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The Implementation of Bilingual Class: An Overview (A Descriptive Study at One of International School in Serang, Banten)

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Abstract. This paper explores the implementation of bilingual education at a national plus bilingual school in Serang, which integrates English instruction with the Montessori method for early childhood and primary levels. A qualitative case study involving an in-depth semi-structured interview with the school principal was conducted. Sociolinguistic frameworks including diglossia, language choice, code-switching, and translanguaging were applied to evaluate how language policy, cognitive demands, and social identity shape daily school interactions through thematic analysis. The results revealed three key dynamics in the school bilingual environment: 1) the establishment of a diglossic pattern where English operates as the dominant language in formal domains, while Indonesian is maintained for social solidarity in informal settings; 2) the high cognitive load experienced by learners when dual language demands trigger mental translation and hinder content comprehension; and 3) the strategic deployment of code-switching and translanguaging as pedagogical tools, integrated with Montessori frameworks, to scaffold learning and mitigate these cognitive barriers. These findings demonstrate the complexity of early bilingual education, suggesting that successful implementation requires flexible pedagogical strategies that prioritize student conceptual comprehension over rigid monolingual rules. This study contributes to the field of sociolinguistics by highlighting the necessity of adaptable academic environments and strong parental involvement at home to create a balanced linguistic ecosystem.

Keywords: bilingualism; code-switching; diglossia; montessori; sociolinguistics

RESEARCH BACKGROUND

The expansion of bilingual education in Indonesia has been driven by the growing need for English proficiency in both education and the workplace, reflecting global trends where English functions as a key linguistic resource in access to knowledge and economic opportunity (Lamb et al., 2019). In this context, bilingual schools must manage two linguistic systems in ways that support academic achievement while maintaining conceptual understanding and the development of the first language, in line with Cummins' (1979) interdependence and threshold hypotheses which stress that strong L1 skills underpin successful L2 learning and cognitive growth. Sociolinguistics offers a useful framework for examining how language operates in such educational settings, particularly through concepts such as language choice, diglossia, code switching, language maintenance, and translanguaging, as outlined by Holmes and Wilson (2022) in their discussion of domains and code choice, and by García and Wei (2014) who conceptualize translanguaging as the pedagogically productive use of learners' full linguistic repertoires.

The school is a national plus bilingual school in Serang that uses English as the everyday language at school and implements the Montessori method at the early childhood and kindergarten levels. In the context of such a multilingual environment, Holmes and Wilson (2022) explain that language choice is shaped by social domains, so the participants, setting, and topic influence which variety is selected and which functions and levels of formality are attached to it, helping to explain why one language is typically reserved for formal instruction while another is preferred in informal interaction. This study analyzes how bilingual education is implemented at The school and how language policy, cognitive demands, and social identity shape the bilingual development of students who use both Indonesian and English in daily school life, guided by ten limitation questions on daily language use, student adaptation, challenges in using English, the role of Montessori methods, cognitive and social effects of bilingualism, classroom management, teacher support in language transition, adaptation to the bilingual curriculum, academic impact, and family and parental support, all of which are conceptually connected to theories of language choice, code switching, diglossia, translanguaging, and cognitive and social bilingualism.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Bilingual education can be viewed not only as a linguistic practice but also as a social and cognitive process situated within multilingual communities. Holmes and Wilson (2022) emphasize that bilingual and multilingual speakers select among available codes depending on setting, participants, and topic, and that such choices are closely linked to social identity, power, and solidarity. In educational contexts, these choices appear in how teachers and students alternate between languages across classroom activities, subjects, and informal interactions. Research on diglossia and bilingualism in Indonesia shows that different language varieties for example, a high language for instruction and a low language for daily communication can coexist and be managed productively in schools when the functions of each variety are clearly defined and pedagogically supported.

Ferguson's classic notion of diglossia describes situations in which a high variety is reserved for formal domains such as education, government, and religion, while a low variety is used in everyday interaction (Ferguson, 1959). Building on this, Holmes and Wilson (2022) and subsequent Indonesian studies point out that diglossic patterns in education can both enrich students' linguistic repertoires and create challenges if the gap between high and low varieties is not carefully bridged. In Indonesian school contexts, the use of Indonesian or English as a high variety alongside local or informal varieties as low varieties must therefore be supported by clear language policies, scaffolding strategies, and consistent classroom practices.

Holmes and Wilson (2022) also discuss code switching as a common practice in multilingual communities, where speakers alternate between codes to signal topic shifts, social distance, or group membership. In educational settings, code switching can function as a strategy to clarify meaning, ease cognitive load, and maintain classroom solidarity, rather than being viewed as a deficiency. Recent discussions in sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, particularly by García and Wei (2014), highlight translanguaging as the flexible use of a speaker's full linguistic repertoire to construct meaning, which can be particularly relevant in bilingual classrooms that integrate content and language learning. Translanguaging perspectives move beyond seeing languages as strictly separated systems and instead focus on how bilingual learners draw on all their linguistic resources to participate in classroom interaction and make sense of academic content.

