



Reading Comprehension Challenges Among Bilingual Students: Teachers' Perspectives and Pedagogical Recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Reading comprehension is a fundamental component of academic success, yet bilingual students often face distinct challenges in this area, particularly in contexts where the language of instruction differs from their home language. This qualitative study investigates the reading comprehension difficulties encountered by bilingual primary school students in Indonesia, drawing on the experiences and insights of 20 classroom teachers from Tangerang Selatan, Banten. Through semi-structured interviews, the study identifies key barriers to comprehension including limited vocabulary, language interference, and low parental involvement—factors often exacerbated by socioeconomic constraints and large family sizes. The study also explores the impact of these difficulties on students' performance in other subjects, as well as the strategies teachers employ to mitigate these challenges. Teachers propose solutions such as adapting textbooks, increasing family engagement, providing professional development in bilingual education, and enhancing early childhood programs. These findings contribute to a nuanced understanding of bilingual students' literacy development in Indonesia and underscore the need for context-sensitive educational interventions.

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INTRODUCTION

Reading is regarded as a crucial process involving multifaceted and higher-order skills. In this respect, it is important to underscore the pervasive influence of reading across various aspects of daily life. According to Cain and Oakhill (2017), achieving the desired success in formal education is contingent upon the ability to read and comprehend texts. Accurate and fluent reading, along with comprehension, can be considered among the primary objectives of elementary education.

It is well acknowledged that the concept of reading encompasses a broad spectrum of meanings. Therefore, it is necessary to examine and articulate the

content and characteristics of reading in a comprehensive manner. Snow and Matthews (2016) emphasize that reading is a cognitively demanding and problem-solving process, cautioning that fluency should not be narrowly equated with mere decoding. Instead, comprehension, interpretation, and critical engagement are central to skilled reading.

Clearly, the reading process cannot be confined to a narrow definition. Accordingly, reading is described as a conscious or unconscious, interactive, complex, and mental process that involves both cognitive and perceptual components. It entails deriving meaning from various texts—such as books, newspapers, letters, and articles—by employing diverse strategies (Afflerbach, 2016; Castles, Rastle, & Nation, 2018; Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Kim, 2020). Reading demands both word recognition and comprehension, the latter referring to the process of constructing meaning from words, sentences, and entire texts. One prerequisite for reading comprehension is the reader's ability to draw upon prior experiences (Cain & Oakhill, 2017).

Reading comprehension is a complex process that encompasses multiple linguistic and cognitive components such as vocabulary knowledge, fluency, background knowledge, and familiarity with the topic. A deficiency in any of these cognitive components may adversely affect comprehension performance (Catts & Kamhi, 2017; Kim, 2020; Duke & Cartwright, 2021). Understanding a text necessitates knowledge of sentence structures, key phrases, and, at the most basic level, the meanings of individual words—highlighting the hierarchical nature of the reading process (Castles et al., 2018).

Reading comprehension can be defined as the ability to identify or construct both explicit and implicit meanings, predictions, and evaluations through the use of various metacognitive reading strategies. As readers begin to comprehend a text, they engage in criticism, analysis, interpretation, connection-making, and idea evaluation. Once comprehension occurs, readers strive to go beyond the surface level of words in the text. For this reason, comprehension is considered the cornerstone of reading (Duke & Cartwright, 2021; Kendeou, McMaster, & Christ, 2016; van den Broek, Helder, & Karlsson, 2018).

To comprehend effectively, readers must understand the text and possess relevant knowledge and experience. Among the most critical elements for comprehension is vocabulary knowledge (Nation, 2017). This is particularly vital for learners of a second language, who often lack both the requisite vocabulary and the experiential knowledge to interpret texts meaningfully (Grabe, 2009; Jeon & Yamashita, 2014; Uchikoshi, 2019). Jeon and Yamashita (2014) also report that second language learners experience significantly more comprehension difficulties than monolingual learners. Similarly, research by Kieffer and Lesaux (2012) confirms that one of the most persistent challenges for English as a Foreign

Language (EFL) learners lies in mastering reading comprehension due to their limited linguistic resources and reduced access to meaningful input.

