational Numeracy
- School Leadership for Foundational Literacy and Numeracy
- Integration of ICT in Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Toy-Based Pedagogy for Foundational Stage

One of the most notable courses is the "Multilingual Education in Primary Grades," which emphasizes the use of home languages alongside state languages and English in foundational classrooms (Department of School Education and Literacy, 2022). It discusses key challenges such as language mixing, language purity concerns, and the duration of home language use in instruction. It even provides practical strategies for teachers, especially for those who are unfamiliar with students' home languages, helping them in building anxiety-free multilingual

classrooms. This shows the strong efforts of these institutions to try to promote teacher training to adequately teach diverse backgrounds of children. However, this programme is conducted entirely online, it excludes or burdens teachers in areas with poor internet connectivity, low digital literacy, or lack of devices, issues especially in tribal and remote areas. There are also no official reports yet showing how effective this training is. The training may increase teachers' workloads because they need to put in extra effort in creating multilingual anxiety-free classrooms as well as giving feedback to higher level administrators. They may perceive NISHTHA as an additional, sometimes pointless, administrative task, which can lead to unfavorable attitudes towards the training and classroom teaching. Also, it may be difficult for teachers to pindown and practice in real classroom situations via online training (National Portal of India, 2021).

Limitations and Challenges - Overall, India adopts a multi-pronged approach to teacher education, offering both specialized programmes such as MLE and MCPP, as well as broader, national-level initiatives like NISHTHA for general elementary teachers. However, the degree to which multicultural and multilingual education is emphasized varies considerably across these programmes. MLE and MCPP are designed with a clear and direct focus on addressing cultural and linguistic diversity, embedding these concerns into both pedagogy and classroom practice (Ministry of Tribal Affairs, n.d.; Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar [NCERT], 2022). In contrast, programmes like PDPET place greater emphasis on foundational pedagogy and employment retention, with relatively less explicit reference to IBE in their curriculum frameworks (National Council for Teacher Education, 2025). These variations can result in inconsistent levels of multicultural awareness and preparedness among teachers, depending on the training pathway and the specific programme they participate in. This underscores the need for a more coherent and unified strategy to ensure that all teacher education programmes, regardless of context, promote the competencies needed for inclusive, multilingual, and culturally responsive teaching.

Besides, as we mentioned, intercultural training should be bidirectional. Teacher training should not be limited only to those who teach in tribal schools but must also extend to general schools. This is crucial to help all students in mainstream schools build multicultural awareness, ensuring that indigenous languages may be preserved and students do not feel ashamed or inferior in using their home languages or experiencing any subtle exclusion from teachers and peers. Therefore, there is a strong need of integrating intercultural training from initial pre-service level to increase teacher multicultural sensitivity, However, current Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) curricula and short-term programs like the 6-month PDPET often lack dedicated modules on adapting to tribal or multilingual classroom contexts (Regional Institute of Education, Bhubaneswar, 2015).

Another significant challenge arises from the collaboration of multiple agencies without a clear, centralized structure. This lack of coordination often results in management inefficiencies, making it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of programs or to track their long-term impact. Many initiatives are relatively new, and formal research’s evaluation needs continuous tracking. Besides, this overlapping responsibilities and unclear management can create confusion intransparency of standardised guidelines. This not only blocks the efficiency of teacher education but can also lead to a loss of trust and confidence among key stakeholders, for example, how’s MLE's 10-day induction training? Most of the publicly available information comes from government websites, prospectuses, or announcements, which may not provide a full picture of how the training is applied in real classroom settings.

While some tribal-dominated states like Odisha and Andhra Pradesh have introduced special multicultural training initiatives, these efforts remain scattered and insufficient. There is a need to identify and scale up more effective models in teacher education to generalize to other regions with significant tribal populations. Another concern is the potential for teacher workloads and incentives to be incomparable, leading to adverse feelings or imbalance in physical and mental health among educators, especially when these come with unclear expectations or limited practical support. For example, while creating anxiety-free multilingual classrooms is a commendable goal, it requires time, effort, and context-specific strategies that many teachers may not feel equipped to implement. Without adequate incentives or support, teachers may view such programs as additional

administrative burdens rather than meaningful opportunities for professional growth. This can result in low motivation and resistance, ultimately undermining the goals of inclusive education.

Another major challenge in IBE classrooms for teachers is the identification and use of students' home languages. In tribal-dominated regions, programmes for IBE often rely on the majority spoken language in the area as the instructional medium (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). However, in reality, many other minority languages are also spoken by students but are not reflected in school practices (Panda, 2014). This creates a significant burden for children who speak a different home language, as they may struggle to understand lessons and feel excluded. Even if a teacher is proficient in the dominant home language, what about the others? Without inclusive strategies, many students will continue to be left behind. If teachers strictly follow the curriculum guidelines without adaptation, they risk either excluding learners or delaying the pace of instruction, both of which can negatively impact long-term learning outcomes (Jabbar et al., 2024). This issue cannot be solved simply by paying teachers extra to offer after-class tutoring or by creating separate classrooms for each home language–such solutions are impractical and unsustainable given the complexity and resource constraints of the public education system.

Finally, there is a noticeable shortage of dedicated teacher programs and initiatives specifically tailored for tribal school settings (Jabbar et al., 2024). New initiatives should be developed with standardized, clear guidelines, and actively promoted in tribal areas to build mutual understanding among students and teachers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As Sharma (2024) notes, many existing teacher education institutions already suffer from issues such as low instructional quality, limited disciplinary scope, and a lack of multidisciplinary training. If teachers are not adequately prepared even in general pedagogy, it becomes even more challenging for them to engage in intercultural education that requires deeper sensitivity, flexibility, and context-specific strategies. This highlights the urgency and complexity of improving teacher preparation at both pre-service and in-service levels, especially in light of the multilingual and multicultural realities of Indian classrooms. Moreover, since there are currently no comprehensive reports or longitudinal studies assessing the real impact of these newly implemented teacher education policies, there is a pressing need for evidence-based monitoring and evaluation. Hopefully, the government and academic institutions will invest in rigorous research and feedback mechanisms to inform future improvements in teacher training for inclusive and equitable education.

6. Comparative analysis: Intercultural bilingual teacher training in Argentina, Chile, and India

Positive Similarities Among the Three Countries - All three countries–Argentina, Chile, and India–have made commendable progress in recognizing the importance of intercultural bilingual education (IBE) and the role of teacher training within it. A key commonality is their shared legal and policy-based commitment to protecting Indigenous rights and integrating Indigenous languages into education systems. In Argentina, the 1994 constitutional reform and the 2006 National Education Law formally recognized Indigenous peoples' cultural and linguistic rights, promoting IBE as an educational modality. Similarly, Chile institutionalized IBE through Decree 280 (2009) and earlier legislation such as Indigenous Law 19.253 (1993), further reinforced by its ratification of ILO Convention 169. India, through the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and the Samagra Shiksha Abhiyan (2018), emphasized multilingualism and teacher-centered reform as central components of inclusive education. These laws are a clear example of these three countries' governments' efforts to legitimize affirmative action in favor of the protection of indigenous languages and traditional practices, thus preserving the richness of the culture in these countries, and ensuring Indigenous people's right of self-determination.

Another important similarity lies in the incorporation of Indigenous educators or community-based figures into their IBE strategies. Argentina supports the training of Indigenous teachers through localized institutions, especially in Chaco and Salta. Chile formally recognizes the role of *Traditional Educators*, who are cultural and linguistic representatives in the classroom. India, particularly through the MLE+ programs, empowers teachers to use students' home languages and incorporate Indigenous knowledge into pedagogy. In all three contexts,

community-based training ensures the legitimate transmission of traditional values and provides the opportunity for educators to educate based on their own traditional knowledge and perspectives, using terminology and examples that guarantee effective understanding.

Each country also promotes multilingual education models. Argentina's regional programs offer instruction in Indigenous languages such as Wichí and Guaraní. Chile mandates Indigenous language instruction in schools with a significant Indigenous student population. India's MLE and MLE+ programs emphasize mother tongue instruction in early grades and facilitate gradual transition to regional and national languages. Finally, across the three contexts, teachers are seen as mediators—cultural bridges between Indigenous communities and state educational systems. This acknowledgment underscores the broader educational goal of fostering cultural legitimacy, empathy, and inclusivity.

Negative Limitations in the Countries - Despite these advances, significant limitations hinder the effective implementation of IBE across all three countries. A pervasive issue is fragmentation and inconsistency in implementation. Argentina lacks a national IBE training standard, leading to wide variation across provinces. Chile, although more centralized in policy design, suffers from weak policy execution and disconnects between official frameworks and actual school practices. India, while boasting an array of specialized programs, faces inconsistency due to lack of centralized coordination and monitoring mechanisms. Another limitation shared among the countries is the undervaluation of Indigenous educators. In Argentina, Indigenous teachers often work in auxiliary roles without formal certification. In Chile, Traditional Educators experience professional isolation, limited collaboration, and poor remuneration, despite their institutional recognition. In India, despite a strong theoretical framework, there are few systemic incentives to retain or formally promote Indigenous-language teachers, especially in non-tribal areas.

The gap between theory and practice is another shared challenge. Chile's university curricula on interculturality remain largely theoretical, with limited applicability in real classrooms. India's MCPP and PDPET programs often fail to deliver authentic cultural immersion or classroom strategies. Argentina's regional programs, though innovative, face infrastructure limitations and often lack high-quality didactic materials in Indigenous languages. Furthermore, the lack of institutional and systemic support affects all three. Chile and Argentina both show weak financial investment and institutional follow-through, resulting in symbolic or compensatory IBE rather than transformational change. India's highly diverse programs often overburden teachers without adequate support or evaluation structures, leading to implementation fatigue and diminishing motivation.

What Each Country Can Learn from the Other - India provides a comprehensive model of multi-tiered training that can benefit both Argentina and Chile. Programs like MLE+, NISHTHA, and LTP combine cultural immersion, language development, and continuous professional development. Argentina and Chile could adopt similar frameworks to better structure pre-service and in-service teacher training, ensuring uniformity and systemic reach. On the other hand, Chile presents a policy model that formally recognizes community educators (Traditional Educators) within the national curriculum. This role, embedded within public policy and legally protected, serves as a formal bridge between Indigenous knowledge and mainstream education. India and Argentina could adapt this framework to elevate the status and visibility of Indigenous educators in their systems. Argentina demonstrates how localized teacher training centers can empower Indigenous communities through culturally grounded recruitment and education. Its institutions in Chaco and Salta illustrate how training programs rooted in community needs can enhance cultural legitimacy and self-determination. Chile and India could take inspiration from Argentina's grassroots training model to better tailor education to local Indigenous realities. Across all three countries, there is a shared need to embed intercultural training into general teacher education, not just for those working in Indigenous regions. This bidirectional approach would help mainstream teachers become culturally responsive and avoid reinforcing systemic exclusion. Additionally, each country must invest in robust monitoring and evaluation systems to measure real-world impact and ensure accountability in teacher training initiatives.

7. Final thoughts

While Argentina, Chile, and India vary significantly in historical, cultural, and policy contexts, their experiences in intercultural bilingual teacher training reflect overlapping goals and common challenges. Their shared strengths lie in recognizing Indigenous rights and involving local educators. Yet, all three struggle with systemic fragmentation, the undervaluation of Indigenous educators, and practical gaps in teacher preparation. These comparative analyses not only prompt us to understand the current progress and challenges that education systems face in the three countries, but also lead us to reflect on the broader difficulties of cultural preservation. Among these challenges is the fact that Indigenous students often have to learn even more to catch up with peers who are already being trained in a third language–namely, competitive English. Additionally, some parents of non-Indigenous students oppose the inclusion of languages or cultural content they perceive as not "useful" for developing competitive skills. This leads to a pressing question: Is there a future for intercultural education in a world where the economic system pushes for time-efficiency–something that is often achieved by standardizing language? How much are we willing to put at stake in the name of "keeping up with the competitive market"? We believe a society can only move forward to the extent that it understands itself inwardly. Therefore, efforts to preserve Indigenous cultures and to understand and sustain ancestral traditions, though imperfect, remain fundamental to ensuring that society moves forward in harmony–not just for one privileged group, but for society as a whole.

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AI-Usage Disclaimer: Artificial intelligence was used to assist with translation and paraphrasing, as most of the authors of this paper are not native English speakers. All information gathering and critical analysis were conducted collaboratively by the authors.

International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 23-32

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Bilingualism and social integration in Hong Kong: The role of education policies in shaping national identity

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Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25204

Abstract

This paper explores how language use in Hong Kong schools' shapes students' identity, sense of belonging, and social opportunities. It focuses on three main languages: English, Cantonese, and Mandarin. Each language represents a different part of students' identity. English is linked to global success, Cantonese to local culture, and Mandarin to national unity. Based on student surveys and existing research, the paper finds that English-medium education is seen as more valuable for careers, while Cantonese is losing space in schools even though it is important to local identity. Mandarin is being promoted by the government but is sometimes seen as forced. These language choices can lead to social divisions and identity confusion. The paper suggests that schools should treat all three languages with equal respect to support students' development, cultural pride, and a stronger sense of community.

Keywords: language policy, cultural identity, bilingual/trilingual education, Hong Kong education, social integration

Bilingualism and social integration in Hong Kong: The role of education policies in shaping national identity

1. Introduction: Context and Purpose

Historical Linguistic Landscape of Hong Kong - Hong Kong's linguistic environment is deeply rooted in its colonial and post-colonial history. Under British colonial rule from 1842 to 1997, English was established as the official language of government, education, and business, while Cantonese remained the dominant spoken language among the local population (Evans, 2013). This dual-language system created a functional bilingualism, where English symbolized institutional power and socioeconomic mobility, and Cantonese embodied local identity and everyday communication. After the 1997 handover to China, the Hong Kong government adopted the "biliterate and trilingual" policy — promoting proficiency in written Chinese and English, and spoken Cantonese, Mandarin (Putonghua), and English. This policy reflected both a desire to integrate with Mainland China and to maintain global relevance (Poon, 2004). However, in practice, these policies have triggered debates over cultural identity and the sociopolitical implications of language use.

Education System: Bilingualism vs. Trilingual Reality - Hong Kong's education system has been a central arena for language policy implementation. While officially promoting trilingualism, schools vary significantly in their language of instruction (MOI). English-medium instruction (EMI) is perceived as prestigious and is associated with elite schools and better career opportunities (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). Cantonese-medium instruction (CMI), although more culturally resonant, is often viewed as less competitive, while Mandarin is increasingly emphasized in line with national integration policies (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2015). This discrepancy between policy and practice reflects the tension between the official narrative and lived linguistic experiences. In reality, students often navigate a trilingual environment that reinforces not only linguistic diversity but also social hierarchies and ideological divisions (Lin, 2006). As a result, schools have become both linguistic battlegrounds and identity-shaping institutions.

Research Aim - This paper seeks to explore the role of bilingual and trilingual education policies in shaping cultural identity, social inequality, and national belonging among students in Hong Kong. Specifically, it investigates how language of instruction in schools' influences identity formation along three intersecting axes: Local (Cantonese), National (Mandarin), and Global (English). By analyzing the educational system's role in identity construction, the study aims to illuminate how language is more than a medium of communication - it is a symbolic marker of power, ideology, and cultural affiliation. Through a multidisciplinary lens incorporating sociolinguistics, education policy, and identity theory, this paper contributes to a deeper understanding of how language functions not only within classrooms, but also within broader societal and political contexts. Ultimately, the research underscores the need for more inclusive, culturally responsive education policies that reflect the multilingual and multicultural realities of Hong Kong's youth.

2. Language and Cultural Identity Formation

In Hong Kong's multilingual and politically dynamic environment, language plays a critical role in shaping students' cultural identities. Educational policy, historical legacies, and sociopolitical events have all contributed to identity alignment along three dominant axes: Mainland (Mandarin), Local (Cantonese), and Global (English). Each language functions not only as a communicative tool but also as a potent symbol of ideological orientation, cultural belonging, and social mobility. Mandarin (Putonghua) represents alignment with a Mainland Chinese identity, symbolizing national integration and political loyalty. Despite its official promotion through post-1997 education reforms and the "biliterate and trilingual" policy, Mandarin is often met with local resistance due to its perceived imposition and limited cultural resonance (Sin & Roebuck, 1996). For students, identifying with Mandarin may suggest conformity to state ideologies, yet this often clashes with Hong Kong's local cultural

sensibilities, leading to identity dissonance.

Cantonese, by contrast, embodies Local identity grounded in cultural autonomy and community cohesion. It remains the dominant spoken language in daily life, popular media, and political activism—particularly during movements such as the Umbrella Movement (Bolton, 2000; Hansen Edwards, 2016). Students aligned with Cantonese often express strong local pride. However, their identities may be undermined in English-centric educational environments where Cantonese is institutionally marginalized, affecting self-esteem and classroom engagement (Bartolomé, 1994; Van Maele & Van Houtte, 2011). English aligns with a Global identity, representing aspirations for internationalism, elite education, and economic advancement. As the language of institutional prestige and postsecondary instruction, English continues to carry colonial-era associations with upward mobility (Wong, 1998; SCMP, 1997). Nevertheless, the privileging of native English-speaking teachers and curricula can marginalize non-native speakers, contributing to perceptions of linguistic and cultural inferiority (Jeon, 2012; Li, 2011).

In response to these identity tensions, Hong Kong English (HKE) and hybrid varieties such as "Kongish" have emerged as forms of local linguistic expression that blend global structures with local meaning (Sewell & Chan, 2017; Li et al., 2020). Among politically conscious youth, these forms are increasingly embraced as identity markers, reflecting a shift toward endonormative stabilization, in which localized varieties gain legitimacy (Schneider, 2007; Kwok & Baldwin, 2015). Pedagogical approaches such as translanguaging have shown promise in bridging identity divides. By allowing the fluid use of Cantonese, English, and Mandarin in the classroom, educators can validate students' full linguistic repertoires, enhance trust, and promote more equitable learning environments (Baker, Grant, & Morlock, 2008; Mitchell, Kensler, & Tschannen-Moran, 2018; Espinet & Chapman-Santiago, 2022). These identity alignments were further intensified during the 2019 protests, which brought the symbolic dimensions of language into sharp focus: Cantonese became a marker of resistance, Mandarin a symbol of state authority, and English a pathway to international solidarity. As such, language choices among students are not merely practical decisions, but active negotiations of belonging, power, and aspiration. To foster inclusive national identity and social integration, education policy must go beyond rigid monolingual frameworks and affirm the multilingual, multicultural realities of Hong Kong's youth (Cummins, 1992; To, 2024).

3. Social Stratification Through Language

Language in Hong Kong schools plays a powerful role in shaping social hierarchy, as demonstrated in our survey responses. While Hong Kong officially promotes bilingualism (Cantonese and English) and increasingly trilingualism (adding Mandarin), in practice, the language of instruction is a key factor in social stratification, reinforcing divides in status, identity, and future opportunity. English-medium instruction (EMI) is consistently viewed as more prestigious by students, with many equating it to higher quality education and better career prospects. One respondent from a Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) school stated, *"English-medium education has significantly higher prestige,"* while another wrote that EMI helped them *"feel confident"* and *"get better grades."* Many participants reported a sense of empowerment from learning in English, associating it with academic excellence and global competitiveness: *"Most terms are easier to understand and memorize in English like biology terms, names of historical figures…"* Others emphasized its value for the future: *"English is useful for university and job opportunities."*

By contrast, Cantonese-medium instruction (CMI), though culturally significant, is often perceived as "local" and less advantageous for upward mobility. Several students expressed concern that Mandarin and English were being emphasized at the expense of Cantonese. One student strongly opposed Mandarin replacing Cantonese in schools, writing, *"Cantonese is the heart and soul of Hong Kong. There is no need to push it out."* Another feared that language reforms would mean *"in the future it may be hard to hear Cantonese spoken in Hong Kong."* Socioeconomic background also emerged as a clear factor in access to different school types and languages of instruction. Many respondents agreed that there is a correlation between family income and school type, with wealthier families sending children to EMI or international schools. One commented: *"There is a strong*

correlation between socioeconomic status and the type of school students attend." Students from EMI or international schools reported greater access to global curricula, foreign teachers, and study abroad opportunities, while students in CMI schools often felt confined to more local or regional opportunities.

This divide creates not only academic but identity-based stratification. Students from EMI or international schools reported a more global orientation: *"I feel like my school is preparing me to leave Hong Kong."* In contrast, those in local CMI schools felt a stronger connection to Hong Kong culture but were less confident about their global competitiveness. Some students noted that while they felt connected to their local roots, they also noticed limited exposure to broader international experiences. These identity tensions reflect how language of instruction can subtly position students within different cultural or ideological spheres: local (Cantonese), national (Mandarin), or global (English). This aligns with Bourdieu's (1991) theory of linguistic capital—where language ability is unequally distributed and tied to access and power. In Hong Kong, English is the most valued capital, enabling mobility, while Cantonese, although rich in cultural meaning, does not always translate to institutional power or opportunity. This was further reflected in student attitudes toward English: nearly all respondents agreed that proficiency in English is essential for academic and career success, regardless of their school background.

In conclusion, our findings show that language in education is not a neutral tool—it functions as a gatekeeper for social mobility. The prestige of English-medium education, the marginalization of Cantonese, and the growing emphasis on Mandarin all serve to reproduce social divisions. A more equitable approach would involve recognizing the cultural legitimacy of Cantonese while providing balanced access to English and Mandarin instruction, without linking any language to hierarchy or exclusion.

4. Policy, Nationalism, and Language Mandates

The "one country, two systems" framework was established to preserve Hong Kong's autonomy following the 1997 handover. Its goal was to balance integration with mainland China while maintaining a degree of local independence. However, recent years have seen growing tensions as national identity and language policies increasingly reflect Beijing's influence. In Hong Kong, language is more than a means of communication; it functions as a vital symbol of cultural identity and power. Cantonese, in particular, has long been a marker of local heritage, history, and community pride. Recent shifts in language policies, therefore, have sparked widespread public concern, with many viewing these changes as threats to their cultural identity and autonomy.

The Hong Kong government has actively promoted Mandarin (Putonghua) as the medium of instruction (MOI) in schools through a range of funding and policy incentives. Between 2008 and 2014, over HK$14 million was allocated to support schools adopting Mandarin for Chinese language classes, encouraging both primary and secondary schools to transition away from Cantonese. By the 2015/16 school year, only 28.3% of primary schools and 63.1% of secondary schools used Cantonese exclusively for Chinese instruction; the remaining schools incorporated Mandarin either partially or fully. This gradual shift has led to the marginalization of Cantonese in formal education settings. The impact has been tangible: research indicates that while basic reading skills improved, high-level reading comprehension declined among students, suggesting that the emphasis on Mandarin may restrict deeper engagement with Chinese language and culture.

This is further supported by recent survey data collected from ten students educated in Hong Kong. Although most respondents attended schools with strong English-medium instruction for non-Chinese subjects (90% studied subjects like science and math in English), only half described their learning experience in Mandarin as favorable. One respondent noted that although Mandarin was not their first language, it was "helpful for our future education and career," while others viewed it as disconnected from their cultural upbringing. The data highlights how students' language experiences are shaped more by practical global considerations (e.g., English for future success) than by an internalized sense of national identity tied to Mandarin.

Public sentiment aligns with these concerns. Data shows that the proportion of Hong Kong residents proficient in Mandarin increased from 40.2% in 2006 to 54.2% in 2021, while Cantonese speakers decreased slightly from 96.5% to 93.7%. Many residents perceive that Cantonese is increasingly threatened as the city's main language. Advocacy groups promoting Cantonese cultural and linguistic preservation have faced significant repression, exemplified by the police raid on a Cantonese advocacy organization in 2023, which effectively silenced a vocal movement to defend local language rights. For many Hongkongers, Cantonese embodies their cultural roots and identity; thus, perceived marginalization of the language is seen as part of broader efforts to diminish their cultural distinctiveness.

The tension between national identity and local resistance plays a central role in this linguistic landscape. The state's nationalist agenda seeks to use language as a tool to cultivate a unified Chinese identity aligned with mainland China's political goals. Emphasizing patriotism, Chinese history, and loyalty to Beijing, the government has implemented curriculum reforms and revised textbooks to reflect a mainland-centric narrative. These reforms often downplay or omit references to Hong Kong's protest movements, democratic aspirations, and local history, further emphasizing loyalty to the central government. Survey data reflects this ambivalence: while students acknowledged exposure to China-related topics—such as Chinese History, General Studies on issues like the "sannong problem," and mandatory flag-raising ceremonies—only a minority felt strongly connected to a "Mainland Chinese" identity. Instead, many viewed these lessons as formalities rather than internalized national values.

Conversely, local communities and youth see Cantonese as a crucial symbol of their heritage and pride. Grassroots campaigns, protests, and media efforts continuously strive to preserve Cantonese, framing it as an essential part of Hong Kong's unique identity. This cultural resistance is often viewed as a safeguard against the erasure of local history and autonomy. According to the survey responses, while a few students recalled school events like heritage tours, local food projects, or Liberal Studies classes that touched on Hong Kong-specific topics, many said their formal education offered little content on local customs or identity. Despite this, 60% of respondents still rated their connection to a "Hong Kong identity" as 4 out of 5 or higher—implying that a strong sense of local belonging may stem from informal, lived experiences outside the classroom rather than official curriculum.

Interestingly, a larger proportion of students reported feeling connected to a **global identity**, with 9 out of 10 respondents rating it 4 or 5 out of 5. English was seen as a natural and practical language for education, especially in STEM fields, and allowed students to connect with international media, ideas, and peers. For some, it even overshadowed local or national affiliations. One student noted: "My family gave me more support in learning English than in learning Chinese. Therefore, I'm more drawn to English." Another remarked, "Never speaking Cantonese" contributed to feeling less embedded in local culture—hinting at the cultural fragmentation caused by these language hierarchies.

Curriculum reforms and political messaging have reinforced these ideological shifts. The introduction of national education programs emphasizes patriotism, Chinese history, and loyalty to Beijing, with textbook revisions designed to align with mainland perspectives. The content now often minimizes or excludes references to Hong Kong's protest history and democratic struggles, fostering feelings of alienation among students who fear political repercussions. In 2024, Hong Kong schools began implementing a new curriculum centered on Xi Jinping's thoughts—an ideological framework aimed at fostering national pride and loyalty. The curriculum includes lessons on China's political structure, the international role of China, and historical events such as the Opium Wars and Japanese invasion—all framed within a nationalist narrative. These educational reforms aim to reinforce a sense of unity but also deepen the divide with local narratives and cultural expressions.

In theoretical terms, Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* provides insight into how nations are socially constructed through common symbols and shared language, while Pierre Bourdieu's *Cultural Capital* emphasizes language as a form of power that influences social status and identity. These frameworks help

explain the significance of language in shaping notions of community and authority in Hong Kong. The surveyed student experiences offer empirical grounding for these theories—demonstrating how educational structures, rather than fostering unified identity, often spark competing attachments to local, national, and global imaginaries.

5. International vs. Local School Systems

The respondents of our survey came from a variety of school backgrounds in Hong Kong. Half of them attended local schools that mainly follow the HKDSE curriculum with Cantonese or blended MOI. Another 20% studied in international schools, 20% in Direct Subsidy Scheme (DSS) schools that typically mix EMI and CMI, while a minority (10%) experienced a hybrid schooling system across different stages. This range of school experiences offers diverse perspectives and helps us understand how identity is shaped differently depending on the school system. One of the most notable findings is the dominance of English as the main language of instruction. According to our survey, 90% of respondents studied non-Chinese subjects (e.g., science, math, history) in English, even in some DSS or local schools. This aligns with broader global trends, as English has become a global lingua franca (ELF). According to Crystal (2003), English is now used across almost all domains of life (education, business, culture, media, and personal communication). A report by the University of Winnipeg highlights that English is an official language in 55 countries (28.5% of the world), and recognized in regions such as Hong Kong, Curaçao, and San Andrés. This widespread use of English not only facilitates access to global knowledge but also pushes students toward a more international or cosmopolitan identity.

On the other hand, Cantonese, though spoken widely in daily life, is used as the main MOI by only 10% of respondents during high school. This significant contrast suggests a shift in educational practices. Despite this, Cantonese remains a strong cultural anchor in Hong Kong. Its presence in local media, law, government, and everyday interactions plays a crucial role in preserving local identity. As WordsPrime (2025) states, “Cantonese is the language of the heart in Hong Kong… a vehicle for cultural expression and resistance.” For many students, Cantonese represents a source of pride and cultural rootedness, even if they do not strongly identify with local nationalism. However, it is important to note that some local schools in Hong Kong have begun adopting Mandarin (Putonghua) as a medium of instruction, particularly in Chinese Language and moral/civic education subjects. This trend is often perceived by students as part of a broader push for integration with Mainland China. Several respondents expressed discomfort with this shift, viewing it as an imposition on local culture. Instead of adjusting Hong Kong’s school system to accommodate Mainland newcomers, some students believed the government should encourage these newcomers to learn Cantonese in order to integrate into Hong Kong society. This sentiment reflects a growing tension between national integration efforts and the desire to preserve local linguistic identity and autonomy.

Our findings also show that students in international schools are more likely to feel connected to a global identity. While these schools often integrate local elements through liberal studies, history lessons, or cultural tours, many students reported that these initiatives feel superficial or performative. One respondent shared, “It felt like my school was preparing me to leave Hong Kong rather than be a part of it. No one spoke Cantonese, and even if you could, your experiences and humor didn’t match.” English was promoted from an early age to avoid exclusion among non-Cantonese speakers, but this had the side effect of weakening connections to Hong Kong’s local culture and making it harder for students to feel truly at home. Furthermore, many students saw English primarily as a practical tool, useful for higher education and career opportunities, but not inherently tied to their personal identity. This instrumental view of English contrasts with the symbolic role Cantonese plays in affirming one's cultural belonging in Hong Kong. Several respondents described a sense of disconnect between their school environment and the broader Hong Kong society, which made social integration more difficult, even when they were fluent in Cantonese.

In summary, international schools tend to nurture a global outlook, but sometimes at the cost of local integration and cultural rootedness. Meanwhile, local and DSS schools, though increasingly adopting English

and Mandarin, still provide students with greater exposure to Hong Kong's sociolinguistic and cultural fabric, reinforcing a sense of local identity and pride. These differences highlight the profound influence of school environments on how students in Hong Kong develop their sense of self, community, and place in the world.

6. Schools as Identity Factories

Based on our survey of Hong Kong students who completed their primary and secondary education locally, it is evident that schools in Hong Kong play an important role not only as academic institutions but also as one of the powerful agents of socialization and identity construction. Through formal curriculum and everyday routines, schools influence how students connect to local, national, and global narratives. As Althusser (1971) suggests, schools operate as Ideological State Apparatuses, they transmit the state's preferred ideology through routine, normalized structures such as school-wide ceremonies, daily rituals, and classroom discourse. In our findings, multiple students reported that their schools hosted patriotic ceremonies, including flag-raising and anthem singing on events like National Day, Sports Day, or school openings. These moments were typically accompanied by speeches, sometimes delivered in Mandarin during weekly "周會" (zhou hui) assemblies, indicating the strategic use of language to promote a specific national identity. This aligns with Anderson's (1983) concept of imagined communities, where those rituals foster a shared symbolic affiliation with the nation-state.

However, several student responses also reveal that the reception of these efforts is not uniform. Some respondents described feeling emotionally detached, attending the ceremonies passively, suggesting that participation does not necessarily result in ideological alignment. This is supported by Bourdieu's (1991) theory of symbolic power, which posits that language in institutional settings reinforces cultural legitimacy only when internalized by its audience. The use of Mandarin in place of Cantonese in public spaces like assemblies and announcements is particularly significant, it subtly signals the privileging of Mainland norms, even within ostensibly local contexts. Moreover, some students noted that their school placed greater emphasis on international or global values, particularly in extracurricular settings or liberal studies, pointing to identity fragmentation rather than cohesion. Overall, our data suggests that while schools in Hong Kong attempt to shape students' national identity and belonging through rituals, symbols, and language, students may internalize, reinterpret, or even resist these messages, resulting in a complex and contested identity landscape.

7. Conclusion

This research paper has explored the multifaceted relationship between language, education, and cultural identity in Hong Kong, emphasizing the critical role of bilingualism and trilingualism in shaping students' self-perceptions and social dynamics. Historically, Hong Kong's linguistic landscape has been influenced by colonial legacies and recent political transformations, resulting in a complex educational framework that aligns students with various cultural narratives: Mainland (Mandarin), Local (Cantonese), and Global (English). The findings highlight the nuanced impact of the current education system on student identity. While many students appreciate the opportunities provided by English-medium instruction, they also express significant concerns about the marginalization of Cantonese and the imposition of Mandarin. This tension underscores broader societal divides, with students often feeling disconnected from their local identity amidst pressures to conform to national narratives. The emphasis on English as a prestigious language further complicates this landscape, contributing to feelings of alienation and identity fragmentation.

