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PREPARING FUTURE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHERS FOR BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A REVIEW OF TEACHER COMPETENCIES AND CHALLENGES

Abstrak

Bilingual education in elementary schools is increasingly needed to respond to the demands of globalization and the development of student literacy competencies. This article aims to examine the competencies that prospective elementary school teachers must have in managing bilingual learning and to identify the main challenges they face during the preparation and teaching practice process. The method used is a literature review by examining relevant national and international journals, books, and education reports. The results of the analysis show that prospective teachers need several important competencies, such as adequate language skills, bilingual pedagogical competencies, professional skills in designing and assessing bilingual learning, and social and personal readiness. However, they still face various obstacles, including limited foreign language skills, a lack of specialized training in PGSD programs, low self-confidence, and limited policies and supporting facilities in schools. This study emphasizes the importance of strengthening the curriculum and training in PGSD programs so that prospective teachers are better prepared to meet the demands of bilingual learning, thereby enabling its implementation in elementary schools to be more effective and sustainable.

Keywords: Bilingual Education, Teacher Competency, PGSD, Challenges For Prospective Teachers, Bilingualism In Elementary Schools

Abstrak

Pendidikan bilingual di sekolah dasar semakin diperlukan untuk memenuhi tuntutan globalisasi dan pengembangan keterampilan literasi siswa. Artikel ini mengkaji kompetensi yang harus dimiliki calon guru sekolah dasar untuk mengelola pembelajaran bilingual dan mengidentifikasi tantangan utama yang mereka hadapi selama persiapan dan praktik mengajar. Metode yang digunakan adalah tinjauan pustaka melalui pemeriksaan jurnal, buku, dan laporan pendidikan nasional dan internasional yang relevan. Hasil analisis menunjukkan bahwa calon guru membutuhkan beberapa kompetensi penting, seperti keterampilan bahasa yang memadai, kompetensi pedagogis bilingual, keterampilan profesional untuk merancang dan mengevaluasi pembelajaran bilingual, serta persiapan sosial dan pribadi. Namun, mereka masih menghadapi berbagai kendala, seperti kemampuan berbahasa asing yang terbatas, kurangnya pelatihan khusus dalam program Pengembangan Bilingual Berorientasi Pendidikan (EOD), rendahnya kepercayaan diri, dan terbatasnya kebijakan dan fasilitas pendukung di sekolah. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya penguatan kurikulum dan pelatihan dalam Program Pengembangan Bilingual (DBP) agar calon guru lebih siap untuk memenuhi tuntutan pembelajaran bilingual, sehingga memungkinkan implementasi yang lebih efektif dan berkelanjutan di sekolah dasar.

Kata kunci: Pendidikan bilingual, Kompetensi guru, PGSD, Tantangan bagi calon guru, Bilingualisme di sekolah dasar

INTRODUCTION

Bilingual education is growing in response to the needs of globalization and increasing community mobility. At the elementary school level, the use of two languages in the learning

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process is not only aimed at developing students' communication skills, but also at improving their cognitive and literacy competencies and their readiness to adapt to a multicultural world. The early implementation of bilingual education is believed to provide a strong foundation for language mastery and character building in the future.

In this context, elementary school teachers play a very strategic role. Teachers not only act as conveyors of learning material, but also as facilitators who help students master two languages in a balanced manner without compromising the quality of their understanding of academic concepts. Therefore, prospective elementary school teachers who will be dealing with bilingual classes need adequate linguistic, pedagogical, and managerial competencies to ensure that the learning process runs effectively.

However, various problems can arise when prospective teachers are not well prepared for bilingual learning. Limited language skills, a lack of bilingual pedagogical strategies, and a lack of confidence can have an impact on the teaching and learning process and student development. These conditions highlight the urgency of ensuring that prospective elementary school teachers have the relevant competencies before entering the world of education.

This article discusses the competencies that prospective elementary school teachers need to have in the context of bilingual education and the challenges they often face during the preparation and teaching practice processes. In addition, this article also reviews how teacher education institutions can play a role in improving the readiness of prospective educators to face bilingual classes.

The purpose of this article is to provide an understanding of the importance of preparing prospective elementary school teachers for bilingual education, identify emerging challenges, and offer an overview of strategies for strengthening competencies so that bilingual learning can take place more optimally.

