

# Voices and Identity Positionality in EFL Teaching and Learning Policy in an Islamic Bilingual Boarding School in Indonesia

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## ABSTRAK

Interaksi siswa dalam kegiatan berbasis sekolah lintas mata pelajaran dan kelompok bahasa telah menjadi fokus studi tentang hubungan antara identitas dan pembelajaran. Begitu juga dengan yang terjadi di kelas bilingual yang sangat menarik untuk dikaji lebih lanjut. Oleh karena itu penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis posisi siswa mengingat suara siswa, guru mata pelajaran, dan pengurus sekolah dipengaruhi oleh kebijakan bahasa sekolah. Penelitian ini menggunakan penelitian studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan dari 102 siswa yang mengikuti wawancara awal, dipilih empat fokal partisipan. Dua siswa perempuan, dan dua laki-laki. Wawancara semi-terstruktur dan observasi dilakukan. Analisis konten kualitatif memanfaatkan data yang dikumpulkan untuk menghasilkan representasi unik dari transkrip, seperti apa yang sedang dibahas pada waktu tertentu. Temuan penelitian ini berbagi suara positif dan negatif siswa terhadap kebijakan bahasa yang diterapkan di sekolah. Mereka memosisikan diri sebagai pengguna bahasa Inggris yang pasif dan aktif dalam mengenali posisionalitas identitas mereka. Studi ini mungkin relevan bagi mereka yang aktif dalam penelitian pendidikan menengah atau tinggi, pengambilan keputusan dan advokasi di sektor nirlaba dan publik, kepemimpinan dan tata kelola sekolah, serta pengajaran dan pembelajaran.

## ABSTRACT

Students' interactions in school-based activities across subject areas and linguistic groups have been the focus of study on the relationship between identity and learning. Likewise with what happened in the bilingual class which is very interesting to be studied further. Therefore the current study aims to analyze the positionality of students considering the voices of students, subject teachers, and school administrators influenced by school language policies. This study uses case study research. The data were collected out of 102 students that participated in the initial interview, four focal participants were chosen. Two of the students were female, and two were male. Semi-structured interviews and observations were performed. The qualitative content analysis utilizes the gathered data to produce unique representations of the transcripts, such as what is being discussed at a specific time. The findings of this study share students' positive and negative voices toward the implemented language policy at the school. They position themselves as passive and active English users in recognizing their identity positionality. This study may be of relevance to those active in secondary or higher education research, decision-making and advocacy in the non-profit and public sectors, school leadership and governance, and teaching and learning.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

To be ready for the demands of the twenty-first century, it is imperative for students to be multilingual. Teachers frequently stress the value of learning many languages to foster students' ability for critical analysis, problem-solving, and cross-cultural dialogue. Multilingualism for students and the community, pointing out the cognitive, educational, socio-emotional, and cultural benefits (J. Anderson et al., 2018; Okal, 2014; Quinteros Baumgart & Billick, 2018). However, it is not easy to become proficient in a second language. Learners of second languages (L2) must master the coordination of many semiotic

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resources to be deemed proficient communicators. The interesting phenomena of student participation in the multi-layered processes and practices of the language in educational policy are presented in bilingual schools (Evans & Cleghorn, 2022; Hornberger, 2018; Ticheloven et al., 2021). With their emphasis on local policy implementation, language planning and policy (LPP), and academics are increasingly concentrating on how potential future policies could respond to these local needs (Marhaeni et al., 2018; Ozturk, 2017). Teachers, school administrators, students, and parents are among the stakeholders impacted by the bilingual school education policy that integrates the national and international curricula.

Language education policies in a private, bilingual Islamic school in Indonesia implement English as mainly used as the language of instruction at the school. The school uses two different curricula: the national and the Cambridge curriculum. The policy is reflected in student's voice and their identity positionality. Language policy as diverse practices have been more prevalent recently. Stakeholders with various goals actively contribute to the creation, comprehension, implementation, and adoption of language policy (Ghaith, 2018; Khayati et al., 2019; Mahmud, 2020). Some academics have been paying greater attention to language policy practices at the micro or local level and focusing on the actors who implemented policies in a natural environment and circumstance in addition to the specific effect they exercised (Wang et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2015). Some academics have demonstrated the importance of identifying language policy actors who are not often seen as authoritative experts or professionals.

