



WHEN ENGLISH LEADS: REFRAMING EYL IN THE CONTEXT OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE STRUGGLES AT KINDERSTATION PRIMARY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of the English-based International Primary Curriculum (IPC) on Indonesian language development at Kinderstation Primary, a National Plus school in Indonesia. Focusing on the dynamics of early bilingualism, it explores how the dominance of English from a young age impacts students' linguistic equilibrium. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers and parents, questionnaires, and student language samples. Findings reveal that lower-grade students (grades 1–2) remain in a transitional phase, predominantly using Indonesian in both learning and interaction. In contrast, upper-grade students (grade 3 and above) exhibit strong English proficiency and increasingly favor English for both academic and everyday contexts. Notably, there is a marked reduction in students' confidence and active use of Indonesian. While most parents did not express concern, they emphasized the importance of balanced bilingualism. The study underscores the need for integrated bilingual instruction, cultural reinforcement, and curriculum refinement to ensure that students grow as globally competent individuals without compromising their national language and identity. These insights offer critical implications for English for Young Learners (EYL) practices within internationalized educational settings in non-English dominant contexts.

Keywords: *English for Young Learner (EYL), International Primary Curriculum (IPC), Bilingualism, Language Dominance*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary era, education has emerged as an indispensable cornerstone of both personal development and societal advancement. It can no longer be overlooked or treated as a secondary concern. As awareness deepens, education is increasingly acknowledged as a transformative force capable of shaping a more orderly, progressive, and resilient future. Its role in cultivating informed, capable individuals and fostering collective stability and growth is more vital than ever. Education serves as a key to success,

providing access to countless opportunities in both personal and professional life (Bigs et al., 2022; Kustyarini & Umamy, 2024). Unlike in the past when access to education was limited by economic hardship, social constraints, or geographical barriers, modern society has witnessed a significant increase in the accessibility of education. Education is no longer a privilege for a select few, but a right that is available to all, regardless of gender, age, socio-economic background, or physical condition. These advances reflect a global commitment to fostering a more just and informed society, where everyone has the

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

opportunity to realize their potential and contribute meaningfully to the world.

In this context, the English learning system for early childhood is known as English for Young Learners (EYL) and the existence of English subjects is considered important to be studied from the early age (Cameron, 2021; Meisani & Purnawarman, 2019). According to Reilly and Ward (2019), young learners are children aged between 3 and 6 years, or even younger. In Indonesia, students at elementary school level are generally categorized as young learners, so the approach to teaching English for this group requires strategies and methods that are adjusted to the characteristics of their cognitive and affective development (Setyaningrum et al., 2022; Celik et al., 2021; Ghwela, 2023; Haq, 2024).

In general, there are still many elementary schools in Indonesia that face challenges in implementing English teaching and learning activities. This is due to various factors, such as limited teaching resources, lack of exposure to English in everyday life, and learning methods that are not fully in accordance with the needs of early childhood. However, this condition is different from Kinderstation Primary or *SD Cahaya Bangsa Utama* which is the object of the case study in this research. This school is a national plus-based institution, and the term national plus refers to the implementation of two curricula simultaneously, namely the National Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) and the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) which is specifically designed for primary schools focusing on cross-subject learning and global skills development (Alfianti et al., 2024). IPC was designed by *Fieldwork Education* in 2000 from the UK. This bilingual and dual-curriculum approach is designed to strengthen students' competencies not only in local contexts, but also globally, and provide a stronger foundation in mastering English from an early age (Treffers-Daller, 2019; Revniuk & Bányi, 2023; Suharyo & Nurhayati, 2021). The correct term for this condition is bilingualism.

Bilingualism is the ability to communicate in everyday life using two languages (Hoffman, 2019; Garcia & Lin, 2019; de Diego-Lázaro, 2022). This condition is known as language dominance. The meaning of language dominance is a complex

construction where the level of proficiency between two languages is different and one of them is stronger in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation (de Diego-Lázaro, 2022; Veto Mortini et al., 2023; aya et al., 2025). To save the conditions mentioned above, it is necessary to balance it by promoting the Pedagogy strategy for balanced bilingualism.