The analysis reveals that their education system exhibits a mixed effect on student identity. On one hand, it enables social mobility through English proficiency; on the other, it reinforces linguistic divisions that can undermine local cultural identity. Many students feel empowered by their English-medium education, associating it with better career prospects, yet they also recognize the risk of losing their connection to Cantonese. The increasing emphasis on Mandarin in educational settings is perceived by some as a threat to local culture, further complicating their sense of belonging. Therefore, while the education system aims to cultivate a cohesive identity among students, it often exacerbates divisions rooted in cultural identity and social stratification.

The survey responses indicate a strong desire for a more inclusive approach that respects and integrates the rich linguistic diversity of Hong Kong. To foster a genuine sense of belonging and community among all students, educational policies must move beyond rigid frameworks and affirm the multilingual, multicultural realities of Hong Kong's youth. Such an approach is essential for promoting social integration and a cohesive national identity in an increasingly complex socio-political landscape.

Recommendations - The educational landscape in Hong Kong currently emphasizes English and Mandarin, often at the expense of Cantonese (Chan, 2020). This framework has led to a perception that English-medium instruction (EMI) is associated with higher quality education, which may reinforce social hierarchies based on language (Chan, 2020). To address these disparities, several actionable recommendations can be made to create a more inclusive educational environment. First, educational policies should mandate the inclusion of Cantonese as a primary language of instruction alongside English and Mandarin. This approach would involve developing a curriculum that values all three languages equally, ensuring that students become proficient in their native language while also acquiring the competencies necessary for navigating both global and national contexts. By integrating Cantonese into the curriculum, schools can foster a stronger sense of local identity and belonging among students. This change could enhance overall engagement and performance, leading to a more cohesive educational environment that respects linguistic diversity (UNESCO, 2023).

Second, the curriculum should encourage critical discussions around national identity. The current emphasis on Mandarin as a means of promoting national identity has led to resistance among some local students who feel disconnected from these narratives. To rectify this, educational policies could incorporate critical discussions that allow students to express their perspectives on both local and global issues. Facilitating open dialogues about identity can empower students and foster a more nuanced understanding of their cultural and national affiliations (Vicarini & Mackway-Jones, 2025). Furthermore, current policies often overlook the social and emotional dimensions of identity formation, which can lead to feelings of isolation among students. To address this issue, schools should implement initiatives that celebrate cultural diversity. Activities such as cultural days, language festivals, and collaborative projects integrating multiple languages and traditions can provide platforms for students to share their heritage. Such initiatives can foster inclusivity and strengthen community bonds, enhancing students' sense of belonging.

Additionally, extracurricular activities tend to prioritize English and international perspectives, which may create a disconnect for students who are more aligned with local culture. To mitigate this issue, schools should diversify their extracurricular offerings to include activities that celebrate local culture, such as Cantonese theater and traditional festivals. Engaging students in culturally relevant activities can enhance their connections to local identity while still providing opportunities for global engagement. Finally, the current findings provide a foundation for further research into inclusive educational practices that respect linguistic diversity and promote cultural identity. Future studies should explore the impact of integrating multiple languages on student engagement and identity formation using larger sample sizes. Moreover, research is needed to investigate the long-term effects of language instruction policies on students' sense of belonging and academic success. Implementing these recommendations can help Hong Kong's education system better address the complexities of identity formation. Policymakers should consider adopting an inclusive framework that embraces linguistic and cultural diversity, enhancing students' experiences and fostering integration. This approach ensures all students feel valued and empowered, promoting a sense of belonging and community in a complex socio-political landscape.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 33-47

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Singapore bilingualism: A model or a myth?

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Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25205

Abstract

This report paper explores the complex relationship between bilingual education, cultural heritage and national development through a comparative case study of Singapore and Taiwan. To begin, we traced back the ideological roots of Singapore's bilingual policy. It was first introduced after its independence in 1965 to promote the usage of English for economic competitiveness and "Mother Tongue" languages for persevering cultural identity. This report paper looks into the development of the policy, highlighting its successes in global integration and the consequences that come after it - particularly the marginalisation of dialects. Taiwan's "Bilingual 2030" policy, aimed at boosting English proficiency, is then analysed in comparison, gaining attention to its own challenges in protecting local dialects and indigenous languages. This paper looks into whether Singapore's bilingual model could be applied to Taiwan, considering Taiwan's democratic system and rich cultural diversity. In the end, it suggests that Taiwan should adopt a more balanced bilingual policy—one that not only supports global communication through English but also protects and promotes its local and indigenous languages.

Keywords: bilingual education, language policy, cultural preservation, Singapore, Taiwan

Singapore bilingualism: A model or a myth?

1. Introduction

Bilingual education, defined as the use of two languages for instruction across a range of subjects in the school curriculum, has become increasingly important in today's globalised and multilingual societies. According to Baker (2001), bilingual education is not a monolithic concept but a diverse and flexible framework that may serve various goals—economic development, cognitive advancement, national integration, and cultural preservation. But in practice, bilingual policies tend to reflect cross-cutting national priorities, namely the tension between encouraging a common national identity and preserving linguistic diversity. This paper investigates that very tension by using Singapore as a comparative case for Taiwan, both of which have implemented assertive bilingual education policies with markedly different political and cultural contexts. both of which have pursued assertive bilingual education policies with rather different political and cultural settings. Singapore's bilingual model of education, introduced after independence in 1965, has been widely praised as a strategic success for English as an engine for global competitiveness and relegating "Mother Tongue" languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) for maintaining ethnic heritage. However, no such model has been trouble-free—particularly, the cultural loss of dialects, differential access to language ability, and the increasingly pervasive disconnection between young generations with their heritage languages.

In this paper, we focus on Taiwan's current push toward bilingualism, particularly its "Bilingual 2030" policy aimed at enhancing English proficiency across society. This recent initiative is marked by an aggressive top-down approach, echoing Singapore's strategy. However, Taiwan's complex linguistic heritage—including Mandarin, Hokkien, Hakka, and over a dozen indigenous languages—presents a vastly different cultural landscape. Taiwan's current policy raises urgent questions: Is the pursuit of global language proficiency coming at the cost of local language survival? Can Taiwan avoid repeating Singapore's missteps in balancing modernisation with cultural identity?

Through analysis of Singapore's bilingual heritage—its ideological roots, successes, tensions, and criticisms—this paper aims to learn lessons that can be exported by Taiwan in developing a more culturally sensitive and forward-looking language policy.

Research Questions:

- How has Singapore's bilingual education policy both succeeded and failed in achieving its goals?
- What can Taiwan learn from Singapore's experience as it grapples with the threat of heritage language loss?

2. Historical Evolution of Bilingual Education in Singapore

Before the 1960s, schools in Singapore used the MTL (Mother Tongue Language) as the main language to teach. Singapore's bilingual education system is separated based on language and ethnicity such as Chinese-medium schools, Malay-medium schools, Tamil-medium schools, and English-medium schools. So, for instance, if there are students of Chinese ethnicity then, they study in Chinese-medium schools. While the mother tongue would strengthen individual value and sense of cultural belonging, the problem is there are different curriculum standards and unequal job opportunities for non-English speakers. Therefore in the 1960s, the Singapore government introduced the bilingual education policy.

2.1 1960s: Introduction of Bilingual Education Policy

In the early 1960s, the government required all students to learn both English and their Mother Tongue

Language (MTL) such as Chinese, Malay, or Tamil. At that time, English was introduced as a second language. After Singapore gained independence in 1965, the government began to focus more on promoting English as the main language of instruction to support economic development. However, most schools were still vernacular schools, where English was taught only as a second language. By the late 1960s, with stronger government support, more English-medium schools were established, and English was increasingly used to teach core subjects, while MTL continued to be part of the curriculum. According to the National Library Board, mathematics and science were taught in English even in vernacular schools, while civics and history were taught in MTL at English-medium schools. This approach gradually developed until MTLs became compulsory as second languages and were made examinable in the PSLE in 1966 and the Cambridge School Certificate in 1969.

To support this, the government also supported and invested in teacher training. The Teachers Training College began upgrading teacher qualifications. By the early 1970s, in order to support the bilingual policy, only university graduate teachers were allowed to enter the Certificate in Education program. This helped prepare teachers to be capable of teaching English, even if they are from vernacular school backgrounds, while also fluent in their Mother Tongue Language. These changes marked the beginning of the shift toward English-medium education, which became more dominant in the 1970s.

2.2 1970s: Emphasis on English and Standardization-Speak Mandarin Campaign

In the 1970s, the government continued their efforts in strengthening the use of English language, while working to standardized Mother Tongue Language use, especially the Chinese community. They focus on Mandarin because the Chinese community is the majority of Singapore's population. Based on the "Integration versus segregation: ethnic minorities and urban politics in Singapore" paper, it states that the ethnic Chinese made up around 76% of Singapore populations. Besides, the government focuses on Mandarin because the government aims to replace various Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese with standard Mandarin. One most important step was "Speak Mandarin Campaign" that was launched by Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew that start in 1979. This campaign includes teacher training programs. Mandarin language teachers were trained to use communicative teaching methods, rather than focusing only on characters or grammar. Communicative training included role play activities and task-based learning.

2.2.1 Role Play

Students learned through real life situations that were done in groups. For example, in a scenario where one asks for directions and the other responds in Mandarin. This method is supported by Noor Hanim Rahmat, Mok Soon Sim, Lau Suk Khin, and Fan Pik Shy in their study "Experiential Learning in Mandarin Classrooms: The Case for Simulation", which states that simulations activities allow learners to gain "hands-on" experience in the form of experiential learning. Such activities help create a positive environment.

2.2.1 Task-Based Learning

Students were given tasks like conducting surveys among classmates in Mandarin. This method is supported by Chao Yang, Xin Wei, and Lifan Xue, in their experiments that compare two groups of learning Mandarin, one using task based language teaching (TBLT) and another using traditional grammar focus called control group. After one semester, students in the task-based group were 25% more proficient compared to 10% more proficient learners in the control group. The experiment also found that TBLT significantly improved student motivation, with TBLT scoring 4.5 compared to 3.2 for the control group. These experiments show how communicative methods help students use Mandarin naturally and support Singapore bilingual education policy goals. Additionally, the government also introduced the Special Assistance Plan (SAP) in 1979. It offered both English and Chinese as working languages to develop bilingual students who were strong in Chinese language and culture.

2.3 1980s: Adjustment Curriculum and Streaming

To continue supporting the goals of the Speak Mandarin Campaign, in the early 1980s, the Ministry Education officially banned other Chinese dialects in the classroom and Mandarin is the only Chinese subject. To support students from non-Mandarin speaking homes, the Ministry of Education introduced different learning levels from low to high tier study class. For instance, lower tier like EM3 stream, where subjects were taught in simpler or basic Mandarin.

2.4 1990s: Refinement of Streaming and Flexibility

The streaming system was introduced by the Ministry of Education in the 1990s to help with students different academic abilities, especially in learning language. It group students based on three streams based on their proficiency:

- **EM1**: for students with high or strong language abilities. The curriculum is faster paced.
- **EM2**: for students with moderate language abilities, curriculum with difficulty adjustment.
- **EM3**: for students with low language abilities. The curriculum is more simplified.

The goal of this streaming is to ensure all students progress effectively in bilingual education without being left behind or overwhelmed. This streaming was seen as a strength of Singapore's education system. Tharman Shanmugaratnam supported this approach by noting, "In contrast to the Singapore system, US standards do not acknowledge that students learn at different rates". Minister for Education Ong Ye Kung also states that streaming helped reduce dropout rates.

2.5 2000s: Curriculum Reforms and Reduce Labeling

After years of implementing EM1, EM2, EM3 in the 1990s, the Ministry of Education was concerned about student labeling, especially the low language abilities of students. Therefore, there were curriculum reforms in the 2000s to reduce such stigma while still supporting bilingual education. The Ministry of Education merged EM1 and EM2 into a single stream. This allows more flexibility in learning languages. Additionally, interactive teaching methods using digital platforms and e-learning are introduced to enhance language acquisition, make bilingual education more engaging.

2.6 2010s: Promotion and Enhancement

2010s marked a new phase in Singapore's bilingual education policy, focused on promoting language use beyond the classroom and enhancing teacher quality. The Lee Kuan Yew Fund for Bilingualism was established in 2011 to support a variety of language initiatives including the development of heritage based educational resources, children's books in MTL, and support for community learning projects. To support the teacher quality in bilingualism, National Institute of Education (NIE) provides service training for Mother Tongue teachers. Service training in NIE includes workshops, teachers learn to apply the practical in class, and they provide coaching sessions for the teachers.

2.6.1 Workshop

Teachers attended workshops on the use of code-switching, learning when and how to mix Mandarin and English to support student understanding.

2.6.2 Practical Applications

Teachers learn to apply code-switching in the classroom. For example, using English to explain difficult

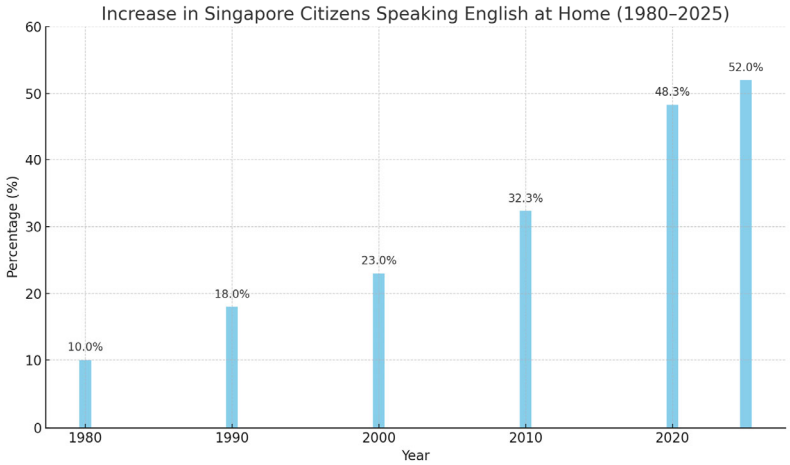
Mandarin words before continuing the lesson in Mandarin.

2.6.3 Coaching

NIE provides feedback and observe the real lessons, allowing teachers to reflect on their lessons, applying the code switch strategy, and improve. This highlights how code-switching became a key method to increase the students ability in language learning. In their study, "Teacher Code-switching in Singapore Primary Schools: a Corpus-based Study" Gwee and Susan Bee found that code-switching helps with curriculum access and classroom management, making lessons more engaging and accessible. Their findings highlight the effectiveness of NIE's teacher training services.

3. Enhancing Bilingual Education in a Changing Singapore (2020–2025)

From 2020 to 2025, Singapore's bilingual education policy has changed a lot to keep up with modern times, new technology, and the global world. In the past, all students had to learn English as their main language in school, while also learning their own Mother Tongue Language (MTL), like Mandarin, Malay, or Tamil. This basic rule is still there, but the government has added new ideas and made the system more flexible and interesting. In 2020, people started getting worried because more and more families were using English at home—almost half of Singaporean homes were mainly English-speaking.



Education Minister Chan Chun Sing warned, "If we do not do anything, we will start to lose our bilingualism edge," and encouraged everyone to work harder on learning MTL. After that, the Ministry of Education (MOE) made some improvements for students of all levels. By 2021, they started using fun technology like augmented reality (AR), animated videos, and Tamil reading pens to help young children learn MTL. They also improved the Mother Tongue Support Programme (MTSP), so students who were struggling could get special help, like one-on-one guidance. In 2022, the Conversational MTL program was expanded to cover more primary and secondary students, especially those who don't speak it at home. Preschools added more fun language activities like songs, stories, and pretend-play to help kids learn both languages more naturally from a young age. One big change happened in 2023, when 35 schools tried out a new MTL curriculum for Primary 1 students. It used hands-on learning, cultural stories, and tech tools like the Tamil e-reading pen. Minister Chan said that MTL should become "more than just a subject, but a living language", which means kids should really use it in daily life, not just study it for exams.

In 2024, this new curriculum was used in all primary schools. Also, MOE changed the rules for who can take Higher Mother Tongue Language (HMTL). Starting in 2026, Secondary 1 students can qualify for HMTL just based on their MTL scores, without needing high PSLE results overall. Prime Minister Lawrence Wong supported this idea, saying that bilingualism helps Singapore stay connected to the world. In 2025, even more updates are

coming. Two MOE kindergartens will start giving kids more MTL time each day—going from 1 hour to 1.5 hours. Also, a new reading program called MTL SOAR (Mother Tongue Languages – Structured Oral and Reading) will give Primary 1 and 2 students an extra 30 minutes of reading time focused on MTL. This program will slowly expand to other levels by 2029. On top of that, some secondary schools will start offering French and German as extra languages (but not for exams), showing that MOE wants students to be ready for a more global future.

Experts agree that these changes are a good step. Prof Eddie Kuo from SUSS said, “Malays have the highest bilingual literacy… which helps entrench their mother tongue”. At the same time, Dr Susan Xu Yun warned that MTL could become “just a subject” if students don’t feel personally interested or connected to the culture. A Tamil mother also shared that her son now enjoys reading Tamil books and even talks to his grandparents in Tamil, thanks to MTL SOAR. Overall, Singapore’s bilingual policy has grown from just keeping the language alive to making it something students use, enjoy, and connect with through technology, culture, and real-life experience.

4. The Pillars of Singapore’s Bilingual Policy Success

Singapore’s bilingual education policy has been widely regarded as a success, and its effectiveness can be attributed to a combination of historical context, strategic policymaking, and societal factors. Here’s an in-depth analysis of why the policy has worked well:

4.1 Strong Political Will and Clear National Vision

Right after Singapore became independent, the leaders—especially Lee Kuan Yew—believed that learning two languages was super important for building the country. They wanted English to be the language everyone could use to connect with each other and the world, while still keeping the Mother Tongue Languages (Mandarin, Malay, Tamil) so people wouldn’t lose their culture and values. Lee Kuan Yew said, "If you are bilingual, you have binocular vision, then you see the world in 3-D." He meant that knowing two languages helps you see things from different points of view and adapt better. Because the government was very clear about this, schools, families, and everyone else worked together to make bilingualism happen.

4.2 Systematic and Well-Structured Education Framework

Singapore made sure that every student learns both English and a Mother Tongue Language in school. English is used to teach most subjects, and students also have to learn their MTL. This way, everyone gets a good base in both languages. The Ministry of Education keeps updating the curriculum and teaching methods to keep up with changes in technology and society. For example, the EdTech Masterplan 2030 helps students learn more with digital tools. There’s a platform called Student Learning Space (SLS) where students can find online lessons and resources for all their subjects, including MTLs. This helps students learn better and makes sure teaching is the same quality in all schools.

4.3 Teacher Specialization and Support

Good teachers are really important for learning languages. Singapore trains special Mother Tongue Language teachers at places like the National Institute of Education. They learn how to teach the language well and understand the culture. To get more people to become MTL teachers, the government offers scholarships. For example, the Chinese Language Teacher Training Sponsorship (CLTTS) is a 4-year program that pays for tuition and gives money every month to people who want to teach Chinese in primary schools. There’s also a $2,000 bonus for preschool teachers who finish special MTL training. This makes sure teachers are well prepared.

4.4 Early Childhood Emphasis

Singapore knows kids learn languages best when they’re young, so they start teaching bilingualism in preschool. MOE Kindergartens include MTL learning in fun ways through programs like the Starlight Literacy

Programme and HI-Light Programme. They use songs, stories, and games that connect to Singapore's culture. For example, PCF Sparkletots has a "One Mother Tongue Language (OneMTL)" program where kids learn through singing, acting, and puppets. They also make e-books in Chinese, Malay, and Tamil to make reading fun and familiar. This is all part of the Nurturing Early Learners (NEL) Framework, which helps kids love their MTL and build good language skills from the start.

4.5 Parental and Societal Reinforcement

Parents really help make bilingual education work. Studies show that 93.7% of Singaporean parents believe it's good for kids to learn two languages early. Most parents think English is important for school and jobs, but they also want their kids to know their Mother Tongue to keep family culture and talk to older relatives. Even though more families speak English at home now, many parents still help their kids practice MTL by reading books and talking in the language. Outside the home, TV, community activities, and cultural events also support bilingualism, so it's part of everyday life.

4.6 Economic and Social Relevance

Being bilingual helps Singapore in lots of ways. English lets Singaporeans work with people all over the world and do well in business and technology. This attracts big international companies. Knowing Mother Tongue Languages, especially Mandarin, is useful too because China's economy is growing fast. Speaking Mandarin opens many business doors. Some research says that English is the biggest factor for higher pay, and just being bilingual doesn't always add more money benefits. But knowing MTLs still helps with culture, talking to older family members, and keeping Singapore's unique identity.

4.7 Flexibility and Reform

Singapore's education system keeps changing to improve. The Ministry of Education looks at the bilingual policy regularly and makes updates. One big change starting in 2026 is that Secondary 1 students can get into Higher Mother Tongue Language (HMTL) classes based just on how well they do in their MTL, without needing high overall PSLE scores. This helps students who are good at languages but not in every subject. For students who find MTLs hard, there are support programs. The Mother Tongue Support Programme (MTSP) helps Primary 3 and 4 students in small groups to improve speaking, listening, and reading skills. These lessons are taught by trained teachers. This shows the system cares about helping all students succeed. Singapore's bilingual policy works well because it's planned carefully, supported by leaders, teachers, and parents, and changes when needed. Kids start learning two languages early, and there are programs to help everyone. Being bilingual helps Singapore stay connected with the world and keep its culture alive. This balance is why the policy is so successful.

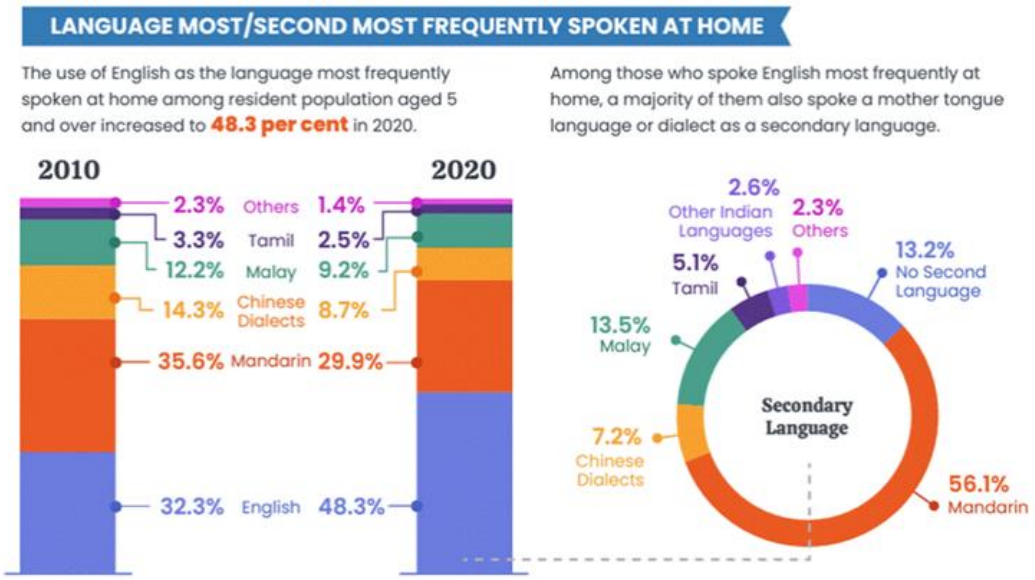
5. Unintended Consequences of Singapore's Bilingual Education Policy

Singapore's bilingual education policy, introduced in 1966, requires students to learn English alongside a designated Mother Tongue language based on their ethnic group. This policy was designed to promote national unity in a multiracial society and to equip citizens with English skills necessary for economic development and global competitiveness. While the policy has achieved many of its goals, it has also led to unintended negative consequences, especially in terms of cultural disconnection and the disappearance of heritage languages.

5.1 Decline of Chinese Dialects and Generational Disconnect

One of the most visible impacts of the bilingual policy is the rapid decline of Chinese dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, Cantonese, and others. In 1980, 81.4% of Chinese Singaporeans spoke dialects at home, reflecting the linguistic diversity within the Chinese community. However, the government's Speak Mandarin Campaign, launched in 1979, aimed to unify the Chinese population by promoting Mandarin as the common Chinese language. This campaign actively discouraged the use of dialects in schools, media, and public spaces.

As a result, by 2020, the use of Chinese dialects at home had dropped dramatically to just 11.8%. This shift has created a cultural gap between generations. Older Singaporeans, who grew up speaking dialects, often find it difficult to communicate fully with younger family members who primarily speak Mandarin or English. This language barrier weakens cultural bonds and disrupts the transmission of cultural knowledge, stories, and traditions that are embedded in dialects.



5.2 Rise of English and Marginalization of Heritage Languages

Alongside the decline of dialects, English has risen to become the dominant language in Singapore. English is the main method of instruction in schools and is widely used in business, government, and daily life. While Mandarin usage peaked in the early 2000s due to government efforts, it has since faced a decline, and dialects continue to fade. Similarly, Malay and Tamil, which are the official Mother Tongue languages for the Malay and Indian communities respectively, have also suffered in relevance and everyday use. Many parents prioritize English for their children because they believe it offers better educational and career opportunities. This practical choice, however, often comes at the expense of ethnic language proficiency. Students may struggle to maintain their Mother Tongue languages due to limited usage outside the classroom, leading to a growing detachment from their cultural roots. Over time, this trend risks the gradual loss of linguistic and cultural diversity within Singapore.

5.3 Language Ability and Social Inequality

Another unintended consequence of the bilingual education policy is the unequal access to language learning resources, which reflects broader social inequalities. Higher-income families often have the means to provide their children with additional support such as enrichment classes, private tuition, and a language-rich home environment. These advantages help students excel in their Mother Tongue languages and maintain cultural connections. In contrast, lower-income families may lack the resources to support language learning outside of school. Their children might face greater challenges in Mother Tongue exams and have fewer opportunities to engage with their heritage languages and cultures. This disparity turns language ability into a marker of social privilege and contributes to cultural inequality. It also means that some groups may become more disconnected from their ethnic identities over time.

5.4 Criticism of Fixed Race-Language Link and Loss of Cultural Diversity

The bilingual policy enforces a fixed link between race and language, which has drawn significant criticism. For example, Chinese students are required to learn Mandarin as their Mother Tongue, even if their families

speak other dialects like Cantonese or Hokkien. Similarly, Indian students are expected to learn Tamil, regardless of whether their home language is Punjabi, Hindi, or another Indian language. This rigid system does not reflect the linguistic reality of many Singaporeans, who may speak multiple languages or identify with different cultural groups. It limits personal choice and fails to accommodate the country's rich diversity. Critics argue that this approach risks erasing minority languages and dialects, which are carriers of unique cultural traditions, histories, and ways of thinking. Many cultural advocates and academics suggest that the bilingual policy, while useful in the past, needs to evolve. They call for more flexible language policies that support multilingualism and protect heritage languages. Such policies would help preserve cultural diversity while still preparing Singaporeans for global participation.

5.5 Expert Views on Singapore's Bilingual Education Policy and Its Consequences

Dr. Mukhlis Abu Bakar from the National Institute of Education highlights that while Singapore's bilingual policy has been effective in promoting English proficiency, it needs to be reinterpreted in light of the current sociolinguistic landscape where English dominates almost all domains of communication. He argues that the traditional model, where English is the medium of instruction and the Mother Tongue is treated as a second language subject is insufficient to keep young Singaporeans connected to their cultural roots. He calls for expanding the role of Mother Tongue languages in education to nurture balanced bilinguals who are proficient and culturally grounded in both languages. Scholars advocate for more flexible, additive bilingual pedagogies that validate students' home languages and dialects alongside English and official Mother Tongues, promoting multilingualism rather than compartmentalized bilingualism. In response to these challenges, the Ministry of Education has introduced initiatives to strengthen Mother Tongue language learning. For example, from 2025, a structured reading programme called MTL Soar will be progressively implemented in primary schools to increase early exposure and engagement with Mother Tongue languages. Additionally, from 2026, more students who perform well academically will be allowed to study their Mother Tongue at higher levels, aiming to raise proficiency and cultural connection.

6. Comparative Case Study: Applicability to Taiwan

6.1 Taiwan's Complex Language Ecosystem

Taiwan is a country with a lot of languages, but Mandarin Chinese is definitely the most dominant, used in schools, government, and the media. Still, local languages like Hokkien, Hakka, and Indigenous languages are really important to people's cultural identity. Since Taiwan became more democratic in the 1990s, there's been a shift in how the government handles language. They've tried to protect local languages while also preparing people to compete globally. This essay looks at Taiwan's recent bilingual education policy (the 2030 plan), the challenges it's facing, and what it means for culture and identity. It also compares Taiwan's experience with Singapore's language policy to see what they might learn from each other. The language situation in Taiwan is an expression of colonial influence, migrations, and political changes over time. The imposition of Mandarin as the main language was much forcefully carried out by the KMT government after its rise to power in 1949. The local languages included amongst others:

- Hokkien (Taiwanese): About 70% of the population speak it, mostly the elderly and southerners.
- Hakka: About 15% speak this. The language is more distinctly heard in places like Miaoli and Hsinchu.
- Indigenous languages: About 2%, are part of the Austronesian family but many are now endangered.

During those times (especially from 1949 to 1987), the state actually went ahead to make Mandarin the sole "official" language. Our local languages could not be used in schools or official media. Consequently, most of the young generation grew up speaking only Mandarin.

6.2 Language Policy After Democratization

Language planning started to change in Taiwan after martial law came to an end in 1987. The government thus began to realize the importance of local languages with respect to the identity of Taiwan. Some important changes were:

- Mother Tongue Education (2001): Elementary school children can take courses in Hokkien, Hakka, or Indigenous languages.
- National Languages Development Act (2017): Local languages were all made equal in law to Mandarin.

Even with these good intentions, the policies haven't been super effective. There aren't enough teachers, resources are limited, and some students just aren't that motivated to learn these languages. Plus, Mandarin still dominates in daily life, so it often seems more "useful."

6.3 The 2030 Bilingual Policy: Goals vs. Reality

In 2017, with expansion regarding bilingualism in Taiwan, Tsai Ing-wen announced a goal from Taiwan's perspective to become fully bilingual in Mandarin and English by 2030. As per her policy, improving English language education and raising bilingual school teaching are viewed as some primary means to make Taiwan more competitive in the global economy.

Implementation Challenges:

- Teacher Preparedness: Teachers do not have enough English proficiency and training for content-subject-bilingual teaching, which brings ineffective instruction and potential confusion for the students.
- Curriculum Design: The policy was rolled out very fast, at the expense of piloting or curriculum preparation, thereby schools implement teaching of varied quality.
- Student Readiness: Students, especially those in rural or underprivileged areas, have difficulty with instruction in English-medium, sometimes at the expense of their comprehension and academic performance.
- Cultural and Linguistic Tensions: The focus on Mandarin and English might further marginalize heritage languages which in their turn exacerbate the decline of Hokkien, Hakka, and indigenous languages.

The policy has faced significant backlash from educators, parents, and students. Many argue that the bilingual plan has created additional burdens without delivering promised benefits. Critics also highlight that bilingual education requires more than language proficiency; it demands pedagogical expertise and culturally sensitive approaches, which are currently lacking.

6.4 Why Taiwan? The Significance of This Case

A bilingual policy and its challenges in Taiwan present the opportunity to study language planning in a multilingual society. The policy is a test case with respect to:

- Cultural Preservation: To maintain linguistic diversity and thereby cultural heritage, local languages should be protected.
- Pragmatic Globalization: Allowing citizens to have English skills for international competitiveness.

Taiwanese experiences, therefore, seem to highlight the difficulty of attempting to implement a top-down

language reform without sufficient consideration to grassroots realities and environmental aspects such as teacher education and community formation.

6.5 Comparative Perspective: Singapore's Language Policy

Singapore's language policy, while having parallels with Taiwan's problems, is quite different both in approaches taken and in results achieved. The Speak Mandarin Campaign, established in 1979, had the pure intention of eliminating Chinese dialects in preference for Mandarin to unify the Chinese population to facilitate economic development.

Outcomes and Challenges:

- Might of Mandarin: The campaign indeed was successful in increasing the use of Mandarin at the expense of other dialects such as Hokkien, Teochew, and Cantonese, which have all seen a steep decline.
- English as the Lingua Franca: English has emerged as the language of education, administration, and business, working as a neutral lingua franca among very distantly related ethnic backgrounds.
- Cultural Identity Issues: But so much that benefits were realized, with dialects dwindling, language barriers became generational, and fears about the loss of cultural heritage began to be voiced by many communities.