RESEARCH METHOD

This article was compiled using the Literature Review method without field research. Data sources were obtained from national and international journals, scientific articles, reference books, and educational reports relevant to the topics of bilingual education and elementary school teacher competence. Data collection techniques were carried out through documentation and systematic literature searches to find information relevant to the focus of the discussion. The data obtained were analyzed using content analysis and literature synthesis by grouping the findings based on the themes of teacher competence and challenges faced in bilingual learning. The results of the analysis were used to formulate conclusions and recommendations in this article.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. The Concept of Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is a learning approach that involves the deliberate use of two languages within the teaching and learning process. In Indonesian elementary schools, this approach generally integrates Indonesian as the primary language and English as a supporting language for delivering instructional content. Ling Ling, Purnasari, and Silvester (2024) emphasize that the implementation of bilingual education is not only intended to develop students' language abilities but also to stimulate cognitive development, enhance cognitive flexibility, and broaden students' access to various global knowledge sources. Therefore, bilingual learning holds a strategic role in building students' academic and linguistic competencies from the early years of schooling.

In practice, several bilingual education models are commonly applied, including Transitional Bilingual Education, Two-Way Immersion, and Language Immersion. In the transitional model, the shift from the first language to the second language is conducted gradually to ensure that students can follow the learning process comfortably. The two-way immersion model integrates students from different linguistic backgrounds, allowing learning to occur in both directions and enabling students to support each other's language development. Meanwhile, the immersion model uses the second language as the primary medium of instruction, providing students with more intensive exposure. Sekar Sari, Fadlilah, Bayu, and colleagues (2025) note that these three models are widely used in Indonesian elementary schools, with varying levels of success depending on school readiness and teacher quality.

In addition to these models, pedagogical approaches such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) have increasingly been adopted in bilingual classrooms. The CLIL approach integrates academic content learning with language development simultaneously, allowing students to acquire new knowledge while naturally strengthening their second language proficiency. Although CLIL is widely practiced in European countries, several Indonesian elementary schools have begun adapting it to increase students' exposure to the second language. However, findings by Febriani and colleagues (2025) indicate that the effectiveness of bilingual education in Indonesia is still constrained by various factors, such as limited teacher language proficiency, insufficient professional training, and inadequate availability of bilingual learning materials aligned with the national curriculum.

Overall, the concept of bilingual education encompasses the deliberate and consistent use of two languages, the application of diverse instructional models based on learners' needs, and the implementation of pedagogical approaches that support both linguistic and academic development. Its effectiveness is largely determined by school infrastructure readiness, teacher competency, and the availability of appropriate learning resources.

B. Competencies of Prospective Elementary School Teachers in Bilingual Education

To effectively implement bilingual learning, prospective elementary school teachers must possess a comprehensive set of interconnected competencies. The most fundamental competency is language proficiency, specifically the ability to master both languages used in instruction. Strong language skills enable teachers to deliver lessons clearly, provide accurate instructions, and manage classroom interaction effectively. Moreover, sufficient linguistic ability helps teachers assess student understanding, especially since students may demonstrate varying levels of proficiency in each language.

In addition, prospective teachers must develop bilingual pedagogical competence, which includes the ability to design, implement, and evaluate teaching strategies that promote the simultaneous development of two languages. This competency involves structuring adaptive teaching methods, applying controlled and meaningful translanguaging practices, and providing appropriate scaffolding so that students gradually grasp content in both languages. Suprayetno and colleagues (2021) stress that teachers need to apply systematic instructional methods, such as the PPP (Presentation, Practice, Production) approach, which has proven effective in enhancing both teaching skills and English language proficiency among educators involved in bilingual instruction.

Another essential competency is professional competence, which includes understanding the bilingual curriculum, the ability to develop bilingual instructional materials, and the skills to carry out assessments aligned with the characteristics of two-language learning. Teachers must be able to evaluate both content mastery and language proficiency simultaneously to ensure that assessments accurately reflect students' academic and linguistic abilities. Intania and colleagues (2025) found that many bilingual teachers still require support, particularly in planning bilingual curricula and developing learning materials that align with student needs and curriculum standards.