This study seeks to examine the impact of implementing the English-medium International Primary Curriculum (IPC) on the development and usage of Indonesian language skills among students at Kinderstation Primary. It further investigates the perspectives of both teachers and parents regarding students' bilingual competencies, with particular attention to the challenges encountered in sustaining Indonesian language fluency. The research is driven by a growing concern over how English-dominant international curricula, such as IPC, influence the linguistic balance in early education, particularly in non-English-speaking contexts. As Kinderstation Primary adopts a bilingual instructional model integrating the Merdeka Curriculum with IPC, it presents a compelling setting to assess the interplay between English and Indonesian. Moreover, exploring stakeholder perceptions is crucial to understanding the tensions between fostering global linguistic competencies and preserving national language identity in a bilingual educational environment.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

English for Young Learner (EYL)

One strategy to introduce English in the form of learning is by layering or dividing the phases. Of course, there is great hope that with this division of phases, the distributed material will be appropriate and orderly. In general, the educational stage by the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) is divided into 8 levels as shown in the picture below.

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

ISCED levels	Description	Recoded educational levels
ISCED level 0	Early childhood education (Primary education not completed)	Low
ISCED level 1	Less than lower secondary	
ISCED level 2	Lower secondary	
ISCED level 3	Lower tier upper secondary/Upper tier upper secondary	Medium
ISCED level 4	Advanced vocational, sub-degree	
ISCED level 5	Short-cycle tertiary education (lower tertiary education)	High
ISCED level 6	Bachelor's degree or equivalent	
ISCED level 7	Master's degree or equivalent	
ISCED level 8	PhD degree or equivalent	

Source: <https://shorturl.at/3jELI>

Figure 1. ISCED Levels and Educational Categories.

Young learners are categorized at levels 1 and 2 where students are generally aged 6-11 years or in the primary period. Children have quite unique characteristics where Bruner (2018) stated that the effectiveness of children's learning is that we get guidance from adults. In English learning, there is also a term English for Young Learners. It is stated by Setyaningrum et al. (2022) that Nunan (2023) stated that all strategies and materials presented in EYL are adjusted to the abilities of students at this age. In a study conducted by Meisani and Purnawarman, (2019), it was shown that English is a favourite subject at the elementary education level, supplemented by a statement from McKay (2018) that this preference can be the basis for developing the students' English skills.

International Primary Curriculum (IPC)

As one of the national plus schools that implements 2 curriculum (Alfianti et al., 2024), namely the Merdeka Curriculum and IPC, Kinderstation Primary has an obligation to balance the portion of its implementation. The International Primary Curriculum is very suitable for use by schools with a diversity orientation. As stated by Muhammad, (2023), the concern of IPC is to be a container and guide for a multicultural environment so that children have the provisions to face diversity.

This curriculum was created approximately 25 years ago by an organization called Fieldwork Education from England. Accessed from the International Curriculum Addiction (ICA) website <https://internationalcurriculum.com/> *International Curriculum Association (ICA)* which is open to the public and contains detailed information about IPC. In its implementation, the International Primary Curriculum (IPC) directs students to learn through a system of work units that are managed thematically and holistically. Each unit is designed to develop personal learning goals that cover various aspects of character and 21st-century skills, including: Adaptable, Communicator, Collaborator, Empathetic, Thinker, Ethical, Resilient, and Respectful. In the International Primary Curriculum (IPC), there are five main stages in the learning cycle Sumarah et al. (2019) designed to increase student engagement and understanding throughout Entry Point: The initial stage designed to arouse students' interest and curiosity in the topic to be studied through engaging and meaningful activities. Knowledge Harvest: The teacher explores students' prior knowledge and what they want to know, to relate new learning to their existing understanding. The Big Picture: The teacher provides general information and the overall context for the learning theme. Research, Recording, and Reflect Activities: Students engage in problem-based exploration activities to independently discover knowledge, record their findings, and reflect on the process and outcomes of their learning. Exit Point: The closing stage that encourages students to reconnect all the learning that has been done. Often involves parents so that students can present their learning outcomes openly.

And the IPC curriculum is applied very neatly in *SD Cahaya Bangsa Utama* or well known as Kinderstation Primary. It is said to be applied well because this school has a recognized license to apply IPC in its teaching and learning activities.

