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THE TENSION BETWEEN THE PROMOTION OF ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AND THE PRESERVATION OF NATIONAL LANGUAGE: PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

A critical study on tensions in the imposition of English as a English Medium Instruction and Bahasa Indonesia as the national unifying language was the education system itself in Indonesia, where English-Medium Instruction (EMI) programs were formulated to compete globally to prepare students and, at the same time, raised concern about the extinction of cultural and linguistic significance of Indonesian. Qualitative data were drawn from parents, and the EMI barriers being investigated include poor teacher training, language problems, and the potential loss of national identity. Study findings indicate how students are prepared for global opportunities and the importance of cultural heritage. Therefore, it highlights the need for policies that combine bilingual education with CLIL based EMI, supporting both diversity and readiness for the global stage. This study contributes to the discussion on language policies, offering insights for education systems trying to balance global connections with preserving their culture.

KEYWORDS: English as Medium Instruction, Preservation of Bahasa Indonesia, Parent's Perspective.

1. INTRODUCTION

English-Medium Instruction (EMI) is to use English as the language of instruction for academic subjects in situations where English is not the language predominantly used in the society (Macaro et al., 2018). It has rapidly grown into a worldwide educational reality at all educational levels (Dearden & Macaro, 2016). It might be understood more as a global spread practice that is outside the context

of localized models of bi- or multilingual education such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) in Europe or French immersion in Canada (Pérez-Cañado, 2011). Although highest prevalent at the tertiary level, when it pursues objectives such as internationalization and graduate employability (Dearden & Macaro, 2016), EMI has recently started becoming pre-tertiary as well, especially in post-colonial societies such as Singapore, South Africa, and India (Bolton et al., 2017; Willans 2022). Presumably, in the pre-tertiary education level, EMI is directed toward the students' improvement of English language competency, and its common motivation has been the trial of new innovative ways of teaching languages (Macaro et al., 2018).

The challenge comes when EMI is associated with methodologies such as CLIL as in the case of Kazakh schools, where teachers are unaware of the language-teaching responsibilities implicit in the approach (Yessenbekova, 2022). The global trend calls to make EMI's aims and implementation methods much clearer, especially in multilingual contexts where linguistic and cultural diversities complicate.

Things here in Indonesia, with the introduction of EMI to be public schools, make students "ready" for globalization. Unfortunately, it brings out the heated arguments on whether it would defile or enhance the esteem of Bahasa Indonesia. Critics, however, tend to argue that EMI will somehow take away the linkages of students to their roots while on the other hand, the advocates see it as a perfect stride toward internationalization. The 2013 ruling of the Constitutional Court against excessive use of EMI makes this whole stuff more complicated.

The research determines the perception experienced by parents in the implementation of EMI programs in the education system of Indonesia. The study subsequently examines how all these entities cope with the tension of both promoting English and the simultaneous preservation of Bahasa Indonesia. Through analysing their experiences and perspectives, such investigations hope to explain the consequences of language policy in a global context. And more fundamentally, such understanding is critical in formulating such education policies that could possibly satisfy both worldwide demands and national identity, enhancing the harmonious coexistence of diversity in languages.

English-Medium Instruction is now seen in some way or the other in multilingual education systems like Indonesia dealing with both its opportunities and challenges. Such opportunities, however, can be reconciled when dealing with the promotion of the global lingua franca, English, with the preservation of the local ones, such as Bahasa Indonesia. In reviewing the literature, teachers, parents, and students will be given an in-depth understanding of EMI experiences, including the important issues regarding its adoption.

A regularly highlighted feature of literature is the lack of English proficiency as a challenge to teachers and students. Earlier studies carried out in Morocco noted that it presented major obstacles in the implementation of EMI especially in science classrooms. This usually resulted in teachers using

translanguaging or codeswitching (Hammou & Abdelaziz, 2023) to help students understand complicated subject matters and not enough training in EMI methodologies. Also, in Indonesia, inadequate language training for faculty stands as a huge barrier, with many educators having doubts about effective integration of EMI in their teaching practices (Ulfah & Basthomi, 2024).

Teacher pedagogical readiness is one of the most lingering problems beyond difficulties in language. Self-efficacy has been established through studies as a significant factor contributing to the success of EMI. Mastery experiences, such as previous successful teaching, greatly impact your confidence in teaching content through English according to an investigation of Indonesian pre-service teachers in Thailand. Unfortunately, the lack of well-structured and organized teacher-training programs specific for EMI contexts has undermined self-efficacy leading to less efficient teaching practice (Signori et al., 2024). Parents and stakeholders have additionally raised ideological and cultural arguments in EMI. EMI, in Indonesia, is perceived to take away the national identity, as Bahasa Indonesia is often termed the language that assembles people into unity within their cultural heritage. EMI does create a sense of preference in students for English over their native language, critics argue, by suggesting that it could lead to dissociation of the students with their linguistic and cultural roots (Ulfah & Basthomi, 2024).