Beyond linguistic, pedagogical, and professional competencies, prospective teachers must also possess relevant social and personal competencies. These include confidence in using the second language, motivation for continuous improvement, and cultural awareness. Cultural awareness is crucial because bilingual learning involves not only linguistic aspects but also values, social contexts, and cultural elements embedded within the language. Research indicates that low teacher confidence and limited exposure to the second language remain major obstacles in the implementation of bilingual programs.

Thus, preparing prospective elementary school teachers for bilingual education must be carried out comprehensively through the strengthening of language, pedagogical, professional, and personal competencies. Without mastery of these competencies, teachers may struggle to implement bilingual learning consistently and effectively. Therefore, teacher education programs, particularly in elementary teacher education (PGSD), need to allocate greater emphasis on training related to bilingual pedagogy, second-language development, and the design of dual-language instructional planning.

C. Challenges Faced by Prospective Elementary School Teachers in Bilingual Education

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1. Limited language proficiency among teachers

One major issue is the limited foreign language proficiency, such as English among prospective elementary school teachers. Many do not possess sufficient language skills to deliver bilingual instruction fluently and naturally. This aligns with research showing that pre-service teachers often lack confidence when using a foreign language, especially in speaking and listening, due to fear of making mistakes or receiving negative judgments.

Referring to Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, language anxiety can increase the "affective filter," which blocks effective language intake and reduces language acquisition. When pre-service teachers feel anxious or lack confidence, their language development becomes hindered when teaching in a bilingual setting.

2. Lack of bilingual courses or training in PGSD programs

Typically, Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) programs do not offer sufficient specialized training or courses in bilingual education. Most pre-service teachers do not receive formal experience in bilingual teaching during their university studies or teaching practicum. As a result, they feel unprepared both pedagogically and linguistically when entering bilingual classrooms. This lack of preparation heightens uncertainty and anxiety during teaching practice. Quantitative and qualitative research on foreign language teaching anxiety shows that inadequate professional preparation is a major contributing factor.

A study conducted by Lian et al. in 2025 in the context of pandemic-era teaching found that school mentors sometimes did not provide clear syllabi or lesson plans, increasing the preparation burden and uncertainty for pre-service teachers. The theory proposed by Freeman and Johnson regarding teacher cognition emphasizes that teachers' thinking (beliefs, experiences, pedagogical knowledge) develops through experience. The absence of formal bilingual teaching experiences during university education weakens their cognitive foundation for bilingual instruction.

3. Challenges related to curriculum, policy, and facilities

Bilingual curricula require adjustments in materials, methods, and assessment. Not all elementary schools have policies that fully support bilingual programs or provide adequate resources such as bilingual teaching materials, textbooks, and multimedia tools. Many pre-service teachers find that bilingual policies are not fully integrated into the school system, and their implementation is often temporary or inconsistent. For instance, a study by Jone et al. (2024) found that multilingual, including bilingual school policies face challenges linked to low teacher confidence and insufficient structural support.

Cummins' Threshold Hypothesis states that to obtain the cognitive benefits of bilingualism, both teachers and students must reach a certain level of proficiency in both languages. If this threshold is not met due to inadequate curriculum support or limited facilities, the positive impact of bilingual programs decreases.

4. Psychological factors, such as confidence and language anxiety

Psychological factors like low confidence and anxiety when communicating in a foreign language have a significant impact. Qualitative research reveals that EFL pre-service teachers often experience foreign language teaching anxiety (FLTA) during teaching practicum, triggered by self-perceived linguistic weakness, difficulty managing classroom activities, and concerns about negative evaluation. Additionally, research by Mendrofa and Yoedo at Petra Christian University highlights the anxiety experienced by prospective elementary teachers when listening to and reading English: they reported fear of mispronunciation, worry about poor evaluations, and limitations in vocabulary.

Learning psychology theories, such as Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory, help explain how self-belief (self-efficacy) shapes teachers' responses to challenges. When pre-service teachers feel incapable, they tend to avoid verbal interaction in bilingual classrooms, which hinders effective learning. Furthermore, stress management strategies become crucial, studies show that pre-service teachers employ personal, social, and professional coping strategies to reduce anxiety during teaching practicum.