Students participating in dialogue, discussion, and consultation on topics that affect their education, particularly pedagogy and their schooling experiences, whether as a student cohort, in separate class groups, or within a forum structure like a student council, defines student voice, an emerging and complex concept (Dishon, 2021; Handayani et al., 2021; Webb, 2009). Consequently, the idea is defined and expressed through various expressions and exercises that center on students shifting their positions to enhance their connection with their teachers and educational institutions (Dementyev, 2016; Ryve et al., 2013). A different description is provided by previous researcher who describes student voice as a concept and a collection of behaviors that place students in the role of professional educators' co-critics and designers of educational practice (Cook-Sather, 2020). Real student voice work involves placing students in the position of identifying and evaluating problems about their schools and learning that they feel to be relevant and having their voices impact action. Students' voice matters in improving educational practices in a variety of contexts, no matter how insignificant (Finardi, K. R., & Guimarães, 2019; Phyak, P., & Bui, 2014).

Positioning Theory is based on discursive or cultural psychology and focuses on how people are positioned in discourse as micro-level identities are formed, presented, or negotiated. The theory tries to comprehend the nature of social acts and relationships as well as identity work in and via language use by looking at how rights, duties, and obligations are allocated among individuals in any social storyline (Sullivan et al., 2018; Tait-McCutcheon & Loveridge, 2016). The theory uses the positioning triangle, which consists of storylines, positions, and speech acts, to achieve this objective. Numerous studies on positioning theory have focused on issues of race, gender, and identity formation (K. Anderson, 2009; Reeves, 2009; Zacher, 2008). The results demonstrate that learners' interactions, especially their access to learning, are influenced by their positioning. Regarding the implication of positioning for the social interactions required for language learning, it is an important consideration to make.

Students' interactions in school-based activities across subject areas and linguistic groups have therefore been the focus of study on the relationship between identity and learning. To understand how students' positioning in small group and whole-class interactions with peers of varying English language proficiency shape students' identities, methodologies like discourse analysis (Dowell et al., 2020; Kajamaa & Kumpulainen, 2020; Warfa et al., 2018). The current study aims to analyze positionality of students considering the voices of students, subject teachers, and school administrators influenced by school language policies. This study use positioning theory to link the identity. This study sheds light on the English language learning practices used by bilingual high school students in Indonesia to construct their identities. Moreover, this study provides the students a platform to discuss their role as language policy actors.

## 2. METHOD

This study uses case study research to gain a thorough knowledge of students' voices and identities positionality. Case study approach is a qualitative approach in which the researcher conducts in-depth, rigorous data collection on a real-life, contemporary bounded entity (a case) or numerous bounded entities (cases) across time (Creswell, 2014). The setting of the study is in Surakarta, Central Java, Indonesia, at a private Islamic bilingual boarding school. It is a non-profit Islamic foundation that runs a private school. Since it is the only Islamic bilingual boarding school in the region that employs EMI

for nearly all subjects except for Javanese (the local language), Islamic Education, and the teaching of Bahasa Indonesia, the school was picked by the author for its unique environment. Semi-structured interviews and observations were performed. Primary data were collected for this investigation to acquire information for the research questions. The chairman of the foundation gave the author permission to conduct the research through the school's principal because the author is both a teacher and a teacher trainer at the foundation. The latest study focuses on the second semester of tenth-grade students' experiences in a bilingual school. The data were collected out of 102 students that participated in the initial interview, four focal participants were chosen. Two of the students were female, and two were male. They were chosen because they offer exceptional examples of students who are willing and able to use English as part of the school's bilingual policy.

When assessing the data, emerging common themes related to the research questions are grouped using qualitative content. A qualitative content analysis, it is a collection of techniques for the systematic investigation of a variety of texts, including underlying data as well as themes and core concepts found in the main source (Mayring, 2010; Schreier, 2012). It is done by classifying the content as examples of the different categories in a coding frame. The qualitative content analysis utilizes the gathered data to produce unique representations of the transcripts, such as what is being discussed at a specific time.

