



Teachers' Perception on Bilingualism and Bilingual Education

Krisma Nurmaya¹, Nida Husna²

^{1,2}Master of English Education Department, UIN Syarif Hidayatullah, Jakarta

Corresponding E-mail: krismanurmaya21@gmail.com

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Abstract

This study examines teachers' perceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education in Indonesia, focusing on their conceptual understanding as well as perceived challenges and opportunities for implementation. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected through questionnaires from 16 teachers and in-depth interviews with five teachers across elementary, secondary, and inclusive education settings. The findings indicate that while teachers generally acknowledge the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism, several barriers impede effective bilingual education. Notably, 68.8% of teachers identified inadequate training as a major challenge, and 62.6% pointed to limited instructional resources and curriculum misalignment. Despite these obstacles, teachers recognized substantial opportunities to strengthen bilingual education, including enhanced professional development, greater community involvement, and increased use of technology to support language learning. These insights underscore the need for targeted policy support and capacity-building initiatives to improve the quality and sustainability of bilingual education in Indonesia.

Keywords: *bilingualism, bilingual education, teachers' perception*

Introduction

Indonesia is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with more than 700 local languages spoken across its archipelago. This multilingual reality shapes how people communicate, learn, and identify themselves within a shared national framework. Amid this diversity, bilingualism, particularly the ability to use both Indonesian and English, has become increasingly important in education, serving as a bridge between local identity and global participation.

Mastering two languages fluently, in which the non-native language as native-like control, is close to the definition of a bilingual (Santoso and Ginting, 2015). However, there are many aspects that can define a bilingual rather only on their

fluency. Baker (2011) analyzed bilinguals (and multilinguals) through several dimensions, such as their ability, the balance of two languages, the use, age, culture, and context. Therefore, Baker (2011) defines bilingual as those who use two or more languages (or dialects) in their daily lives, despite their fluency. This individual capacity to speak two or more languages without paraphrasing it from his or her mother tongue represents the definition of bilingualism (Santoso and Ginting, 2015). While bilingual is an adjective and noun used for the person who speaks two languages, bilingualism is a noun that refers to the ability itself.

According to Abduh and Rosmaladewi (2019), experiencing a long period of colonization by more than one country, affected Indonesia to have many language policy changes before and after the independence phase. In the independence phase of Indonesia, Indonesian was established as the sole national language for formal administrative and educational affairs. Interestingly, despite Indonesia being colonized by Japan and the Netherlands, English was the first foreign language taught in the educational setting. During the new order regime phase, English was spreading among few elite and privileged Indonesian which led to the recognition of bilingual education in 1998 to the present. More than the concept itself, bilingual education is one component inside a wider framework of society, economy, education, culture, and politics (Baker, 2001). Therefore, the concept of bilingual education possibly differs from one country to another.

In Indonesia, bilingual education applied to the national curriculum using Indonesian with an international program for mathematics and natural science using English as a means of classroom communication. Due to the raised concerns about national pride declined and funding practices against the policy, this program has been banned but remains for some private schools (Jayanti and Sujarwo, 2019). However, the implementation of internationally oriented education remains supported by national law. The Act of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20, Year 2003 on the National Education System, Chapter XIV, Article 50, Paragraph (3), states that "The Government and local governments organize at least one educational unit at every level of education to be developed further as a unit having international standards of education."

This provision implies that even though bilingual programs in public schools were discontinued, the idea of international-standard education continues to align with the national education framework. Implementing bilingual education in a multicultural and multilingual country like Indonesia is adversely challenging. It needs high-quality materials, accessibility, and teacher support for the success of the bilingual program (Ma, 2023). Said, et al., (2018) listed seven attributes as parts of bilingual education program, those are (1) leadership, vision, and goals, (2) creation of classroom climate, (3) program articulation, (4) organization, accountability, and assessment, (5) quality people, (6) parental and community involvement, and (7) curriculum and instruction.