Notably, socio-cultural and structural differences between languages, limited vocabulary knowledge, and a habitual reliance on first-language thinking often lead to problems in reading and comprehension. Vocabulary and linguistic structure are deeply intertwined and thus play a crucial role in reading comprehension in a second language. This view is supported Friesen and Haigh (2018) “Simple View of Reading,” presented in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The Simple View of Reading

Figure 1 illustrates the Simple View of Reading, which posits that reading comprehension is the product of two core components: word recognition and language comprehension. This model underscores the interdependence of decoding skills (the ability to accurately and fluently recognize written words) and linguistic competence (the ability to derive meaning from spoken or written language). Effective reading comprehension can only occur when both components function proficiently. If either word recognition or language comprehension is underdeveloped, the overall understanding of a text will be significantly impaired. Thus, this model emphasizes that reading is not merely a decoding task but a cognitively integrative process involving both the recognition of written symbols and the construction of meaning from language.

According to the Simple View of Reading, reading comprehension among bilingual students—particularly those who are either schooled in a language other than their mother tongue or are in the process of acquiring a second language—relies heavily on two core competencies: word recognition and language comprehension. Deficiencies in either of these domains can lead to reading difficulties and poor comprehension outcomes for both bilingual and monolingual learners. Bilingual students whose first language differs from the instructional language are particularly susceptible to such challenges. Addressing these issues is critical for the success of second language education.

The demands of the 21st century increasingly require bilingual learners—especially those studying in countries where the instructional language differs from

their native tongue—to attain proficiency in the second language on par with their first (Cummins, 2021; García & Kleyn, 2016). Lesaux and Kieffer (2010) similarly highlight this issue, attributing the problem to specific sociolinguistic contexts and disparities in language exposure. In Indonesia, for example, students whose home language is not Indonesian often receive their formal education in Indonesian, yet do not frequently use Indonesian in their daily lives. This linguistic dissonance, compounded by the absence of a tailored educational program for such learners, exacerbates the difficulties they encounter in reading comprehension.

The literature contains numerous studies that address the reading comprehension challenges faced by bilingual students whose first language differs from the language of instruction. August and Shanahan (2017), for instance, examined the reading comprehension abilities of bilingual learners and found a persistent performance gap when compared to monolingual peers, particularly in academic text processing. Kieffer and Thompson (2018) focused on English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners, attributing their comprehension difficulties primarily to linguistic limitations. They observed that unfamiliar vocabulary, syntactic complexity, and limited exposure to rich language input are significant barriers, suggesting that vocabulary knowledge plays a pivotal role in reading success.

Similarly, Nation (2017) explored the difficulties experienced by EFL learners acquiring a second language. He identified a range of factors impeding reading comprehension, including limited vocabulary knowledge, rapid forgetting of newly encountered words, inadequately scaffolded reading activities, and poorly structured texts. Grabe and Stoller (2019) extended this line of inquiry by examining the impact of targeted reading strategies on EFL learners' reading performance, demonstrating that strategy-based instruction—such as inference training, summarizing, and predicting—can significantly enhance comprehension outcomes. Uccelli and Galloway (2021) also investigated how reading comprehension skills can be improved among second language learners. Their findings reinforced the conclusion that bilingual students often face greater challenges than their monolingual peers, particularly when engaging with complex academic texts that require advanced discourse knowledge and vocabulary depth.

In the context of Indonesia, there appears to be a noticeable gap in research that not only documents the reading difficulties faced by bilingual students but also proposes concrete pedagogical solutions. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct further studies to identify the specific challenges faced by bilingual learners and develop strategies to address them.

Motivated by this research gap, the present study seeks to examine the reading comprehension problems encountered by bilingual students from the perspective of teachers. The study also explores potential solutions proposed by teachers based

on their classroom experiences. Specifically, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the reading comprehension challenges faced by bilingual students?
2. How do these challenges impact students' performance in other academic subjects?
3. What types of reading comprehension activities do teachers implement for bilingual students?
4. What solutions do teachers propose to overcome reading comprehension difficulties among bilingual learners?