The thorough research revealed the value of school education to consider all aspects of teacher training in both linguistics and pedagogy. New CLIL-ised EMI model comprises language and content learning objectives for a more balanced model of bilingual provision. Thus, the model stimulates collaborative work within content and language specialists to make sure that students obtain the necessary linguistic support without compromising academic content (Hu, 2023). Institutional support matters a lot for the success of EMI. The studies recommend that targeted professional development initiatives be tailored to address specific areas of need among faculty members, such as language proficiency, curriculum design, and classroom interaction strategies. For example, Prabjandee & Nilpirom, 2022 recommend EMI-specific teacher training that includes both linguistic and pedagogical aspects, enabling teachers to work effectively in multilingual classrooms.

English as a medium of instruction brings a recurrent possibility of tension between promoting English for global competitiveness and maintaining local languages or identities (Gu & ohn, 2019). Although this innovative application indeed presents opportunities for enhancing student's English proficiency and global employability, it has to be planned carefully, adequately trained teachers, internalized, and culturally sensitive in the implementation (Khan, 2024). Education systems will then achieve a better balance between the global and local linguistic priorities through models such as CLIL-EMI and institutional collaboration (Rose et al., 2022).

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

Methodologically, the research has been designed through a case study approach with deep qualitative exploration regarding parents' perceptions of existing tensions between promoting English as a

Medium of Instruction and maintaining Bahasa Indonesia as a national language. “An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the case) in depth and its real-world context.” This denotes the notion of a case study, according to (Yin, 2013). This study was conducted in three different primary international schools in Indonesia; the study explores the beliefs, experiences, and challenges of parents whose children are tough in an EMI environment.

2.1 Data Collection

We used triangulation to gather the data by employing three different instruments: interview and document review. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 3 parents focusing on their perceptions of EMI benefits and challenges, influences on the children's connection with Indonesian culture, and expectations from the school. The focus group discussion (FGD) was organized so parents could deliberate and reflect on their collective experiences. The discussions include parents' perceptions of the EMI's advantages and challenges and their suggestions for the EMI while preserving Bahasa Indonesia. Relevant school policies, curriculum, and classroom practices concerning document analyses were reviewed to engage parents' responses. This analysis helped regarding Bahasa Indonesia's position within the EMI goals.

2.2 Data Analysis

To investigate the perspectives of three parents from different schools in Batam and East Java in Indonesia, we collected information through semi-structured, focus group discussions and document reading. According to the qualitative case analysis methodology, it began with the process of transcribing and carefully organizing data as guided by (Bezemer & Mavers, 2011), who stated that parental tensions in the effort to establish English as the Medium of Instruction and maintain Indonesian as the National Language in the context of classroom teaching. Transcriptions involved organizing data to suit the research objectives, selecting responses that described parents' problems, experiences, and beliefs in-depth, and translating oral data from interviews and focus group discussions into written descriptive formats. Documentation such as school policies, curriculum, and classroom procedures were further examined to place parents' perspectives on EMI.

According to Braun & Clarke, 2021, theoretical analysis is a way to conduct a detailed examination through relevant data, transcripts, and contexts and then follow up, starting with an initial phase of familiarization when re-reading the digitized versions of the raw data to understand more about parents' reactions or challenges and the broader context in which EMI is implemented in schools. This identification is based on parents' experiences of EMI, parents' views of EMI, and its impact on their children, especially Indonesian culture, and global and national linguistic boundaries.

These indicators were analyzed to find recurring and interesting themes, including language identity and preservation of Indonesian culture, perceived academic benefits of EMI, and parents' concerns about the declining position of Indonesians in the school environment. Key themes were carefully analyzed to ensure that they aligned with the study's objectives. On the other hand, this approach was

strengthened by triangulation, which included interviews and focus group discussions to identify similarities and differences in data sources. In the final session, the data obtained were organized and coded to create a discussion framework on how EMI influences parents' perceptions, children's cultural identity, and the role of Indonesian language culture in a learning environment that focuses on the use of English. The results were combined to explore the balance between global and local language preferences in the context of EMI in elementary schools in Indonesia.

3. RESULT

The Positive Impact of English Learning

All three participants said that using English in school helped their children become more confident and better at speaking. Parent 1 (P1) noticed that her child became more fluent over time after being in an international school. At first, the child was shy, but later became more used to speaking English because it was used every day.

Parent 2 (P2) had a similar experience. She said her child used to be quiet, but the teacher used songs and games to make learning fun. This helped the child feel comfortable speaking in English. Parent 3 (P3) also said her child improved a lot in English and liked joining English competitions at school.