Bilingualism

Bilingualism is a person's ability to communicate in everyday life using two languages (Hoffman, 2019; Vallejo, 2018). This ability is not only related to linguistic aspects, but also has a positive impact on the individual's cognitive development. Research by Revniuk & Bátyi, (2023) shows that individuals who master two languages tend to have more flexible thinking skills, better working memory, and sharper problem-solving skills compared to monolinguals. However, in practice, it is rare to find bilingual individuals who have a truly balanced level of proficiency in both languages. Usually, there will be one language that is more dominant than the other, both in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, and frequency of use. This condition is called language dominance. According to de Diego-Lázaro, (2022), language dominance is a complex construct that reflects the inequality between the two languages mastered, where one of them has more power in certain linguistic aspects. Facts show that usually since children are 7 years old, they already have the potential to master two or even more languages. This is because their reasoning is already running so that it can be directed to new logical knowledge (Revniuk & Bátyi, 2023; Kirk et al., 2022).

Students and educators at Kinderstation Primary are bilingual to multilingual. This is proven by the school atmosphere where in daily life interactions between school residents mostly use English, sometimes mixed with Indonesian at certain moments such as during the Merdeka Curriculum learning.

Language Dominance

Language dominance refers to a situation where someone who masters two languages has an unbalanced level of proficiency between the two. One language becomes more dominant than the other, both in terms of grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. According to de Diego-Lázaro, (2022), language dominance is a complex

construct, because it includes various linguistic and cognitive dimensions that influence each other in everyday language use. This phenomenon often occurs in the context of bilingualism, especially when one language is used more often in formal environments such as schools, while the other language is used more in informal or domestic contexts. As a result, an individual's ability in the less dominant language tends to weaken, both in terms of receptive (understanding) and productive (expressing) (Sujariati et al., 2016; Jusslin et al., 2022). In the long term, this imbalance can result in the loss of fluency in one language, which can also indirectly affect the individual's cultural and social identity. There are many previous studies that analyse language dominance caused by bilingualism and most of them say that this language advantage is indicated by a person's mastery of vocabulary and grammar (Escudero et al., 2016; Treffers-Daller, 2019).

Research in the field of English for Young Learners (EYL) in Indonesia has so far focused more on the challenges of introducing English as a foreign language in public schools, where students' exposure to and competence in English is generally still limited. However, there is a research gap related to the opposite situation, namely when English becomes the dominant language in learning from an early age, especially in National Plus schools that implement international curricula such as the International Primary Curriculum (IPC). In this context, students often demonstrate high fluency in English, but their ability and confidence in using Indonesian tend to decline.

The novelty of this research lies in its perspective, which is different from EYL research in general. This research not only highlights how students learn English, but also explores the impact of English dominance on the development and preservation of Indonesian. Through a case study at Kinderstation Primary, this research makes new contributions to understanding children's bilingual identity formation, language inequalities due to curriculum choices, and the role of international schools in preserving

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

national language heritage amidst the globalization of education.

3. METHODS

This research adopts a qualitative methodology utilizing a case study design. According to Tisdell et al. (2025) and (Patton (2020), the case study is a qualitative method that enables an in-depth exploration of a specific entity such as an organization, program, event, or individual—within its authentic setting. This approach is appropriate as the investigation centers on a single institution: Kinderstation Primary, a National Plus school in Indonesia that has adopted the International Primary Curriculum (IPC). Rather than employing experimental methods, simulations, or extensive literature reviews, the study relies on direct observations and survey-based data collection. Its primary objective is to analyze the influence of an English-medium curriculum on students' acquisition and use of the Indonesian language, while also gaining insight into how educators and parents perceive the children's bilingual development within this educational framework.

The study was conducted at Kinderstation Primary, which uses English as the main language of instruction in the teaching and learning process, while Indonesian is taught as a separate subject. The subjects of the study consisted of:

1. Students in grades 1–5: observed in learning activities and social interactions.
2. Teachers (n = 5): interviewed to find out their views on students' language development.
3. Parents of students (n = 10): filled out a questionnaire.

Sampling was done using purposive sampling, by selecting participants who were directly involved in the bilingual educational environment.

Data collection was conducted through classroom observations, field notes, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Observations were conducted using structured observation sheets to record teacher and student language use, frequency of code-

switching, and the presence of Indonesian language teaching materials, as suggested in a study of bilingual environments (Vallejo, 2018). Observations covered IPC subjects, Indonesian, and transitional moments such as breaks using field notes to record student and teacher behaviour and reactions to the use of both languages in the social context of the school, in line with the ethnographic approach in qualitative research (Van Maanen, 2025). Below is the observation table used by the researcher.