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a case study design. Case studies focus on one or more individuals, events, or phenomena and the variables that affect or are affected by these contexts. Given that this research aims to explore the reading comprehension challenges experienced by bilingual students and how these challenges impact their performance in other academic subjects, the case study design is deemed appropriate for addressing the research objectives.

Participants

The study was conducted with a purposive sample of 20 teachers working in Tangerang Selatan, Banten. Specifically, criterion sampling—one of the purposive sampling methods—was employed to select participants. In criterion sampling, individuals, events, or cases that meet predetermined criteria aligned with the aim of the study are included in the sample. In this study, the criterion was that participating teachers must have both monolingual and bilingual students in their classrooms. Accordingly, only classroom teachers who met this condition were included. The demographic characteristics of the participant teachers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of Participant Teachers

Characteristic	Category	Frequency (N)
Gender	Female	9
	Male	11
Teaching Experience	1–5 years	5
	6–10 years	9
	11 years or more	6
Total		20

As shown in Table 1, the participant group consisted of 9 female and 11 male teachers. In terms of professional experience, 5 teachers had between 1 and 5 years of experience, 9 had between 6 and 10 years, and 6 had over 11 years of teaching experience. The participant will be named as PT-1, PT-2, PT-3 to PT-20.

Data Collection Instruments

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview form developed by the researcher. The interview form comprised five main questions along with follow-up probes related to each question. These open-ended questions focused on teachers' observations regarding bilingual students' challenges in reading comprehension, the impact of such challenges on other subject areas, activities conducted by teachers to support reading comprehension, and proposed solutions to address the identified difficulties. The draft version of the interview form was reviewed by four experts in the fields of Education, Language Education, and Educational Sciences to assess its linguistic clarity and content relevance. Based on their feedback, one question was removed, and the remaining items were revised for linguistic and content validity. The finalized version of the interview form was then used in data collection.

Data Collection

The interviews were conducted during the 2024–2025 of academic year. While interviews with 15 teachers were conducted via telephone, the remaining 5 teachers opted to provide written responses due to personal preference. Each interview lasted approximately 20 minutes.

The collected data were analyzed using descriptive analysis techniques. In descriptive analysis, themes are identified based on the research questions and data, and the findings are organized and interpreted according to these themes. For this study, themes were generated in line with the interview questions, and the data were systematically categorized and interpreted within the framework of the identified themes.

To ensure external reliability in this study, detailed descriptions were provided regarding the research objectives, sub-problems, study group, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis processes. For internal reliability, the data were independently coded by the researchers. To assess the consistency between coders, the reliability was computed using the method described by Miles and Huberman (1994), where reliability is determined by dividing the number of agreements by the total of agreements and disagreements. The calculated inter-coder reliability was 96%, reflecting strong consistency in the coding outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To enhance both internal and external validity, the descriptive findings were substantiated with direct quotations from participants, thereby strengthening the credibility and confirmability of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative data collected from teacher interviews were systematically categorized into four main themes: the specific challenges bilingual students encounter in reading comprehension, the subsequent effects of these difficulties on their academic performance across various subjects, the pedagogical activities implemented by teachers to enhance reading comprehension, and the proposed solutions to address these identified issues. This thematic organization facilitated a descriptive analysis of the findings.

1. Difficulties Bilingual Students Face in Reading Comprehension

Teachers were asked the following questions: *“What are your observations regarding the reading comprehension abilities of bilingual and monolingual students? Do you think bilingual students experience more difficulties in reading comprehension? If so, what are the reasons?”*

The vast majority of teachers (n=18) reported that bilingual students experience more challenges in reading comprehension compared to their monolingual peers. Only two teachers expressed that there was no significant difference between the two groups in this regard. Some illustrative excerpts from teacher responses are as follows:

- 1) “There is a serious difference. While bilingual students should, in theory, be at an advantage, unfortunately, in our country, the opposite is true.” (PT-8)
- 2) “There is a significant gap. Monolingual students are more successful in this area. When bilingual students are first introduced to Indonesian, they begin to struggle—even confusing sounds and letters.” (PT-10)
- 3) “There is clearly a difference. There are serious problems with reading comprehension.” (PT-12)

As highlighted above, the majority of teachers (n=18) stated that bilingual students experience difficulty understanding texts because they cannot effectively process what they read. Additionally, some teachers noted that these students make more grammatical errors (n=3) or experience conceptual confusion (n=2).