Studies on bilingual education and Montessori or national plus contexts in Indonesia indicate that combining bilingual instruction, student-centered methods, and translanguaging practices can support both language development and conceptual understanding, while also presenting challenges related to policy constraints, teacher preparation, and varying student language backgrounds. Within this broader field, the present study uses Holmes and Wilson's (2022) sociolinguistic framework of language choice in multilingual communities, diglossia, code switching, and language maintenance as the grand theory for understanding how English and Indonesian are used and managed in the bilingual context of the school.

> Quotation that consists of more than three lines uses Times New Roman font type, 12 pt, single space. Quotation in languages other than English is written in *italic* and should be provided with the translation. (Jones, 2021, p.77) **(Quote Style)**

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative inquiry approach with a case study design to explore the implementation of bilingual education at one of school in Serang, Banten. The case is bounded by one institution that applies a bilingual curriculum (Indonesian and English) and uses the Montessori method at the early childhood and kindergarten levels and bilingual instruction at the primary level. Such a case study design is appropriate for an in-depth examination of language policy, classroom practices, and the perceived impacts of bilingualism within a specific school.

Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with the school principal, who is responsible for curriculum design, language policy, and pedagogical implementation. The interview guide was constructed based on ten conceptual areas that serve as the limitations of the study. The questions were used to guide the conversation rather than as a rigid questionnaire, allowing the principal to provide narrative accounts and examples. Follow-up questions were added to clarify and deepen the principal's descriptions of language use, student reactions, and parental feedback.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase model: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a flexible yet rigorous method for identifying and reporting patterns of meaning within qualitative data, moving from descriptive coding to more interpretive thematic accounts. Interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and read repeatedly to identify codes related to language policy, language choice, code switching, translanguaging, cognitive load, social identity, and parental roles.

Codes were then grouped into broader themes through a process of looking for connections, overlaps, and contrasts among coded segments. These themes were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure that they were coherent, distinctive, and well supported by the data. Finally, themes were defined and named in ways that captured their core meaning and were interpreted using Holmes and Wilson's (2022) sociolinguistic theory of language choice, diglossia, and code switching, as well as the literature on bilingual and Montessori-based education. This process ensured that the findings remained grounded in the interview data while being connected to relevant theoretical concepts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings, organized into themes that capture key patterns in language management, cognitive processes, and social identity within the bilingual environment of The school, and integrated with sociolinguistic analysis.

Table 1. Bilingual Education and Implications at the school

Statement	Implication	Example of Quotes
English as everyday school language	English for formal learning, Indonesian maintained in informal talk	"The form is indeed encouragement for the children, like teachers are required to speak in English..."
Student challenges adapting to bilingual learning	New students feel overwhelmed; frequent mental translation needed	"It turns out one year is not enough. There are children who still cry facing math problems, not because they don't understand, but more because of the language. They have to translate first."
Montessori influence on bilingual development	Oral, activity-based learning supports natural English acquisition	"In Montessori, there are developmental stages... The body first, they can walk properly. Good gross and fine motor skills, then later they can achieve academic independence."
Cognitive and social effects of bilingualism	Dual languages shape thinking and identities; can overload some	Cognitive: "He said, English is more logical for him than Indonesian. According to him, yes. He said it's complicated, he said, Indonesian is..."Social: "We encourage them to chat using English... but mostly they still chat using Indonesian."
Classroom management for both languages	Teachers enforce English but allow Indonesian for clarification	"Especially for teachers, for example, homeroom teachers are required [to speak English]... So usually we simplify the content, the words, for example, adjusting the diction."

Teacher support for language transition	Teachers scaffold with code switching and emotional support	"Usually we focus on one language first, Indonesian first, their mother tongue first, because we believe that if their understanding of their mother tongue is already good..."
School response to curriculum adaptation	School relaxes strict English, adjusts to student readiness	"Finally, it went down again in fourth grade. It's in Indonesian, for example. FPB and KPK (Greatest Common Divisor and Least Common Multiple) don't exist in that language [English curriculum]."
English impact on academic achievement	English aids long-term access but can hinder understanding	"Well, that will automatically affect their achievement in IPAS (Science and Social Studies) because their English is not yet capable. So usually we look for a solution, we try our best not to translate it into Indonesian."
Role of social environment and family	Home uses Indonesian; supports identity, complements school English	"At home, it is very helpful. If the English exposure is good, when they come to us it's more like sharpening it.""But children nowadays are indeed helped... because in games they also converse in English."
Parents' perceptions of English curriculum	Parents value English yet want strong Indonesian at home	"The child said, 'Mommy... maybe the parents, with their abilities, want to hear [them speak English].... But eventually, they don't want to. 'Mommy, I am Javanese, my pronunciation is also wrong,' they said."