Table 1. Observation Table

No	Category	Observation Criteria	Language	Notes
1.	Teacher's Language Use	Primary language used for instruction		
		Occasional use of Bahasa Indonesia for clarification		
		Encourages Bahasa Indonesia in certain subjects or tasks		
2.	Student Language Use	Language used in peer discussions		
		Student participation in Bahasa Indonesia (e.g., during Bahasa Indonesia lesson)		
		Code-switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia		
3.	Student Reactions	Comfort level using Bahasa Indonesia (e.g., hesitation, fluency, avoidance)		
		Reactions to teacher prompts in Bahasa Indonesia		
4.	Environment	Any visible Bahasa Indonesia materials (posters, books, labels)		
		Bahasa Indonesia represented equally with English?		

Semi structured interviews with teachers and parents explored perceptions of children's bilingual abilities and English dominance. Interviews were recorded using an iPhone 13 basic and transcribed using Microsoft Word 2021.

A questionnaire was distributed to parents via Google Forms, including open-ended and closed-ended questions about language use at home, comparison of children's English and Indonesian language abilities, and attitudes toward the IPC curriculum. The questionnaire design followed the principles of instrument development in social research (Louis Cohen et al., 2018). The following is an example of a display from a Google form that was shared with parents to fulfil research data. Through the Google Form provided, parents/guardians of students will be asked to answer several questions related to their children's use of English at school. These questions aim to find out how the English-

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

based curriculum affects children's language development, as well as its potential impact on their Indonesian language skills.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION***Class Observation***

Observations across six classrooms revealed that educators in grades 1 and 2 continue to employ a bilingual instructional approach, utilizing both English and Indonesian. This dual-language strategy serves as a transitional linguistic scaffold, designed to ease young learners into an English-dominant academic setting. At this developmental stage, bilingual instruction is deemed beneficial in enhancing comprehension and reducing cognitive overload, as students are still acclimating to the demands of learning in a foreign language.

Conversely, teachers in the upper primary levels (grades 3 to 6) have transitioned entirely to English as the medium of instruction, even for nationally mandated subjects such as IPAS, PPKn, and Bahasa Indonesia. This shift aligns with students' heightened linguistic proficiency, which allows for more efficient processing of content when presented in English. Moreover, frequent code-switching alternating between English and Indonesian was observed predominantly in the lower grades, particularly when clarification of complex ideas was necessary. This practice illustrates the interlanguage phenomenon, a transitional phase in second language acquisition characterized by the blending of linguistic elements from both the native and target languages. Notably, the frequency of code-switching diminishes in higher grades, reflecting a growing linguistic competence and a more stable preference for English as the primary mode of communication.

This phenomenon is in line with what was stated by Revniuk & Bátyi, (2023), which stated that individuals who master two or more languages tend to have higher cognitive flexibility. This ability is reflected in the ability to think more openly, adaptively, and creatively in solving problems or understanding new concepts. In this context, students in grades 3, 4, 5, and 6 demonstrate this capability through their proficiency in

quickly grasping lesson material, both when delivered in Indonesian and in English in full. This proves that bilingualism not only contributes to linguistic ability but also supports broader cognitive development. Furthermore, as stated by de Diego-Lázaro, (2022), the dominance of English in everyday life also shapes students' linguistic habits, including the tendency to use code switching unconsciously in everyday communication. This can be seen as a natural form of bilingual practice, where students use both languages dynamically depending on the context, interlocutor, and ease of expression. Although sometimes seen as an obstacle to language purity, in practice, code switching reflects the linguistic flexibility and sophistication possessed by bilingual learners.

Teacher Interview Results

Interviews with six teachers at Kinderstation Primary substantiated the findings from classroom observations, offering deeper pedagogical and psychological insight into students' linguistic tendencies and development. Broadly, teachers observed that students in grades 1 and 2 predominantly use Indonesian in both instructional and informal settings. This is viewed as natural, considering their young age and the foundational role of Indonesian as their first language, spoken at home and in everyday contexts. Consequently, lower grade educators intentionally permit Indonesian to support comprehension, despite the IPC's emphasis on English as the principal instructional language.