Teachers identified several causes behind the reading comprehension difficulties of bilingual students. Most of them emphasized *language conflict* (n=18) and *limited vocabulary* (n=17) as the primary factors. Selected excerpts from teacher responses include:

- 4) “An inadequate vocabulary is a serious issue. When a student encounters an unfamiliar word in a text and struggles to understand it, they become stuck, which then affects their comprehension of the entire passage. Another important factor is the student’s prior experiences, particularly in terms of language. These experiences are shaped by their first language, Sundanese, and this can cause conflict when they are exposed to Indonesian.” (PT-7)
- 5) “Bilingual children do face difficulties due to language conflict. For instance, they speak one language—Sundanese—at home and another—Indonesian—at school. This creates a major challenge. They essentially learn English at school, but even if they speak it, they may not fully understand the meanings of the words. For example, they read the word *mother* and say it, but they may not fully grasp its meaning.” (PT-2)

As these accounts illustrate, most teachers noted that bilingual students struggle with reading comprehension due to the differences between the home language and the school language, the lack of home support for the school language, and the students' limited vocabulary, which hampers their understanding of text content.

In addition to the primary causes, some teachers also highlighted other contributing factors: thinking in their native language (n=5), lack of reading habits (n=5), no access to early childhood education (n=2), parental neglect (n=2), and limited resources (n=1). Selected responses include:

- 6) "In this region, there is no culture of reading. This leads to students repeatedly using the same words and prevents vocabulary development. Also, the quality of early childhood education is very poor, and perhaps more critically, there is no effective educational intervention to address these issues." (PT-9)
- 7) "There is this phenomenon of 'thinking in Indonesia.' They think in Indonesia and try to express themselves in English, but the English they produce doesn't fully convey their thoughts." (PT-4)
- 8) "Bilingual students are already at a disadvantage in this respect. On top of that, their families are unfortunately not engaged. Since there are no reading activities at home and no parental support, the children cannot reinforce what they learn at school." (PT-20)

As emphasized in the teacher responses, bilingual students often attempt to understand texts by first thinking in their native language and then translating into English. The absence of reading habits and a lack of family support further exacerbate their struggles with reading comprehension.

2. The impact of the Difficulties on Performance in Other Academic Subjects

Teachers were asked the following question: *"Do you think the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by bilingual students affect their performance in other subjects? If so, how does this situation impact those subjects?"* All participating teachers (n=20) indicated that the reading comprehension challenges faced by bilingual students have negative repercussions on their academic performance across various subjects. The majority of teachers (n=14) emphasized that these difficulties broadly affect students' achievement in all subjects, while others noted a particularly stronger impact in specific disciplines. Selected illustrative teacher responses are provided below:

- 9) "There is definitely an effect on other subjects. For instance, I had a Javanese student who was excellent in Mathematics. However, when we worked on word problems, the student struggled to understand the problem when reading it independently. Yet, when I read and explained the problem orally, he could solve it mentally and very quickly, without even using a pencil." (PT-14)
- 10) "Yes, it does affect other subjects. For example, when a student fails to understand the text, they cannot solve math problems either, simply because they don't comprehend the instructions. The same applies to Life Science. Let me put it this way: when a direct arithmetic operation is given—like addition or subtraction—they can solve it right away. They're actually quite good at

that. But when it comes to word problems, where comprehension is key, they are unable to answer questions even if they know the solution.” (PT-12)

11) “Reading comprehension problems also affect other courses. For instance, in Science class, reading comprehension plays a crucial role. Our students perform poorly in English, and the main reason behind this underperformance is that their reading comprehension in Indonesian has not yet been adequately developed. We expect children to understand English while they are still struggling with Indonesian.” (PT-11)

12) “In Science, this issue is clearly evident. They simply do not understand what they read.” (PT-9)

13) “In subjects like Mathematics and Science, students struggle to understand and respond to the required expressions, questions, and instructions.” (PT-13)

As underscored in the teachers’ statements above, it is evident that reading comprehension difficulties among bilingual students adversely impact their overall academic performance. Most teachers specifically pointed to challenges in Mathematics (n=16) and Science (n=15), where students often fail to interpret problem statements and instructions accurately. Additionally, several teachers mentioned that these comprehension issues negatively affect students’ performance in Science (n=6) and Mathematics (n=2) courses.