### 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

#### Result

#### *Students' voices on the EFL teaching and learning policy using English encourages*

Respondent was encouraged to use English since she attended a private junior high school founded on the same principles as the bilingual high school she currently attends. She demonstrated this by speaking with and responding to the teachers' queries in English compulsory class. In addition, she frequently acted as a 'translator' in class whenever she had friends who were unable to comprehend the meaning of the teacher's questions. Additionally, student's voice promotes students' feelings of being valued and involved in the classroom. Respect of this kind encourages more productive engagement; it establishes connections in which students and teachers may interact and learn from one another. Another significant aspect of student's voice is the primacy of respect for students as knowers and performers. Not only do they feel supported in the classroom, but their voices may also contribute to the potential for a cultural shift in educational research and reform.

The majority of the kids who are proficient in English attended a private junior high school founded on the same principles as the bilingual high school they currently attend. The junior high school offers the same curriculum as the high school for bilingual students. Students who participated in the International Cambridge Program (ICP) in middle school proceeded with the same program when they enrolled in the bilingual high school. They do not perceive any distinctions in their current school's English language instruction and application. Since they experienced a similar policy while they were in junior high school, they view the policy as very typical and familiar. Respondent who graduated from the previous junior high school under the same foundation as the current high school where the study was conducted. Respondent former school similarly implemented the identical language program following the school language policy in the current school since they are under the same school foundation. Respondent continued participation in the same program (ICP) has acclimatized him to the school's language policy and initiatives designed to improve pupils' language skills. Language policy is one method that dominant narratives about language (education) are maintained to acclimate students to the use of language at school. Thus, we may view a language policy as one of many managed communications ensembles that shape school interaction. Schools may be viewed as disciplinary institutions that transform individuals into entities via language.

Prior institutions did not support English language policy. This has become the primary reason why students at private Islamic bilingual schools are inexperienced with English. Especially for students who enrolled in a school other than the current Islamic bilingual high school where the English language policy is applied. The junior high school students previously used English only in English classes, and the school did not regularly enforce its policy regarding the use of English as the school language policy. Raya's remark reveals there is insufficient English habituation at school. To facilitate the learning of English in EFL contexts where students typically lack exposure to the target language, policymakers and educators may employ a model of bilingual education that employs a second, foreign, or additional language as the language of instruction in non-language content subjects (such as history, science, and mathematics). Implementing Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) can be a method for integrating content and language learning for students. CLIL programs give adequate opportunities and

encourage students to use the foreign language as frequently as possible since the foreign language is employed to a far greater extent than in conventional classrooms. It will eventually develop an English-language educational atmosphere in which students routinely converse in English. In terms of school language policy for English language acquisition and use in a private Islamic boarding school, English is more habitually used in the classroom than outside of it. Daily school conversations are frequently conducted in *Bahasa Indonesia* rather than in English. Not only do students in the Tahfidz Class Program (TCP) and Information, Communication, and Technology (ICT) programs share the same viewpoint, but so do students in the International Cambridge Program (ICP). Outside the classroom, students prefer to talk in Bahasa or even Javanese. Respondent explained the primary reason for the pupils' lack of English habituation the Islamic bilingual high school teachers shared the same values. Since the pandemic outbreak, the school community has lacked language support programs that help improve English proficiency. As a result, the teaching and learning process was conducted remotely. Routine programs such as English Day and English Camp were ruled unsuitable because they needed participants to gather. Due to this condition, students and teachers felt more comfortable speaking Bahasa Indonesia outside of the classroom.

When English is used as the medium of instruction in academic courses, switching between languages is typically required to improve both content acquisition and English language acquisition. Therefore, students view Bahasa Indonesia as having the same importance as English in the classroom. Specific terminologies or technical vocabularies must be explained in Bahasa to students who do not comprehend them. Not only the students but also the subject teachers share similar perspectives. When English is utilized in the classroom, subject teachers combine English and Bahasa Indonesia when delivering content and communicating with students. As part of quality control in the teaching and learning process, vice principal certain teachers frequently taught in Bahasa Indonesia, while others blended English and Bahasa. The issue applied to all school teachers, regardless of whether they taught ICT, TCP, or ICP. The vice principal also raised concern for ICP teachers who continue to speak Bahasa rather than English. The transcript of his explanation from the interview is show in [Table 1](#).