A marked linguistic shift emerges in grade 3 and beyond, where teachers reported that students begin to exhibit notable English fluency. This proficiency extends beyond academic discourse to informal interactions, often surpassing their comfort with Indonesian. One respondent, Teacher 3, noted that many upper-grade students display a clear preference for English, even during national subjects such as PPKn and Bahasa Indonesia. She expressed concern about students' diminished ability to articulate ideas in Indonesian, noting that while they passively understand the language, active expression especially in academic contexts proves challenging. Teachers 4 and 5 echoed this, observing greater confidence, fluency, and

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

clarity in English oral presentations, in contrast to students' hesitant and awkward use of Indonesian.

This trend points to a growing linguistic asymmetry, rooted in the English-dominant learning environment. While educators recognize the need to sustain Indonesian language use, they also acknowledge that English has become deeply embedded in the school's academic framework. The core challenge, therefore, is to design a bilingual strategy that fosters balanced proficiency supporting global competencies through English, without eroding students' connection to their national language and cultural identity.

Parent Questionnaire Results

The results of the questionnaire distributed to parents of students at Kinderstation Primary provide valuable perspectives from a total of 10 parents were involved as respondents in this data collection. In general, the questionnaire results show that parents have diverse views on the development of their children's language skills, especially in the context of bilingualism implemented in schools.

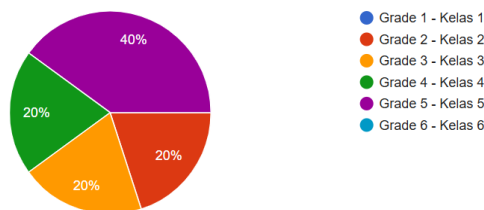


Figure 2. Percentage of Parents as Respondents
(source: <https://shorturl.at/6NQWh>)

Four out of ten parents stated that their children showed certain challenges in using Indonesian actively. They said that children tend to use English more often, both at school and at home, so that their ability to speak Indonesian does not develop as quickly as their English ability. Several parents also mentioned that their children often had difficulty finding vocabulary in Indonesian or forming appropriate sentences when they had to speak in their mother tongue. However, they appreciated the school's efforts in providing additional support through various approaches,

such as Indonesian literacy programs and special time for Indonesian lessons, which helped maintain children's exposure to the national language.

Five other parents expressed a more positive view of their children's language development. They were very satisfied with the significant improvement in their children's English language skills since they attended Kinderstation Primary. They noted that before entering this school, their children had limited English, but after participating in the learning process in an environment that supports English immersion, they experienced rapid improvements, not only in speaking, but also in reading and writing comprehension. For some parents, this success is seen as important capital for their children's future, especially in facing global challenges and continuing their education to an international level. Although they realize that their children's Indonesian language skills are not as strong as their English, they do not see this as a major problem, as long as the child still has adequate basic skills in Indonesian for social and family contexts.

One parent expressed a unique and reflective view. He felt that his child actually developed optimally because he was introduced to the concept of bilingualism from an early age. According to him, the presence of two languages in a child's daily life not only provides linguistic benefits, but also enriches cultural insight and broadens the child's way of thinking. He said that schools have become the right space for children to grow as individuals who are open to linguistic and cultural diversity. For these parents, bilingualism is not merely about mastering two languages, but rather about the child's ability to shift perspectives, understand differences, and develop a complex yet whole sense of identity. Overall, the questionnaire results showed that parents basically do not see English dominance as a direct threat to their children's Indonesian. However, there is a growing awareness of the importance of maintaining a balance between the two languages. Parents appreciate the role of schools as the main facilitator in the formation of children's bilingual competence, and they hope that teaching strategies in schools continue to pay attention to

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

strengthening Indonesian without reducing the effectiveness of English learning.

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight the dynamic interplay between bilingual instruction and students' linguistic development at Kinderstation Primary. The observations revealed that in the early grades (1 and 2), a bilingual approach utilizing both Indonesian and English serves as a crucial scaffold, helping students navigate the demands of learning in a foreign language. This approach aligns with Cummins' (2000) theory of bilingual education, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining the first language while developing the second, particularly to avoid cognitive overload and support comprehension in early stages. As students progress to higher grades (3 to 6), instruction shifts predominantly to English, with a noticeable reduction in code-switching practices, indicating growing linguistic proficiency and cognitive flexibility—traits associated with balanced bilingualism (Revniuk & Bátyi, 2023). This developmental trajectory suggests that bilingualism enhances not only language skills but also cognitive functions such as problem-solving and adaptability.