Singapore's pragmatic language policy prioritized economic development and social cohesion but sacrificed some linguistic diversity. Taiwan faces a similar dilemma but with the added complexity of balancing three key languages, Mandarin, English, and local heritage languages.

6.6 Language, Identity, and Generational Gaps

Language relates to cultural identity and intergenerational relations in a very profound way. Improper transmission of heritage languages in Taiwan means improper transmission of knowledge of culture and traditions. The preference for Mandarin and English among younger populations reflects social changes but arguably endangers the unique cultural makeup of Taiwan. The Singapore experience affirms language policies can create identity and social cohesion but potentially alienate the elders and create a window of cultural pluralism. Both these societies vividly demonstrate the need for language policies that are sufficiently inclusive to embrace diversity as well as satisfy practical ends.

7. Crossing Borders: The Viability of Singapore's Policy in Taiwan

With globalization, bilingual education has become an essential tool for promoting international competitiveness as well as the preservation of culture. Singapore is often cited as a model, with a top-down language policy oriented toward English and respective mother tongues. However, it is difficult to simply adopt this model in Taiwan. The multilanguage scheme in Taiwan, consisting of Mandarin, Taiwanese Hokkien, Hakka, and Indigenous languages, is representative of rather complicated histories and identities. This paper examines whether the Singapore-style bilingual system can be brought into Taiwan with due consideration of the linguistic, educational, and sociocultural differences.

7.1 Feasibility of Implementing Singapore's Bilingual Policy in Taiwan

Institution of Bilingual Education - Bilingualism in Singapore is institutionalized, with English as the language of governance and commerce, alongside mother tongues. Taiwan may expand bilingual education, with Mandarin and Taiwanese being languages of culture while English is promoted for international communication. In fact, Taiwan's "Bilingual 2030" policy initiative aims at increasing English fluency pursuant to this approach.

Functional Differentiation between Languages - In Singapore, English carries professional and academic standards, while the mother tongue stands personal and cultural. Taiwan may consider Mandarin and Taiwanese for cultural domains, yet for business and higher education, English dominates, in tandem with its focus on international trade.

Thinking of Bilingualism beyond the "Global Language" Paradigm - Bilingualism should not factor English only as a tool of global mobility. Instead, it should accommodate local and indigenous languages' preservation and promotion. This wider view accords language more than just a means of economic activity, making it a concern for identity, culture, and community membership. Taiwan, therefore, may build a more inclusive bilingual model through the balancing of global communication and local language revitalization.

7.2 Limitations and Challenges of Applying Singapore's Policy to Taiwan

Top-Down Imposition of "Official" Mother Tongues - Singapore's top-down approach to enforcing English would face resistance in Taiwan, due to its democratic system and strong cultural identity tied to local languages like Taiwanese and indigenous languages.

English-Dominated Academic Resources and Exam Standards - Shifting to an English-dominated academic environment in Taiwan would require significant investments in resources and training, potentially increasing educational inequality between students with varying levels of English proficiency.

8. Conclusion

After going through the research, it could be concluded that the bilingual education policy that is currently being implemented in Singapore could not be directly implemented in Taiwan due to the vast difference of structural governance, cultural diversity, etc. Although, to say that it would definitely not succeed would also be partially wrong because it would still be possible to implement the policy if Taiwan decided to implement the policy adapting in accordance with Taiwan politic, social, and cultural difference. Different countries would have different needs, so it is fair to conclude that some changes are necessary as well, especially when dealing in terms of education where it is a considerably major aspect in a country's society.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 49-74

Bilingual education in Taiwan: Analyzing the current practice and teachers' and students' perceptions in bilingual experimental classes

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ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25206

Abstract

This study investigates the implementation and stakeholder perceptions of bilingual experimental classes under Taiwan's Bilingual Nation 2030 policy, which aims to enhance English proficiency and global competitiveness. Despite policy support, schools face persistent challenges, including teacher shortages, unclear curriculum guidelines, and unequal resource distribution. Drawing on surveys and in-depth interviews with one mathematics teacher and 14 tenth-grade students from a junior high school in Kaohsiung, the study explores classroom practices, learning outcomes, and implementation barriers. Findings show that 71% of students expressed satisfaction with the program, citing improvements in English listening, comprehension, and communication skills, as well as increased subject engagement and international awareness. However, students noted limited interaction with foreign teachers and inconsistent adherence to the 50% English instruction target. The teacher reported increased workload, diverse student language abilities, and insufficient teaching materials as major obstacles. Collaboration with foreign teachers was hindered by mismatched subject expertise and scheduling constraints. The study highlights the need for enhanced teacher training, clearer curricular goals, and stronger mechanisms for integrating foreign educators. It also calls for equity-focused measures to prevent bilingual programs from widening academic gaps. These findings offer actionable insights for refining Taiwan's bilingual education policy and supporting its sustainable implementation.

Keywords: Taiwan Bilingual education, bilingual experimental classes, Bilingual Nation 2030 Policy, content and language integrated learning, CLIL, teacher and student perceptions

Bilingual education in Taiwan: Analyzing the current practice and teachers' and students' perceptions in bilingual experimental classes

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Motivation

In 2018, the Taiwanese government introduced the "Bilingual 2030" policy with the ambitious aim of enhancing citizens' English proficiency and global competitiveness (National Development Council et al., 2021). As globalization intensifies, the ability to function effectively in a bilingual environment has become a key educational goal. This policy reflects a broader national commitment to equipping future generations with the linguistic and cultural competencies necessary for participation in an increasingly interconnected world. Bilingual education, particularly through Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), has been widely adopted in experimental classes across Taiwan. These initiatives seek to integrate academic content with English language instruction to foster both subject mastery and language proficiency. However, the rapid promotion of bilingual experimental classes has revealed several challenges, including a shortage of trained bilingual teachers, lack of standardized curriculum guidelines, insufficient resource allocation, and mixed perceptions among teachers and students.

In response to the "Bilingual 2030" policy blueprint launched by Taiwan's Executive Yuan in 2018, various municipalities, including Taipei, New Taipei, and Tainan, began piloting CLIL-based bilingual education programs as early as 2017. These programs aimed to establish bilingual experimental classes at primary and secondary school levels, allowing students to learn both academic content and English simultaneously (Huang & Tsou, 2023). As Ministry of Education plan for bilingual education (2018), the primary intention behind establishing bilingual experimental classes is to move beyond treating English as a standalone subject. Instead, English is embedded within content subjects to develop language proficiency and subject knowledge in an integrated way. This approach is intended to cultivate students' global competitiveness by enhancing their ability to use English naturally in academic and everyday contexts. To support this initiative, the Ministry of Education has provided financial subsidies to help schools recruit foreign teachers, offer professional development for local teachers, and improve classroom facilities.

Nevertheless, schools continue to face numerous implementation challenges. A significant issue is the shortage of qualified bilingual teachers—those who are proficient in both subject content and English instruction—making it difficult to ensure consistent teaching quality. Moreover, there is a lack of unified and concrete curriculum and assessment guidelines, leaving schools to independently design and adjust programs, which can lead to anxiety among educators and even result in program discontinuation. For example, some high schools ceased offering bilingual classes after just one year. Additional obstacles include administrative burdens, unequal distribution of teaching resources, and difficulty for both teachers and students to adapt to the bilingual learning environment.

Despite the government's investment and policy support, the implementation of bilingual experimental classes remains inconsistent. Some schools have even discontinued these programs after only one year, citing issues such as teacher burnout, unclear pedagogical goals, and difficulties in student adaptation. Moreover, while many students express satisfaction with the idea of bilingual education, they also report challenges such as the scarcity of qualified foreign teachers and the widening of academic gaps among students with different language backgrounds. Given this context, there is a pressing need to examine how bilingual education is currently practiced in Taiwan and to understand the real experiences of those most directly involved: the teachers and students. This study aims to bridge the gap between policy expectations and classroom realities by providing an in-depth analysis of the strategies, outcomes, and perceptions related to bilingual experimental classes.

1.2 Research Background

In 2018, Taiwan launched the "Bilingual 2030" policy with the primary goal of enhancing national English proficiency and boosting international competitiveness. According to the Executive Yuan's development plan (2023), the government has invested substantial resources to meet these goals: by 2024, all English classes in elementary and junior high schools are to be taught entirely in English, supported by 300 foreign teachers. By 2030, high school English courses will also adopt full English instruction, and one-third of schools will implement bilingual curriculum models. To realize this vision, Taiwan's education sector has actively introduced the Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) approach, which promotes teaching subject content through a second language to improve both academic understanding and language proficiency (Yang, 2014; Luo, 2022). While CLIL has shown success in Western contexts, its application in Asian educational systems—especially in Taiwan—is still experimental (Lee, 2024). Challenges remain in areas such as teacher preparation, curriculum design, assessment mechanisms, and access to appropriate teaching materials (Luo, 2024; Lee, 2024).

Studies show that many teachers lack a deep understanding of CLIL, leading to inconsistencies in its implementation. Some classrooms adopt full English immersion, while others use a mixed bilingual approach, resulting in uneven teaching outcomes. Researchers also highlight the crucial role of administrative support and school-based Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in successful policy execution, but these areas remain underexplored. Moreover, public skepticism still surrounds the bilingual policy: Will it marginalize local languages and cultures? Can the 2030 goals truly be met? Are the funding and teaching workforce sufficient? These concerns remain unresolved. Despite the ambitious goals and significant investments, Taiwan's bilingual education still faces notable challenges in bridging policy and practice. This study seeks to investigate the realities of bilingual experimental classes, offering a dual perspective on institutional structures and classroom teaching to inform future improvements.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To explore the current implementation of bilingual experimental classes in Taiwan.

This includes identifying how the CLIL approach is applied in real classroom settings, the design of bilingual curricula, and the extent to which English is integrated into subject teaching across different schools.

- To investigate the perspectives of teachers involved in bilingual education.

This objective focuses on understanding teachers' preparedness, challenges in curriculum design, teaching strategies, collaboration with foreign educators, and professional development experiences.

- To examine students' experiences and attitudes toward bilingual experimental classes.

The research seeks to uncover how students perceive bilingual instruction, the difficulties they face, their interactions with foreign teachers, and the impact of bilingual education on their language learning and academic performance.

- To identify the key obstacles and potential improvements in the current bilingual education system.

Based on interview and survey data, the study aims to highlight systemic issues—such as lack of clear guidelines and uneven resource distribution—and to offer practical recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of bilingual education in Taiwan.

- To contribute insights that support the successful realization of the "Bilingual 2030" policy.

By analyzing real-world classroom dynamics and stakeholder feedback, the study intends to inform future policy adjustments and promote a more inclusive and sustainable bilingual education framework.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education in Taiwan is increasingly influenced by international frameworks that promote both language development and content mastery. Among these, Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) has emerged as a dominant model. According to Verhoeven, Goris, and Denessen (2019), CLIL has demonstrated a significant positive impact on second language (L2) acquisition, particularly in improving students' comprehension and production skills. However, their systematic review also points to wide variation in CLIL implementation, with outcomes dependent on factors such as teaching quality, curriculum design, and learner background. CLIL's success depends heavily on the preparedness of teachers. Cañado (2018) argues that effective CLIL delivery requires teacher training programs to go beyond general pedagogy and include targeted instruction in linguistic proficiency, bilingual methodology, and interdisciplinary curriculum design. Without such preparation, teachers may struggle to balance subject matter with language instruction, potentially undermining both.

In terms of language practices within bilingual classrooms, translanguaging has received growing attention as a dynamic and inclusive strategy. Poza (2018) emphasizes that translanguaging—where learners flexibly draw on their full linguistic repertoire—supports both conceptual understanding and identity affirmation. His case study in a bilingual science classroom illustrates how alternating between English and Spanish allowed students to deepen their engagement with complex content. Similarly, Lisaitė and Smits (2022) explore the role of translanguaging within CLIL contexts and find that it enables multilingual learners to access prior knowledge, manage cognitive load, and construct meaning across languages. They argue that translanguaging should not be viewed as a barrier to English acquisition but as a legitimate pedagogical resource that affirms students' multilingual identities. In addition to reading comprehension and conceptual development, CLIL has also been shown to benefit oral communication. Lancaster and Cañado (2017) report that students exposed to CLIL instruction demonstrate measurable gains in speaking fluency and listening comprehension. These findings align with the objectives of Taiwan's bilingual policy, which prioritizes communicative competence alongside academic achievement.

2.2 Previous Studies on Taiwan's Bilingual Policy and Bilingual Experimental Classes

Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 policy represents a bold national initiative to enhance English proficiency and global competitiveness by integrating English as a medium of instruction (EMI) across all levels of education. Central to this initiative is the establishment of bilingual experimental classes in public schools, which serve as pilot programs to implement subject-based English instruction, typically through models such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). While the vision is ambitious, a growing body of research reveals discrepancies between policy goals and actual classroom realities. According to the National Development Council and the Ministry of Education (2021), by 2024, 60% of schools at the senior high school level and below nationwide are expected to adopt all-English teaching in English class. And by 2030, 100% of schools at the senior high school level and below nationwide are expected to adopt all-English teaching in English class. This policy push is supported by statistical indicators, such as the finding that 17.1% of senior high school students have already attained the CEFR B2 level in English proficiency. In addition, the government has committed to expanding bilingual experimental programs, enhancing teacher training, and promoting the use of digital platforms like Cool English to support language learning.

While the term "bilingual experimental class" sounds unified, the actual design and implementation of these classes vary widely across schools. The Ministry of Education requires that at least 50% of subject instruction in these classes be conducted in English. However, interviews and school reports suggest that this standard is not consistently followed. Teachers frequently switch back to Mandarin for complex concepts or test preparation, especially outside of formal classroom observations (National Development Council & Ministry of Education,

2021). However, critiques from both scholars and students suggest that implementation has outpaced preparation. He (2020) cautions that the bilingual policy may marginalize Taiwan's multilingual identity and risk self-colonization by prioritizing English over native languages. Li (2021) further argues that the policy assumes uniform student ability, failing to account for students who may have limited exposure to or interest in English. Such concerns point to a fundamental tension between the policy's vision and the linguistic realities of Taiwanese classrooms.

EdYouth's (2023) large-scale student survey presents further evidence of this misalignment. The survey revealed that only 42% of high school students liked their English teachers' instructional methods, and just 32% found English classes helpful for real-life communication. Moreover, 38.4% of students disagreed that bilingual instruction in non-language subjects could improve English proficiency, and 68% reported that it negatively affected their learning of core subject content. These student views differ significantly between those in bilingual experimental classes and those in regular classes. According to EdYouth, bilingual experimental class students report higher confidence in using English, with over half self-reporting at CEFR B1 or above. In contrast, many students in regular classes—particularly those at CEFR A2 or lower—struggle to follow EMI content and report relying on classmates for translation or simply tuning out of lessons (EdYouth, 2023).

This problem is compounded by the "bimodal" phenomenon—the widening gap between students with high and low English proficiency. According to the 2024 policy implementation report, CEFR A2-level students can comprehend only around 50% of EMI content, and 32% can understand less than 25% (EdYouth, 2023). In contrast, B1-level students understand approximately 73% on average. These discrepancies suggest that EMI could exacerbate educational inequalities, particularly in under-resourced schools or among socioeconomically disadvantaged students (Lin & Wu, 2025). Qualitative findings further illuminate challenges in the implementation of bilingual experimental classes. Although government guidelines require that at least 50% of class time in such programs be conducted in English, interviews with students reveal that many teachers revert to Chinese, except when observed by administrators. Teachers report feeling unequipped for EMI due to a lack of systematic training, insufficient materials, and pressure to cover subject content for standardized exams (National Development Council & Ministry of Education, 2021; EdYouth, 2023). Moreover, the frequency of bilingual lessons is inconsistent across schools. While some experimental classes meet once or twice per week, others are held only once a semester—limiting the potential for sustained immersion. Students also report variation in instructional style: some teachers attempt CLIL-based approaches, while others primarily translate vocabulary or alternate languages during instruction (National Development Council & Ministry of Education, 2021).

Students also express mixed reactions. While some acknowledge the benefits of learning subject-specific English terms—particularly in STEM and arts courses—others report confusion, reduced comprehension, and anxiety, especially when instruction occurs without prior notice or adequate scaffolding. The frequency of bilingual lessons also varies significantly across schools, ranging from once a semester to once a week, reducing opportunities for immersion and habit formation. The report also identifies a strong link between student outcomes and socioeconomic background. Bilingual experimental class students often come from families with greater financial and educational resources, having attended bilingual kindergartens or international programs. As one student noted, "The bilingual class just gathers the elite students for more elite training," raising concerns about equity and access (EdYouth, 2023).

Researchers also point out the lack of standardized evaluation for bilingual experimental classes. Lin and Wu (2025) criticize the government's emphasis on counting schools rather than examining teaching quality or student well-being. Without clear learning benchmarks, each school interprets "bilingual education" differently, which creates disparities in learning outcomes and instructional quality. Finally, while the policy sets quantitative goals, its qualitative indicators remain underdeveloped. Lin and Wu (2025) criticize the government's emphasis on the number of schools offering bilingual education rather than evaluating teaching effectiveness, learning outcomes, or student well-being. Moreover, with curriculum guidelines left vague, each school interprets

"bilingual education" differently, resulting in inconsistency across teaching practices, student experiences, and measurable success. In conclusion, although Taiwan's bilingual policy has stimulated innovation and global alignment, it faces substantial implementation challenges. Without addressing gaps in teacher training, curriculum integration, resource equity, and student readiness, the risk of deepening educational inequality remains high. Researchers call for more inclusive, data-informed strategies that align policy vision with classroom realities, ensuring that bilingual education serves all students, not just the already advantaged.

2.3 Review of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Bilingual Education

The success of bilingual education policies often hinges on the perceptions and experiences of the key stakeholders—teachers and students. In Taiwan's context, research and policy reports have documented a mixture of optimism, skepticism, and practical concerns regarding bilingual instruction, particularly in bilingual experimental classes. These perceptions are critical in evaluating the feasibility and sustainability of the *Bilingual 2030* policy.

2.4 Teachers' Perceptions

Teachers occupy a central role in the execution of bilingual education, but many report feeling ill-equipped to deliver content through English. Tseng (2020) found that while educators generally support the goals of bilingual reform, they often lack the linguistic and pedagogical confidence to integrate content and language instruction effectively. This concern is echoed in qualitative interviews from the 2024 bilingual policy report, where several high school teachers admitted that EMI teaching was implemented only during formal observations or inspections, and that they would revert to Chinese otherwise due to discomfort or student feedback (Wu & Lin, 2024). In the same report, teachers expressed challenges such as a lack of time for lesson preparation, limited bilingual teaching materials, and the absence of institutional support. Some reported being "assigned" to teach bilingual courses without sufficient EMI training, leading to additional pressure and occasional student backlash when their English proficiency was questioned. As one student noted, "At the beginning of the semester, our teacher tried teaching in English, but after students made fun of her pronunciation, she switched back to Chinese" (EdYouth, 2023). Nevertheless, many teachers recognize the potential benefits of bilingual instruction. When adequately supported, they see it as an opportunity to enhance students' global competence and critical thinking. A number of educators have called for greater clarity in curriculum expectations, access to targeted EMI professional development, and more collaborative teaching models involving foreign teaching assistants.

2.5 Students' Perceptions

Student responses to bilingual education are also varied and deeply tied to their English proficiency, subject matter, and classroom experience. Student Group Surveys also indicate that while some students enjoy the novelty of using English in non-language subjects, many—especially those with lower CEFR levels—find it confusing, demotivating, or even exclusionary. For example, Data from EdYouth (2023) demonstrates that only 19.9% of surveyed students agreed that learning other subjects in English did not affect their understanding of those subjects, while 68% felt that bilingual instruction disrupted content learning. Students in bilingual experimental classes reported a more positive experience, particularly when bilingual teaching occurred in subjects like physical education, music, or science, where many technical terms already derive from English. One student remarked, "Using English in chemistry or history helps me understand the original meaning of concepts and trace the roots of certain terms" (EdYouth, 2023). However, they also highlighted inconsistencies between schools, teachers, and class frequency, noting that irregular exposure made it difficult to adapt and develop fluency.

Students in regular classes, by contrast, frequently cited feelings of exclusion, anxiety, and disengagement. Among CEFR A2-level students, 32% could only understand less than a quarter of English-medium instruction. These students reported relying on classmates for translation, or simply tuning out entirely. Some viewed

bilingual policy as favoring elite students with stronger academic backgrounds or greater access to private English education. Despite these concerns, there is also cautious support for the policy's long-term goals. Many students agreed that the ability to use English in real-world contexts would be beneficial, but stressed the need for gradual implementation, differentiated instruction, and stronger integration with everyday language use. Several emphasized the importance of interactivity and real-life applications in English class, rather than rote memorization or test preparation.

2.6 Shared Observations

Both teachers and students recognized the importance of teacher fluency and teaching style in shaping bilingual classroom outcomes. A recurring theme in both groups was the perception that current EMI instruction lacks clear structure and purpose. Teachers called for curriculum alignment and realistic pacing, while students asked for more transparency, scaffolding, and opportunities for oral interaction. Additionally, both stakeholders expressed concern about equity. The 2024 bilingual policy report highlighted that bilingual experimental classes often cluster students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, reinforcing educational inequality. One student commented, "The bilingual class just gathers the elite students together. The rest of us don't get the same resources or attention" (EdYouth, 2023).

In conclusion, the reviewed literature highlights both the theoretical foundations and practical challenges of bilingual education in Taiwan, especially within the context of the Bilingual 2030 policy. Models like Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) and translanguaging have shown promise in enhancing language proficiency and subject comprehension. However, successful implementation relies heavily on teacher preparedness, curriculum design, and student background. In practice, Taiwan's bilingual experimental classes—central to the policy—show inconsistent implementation, with wide variations in lesson frequency, teaching strategies, and adherence to the requirement that at least 50% of subject instruction be conducted in English. While some students benefit from increased English exposure and develop higher confidence, others, particularly those with lower proficiency or fewer resources, report confusion, anxiety, and disengagement. Teachers similarly express support for the goals of bilingual education but feel underprepared and under-resourced, often reverting to Mandarin outside of formal evaluations. These disparities raise concerns about educational equity, with bilingual experimental classes often serving more advantaged students. To address these gaps, this study will next explore the current state of bilingual experimental classes in Taiwan by investigating the lived experiences and perceptions of both teachers and students. By understanding their views on teaching effectiveness, classroom dynamics, and language learning outcomes, the research aims to identify actionable improvements—not only for the bilingual experimental classes themselves but also for Taiwan's broader bilingual education policy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

The study involved a small sample consisting of one mathematics teacher and several 10th-grade students enrolled in a bilingual experimental class at a junior high school in Kaohsiung City. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in bilingual education. The teacher had extensive teaching experience and had received professional development in bilingual instruction. The students had prior exposure to English learning and were actively participating in a bilingual curriculum that integrated subject content with English language use. The participants' ages ranged from approximately 15 to 16 years old for the students, while the teacher was in their mid-career teaching stage.

3.2 Materials

The study utilized semi-structured interview guides designed for both teacher and student participants. No standardized questionnaires or formal tests were used. Interviews were recorded using digital audio devices for

transcription purposes. The primary tools for data analysis included using google questionnaires for quantitative analysis, as well as utilizing word and excel tools for interview resources integration.

3.3 Procedure

The research followed a multi-step process:

Recruitment of Participants: The teacher and students were invited to participate based on their affiliation with the bilingual experimental program.

Distribution of Interview Guides: Semi-structured questions were designed to explore perspectives on bilingual instruction and learning experiences.

Conducting Interviews: One-on-one interviews were conducted separately with the teacher and with each student in a quiet setting to encourage open responses.

Transcription and Coding: All interviews were transcribed verbatim. The data was then subjected to thematic coding to identify key themes and recurring ideas.

Data Analysis: A combination of **qualitative thematic analysis** and **basic descriptive statistics** (e.g., frequency of themes) was used to interpret the findings.

4. Research Result

This study collected data through surveys and interviews to better understand the experiences and perspectives of students and teachers in Taiwan's high school experimental bilingual classes. The interview participants included one mathematics teacher with extensive experience in bilingual experimental class and five students enrolled in the bilingual program. The research findings are presented in two main sections: (1) descriptive statistical analysis of the student survey responses, and (2) thematic analysis of the interviews, highlighting key insights from both the teacher and student perspectives. The report concludes with a comparative summary of these viewpoints.

4.1 Survey Result Analysis

Overall Satisfaction with Bilingual Program **-** A total of 14 student questionnaires were collected, consisting of eight Likert-scale items covering satisfaction with the bilingual program, availability of foreign teacher resources, teaching strategies, and perceived policy equity. Overall, students reported positive experiences in the bilingual experimental class. The average rating for overall satisfaction was 3.8 out of 5, indicating that a majority of respondents felt content with their learning. In fact, 71% of students agreed or strongly agreed that they are satisfied with their bilingual class experience. Similarly, most students felt the program met their expectations (mean rating ≈3.9).

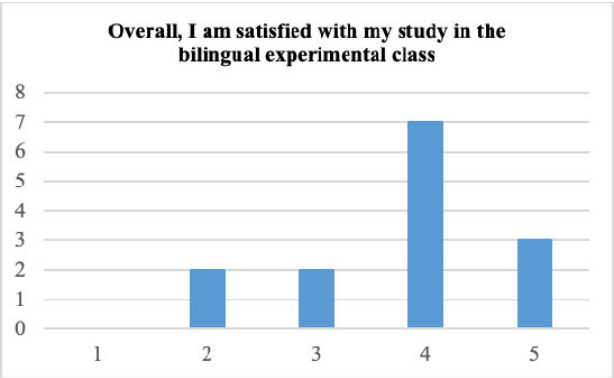

Figure 1: Overall satisfaction of bilingual program

Teaching Effectiveness and Language Impact - Regarding teaching effectiveness, opinions were more mixed. When asked if the bilingual teaching methods helped them absorb subject content, the average rating was 3.5, with many students selecting a neutral stance. Several did agree that the teaching approach was effective, but a few were uncertain. Likewise, students were divided on whether learning other subjects in English affected their understanding of those subjects (statement "Using English to learn other subjects does not affect my learning of those subjects"). About half of the respondents agreed it did not negatively affect them, while the others felt some impact – reflected in an average score of 3.5. This split indicates that some students felt comfortable learning content in English, whereas others experienced language as a barrier to fully grasping subject matter. Notably, one student mentioned that unfamiliar terminology was a challenge initially, whereas another student said English comprehension was not a problem for them, exemplifying the range of experiences.

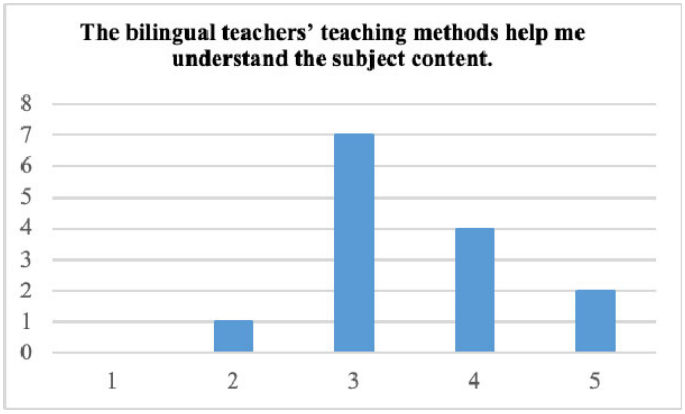

Figure 2: Bilingual teaching methods helped students absorb subject content

Availability and Quality of Foreign Teacher Resources - For foreign teacher resources, the survey revealed a potential shortfall. The statement "Foreign teacher resources are sufficient" received the lowest agreement, with an average of 2.9 out of 5. Nearly half of the students disagreed indicating that many felt the number or availability of foreign teachers was inadequate. This finding aligns with interview comments that, although a foreign teacher was assigned, interaction opportunities were limited. In contrast, students were generally positive about the quality of foreign teachers' instruction: the item "Foreign teachers' teaching methods improve my English learning" had a high average of 3.8, and notably, no student disagreed with it. In other words, when foreign teachers were present, students found their teaching helpful for improving English. The issue, therefore, lies in quantity rather than quality. One student suggested increasing the proportion of foreign teachers in class to enhance students' exposure to authentic English.

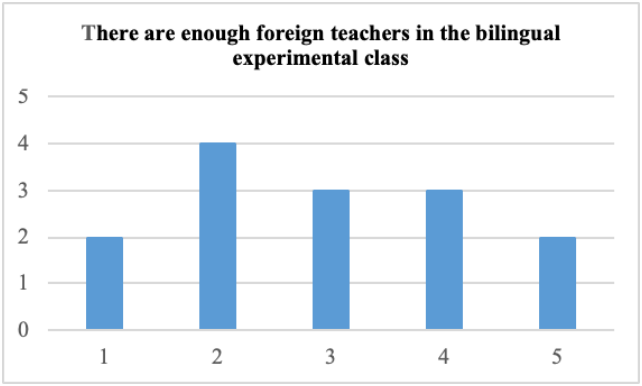

Figure 3: Availability of foreign teacher resources in bilingual classes

Student Perceptions of Bilingual Policy and Implementation - In terms of policy perceptions, students' attitudes were cautiously optimistic with some reservations. In the survey, we asked whether they perceive the

bilingual policy as "a policy that only lifts high achievers but does not help weaker students" (a critical viewpoint). Responses centered around neutrality (mean ≈3.2). About as many students agreed with that statement as disagreed, indicating uncertainty or diverse views on the policy's fairness. Meanwhile, when rating overall agreement with the bilingual policy, the average score was 3.5. Roughly half of the students expressed support for the policy (choosing "agree"), and the rest were mostly neutral with only one clear "disagree." This suggests that while students appreciate the idea behind the bilingual policy and its goals, some are not fully convinced of its implementation or equity. In open-ended explanations, several students wrote that the policy's intent is good (e.g. improving English as an international language) but felt it "has not been implemented very thoroughly". Some mentioned that English usage in practice is still limited and the policy needs to be more perfected.

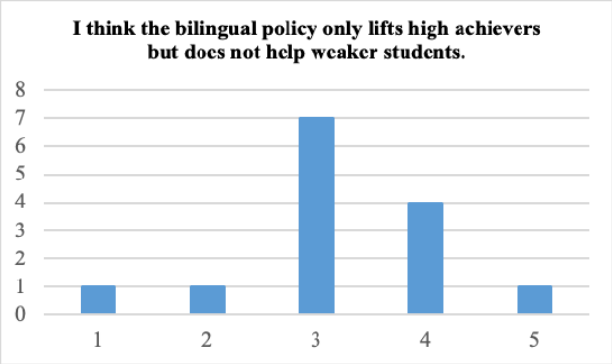

Figure 4: Student perceptions of policy fairness toward weaker students

Additional notable quantitative findings include the following: Only 50% of students reported that their class meets the official guideline of using English for at least half of each subject's instruction, while the other half said their class falls short of that 50% English exposure requirement. This echoes a student's remark that, in reality, only certain courses (like English and a special "bilingual math" class) were conducted fully in English, whereas other subjects mostly used Chinese with some English terms. When asked whether the school emphasizes English ability or true bilingual ability, 64% perceived that their school values bilingual (Chinese and English) competence, whereas 36% felt the emphasis was only on English. This suggests most students do sense a dual-language focus, but a significant minority see the program as leaning too heavily on English alone. Finally, students rated their own comprehension of all-English instruction: the majority (11 out of 14) estimated they could understand about 75% of a fully English-taught lesson, and a few outliers ranged from 50% comprehension to nearly 100%. Only one student felt they would catch as little as 25% of it. This self-assessed comprehension level indicates confidence by most students in following English-medium instruction, though not complete – consistent with the fact that entirely English-taught classes were limited.

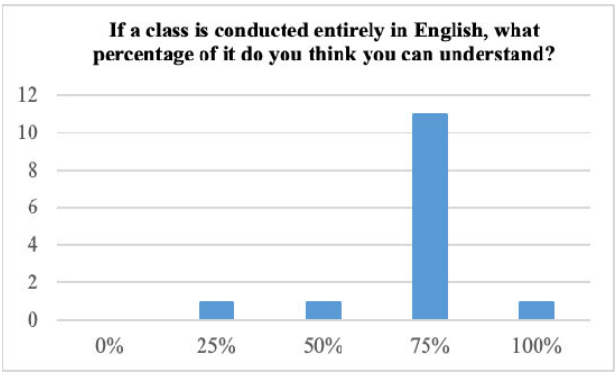

Figure 5: Students' comprehension of all-English instruction

In summary, the quantitative data portray generally positive student satisfaction and perceived benefits, tempered by concerns about resource sufficiency and uneven implementation of the bilingual policy.

4.2 Thematic Analysis of the Student Interviews

Adaptation and Learning Challenges - Students reported encountering some initial challenges when adapting to bilingual classes. A common difficulty was unfamiliar terminology – several students mentioned that at first they did not know many English vocabulary words or specialized terms, which meant they sometimes had to guess the teacher's questions or look up words while answering. One student noted that occasionally they resorted to Chinese when they didn't know how to express something in English.