**Table 1.** Interview Transcript with Vice Principal

Researcher	<i>When the teachers (in the ICT and TCP programs) teach, do they utilize English?</i>
vice principal:	<i>When supervising classrooms, I observed teachers who did not speak English while presenting the lecture</i>
Researcher:	<i>How about the teachers in ICP classes? Do they speak English?</i>
vice principal:	<i>A few do, but others (teachers) do not (use English).</i>
Researcher:	<i>But not Cambridge subject teachers, right?</i>
vice principal:	<i>Err... even.</i>
Researcher:	<i>Even the instructors of Cambridge subjects?</i>
vice principal:	<i>Physics, chemistry, math teachers, and...</i>
Researcher:	<i>Biology?</i>
Vice principal:	<i>Yes, and also Biology. Some teachers are still. What is it? Err... The teachers consider that they cannot always utilize English when instructing the students since they need to ensure that the students understand the material being delivered. The second reason has to do with assessing students. The teachers must ensure that all students achieve passing grades.</i>

Base on [Table 1](#), even if the teachers speak English, Bahasa is deemed to be of equal importance. It is employed on the presumption that students would not be able to comprehend what their teachers are attempting to convey if they continue to teach in English. The obligation of teachers to maintain students' grades above the minimal mark also becomes a consideration for code-switching. When conducting assessments, they wish to better link the learning objectives with the success criteria of their students.

**Students' identity positionality as EFL learners**

The triangle of storylines, speech acts, and classroom positions include classroom positions. They may be considered the responsibilities and rights that social interaction participants must respect. According to positioning theory, competency is shaped by the person and the local corpus of sayings and doings. It is, therefore, essential to emphasize the positioning's local social component. In light of the unique moral code, classroom interaction practices provide a setting for defining and communicating participants' roles, rights, and responsibilities. Respondent state responsibility as a student at a bilingual

school to adhere to the language policy. However, on the other hand, he realized that it was his prerogative to choose the language he would use while interacting with his classmates and friends. Respondent has the desire and aptitude to use English more frequently in the classroom. However, not many of his classmates can communicate with or use English. Therefore, he described himself as an inactive English speaker.

When respondent positioned herself in the classroom as 'very' passive. She only speaks English spontaneously on occasion. It belongs to a concept highlighting the complex relationship between language learner identity and motivation to acquire a second language. Even if a student is highly motivated, he or she may not be involved in the language used in a certain classroom or community. A student may not be entirely devoted to a particular linguistic activity while being willing to study a language. However, a learner committed to a specific set of language exercises is likely to be a motivated language student. The respondent is motivated as a language learner, but because the classroom's language practices may not align with her expectations, she chooses to be a passive user of English.

The need for affiliation, stability, protection, and recognition are all connected to one's sense of self. Such ambitions are intricately tied to the distribution of material resources within a community. People with access to a range of resources in society will also have access to power and privilege, which will alter their perception of their place in the world and their future possibilities. Their access to material resources will govern individuals' ability to communicate their desires. The identity of a person will change as society evolves. The respondent have access to power and privilege not shared by their peers. They have opportunities to fulfill their English potential through school programs, including the instructors' confidence in their ability to utilize English outside of the classroom. They position themselves as both active and passive consumers in line with the classroom's material resources. When students receive more language input from instructors or peers, they tend to use English more and identify as active English users. On the other hand, when there is a dearth of English language users and restricted access to use English in the classroom (because teachers teach in *Bahasa* as opposed to English), they both opt to be passive English language users.