Teachers' perception plays a significant role in supporting bilingual education. Many studies showed that various understanding of teachers toward bilingual education impacts their teaching in the classroom and the students' outcomes (Anggung, et al., 2022; Canillas, 2021; Park-Johnson, 2019). Teaching in bilingual education, teachers need to create a learning environment that values students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Nietto, 2022). The training and professional development that teachers receive regarding bilingualism can shape their instructional strategies and their adaptation to teaching methods (Lucas, et al., 2008). More than that, teachers' perceptions of their own teaching capabilities or self-efficacy beliefs directly influence their actual teaching and overall teaching environment (Lee, 2018).

This perception of the teachers can impact the teaching and learning process, and also has the possibility to give impact in bilingual education settings. Therefore, fostering a positive and informed perception of bilingualism and bilingual education among the teachers is essential. Fostering a positive perception of teachers in bilingual education can be initiated by addressing the advantages of bilingualism. It is widely recognized that being bilingual or able to speak fluently in two languages has many benefits (Bialystok and Shapero, 2005; Bialystok, et al., 2004; and Sanz, 2000). By learning in both languages, students are expected to gain not only academic knowledge but also the language skills that are essential for higher education and international careers (Musthafa, 2010). In addition, bilinguals come from a dynamic community structure that can influence their culture and language acquisition (Baker, 2011). Thus, teachers can value more students' culture and linguistic backgrounds.

This understanding cannot be obtained, unless teachers receive training and professional development regarding bilingualism and bilingual education. Through the training, teachers can get knowledge about classroom management, the use of two languages as teaching techniques, and evaluation of the bilingual method (Anggung, et al., 2022). Implementing bilingual education has many challenges (Jayanti and Sujarwo, 2019). Therefore, teacher training and professional development for bilingual teachers is necessary.

When teachers are adequately trained on bilingual education, the teaching and learning process can progress in accordance with the vision and goals of bilingual education. The vision and goals of bilingual education, viewing from teachers' perception, can be disseminated through the schools' community members to meet the expectation (Said, et al. 2019). Teachers will also gain their self-efficacy, while this belief, said by Lee (2018), has relation to the classroom practices. In addition, the classroom's practices have relation to the students' outcomes (Everston, et al., 1980).

Despite the growing attention to bilingual education in Indonesia, previous research has predominantly centered on students' perceptions or institutional policies (Asrifan et al., 2017; Larasati et al., 2021; Murtini, 2024; Manik, 2025),

leaving teachers' perspectives relatively underexplored. Considering teachers' central role as both language models and content facilitators, understanding their perceptions is critical for the effective implementation of bilingual education. This study therefore aims to investigate Indonesian teachers' perceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education, including their understanding, perceived benefits, challenges, and the support systems needed to strengthen bilingual education practice in the country.

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design aimed at providing a detailed, straightforward account of teachers' perceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education in Indonesia. The design was chosen to capture participants' experiences in natural settings without imposing predetermined theoretical models (Ayton, 2023). Although qualitative in nature, the study also incorporated questionnaire data to complement and contextualize interview findings, allowing data triangulation and a more holistic understanding of teachers' views (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Participants and Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling, focusing on teachers with experience or familiarity with bilingual education. The study involved two groups of participants:

1. Interview participants: 5 teachers with direct experience teaching in bilingual school settings, chosen as the main data source to gain in-depth insights.
2. Questionnaire participants: 16 teachers from various school levels (elementary to high school) who completed an online questionnaire via Google Forms.

The participants were all graduates of educational faculty programs and represented a range of school contexts, including private, public, and inclusive schools in Tangerang, Jakarta, and surrounding areas. Their teaching experience ranged from 1 to over 10 years, with most working at the elementary and junior high level.