In short, having regular practice with English in class, supported by fun activities and a positive environment, helped the children feel more confident and excited about learning the language.

Challenges in Using the Mother Tongue

Even though the children were good at English, all participants noticed that their children had some problems using Indonesian language, especially for school assignments or formal words. P1 said her child didn't understand words like "menggunakan" in a reading task. This showed that the child was more used to casual conversation than formal Indonesian.

P3 said her child often mixed English and Indonesian in daily life. For example, the child would say, "I want ndok" (egg). It took time and practice to help the child use each language separately. P2 added that the Indonesian language is very important because it connects children with their culture and identity. She said it should still be used and taught well, even if English is important too. This shows that while learning English is useful, it's also important to keep supporting the mother tongue at home and in school so that children don't lose their ability to use it well.

Installing cultural values and identities

Parents' responses indicated a conscious effort to instill local cultural values and identity in their children, even though the children attended school in an English-speaking environment. One parent explained, *"I still use the local language at home and pick up and drop off my child to school regularly"* (p2), which reflects the family's efforts to maintain the child's emotional connection to their cultural roots. Another parent said, *"Even though English is used at school, I do not want my child to forget*

our own culture" (p3). This proves that their concern about the potential loss of cultural identity is enormous due to the dominance of English in their education.

The efforts that parents have made are strengthened through the role of the school by actively incorporating elements of local culture into teaching and learning activities; for example, some of the activities mentioned by parents include a cultural-themed project week, traditional dance performances, and cosplay activities as national heroes. Another parent added, *"I am thrilled because my child's school also holds activities such as hero cosplay; these activities remind the children of our culture"* (p1). Collaboration between activities at home, in this case, parents and schools, seems to be an important strategy in ensuring that bilingual education does not erode children's cultural identity but creates a space where they are relevant and where global languages and local values coexist.

Synergy of Family Support and School Environment

Family involvement in the child's learning process in the home environment is powerful, especially in the context of bilingual education. Although their language skills backgrounds differ, the family shows consistent support through communication using two languages and is directly involved in the child's learning activities at home. One parent said, *"Actually, I am not fluent in English, but I help my child in my way; we often study together and usually look for additional learning resources"* (p3). From that statement, the quality of support is not only due to language support but also to the willingness to be directly and actively involved in the child's education process.

Meanwhile, the school environment supports the child's development through a fun and non-pressuring approach. One participant said, *"I feel very happy because the school never pressures its students; my child learns through games, and the teachers care"* (P1). The curriculum that combines the Cambridge curriculum and the national curriculum provides flexibility in determining the direction of the child's education in the future. One parent added, *"If my child wants to study abroad, it is still possible. However, if he wants to take the National Examination, my child is also ready"* (P2). The synergy between support at home and an inclusive school approach shows the important role of both environments in shaping children's positive learning experiences in a bilingual education system.

Parents' expectations for children's education

Parents' responses revealed clear hopes that English Medium Instruction (EMI) education would serve as a gateway for their children's future success, especially by the quality of education that is seemingly better and has more options. One parent stated, *"with less quantity of students, the learning supervising process can be better"* (P1). Another shared, *"The school provides two curriculum, Cambridge and UN"* (P3). These hopes reflect parents' belief that mastering English through EMI schooling will provide their children with better methodology and environment to learn.

4. DISCUSSION

The results of this study show that learning English from a young age helps children become more confident when speaking. All three parents (P1, P2, and P3) said their children became more

comfortable using English after being exposed to it in school. This supports what Ellis, 2017 said that children learn language better when they use it in fun ways, like through games, songs, or projects. In the interviews, teachers used these methods to make children feel happy and not afraid to speak. Even at home, parents helped by watching English videos with their kids or helping them with homework. This agrees with what García & Wei, 2014 found: when parents support language learning at home, it helps children improve faster. So, having a good school and supportive home can make a big difference in how children learn English.

Even though the children were good at English, they had some trouble with their first language Indonesian language. For example, P1 said her child didn't understand some Indonesian words used at school. P3 said her child often mixed Indonesian and English when speaking. This is something that often happens with bilingual children. According to Cummins, 2000, if children don't get enough practice in their first language, they might get weaker in it. That's why it's important to keep using and teaching Indonesian language at home and in school. P2 also said that the Indonesian language is very important because it's part of the child's identity and culture. Faridy & Syaodih, 2016 also said that the mother tongue helps children understand values and who they are. So, while it's good for children to learn English, we should also help them stay strong in their first language.