The table shows that The school's bilingual policy positions English as the main language of formal learning while allowing Indonesian to remain the everyday language of informal interaction, so

students' first language is maintained alongside growing English confidence. Students, especially newcomers, initially struggle with bilingual learning because content delivered in English demands constant mental translation, which can be emotionally and cognitively overwhelming. Montessoribased, activityrich classrooms help children acquire English orally in a natural way, but the dual demands of language and content still risk overloading some learners, shaping both their thinking and their emerging identities. In response, teachers manage classrooms by enforcing English as the default instructional code while strategically using Indonesian for clarification and emotional support, effectively using code switching as scaffolding. The school itself has softened a strictly Englishonly stance and now adjusts its bilingual curriculum to student readiness, recognizing that English can open longterm academic access yet may temporarily hinder understanding of subjects like Mathematics. Outside school, families typically use Indonesian, which sustains children's cultural identity and complements schoolbased English, while parents generally value English in the curriculum but also insist that their children maintain strong Indonesian at home.

Oral Priority and Language Management

The school adopts a policy that emphasizes oral communication in English during the early stages of schooling to build students' confidence before moving toward literacy skills. The principal explains that teachers prioritize speaking and listening activities in English so that children become comfortable and confident, while reading and writing are introduced later when students already feel secure in using English orally. This is expressed in the following statement:

> "We prioritize spoken English first. The goal is for children to be brave enough to speak and be confident. Reading or writing comes later. If they are comfortable, the rest is easier."

This policy reflects deliberate language management at the institutional level, where the school shapes the linguistic environment by designating English as the expected code in classroom instruction and structured school activities. In Holmes and Wilson's (2022) terms, the school constructs an English-dominant domain for formal learning, in which English functions as the high variety associated with schooling, academic tasks, and teacher student interaction, while Indonesian tends to operate as the low variety in informal spaces. By establishing this diglossic pattern, the school narrows the social distance between students and English and provides frequent opportunities for exposure and practice in meaningful contexts. At the same time, Indonesian remains available as a familiar resource, which supports language maintenance and allows students to navigate between languages as needed in less formal interactions.

This finding is directly related to the limitation questions on how English as an everyday school language affects students' language abilities, how teachers manage bilingual classes, and how the school handles student adaptation to the bilingual curriculum. It shows that language management decisions at the policy level shape the conditions under which students develop their bilingual skills.

Cognitive Load and Code Switching

The use of English as a medium of instruction in content subjects such as Mathematics creates notable cognitive challenges for students, particularly for those who are new to the school or who have limited prior exposure to English. The principal reports that some students feel overwhelmed or even cry

because they do not fully understand the questions presented in English and must mentally switch to Indonesian to make sense of them:

> "Students, especially new entrants, often cry because they don't understand the questions. They have to perform a 'language switch' in their heads… This process hinders their grasp of the math concepts themselves."

This account illustrates how cognitive load increases when students are required to process both language and content simultaneously. Cummins (1979) suggests through his threshold and interdependence hypotheses that bilingual learners need sufficient proficiency in both languages to avoid cognitive disadvantages and to benefit from bilingualism academically. When learners lack this threshold, tasks that demand simultaneous processing of language and content can overload their cognitive resources. Instead of using code switching flexibly as a communicative strategy, students in this situation are forced into constant mental translation, which divides their cognitive resources between decoding English and understanding the underlying concepts. From a sociolinguistic perspective, this reflects a tension between immersion and conceptual grasp: the desire to maintain an English-medium classroom on one hand, and the need to secure understanding through Indonesian on the other.

In response to these challenges, the school has adjusted its curriculum and classroom practices by allowing more strategic use of Indonesian to clarify key concepts while still retaining English as the main language of instruction. This adjustment can be understood as a pragmatic application of language choice in a multilingual domain, where the teacher deliberately alternates codes to reduce cognitive burden. Studies of Indonesian EFL classrooms show that teachers who use code switching strategically can help students understand complex content, maintain classroom management, and build solidarity, especially when learners are still developing their English proficiency. Rather than abandoning English, the school reframes code switching and translanguaging as pedagogical tools that support comprehension, enabling students to mobilize their full linguistic repertoire to access content. García and Wei (2014), for instance, argue that translanguaging allows learners to use all their linguistic resources to make meaning, rather than being constrained by rigid language boundaries.

This theme links directly to the limitation questions concerning challenges in bilingual learning at different levels, the impact of English on academic achievement, and the role of teachers in supporting students who struggle with language transitions. It suggests that careful management of code switching and translanguaging is essential to balance language learning goals with cognitive load in bilingual classrooms.