Research Instruments

The research instruments are 5 interview questions and 20 questionnaire questions. Both were adapted from Baker (2011) and Said et al. (2019) to explore teachers' understanding, attitudes, and perceptions of bilingual education, as well as its challenges and opportunities. It was divided into two sections:

1. Teachers' perceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education
2. Perceived challenges and opportunities in implementation

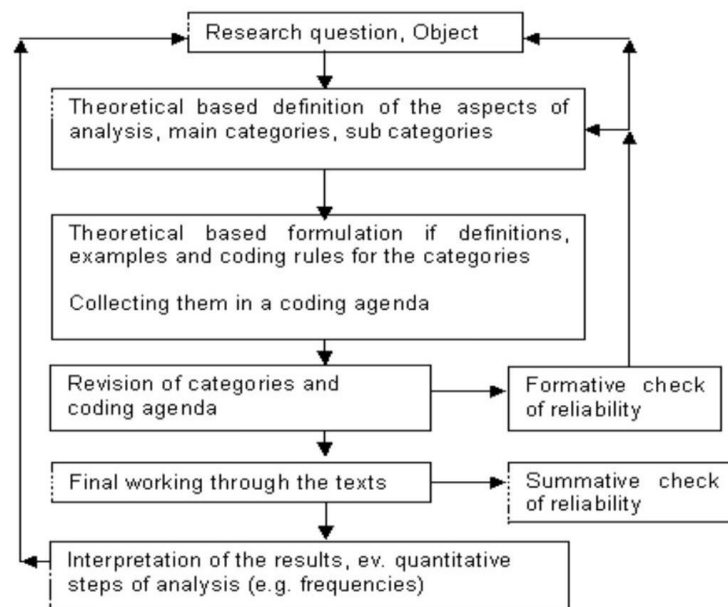
The interview served as the main data collection instrument, aiming to explore in greater depth the teachers' lived experiences and perceptions of bilingual education. The semi-structured interviews consisted of five open-ended questions aligned with the questionnaire themes. Three interviews were conducted face-to-face, while two were conducted via WhatsApp voice call for convenience. Each session lasted 30–45 minutes, and participants could use English or Bahasa Indonesia, depending on their preference. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

The questionnaire items used a five-point Likert scale (*1 = strongly disagree* to *5 = strongly agree*). The questionnaire was distributed online via Google Forms to reach teachers from different institutions efficiently. The instrument was validated by two English Education experts from a university in Jakarta, and reliability analysis using Cronbach's alpha produced a coefficient of 0.86, indicating high internal consistency.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using Mayring's (2000) Qualitative Content Analysis, following the Step Model of Inductive Category Development. This model was chosen for its systematic and transparent approach to building categories inductively from textual data, making it suitable for exploring teachers' perceptions of bilingualism and bilingual education in Indonesia. As depicted in Figure 1, the analysis proceeded through iterative stages of category formulation, revision, and verification following Mayring's (2000) model.

Fig. 1: Step model of inductive category development (MAYRING 2000)



The analysis process began by defining the research question as the central analytical focus. Next, category definitions and levels of abstraction were determined based on the initial reading of the transcripts. The researcher then conducted step-by-step formulation of inductive categories directly from the interview data. During this phase, new categories were developed, while previously formed ones were revised or subsumed under broader themes as the analysis progressed.

After analyzing approximately 10–50% of the data, a revision of the category system was carried out to ensure consistency and representativeness of the themes. A formative reliability check was conducted by reviewing coded segments to ensure coherence of interpretation. Once all interviews were analyzed, a summative reliability check confirmed the stability of the categories across the entire dataset. Finally, interpretation and thematic synthesis were performed. Representative quotations were selected to illustrate each theme. To enhance the robustness of the findings, frequency counts were occasionally used to show the prominence of certain views among participants.