Parents' conscious efforts to instil cultural values and local identity in their children demonstrate an awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage amidst the dominance of global languages. Practices such as using local languages at home and regular visits to hometowns are family strategies to maintain children's connection to their cultural roots. Similar to Maharani et al., 2024a documented that parents from high socioeconomic backgrounds tend to send their children to good bilingual schools but also pay attention to their children in preserving local culture but also recognize strategic education in bilingual language classes. One participant said "we must not close our eyes to the development of the times, but never forget our culture" (P2), reflecting the equality between aspirations for global-based education and the preservation of local values. Apart from parental efforts, cultural preservation is also facilitated by schools through cultural activities such as weekly project-based learning, traditional dance performances, and national hero cosplay. Of course, this initiative reflects how schools address parental concerns about losing children's cultural identity amidst EMI practices in the school environment. Maharani et al., 2024a explained that there is an imbalance in language ideology where English is often positioned higher or more dominant than our language, especially regional languages, which causes concern among parents. However, when viewed from interviews, parents continue to emphasize the importance of maintaining and being involved in children's learning so that they do not forget their regional language or regional culture. On the other hand, concerns about the potential loss of language and cultural identity due to the dominance of English emerged as a recurring theme. It is important that parents actively participate in voicing that the priority of English can interfere with the use of regional languages in the family and school environment. Stubbs 1991 reinforced emphasizing that language shifts can damage cultural cohesion in a particular community or ethnicity. Alternatively, voices have emerged that support a balanced approach to bilingual schools. Parents aware of this emphasize the importance of maintaining linguistic and cultural ties. This finding

aligns with Wright & Baker 2016 idea of additive bilingualism, which is the view that mastery of one language can support but replace another language that has been mastered so that there is no marginalization of our local language, culture, and identity.

Based on the interview results, it is clear that the parents' English language skills do not entirely determine family involvement in supporting children's learning process in a bilingual environment. The support provided is strategic and personal. One parent said, "I am not fluent in English, but I help my child in my way" (P3). Yosso *, 2005 argued that thinking in Two Dimensions of Parental Involvement, which states that parental involvement especially from minority backgrounds can be driven by forms of cultural capital such as aspirational capital, family capital, and navigation capital, even though they may not have high language competence or formal education. Furthermore, this support from home is strengthened by a positive school environment responsive to the needs of children and parents. One participant said play-based learning methods and teacher attention provide children security and comfort. This supports the findings of Ee, 2017, which shows that a supportive school environment significantly increases parental participation in the context of Dual Language Immersion (DLI). Schools that implement open and flexible policies towards collaboration with parents can create synergy between families and educational institutions. The school's flexible integration of the Merdeka and Cambridge Curricula allows students to pursue global academic pathways while remaining connected to local values and cultural identity. The study documented by Dinurrohmah & Pratomo, 2023, show that the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes differentiated learning, project-based assessment, and strengthening the values of the Pancasila Student Profile, which, when combined with the Cambridge Curriculum can strengthen students' global competence without sacrificing local character and cultural values. In addition, elements such as learning independence, creativity, and collaboration carried by the Merdeka Curriculum have strong intersections with the Cambridge approach, making them relevant to the context of bilingual schools. Regarding emotional involvement and motivation, Wesely & Baig, 2012 also emphasize that the role of parents in children's learning in bilingual programs tends to be dynamic and changes as the child develops. In this context, family participation in EMI is not only about language skills but also about long-term commitment to children's education, which includes adaptation, cooperation with schools, and strengthening cultural values.

The findings show that parents' hopes for EMI education are not only about language proficiency but also superior teaching methodologies and enriched learning environments. This reflects a broader global trend where parents perceive EMI schools as offering higher educational quality and more structured learning opportunities (Macaro et al., 2018b) The presence of dual curricula, like Cambridge and the national curriculum (P3), is viewed as providing more than just local credentials, thereby increasing their competitiveness (Maharani et al., 2024). On the other hand, Marcjanik, 2023 said that EMI schools are often marketed as offering best school settings that respond to parents' hopes for holistic educational outcomes. These findings suggest that parental hopes are not only on English acquisition but on broader familiarization that will give their children an advantage in the future.

5. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the complex perceptions of parents on the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in Indonesian primary schools and its implications for the preservation of Bahasa Indonesia as a national language. The findings show that while EMI has invaluable advantages of enhancing the English proficiency of children and their confidence in international communication, it is also filled with hurdles of declining use and mastery of Bahasa Indonesia, especially in the formal environment. The parents value the advantages of EMI in exposing their children to global opportunities but worry about the potential loss of national identity and cultural heritage. Their initial move at home, for instance, using the national language and imparting cultural values, all show their preference for strong attachments to Indonesian identity. While this is simultaneous with the existence of schools that successfully embrace bilingual and bicultural practices into the curriculum, it suggests an optimistic trend towards balanced education. The study highlights the importance of co-operation between schools and families for bilingual development among children, in terms of worldwide and domestic issues of language. Two curricula (Cambridge and National) also help manage this balance, granting flexibility to pupils to achieve both internationally and nationally in educational pursuits.

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