Social Solidarity and Language Identity

Despite the school's emphasis on English in formal teaching and learning, the findings indicate that social identity and peer relationships strongly influence language use outside the classroom. The principal notes that while students generally follow the expectation to use English in lessons, they tend to shift back to Indonesian during breaks, playtime, and informal conversations with friends:

> "In class, they might use English, but during breaks or playing with peers, they automatically revert to Indonesian. It's their 'language of solidarity'."

This pattern highlights Indonesian's role as the language that indexes intimacy, common background, and in-group membership among students. Drawing on Holmes and Wilson's (2022) framework, this can be interpreted as an example of how speakers in multilingual communities choose different codes across domains, with one variety used for formal, institutional purposes and another selected to express solidarity and closeness. In the school context, English is associated with institutional authority, assessment, and academic identity, whereas Indonesian is associated with friendship, comfort, and emotional security.

Research on bilingual identities supports this interpretation. Yoon (2020), for example, shows that bilingual students' language and literacy development is closely tied to the ways they perform social identities in school, and that language choices signal alignment with particular groups and values. Similarly, studies of diglossia in Indonesian settings suggest that the low variety (in this case, Indonesian in peer interaction) often functions as a language of solidarity, even when another language holds higher prestige in formal domains.

Students thus actively negotiate their own linguistic domains within the broader bilingual policy. While the school sets the formal domain where English is dominant, students exercise agency in informal domains by choosing Indonesian as the language that best represents their shared identity. This dynamic shows that bilingual education is not only a matter of policy and pedagogy, but also a process of ongoing identity work, where students balance the demands of learning in a second language with the need to maintain social bonds and affirm their sense of belonging. This theme connects to the limitation questions on cognitive and social effects of bilingualism, the influence of the social environment outside school, and parental perceptions of English. It indicates that bilingualism at the school involves both cognitive and social dimensions, with Indonesian playing a central role in maintaining social cohesion and identity, even as English gains prominence in formal schooling.

Pedagogical Strategies and Family Role

The findings indicate that The school employs flexible pedagogical strategies to balance its English dominant policy with students' varying language backgrounds. Teachers prioritize English for instruction but deliberately use Indonesian to scaffold understanding of key concepts, manage classroom behavior, and reduce anxiety, a practice that reflects Holmes and Wilson's (2022) view of code switching as a resource for marking relationships and managing discourse rather than as a deficiency. In line with translanguaging perspectives, García and Wei (2014) argue that drawing on the full linguistic repertoire in the classroom can deepen comprehension and participation, which is consistent with teachers' use of both Indonesian and English at the school to help students access content while still pursuing bilingual goals. The school's gradual increase of academic English demand, beginning with oral and play based exposure in early years and moving toward more complex language in primary grades, also resonates with Cummins' (1979) distinction between basic interpersonal communicative skills and cognitive academic language proficiency, suggesting that oral confidence is built first before heavier academic language is required.

At the same time, families and the wider social environment play a crucial role in sustaining Indonesian and supporting children's bilingual development. Holmes and Wilson (2022) note that language maintenance is more likely when a language is used across multiple domains, including home and community, which helps explain why Indonesian remains strong as the main language of

home communication, cultural transmission, and emotional bonding in this context. Research on parents' motivations for choosing bilingual schools in Indonesia shows that families often value English for its perceived economic and educational capital but do not wish to lose the national language or local cultural identity, leading them to support a complementary division of labor between school and home. Within this arrangement, The school strengthens English for academic and institutional purposes, while families help maintain Indonesian as the language of identity, solidarity, and everyday life, jointly creating the conditions for balanced bilingual development.

CONCLUSION

This case study of the school shows that bilingual education is a dynamic process shaped by language policy, cognitive demands, and social identity within a multilingual community. The school's emphasis on oral English in the early stages represents a deliberate language management strategy aimed at building students' confidence in using English, while adjustments in curriculum and teaching strategies seek to reduce the cognitive load associated with using English in content subjects.

The findings illustrate that although English is established as the language of formal schooling, Indonesian remains central as the language of solidarity in students' informal interactions, reflecting the domain-based nature of language choice and diglossic patterns described by Holmes and Wilson (2022). The study also suggests that flexible use of Indonesian and English in the classroom, in line with translanguaging principles described by García and Wei (2014), can help students access complex content while still promoting bilingual development, particularly in a Montessori-inspired environment that values student-centered learning.

For schools implementing bilingual education, the The school case highlights the importance of viewing bilingualism as a resource to be managed in response to students' cognitive and social needs, rather than as a rigid policy of exclusive use of one language. Future research could involve multiple participants (teachers, students, and parents) and classroom observations to further explore how language choice, code switching, and translanguaging operate across different subjects and grade levels in bilingual Montessori settings.

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