In addition to the interview data, the questionnaire responses from 16 teachers were analyzed to provide quantitative support and triangulation for the qualitative results. The questionnaire, consisting of 25 closed-ended items on a 5-point Likert scale, was analyzed descriptively by calculating means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions. These results were compared with the qualitative themes to cross-validate teachers' perceptions, thereby strengthening the credibility of the findings through methodological triangulation (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Results

Thematic Findings from the Interviews

This section presents the results of the study based on semi-structured interviews with five teachers from different bilingual school contexts (two elementary bilingual teachers, two junior high bilingual teachers, and one teacher from an inclusive bilingual school for learners with special needs). The entire sample of teachers was drawn from educational institutions in South Tangerang, Indonesia. Their responses were analyzed inductively and organized into five themes: (1) Understanding of Bilingualism, (2) Implementation Challenges, (3) Opportunities and Enablers, (4) Support and Resources Needed, and (5) Impact and Recommendations for the Future. Frequencies are presented in percentages to enhance clarity, and example quotes include the original Indonesian statements with English translations provided by the researcher.

Understanding of bilingualism

Participants demonstrated a generally consistent understanding of bilingualism. The majority defined bilingualism as the ability to use two or more languages across daily and academic contexts. One interviewee explained, "*Bilingualisme adalah kemampuan seseorang dalam penggunaan bahasa lebih dari*

bahasa yang digunakan dalam sehari-hari" (Indonesian; translated: "*Bilingualism is the ability to use more than one language in daily life.*") This reflects a functional and communicative view of bilingual ability, with emphasis on use rather than formal proficiency.

All participants highlighted perceived benefits of bilingualism, particularly in enhancing students' confidence, communication skills, and cognitive development. As a junior high school teacher noted, "*Bilingualisme membantu siswa lebih percaya diri... dan meningkatkan kemampuan berpikir dan kreativitas.*" These benefits align with existing literature on cognitive and socio-emotional advantages of bilingual education.

Implementation Challenges

Despite strong support for bilingual education, teachers reported several key challenges. The most frequently mentioned issue was variation in students' English proficiency, which affected participation and comprehension. Teachers also emphasized how the transition to English-medium learning creates difficulty for students who lack foundational exposure.

Teacher language proficiency emerged as an additional challenge, with participants noting that teachers who are not confident in English struggle to deliver instruction effectively. Limited availability of bilingual resources, such as textbooks, learning apps, or visual materials, was also cited by participants.

A decline in motivation among higher-level students was observed by the majority of participants, indicating a developmental pattern in learner engagement that schools need to anticipate. Finally, all interviewees acknowledged contextual constraints in rural or resource-limited areas, where infrastructure and access to bilingual materials are insufficient to support effective implementation.

Opportunities and Supportive Factors

Participants identified several opportunities to strengthen bilingual education. Four out of five teachers underscored the role of technology, especially language-learning applications, digital games, and online media, as an important enabler that expands access to bilingual materials and supports independent learning. A junior-high teacher described how "*teknologi... bisa meningkatkan efektivitas pendidikan bilingual.*"

All participants emphasized the value of global exposure and how bilingual education prepares students for future academic and professional environments. The merged category of global competence and future readiness reflects teachers shared perception that bilingual students are better equipped for international communication and global challenges.

Support and Resources Needed

Across all interviewees, teacher professional development was identified as the most urgent need. Teachers expressed a desire for structured, ongoing training to improve their bilingual teaching methods and English proficiency. As one elementary teacher stated, "*Guru perlu pelatihan profesional... dan kemampuan berbahasa.*"

Resource availability, including bilingual books, multimodal materials, and learning applications, was emphasized by the majority of participants. Additionally, three out of five stressed the need for stronger parental involvement, noting that parental trust and home-support practices significantly influence students' bilingual learning trajectories.

Impact of Bilingual Education and Recommendation

Participants reported predominantly positive impacts of bilingual education. All interviewees observed improved academic performance, particularly in activities that involve critical thinking and problem-solving. They also highlighted enhanced communication skills and confidence among bilingual students. However, two out of five of participants noted that bilingual learners with lower proficiency in either language may experience a slower learning process, suggesting the need for differentiated instruction and targeted scaffolding.

Recommendations focused on system-level improvements. All participants called for curriculum reform to better integrate bilingual competencies and provide flexibility in language use. Continuous professional development for teachers was also universally recommended. Finally, the majority of participants emphasized the importance of parental and community engagement to sustain bilingual learning beyond the classroom.