> *At first, I didn't know many English vocabulary words or technical terms, so I had to guess what the teacher was asking. When it came to answering questions, I also needed to look up words or try using other ones to express myself. (Student Participant 1)*

However, this experience was not universal: another student stated that English listening and comprehension "was not a problem" for them from the beginning. This range of responses suggests that while some students struggled with language barriers in academic content (e.g. not immediately understanding worksheet questions in subjects like bilingual math), others had sufficient English proficiency to adapt more easily. Overall, students indicated that these challenges eased over time as their vocabulary grew.

Teaching Methods and Bilingual Classroom Experience - Interviewees consistently observed that the bilingual experimental class provided a different learning experience compared to regular classes. They highlighted specific differences in teaching methods and curriculum. For example, English class in the bilingual program was conducted entirely in English and included English-medium class discussions, often with a foreign teacher co-teaching or assisting in class. In subjects like math, students had dedicated bilingual math lessons where the teacher taught completely in English, which helped train their English comprehension and usage in a content area. The bilingual class also offered special courses (such as English critical thinking and debate, technology/AI topics, etc.) that were not available to regular classes. Students described these opportunities as a "completely different experience," providing chances to strengthen logical thinking and practice language skills simultaneously. The classroom atmosphere in the bilingual class was seen as more engaging and academically motivated – one student mentioned the class culture was better, with capable peers who actively use English and learn from each other.

> *Bilingual classes gave me a completely different experience, a chance to strengthen my logical thinking and language skills, and also an opportunity to express myself. (Student Participant 2)*

> *Bilingual math was very different — the teacher explained everything in English, which helped train our English comprehension and made us more used to using English. (Student Participant 4)*

> *The bilingual class offered more special courses, and both math and English were taught entirely in English. Sometimes the foreign teachers would observe or lead activities. Since the bilingual experimental class was in the science track, we had more topic-based courses related to technology, AI, and debate. (Student Participant 5)*

Overall, students appreciated the unique curriculum and extra English exposure, feeling it gave them more room to express themselves and use English than they would have in a normal class setting.

Perceived Learning Outcomes - The students generally believed that being in the bilingual program benefited their learning, especially in English proficiency. Many noted concrete improvements in their English listening, comprehension, and communication skills. They explained that they got substantially more practice using English – for instance, through class discussions or group work – which helped boost their confidence in

speaking and collaborating in English. Several students also mentioned that the bilingual environment made them more aware of their weaknesses and motivated them to improve. One student said that learning in English revealed the gaps in their knowledge and pushed them to work harder to keep up with the teacher.

> *The bilingual environment improved my English skills and gave me more opportunities to communicate. My English listening ability improved, and I also became more familiar with English logic. (Student Participant 1)*

> *It was very helpful for understanding and using English. I became more aware of my weaknesses and was motivated to work harder to keep up with the teacher. (Student Participant 4)*

Others pointed out that their fear of English in academic contexts diminished; for example, encountering technical terms in English (such as in math) became less intimidating once they had seen them in class – they learned to infer meanings from roots or prefixes and felt less "afraid" of English terminology. Beyond language skills, a few students mentioned gaining new perspectives or knowledge: since the bilingual class included topics on technology, AI, and debates, it broadened their horizons compared to the regular curriculum. In sum, the interviews with students reflect a consensus that the bilingual program improved their English ability and provided valuable learning experiences, aligning with the positive survey results on learning effectiveness.

> *After joining the bilingual experimental class, my English listening improved. Often, when I came across English math terms that I had learned before, they didn't feel as difficult anymore. I learned to guess the meaning from prefixes or roots, and I wasn't as afraid of English as before. (Student Participant 5)*

Resource and Implementation Issues - Despite these positive outcomes, students identified several implementation issues regarding resources and program structure. The primary concern was limited interaction with foreign teachers and native English speakers. Many students wanted more meaningful engagements, suggesting increased foreign teacher participation to enhance their pronunciation and English thinking patterns. Others proposed opportunities to communicate with international students or native speakers through exchange programs. In reality, some students noticed that even when foreign teachers were available, interactions were minimal, leaving them wishing for more direct guidance.

> *I hope there could be a higher proportion of foreign teachers so that our way of thinking and accents can become more native-like. I also wish teachers from arts and humanities subjects who are good at English could help teach classes, so we'd have more chances to use English. (Student Participant 1)*

Additionally, others expressed disappointment and desired greater immersion. For instance, one student suggested replacing some bilingual math sessions, viewed as tedious, with courses focused on international topics like global news. Overall, students consistently called for enhanced foreign teacher involvement and a more globally oriented curriculum to better meet their expectations.

> *I hope there can be more opportunities to interact with foreign students, especially native English speakers. (Student Participant 2)*

> *Besides the issue of foreign teachers, I hope there can be more globally connected topic-based courses — for example, discussing international news together. As for bilingual math, it felt a bit dull. It might be enjoyable for students majoring in math, but I would prefer using that time for courses more related to global topics. (Student Participant 5)*

School Emphasis and Policy Perceptions - When discussing their school's priorities, most students felt the aim was to cultivate balanced bilingual skills (Chinese and English) rather than solely emphasizing English proficiency. They noted that teachers frequently provided explanations in Chinese when students struggled,

highlighting a practical approach to bilingual education. However, some perceived a mismatch between the school's bilingual aspirations and actual practices. A few students felt the emphasis still tilted significantly toward English, while others pointed to conflicts within policy implementation. For instance, one student mentioned being required to take mother-tongue classes and exams, viewing this as an additional burden unrelated to the bilingual program's core objectives.

> *Our bilingual experimental class focused more on bilingualism rather than just English. It aimed to encourage and train students to speak English confidently and bravely. (Student Participant 2)*

> *Teachers shouldn't force us to take local language classes or exams, because they are unrelated to the bilingual experimental program. Learning three languages at the same time is also stressful. (Student Participant 3)*

Regarding the broader governmental bilingual policy, students generally supported its fundamental goals—enhancing fluent English use in daily life, education, and work contexts to strengthen Taiwan's global connectivity. They described tangible benefits, such as increased English proficiency, reduced fear of speaking English, and better academic outcomes. Nonetheless, their support was tempered by critiques of policy execution. Students noted Taiwan's bilingual environment was not yet fully realized, describing the implementation as somewhat incomplete or superficial compared to other countries. A lingering concern was that the policy might disproportionately benefit stronger students, echoing their mixed survey responses. Ultimately, students appreciated the policy's intent and effects but advocated for improvements, specifically better teacher training, resource allocation (particularly involving foreign teachers), and referencing successful international examples to refine Taiwan's bilingual education approach.

Suggestions for Improvement - During the interviews, students enthusiastically shared suggestions to enhance the bilingual program. A number of students emphasized the importance of improving teacher training and English proficiency for local (non-foreign) teachers. They felt that if subject teachers have stronger English teaching skills, classes could be conducted more effectively in English. Some suggested that schools should encourage more teachers to offer bilingual classes, thereby expanding the program's reach. Students also called for the school and government to create more authentic English usage opportunities. This included ideas like organizing exchanges where they could communicate with foreign students, or inviting guest speakers so that they can apply their English in real interactions. Many reiterated the desire for greater foreign teacher involvement – they proposed that foreign teachers spend more time with the class (not just occasional appearances), giving students more continuous exposure to native English throughout the week. In their view, this would help make accents and thinking patterns more native-like and increase confidence in speaking.

> *Teachers should efficiently complete the core curriculum so that we have the chance to explore more diverse fields. At the same time, they should also possess sufficient English teaching ability. (Student Participant 5)*

On the curriculum side, as noted, students suggested adding or substituting more globally focused content. They were excited about courses that connect to the international community or current events, and thought that incorporating such content (even at the expense of some existing bilingual coursework) would make the program more engaging and relevant. Finally, some practical suggestions included ensuring the class schedule allows enough time to cover both the required material and the extra bilingual activities – one student noted that time constraints sometimes prevent completing all planned lessons. In summary, student interviewees expressed a desire to make the bilingual program more immersive, resource-rich, and globally connected, while also appreciating the efforts their teachers and school have already put in. Indeed, several students praised their teachers for being very dedicated and for providing many opportunities beyond the regular curriculum, indicating that they value the program and simply wish to see it continually improved.

4.3 Thematic Analysis of the Teacher Interviews

The interview with a teacher in the bilingual program provided insight into the implementation from an educator's perspective, including classroom strategies, challenges, and views on policy support.

Teaching Approach and Curriculum - The teacher described specific approaches for integrating bilingual instruction into the school's curriculum and daily schedule. In this school's model, specific class periods are deliberately allocated to bilingual teaching, ensuring regular English-language exposure. For instance, mathematics involves six weekly periods, with two consecutive sessions specifically dedicated to "bilingual math," providing students consistent, continuous practice in English. Additionally, the teacher enriches the bilingual experience by incorporating cross-disciplinary and experiential learning activities, such as weekend field trips. One notable example included a visit to a university science education center, where students learned scientific concepts, like optics, directly in English from university professors. Such activities not only broaden students' academic knowledge but also enhance their practical language skills.

Further, after delivering the core lesson content in Chinese, the teacher supplements it with English-based tasks, discussions, or literacy exercises to reinforce subject understanding and bilingual competencies. Classroom routines have also been adapted to maximize student participation in English. The teacher regularly utilizes group activities, student presentations, and pair work—sometimes strategically pairing stronger and weaker students—to ensure active interaction and ample speaking opportunities for all. A point-based reward system is implemented to motivate students, offering extra credit for active English communication. Overall, these pedagogical strategies create a more student-centered and interactive learning environment. The teacher concluded that successful bilingual education requires careful scheduling of English instructional periods combined with innovative teaching methodologies, such as field trips, hands-on projects, and collaborative group work.

Student Response and Progress - According to the teacher, student response to bilingual classes has been largely positive. They observed that students are engaged and adaptive when taught using bilingual methods. One benefit the teacher noted was that teaching in two languages can help uncover students' learning gaps; by presenting material in English, they sometimes identify points of misunderstanding that weren't apparent in Chinese, and then they can address those gaps, thereby reinforcing learning. The teacher described the approach as student-centered, with an emphasis on collaboration (students working together to solve problems) and progression in language skills. They outlined a general progression they've seen: at first, students focus on understanding English, then on communicating in simple English, and eventually on engaging in richer English dialogue and giving presentations as their confidence grows.

Importantly, the teacher mentioned that when a student doesn't understand something in class, it is "not because of the language but because of the math" – implying that the conceptual difficulty of the subject (e.g. math concepts) is the real challenge, rather than the English itself. This suggests that with proper scaffolding, language does not become an insurmountable barrier; students can follow along with English instruction to the point that the limiting factor is still the content difficulty, which is a promising sign for bilingual education. The teacher's remarks indicate that students in the bilingual program are managing the dual-language instruction reasonably well. In fact, by requiring students to document their learning process (for example, submitting learning portfolios each semester, possibly in English), the teacher has seen students take more responsibility in their learning and improve over time. Overall, the teacher was encouraged by the students' attitude and growth, noting that many students show improved confidence and competence in using English as the class progresses.

Challenges and Teacher Support - The teacher candidly discussed several challenges faced when implementing bilingual education, emphasizing the educator's perspective. A primary challenge highlighted was the increased preparation workload. Teaching both subject content and language skills simultaneously requires carefully designed lessons with proper scaffolding—providing strong initial support like bilingual glossaries and multimodal visual aids, then gradually reducing assistance as students become more capable. This meticulous

approach considerably adds to the teacher's preparation time.

Another major issue is managing the diverse English proficiency levels among students. Within the same classroom, some students exhibit high fluency, while others struggle significantly. This variance necessitates differentiated instructional strategies and multimodal teaching methods to accommodate diverse student needs effectively. Additionally, finding suitable bilingual teaching resources presents ongoing difficulties. Although worksheets and selected materials from American textbooks are helpful, these resources often require extensive adaptation to align with Taiwan's curriculum, further increasing preparation burdens. The teacher actively pursued professional development opportunities to overcome these challenges, participating in bilingual education training programs designed to integrate core competencies effectively into bilingual instruction. Joining teacher professional learning communities also provided valuable collaborative support. Through such communities, teachers co-design lessons, exchange resources, and discuss solutions to immediate language and instructional issues.

Despite these efforts, the teacher expressed significant concerns regarding insufficient institutional support and incentives. Current incentives, such as slightly reduced teaching hours or marginal salary increases, were described as minimal compared to the substantially increased workload. As a result, the teacher humorously yet earnestly remarked that sustaining the bilingual program often feels like "burning" their passion under difficult conditions. The teacher stressed the necessity for increased institutional and government support, advocating specifically for better salaries, improved welfare benefits, and additional staffing. In closing, the teacher advised new bilingual educators to prepare for extra effort and actively seek resources, emphasizing that tangible financial incentives are crucial to motivating and sustaining teachers' long-term commitment to bilingual education.

Integration of Foreign Teachers - Another significant theme raised by the teacher was the integration of foreign teachers into the bilingual program. The teacher candidly identified multiple challenges hindering effective integration. One prominent issue is the mismatch in subject expertise; foreign teachers, typically ESL instructors, often lack specialized content knowledge in subjects like math or science. Consequently, local subject teachers, who possess greater bilingual teaching ability and subject expertise, feel reluctant to fully entrust class periods to foreign teachers unfamiliar with the curriculum. This scenario often marginalizes foreign teachers, who may end up passively observing rather than actively teaching.

Co-teaching logistics and language strategies presented further difficulties. The teacher described attempts to split lessons between local and foreign teachers, with the first half in Chinese and the second half in English. However, this approach proved problematic, as it diminished overall English exposure and disrupted lesson continuity. The teacher therefore advised against this co-teaching format, noting it complicates maintaining mandated language ratios and interferes with instructional flow. Scheduling further complicates the integration process. Foreign teachers frequently joined classes mid-semester, when local teachers had already planned the curriculum, making schedule adjustments difficult without sacrificing essential content. Consequently, foreign teachers often occupied only peripheral roles, sometimes even being phased out entirely from certain classes.

Despite these implementation challenges, students clearly expressed a desire for more interaction with foreign teachers, a sentiment echoed in student interviews. However, practical interaction opportunities were limited. For instance, foreign teachers typically did not engage informally with students during breaks, leading to minimal interaction outside structured classroom activities. Furthermore, foreign teachers' involvement often was limited to extracurricular electives rather than regular subject instruction, further restricting their meaningful participation. Ultimately, the teacher acknowledged the paradox: while students and policymakers highly value the native-English exposure foreign teachers offer, structural issues—such as scheduling conflicts, inadequate curriculum alignment, and limited co-planning—prevent foreign teachers from effectively contributing to the bilingual classroom. The teacher suggested rethinking foreign teacher roles, recommending they focus more clearly on their strengths, such as conversational English sessions, rather than traditional subject teaching.

Without these structural adjustments, the inclusion of foreign teachers' risks becoming counterproductive, highlighting a significant gap between policy aspirations and classroom realities.

Policy Impact and Suggestions - Finally, the teacher shared their views on the overall bilingual policy and its school-level impact. They generally supported the policy's continuation, emphasizing that strong English skills are crucial for students' futures, and a bilingual environment benefits educational development. They acknowledged the policy's positive impacts, such as fostering a more international outlook among teachers and encouraging the integration of innovative methods, including digital technology—though they also pointed out the need for further training in these areas. From an administrative perspective, implementing the policy necessitated adjustments in scheduling, resource allocation, and foreign teacher hiring, which the teacher has managed since the program's inception. Although there were no explicitly stated major shifts in school culture or operations beyond classroom practices, the teacher noted increased sharing of teaching experiences, highlighting their own presentations on bilingual education at national events.

Regarding future improvements, the teacher emphasized strengthening both the "software" and "hardware" aspects of bilingual education. "Software" improvements involve enhancing teacher training, pedagogical strategies, and support networks, while "hardware" includes better instructional materials and digital resources to support bilingual teaching effectively. A critical recommendation was enhancing professional development support and providing more substantial incentives. The teacher highlighted that current incentives, such as minor salary increases or slight workload reductions, are insufficient to attract and retain dedicated bilingual educators, stressing the necessity of higher salaries, greater recognition, and measures to prevent teacher burnout. They clearly stated that, while personally supportive of the policy's goals, effective implementation demands increased government and institutional support.

In closing, the teacher advised prospective bilingual teachers to anticipate challenges, but encouraged them by noting the availability of supportive communities and resources. They underscored the importance of systemic improvements, particularly tangible rewards, to maintain teachers' morale and motivation. Ultimately, the teacher's insights illustrate that the bilingual policy's success depends not only on defined goals, such as mandated English instruction hours, but crucially on practical support and adequate resources provided to those implementing it in classrooms.

4.4 Summary

The findings reveal that students generally viewed the bilingual experimental classes positively, particularly noting improvements in their English proficiency and confidence. They appreciated the unique learning opportunities provided, such as bilingual mathematics and interdisciplinary activities, yet also identified key areas for improvement, including greater access to foreign teachers, more immersive English instruction, and a more globally-oriented curriculum. Teachers emphasized significant workload challenges, difficulties integrating foreign teachers effectively, and insufficient institutional support and incentives. Overall, while participants supported the bilingual policy's goals, the study clearly underscores the need for practical improvements in resource allocation, teaching support, and program implementation to sustain meaningful bilingual education.

5. Discussion

This study aimed to examine the current state of bilingual experimental classes in Taiwan through five specific research objectives. The findings provide valuable insights into the implementation challenges and stakeholder perspectives that characterize Taiwan's bilingual education landscape. The following discussion addresses each research objective by integrating literature review insights with empirical findings.

5.1 Current Implementation of Bilingual Experimental Classes in Taiwan

Our survey results strongly support the theoretical benefits of Content and Language Integrated Learning

(CLIL) outlined in the research framework. The finding that students perceive bilingual teachers' methods as "very helpful for absorbing subject knowledge" and "improves language fluency" validates the CLIL principle that students can simultaneously acquire both language skills and content knowledge. This aligns with the 4Cs framework's emphasis on meaningful integration of Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture. However, the study also reveals significant gaps between policy expectations and classroom realities in the implementation of bilingual experimental classes. While the government mandates that at least 50% of instruction in bilingual classes should be conducted in English, survey findings indicate that only 50% of students reported their classes meeting this requirement. This aligns with Wu and Lin's (2024) observation that teachers often revert to Chinese instruction except during formal observations, highlighting a fundamental disconnect between policy guidelines and actual practice.

The curriculum design in the observed bilingual experimental class demonstrated both strengths and limitations. Students appreciated unique offerings such as English critical thinking, debate courses, and technology/AI topics that were unavailable in regular classes. However, the fragmented nature of English integration suggests that schools are still experimenting with curriculum models rather than following standardized frameworks. This finding resonates with the literature's emphasis on the experimental nature of CLIL implementation in Asian contexts, where adaptation remains ongoing.

5.2 Teacher Perspectives on Bilingual Education

The teacher interview revealed several critical challenges that align with the broader literature on bilingual education implementation. The mathematics teacher's experience reflects the systemic issues identified by Tseng (2020), including insufficient pedagogical confidence in content and language integration. While the teacher demonstrated motivation and dedication, practical challenges emerged in the areas of curriculum preparation, resource availability, and time management. The study confirms Cañado's (2018) assertion that effective CLIL delivery requires specialized teacher training beyond general pedagogy. The teacher's struggle with balancing subject matter and language instruction, coupled with limited access to appropriate bilingual teaching materials, highlights the gap between policy expectations and professional support systems. This aligns with Wu and Lin's (2024) findings that teachers often feel "assigned" to bilingual courses without adequate EMI training. Resource limitations emerged as a significant concern, with the teacher suggesting improvements such as purchasing foreign textbooks and utilizing specialized teaching aids. This finding supports the literature's emphasis on the crucial role of administrative support and resource allocation in successful policy execution. The teacher's call for better collaboration mechanisms with foreign educators also reflects the broader challenge of establishing effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in bilingual contexts.

5.3 Student Experiences and Attitudes in Bilingual Education Classes

Student responses revealed a complex range of experiences in bilingual classes, shaped largely by their individual English proficiency levels. Overall, attitudes were positive, with an average satisfaction rating of 3.8 out of 5. Students consistently reported noticeable improvements in listening, comprehension, and communication skills. Interview data further highlighted that increased opportunities for English use—particularly through discussions and group work—boosted their speaking confidence. These findings support Lancaster and Cañado's (2017) assertion that CLIL enhances oral communication and listening comprehension. Nevertheless, a key concern was the limited interaction with foreign teachers, which received the lowest satisfaction score (2.9/5). While students valued the teaching quality of foreign educators—evidenced by the high rating (3.8/5) for their impact on English learning—the primary issue lay in their limited availability rather than effectiveness. Many students expressed a clear desire for greater international teacher involvement to improve pronunciation and develop English thinking patterns.

In response to these challenges, students proposed actionable solutions such as increasing the number of foreign teachers, fostering more communication with international students, and establishing exchange programs. These suggestions reflect a strong awareness of the importance of authentic language exposure and align with

translanguaging approaches proposed by Poza (2018) and Lisaitė and Smits (2022), emphasizing the role of immersive, cross-cultural interaction in language acquisition.

5.4 Key Obstacles and Potential Improvements when implementing Bilingual Education in Taiwan

As the results of the bilingual class teacher's interview, implementing bilingual education in Taiwan faces key obstacles, notably the heavy workload for teachers. Simultaneously teaching subject content and language skills demands carefully scaffolded lessons, bilingual glossaries, and visual aids, which significantly increase preparation time. Teachers must also accommodate students with vastly different English proficiency levels, from fluent speakers to those struggling with basic comprehension. This "bimodal" phenomenon requires differentiated teaching strategies, adding further complexity to classroom management and instructional design. Another major issue is the lack of localized resources. While American textbooks and worksheets are available, they often need extensive adaptation to fit Taiwan's curriculum, intensifying teacher workload. Despite these challenges, some teachers actively participate in bilingual training and professional learning communities to co-design lessons and exchange resources. These communities offer valuable support, but current implementation still heavily relies on individual teacher initiative rather than systematic institutional backing.

Additionally, at students' perspective, limited collaboration between local and foreign teachers also hinders their learning of English usage and Culture understanding. As the interview of the local teacher indicates, Foreign teachers, often ESL specialists, lack subject knowledge in math or science, leading local teachers to dominate class time. Co-teaching models, such as splitting lessons by language, disrupted flow and reduced English exposure. Scheduling challenges also meant foreign teachers often joined classes mid-semester, further limiting their role. However, as the students' desire to interact with foreign teachers, it highlights the dilemma between their limited classroom role and the need for authentic English exposure. Despite challenges, students proposed insightful solutions. They called for more teacher training, greater English immersion through exchanges and guest speakers, and globally-relevant curriculum content. Their emphasis on authentic language exposure and stronger foreign teacher involvement aligns with translanguaging theories (Poza, 2018; Lisaitė & Smits, 2022), offering practical guidance to bridge the policy-practice gap and ensure more equitable bilingual education.

5.5 Stakeholder Recommendations for the "Bilingual 2030" Policy

The study found that both teachers and students generally supported the goals of the "Bilingual 2030" policy but identified key areas needing reform. Their classroom-based suggestions offer practical guidance for improving implementation. One core issue was teacher training. The math teacher interviewed struggled to balance subject teaching with English instruction, echoing Cañado's (2018) view that effective CLIL requires specialized training. Students also urged schools to boost teacher English proficiency and encourage more local teachers to join bilingual programs. These shared concerns highlight gaps in current professional development and align with calls for training in language skills and bilingual pedagogy.

A second major concern was the limited number and integration of foreign teachers. Students gave the lowest satisfaction score (2.9/5) to foreign teacher availability but rated their quality highly (3.8/5), calling for more consistent English exposure and longer contact hours. The teacher echoed the need for better collaboration mechanisms. These findings suggest a mismatch between policy promises and actual resource allocation, underscoring the importance of native speaker involvement for authentic language learning, as advocated in translanguaging literature.

Stakeholders also suggested improving curriculum design by incorporating global content, current events, and real-world English use. Ideas included inviting guest speakers and organizing exchanges with international students. The teacher emphasized the need for quality materials and diverse teaching aids. These suggestions reflect an understanding of CLIL's integration of content, language, and culture, addressing the lack of structure in many bilingual classrooms.

Finally, both groups expressed concern over fairness, noting that students with higher English proficiency benefit more. The average fairness rating (3.2/5) reflects this tension. Suggestions included remedial support and clear learning goals to reduce inequality. These proposals echo critiques by He (2020) and Li (2021) and call for more inclusive strategies to ensure bilingual education benefits all learners.

6. Conclusion

6.1 Overall Conclusion and Key Challenges

The study indicates a general support for bilingual education among both teachers and students within the observed bilingual experimental class. Students reported positive outcomes, including increased confidence, improved English proficiency, and a better understanding of subject content. Specifically, half of the surveyed students (50%) strongly agreed that the teaching methods in the bilingual experimental class were highly beneficial for absorbing subject knowledge. Furthermore, an equal proportion (50%) of students expressed overall satisfaction with their learning experience in the bilingual experimental class. Students noted that bilingual instruction helped them improve their listening and communication skills and reduced their fear of English, simultaneously deepening their understanding of subject content and fostering a global perspective. Despite this positive reception, both teachers and students faced struggles related to training, curriculum clarity, and resource availability. Several key challenges persist within the implementation of bilingual education, as highlighted by the findings:

Challenges Faced by Students

Mismatched English Immersion with Student Expectations - Students perceived that the level of English integration in bilingual experimental classes did not meet their expectations. Only 50% of students reported that their class met the official guideline of using English for at least half of each subject's instruction, indicating that actual English exposure often fell short of the policy's goal and students' hopes for more immersion.

Limited Foreign Teacher Interaction - This was a primary concern. Nearly half of the students disagreed that "Foreign teacher resources are sufficient" (average 2.9 out of 5), despite generally praising the quality of instruction when foreign teachers were present (average 3.8 out of 5 for "Foreign teachers' teaching methods improve my English learning"). Students wished for more meaningful engagement, increased foreign teacher participation for pronunciation and thinking patterns, and opportunities to communicate with native speakers.

Challenges Faced by Teachers

Lack of Training, Support, and Teacher Communities for Bilingual Educators - Bilingual education is a relatively new teaching approach in Taiwan. However, teachers have pointed out that current training programs for bilingual educators often fall short in helping them simultaneously acquire bilingual teaching methods and the skills needed to use educational technologies effectively. In addition to preparing lessons on their own, bilingual teachers also require financial support and access to advanced English training from educational policies—resources that are currently lacking. To improve teaching quality, bilingual teacher collaboration communities can serve as platforms for exchanging ideas. However, these communities depend heavily on teacher initiative, and at present, there are few professional collaborative networks specifically focused on bilingual education.

Inadequate Incentives and Workload Issues - The increased workload associated with meticulous lesson design, material adaptation, and managing diverse student abilities was not adequately compensated by existing incentives (e.g., minor salary increases or slightly reduced teaching hours). This leads to teachers feeling "burned out" and questioning the long-term sustainability of their commitment without more substantial financial and systemic support.

Challenges in Foreign Teacher Collaboration - A significant challenge lies in the mismatch in subject

expertise of foreign teachers and their tendency to join schools mid-semester. These factors make it difficult for local and foreign teachers to collaborate effectively. Even when collaboration occurs, linguistic and cultural differences often hinder joint lesson preparation. However, students explicitly hoped for increased interaction time with foreign teachers to practice language use, and a notable percentage (28.6%) felt there were not enough foreign teachers in the bilingual experimental classes. This highlights a discrepancy between student demand for foreign teacher involvement and the current state of teaching collaboration and preparation.

6.2 Implications for Taiwan's Bilingual Education Policy

This study offers several practical implications for Taiwan's bilingual education policy:

Aligning Policy Goals with Pedagogical Practices - To realize the "Bilingual 2030" vision, policies should more effectively promote CLIL and the 4Cs framework. These approaches help integrate language learning with content knowledge, critical thinking, and intercultural awareness.

Strengthening Teacher Training and Professional Support - Given the shortage of qualified bilingual teachers, it is crucial to invest in professional development that enhances both subject expertise and English instructional competence. Training in scaffolding and multimodal strategies is particularly important to meet diverse learner needs.

Enhancing Curriculum Design and Resource Integration - Schools should be encouraged to create bilingual curricula grounded in real-life experiences. Sufficient support should be provided to access quality materials, including foreign textbooks and diverse teaching aids.

Improving Collaboration with Foreign Teachers - Students expressed a desire for more interaction with foreign teachers. Increasing their numbers and establishing clear collaboration mechanisms can enrich classroom experiences and promote authentic language use.

Promoting Educational Equity - Concerns about the bilingual policy widening learning gaps must be addressed. Targeted support—such as remedial instruction or differentiated teaching—can help ensure that students with lower proficiency are not left behind.

Clarifying Learning Goals and Assessment Standards - Clear bilingual learning objectives and consistent assessment criteria are necessary to guide instruction and evaluate student progress. Special attention should be given to rural areas to ensure equitable access to resources.

6.3 Research Limitations and Future Research Recommendations

This study, while offering valuable insights, is subject to certain limitations, which in turn inform recommendations for future research.

Research Limitations

Limited Sample Size for Student Survey: The student survey component of this study collected only 14 responses. This relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of the findings to a broader student population in bilingual experimental classes across Taiwan.

Case Study Nature: The study primarily focused on the perspectives of one teacher and students from a bilingual experimental class in a single junior high school in Kaohsiung City. Consequently, the findings might not be fully representative of bilingual education implementation in other regions, different educational stages, or varying instructional models.

Future Research Recommendations

Expanding Sample and Scope: Future research should aim to expand the sample size by including more

students and teachers from bilingual experimental classes. It is also recommended to broaden the scope to cover diverse geographic regions, various types of schools (e.g., public, private, rural, urban), and a range of subject disciplines. This would enhance the representativeness and generalizability of the findings across different educational contexts.

Investigating Learning Gap and Equity: Given that half of the surveyed students perceived the bilingual policy as exacerbating learning disparities and insufficiently supporting students with weaker academic backgrounds, future studies should delve into the underlying factors contributing to such perceived inequities. Employing mixed-methods approaches may help identify causal relationships and inform targeted, evidence-based strategies to ensure equitable learning opportunities for all students within bilingual education systems.

Longitudinal Studies on Student Outcomes: Long-term research is needed to trace the sustained impact of bilingual education on students' English language proficiency (listening, speaking, reading, and writing), subject-specific academic performance, critical thinking, and global competencies. Longitudinal data would provide a more comprehensive view of the developmental trajectories influenced by bilingual programs.

Resource Allocation and Assessment Tools: Further investigation should address the equitable allocation of bilingual education resources, especially in underserved or rural areas. In parallel, there is a need to develop inclusive, diversified assessment instruments capable of capturing student progress in both language acquisition and subject matter learning, thereby providing a more holistic understanding of bilingual learning outcomes.

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Appendices

1.1 Appendix A: Bilingual Experimental Class Student Questionnaire

(*Indicates required questions)

*1. How would you like to be addressed? (You may use a nickname)

*2. What is your level of English proficiency?

- A1
- A2
- B1
- B2
- C1
- C2
- unable to self-evaluate
- native speaker

*3. What was your reason for joining the bilingual experimental class? (multiple question)

- To improve my English skills
- To improve both Chinese and English skills
- To gain a more international perspective
- I believe being bilingual gives me a competitive advantage
- Because of my parents' expectations
- I believe it gives me an advantage in further education
- I wanted to join that particular academic track (e.g., Science Track + Bilingual)
- Other: _____

*4. After joining the bilingual class, it met my expectations of what a bilingual class should be like.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*5. The bilingual teachers' teaching methods help me understand the subject content.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*6. There are enough foreign teachers in the bilingual experimental class.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*7. The teaching methods used by foreign teachers help me improve my English.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*8. Learning other subjects in English does not affect my understanding of those subjects.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*9. Overall, I am satisfied with my learning experience in the bilingual experimental class.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*10. According to the Ministry of Education's policy, at least 50% of class time in a bilingual lesson should be conducted in English. Does your school's bilingual class meet this standard?

- Yes
- No

*11. If a class is conducted entirely in English, what percentage of it do you think you can understand?

- 0%
- 25%
- 50%
- 75%
- 100%

*12. Do you think your school emphasizes English proficiency, Chinese proficiency, or both equally?

- English
- Chinese
- Both (bilingual: Chinese and English)

*13. I believe the bilingual policy favors high-achieving students and does not support those who struggle.

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

*14. Based on your understanding and observations, how much do you support the bilingual policy?