D. Implications for the PGSD Study Program

Based on an analysis of the literature discussing bilingual education at the elementary level and pre-service teacher preparation, several strategic implications emerge for Primary School Teacher Education (PGSD) programs. These implications are interconnected and form a comprehensive framework to strengthen the study program so that pre-service teachers become more prepared and effective in teaching within bilingual school systems.

First, the importance of adding bilingual-focused courses to the PGSD curriculum cannot be overlooked. Literature reviews indicate that early teacher education significantly influences pre-service teachers' readiness to teach in two languages. For example, a study on pre-service teachers in Spain participating in a CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) program showed that they improved their conceptual understanding and methodological foundation for bilingual instruction after taking introductory CLIL courses. By incorporating courses specifically designed for bilingual education—such as CLIL theories, translanguaging planning, and bilingual teaching methodologies—PGSD programs can help pre-service teachers develop a deeper understanding of how to integrate academic content with language instruction.

Second, bilingual training and microteaching should become essential components of teacher education. Literature from the Indonesian context emphasizes that teacher readiness and institutional support are key factors in the success of bilingual programs in elementary schools. Without practical teaching experience in bilingual settings, pre-service teachers may struggle to adopt effective bilingual instructional strategies. Therefore, PGSD programs need to provide routine training (workshops, professional development modules) and bilingual microteaching as opportunities for teaching practice, allowing pre-service teachers to experiment with using two languages, apply translanguaging techniques, and try relevant instructional models (such as immersion, cooperative learning, and contextual teaching and learning), as highlighted in the literature on bilingual models. This combination of training and microteaching helps reduce anxiety while increasing pre-service teachers' confidence in bilingual instructional contexts.

Third, there is an urgent need to strengthen the PGSD curriculum so that it aligns with the demands of bilingual learning in the era of the Merdeka Curriculum and bilingual school policies. Indonesian literature notes that the success of bilingual programs is heavily influenced by institutional readiness, available infrastructure, and policy integration at the elementary school level. PGSD programs should revise their curriculum so that bilingual components become central to graduate competencies rather than optional additions. For instance, competencies in bilingual pedagogy, bilingual assessment, and cultural language literacy should be incorporated. Theories of bilingualism, such as translanguaging approaches, emphasize the flexible use of languages in teaching, pre-service teachers need to learn to utilize both languages as evolving learning resources. Several case studies of CLIL implementation in Indonesian schools also highlight how teachers use translanguaging as a key strategy to help students understand academic content.

Fourth, establishing partnerships with bilingual schools is crucial for enriching pre-service teachers' practical experience. PGSD programs should form formal collaborations with bilingual schools (national-plus, CLIL-based, or bilingual immersion models) to ensure that microteaching, internships, and field practice take place in authentic settings. Through this approach, pre-service teachers not only learn theoretical concepts but also observe and practice in real bilingual environments, experiencing the actual challenges posed by bilingual students and school policies. Such collaborations also provide opportunities for PGSD students to conduct classroom action research, which in turn may contribute to improving bilingual programs in both institutions.

Collectively, these four implications, bilingual course integration, bilingual training and microteaching, curriculum development, and partnerships with bilingual schools, create a mutually reinforcing cycle: the study program provides theoretical foundations; training and microteaching translate theory into practice; curriculum enhancement ensures sustained bilingual competencies; and school partnerships guarantee real-world relevance. If implemented comprehensively, PGSD programs will be more effective in preparing primary school teachers who possess strong competencies and adaptability to meet the demands of bilingual education in the era of globalization.

CONCLUSION

Bilingual education requires prospective elementary school teachers to have broad competencies, ranging from good language proficiency, pedagogical skills to manage two languages in a balanced manner, to professional competencies such as bilingual material development and evaluation. In addition, prospective teachers also need social-personal competencies that include self-confidence, cultural awareness, and motivation to continuously improve their abilities.

On the other hand, various challenges still arise in the process of preparing prospective teachers, such as low foreign language skills, lack of bilingual teaching experience, limited curriculum and school facilities, and psychological factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence when teaching in two languages. These conditions show that bilingual learning requires comprehensive preparation, both from prospective teachers and educational institutions.

Therefore, strengthening the PGSD program is crucial to ensure that prospective teachers receive adequate training and experience before entering bilingual classrooms. Curriculum reform, improved training, and cooperation with bilingual schools are strategic steps in preparing competent and adaptive prospective teachers.

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