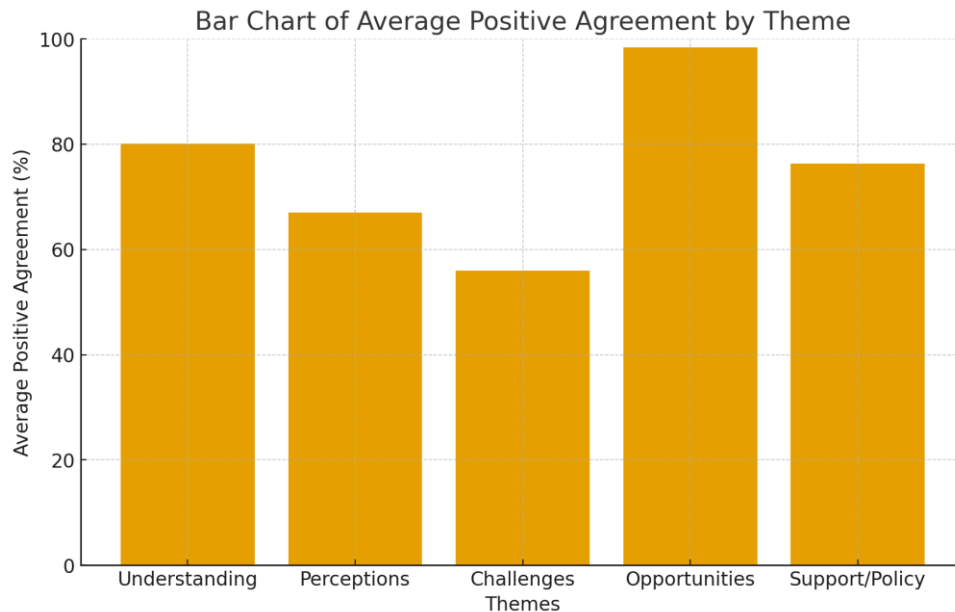
Divergent perspectives across teaching contexts reveal that bilingual education is not experienced uniformly. Elementary bilingual teachers highlighted immediate, observable gains, such as improved confidence and communicative ability, while underscoring the importance of parental involvement to reinforce learning at home. In contrast, junior-high teachers emphasized curriculum alignment, academic performance, and persistent gaps in systemic resources. Meanwhile, the inclusive-school teacher stressed the need for flexible and adaptive language policies, noting that fully English-medium environments may present difficulties for students with special needs. Collectively, these patterns suggest that effective bilingual implementation must be differentiated across school levels and tailored to the specific characteristics and needs of diverse learner groups.

Triangulated Findings from the Questionnaire

The questionnaire, administered to 16 teachers across bilingual and semi-bilingual school contexts, consisted of five sections addressing teachers' understanding of bilingualism, perceptions of bilingual education, challenges encountered, potential opportunities, and the existing support and policy landscape. The following subsections present a synthesized analysis of the quantitative

responses. The table below summarizes the distribution of positive agreement by theme, presented in the form of a bar chart.

Table 4.1. Bar Chart of Positive Agreement by Theme



Teachers' Understanding of Bilingualism

Overall, teachers reported a positive and generally informed understanding of bilingualism. A combined 62.5% of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed that they understood the concept of bilingualism and its application in educational settings, while 25% indicated neutrality and 12.5% expressed disagreement.

When asked to differentiate between *bilingualism*, *bilingually*, and *being bilingual*, responses became more varied, suggesting some conceptual ambiguity. Although 56.3% agreed or strongly agreed that they could distinguish these terms, an equal proportion of respondents expressed neutrality or disagreement (18.8% neutral, 18.8% disagreed, 6.3% strongly disagreed).