Strongly disagree — 1 2 3 4 5 — Strongly agree

15. (Follow-up) Why do you feel this way about the bilingual policy? (Open-ended)

16. Do you have any additional thoughts about the bilingual class or the bilingual education policy? (Open-ended)

17. Do you have any feedback, questions, or praise specifically for the Fengshan High School Bilingual Experimental Class? (Open-ended)

1.2 Appendix B: Interview Guide for Students

1. Self-Introduction
   - Can you briefly introduce yourself? (e.g., your grade level and class)

2. Learning Experience and Challenges
   - Have you encountered any difficulties or challenges in adapting to bilingual classes?
   - What are your impressions of the teaching methods used in bilingual experimental classes? How do they differ from regular classes?
   - Do you feel that the bilingual experimental class has been helpful in terms of learning outcomes? (e.g., improving your English comprehension and usage, understanding subject knowledge, or gaining new perspectives on the world)
   - Do you think your school focuses more on English proficiency or bilingual competence? What are your thoughts on this situation?

3. Future Outlook
   - What aspects of the current bilingual experimental classes do you think need to be changed? Why do you think these changes are necessary?
   - If changes could be made, what adjustments would you like to see from your school or the government to improve the bilingual experimental classes?

4. Bilingual Policy
   - What are your overall thoughts on the bilingual education policy? What do you think its main goals are?
   - How effective do you think the school's implementation of bilingual education has been? Have your learning expectations been met?
   - Based on the previous discussion, do you support the bilingual education policy? Why or why not?

1.3 Appendix B: Interview Guide for the Bilingual Class Teacher

1. Please briefly introduce yourself (subjects you teach, experience teaching in bilingual classes).

2. How is teaching in the bilingual experimental class different from regular classes in terms of content and methods?

- How has the bilingual policy specifically influenced your lesson planning and instructional design?
- Do you need to prepare additional English teaching materials?
- How do you plan the proportion of English instruction and your language use strategies?

3. How do students respond to bilingual classes? (Learning attitudes, level of understanding, participation)

4. What difficulties or challenges have you encountered while implementing bilingual teaching?

5. For example: language proficiency, teaching materials, differences in student abilities.

6. Have you participated in any bilingual teaching-related training or support programs? How effective were they?

7. In your opinion, is the current bilingual policy providing sufficient support for teachers' professional development?

8. How do you view the impact of the bilingual policy on students' learning outcomes? (Language ability, subject knowledge, etc.)

9. On a school-wide level, what impact has the bilingual policy had on the teaching atmosphere or administrative operations?

10. If the bilingual policy is to continue, what areas do you think need improvement?

11. Do you support the continued implementation of the bilingual policy? Why or why not?

12. If you were to give advice to new bilingual class teachers, what would you say?

13. Are there any thoughts or experiences you would like to share, so that more people can understand the situation and needs of bilingual class teachers?

International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 75-82

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Challenges in implementing bilingual education in Thai public schools

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Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25207

Abstract

This report explores the multifaceted challenges of implementing bilingual education in Thai public schools, focusing on the systemic and contextual barriers that limit its effectiveness and equity. As Thailand strives to enhance its global competitiveness and regional integration within ASEAN, bilingual education particularly programs like the English Program (EP), Mini English Program (MEP), and English for Integrated Studies (EIS) has become central to national education reform. However, the implementation of these models remains highly uneven, with significant disparities between urban and rural areas. Drawing on policy analysis and comparative research, this study identifies five key challenges: policy fragmentation, limited teacher training, regional inequality, inadequate infrastructure, and cultural tensions. The report highlights how these challenges intersect to undermine educational equity, teacher capacity, and student outcomes, especially in under-resourced communities. By examining experiences from Thailand, Singapore, and Malaysia, the report underscores the need for a coherent national framework, capacity-building initiatives, and culturally responsive pedagogy. The findings call for equity-based reforms that prioritize both linguistic competence and social inclusion, ensuring that bilingual education in Thailand moves beyond surface-level implementation toward meaningful transformation.

Keywords: bilingual education, Thailand, public schools, language policy, regional inequality

Challenges in implementing bilingual education in Thai public schools

1. Introduction

Bilingual education has emerged as a pivotal strategy for enhancing global competencies among students in non-English speaking countries, particularly Thailand. As the nation deepens its integration within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the global economy, English language proficiency is increasingly seen as a necessary skill for economic and academic advancement. In response, Thai education policymakers have turned to bilingual education as a tool to bridge linguistic gaps and equip students for the demands of the 21st century (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016). In the context of Thai public schools, bilingual education refers to the use of both Thai and English as mediums of instruction for core academic subjects, not merely teaching English as a subject. Key models include the English Program (EP), Mini English Program (MEP), and English for Integrated Studies (EIS). The EIS model, in particular, allows Thai teachers to teach STEM subjects in English, supported by targeted training and lesson design (Ngamsom, 2019). These initiatives are grounded in the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008), which outlines the goals of fostering communication skills, cultural understanding, and global readiness among Thai learners (Office of the Basic Education Commission, 2008). Despite these efforts, the implementation of bilingual education remains inconsistent and heavily skewed toward urban or well-funded schools. Rural regions often face shortages in trained teachers, limited English resources, and unclear policy support. This paper investigates these systemic challenges, focusing on four core areas: policy limitations, teacher preparedness, regional inequality, and differences between urban and rural implementation contexts.

2. Literature Review and Policy Background

2.1 Bilingual Education Policy Development in Thailand

The Thai government's interest in bilingual education stems from broader efforts to improve national competitiveness and integrate with ASEAN's socio-economic agenda. This shift can be traced back to education reforms in the 1990s and 2000s that emphasized communicative English and the promotion of global skills (Foley, 2005; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). The Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) reflects these goals by emphasizing linguistic proficiency, intercultural communication, and student-centered learning (Office of the Basic Education Commission [OBEC], 2008).

In practice, the implementation of bilingual programs in Thai public schools has taken several forms. Most notably, the English Program (EP) and Mini English Program (MEP) were introduced to promote partial or full English instruction for select subjects, mainly math, science, and computing. The English for Integrated Studies (EIS) model offers a more scalable solution by training Thai teachers to deliver STEM content in English, supported by specialized instructional frameworks and mentoring (Ngamsom, 2019). These programs represent a significant departure from traditional rote English instruction, aiming instead to develop functional language skills through content integration. However, the rollout of bilingual programs has been uneven.

Most EP and MEP schools are located in urban or affluent areas, where funding is sufficient to hire foreign teachers or bilingual Thai educators. Meanwhile, rural public schools continue to struggle with insufficient training, inadequate materials, and teacher shortages, factors that contribute to persistent inequality in English learning outcomes (Kaur et al., 2016; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). The discrepancy is not only geographical but also socio-economic, as students from wealthier families are more likely to access bilingual education, either through public EP schools or private international schools (Tupas, 2014).

2.2 Thai Curriculum Structure and Implementation Gaps

The Thai national curriculum promotes bilingualism in principle, but execution remains limited by a lack of institutional coherence. While OBEC (2008) sets forth guidelines for communicative and content-based instruction, the curriculum lacks detailed alignment between language learning objectives and subject-matter content. Moreover, most Thai teachers are trained in general education, not in Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodologies, which are essential for successful bilingual instruction (Ngamsom, 2019). As a result, even schools with EIS or MEP models often default to teaching in Thai or resort to translating technical terms without adequate language scaffolding (Kaur et al., 2016).

Another challenge lies in the high-stakes national examination system, which prioritizes rote memorization and grammar-based English knowledge rather than communicative competence. This discourages innovation in classroom practices, especially in rural schools where exam results influence school funding and teacher evaluations (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). While some pilot programs have attempted to integrate formative assessment and bilingual instructional strategies, these efforts are fragmented and not supported by long-term professional development.

Efforts to scale bilingual education have also been hampered by teacher resistance and policy ambiguity. Many teachers view bilingual education as an added burden, especially when training opportunities are limited and policy goals are poorly communicated (Kaur et al., 2016). Even where EIS is introduced, teachers frequently lack confidence in their English proficiency and are reluctant to use English beyond memorized scripts or phrases (Ngamsom, 2019). These challenges are exacerbated by a policy environment that lacks accountability measures and consistent evaluation criteria.

2.3 International Comparisons: Lessons from Singapore and Malaysia

Thailand's experience contrasts sharply with countries like Singapore and Malaysia, where bilingual education is more systematically embedded into national education frameworks. Singapore's bilingual policy mandates English as the main medium of instruction across all public schools, while simultaneously requiring mother tongue instruction to preserve cultural identity (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008). This dual-language strategy is supported by strong teacher training institutions, coherent curriculum design, and consistent political backing. Importantly, bilingualism in Singapore is viewed as a societal norm, which reduces classroom resistance and enhances parental support.

Malaysia's PPSMI policy (2003–2012) mandated the teaching of mathematics and science in English to boost language skills and global competitiveness. However, Pratheepa (2015) found that implementation was uneven, teachers lacked linguistic and pedagogical preparation, rural regions were under-resourced, and some students underperformed due to a mismatch between language proficiency and subject demands. The policy was eventually reversed, underscoring the need for capacity-building and equity-focused rollout in bilingual education.

Compared to these models, Thailand's bilingual education strategy lacks the infrastructure and institutional alignment required for national-scale implementation. Moreover, Thailand's linguistic and regional diversity, including the use of local languages such as Isan and Malay, adds another layer of complexity to the adoption of bilingual models focused on Thai and English alone (Tupas, 2014).

2.4 Previous Research on Thai-English Bilingual Models

Several studies have examined the outcomes and challenges of Thai-English bilingual education. Foley (2005) notes that while Thailand has embraced English for economic and diplomatic reasons, the actual classroom environment remains bound by traditional pedagogies. Ngamsom (2019) offers a more optimistic view through her study of the EIS model, which shows promise in building teacher confidence and student

engagement when adequate support systems are provided. However, her findings also highlight the difficulties in scaling such a model without national coordination and policy backing.

Hallinger and Bryant (2013) provide a meta-analysis of education reforms in Thailand and emphasize the disconnect between central policy ambitions and decentralized implementation. Their findings align with Kaur et al. (2016), who identify teacher capacity, inconsistent training, and lack of stakeholder communication as key obstacles to policy success. Tupas (2014) adds a socio-cultural lens, warning that bilingual models can unintentionally reinforce class and regional inequalities when implemented without social justice considerations.

These studies converge on a common theme: bilingual education in Thailand is conceptually promising but practically underdeveloped. Without stronger policy coherence, teacher development, and contextual sensitivity, bilingual programs risk becoming cosmetic reforms rather than transformative strategies.

3. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research methodology grounded in policy analysis, secondary data review, and comparative case study. Core materials include official Thai education policy documents such as the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (OBEC, 2008), alongside educational reports and academic analyses (Ngamsom, 2019; Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). To assess implementation challenges, the study analyzes data from UNICEF's Thailand Education Fact Sheets (Mishra & Amaro, 2019) and recent findings from the World Bank (Boonruang, 2024), particularly regarding regional disparities and access to learning resources. Comparative insights are drawn from bilingual education experiences in Singapore and Malaysia (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008; Pratheepa, 2015), which help contextualize Thailand's position. While no original fieldwork or interviews were conducted, the paper incorporates qualitative evidence from teacher reflections, educational case studies, and classroom observations reported in prior research (Laksanasut, 2020; Songkram & Osuwan, 2022; Thanaittipath & Boonmoh, 2024). These secondary sources provide a grounded understanding of real-world school conditions and policy impacts, particularly in rural and under-resourced areas.

4. Key Challenges in Implementation

4.1 Policy Gaps and Structural Problems

Thailand's bilingual education system continues to struggle due to the absence of a coherent national framework that clearly defines program standards, teacher qualifications, curricular requirements, and assessment protocols. While the Basic Education Core Curriculum B.E. 2551 (2008) encourages bilingual instruction, it lacks the detailed structuring needed to guide schools uniformly (Macrothink Institute, 2023). As a result, provincial education offices and school administrators interpret the policy differently, leading to significant regional disparities (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Some schools leverage local autonomy to pilot structured English for Integrated Studies (EIS) models, while others with limited capacity merely append English lessons to Thai-medium subjects, resulting in inconsistency and dilution of bilingual objectives.

A second structural issue is the absence of standardized teacher criteria for bilingual instruction. Neither English Program (EP) nor EIS models enforce minimum linguistic proficiency or pedagogical competencies, allowing schools to recruit teachers based on availability rather than expertise (IPGCE, 2024). This creates a wide proficiency gap: urban schools might attract foreign or highly proficient Thai-English teachers, while rural schools often rely on general Thai teachers with limited English and no exposure to Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) methodologies (Taylor, 2022). Teacher training, when available, is sporadic and often lacks follow-up support, resulting in only short-term improvements rather than systemic change. The fragmented support system undermines program quality, as many Thai teachers lack the confidence to deliver instruction beyond rote phrases or pre-written scripts (Taylor, 2022; IPGCE, 2024).

Finally, there is no nationally recognized bilingual curriculum or assessment system, leaving schools to design their own content, materials, and metrics based on local capacity (Macrothink Institute, 2023). This has led to a patchwork of EIS, EP, and Mini English Program (MEP) implementations, each with varying standards. Without alignment to assessment tools—particularly national exams, which remain Thai-language focused—bilingual models risk prioritizing Thai proficiency for test preparation, defeating the intent of English-medium content (Kaur et al., 2016). Pilot initiatives that aim to incorporate bilingual assessments often falter due to a lack of funding, teacher preparedness, or systemic oversight. These factors reinforce a cycle of low structural accountability and limited scalability (Johnston, 2016).

4.2 Teacher Training and Capacity

A major barrier to implementing bilingual education effectively in Thai public schools is the limited English proficiency among teachers. While some urban schools can hire bilingual or native English-speaking staff, the majority of public schools especially in rural areas, rely on Thai teachers who often lack confidence in using English beyond memorized scripts or basic classroom phrases. Even in English for Integrated Studies (EIS) programs, many teachers feel unprepared to teach academic subjects in English and tend to revert to Thai during instruction (Ngamsom, 2019). This undermines the goals of bilingual education, which depend on consistent English-medium instruction to build student proficiency across content areas.

This language barrier is further compounded by the lack of targeted training and ongoing professional development, particularly outside urban centers. Most Thai teacher training programs do not focus on bilingual or CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) instruction, leaving educators without the necessary pedagogical tools (Hallinger & Bryant, 2013). Teachers in rural schools often face additional challenges such as isolation, inadequate mentorship, and scarce training opportunities. These gaps lead to high stress levels and a lack of confidence when teaching in English, with many teachers viewing bilingual instruction as an added burden rather than a skill-building opportunity (Kaur, Young, & Kirkpatrick, 2016). Without a stronger training infrastructure and support systems, bilingual education risks deepening inequalities between schools rather than narrowing them.

4.3 Regional Disparities: Urban vs Rural

Thailand faces stark educational disparities between urban and rural areas, significantly affecting learning outcomes and literacy development. According to the *Thailand Education Fact Sheets 2019*, while primary school completion rates are nearly universal, the gap widens dramatically at the secondary level. Only 47% of students complete upper secondary education, with rural students lagging behind urban counterparts (37% vs. 56%). Furthermore, just 19% of students from the poorest wealth quintile complete upper secondary, compared to 76% from the richest, underlining how poverty and geography compound barriers to educational attainment (Mishra & Amaro, 2019).

The disparities extend to foundational learning. Children in rural areas are more likely to lack basic reading and numeracy skills, with 30% lacking reading skills and 35% lacking numeracy, compared to 24% and 27% in urban areas, respectively (Mishra & Amaro, 2019). Socioeconomic status again plays a decisive role: while 78% of children from the richest quintile demonstrate foundational numeracy skills, only 59% of those from the poorest do. A 2024 report by the World Bank echoes these findings, revealing that 70.3% of rural Thai youths and adults lack foundational literacy, as opposed to 58% in urban areas (Boonruang, 2024).

These learning gaps are aggravated by unequal access to learning resources. The number of bookstores in Thailand dropped from 2,483 in 2022 to just 800 in 2024, with most located in urban centers like Bangkok. In rural areas, students often grow up in households without a single children's book. For instance, a teacher in Chiang Mai noted that mountain communities rarely prioritize reading, due in part to economic hardship and cultural norms that deprioritize books in favor of toys or digital media (Boonruang, 2024). While the Thai

government has expressed intent to promote reading nationwide, advocates argue that more tangible investments are needed, such as funding for mobile libraries, free books in schools, and community engagement programs (Boonruang, 2024; Mishra & Amaro, 2019).

4.4 Infrastructure, Student Impact, and Learning Conditions

One of the primary challenges facing bilingual education in Thai public schools is the infrastructural gap, which manifests in large class sizes, limited access to educational materials, and an unequal transition to online learning. Many public school classrooms in Thailand accommodate over 40 students, making it difficult for teachers to provide individualized support or facilitate meaningful English-language interaction (Laksanasut, 2020). Bilingual education, which relies on active engagement, is constrained in such overcrowded environments. Furthermore, the lack of teaching materials, especially bilingual textbooks and language-learning software, disproportionately affects rural schools. This divide became more visible during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools were forced to shift to digital platforms. While some urban schools adapted quickly, rural schools lacked basic infrastructure such as stable internet connections or access to digital devices. As Songkram and Osuwan (2022) point out, many Thai teachers also lacked the training needed to implement online learning effectively, widening the digital learning gap between regions and school types.

These infrastructural issues directly influence students' academic performance. In bilingual programs that are well-supported with proper resources, students have been shown to perform better not only in language subjects but also in other academic areas due to cognitive benefits associated with multilingualism (Laksanasut, 2020). However, in under-resourced schools, the absence of supportive conditions undermines learning outcomes. Thanaittipath and Boonmoh (2024) observed that teachers in these contexts often struggle to integrate digital tools or differentiated instruction strategies, leading to inconsistent learning experiences. Students in less privileged settings often receive limited language exposure and fewer opportunities to practice English, resulting in lower test scores and a weaker grasp of content delivered in a second language.

Beyond grades, students' confidence and communication skills are also affected. Many Thai students, especially those in public schools, report being hesitant to speak English due to fear of making mistakes or embarrassment in front of peers (Songkram & Osuwan, 2022). These communication barriers are often compounded by limited speaking opportunities in large classes and a lack of encouragement or feedback. Over time, this leads to reduced motivation and engagement with bilingual learning. Moreover, the long-term impact is significant; students who lack English proficiency face disadvantages in accessing global academic or employment opportunities. As Thanaittipath and Boonmoh (2024) argue, unless schools can close these confidence and opportunity gaps, bilingual education will continue to reinforce social inequality rather than bridging it.

4.5 Parental and Community Role + Cultural Concerns

Community engagement and parental perception play a pivotal role in the success or failure of bilingual education in Thai public schools. While urban, middle-class parents often view English proficiency as a tool for upward mobility and international opportunity, many rural families remain cautious or even resistant. These differing views are shaped by socioeconomic backgrounds, access to resources, and cultural concerns about identity and linguistic heritage.

In rural and ethnolinguistic regions of Thailand, such as Isan or the Deep South, parents and local leaders frequently express concern that bilingual education prioritizes English and standard Thai at the expense of local languages and cultural identity (Tupas, 2014). This perception can lead to reduced community support, mistrust toward school initiatives, and a lack of encouragement for students to engage in English learning at home. These concerns are not unfounded. As Zajda and Ozdowski (2017) argue, education policies that ignore cultural contexts and emphasize one dominant language often deepen existing social inequalities, especially in

linguistically diverse societies. The marginalization of regional identities may inadvertently create cultural dissonance and resistance among families who fear assimilation or loss of heritage.

Furthermore, human rights education literature underscores the need for education systems to balance universal competencies with localized values and inclusive pedagogy (Zajda, 2021). Bilingual education should not simply aim for global competitiveness but also foster intercultural dialogue, respect for minority languages, and democratic participation. To achieve this, schools must actively engage parents and communities in the policy process. Outreach strategies such as multilingual communication, cultural fairs, and parent workshops can build trust and show respect for local identities. As emphasized by Monaghan and Spreen (2017), inclusive and context-sensitive education policy fosters long-term social cohesion and promotes both equity and cultural continuity. Therefore, sustainable bilingual education in Thailand must go beyond language delivery. It must be grounded in human rights principles of equity, identity, and participation. Only by aligning educational reform with both global competencies and local values can Thailand build a system that is inclusive, effective, and just.

5. Recommendations

Thailand's education system continues to face challenges, particularly the widening gap between urban and rural areas. This structural inequality contributes to a second critical concern: the limited English proficiency among teachers, especially in rural schools. The findings indicate that teachers encounter notable difficulties in teaching writing, integrating experiential learning into English instruction, and utilizing English effectively due to minimal exposure to the language. From the students' perspective, the situation is equally concerning. Many learners lack opportunities for independent English practice, experience limited exposure to English outside the classroom, and possess insufficient foundational language skills. These issues are further compounded by systemic limitations within the national curriculum and assessment frameworks. Teachers have expressed concerns regarding the impracticality of curriculum guidelines, content overload, lack of familiarity with curriculum structure, and the misalignment between prescribed content and local educational contexts. Although problems such as outdated curricula and restricted autonomy in textbook selection were deemed less severe, they nonetheless highlight the need for broader reform.

To address these interrelated challenges, a set of comprehensive and strategic actions is essential. First, the establishment of a national bilingual education framework would provide clear and consistent direction for the implementation of bilingual policies across the country. In parallel, targeted investment in teacher training, especially in bilingual education strategies and CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) is critical to enhance both capabilities and language competence. Moreover, implementing equity-based funding models would help reduce resource gaps between urban and rural schools, ensuring more inclusive access to training, materials, and support systems. Lastly, integrating culturally relevant and context-sensitive content into curricular materials would better engage students by reflecting their lived experiences and local identities. Collectively, these recommendations aim to support the development of a more equitable, effective, and linguistically inclusive bilingual education system in Thailand.

6. Conclusion

Thailand is still facing many challenges in building a bilingual education system that is truly inclusive and effective. One of the biggest issues is the gap between urban and rural areas, which affects access to resources, teacher quality, and learning conditions. Problems with infrastructure, teacher training, curriculum, and lack of community involvement continue to impact how students learn and how well they do in school. These are not just educational problems; they also reflect deeper concerns about fairness, respect for culture, and human rights. To move forward, it's important that bilingual education reforms consider both the big picture and the local context. Everyone, no matter where they live or what their background is, should have access to quality education. Supporting multilingual learning, making teaching more relevant to students' lives, and ensuring fair policies can help Thailand build a system that respects students' identities, rights, and future opportunities.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 83-91

Impact of bilingual education on university toward employability in Indonesia

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ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25208

Abstract

This paper explores the impact of bilingual education on the employability rate of university graduates in Indonesia. As globalization increases the demand for multilingual professionals, the ability to communicate in more than one language has become a valuable asset in the job market. This study investigates how bilingual proficiency, particularly in English and Bahasa Indonesia, enhances graduates' employment opportunities and career readiness. By analyzing how bilingual education influences employability, this research contributes to the ongoing conversation about preparing Indonesia's graduates for success in an increasingly interconnected world.

Keywords: bilingual, employability rate, education, university, Indonesia

Impact of bilingual education on university toward employability in Indonesia

1. Introduction and problem statement

Related Work - As bilingual education becomes more prevalent, particularly at the university level, questions arise regarding its impact on graduates' employability. This research aims to investigate the employability rate of graduates from bilingual universities in Indonesia, with a focus on how English proficiency affects their career opportunities and workplace experiences. By examining the perceptions of university graduates, the study seeks to bridge the gap between theoretical discourse on the global role of English and the practical realities faced by individuals entering the workforce. Ultimately, this study offers valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and employers.

The Role of English in Indonesia's Globalization: Language as Capital in Education and Society - In recent years, English has become one of the most widely used languages in Indonesia, not only as a compulsory subject in schools but also as a crucial medium for daily communication, business dealings, and social interactions. This rise in English usage aligns with Indonesia's response to globalization and the industrial revolution 4.0, where English proficiency is increasingly seen as a key driver of competitiveness in the global economy. The Indonesian government's focus on enhancing the nation's global standing has made English fluency an essential skill, particularly in education and the professional workforce. Educational institutions across the country have responded to this demand by adopting international curricula and implementing bilingual programs, with English often used as the primary language of instruction. Many schools and universities now aim to prepare students for international communication and global job markets. This shift is reflected in Indonesia's ranking of 39th out of 80 countries in the 2017 English Proficiency Index (EPI) conducted by EF, highlighting both the progress and challenges in improving national language skills (Fudiyartanto, 2024). Globalisation and neoliberalism have profoundly reshaped the landscape of higher education worldwide, including in Indonesia. These global forces, manifesting through a globalised knowledge economy and an increasingly corporatised university sector, continue to influence how English is taught and perceived in Indonesian higher education – a field referred to here as English Studies. Within this framework, English should be understood not merely as a foreign language, but as a form of linguistic capital — a crucial component of cultural capital. This capital can be accrued through education and later transformed into symbolic recognition, social mobility, or access to prestigious opportunities both locally and globally.

Challenges and Perceptions of English Medium Instruction in Indonesian Education - In Indonesia, English is officially designated as a foreign language (EFL) and is primarily taught in secondary schools. However, outside of formal education, students predominantly use Indonesian or regional vernaculars for daily communication, limiting their exposure to English. The implementation of the 2013 national curriculum has further exacerbated this limitation by allocating only two lesson hours per week (2 x 45 minutes) for English instruction. This insufficient instructional time hinders students' opportunities to gain meaningful proficiency in English, leading to a prioritisation of curriculum coverage over comprehension in many classrooms. Consequently, English teachers are often compelled to sacrifice depth of understanding for breadth of material, with some turning to technology as a coping mechanism to address the lack of instructional time (Agustina, 2017). Perceptions of English Medium Instruction (EMI) in Indonesian higher education in response to the government's plan to make English interaction compulsory among university students. Using a mixed-methods approach with a focus on qualitative data, the study includes participants from public and private universities of both secular and religious orientations. It examines three key themes: perceptions of EMI, the role of English in shaping national identity, and attitudes toward English as a language associated with the West. Findings indicate that perceptions of EMI are complex and extend beyond language, encompassing cultural and ideological concerns within the academic context (Dewi, 2017).

English, Employability, and the Indonesian Graduate: Insights from the Classroom to the Workplace - In an increasingly globalized economy, the ability to communicate in English is no longer a luxury; it's a necessity, especially for young professionals entering Indonesia's competitive job market. While economic growth continues across the country, many graduates still struggle to find employment that matches their qualifications. Recent research, especially a 2024 qualitative study involving 30 graduates from an English-Medium Instruction (EMI) university in Jakarta, reveals just how critical English proficiency has become not only for securing a job but also for thriving in the workplace.

Lessons from 30 Graduates: English as a Professional Advantage - In a 2024 study by Hidayat, 30 graduates reflected on their educational experiences and how English shaped their careers. These individuals studied at an EMI university in Jakarta, where nearly all instruction was delivered in English. What they shared was powerful and consistent: English had not only helped them land jobs, but it also gave them the skills and confidence to succeed once hired (Hidayat, 2024). Graduates spoke about feeling prepared to engage in professional environments where English was a working language, whether it was writing reports, leading meetings, or communicating with international clients. One participant noted, "I didn't just learn English, I learned how to work in English," emphasizing that fluency was deeply tied to job effectiveness, not just academic performance. This study lines up with findings from Santoso, Hamied, and Muslim (2024), who explored Indonesian university students' attitudes toward EMI. While many students welcomed EMI for its career benefits, they also stressed the importance of academic language support, indicating that English alone isn't enough unless it's supported by clear, structured instruction. The 30-graduate case study shows what happens when EMI is implemented well: students leave not just bilingual, but professionally capable.

What the Workplace Is Demanding - Outside the university, the importance of English is just as pronounced. A 2022 survey of Indonesian polytechnic alumni showed that more than 80% considered English essential for job applications and upward mobility in the workplace. Many respondents described job interviews conducted partially or fully in English, and noted that fluency was often linked to faster promotions and higher salaries. In the customer service sector, a 2024 study focused on railway employees found that English communication, especially speaking and listening, is crucial for professionalism and customer interaction. Workers wanted vocational training to improve these skills, suggesting that employers and training institutions alike need to step up their language support efforts. These findings are echoed by Muniroh et al. (2022), who explored the management of bilingual schools in Indonesia. They emphasized that successful bilingual education depends not only on language instruction but also on leadership, infrastructure, and long-term support. Whether in schools or on the job, structured English learning must be backed by strong systems.

University-Level Gaps and Opportunities - Despite the promising cases, implementing EMI in Indonesian universities is far from easy. Abduh (2018) found that lecturers often struggle with delivering content in English due to limited training, institutional support, or personal language confidence. Even when universities launch EMI programs, success depends on whether instructors are prepared and students are supported. Still, there are strong signs that EMI is worth the investment. Universities that offer more English-taught programs like Universitas Indonesia (UI) and Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), also tend to rank higher on employability indexes such as QS. A moderate correlation has been found between the number of EMI programs a university offers and its graduate employability ranking ($\rho = 0.567$), showing that these programs may help prepare students for the demands of international and modern Indonesian workplaces.

Bringing It All Together - The story across all these studies is consistent: English proficiency plays a major role in employability. But more importantly, it's not just about passing a test or learning vocabulary. What matters most is functional fluency, the ability to communicate confidently and professionally in real-world settings. From Hidayat's 30 EMI graduates to railway employees and polytechnic alumni, the message is clear: English unlocks opportunity. It helps young Indonesians not just get jobs, but grow in them. And it positions Indonesia's workforce to compete and collaborate internationally.

Policy and Practice: What Needs to Happen Next - Given the evidence, here are some steps policymakers and educators should consider:

- Expand EMI Programs: More Indonesian universities, especially those outside the top tier, should pilot and scale EMI courses, with training and resources for instructors.
- Boost English in Vocational Training: Sectors like hospitality, transportation, and retail need English-for-specific-purposes training that matches daily job demands.
- Invest in Support Systems: Academic language support, mentorship, and faculty development are essential for making EMI effective, as emphasized by Santoso et al. (2024).
- Listen to Graduates: Use student and alumni feedback, like the testimonials from Hidayat' s study, to shape programs that meet real-world needs.

English is not a silver bullet, but it's undeniably a career catalyst. The stories of those 30 graduates show what happens when language education is relevant, immersive, and connected to real goals. For Indonesia to maximize its potential in the global economy, investing in meaningful English instruction from vocational centers to EMI universities may be one of the smartest, most inclusive moves it can make.

2. Global studies overview

2.1 Bilingual Education and Employability: A Global Comparative Review

As globalization continues to shape labor market expectations, English language proficiency has emerged as a key determinant of graduate employability in non-native English-speaking countries. Regions such as Afghanistan, Malaysia, and the Middle East provide critical insights into how English-medium instruction (EMI) and bilingual education systems contribute to career readiness and labor mobility. This section synthesizes findings from recent studies to highlight global trends in bilingualism and employability.

Afghanistan: English as a Career Catalyst - A 2024 study conducted by scholars at Takhar University examined how English proficiency influences job outcomes among Afghan graduates (Takhar University, 2024). The research found that graduates with strong English communication skills experienced significantly higher employment rates, better salaries, and quicker promotions. In Afghanistan's post-conflict job market, where international NGOs and multinational organizations are major employers, English serves both practical and symbolic roles—signaling modern competencies and facilitating integration into international networks. Employers emphasized the importance of confidence, fluency, and the ability to articulate complex ideas in English, not merely grammatical accuracy. The study concluded that English proficiency was among the top three skills valued by employers, placing it above even technical expertise in some sectors.

Malaysia: EMI's Practical Impact on Graduate Outcomes - A 2018 case study published by Routledge explored how a public Malaysian university implemented EMI and how it influenced student employability (Public University in Malaysia, 2018). The study showed that while many students initially faced language barriers, most later acknowledged that EMI played a vital role in preparing them for interviews, cross-border collaboration, and professional communication. Employers in sectors such as IT, education, and logistics confirmed a hiring bias toward EMI graduates. Importantly, the study emphasized that EMI worked best when combined with practical experiences such as internships, case-based learning, and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) modules. In other words, EMI's value lies not just in linguistic skill, but in its embeddedness in career-aligned education.

Middle East: English as a Baseline for Competitiveness - In the MENA region, English has become a baseline requirement for many professional fields. A detailed British Council study by a University of Graz

researcher, Dr. Elizabeth J. Erling, mapped how English proficiency impacts graduate employability across Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco (University of Graz / British Council, 2020). Employers overwhelmingly preferred candidates from EMI institutions or those with a strong command of workplace English. The study emphasized that English not only facilitates job entry but also supports long-term career progression in finance, hospitality, and engineering sectors. Moreover, multilingual graduates were more likely to gain access to international job postings, client-facing roles, and leadership training. Erling's findings strongly reinforce the idea that English functions as a "gateway language" in multilingual labor environments.