Interviews with teachers further confirmed this shift in linguistic behavior. Educators observed that students in lower grades are still heavily reliant on Indonesian, while those in upper grades exhibit a preference for English, even in national curriculum subjects like PPKn and Bahasa Indonesia. Some teachers expressed concern about students' declining ability to express themselves academically in Indonesian, although their passive understanding remains intact. This trend reflects a growing linguistic asymmetry, driven by an English-dominant learning environment. De Diego-Lázaro (2022) supports this observation, noting that code-switching often becomes unconscious in bilingual learners, reflecting their natural adaptability to different contexts. However, the risk of marginalizing the national language remains a critical concern. As Hornberger (2005) advocates in her continua of biliteracy model, true bilingual education should promote additive bilingualism—where learning a

second language does not come at the expense of the first.

Parent responses to the questionnaire echoed these findings, offering a nuanced perspective on the outcomes of bilingual education. While some parents noted challenges in their children's active use of Indonesian, especially in forming appropriate vocabulary and sentence structures, most appreciated the school's efforts to maintain exposure to the national language through targeted programs. Others highlighted their children's impressive progress in English as a key advantage, viewing bilingual competence as an essential asset for global competitiveness. One parent reflected on the deeper cultural and cognitive benefits of early bilingual exposure, emphasizing that bilingualism promotes openness, identity development, and cultural insight. These reflections resonate with Revniuk and Bátyi (2023) assertion that bilingual education, when well-implemented, fosters not just language proficiency but also intercultural competence and broader cognitive development.

In conclusion, the study underscores the importance of balanced bilingual strategies in education. While English immersion contributes significantly to linguistic competence and academic readiness for global contexts, sustaining the use and development of Indonesian remains essential for cultural identity and national cohesion. Schools, therefore, must design curricula that integrate both languages meaningfully, ensuring that students emerge not just as fluent English speakers, but also as linguistically and culturally grounded individuals capable of navigating diverse linguistic landscapes.

5. CONCLUSION

This study underscores the significant influence of the English-based International Primary Curriculum (IPC) on students' English language development at Kinderstation Primary, particularly from grade 3 onwards. Students exhibit a high level of fluency and confidence in using English, both academically and socially, which can be attributed to the school's immersive English-language environment. This setting evidently fosters

Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

strong linguistic competence and supports the acquisition of global communication skills.

Nevertheless, the predominance of English in instructional and informal contexts has led to a noticeable decline in students' active proficiency in Indonesian, especially in formal or academic situations such as presenting arguments or engaging in discussions during national curriculum subjects. This linguistic shift signals an emerging imbalance, wherein the development of the national language is inadvertently marginalized. The limited opportunities for meaningful engagement with Indonesian within the school context appear to hinder students' confidence and expressive ability in their mother tongue

While several parents regard this phenomenon as a natural consequence of global-oriented education and express satisfaction with their children's English proficiency, many still advocate for a more balanced bilingual approach. They emphasize the importance of preserving Indonesian language competence as a cornerstone of national identity and cultural continuity. Hence, it becomes imperative for the school to implement a more holistic and integrated bilingual education model—one that not only maintains English as a tool for global engagement but also strengthens Indonesian through curricular content, literacy activities, and school-wide cultural programming.

For future research, it is recommended to conduct longitudinal studies that track students' bilingual development over several academic years to better understand the long-term cognitive, academic, and sociocultural implications of an English-dominant curriculum. Further exploration could also include comparative analyses with other bilingual or national-plus schools to identify best practices in sustaining balanced bilingualism. Additionally, involving a broader range of stakeholders—including alumni, local educators, and language policy experts—may yield more comprehensive insights into how bilingual education can be designed to support both global competencies and national identity in an increasingly interconnected world.

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Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

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Vol 8, No 2 (2025): ESTEEM

Sosiolinguistik Pemilihan dan Pemertahanan Bahasa _ Suharyo _ ISBN _ 2021_opt.pdf

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