Perceptions of bilingualism's benefits were overwhelmingly positive. All respondents agreed that bilingualism contributes to students' cognitive development, with 37.5% strongly agreeing and 62.5% agreeing. Similarly, 93.8% indicated that understanding bilingualism is crucial for successful bilingual education. Teachers also recognized its socio-cultural value, with 81.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing that bilingualism strengthens students' cultural identity. Taken together, these findings indicate generally favorable attitudes toward bilingualism, despite some uncertainty regarding specific theoretical distinctions.

Perceptions of Bilingual Education

Teachers expressed strong support for the implementation of bilingual education. Nearly all respondents (81.3% strongly agreeing; 18.3% agreeing) believed that bilingual education enhances students' competitiveness in a globalized environment. A similarly high proportion (87.5%) believed that bilingual education supports balanced mastery of two languages.

Perceptions of bilingual education's impact on overall learning outcomes were also positive: 68.8% agreed or strongly agreed, although 25% remained neutral and 6.3% disagreed.

However, responses revealed mixed perceptions regarding the alignment between current bilingual education practices and students' needs. Only 25% agreed that implementation is currently appropriate, while a plurality (43.8%) remained neutral and 31.3% disagreed. This indicates concerns regarding the quality, consistency, and contextual fit of bilingual education in Indonesian schools.

With regard to cultural diversity, 56.3% agreed that bilingual education strengthens cultural diversity, though 43.8% reported neutrality. Overall, these findings suggest that teachers value bilingual education in principle but remain cautious about its practical execution.

Challenges in Bilingual Education

Several challenges were prominently identified. The majority of teachers (68.8%) perceived the lack of teacher training as a major obstacle to effective bilingual education. Only 12.6% expressed disagreement, suggesting widespread acknowledgement of professional development gaps.

Resource-related constraints were also identified as a significant barrier. A combined 62.6% agreed that limited learning materials hinder bilingual instruction, though 25% remained neutral and 12.5% strongly disagreed, indicating variation in resource availability across institutions.

Teachers held divided views on the linguistic impact of bilingual education. While half (50%) believed that extensive use of a foreign language could reduce the presence of Bahasa Indonesia in classrooms, an equal proportion either disagreed or remained neutral. Perceptions of parental support were similarly varied: 37.5% expressed neutrality, while the remainder were split between agreement and disagreement.

Finally, 68.8% of teachers reported that the current curriculum does not adequately support bilingual education. This suggests structural constraints that limit the effectiveness of bilingual implementation. Collectively, these responses highlight key systemic barriers, including insufficient training, resource shortages, and misalignment between curricular expectations and bilingual practices.

Opportunities in Bilingual Education

Despite challenges, teachers expressed strong optimism about the potential of bilingual education. An overwhelming majority (100%) believed that bilingual education prepares students for international career pathways, underscoring its perceived long-term value. Collaboration among teachers was universally acknowledged as beneficial, with all respondents agreeing that it enhances program effectiveness. Regular professional development was also unanimously endorsed, as was the integration of local cultural elements into bilingual instruction.

Technology emerged as a particularly salient opportunity, with 81.3% strongly agreeing and 18.8% agreeing that technological tools can significantly support the implementation of bilingual education. These findings indicate that teachers perceive bilingual education not only as a pedagogical approach but also as a strategic avenue for enhancing global competence, cultural relevance, and instructional innovation.

Support and Policy for Bilingual Education

Teachers identified substantial needs in terms of support and policy. A strong majority (93.8%) agreed that the government should provide more training to strengthen bilingual education. School-level support was perceived less consistently. While 62.6% agreed or strongly agreed that their schools had clear bilingual policies, 25% disagreed and 12.5% remained neutral, suggesting uneven institutional commitment.

The role of the school community was widely recognized, with all respondents acknowledging its importance. However, perceptions of current national policies were mixed: half of the respondents remained neutral regarding the need for policy revisions, while 43.8% agreed or strongly agreed, and 6.3% strongly disagreed. Despite these variations, teachers expressed strong optimism about the future of bilingual education in Indonesia, with 100% agreeing that the field has a promising trajectory if current challenges are addressed.