3. Activities Aimed at Improving Reading Comprehension

Teachers were also asked: “*What activities do you implement during reading to improve the reading comprehension skills of bilingual students? Do you utilize reading comprehension strategies? If so, which strategies do you employ?*” The findings revealed that teachers employ a variety of activities and strategies to enhance bilingual students’ reading comprehension skills.

The most frequently mentioned strategies included:

- a) Reading comprehension strategies such as summarizing, underlining, question-answer techniques, identifying main ideas (n=8)
- b) Repeated readings (n=8)
- c) Use of visual materials (n=7)
- d) Use of simplified and short reading texts (n=7)
- e) Free reading activities (n=6)
- f) Providing examples in the students’ native language (n=6)

Selected illustrative responses are as follows:

14) “I make them read books constantly. Because this is a major issue in this region. It is unfortunately the only viable solution. We dedicate one hour each day solely to reading.” (PT-19)

15) “I conduct repeated reading activities. The texts in the textbooks are often too long, so I shorten them when necessary. Sometimes we read sentence by sentence. During book reading sessions, we go slowly and thoroughly. I make extensive use of storybooks.” (PT-6)

16) “Since primary school texts are rich in visuals, I use the pictures to support comprehension. For example, I show the pictures and ask questions like ‘What do you think this text is about?’ During reading, I use dramatizations or explanations where necessary. I encourage students to take notes on parts

they find interesting. After reading, I ask them to summarize the text, pose questions, and help them identify the topic and main idea.” (PT-15)

- 17) “During reading activities, to enhance associations and retention, I provide examples from the student’s native language for words they do not understand.” (PT-6)

These findings underscore the importance of integrating targeted reading strategies and multimodal support to facilitate bilingual students’ reading comprehension development and, by extension, their academic success across all subjects.

In addition, several teachers reported utilizing a variety of multimodal and interactive strategies to enhance bilingual students’ reading comprehension skills. These included the use of drama, role-play, and performance activities (n=4); audiovisual materials such as videos, films, and animations (n=4); as well as musical and poetic activities such as songs, poems, and riddles (n=3). Furthermore, some teachers reported incorporating read-aloud practices (n=2), the use of storybooks (n=2), the application of the 5W1H (Who, What, When, Where, Why, How) technique (n=2), and the provision of enriched stimuli (n=1). Representative teacher responses illustrating these practices are presented below:

- 18) “Reading comprehension difficulties in bilingual students often begin with slow reading. I use the 5W1H technique to evaluate their understanding of texts. Additionally, I develop a variety of visual materials. I proceed word by word, sentence by sentence, to facilitate comprehension. I assign very short reading texts to ensure that students read and understand them within a limited timeframe.” (PT-5)
- 19) “I utilize video and drama activities. We attempt to dramatize sentences and texts that have been read, and we support this process with relevant videos.” (PT-3)
- 20) “I support students’ acquisition of unfamiliar words and sentence structures through visual activities, videos, and similar materials, helping them to match these expressions with equivalents in their native language. After they learn to read and write, I reinforce their understanding with simple poems, riddles, and nursery rhymes, typically one or two stanzas in length and suited to their proficiency level. I also use age-appropriate educational cartoons and animations to strengthen learning and retention.” (PT-13)

3. Proposed Solutions

Teachers were asked the following question: *“What are your proposed solutions to address the reading comprehension difficulties experienced by bilingual students? In your opinion, what should be done?”* In response, the teachers offered a range of recommendations aimed at enhancing bilingual students’ reading comprehension skills. The most frequently cited suggestions included: increasing parental support and involvement (n=12); adapting curricula and textbooks to the regional context and student proficiency levels (n=10); providing teacher training on bilingual education (n=10); and organizing awareness-raising seminars or educational programs for parents (n=8).