2.2 Global Citizenship & Intercultural Competence

Beyond employment metrics, bilingual education plays a crucial role in developing intercultural communication, and increasingly valued skill in globally connected economies. A 2024 study by scholars examined how multilingual education contributes to global citizenship and workforce inclusion. The researchers argued that language is more than a functional skill—it's a vehicle for empathy, intercultural understanding, and global readiness. Their study found that students exposed to multilingual environments were more adaptable, collaborative, and better prepared to navigate culturally diverse workplaces. These qualities are highly sought after by employers, especially in multinational companies and NGOs. This reinforces the idea that EMI and bilingual education have intrinsic value beyond employability; they also shape globally competent citizens. For countries like Indonesia, where diversity is a national characteristic, this perspective may be especially relevant as the government considers language education reform.

2.3 Global Insights for Indonesian Policy

Taken together, these global cases show that EMI and bilingual education enhance not only direct employability outcomes but also broader workforce competencies such as communication, intercultural agility, and professional confidence. While contextual differences exist, the strategic use of English education appears to correlate strongly with labor market success. Indonesia can draw from these models to shape its own approach, especially as Section 2B will explore how such dynamics are unfolding domestically.

3. Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative statistical analysis with qualitative synthesis to investigate the impact of English-taught (bilingual) programs on graduate employability in Indonesia. The goal is to explore whether universities that offer more English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programs are more likely to be recognized in global employability rankings and whether graduates from such programs perform better in the job market.

Research Design - The study is structured around two core components: (1) Quantitative Analysis – examining the statistical correlation between the number of EMI programs offered and QS employability rankings. (2) Qualitative Analysis – integrating findings from previous studies and surveys on English proficiency and graduate outcomes.

Data Sources and Sample - The research draws on data from the top 10 Indonesian universities listed by UniRank, cross-referenced with the QS Graduate Employability Rankings 2022. Data on EMI program offerings were collected from official university websites and fact sheets.

University	EMI Programs	QS Employability Listed
Universitas Brawijaya (UB)	174.0	Yes
Universitas Indonesia (UI)	167.0	Yes
Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB)	130.0	Yes
Universitas Airlangga (UNAIR)	74.0	Yes
Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM)	51.0	Yes
Institut Teknologi Sepuluh Nopember (ITS)	42.0	Yes

Universitas Diponegoro (UNDIP)	38.0	Yes
IPB University	14.0	No
Universitas Hasanuddin (UNHAS)	11.0	No
BINUS University	11.0	Yes
Universitas Sebelas Maret (UNS)	nan	No

Quantitative Analysis - To determine the relationship between the number of English-taught programs and employability rankings, the study employed Spearman's rank-order correlation. The analysis yielded a Spearman's ρ value of 0.567 and a p-value of 0.087, suggesting a moderate positive correlation between EMI programs and employability recognition. While not statistically significant, this trend remains suggestive in the context of higher education research.

Qualitative Data and Integration - Additional context is provided by studies conducted between 2022 and 2024, which include findings from Indonesian graduates, vocational employees, and EMI university alumni. These studies highlight the real-world impact of English proficiency on career advancement.

Limitations - Limitations include incomplete data for certain universities, reliance on EMI program counts as proxies for English exposure, a cross-sectional research design, and the absence of direct employer input. Despite these, the combined methodology offers a balanced analysis of the link between bilingual education and employability. The mixed-methods approach validates the importance of English-taught programs in Indonesian higher education. The data suggests that EMI contributes positively to global recognition and employability, reinforcing the need for expanded bilingual education initiatives.

4. Result and analysis

4.1 Quantitative Analysis

A research analysis regarding graduate employability data in Indonesia reveals a **strong** correlation between bilingual education programs and improved employment outcomes. Based on data, 8 out of 11 universities that offer EMI classes are ranked among the top 8 in Indonesia's graduate employment ratings. This highlights a connection between EMI and students' readiness for the job market. These universities equip students with English ability that opens opportunities for the students, qualities that align with employer demands, especially in international or corporate settings. However, **BINUS University** stands out as an outlier in this research. Even having only 11 EMI course programs, it didn't mean that BINUS students' abilities couldn't be compared with another campus in Indonesia. BINUS still consistently produces valuable graduate students to enter the workforce. This indicates that while bilingual instruction may be a big factor for employment, other elements such as campus culture, campus curriculum, and networks also play crucial roles in preparing graduates for the workforce.

This research finding aligns with trends observed in international research. Kirkpatrick (2012) emphasizes that EMI programs across Southeast Asia are often associated with higher employability due to the rising importance of English in regional and global labor markets. Similarly, Hamid (2013) also argues that EMI improves not only language skills but also students' opportunities for global knowledge and academic resources, which are advantageous in competitive job sectors. In the Indonesian context, a British Council (2018) report notes that employers consistently rate English proficiency as a key hiring criterion, particularly in sectors such as finance, technology, and international business. However, the case of BINUS University demonstrates that EMI alone may not fully determine graduate success; institutional focus on practical skills, innovation, and employer engagement can also be highly influential. This suggests that while bilingual education enhances employability, it operates most effectively when combined with a broader strategy of career-oriented education.

4.2 Qualitative Findings

In the qualitative aspect, we found out that many students who graduate from the EMI program report that they are confident in using English for daily communication aspects or also in professional settings (interviews, Presentations, etc). Meanwhile, from the employers' perspectives, employers often see students who graduate from EMI programs as more “work-ready”, and even some employers specifically seek out candidates from universities with EMI instruction. Despite Bahasa Indonesia still becoming the main language in Indonesia, some multinational companies like accounting firms start to conduct their interviews for new candidates using English, indicating that companies already assume that English is a necessary skill.

Some research findings also found that having sufficient English can enhance their career prospects. Especially in metropolitan cities such as Jakarta, for example, English is considered to be a core skill to secure highly competitive jobs. It also becomes a necessity for promotion in international enterprises that normally offer higher salaries than local ones.

4.3 Contrast Finding

While both qualitative and quantitative aspects strongly showed that EMI programs had a big impact on employment, the statistical association observed through Spearman's correlation is only moderate. This can happen because of a lot of factors, but the main factor is probably that the main language in the corporate field is still Bahasa Indonesia. Some of the big or multinational companies in Indonesia already conduct their interviews using English; however, in daily use (meetings, presentations), almost all employees still use Bahasa Indonesia. Unlike the Philippines, where they have their own language (Tagalog), in the education and corporate fields, they use English to communicate daily (presentations, meetings). This contrast between the strong qualitative findings and the moderate statistical correlation suggests that while EMI programs are perceived to enhance employability, their measurable impact may be influenced by contextual factors like language use in the workplace. Therefore, the effectiveness of EMI might not be fully captured through statistical analysis alone in environments where English is not the dominant professional language.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1 Conclusion

This study confirms that English Medium Instruction (EMI) contributes positively to graduate employability in Indonesia, although its impact is part of a wider network of contributing factors. The moderate correlation identified through quantitative analysis (Spearman’s $\rho = 0.567$) supports the idea that EMI is linked with better recognition in global employability rankings. However, findings from interviews and previous studies show even more compelling evidence that graduates of EMI programs often feel better equipped to enter professional environments, particularly those involving international communication or multinational companies.

In urban centers like Jakarta, where job competition is high and international firms are more active, English proficiency increasingly serves as a differentiating factor for applicants. Graduates from EMI backgrounds are frequently perceived by employers as more prepared for interviews, team-based communication, and leadership development. Some companies even conduct recruitment processes in English, indicating a shift toward higher expectations for language competence. However, institutional context still matters. BINUS University, despite offering a smaller number of EMI programs compared to other top-ranked institutions, remains highly regarded for producing work-ready graduates. This reflects the importance of institutional approaches such as updated curricula, hands-on learning opportunities, and career services. EMI may enhance employability, but its effectiveness is amplified when integrated with broader academic and industry-focused strategies.

This conclusion is consistent with international perspectives. Kirkpatrick (2012) noted that in Southeast Asia,

EMI supports global competitiveness not just through language acquisition but by providing access to global academic resources. Hamid (2013) similarly emphasized that EMI should be viewed as part of a larger framework for internationalization, offering both symbolic and practical value for students navigating increasingly global job markets.

5.2 Policy Recommendations

Based on these findings, several policy directions are proposed to enhance the impact of EMI across Indonesian higher education. These are especially relevant not only for institutions already implementing EMI programs but also for universities still developing their bilingual education infrastructure.

Develop and Implement National EMI Guidelines - A standardized national framework for EMI can help align objectives, quality assurance, and evaluation practices across institutions. These guidelines should include benchmarks for English proficiency, lecturer readiness, content delivery methods, and student support systems. Uniform standards will ensure EMI programs are not only widespread but also effective across diverse educational settings (Sudana et al., 2023).

Broaden EMI Investment and Support Structures - While top-tier universities already benefit from EMI adoption, institutions outside major cities often lack sufficient resources. Targeted funding—particularly for faculty development, instructional materials, and blended learning technologies—can reduce the performance gap and make EMI more accessible nationwide. Simbolon (2021) emphasized that lecturer preparedness is just as critical as student proficiency in ensuring successful EMI delivery.

Enhance University Collaboration with Industry Sectors - Embedding EMI into work-based learning is essential for it to be more than a linguistic exercise. Universities should actively collaborate with industry to co-develop curriculum, offer practical internships, and ensure graduates are equipped with both language fluency and job-specific competencies. In sectors like IT, logistics, and international business, EMI has been shown to directly improve job placement outcomes (Talaue & Kim, 2020).

Establish On-Campus EMI Resource Centers - To sustain student and faculty engagement with EMI, universities should create dedicated support centers. These centers can offer workshops, peer tutoring, professional writing labs, and speaking clinics, especially for students who may struggle with academic English. In addition, faculty can use these hubs to exchange EMI teaching strategies and access ongoing training (Setiawan, 2022). Such institutional support plays a major role in improving the depth and reach of EMI impact beyond just the classroom.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 93-104

ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

English fever and international schools in South Korea: Global models reshaping local education

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Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25209

Abstract

South Korea's education system is undergoing a significant transformation driven largely by the phenomenon known as English fever. This has led to a rapid increase in the number of international schools and the adoption of global curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP). These programs prioritize bilingualism, critical thinking, and global citizenship, often delivered primarily in English. Many families see these options as essential for preparing their children to compete in a globalized world, offering pathways to prestigious universities and competitive careers both domestically and internationally. However, access to these international schools and global curricula tends to be limited to wealthier families, which deepens social inequality and reinforces existing educational divides. At the same time, both students and teachers face challenges in adapting to these new systems, including the increased pressure to perform in bilingual settings and the difficulty of balancing traditional expectations with international standards. English proficiency has thus become a crucial form of cultural capital, shaping not only academic success but also social status. Meanwhile, the rise of English-medium education raises concerns about preserving Korean cultural identity and maintaining social cohesion amid rapid internationalization. As a result, South Korea faces the complex task of expanding access to high-quality bilingual education while maintaining the preservation of its cultural heritage. This ongoing transformation is reshaping how education and success are understood in the country, opening new opportunities but also prompting critical discussions about social inequality, identity, and the future direction of the nation's education system.

Keywords: English Fever, international school, bilingualism, global curriculum, social inequality

English fever and international schools in South Korea: Global models reshaping local education

1. Introduction

As children, we learn the rules on the nature of life that sticks with us for a long time. We are taught that strangers are dangerous and that belief is something we naturally uphold throughout our entire life. A country's educational system acts the same way. It is a system that for some countries, is so entrenched in national history and culture, that understanding it (and the values it upholds) requires a deep understanding of its background. In this constantly evolving world, it is the educational system that constantly stays to be one of the most crucial factors in keeping up with educating the new generation with the essential and correct knowledge.

A country's educational system is like a living tree. Its branches grow when new reforms are made yet old, withering, sick bits are pruned (capturing the nature of faulty methods being discarded for new). A tree changes in the face of new seasons, representing the new trends being incorporated into the curriculum. Old trends fall out, and new trends always appear. Most importantly, the fruit, the success, is molded by factors that come before all these branches grow, the root and its soil. The roots and soil is the culture and changing history that sets the course for how the tree grows. Understanding this allows us to see how various countries' have differing curriculums and explains why some are so drastically different from the others. As different eras come and go, the demands of what is to be expected from the curriculums also evolve. In Europe, being geographical neighbors as well as the emergence of numerous super powers, made it natural for countries to learn the language of neighboring countries in their schools. Learning French or English became the norm in many European countries and even became a luxury in some Asian countries (Eurostat, 2024). In America, long after the English colonized and became the majority, Spanish began to make an emergence in the American curriculum. As America borders Mexico (a Spanish speaking South American country) and receives a lot of people from Mexico, learning Spanish to interact with the growing Hispanic-Latino community became vital. One of the biggest changes we saw, globally, is the surge in the need to speak English. As America emerged from the dust of the second world war and waltzed into its golden era of the 60s, 70s, and 80s, it soon found itself not only to be the world's most powerful economy and military, it had also embedded itself deep into the heart of the global trade market. The entire world quickly became dependent on the American dollar, American aid, and the American economy. America leading the world would lead to a beginning in demand of education in America. This would start a chain reaction that would soon culminate to "English Fever." Learning English suddenly became trending while actually studying in America became the dream. This surge impacted the educational system of nations all across the globe (Ives et al., 2016–2019).

The modern South Korean education system, through an increase in demand of international schools and global curriculums, currently undergoes a vital change spearheaded by a phenomenon called "English fever." English proficiency allows students to undergo such programs yet as more time passes, that privilege falls more and more into the hands of affluent families. Disparities such as this highlights the glaring problems of social inequality and further reinforces a divide between those privileged enough to benefit from the system and those who aren't. These glaring issues have led to a debated dilemma between the pursuit of global competitiveness and the preservation of Korean culture. This study examines how the growth of international education influences South Korea's student experiences, academic culture, and societal perceptions, whilst looking into the uncertain social dynamic and future it brings.

Background - Korea was one of the countries that was affected by English fever. Like many other countries, the demand for an English education enveloped Korea. After the numerous conflicts and having to build up everything from devastation, the Korean economy saw a huge surge in the late 1900s as it found a seat for itself in the global market. Being able to provide goods at a lower cost than Japan whilst lacking the infamy that

cheaply-produced Chinese products had helped secure Korea's future as it continued to rise in the ranks of the world economy. The Korean people soon realized that America was not only a huge part of Korea's success, it was also an affluent land of rich opportunities, a belief that would be reinforced for generations to come.

The English language not only lingered in the people's dreams, it also planted its roots within the Korean educational system. People paid extra just to provide their children the chance to learn English. The Korean curriculum would eventually grow the branches and leaves of a new English course for almost every school nation-wide. Although it didn't make the entire population fluent in English, the importance of the subject, its uses, and prestigious status when being proficient at it was solidified into Korean society. Coupled with the appearances of international schools in Korea, the curriculum would soon be called into question in ways it hasn't before (N.R., 2022).

It's in the nature of economics that dictates that a shift in the demand for English leads to a higher price of obtaining that service (Universities UK, 2024). Not only did the English speakers around the world realize this but also the parents of children around the world. As English wormed its way into not only becoming a requirement for being accomplished but also a social status of its own, prices for learning English soared (BridgeUniverse, 2025). This was apparent in Korea, a country long plagued with an income-inequality that used this opportunity to show bare its fangs. Being able to speak and even be proficient at it became a high standard of its own. Korean parents were able to flaunt their wealth based on how well their children were academically achieved and English had been added to the near top of that pile. Receiving a private education for English studies became a luxury and a privilege. The disparity of the ability to speak English between children not being able to afford private educators and children that are privileged enough to be able to receive it became apparent. It is a debated problem that concerns the parents and children that watch as their affluent peers receive an education they cannot (Asia Society Korea, 2022).

Research Question - This study aims to understand how international schools and South Korea's focus on English education can affect student experiences, academic outcomes, and social perceptions. Driven by widespread "English fever," many families choose international schools and global programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP), believing English proficiency is essential for success. Furthermore, English has become a form of cultural capital, reinforcing social hierarchies and raising concerns about fairness and the preservation of Korean cultural identity. The rise of English-medium education also creates tensions amid globalization, challenging traditional values and social cohesion. Hence, our research question is:

> *How do international schools and South Korea's emphasis on English education influence student experiences, academic outcomes, and social perceptions?*

2. Parental Choices: Motivations Behind the Preference for International Schools in South Korea

In South Korea, a quiet but powerful shift is happening in how families think about education. More and more parents are choosing to send their children to international schools, not just because it sounds trendy, but because the choice reflects something deeper: hopes, dreams, and sometimes quiet worries about what's best for their kids.

Doors to a Bigger World - For many parents, the appeal of international schools starts with a simple but powerful idea: a better future. These schools offer instruction in English and follow global programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP). This is not just about learning a foreign language, it's about preparing for a world that's more competitive, unpredictable and connected. Parents see these schools as a stepping stone. Maybe it's a path to a top university overseas or landing a job with an international company. But, it's about giving their children a sense of confidence and adaptability skills they'll need no matter where life takes them. In a country where education is often seen as the gateway to success, many South Korean parents are willing to invest heavily in their financial, emotional or even mentally, because International schools represent that opportunity.

Escaping the Pressure Cooker - For some parents, the decision isn't only about ambition, it's also about escape. South Korea's education system is famously intense. Kids often study late into the night, attend extra classes, and prepare endlessly for make-or-break exams. While the system has produced impressive academic results, it can come at a cost of burnout, anxiety, and a growing fear of failure. So, when parents look at international schools, they see something refreshing. These schools often emphasize **creativity over memorization**, **exploration over repetition**, and well-being over relentless competition. For many families, that shift feels like a breath of fresh air, a chance for their children to actually enjoy learning again. and that matters, because behind every report card and university application is a kid who just wants to feel curious, capable, and okay.

It's about more than just a Grades - At the end of the day, most parents want the same thing: **for their children to be happy, successful, and resilient**. Choosing an international school isn't just about chasing elite degrees or high-powered careers. It's about nurturing well-rounded kids who know how to think, adapt, and care for themselves and for others. Of course, not every family has the same access to these schools. Tuition costs are high, and spaces are limited. That reality has sparked growing conversations about fairness, about who gets to dream big, and who gets left behind. Still, for the families who make the leap, international schools represent more than just a classroom. They're a symbol of possibility, of care, and of a deep parental hope that their children can grow up not just smart, but whole.

Curriculum Differences: IB/AP and Bilingualism versus Korea's Exam-Focused National Curriculum - Being one of the countries that have maintained great education competitiveness around the world, South Korea reflects a commitment in persevering academic growth and development, as well as a tradition of morality in its national curriculum. These emphasized values also translate to other international curriculums around the world, including the International Baccalaureate programme, commonly referred to as the IB, and the Advanced Placement (AP). As to the rapid globalization of education in South Korea, these global curriculums are often positioned in stark contrast to South Korea's receptive learning. South Korea's education fervor is undeniably one valuable asset for the main driving force to boost economic and social development. However, its 'receptive learning', where the teaching methods are emphasized on traditional, exam-focused and monolingual instructions, have raised concerns and are seen to have diminishing prospects for future success. Receptive learning mainly refers to students who receive knowledge without forming their own critical thinking, where knowledge is only passed down through textbooks of one-way lectures.

Additionally, for the most part, education is largely delivered in Korean, with English taught as a compulsory subject from elementary school (Primary 3) onwards. English instruction within the national system is typically grammar-focused and geared toward achieving high scores on standardized tests, most notably the College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT, or Suneung). This high-stakes exam culture fosters rote memorization, intense competition, and a narrow definition of academic success (Byun & Kim, 2011). While English proficiency is highly valued, the national curriculum's approach often limits students' opportunities for authentic language use and communicative competence. English is rather treated as an academic hurdle instead of a tool for global engagement. Hence, bilingualism is rarely achieved through this system's mechanism (Park, 2009).

The Rise of International Curriculum: IB and AP in South Korea - In response to the growing parental demand for global competitiveness and holistic education, international curriculums such as IB and AP have been introduced in not only private international schools, but more recently, have as well expanded its reach to select public schools. These programs are commonly described as a multicultural curriculum, characterized by their emphasis on inquiry-based learning, critical thinking, and the development of bilingual or multilingual proficiency.

The International Baccalaureate (IB)

The International Baccalaureate (IB) programmes has constantly gained unprecedented momentum in the Asia Pacific, including South Korea. With a presence in 158 countries and across 5,284 schools worldwide, South

Korea's model collaboration between the IB and public education authorities to make IB education accessible in the Korean language reflects a geared integration of a more global, holistic approach that nurtures essential capabilities in today's economy. The IB PYP and IBDP is taught in English, and each area of subject integrates global current events and the different perspectives of various cultures and communities. This global perspective is designed to become global citizens, fostering students' ability to effortlessly collaborate with people from various cultures and backgrounds.

The IB Diploma Programme (IBDP) in particular, is a two-year program that requires students to study six subjects across diverse disciplines. Students are required to complete its core curriculum, including an Extended Essay, participate in Creativity, Activity, Service (CAS), and engage with Theory of Knowledge (TOK), a framework intended to broaden student's educational experience, that transcends a mere textbook learning. These assessments include essays, oral presentations, and research projects. Hence, a defining feature of the IB is its commitment to encourage students into thinking more critically, communicate effectively in multiple languages, and to acknowledge and foster diverse perspectives, embedded from intercultural understanding. In South Korea, some IB World Schools and public pilot programs offer dual-language instruction, enabling students to take courses in both Korean and English (Yoon, 2023).

Advanced Placement (AP)

On the other hand, the AP program, developed by the College Board in the United States, offers college-level courses and exams in specific subjects, primarily taught in English. While AP does not have a structured bilingual component like IB, it provides students with opportunities to engage deeply with academic content in English, thereby enhancing their proficiency.

Comparative Analysis: Bilingualism and Educational Outcomes - The differences between these curriculums are pronounced, particularly in their pedagogical approaches to language and learning:

Feature	International Baccalaureate (IB)	Advanced Placement (AP)	Korea's National Curriculum
Structure	Comprehensive program with six subject groups and core components (Theory of Knowledge, Extended Essay, CAS)	Individual courses in specific subjects; students choose which to take	Grade-based curriculum with prescribed subjects and content
Curriculum Focus	Inquiry-based learning, interdisciplinary approach, global perspectives	Subject-specific college-level content and exams	Content mastery, preparation for national exams
Language of Instruction	Primarily English, with options for bilingual instruction	English	Primarily Korean; English taught as a foreign language subject
Bilingualism	Supports bilingual education through dual-language options	Limited focus on bilingualism; language courses available	English taught as a subject; limited bilingual instruction
Assessment	Combination of internal assessments and external exams, including essays and projects	External standardized exams per course, mainly multiple-choice and essays	National standardized exams focused on knowledge recall and problem-solving
Flexibility	Students select subjects across six groups with core requirements	Students select individual courses according to interest and goals	Fixed curriculum with limited elective options
Global Recognition	Recognized internationally for university admissions	Recognized primarily in the US and some other countries	Recognized nationally; university admission based on national exam results

Pedagogical Approach	Emphasizes inquiry, critical thinking, and student-centered learning	Focuses on advanced content knowledge and exam preparation	Teacher-led instruction with emphasis on content delivery and exam readiness
Student Experience	Includes creativity, activity, service components alongside academics	Focuses on academic rigor in specific subjects	High emphasis on exam preparation and academic achievement
Accessibility	Available mainly in private/international schools and select public programs; associated costs vary	Available in some public and private schools; exam fees apply	Universal access through public education; private tutoring common

As seen from the table above, IBDP's bilingual model offers a clear departure from the exam-driven Korean system. Though language proficiency and multilingualism play an important role in both national and international curriculum, within the Korean National Curriculum, students are taught most of their courses in Korean. Contrastingly, by taking a conversational approach to instruction, curriculums such as the IB and AP helps students to become naturally proficient in the English language.

The Korean National Curriculum had made it their goal to develop new competencies such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration skills in teaching and learning. However, there have still been ongoing critiques regarding Korea's national exams that mostly assess receptive learning abilities rather than critical or creative thinking capabilities. As such, there are discrepancies between the education goals and final outcomes. With the increasing interconnectedness of global economies and industries across the world, this escalates to a growing need for individuals to possess both local insights and global perspectives.

With this education paradigm shift in Korea, there has been an ongoing discussion regarding the introduction of international curriculums, such as the IB, in Korean public schools. By requiring coursework in two languages and embedding global perspectives throughout the curriculum, the International Baccalaureate not only enhances English proficiency but also supports the maintenance of Korean language and identity. This dual focus is particularly significant in a society grappling with the cultural implications of "English fever."

3. Student Perceptions & Experience — How English Fluency is Seen as in Korea

In a global or general perspective, English is seen as a critical and or crucial point for future opportunities as English is widely known for being the international/ global language. As English is known as the global language, people see this as an asset that grants people with academic advancement, career competitiveness, social status, and success generally. According to Park (2009), English fluency functions as a form of social and cultural capital that can open doors to elite opportunities. With this mindset, particularly in Korea, a lot of families or parents would invest their money into private English lessons, after-school academies, and even overseas education. Song (2013) explains how some families go so far as sending their children abroad to give them an edge in English learning. This shows how deeply rooted the idea that English fluency is tied to future success in Korea—both academically and socially.

Academic-wise, international schools and or English-focused education has led to higher academic performance and better university access. South Korea consistently ranks among the top countries in global assessments like PISA, with students excelling in reading, mathematics, and science. However, students attending international schools or English-focused programs often benefit from curricula such as the International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement (AP), which are globally recognized and geared toward fostering critical thinking and creativity beyond rote memorization dominant in Korean public schools. These programs enhance readiness for admission to prestigious universities both in Korea and abroad, particularly English-medium institutions.

International schools, which are often accessible primarily to wealthier families, emphasize English fluency

through immersion and interactive learning, which improves students' communicative competence and academic confidence. This contrasts with the Korean public system's heavy focus on grammar and test preparation. Research suggests that students in English-focused environments develop stronger language skills and adaptability, which positively affect academic engagement and outcomes at tertiary levels.

Student Perceptions & Experience — How do International Schools and English-Focused Education Affect Students' Academic Outcomes and Social Perceptions of Success? For some students, English-focused education can be transformative. Lee (2016) interviewed high school students in immersion programs, many of whom described gaining confidence and critical thinking skills. One student said, "It's not just about English. It helped me express my opinions and think more critically, which we don't often practice in regular Korean classes." So, it's not merely about acquiring a skill, but more about the process of learning it. Yet, this growth often comes with emotional costs. Students frequently feel anxious and academically overwhelmed in English-medium instruction (EMI) courses, especially when there is little support in Korean. In a study by Kim (2014), students described EMI lectures as "very stressful" and reported relying heavily on textbooks because they couldn't follow spoken English in class. Others avoided EMI courses entirely due to fear of underperformance.

These pressures extend beyond the classroom. Park (2009) explains that English in Korea functions as a form of cultural capital. It is seen as a prerequisite for elite university admission, high-status jobs, and social mobility, rather than just a skill to acquire and use daily. Consequently, families invest large amounts of money in private English lessons, overseas schooling, and even family separation (e.g., "goose families") to give their children a competitive edge (Song, 2013). The social perception of English fluency is powerful in Korea. Being good at English is often equated with intelligence, global sophistication, and higher class status (Lo & Kim, 2015). Students from international schools are frequently viewed as "elite" or globally competent, reinforcing the idea that success requires aligning with Western, English-speaking norms. At the same time, this creates a hierarchy among students. Those educated in Korean-medium schools or from less privileged backgrounds may feel excluded or seen as less successful. This leads to what Park and Wee (2012) describe as "linguistic stratification," where English becomes not just a language skill but a social filter.

These perceptions largely stem from the nature of English education in South Korea, which is heavily oriented toward preparing students for high-stakes exams, particularly the Korean Scholastic Ability Test (KSAT), rather than developing practical communication skills. For many students and their families, English is primarily valued as a tool to gain admission into prestigious universities, which are seen as crucial stepping stones to desirable career paths and social status. As a result, English instruction often prioritizes grammar, vocabulary, and test-taking strategies aimed at maximizing exam scores, rather than fostering conversational fluency or intercultural communication skills that are essential in a truly globalized context. Moreover, this narrow focus reinforces the idea that English is primarily an academic subject rather than a living language used for global communication and collaboration. Parents often support this approach because it aligns with the immediate goal of securing university admission and future job prospects, which are perceived as the main avenues to success in Korea's competitive society.

Social Implications: English Education and the Deepening of Social Inequality in South Korea - Most people know that the growing popularity of International schools and English-medium instruction (EMI) education in South Korea has changed both the academic and cultural landscapes. But recently, many argue that it is beginning to intensify the country's already existing socio economic divides. While some see these institutions as doors to global opportunity. Others see it as barriers - which are only accessible primarily to wealthier families. As a result, being fluent in English and receiving international education are becoming powerful markers of social class, widening the gap between rich and poor, and reshaping what educational privilege looks like.

Elite Access and the Reproduction of Social Hierarchies - One of the most visible effects of South Korea's obsession with English — often called "English fever" — is the growing divide in its education system. More and more, access to globalized learning programs like the International Baccalaureate (IB) or Advanced Placement

(AP) is something only the wealthiest families can afford. Tuition at international schools can run into the tens of thousands of dollars each year, not to mention the extra costs for private tutoring, extracurriculars, or overseas summer camps. As Park (2009) points out, speaking fluent English isn't just about communication — it acts like cultural capital, opening doors to prestige, mobility, and elite circles. In this kind of environment, English becomes more than a language — it turns into a symbol of class. This is what sociologists call "educational stratification": kids from wealthy families are far more likely to attend international schools, go abroad for studies, and get into top universities at home or overseas. Meanwhile, those from lower-income backgrounds who stay in the public school system often miss out on these same opportunities — especially when it comes to building strong English skills or getting global exposure. Over time, this deepens the gap and makes it even harder for students from less privileged backgrounds to move up in society.

Two-Tiered Education System: Elite vs. General Track - Another social implication of South Korea's English-focused education system is the clear divide between two very different educational tracks. On one side, there's the elite, globally oriented path built around English immersion and international programs. Students in this track — usually those in private international schools — follow globally recognized curriculums like the IB or AP, which focus on critical thinking, broad learning, and getting into top universities abroad. These students are often on a track to international careers and long-term success, which strengthens their social and economic advantages down the line. On the other side, there are most students that remain in the general track — mainly in public schools — where the focus is still on memorization, test preparation, and sticking closely to the national curriculum, especially when it comes to preparing for the Korean college entrance exam (KSAT). The differences in these educational tracks doesn't just lead to different academic outcomes — it also shapes how students see themselves and their futures. Those in the elite track might grow up more aligned with Western values and feel more at home in global spaces, while those in the public system can end up feeling left out of that picture entirely. Some may start to see themselves as less capable or less worthy, simply because they weren't given the same opportunities. Over time, this two-track system makes inequality even more deeply rooted — turning education into something that not only divides people by class, but also by the kind of future they can realistically hope for.

English as a Social Filter - In South Korea today, English isn't just a subject — it's becoming a social filter, a tool of sorting people. People are classified based on their language proficiency and the institutions they attend. Students attending international schools are often seen as more polished, more global, more "prepared" for success. Meanwhile, students from regular public schools may be unfairly viewed as less suited for the international job market. This kind of thinking will eventually lead to a social hierarchy in education, where going to an English-medium or international school isn't just about academics — it's also about being seen as part of a higher social class. Lo and Kim (2015) describe this phenomenon as **"linguistic stratification"** — the process by which language ability, particularly in English, becomes a basis for social differentiation. In this system, English functions as a "symbolic gatekeeper," separating the global elite from the local mainstream. Students educated in English-speaking environments often enjoy better job prospects, are more competitive in global labor markets, and are favored in admissions to prestigious universities. This entrenches a meritocracy that is not only academic but also linguistic and economic.

Consequences for Social Cohesion - The widening gap between students who can access international education and those who cannot may lead to long-term social fragmentation. When global demand for people who speak English rises, and when English fluency becomes prerequisites for desirable jobs, high incomes, and social prestige, students from less privileged backgrounds are systematically excluded from full participation in modern Korean society. This not only undermines the principle of equal opportunity but also threatens national cohesion by creating a two-tiered society: one fluent in global capital, and the other increasingly marginalized. As Song (2013) puts it, Korea's obsession with English has turned from an educational trend into a kind of "social epidemic." It fuels dreams of global success, but also creates a sense of alienation for those who can't keep up. While today's world calls for people who are multilingual and flexible, the reality in Korea is that the road to becoming that kind of person is uneven — and often only open to those who can afford it.