Contradictions and Discrepancies

Despite these points of convergence, several discrepancies emerged between the two data sources. For example, while the questionnaire suggested relatively neutral or mixed perceptions regarding parental support and curriculum alignment, interviewees described these issues as more urgent and impactful in practice. Likewise, the questionnaire indicated generally positive perceptions of bilingual policy implementation, yet interview participants, especially those teaching at the junior-high and inclusive school levels, expressed stronger concerns about curriculum rigidity, uneven student readiness, and limited real-world support. These discrepancies suggest that while teachers may express broad agreement with bilingual education in survey responses, their lived experiences reveal more complex and nuanced challenges that only emerge through in-depth qualitative inquiry.

Discussion

The findings of this study highlight the perceptions of teachers regarding the implementation of bilingual education in Indonesia. Interviews and questionnaires provided a detailed overview of their understanding, challenges, opportunities, and required support to enhance bilingual education.

The majority of participants acknowledged bilingualism as the ability to use two languages and recognized its positive cognitive and social impact. Teachers noted that students benefit from increased confidence, improved communication skills, and higher critical thinking abilities. However, they also pointed out that students with limited exposure to the target language, typically English, experience slower learning processes. This finding is consistent with the research conducted by Hermawan, Triana, & Dewi (2024), that bilingualism offered advantages for the students, including enhanced communication abilities, smoother interactions with others, greater self-confidence, and an expanded vocabulary.

The challenges identified in this study are multifaceted. Teachers expressed concerns about their language proficiency, limited resources, and the lack of proper teacher training. Similar outcomes were reported that teachers' difficulty in carrying out the bilingual education program was their limited proficiency in English (Syafitri, 2023). A significant proportion of respondents (68.8%) agreed that insufficient professional development creates a barrier to effective bilingual instruction. This observation echoes the findings of Muniroh, et al. (2022) that highlights the need of trained personnel in bilingual schools to enhance the quality of bilingual education through improved management, content knowledge, and practical teaching practices. Furthermore, limited teaching materials, such as bilingual textbooks and interactive tools, contribute to the difficulty of implementing bilingual education effectively.

The findings also indicate significant gaps in policy support and infrastructure, particularly in rural areas. While teachers remain optimistic about the future of bilingual education in Indonesia, they strongly believe that the government must take a more proactive role in providing infrastructure, training opportunities, and policy reforms. Our findings support the conclusions drawn by Wijaya & Santosa (2021) in their investigation of challenges in bilingual education are related to assessment, curriculum design, student attitudes, lesson preparation, and collaboration with other stakeholders.

Teachers also highlighted the critical role of parental and community involvement in supporting bilingual programs, such as the parental involvement framework, which emphasizes collaboration between schools and families to enhance educational outcomes. The previous study by Surdayanto (2018) also noted that parents play a key role in children's school readiness and language development because they spend the most time with them.

Despite these challenges, the use of technology emerged as a promising opportunity to address some of these challenges. Teachers suggested that digital learning applications and online platforms could facilitate more interactive and accessible bilingual education. Farisiyah, et al. (2023) also stated that the application

of technology has a positive impact on the learning process in bilingual education. Additionally, teachers emphasized the importance of integrating local culture within bilingual education to enrich students' learning experiences.

Moreover, teachers recognized the significant potential of bilingual education in preparing students for global opportunities. The majority (81.3%) agreed that bilingual education equips students with the skills needed to compete internationally, particularly in English as a global lingua franca that highlights the importance of English proficiency in accessing educational, economic, and social opportunities worldwide.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study illustrates that while bilingual education holds significant promise for cognitive, social, and global benefits, its effective implementation in Indonesia faces several challenges. Limited teacher training, insufficient resources, and policy gaps are the primary barriers identified. However, opportunities such as technological integration, cultural inclusion, and stronger community involvement offer potential solutions to address these issues. Moving forward, a collaborative effort involving government policies, teacher professional development, and community support is essential to unlock the full potential of bilingual education in Indonesia.

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