Representative teacher responses illustrating these proposed solutions are presented below:

- 21) "Simplifying textbooks is essential. These simplified textbooks should also be supported with visual aids. The current materials contain overly long written texts, sometimes spanning six to seven pages, which are overwhelming for bilingual students. We are often compelled to simplify them ourselves. Textbook content is a major issue. Moreover, the lack of parental involvement must also be acknowledged. Parental engagement is necessary to overcome this problem. The Ministry should provide seminars to teachers on these challenges and how to address them. Teachers must also take initiative to improve themselves in this area. In addition, it is crucial that teachers who are not familiar with English receive targeted training to handle these issues effectively." (PT-3)
- 22) "Reading texts are excessively long. This issue should be addressed by shortening the materials. I currently teach fourth grade, and even at this level the texts are abstract and too lengthy. Parents need to be involved in this process. Unfortunately, they do not value or support their children's education. There is a general sense of indifference among parents." (PT-12)
- 23) "Educational programs should be designed specifically for parents. These programs should include practical strategies to support the development of reading comprehension, emphasize the importance of effective communication with their children, and suggest that the language used in communication be the one in which the child struggles most. Parents need to be made aware of these issues through seminars and training sessions." (PT-1)
- 24) "Parents have a significant role to play. They must act with dedication and support their children's language development through home-based learning. Serious efforts should be made to simplify textbooks. At the very least, textbooks distributed in this region should be adapted to the needs of local children. In my view, having linguistically disadvantaged students learn from the same materials as their peers in other regions places them at an unfair disadvantage from the start. Additionally, teachers assigned to this region should receive specific training to help them address these challenges." (PT-2)

Furthermore, some teachers recommended implementing family-based reading activities (n=6); promoting story reading and similar practices (n=5); supporting early childhood education (n=4); incorporating more visual aids (n=2); using supplementary reading materials (n=2); and applying reading strategies (n=1). The following responses reflect these additional suggestions:

- 25) "Preschool education is essential—it must be prioritized. Instead of the current 6+3+3 educational structure, a preparatory year could be introduced for bilingual students before they enter the first grade." (PT-11)
- 26) "I believe story reading hours should be implemented. Reading activities should also take place within the family so that children can model this behavior. This would be truly effective." (PT-8)

Discussion

This study found that nearly all teachers believed bilingual students experience greater difficulties in reading comprehension compared to their

monolingual peers. The teachers overwhelmingly identified the primary causes of these comprehension challenges as language interference and limited vocabulary knowledge. Additionally, some teachers attributed the difficulties faced by bilingual students to factors such as thinking primarily in their native language, lack of reading habits, absence of preschool education, parental disengagement, and restricted socioeconomic opportunities. It was also observed that monolingual students generally outperform bilingual students in this regard. These findings indicate that the cognitive and linguistic advantages typically associated with bilingualism do not translate into superior reading comprehension for bilingual students in this context. Due to the outlined factors, bilingualism becomes a disadvantageous condition within Indonesia.

Overall, the lower reading comprehension ability of bilingual students aligns with findings from various studies, both domestic and international. For example, Hastomo et al. (2025) emphasized that the generally low educational attainment of families with bilingual children significantly limits parental support and engagement in their children's reading development. In the Indonesian context, similar findings are evident in regions with high bilingual populations, such as communities where local languages (e.g., Bugis, Javanese, Sundanese, Batak, or indigenous Papuan languages) are spoken. In these communities, many parents lack formal education, which limits their ability to support their children's literacy development (Andari et al., 2025; Aswandi, 2019).

Additionally, low parental involvement is often associated with large family sizes, which are still common among bilingual households in rural or remote areas. Families with five or more children tend to face limitations in providing optimal academic support for each child (Syah, 2020). Bilingual students are also generally exposed to the second language (typically Indonesian or English) less frequently than their monolingual peers, which reduces their vocabulary capacity, sentence comprehension, and phonological awareness (Iskandarwassid & Sunendar, 2014).

Several studies also indicate that bilingual students in Indonesia often come from low-income families, especially in peripheral regions and traditional communities (Riyadi, 2017). Insufficient exposure to Indonesian or English in the home or community environment—combined with limited parental involvement—creates major challenges for bilingual students in acquiring reading literacy skills (Mandasari et al., 2025).