Cultural Balance - South Korea is experiencing a rapid rise in international education, bringing both global opportunities and deepening the challenges of maintaining national identity. As English-Medium Instruction (EMI) becomes more dominant, especially in early childhood settings, educators are increasingly faced with the challenge of balancing Korean cultural values and global education frameworks. These changes are especially visible in international and private schools, where students are frequently encouraged to adopt global ideals while staying rooted in their cultural values. Kim and Choi (2024) argue that the spread of English-medium kindergartens, driven by social competition and policy neglect, contributes to a widespread "English fever", an obsession with English fluency. Kim & Brutt-Griffler (2025) argues that the phenomenon of "English fever" has created a learning environment where English is treated as the primary marker of success and seen as the most essential tool for success. These studies highlight how early childhood English education, instead of being carefully managed by the state, is shaped by market demands and parental anxieties. Many educators in these settings face strong pressure to prioritize English immersion, often at the cost of culturally appropriate, play-based, or Korean-language learning. While the government blames these schools for undermining integrity, Kim and Choi (2024) show that many educators are actually trying to resist full immersion and preserve Korean values through bilingual materials and flexible language use.

Similarly, Kim and Brutt-Griffler (2025) examine how family language policies reflect this same tension at home. In households with strict English-only rules, the usage of Korean language becomes limited, not only reducing fluency in the mother tongue but also distancing children from their culture, history, and emotional expression. The authors describe this approach as a "high-pressure family language policy," which may succeed in producing English fluency but risks cultural disconnection. However, they also point out the families and educators who are beginning to embrace a more balanced approach. These families believe that children should be able to develop multiple languages, including Korean, to remain globally competitive while staying culturally rooted. Despite structural pressures, some educators are taking action to maintain a cultural balance. Schools have started embedding Korean Studies modules within English-language curricula. For example, teachers might use bilingual storybooks, incorporate Korean historical content, or celebrate national holidays. While they are not a perfect solution, these practices help restore a sense of identity and belonging, allowing students to make personal connections between global themes and Korean realities. Furthermore, educators and schools have started to rebalance priorities, with holistic development as their number one priority.

Kim and Choi (2024) also describe how some kindergartens allow code switching, making space for child-led play in Korean. Although limited, these approaches help young learners affirm their Korean identity, express their feelings while still acquiring English skills. Similarly, Kim and Brutt-Griffler (2025) show that educators who support bilingualism, not just English fluency, are better positioned to meet the emotional and cultural needs of their students. In conclusion, educators in South Korea are navigating through a complex space where global expectations and national identity collide. Maintaining cultural balance requires more than just changing textbooks; it demands a deeper shift in educational philosophy, one that values both local roots and global reach. As the country continues to internationalize, this balancing act will remain one of the most critical and defining challenges for its educators

4. Discussion

This essay highlights the intricate dynamics among international education, linguistic stratification, and cultural identity within the context of South Korea. It delineates a conflict between the pursuit of global competitiveness, predominantly through the acquisition of the English language, and the imperative to uphold Korean cultural values and social cohesion. The prioritization of international schools as conduits to success has the potential to engender a social hierarchy, given that these institutions are frequently regarded as offering superior preparation for the global arena. This perception, as articulated in the document, may result in students enrolled in conventional public schools being unjustly perceived as less equipped for the international labor market, thereby contributing to an educational social stratification that transcends mere academic performance.

The notion of "linguistic stratification," as articulated by Lo and Kim, is pivotal for comprehending the intricate social dynamics involved. As per the document, proficiency in English has evolved into a "symbolic gatekeeper," establishing a hierarchy wherein individuals fluent in English are afforded enhanced access to opportunities and elevated social standing. This stratification may engender disparities in opportunities for students hailing from less privileged backgrounds, thereby potentially relegating them to exclusion from sought-after employment and advanced educational avenues. The expanding chasm between those who can avail themselves of international education and those who remain unable poses a threat to national cohesion, thereby risking the emergence of a bifurcated society. When fluency in English becomes a requisite for lucrative positions, substantial incomes, and social esteem, students from less affluent backgrounds may be systematically marginalized from full engagement within contemporary Korean society.

This essay examines the difficulties of preserving Korean cultural identity in a world that is becoming more globalized. The increase of English-medium instruction, especially in early childhood environments, leads to worries about the possible decline of Korean language proficiency and cultural awareness. According to Kim and Choi, the proliferation of English-medium kindergartens, fueled by social rivalry and governmental oversight, leads to a pervasive "English fever," an obsession with achieving English fluency. This "English fever" has established a learning atmosphere in which English is regarded as the main indicator of achievement. This essay also states that numerous educators in these environments experience significant pressure to focus on English immersion, frequently at the expense of culturally relevant, play-oriented, or Korean-language education. This strong emphasis on learning English may create a setting where English is viewed as the main indicator of achievement, possibly undermining the Korean language and culture. The document states that families enforcing strict English-only rules may inadvertently alienate children from their culture, history, and emotional expression, a situation referred to as a "high-pressure family language policy."

5. Conclusion

South Korea’s integration of international schools and its strong emphasis on English education have profoundly influenced student experiences, academic outcomes, and social perceptions. The adoption of global curricula like the International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) has shifted the nation’s educational paradigm from traditional, exam-focused, and memorization-based instruction toward a model that values bilingualism, critical thinking, and global citizenship.

Student Experiences - International schools and English-medium programs offer students more diverse, inquiry-based learning environments. These settings foster the usage of English and encourage skills such as adaptability, creativity, and independent thought qualities often held back by Korea’s high-pressure, test-driven national curriculum. However, students who are accustomed to rote memorization may struggle to adapt to these new demands, especially in bilingual or English-medium classrooms. The transition requires not only academic adjustment but also significant support for student well-being and identity development.

Academic Outcomes - The IB and AP programs provide pathways to prestigious universities and global careers, making them highly attractive to families seeking international opportunities for their children. Students in these programs typically gain stronger communicative competence in English and are better prepared for the demands of a globalized world, although the benefits are not universally accessible. High tuition fees and limited spaces mean that these opportunities are largely reserved for affluent families, this deepens the educational inequality and reinforces social stratification.

Social Perceptions - English proficiency and international education have become powerful forms of cultural capital, symbolizing elite status and serving as gateways to social mobility. This has intensified competition and contributed to a dual education system, where access to global programs marks a clear divide between privileged and less privileged students. At the same time, the expansion of English-medium education and global curricula has sparked concerns about the decrease of Korean cultural identity and social cohesion, as English and

international values sometimes overshadow local traditions and language.

Implementation Challenges and Local Adaptations - Integrating IB and AP curricula into Korean schools presents significant challenges. Teachers require extensive training to shift from didactic, exam-focused methods to the facilitative, student-centered approaches favored by these programs. Students and families must also navigate the tension between global competitiveness and the preservation of Korean heritage. Recent government initiatives, such as the introduction of dual-language IB programs in public schools, represent important efforts to democratize access to global education and reduce reliance on costly private international schools. These policy experiments are crucial for balancing educational equity with the need to maintain national and cultural significance. In conclusion, South Korea's focus on international schools and English education has opened new avenues for student growth and global engagement, but it has also intensified debates about equity, identity, and the meaning of educational success. South Korea faces the ongoing challenge of expanding access to high-quality, bilingual education while safeguarding its cultural heritage and ensuring that all students, not just the privileged few, can benefit from the opportunities of a globalized world. The full potential of these reforms will require sustained commitment from policymakers, educators, and communities to address both the promise and the pitfalls of this educational transformation.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 105-112

Language and identity: Bilingual education policy in Malaysian society

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ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

OPEN ACCESS

Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25210

Abstract

This paper critically examines the evolution and complexities of bilingual education policies in Malaysia, focusing on three major policy frameworks: Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI), Memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu, Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI), and the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (MEB). Each policy reflects Malaysia's efforts to reconcile national identity, linguistic diversity, and global competitiveness. PPSMI aimed to improve English proficiency through the teaching of Science and Mathematics in English but was met with strong resistance due to concerns about equity, teacher preparedness, and cultural identity. MBMMBI, introduced as a more balanced successor, emphasized both the strengthening of Bahasa Malaysia and the enhancement of English through complementary programs such as the Dual Language Programme (DLP) and the Highly Immersive Programme (HIP). The Malaysia Education Blueprint introduced broader systemic reforms, including digital integration and equity-focused strategies, but continued to face challenges related to top-down implementation, teacher recruitment, and local adaptation. The paper also offers a comparative perspective by analyzing bilingual education in Singapore and Vietnam. Singapore's centralized and pragmatic approach has successfully elevated English as the dominant medium of instruction while preserving mother tongue education. In contrast, Vietnam's bilingual initiatives remain limited, largely due to resource constraints and implementation gaps. Compared to these countries, Malaysia demonstrates a more pluralistic but fragmented approach, marked by frequent policy shifts and ongoing debates over linguistic and cultural priorities. The paper concludes by advocating for more inclusive and stable language planning, teacher capacity-building, and school-level autonomy to ensure the long-term success of bilingual education in Malaysia's multilingual society.

Keywords: bilingual education policy, Malaysia education blueprint, PPSMI, MBMMBI, language and identity, comparative education

Language and identity: Bilingual education policy in Malaysian society

1. Introduction

Malaysia is famous for being a culturally rich and multilingual country. Coluzzi (2017) referred to Malaysia as one of Asia's most linguistically diverse countries. With a population of approximately 34.1 million (2024) and a long history of migration, colonial rule, and globalization, Malays, Chinese, and Indians are currently the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia. While Bahasa Malaysia is the official language, English is also highly favored, and is considered the second most important language in Malaysia. Bilingual refers to one's ability to use two languages in one's daily life (Grosjean, 2010). In the past, Malaysia had a history of English-medium education in primary schools. However, after its independence in 1957, new policies emerged, and many Malay-medium schools were established around the nation. This raised the need to develop Malay teaching materials in primary schools and a rearrangement of teaching English in secondary schools. By 1984, English-medium schools all over Malaysia had been transformed into Malay-medium schools. Malaysian public education is divided into two types of schools: National Schools, which primarily use Bahasa Malaysia as the medium of instruction, and National-Type Schools, which use Mandarin or Tamil as the medium of instruction. While English is still widely used, it is currently taught as a subject at most schools. Bilingual education in Malaysia has gone through various transformations and changes, with policies emerging and shifting throughout the years. The paper discusses three of the most significant policies so far: Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI), Memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu, Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI), and Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB). The policies, their impacts, public reactions, and strengths and weaknesses will each be discussed thoroughly. Moreover, a comparative study section will discuss the differences in bilingual education in Malaysia and two of its neighbouring countries, Vietnam and Singapore.

1.1 Malaysian bilingual education policy analysis

Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik Dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI) - The Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris (PPSMI) policy was introduced in 2003 by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad. The goal of this policy is to improve English language proficiency among Malaysian students by teaching Science and Mathematics in English (Desi, n.d.). This policy was implemented in phases, beginning with Year 1 primary and Form 1 secondary students in 2003, and fully applied by 2008 for primary and 2007 for secondary levels (Desi, n.d.).

Policy Background and Objectives - Historically, Malaysia's education system had been stratified by language, with English-medium schools often better resourced and attended by urban, wealthier students, while rural Malay-medium schools lagged behind (Noss, 1967). The PPSMI goal is to equip students with English proficiency to fit in with the global market, especially in science and technology fields. However, the policy faced significant challenges. Research such as that by *Permuafakatan Badan Ilmiah Nasional* (PEMBINA) highlighted poor teacher competency in English and the negative impact on students' comprehension and retention in Science and Mathematics (Faizal, n.d.). As a result, the policy was reversed starting in 2012 (Jebat Must Die, 2011).

Public Reaction: Students, Teachers, Parents, and Social Norms - Public reaction to PPSMI was deeply divided, with different social standings. Well-educated urban populations generally supported the policy as they view English proficiency as essential for global competitiveness and economic progress (Yunus, Sulaiman, & Embi, 2017). However, rural communities who possess low proficiency for English found the policy unfair as they struggle to learn complex subjects such as science and math in an unfamiliar language. Teachers also reported difficulties as there is inadequate training and increased workload (Faizal, n.d.). Parents' and guardians' opinions differ and are split between urban and rural communities. Some welcomed the opportunity for their children to gain English skills, equipping them with the ability to expand their children's job opportunities. On the other hand,

others feared the erosion of the Malay language and cultural identity. The opposition from groups such as *Gerakan Mansuhkan PPSMI* (GMP) showed broader anxieties about national language status and social equity (A. R., 2020).

The reactions to the policy clearly reflect how Malaysians understand and experience language as more than just a medium of communication. Language, according to them, is tied to identity, power, and opportunity. PPSMI disrupted the long-standing norm of using Malay as the main language of instruction. This inevitably stirred debate where on one side, there were strong sentiments about protecting linguistic nationalism, while on the other, some viewed the policy as a necessary step toward embracing globalization and improving access to global knowledge. Interestingly, the controversy also revealed deeper issues that go beyond language itself. For instance, urban and rural communities reacted differently, showing how socio-economic backgrounds can shape access to quality education and influence learning outcomes (Yunus et al., 2017).

Impacts and Social Norms Created by PPSMI - The PPSMI policy changed how language functions in education by introducing new norms that placed English at the center of access to scientific and technological knowledge (Faizal, n.d.). This move strengthened English as a global language, but it also unintentionally widened the gap for students who weren't fluent in it. As a result, doing well in English became closely tied to academic success and even social mobility. Therefore, local languages were gradually pushed aside in the classroom. When the policy was eventually reversed, it was a renewed effort to prioritize Malay as both a symbol of national identity and a foundation of the education system (Jebat Must Die, 2011). This shows just how strong language nationalism still is in Malaysia. Even today, the tension between using English to stay globally competitive and preserving local languages and cultures continues to shape how education policies are made (A. R., 2020).

Public vs Authorities: The Controversy - The PPSMI policy has sparked significant controversy. This policy is drawing criticism from teachers, parents, and political groups who oppose its top-down system of implementation and the lack of meaningful consultation (Faizal, n.d.; Desi, n.d.). Many felt that the government pushed the policy forward without adequately preparing teachers or creating space for public dialogue. The absence of transparency and failure to implement the policy in stages or support it with ongoing research deepened the sense of distrust of the public. By 2012, growing public pressure and research pointing to the policy's limitations led to its reversal (Jebat Must Die, 2011). Therefore, the PPSMI debate wasn't just about language, it reflected a larger tension between state-led efforts to modernize through English and grassroots movements to protect linguistic and cultural identities.

Policy Strengths and Weaknesses: Challenges and Issues - Despite the backlash, the PPSMI policy did bring some advantages. It was introduced with the goal of improving students' English proficiency, which is an important skill in this increasingly globalized world and for strengthening the country's future workforce (Yunus et al., 2017). By focusing on Science and Mathematics, the policy also recognized the critical role these subjects play in national development. Moreover, PPSMI symbolised a bold step toward educational reform, as Malaysia sought to keep pace with international standards, in response to the pressures of globalization (A. R., 2020). Nonetheless, the policy came with serious weaknesses. Many teachers were not fully equipped in terms of training and English fluency. This made classroom delivery uneven and often ineffective (Faizal, n.d.). This was especially felt in rural areas, where students struggled to follow lessons, leading to a noticeable drop in academic performance. The policy was rolled out too quickly, without gradual implementation, consistent evaluation, or meaningful involvement from the wider community, all of which added to public dissatisfaction and, eventually, the policy's failure (Desi, n.d.). On top of that, it failed to acknowledge Malaysia's rich linguistic landscape and the value of mother tongue education. By privileging English, the policy unintentionally created new social inequalities. It benefits those already proficient in English, which are the wealthier families who can afford English tutors, while leaving others behind. In the end, PPSMI had to confront the difficult challenge of promoting English for global competitiveness, while also respecting national languages and reducing educational gaps, while at the same time valuing deep-rooted cultural attitudes around language.

1.2 Memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu, Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris (MBMMBI)

Policy Background and Objectives - Since PPSMI had been criticized for its limited impact on improving students' academic performance in Mathematics and Science, the government decided to find a more balanced and culturally grounded replacement for this policy. On July 8, 2009, the Cabinet officially decided to abolish PPSMI. The new policy, MBMMBI, which is also known as "Memartabatkan Bahasa Melayu, Memperkukuhkan Bahasa Inggeris," quickly filled the gap. The goal of MBMMBI is to uphold the Malay Language and enhance the English language proficiency of Malaysian citizens. The major contents of the policy include four key points: Language teaching reform, English enhancement programmes, teacher professional development and curriculum and teaching materials update. Notably, while MBMMBI rectifies the teacher-related shortcomings of PPSMI, its effectiveness is still a subject of considerable discussion.

The Process of MBMMBI - In 2011, Math and Science in elementary schools (Malay, Chinese, and Tamil — referring to the three language-medium elementary schools in Malaysia) first grade were changed to be taught in the respective mother tongues. Between 2011 and 2016, there was a transitional period. Schools could decide whether to teach Math and Science in English on their own. In 2016, Math and Science in whole elementary schools were changed to be taught in their respective mother tongues. Since 2017, governments have started to limit junior high schools to teach Math and Science in their respective mother tongues more strictly.

The Supplementary Policy and the Relevant Changes - To ensure the effectiveness of MBMMBI, the government set up some supplementary policies to consummate the whole system. DLP, Dual Language Programme, which was set up in 2016, allows students to choose to learn in English or Malay. In the same year, HIP, which is also known as Highly Immersive Programme, was launched. It creates a rich English learning environment and engaging activities, fostering students' motivation and confidence in learning English. In addition, from 2016, English became a must-pass subject for the award of SPM (Malay for Malaysian Certificate of Education). Those policies emphasize the importance of English and the mother language in Malaysia at the same time.

Policy Strengths and Weaknesses and Public Reaction - MBMMBI provides a non-mandatory environment of English learning, which then improves students' learning outcomes and motivation. It played a significant role in addressing the issues caused by PPSMI. However, there are still some problems. For example, though MBMMBI tries to fix the teacher-related shortcomings with Teacher Professional Development, which is aimed at upskilling the teachers' English proficiency, the problem still exists. Furthermore, the urban-rural gap is not filled completely either. The supporters of MBMMBI consider the policy efficient, since it strengthens the status of the national language and fosters national identity and enhances English proficiency to boost international competitiveness. On the contrary, people who oppose the policy put forward several arguments: Besides the shortage of qualified language teachers, teachers and school administrators also called for greater autonomy in curriculum implementation. Since the policy required schools to have at least one class using the mother tongue to teach, bilingual schools, which were not affected by PPSMI as they had already been using English to teach math and science, were forced to switch their teaching methods. Students and parents point out that mandatory instruction in the national language may hinder learning outcomes, due to the frequent changes in the policies. Linguists and Education Experts acknowledged the policy's intent, criticizing its frequent shifts and overemphasis on language transition at the expense of curriculum quality and teacher training. As for the media and public, some of them are afraid that this kind of switch will stir up interethnic conflict. Sin Chew Daily also warned that the effect of DLP may be weakened.

Our Recommendations - Since some of the problems are not fixed from PPSMI to MBMMBI, the government should focus on improving teacher quality and curriculum. Moreover, the policy should not impose restrictions that limit the actions of schools. Schools should be given greater autonomy to form the policies that best fit their students, while the government should fulfill its role of supervision and support.

1.3 Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB)

Policy Background and Objectives - The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013–2025 (MEB), released by the Ministry of Education in 2013, is a 13-year roadmap to combat fundamental systemic issues impeding progress in the Malaysian education system. Among the issues are diminishing quality of education, low international competitiveness and sustained inequalities based on social origin and ethnicity. The blueprint was jointly worked out among local and international players, that is, the World Bank and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), and was also influenced through wide consultation, such as the National Education Dialogue. The MEB presents 11 strategic thrusts including among others, to raise the level of HOTS among students, professionalize the teaching force, promoting greater involvement in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and TVET (Technical and Vocational Education and Training), integrating digital learning infrastructure, and enhancing the equitable access of quality education for all regions and ethnic groups.

Implementation Effectiveness and Challenges - In the years since the start of the blueprint, many positive outcomes have been realized. In 2022, secondary school enrollment stood at 89.97 per cent from approximately 85 percent in 2011. Similarly, the dropout rate fell dramatically from 2.5 percent in 2011 to 0.99 percent in 2022. Classroom digitalization rose significantly as the use of more technology by teachers increased with the use of interactive whiteboards, projectors, tablets and digital platforms like Google Classroom, Frog Virtual Learning Environment (Frog VLE), and Zoom. These technologies have opened the way for more dynamic teaching and have allowed teachers to facilitate community-managed assignments, assessments and progress for whole groups of students without the complications of lots of pieces of paper. Nonetheless, the implementation has been patchy. Only 9 percent of teaching candidates came from the top-performing educational cohort, indicating both difficulty in attracting quality educators. Rural and resource-deprived schools are still plagued by antiquated facilities and inadequate access to digital technology, limiting the effectiveness of the nation-building reforms. The top-down implementation of the blueprint has also limited flexibility at the school level, stifling innovative capacity and responsiveness to unique community needs.

Reactions from Students and Teachers - Students have demonstrated mixed levels of support, with some expressing worry. A common theme is that digital learning and improved STEM education have generated better levels of engagement and performance on international assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). However, many students feel the curriculum is still largely based on examinations and did not find they were able to develop HOTS practically as a result. Some students have mentioned feeling under a lot of pressure while working under KPI-based systems and developing more HOTS remains a priority while other lower-level skills are being developed. Teachers display similar mixed responses. Many appreciate the policy's attention to professional learning, the tightening of performance standards, and the infusion of technology in the classroom. However, too much time doing paperwork and not enough time in classrooms has sapped the energy needed for both teachers' morale and innovation. Some teachers rejected new ways of teaching, classes, and even department curriculum documents because they didn't have adequate support, training, and agency in their decision-making.

Perspectives of Parents and Guardians - While parents and guardians are generally supportive of the overarching goals of the blueprint, particularly when it comes to equity and quality, parental concerns regarding the changing language of instruction remain high. Parents raised many concerns about changes to the language of instruction (especially in relation to English and Mathematics) and whether or not policymakers are being consistent, and whether consistency has a positive influence on student learning. Many parents also continue to advocate for more accountability and transparency, clearer communication from policymakers, and better opportunities for parent and community input in educational decision-making.

Public Perception and Broader Social Impact - On the societal level, the design has advocated for multilingual education, and reemphasized multicultural values that support greater social cohesion. However, its performance indicator approach -preoccupation with KPIs and competitive school ranking - is equally responsible

for a culture in education of overcompetition and increased stress levels for students and teachers. Public comments have been somewhat critical in terms of the over-bureaucratic, centralized stance of the MEB, and called for more flexible, local and contextualized educational policies.

Recommendations **-** The Malaysia Education Blueprint has made good progress in terms of access, digitalization, and restructuring. There are still a number of issues and contradictions in the education system, particularly in accessing professional development for teachers, stability in policies, and adaptation at the grassroots level. In considering further change, reforms should include greater school-level autonomy, a reformed recruitment and professional support system for teachers, incentivizing a non-stop language policy, and fostering an independent monitoring process for accountability and improvement.

2. Comparative studies

2.1 Bilingual education in Singapore

After its separation from Malaysia, Singapore claimed its independence in 1965. The country became a multilingual state with four official languages: English, Mandarin Chinese, Malay, and Tamil. English became the common language for interethnic communication. In 1966, Singapore officially implemented a bilingual policy, requiring all students in national schools to learn English as the first language and a "mother tongue" (Malay, Mandarin, or Tamil) as a second language. This policy aimed to unify the multi-ethnic nation, preserve cultural heritage, and facilitate economic development. Singapore's language education policy evolved significantly under their Prime Minister from 1959 to 1990, Lee Kuan Yew, who believed that English proficiency was essential for accessing international trade, investment, and Western technology. Initially, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil were introduced in English-medium schools, a move welcomed by many parents. Later, English was introduced into Chinese, Malay, and Tamil schools. As policies faced mixed reactions from parents and teachers, bilingual education was implemented as a compromise, requiring students to learn English alongside one other official language. However, enrollment in mother-tongue medium schools declined sharply. By 1987, English became the main medium of instruction across all schools, with Chinese, Malay, or Tamil taught as second languages (Gopinathan, 1999). Despite initially having little cultural relevance in Singapore's diverse communities, English gained wide acceptance due to its perceived economic value and high status (Lee, 2000). The Singapore government has successfully implemented policies that transitioned English and Mandarin into their home languages, despite the languages initially only being used by a small portion of the population. Their policy also succeeded in pushing the academic excellence of bilingual students, who have shown to perform as well as or surpass monolingual students in other countries.

2.2 Bilingual education in Vietnam

In recent years, English has gained increasing importance in Vietnam's education system (Devanadera, 2018), largely driven by the National Foreign Language 2020 Project. This initiative aimed to reform foreign language education and introduce bilingual programs nationwide, with the goal that by 2020, most young Vietnamese graduates would be able to use a foreign language confidently in daily life, education, and work within a globalized environment (Ministry of Education and Training, 2008). However, the project faced several drawbacks that held it back from achieving its goals, like a shortage of qualified teachers, reliance on training courses offered by the ministry, and a funding priority on equipment rather than teacher development. English teaching remains heavily academic, with an emphasis on reading and writing for exams. These classes also lack teacher-student interactions. Despite these limitations and mainly being implemented in private and international schools, bilingual education offers more student-centered, creative, and practical learning experiences. Overall, Vietnamese remains the primary language of instruction, with the government emphasizing its use to preserve national identity.

2.3 Comparison of bilingual education in Malaysia, Singapore, and Vietnam

Singapore, Vietnam, and Malaysia all promote bilingual education, but in different ways based on their national priorities and social contexts. Singapore took an efficient approach by making English the main language of instruction to support international trade and development, while still requiring students to learn their mother tongue to keep their cultural roots. This policy led to a steady decline in non-English-medium schools. Today, English is widely accepted because of its high status and economic value. Vietnam launched the National Foreign Language 2020 Project to improve English learning nationwide, but it did not meet its goals. There were not enough qualified teachers, and many schools focused too much on exams instead of communication. Bilingual programs in Vietnam are still limited, mostly found in private or international schools, and Vietnamese remains the dominant language. In Malaysia, the situation is more mixed. Malay is the national language and the main medium in public schools, but English is still considered important, especially for science and math. Malaysia also has vernacular schools that teach in Chinese or Tamil, showing a stronger support for multilingualism. However, Malaysia also faces issues like unequal language proficiency and debates over how much English should be used in education. Compared to Vietnam and Malaysia, Singapore's bilingual policy is more centralized and has been more successful in making English a key part of its education system while still recognizing other languages.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper examined three significant policies in Malaysian language education: PPSMI, MBMMBI, and the Malaysia Education Blueprint (MEB). It focused on their objectives, implementation, impact, public response, and overall effectiveness. These policies showcase Malaysia's ongoing effort to balance the role of Bahasa Malaysia as the national language with the growing significance of English for global competitiveness. While PPSMI faced controversy, MBMMBI aimed to strengthen Malay alongside improving English proficiency. While it did not fix what PPSMI and MBMMBI lacked, the MEB helped balance the act with a more long-term vision for education reform. Our analysis shows that alongside their strengths, the policies faced certain challenges, such as promoting bilingual competency and responding to global demands. They also had problems regarding policy shifts, teaching resources, teachers' qualifications, and inequality in implementation. The comparative section highlights how Malaysia's approach differs from Singapore's more centralized model and Vietnam's developing system. Ultimately, the success of bilingual education in Malaysia depends heavily on consistent planning, inclusive decision-making, and addressing the diverse linguistic needs of its population.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education
2025 Volume 14 Number 13, 113-125

Bilingualism and the politics of recognition: A Taylorian view of cultural identity in Philippine language policy

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ISSN: 2243-7703
Online ISSN: 2243-7711

Received: 13 May 2025 **Revised**: 18 June 2025 **Accepted**: 8 July 2025
Available Online: 10 July 2025 **DOI**: 10.5861/ijrse.2025.25211

OPEN ACCESS

Abstract

This study conceptually offers a philosophical inquiry into the bilingual education policy of the Philippines, employing Charles Taylor's theory of the politics of recognition as a lens for re-evaluating its ethical and sociocultural dimensions. It argues that the state-sanctioned privileging of English and Filipino within formal education systems, while often justified in the name of national unity and global competitiveness, has contributed to the systemic marginalization of regional and indigenous languages. This marginalization, the paper posits, is not a neutral byproduct of modernization but a form of misrecognition that undermines the formation of cultural identity and belonging among students whose mother tongues lie outside the dominant language pair. Taylor's philosophical emphasis on the dialogical nature of identity and the moral significance of recognition provides the theoretical framework for analyzing how language policy functions as a site of either affirmation or exclusion. The paper further critiques the prevailing instrumentalist logic that equates language education with economic utility, calling attention instead to the deeper human need for cultural rootedness and expressive freedom. Drawing on both philosophical insight and contextual analysis of Philippine educational history, the study envisions a more inclusive language policy; one that actively embraces linguistic plurality as a source of national richness rather than as an administrative challenge. In so doing, it repositions bilingual education as a moral and political commitment to justice, dignity, and the recognition of all cultural narratives within the nation's pedagogical spaces.

Keywords: bilingualism, politics, Taylorian view, policy, language, Philippines

Bilingualism and the politics of recognition: A Taylorian view of cultural identity in Philippine language policy

1. Introduction

The history of language education in the Philippines reflects the complex and often contradictory intersections of colonial legacies, nationalist aspirations, and economic rationalities. From the Spanish colonial period to the American occupation and beyond, language has been used as both a mechanism of domination and a symbol of resistance. The institutionalization of English during the American period dramatically reshaped the linguistic landscape of the archipelago, privileging a foreign tongue in the spheres of education, governance, and social mobility (Bernardo, 2004). Post-independence efforts to assert a national identity led to the establishment of the 1974 Bilingual Education Policy (BEP), mandating the use of Filipino and English as the dual languages of instruction: Filipino for social sciences and civics, and English for mathematics, science, and technical subjects (Gonzalez, 1996).

This framework was reaffirmed in 1987 under Department Order No. 52, which reinforced the role of bilingualism in promoting national development and international competitiveness (Tupas, 2001). The emergence of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy in 2009, formally institutionalized through the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10533), marked a significant shift in educational language planning. It recognized regional and indigenous languages as foundational mediums of instruction in early education (Department of Education [DepEd], 2012). However, while these developments reflect evolving policy priorities, the entrenched linguistic hierarchy—where English remains dominant, Filipino is promoted as the national language, and mother tongues are peripheral—continues to raise unresolved ethical and philosophical questions about the role of language in education and identity formation.

Central to these concerns is the dual function of language in education: as a tool for cognitive development and as a bearer of cultural identity. Despite the institutional recognition of regional languages, prevailing classroom practices often reduce them to transitional tools, useful only until learners are deemed proficient enough in English and Filipino. English, in particular, is perceived as the language of social and economic advancement, while Filipino is valorized as the symbol of national cohesion. This instrumentalist treatment of language, as a means to a utilitarian end rather than an expression of cultural depth, risks marginalizing the very learners the policy aims to include. As Bernardo (2004) observes, English proficiency in the Philippines remains a key determinant of access to higher education and employment, reinforcing social inequalities. Martin (2014) similarly highlights the tension between stated policies of inclusion and the reality of continued linguistic discrimination against non-dominant language speakers. The result is a structurally embedded system where learners whose first language is neither English nor Filipino often face cognitive, psychological, and social disadvantages. They are not only expected to learn content through unfamiliar languages but are also implicitly taught that their own linguistic heritage lacks legitimacy and value in formal education spaces.

This context necessitates a deeper philosophical engagement with the meaning and purpose of bilingual education. While pedagogical, sociolinguistic, and policy-oriented analyses have been critical in evaluating the effectiveness of bilingual and multilingual frameworks (Tupas, 2015), fewer studies have examined the ethical dimensions of how language policies affirm or deny personal and cultural identities. Charles Taylor's (1994) theory of the politics of recognition provides a powerful lens through which to examine these dynamics. According to Taylor, recognition is a vital human need, essential for the development of a coherent sense of self. Identities are not formed in isolation but are shaped dialogically within cultural and linguistic contexts. When institutions fail to acknowledge the linguistic identity of individuals, especially through exclusionary or tokenistic policies, they inflict what Taylor describes as a form of misrecognition that can cause real harm, both

psychologically and socially. In this light, language education becomes more than an academic or policy issue; it becomes a site of moral contestation, where inclusion and exclusion are not merely procedural outcomes but reflections of deeper value commitments.

Applying Taylor's theory to the Philippine case reveals the ethical shortcomings of a bilingual education system that continues to prioritize dominant languages at the expense of linguistic pluralism. While the MTB-MLE policy officially acknowledges the pedagogical and cultural benefits of using the mother tongue, its implementation is often limited by resource constraints, policy inconsistencies, and prevailing biases toward English and Filipino. In practice, many students are subtly discouraged from speaking their first language beyond early grade levels, reinforcing a perception that it is inferior or unsuitable for academic discourse. Such practices mirror what Taylor (1994) critiques as "the monological imposition of identity," wherein the state or dominant culture defines the parameters of legitimacy without engaging in a genuine dialogue with marginalized communities. The consequences are profound: students internalize linguistic shame, lose confidence in their cultural identities, and become alienated from their educational experiences. These outcomes are not incidental but symptomatic of a broader failure to recognize linguistic difference as a legitimate expression of human identity and dignity.

A recognition-based approach to language policy thus demands a radical shift in how educational institutions conceptualize language, identity, and justice. It challenges the technocratic view that language planning is merely a matter of administrative efficiency or global competitiveness. Instead, it repositions language as a moral and political concern, one that speaks to the core of democratic participation and cultural belonging. Rather than viewing linguistic diversity as an obstacle to national unity, policymakers must embrace it as a constitutive element of the Philippine nation itself. This requires going beyond surface-level inclusion to create institutional structures that meaningfully support linguistic plurality across all levels of education. It also entails a rethinking of the role of Filipino as the national language not as a homogenizing force but as a bridge language that coexists with, rather than eclipses, other tongues. In this way, Taylor's notion of dialogical recognition offers both a critique and a constructive alternative: it calls for a model of education where all students can see their linguistic identities reflected and affirmed in the curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional culture.

This philosophical reorientation holds significant implications for both theory and practice. While existing research has provided valuable insights into the historical and political evolution of bilingualism in the Philippines (Tupas, 2001; Gonzalez, 1996), much of it stops short of articulating a normative vision for what language justice might look like. By incorporating Taylor's moral framework, this study contributes to a growing body of work that seeks to align language policy with ethical commitments to dignity, diversity, and democratic inclusion. It foregrounds the lived experiences of students, particularly those from marginalized linguistic communities, whose stories are often lost in technocratic debates over policy implementation and academic performance. In doing so, the study not only enriches the field of philosophy of education but also offers concrete insights for educators, administrators, and policymakers striving to build a more equitable and inclusive educational system. It suggests that recognition—far from being a vague philosophical ideal—is a practical imperative with real consequences for how students learn, grow, and participate in the life of the nation.

Nevertheless, I argue that while the Philippine bilingual education policy has undergone important reforms, it continues to perpetuate a structure of cultural misrecognition by privileging dominant languages and marginalizing the linguistic identities of regional and indigenous communities. Drawing on Charles Taylor's theory of the politics of recognition, the study reexamines language policy not simply as a pedagogical tool, but as a moral and political instrument that shapes the development of identity and the experience of dignity. Any meaningful reform must therefore go beyond the utilitarian logic of bilingualism and embrace a more dialogical, inclusive, and justice-oriented framework. Such a shift would transform the classroom from a site of linguistic hierarchy into a space of cultural affirmation, ethical encounter, and democratic participation of laying the groundwork for a more pluralistic and morally responsive national education system.

2. Theoretical Framework: Charles Taylor's Politics of Recognition

At the heart of Charles Taylor's philosophical project is a fundamental assertion: human identity is not formed in isolation but arises through interaction, affirmation, and mutual understanding within a social and cultural context. This assertion becomes central in his influential essay The Politics of Recognition (1994), where he explores the moral and political consequences of acknowledging, or failing to acknowledge, the cultural identities of others. Taylor argues that recognition is not a mere courtesy extended to individuals or groups; rather, it is a constitutive component of personhood. One's sense of self is shaped dialogically through conversation with others, and through affirmation of the cultural frameworks in which that self is embedded. Thus, when individuals or communities are misrecognized, when their identities are ignored, marginalized, or denigrated, they do not simply suffer an external injustice. They are also denied the basic social conditions necessary for self-realization and dignity (Taylor, 1994).

Taylor's framework pivots on several interrelated concepts: authenticity, dialogical identity, and misrecognition. Authenticity, as he describes it, is not the pursuit of a solitary, self-generated identity, but a process rooted in one's cultural and linguistic milieu. The modern ideal of authenticity, while often misunderstood as inward-looking individualism, is in fact socially mediated. One cannot be true to oneself without a context of mutual recognition and cultural affirmation. In this sense, identity is not chosen arbitrarily; it unfolds within a horizon of values and traditions that are shared and negotiated with others (Taylor, 1994). Dialogical identity, then, becomes a necessary feature of human existence: to develop a coherent self, one must be acknowledged by others who recognize the validity of one's cultural narrative and symbolic universe.

It is precisely in the absence of such recognition that the phenomenon of misrecognition emerges—a condition Taylor considers not merely an epistemic failure but a moral injury. Misrecognition involves more than misunderstanding; it entails denying others the legitimacy of their cultural symbols, languages, and histories. When perpetuated through institutions, such as the state or the education system, misrecognition takes on a systemic form, contributing to what Taylor calls "a grievous form of oppression" (Taylor, 1994, p. 36). In multicultural and postcolonial societies such as the Philippines this philosophical insight bears enormous significance. The privileging of certain languages and cultural norms, often justified through appeals to national unity or global competitiveness, can easily slip into a form of institutionalized misrecognition. When students from linguistic minorities are discouraged from using their mother tongue, or when their language is absent from curriculum and pedagogy, what is denied is not just a means of communication but a fundamental aspect of who they are.

Taylor's political philosophy operates within the broader landscape of liberal-democratic thought but offers a crucial modification to its standard formulation. Classical liberalism, with its emphasis on individual rights and state neutrality, often avoids endorsing particular cultural identities. Taylor challenges this "difference-blind" model, arguing that state neutrality can paradoxically perpetuate inequalities by ignoring the social and historical contexts that shape identity (Taylor, 1994). In multicultural societies, where certain groups have historically dominated the political and cultural space, neutrality is never neutral, it always benefits the already privileged. A just society, therefore, must go beyond procedural fairness to actively support the flourishing of all cultural identities, particularly those that have been historically marginalized. This involves not only legal protections but also symbolic recognition of affirming through policy and public discourse that all identities matter and that they have a rightful place in the common life.

The implications of Taylor's theory for language and education are profound. Language is not simply a technical medium for conveying information; it is one of the deepest markers of identity and a vessel for a community's memory, values, and worldview. To strip a learner of the right to be educated in their mother tongue is, in effect, to deny them access to their own horizon of meaning. Moreover, it communicates a subtle but powerful message: that some languages—and by extension, some cultures—are more legitimate than others. This hierarchization of language mirrors Taylor's concern about "misrecognition becoming a form of

oppression" (1994, p. 36), where learners internalize the inferiority of their own linguistic and cultural background. The politics of language policy thus becomes inseparable from the politics of recognition. It is not enough for multilingualism to be legislated; it must be meaningfully implemented in ways that affirm the linguistic identity of all learners and enable their full participation in both the educational process and the broader civic sphere.

In the Philippine context, Taylor's insights shed light on the persistent marginalization of regional languages despite formal policies that purport to promote linguistic inclusion. The introduction of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy in 2012 by the Department of Education was an attempt to address historical imbalances by recognizing the pedagogical and cultural value of regional tongues in early childhood education (Department of Education, 2012). However, as Martin (2014) notes, deep-seated ideological biases continue to position English as the language of aspiration and power, relegating mother tongues to the realm of the informal or the obsolete. This suggests that recognition, in Taylor's sense, has not yet been realized. The policy shift toward multilingualism remains incomplete unless it is accompanied by a deeper cultural and institutional transformation that treats all languages not as temporary scaffolds but as legitimate vehicles of knowledge, identity, and civic participation.

Taylor's theory of the politics of recognition, therefore, provides a compelling philosophical foundation for rethinking language policy in education. It reframes bilingual and multilingual education not simply as a pedagogical or administrative issue but as a moral question about how we affirm or deny the identities of others. Recognition, authenticity, and dialogical identity are not abstract concepts, rather, they are lived realities with concrete implications for how learners experience the classroom; how they see themselves, and how they envision their place in the nation. For language policies to be truly inclusive and just, they must move beyond the surface-level accommodation of diversity and toward a deeper commitment to cultural and linguistic recognition; one that honors the full humanity of every learner.

3. Colonial Legacies and Linguistic Hierarchies in Philippine Education

The foundations of language policy in the Philippines are inextricably tied to the country's colonial experience, which laid the groundwork for deeply entrenched linguistic hierarchies. Under Spanish rule, while a degree of linguistic pluralism was preserved through the use of vernacular languages in religious catechesis, formal education was reserved for Spanish speakers, creating a linguistic elite. However, it was during the American occupation that language policy was radically restructured. English was institutionalized as the exclusive medium of instruction through Act No. 74 of 1901, positioning it as the language of civilization, reason, and modernity (Bernardo, 2004). The imposition of English was not simply an educational reform; it was a deliberate act of ideological engineering. The colonial state sought to replace native epistemologies with Anglo-American norms and practices, thereby embedding imperial authority in the minds of young Filipinos (Gonzalez, 1996). This linguistic engineering did not merely introduce a foreign language—it actively subordinated local languages and redefined what counted as legitimate knowledge and speech.

This linguistic framework persisted well into the post-independence era. Despite the political shift in 1946, the educational system remained English-centric, a reality that reflects what Tupas (2001) refers to as the "coloniality of language policy." English remained the language of opportunity, governance, and global integration, while the attempt to develop a national language a Filipino, based largely on Tagalog, produced another layer of linguistic centralization. Although constitutionally declared as the national language in 1935 and reinforced in 1987, Filipino did not arise from democratic linguistic consensus but from state-driven policy that elevated one regional language above others (Martin, 2014). Consequently, rather than bridging linguistic diversity, Filipino reinforced Tagalog dominance, relegating non-Tagalog languages to a symbolic or folkloric role. As a result, Filipino and English together formed a binary of national and global linguistic capital, marginalizing regional languages that continued to flourish in households and communities but found little affirmation in formal institutions.

Within the classroom, these policies produced a fragmented linguistic experience for many students. While English was upheld as the language of science, technology, and upward mobility, Filipino was associated with citizenship and cultural identity. Yet both languages excluded the mother tongues of the majority, including Cebuano, Ilocano, Waray, and Hiligaynon, among others. These mother tongues were either ignored altogether or tolerated as informal speech outside of instructional time. This hierarchy created what Lippi-Green (2012) calls a "standard language ideology," where certain languages are treated as inherently superior, while others are stigmatized as unfit for intellectual engagement. This reality fostered what Martin (2014) identifies as a pervasive ideological conflict in schools: the dissonance between the multilingual lives students lived at home and the monolingual expectations of the classroom. For many learners, this meant not only struggling with comprehension but also feeling that their linguistic identity was somehow unworthy of academic or national recognition.

The consequences of this exclusion are not merely educational; they are ethical. Drawing from Taylor's (1994) theory of the politics of recognition, we can understand this linguistic marginalization as a form of misrecognition that undermines both individual identity and collective dignity. For Taylor, recognition is a fundamental human need, and when individuals or communities are denied acknowledgment of their cultural and linguistic particularities, they suffer harm that is more than symbolic. In the Philippine context, language policy that privileges English and Filipino while tokenizing other languages institutionalizes this misrecognition. It sends a message to learners that their home language and by extension, their familial histories and cultural perspectives, is not worthy of public legitimacy. In the words of Tupas (2015), this is not simply a pedagogical misstep but a continuation of coloniality, where systems of exclusion are perpetuated under new forms.

Recent developments in policy, such as the Department of Education's (2012) implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), aim to address these historical injustices. The MTB-MLE policy mandates the use of regional languages in Kindergarten through Grade 3, based on the premise that learners acquire foundational skills more effectively in their first language. However, as Galang and Tupas (2022) note, implementation has been uneven and often symbolic. Many teachers lack formal training in the assigned regional language, textbooks are limited or nonexistent, and social prejudices persist against the use of mother tongues in academic settings. This situation illustrates a broader issue flagged by Gonzalez (1996): policy without political will and cultural transformation results in superficial change. Although MTB-MLE reflects a significant philosophical shift, it often fails to translate into meaningful classroom practice. The result is that mother tongues remain at the margins, reaffirming a hierarchy that privileges English as global capital and Filipino as national identity, while offering regional languages a brief and conditional space.

This enduring hierarchy cannot be dismantled without an honest reckoning with its colonial and postcolonial origins. It is not enough to symbolically include regional languages in early education if their value is not affirmed throughout the educational continuum and in society at large. Language, as Taylor (1994) reminds us, is constitutive of identity; it is the medium through which individuals articulate who they are and how they belong. Therefore, recognition must be more than representational; it must be structural. This means investing in mother tongue education beyond Grade 3, developing curricular materials in multiple languages, and most importantly, shifting societal attitudes that equate linguistic diversity with backwardness. Until these changes occur, the Philippines will continue to carry the burden of a colonial linguistic legacy that denies many of its citizens the full affirmation of their cultural identities.

4. Bilingualism, Economic Rationality, and Neoliberal Logic

The persistence of English as a dominant language in Philippine education cannot be explained solely through historical analysis; its modern resurgence is deeply entangled with contemporary economic rationalities and global neoliberal ideology. English proficiency has become synonymous with professional success, international mobility, and cultural capital, especially in the context of labor export policies and the booming business process outsourcing (BPO) industry. Bernardo (2004) identifies how English, once imposed through

colonial rule, is now widely accepted as a "neutral" vehicle for economic integration. However, this neutrality is illusory. English's continued dominance in the Philippines reflects a broader economic discourse in which language is no longer valued for cultural or communicative richness but for its market utility—its ability to generate income, facilitate outsourcing, and train a globally mobile labor force.

This instrumentalization of language is a hallmark of neoliberalism, which reframes education as a tool to produce efficient, employable individuals in service of the global economy (Apple, 2001; Block et al., 2012). In this framework, bilingual education is promoted not as a means of fostering inclusion or affirming identity, but as a method of enhancing human capital. Learners are groomed to master English not to engage with diverse ideas or preserve heritage, but to compete in global markets. Block et al. (2012) argue that neoliberalism imposes a business logic upon language education—where linguistic proficiency is measured through standardized testing, and where "worthwhile" languages are determined by their perceived economic return. Filipino, while celebrated in state discourse as the national language, lacks the same economic cachet. Regional languages, meanwhile, are often ignored, trivialized, or viewed as obstacles to advancement.

Within Philippine classrooms, the effects of this ideology are palpable. Instructional time is often geared toward preparing students for English-medium assessments, even in early grades, despite the existence of the MTB-MLE policy that mandates the use of mother tongues until Grade 3 (Department of Education, 2012). Martin (2014) observes that many educators, particularly in urban or elite settings, resist implementing the MTB-MLE policy fully, perceiving English as more prestigious and more practical for their students' future careers. As a result, regional languages are used inconsistently, and students internalize the message that success is best achieved through linguistic assimilation. Flores and Rosa (2015) label this process as guided by "raciolinguistic ideologies," where nonstandard accents or vernacular speech forms are pathologized, even when expressed in English. Learners are not merely expected to use English—they must embody a particular "ideal speaker" imagined through colonial and racialized norms.

This form of linguistic gatekeeping exacerbates educational inequalities. Learners from marginalized communities often lack access to the linguistic capital that more privileged students acquire at home, through private schooling, or through early exposure to English media. As Galang and Tupas (2022) point out, the classroom becomes a space of surveillance and silence, where learners feel compelled to abandon their mother tongues to conform to expectations of linguistic appropriateness. Yet even when they speak English, they are often deemed deficient due to accent, vocabulary, or cultural framing. The result is a pedagogy of exclusion, where the language of instruction alienates learners from their identities, their communities, and sometimes even their own voice. These dynamics undermine not only academic engagement but also emotional well-being and social participation.

Taylor's (1994) concept of recognition helps elucidate the deeper ethical stakes of such a system. In a neoliberal framework where value is measured by productivity, only those linguistic identities that align with dominant norms are "seen" or legitimized. Taylor insists that recognition is not a luxury but a fundamental human need, one rooted in mutual affirmation and respect for difference. When learners are only affirmed insofar as they approximate English fluency, they are misrecognized; their full selves are reduced to marketable traits. This produces a disjuncture between the learner's internal sense of self and the identity validated by institutions. In such a setting, bilingualism becomes a form of assimilation rather than a site of plurality and dialogue. Recognition, in this sense, must go beyond technical inclusion and confront the systemic devaluation of languages deemed economically useless or culturally inferior.

To resist the reductive economic framing of bilingualism, educators and policymakers must reframe language policy as a commitment to justice and democratic participation. This would require de-centering English as the default language of progress and acknowledging the epistemic value of all Philippine languages. Tupas (2015) suggests that multilingual education must be reclaimed as a project of social equity, not merely pedagogical efficiency. He emphasizes the need to interrogate the structural forces that produce linguistic

inequality; forces that are often embedded in teacher education, textbook development, national assessments, and the broader culture of schooling. Ultimately, resisting the neoliberalization of language policy entails embracing a multilingual paradigm not as a compromise but as a vision of what it means to affirm the dignity, identity, and voice of every learner in the archipelago.

5. Dialogical Identity and the Classroom

The classroom, often imagined as a neutral site of learning, is in fact a space where identities are shaped, challenged, and either affirmed or suppressed. For Charles Taylor (1994), identity is dialogical; it arises in and through our interactions with others, in contexts where we are either recognized or misrecognized. This insight is crucial when applied to language education, where the medium of instruction is not simply a conduit for knowledge transmission but a vehicle for forming self-understanding. Language carries within it not only the lexicon of a people but their stories, their metaphors, and their memories. To speak in one's language, especially in the formative years of education, is to be seen and heard in a manner that validates one's place in the world. When that language is silenced or devalued in the classroom, it is not merely a pedagogical inconvenience, it is a form of ontological denial.

In the Philippine context, this tension is particularly acute. The implementation of the Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) policy in 2012 acknowledged the cognitive and cultural importance of learners' first languages. It promised to transform early childhood education by anchoring it in the linguistic realities of Filipino children (Department of Education, 2012). However, the policy's rollout has faced numerous challenges, from inadequate teacher training and lack of localized materials to deep-seated social biases against regional languages. As Martin (2014) has noted, many teachers view English and Filipino as "better" languages, more aligned with progress and academic seriousness. This perception inevitably affects classroom practices, where students may be formally taught in their mother tongue but subtly encouraged to aspire to proficiency in English or Filipino. The result is a conflicted linguistic environment, where recognition is partial, conditional, and often performative.

In such environments, students may experience what Galang and Tupas (2022) term a "pedagogy of silence"—a classroom culture in which learners internalize the marginal status of their mother tongue and gradually retreat from expressing themselves fully. This is not simply a question of language mismatch; it is a question of identity safety. Learners who feel that their home language is unwelcome or inferior may also feel that their cultural background is inappropriate for academic engagement. This has implications far beyond immediate academic performance. When students do not see their identities reflected in the classroom, they are less likely to participate, to ask questions, or to take intellectual risks. This diminished engagement is a silent but powerful consequence of misrecognition, students learn to speak less because they have learned that their way of speaking is less valued.

The concept of dialogical identity calls for a rethinking of the teacher's role not merely as a content provider but as a mediator of recognition. Teachers shape the ethical climate of the classroom by determining which voices are amplified and which are minimized. Apple (2001) argues that classrooms are not apolitical; they are structured by broader ideologies that seep into lesson planning, discipline practices, and language expectations. In a neoliberal system, these ideologies often prioritize English as the language of performance and global competitiveness, leaving little space for other linguistic registers. Block, Gray, and Holborow (2012) emphasize that language choices are never neutral in such systems, they reproduce hierarchies and communicate to students who belongs and who does not. The dialogical model, in contrast, would require teachers to engage students in their linguistic and cultural specificity, fostering a space where recognition is not contingent on assimilation.

Moreover, recognition in the classroom must be more than symbolic. It must involve structural and curricular changes that reflect the lived linguistic realities of students. This includes the integration of local literature, histories, and oral traditions into the curriculum, as well as assessments that allow students to

demonstrate understanding in their mother tongue. It also calls for a reorientation of teacher education. As Flores and Rosa (2015) argue, the very idea of "appropriate" language use must be challenged, since it often reflects raciolinguistic ideologies that pathologize non-dominant speech patterns. In the Philippine context, this means resisting the tendency to view English proficiency as synonymous with intelligence or civic virtue. Instead, teachers and policymakers must affirm multilingual competence as a legitimate and powerful form of knowing. Recognition, in this sense, is not a passive tolerance of difference but an active reshaping of educational norms and expectations.

Ultimately, a dialogical classroom is one in which students are not merely accommodated but affirmed. Such affirmation enables them to speak from where they are—linguistically, culturally, and intellectually—without fear of correction or exclusion. Taylor (1994) reminds us that identity is always vulnerable to the judgments of others. In the classroom, this vulnerability is magnified. Every correction, every curriculum choice, every language policy sends a message about who belongs and who does not. A just education system, therefore, must take seriously its role in either reinforcing or dismantling these hierarchies. The classroom, far from being a passive vessel for information transfer, is a battleground for recognition—a place where the nation is rehearsed, contested, and possibly reimagined through the everyday acts of speaking, listening, and being heard.

6. Proposing a Taylorian Model of Language Policy

Language is more than a tool of communication; it is a vessel of identity, memory, and belonging. In multilingual societies like the Philippines, language policy is never neutral; it either affirms or denies the dignity of its citizens. Current bilingual education in the Philippines, despite reforms like MTB-MLE, continues to operate within frameworks shaped by colonial legacy and neoliberal efficiency. Charles Taylor's (1994) theory of recognition provides a compelling philosophical lens through which to reframe these policies. He argues that identity is dialogically formed, meaning individuals become who they are through recognition by others. Denying recognition—especially in the form of linguistic exclusion—is not a benign oversight; it is a form of injustice that undermines self-worth and limits one's participation in society.

Recognition, in Taylor's model, must be both interpersonal and institutional. It is not enough for individuals to accept each other's differences; institutions must actively affirm them. In language policy, this means more than allowing mother tongues in classrooms—it entails creating structures that validate those languages across curricula, assessment, governance, and teacher formation. In this context, bilingualism or multilingualism should not be seen as a transitional phase toward English fluency, but as a lasting, pluralistic framework that acknowledges the diverse linguistic realities of Filipino learners. Flores and Rosa (2015) remind us that language hierarchies are often naturalized through what they call "raciolinguistic ideologies," in which certain ways of speaking, typically closer to white, Western norms—are considered more legitimate. A Taylorian model would reject such ideologies and call for an educational culture grounded in ethical pluralism.

To articulate this vision, this paper introduces the Recognition Circle Model, a conceptual and visual framework that places learners' linguistic identities at the heart of policy and practice. The model is structured as three concentric circles. At its center lies the Mother Tongue and Identity, emphasizing the learner's foundational relationship to their language and community. Surrounding this is the ring of Institutional Affirmation, representing curricula, teacher practices, and education policies that sustain and legitimize the learner's language in formal settings. The outermost circle, Dialogical Structures, reflects the role of community partnerships, inclusive policymaking, and local governance in maintaining linguistic diversity as a shared social value. Each layer reinforces the others; recognition must flow from the individual outward to institutions and back through participatory dialogue.

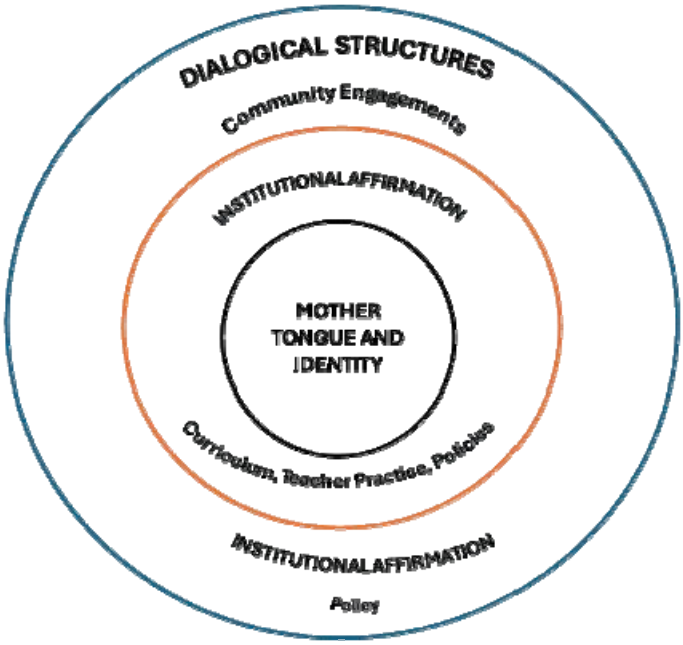

Figure 1. Recognition Circle Model: A Taylorian Framework for Linguistic Justice in Language Policy. The model visualizes a learner-centered approach rooted in identity, affirmed institutionally, and reinforced through dialogical engagement with communities.

The first layer, Mother Tongue and Identity is where recognition begins. Language is the medium through which children first experience the world. It carries ancestral knowledge, spirituality, humor, and ways of being that are irreducible to other tongues. For many Filipino learners, the mother tongue is not simply a "home language", it is the language of emotion, kinship, and moral formation. To silence this language in formal education, or treat it as a temporary scaffolding, is to communicate that the learner's primary identity is unsuited for academic spaces. As Taylor (1994) notes, denying the public legitimacy of someone's identity is a form of harm with long-term psychosocial consequences. Recognition at this level, then, is foundational to all other educational outcomes.

The second layer, Institutional Affirmation, focuses on how schools, curricula, and teacher practices operationalize recognition. While the Department of Education (2012) has taken steps through MTB-MLE to mandate mother tongue instruction in early grades, its implementation remains partial and inconsistent. Martin (2014) notes that many educators resist the policy due to deep-seated biases or lack of training, often reverting to English or Filipino even when not pedagogically appropriate. In a Taylorian model, institutions must move beyond compliance to conviction: they must develop curriculum materials rooted in local knowledge, assess students in their own languages, and restructure teacher education to include linguistic pluralism as a core competency. Institutional recognition cannot be symbolic; it must be embedded in the daily practices of the school.

The outermost layer, the Dialogical Structures, recognizes that language recognition cannot be imposed from above. It must be co-produced with communities who are the bearers and transmitters of local languages. This includes involving elders, local historians, Indigenous leaders, and cultural workers in curricular design, school governance, and textbook production. Hornberger and Johnson (2007) argue that language policy becomes meaningful when it emerges from what they term "ethnographic layering," or the intersection of top-down policy and bottom-up cultural practice. In this way, recognition is not only distributed across time and institutions but co-authored by those most affected by it. Language justice, then, becomes a civic project that

fosters solidarity, not just access.

The Recognition Circle Model also challenges dominant forms of assessment. High-stakes testing in English or Filipino creates what Apple (2001) refers to as an "audit culture," in which education is driven by what can be easily measured, often at the expense of what truly matters. Standardized tests disproportionately disadvantage learners from non-dominant linguistic backgrounds, whose cognitive and cultural capital are often invisible to such assessments. A recognition-based policy would prioritize assessments that reflect linguistic diversity and multiple forms of intelligence—narrative-based portfolios, community presentations, and multilingual performance tasks. These methods not only affirm the learner's language but also reflect more authentic understandings of competence and contribution.

Additionally, the Taylorian model insists on political accountability. Recognition is not charity; it is a right. The state has an obligation to fund, implement, and evaluate language programs that serve marginalized linguistic communities. As Tupas (2015) contends, language inequality in the Philippines persists not due to lack of policy but due to a lack of political will. A recognition-based model would require localized budgets, protected time for community consultation, and equity metrics to track inclusion across linguistic groups. Galang and Tupas (2022) further emphasize that policy alone is insufficient without cultural change: it must be accompanied by shifts in attitudes, practices, and discourses that stigmatize local languages as backward or unworthy of academic engagement.

What sets the Recognition Circle Model apart is that it invites a radical rethinking of educational purpose. It asks not only what languages we teach in, but what values we affirm in doing so. Language policy becomes a space where democracy is enacted not merely through voting or legislation, but through daily classroom interactions, curricular decisions, and institutional priorities. A school that recognizes its students' languages recognizes their personhood. This is the crux of Taylor's (1994) claim: that recognition is constitutive of identity, and that its denial is a form of cultural injury. A multilingual education that upholds dignity, fosters mutual respect, and shares narrative space with all Filipinos is not simply preferable; it is a moral necessity.

It is in this regard that the Taylorian model, conceptualized through the Recognition Circle, offers a comprehensive and justice-oriented framework for Philippine language policy. It responds to the failures of colonial hierarchy, neoliberal efficiency, and nationalist uniformity by rooting policy in dialogical identity, institutional affirmation, and participatory democracy. While the road to implementation is complex, the moral clarity of the model offers a direction for reform that honors the nation's linguistic heritage and the dignity of its most vulnerable learners. Through this model, recognition becomes not only a philosophical ideal but a practical strategy for building a more humane and inclusive educational future.

7. Conclusion

This study began with a central claim: that the Philippine bilingual education policy particularly as implemented in the 1974, 1987, and 2012 language reforms, must be examined not only as a pedagogical or political tool, but as a moral issue concerning identity, justice, and recognition. Drawing on Charles Taylor's (1994) philosophical framework, we argued that language is not merely a medium for instruction, but a formative site of identity construction. The politics of recognition thus provides a robust theoretical lens to critique the unequal linguistic landscape of Philippine education, where English and Filipino remain dominant while regional and indigenous languages continue to be marginalized, often invisibly. The denial of linguistic recognition, as Taylor posits, is a form of cultural misrecognition that threatens not just educational access, but the very selfhood and dignity of learners.

This ethical insight brings into sharp relief the limitations of prevailing policy models. While the Department of Education's MTB-MLE program (DepEd, 2012) made strides toward acknowledging the pedagogical value of mother tongue instruction, its fragmented implementation, lack of community engagement, and failure to institutionalize deep cultural affirmation have constrained its transformative potential. As scholars

such as Tupas (2015), Martin (2014), and Galang and Tupas (2022) have shown, these policies often coexist with persistent language ideologies that associate English with intelligence and progress, and local languages with backwardness or marginality. Such ideologies are further reinforced by neoliberal logics of competitiveness and standardization (Block, Gray, & Holborow, 2012; Apple, 2001), which reframe language not as a right, but as a commodity. The result is a system where recognition is uneven, conditional, and ultimately exclusionary.

The Taylorian model of language policy presented in this paper, summarized visually in the Recognition Circle Model, offers a holistic, justice-oriented alternative. By centering mother tongue and identity, embedding institutional affirmation, and cultivating dialogical structures with local communities, this model imagines language education as a moral project grounded in plurality and dignity. It calls for a reconstitution of the classroom, the curriculum, and the policymaking process as spaces where learners are seen, heard, and empowered to express themselves through the language most intimately tied to their being. Recognition, in this sense, becomes not a supplement to technical reform but the very foundation of an inclusive educational paradigm.

The implications of such a model for Philippine education are profound. It challenges the nation to confront the lingering shadows of colonialism and the flattening force of economic globalization. It demands that educational justice be rooted not only in access to schools or textbooks, but in the cultural and linguistic validation of every Filipino child. This entails revising teacher education programs to include linguistic sensitivity, reforming national assessments to be multilingual and culturally grounded, and redesigning curricula that honor rather than erase local epistemologies. It also requires sustained political commitment to community consultation, budget allocations, and equity monitoring. In short, the Taylorian approach reframes education policy as a dialogical and participatory ethical process, not a technocratic imposition. Furthermore, this model intersects with broader national questions about identity and sovereignty. A nation that silences its linguistic plurality risks eroding the very fabric of its democratic life. The recognition of all languages—spoken not just in classrooms but in streets, homes, rituals, and dreams—is also the recognition of the people who speak them. The preservation and affirmation of linguistic diversity is thus not a nostalgic gesture, but a forward-looking commitment to equity and belonging. As Flores and Rosa (2015) assert, resisting dominant raciolinguistic ideologies is key to building truly emancipatory learning environments. In the Philippine case, it is also essential for national coherence that respects difference without flattening it.

In light of this, recognition must be understood not as a concession offered by those in power, but as a moral obligation embedded in the very structure of democratic life. Language education, when approached through Taylor's philosophy, ceases to be merely a battleground of scripts and standards; it becomes a site of encounter, solidarity, and human flourishing. The question, then, is not whether we can afford to recognize linguistic diversity, but whether we can afford not to—given its central role in shaping not only individual identity, but the future of the nation itself. Furthermore, a Taylorian-informed language policy offers a compelling vision for a more just, pluralistic, and dialogical Philippine education system. It challenges us to rethink not only the languages we teach in, but the values we teach for. It reminds us that to recognize someone's language is to recognize their humanity, their dignity, and their rightful place in the story of the nation. This is the promise and the moral imperative of a language policy built not on domination or utility, but on mutual respect and recognition.

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International Journal of Research Studies in Education

Consortia Academia: A partner of Network of Professional Researchers and Educators (NPRE)
Barangay Concepcion, Malabon City, Metro Manila, Philippines

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ISSN: 2243-7703

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