Lesaux and Kieffer (2010) argue that the reading comprehension difficulties faced by bilingual students are mainly due to two key factors: the socioeconomic status of the family and linguistic issues such as limited vocabulary, low reading test scores, inadequate instructional materials, and weak word decoding abilities. Specifically, bilingual children from low-income households tend to have smaller vocabularies, a limitation that significantly affects their reading comprehension outcomes.

One of the most critical factors hampering bilingual students' reading comprehension is language interference, often referred to as language shock. This phenomenon frequently occurs in conjunction with cultural shock (Uchikoshi, 2019). Language interference typically arises when bilingual students begin the second-language acquisition process by thinking in their first language. When first-language skills are not effectively transferred or when the two languages involved

have very different structures (such as between a local language and Indonesian), interference becomes inevitable and negatively affects reading comprehension.

Nonetheless, some studies show that bilingualism can offer advantages in reading comprehension. For instance, Uchikoshi (2019) reported that bilingual students outperformed their monolingual peers in reading tasks. Kalantari et al. (2020) also found that, under certain conditions, bilingual students demonstrate superior reading skills. These findings suggest that bilingualism can be beneficial when supported by a conducive educational and social environment.

While the literature presents mixed results, this study suggests that bilingualism currently poses a challenge to reading comprehension development in the Indonesian context. Factors such as socioeconomic status, limited parental involvement, and language interference are the primary issues that must be urgently addressed through national educational policy and practice.

As discussed above, based on similar findings in the existing literature and the results of this study, it can be asserted that, according to teachers' perspectives, bilingual students studying in Indonesia experience greater difficulties in reading comprehension compared to their monolingual peers. Although the primary reasons for these difficulties are attributed to language conflict experienced by bilingual students—such as differences between the home language and the language used at school, and the lack of support for the school language at home—and their limited vocabulary knowledge, other related factors may also contribute. These include bilingual students' tendency to think in their mother tongue, the absence of regular reading habits, lack of preschool education, parental disinterest, and limited socio-economic opportunities. Therefore, it can be concluded that bilingual students face disadvantages in reading comprehension due to both language-related factors and family or environmental influences, compared to monolingual students.

The majority of classroom teachers indicated that the reading comprehension challenges faced by bilingual students have a negative impact on their performance in other subjects as well. It was reported that bilingual students often read problems in subjects such as mathematics and science but struggle to understand them. Similarly, difficulties in comprehending texts were observed in subjects like Mathematics and Sciences. This underscores that reading comprehension affects all academic disciplines. Hence, it is crucial to implement activities aimed at improving reading comprehension and to employ various strategies across different subjects.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes by articulating several key recommendations from teachers for enhancing the reading comprehension of bilingual students. These recommendations include ensuring parental support and involvement, tailoring curricula and textbooks to regional contexts and student proficiency levels, providing professional development for teachers, and organizing educational seminars to increase parental awareness. Despite Indonesia's educational principles of equality, as demonstrated by uniform textbook distribution, the development of policies that address specific regional needs is crucial. Therefore, designing and implementing contextually appropriate curricula and textbooks for regions with bilingual students is

essential to mitigate linguistic disadvantages.

Furthermore, a significant lack of instructional materials specifically designed to address reading comprehension challenges in bilingual students limits the effectiveness of learning activities, thus necessitating the creation of original, needs-based materials. Given that preschool education aids bilingual students in overcoming language confusion and shock when their first language differs from the instructional medium, making preschool education compulsory and integrating targeted English language acquisition activities within early childhood education is advisable. Insufficient family support also significantly contributes to these difficulties, highlighting the need for families to actively promote English language use at home and in the community for students who use different languages at school and home, thereby alleviating linguistic confusion.

Finally, the study acknowledges its limitations, being confined to a specific sample of primary school teachers in Tangerang Selatan and relying on interview forms for data collection. Future research could expand its scope by including different provinces and engaging additional stakeholders like parents and school administrators, while also employing alternative data collection methods such as classroom observations to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges in bilingual reading comprehension

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