## Discussion

The results indicate that students' voice encourages a sense of community, motivation, and involvement in implementing school language policy. This kind of respect encourages deeper engagement and forges connections that enable communication and information sharing between students and teachers. All perspectives from students, no matter how strong or weak, are essential for enhancing educational methods in many situations (Finardi, K. R., & Guimarães, 2019; Phyak, P., & Bui, 2014). Another crucial component of students' voices is the requirement for respect for students as actors and knowers. In addition to giving them a sense of support in the classroom, their voices may also contribute to the prospect of a cultural shift in educational research and reform. The school must provide more chances for student engagement, debate, and feedback on issues affecting their education, particularly about the teaching and learning process and their educational experiences. This calls for a more thoughtfully designed school language policy that takes into account the opinions of the children to be responsive to their requirements.

Real student voice work aims to put students in a position to identify and assess issues that they believe are important about their schools and learning (Joiner & Patterson, 2019; Ranalli et al., 2018). The respondents have spoken their voices to affect the language regulations in schools that have been implemented. Students' voices should be heard by the school to finally make improvements to the curriculum and help students become more comfortable learning and using the English language. To successfully implement the school's language policy, the school should assist the students with it by involving their voices and enabling them to exercise their agency. In addition, having after-school programs catering to kids' needs may increase their familiarity with English outside of a structured classroom setting.

Students express concerns about the low level of English usage in the classroom. Policymakers and educators may address the issue with a model of bilingual education that uses a second, foreign, or additional language as the language of instruction in non-language content subjects (such as history, science, and mathematics) to facilitate the learning of English in EFL contexts where students typically lack exposure to the target language. Another interesting finding from the research is that both students and teachers share the needs to code-switch. It is unnatural to divide languages in a multilingual classroom by exclusively employing monolingual communication since code-switching is a natural communication method for bilinguals (Fathimah, 2016; Koban, 2013; Van Hell et al., 2015). Code-switching can help students grasp concepts better and allow them to participate in discussions when teachers transition between languages to maximize their education. As stated by previous study code-

switching allows students to use creative, pragmatic, and safe methods between the lesson's official language and a language they have more access to (Fathimah, 2016). Either the teachers or the students in the school think that the teaching and learning process can be comprehended much more effectively when code-switching occurs in the classroom. When teachers and students have similar pedagogical philosophies, using code-switching in comprehension and learning activities can be acceptable (Cahyani et al., 2018; Suganda et al., 2018). In addition, as part of the student's learning in the classroom, code-switching can facilitate communication and exploratory discussion (Lee, 2016; Wirhayati & Safitry, 2020). This study offers chances for more studies that incorporate student's voice. Positioning students as collaborators and participants in creating the language policy within the school. It creates opportunities for secondary and higher education students to collaborate with academics on future studies. Even young students may be taught to collaborate on academic work and make decisions that affect their teaching and learning. This study concentrates on the positioning of individuals in speech as micro-level identities are formed, projected, or negotiated. The theory looks at how rights, duties, and obligations are distributed among people in any social storyline to understand the nature of social acts and relationships and identity works in and via language usage. The theory uses the positioning triangle, which comprises storylines, positions, and speech acts, to achieve this objective (Martin-Beltrán, 2010; Ritchie, 2002). Since learners' positioning skills are crucial for participating in social interactions and serve as proof of their social competency, it stresses the social component of interactions.

Understanding how social episodes are formed, as well as how rights and obligations are assigned in the specifics of social and discursive actions in daily life, is the goal of positioning theory, an explanatory theory on the meanings of speaking and acting. The theory functions as an explanatory theory in educational contexts, illuminating how positions are constructed and negotiated, how stories develop, and how these factors affect identity work and learning and teaching processes. It also functions as an analytical tool, offering a set of guidelines for evaluating positions, acts, and storylines (Chan, 2018; Sushchy, 2021). Based on their placement in a storyline, the participants' positioning as active and passive English users is revealed in the result. This study sheds light on how Jaka, Davi, Layla, and Raya's identities are positioned concerning the rights and obligations imposed on them in the classroom, guided by positioning theory as an analytical framework.

There are not enough studies on English language learners in ESL programs (Kayi-Aydar, 2014; Menard-Warwick, 2008; Miller, 2007). Previous study reported two case studies including two English language learners in her research (Kayi-Aydar, 2014). The relationship between social status and language learning practices. In contrast to a prior study, this research framed students' positioning to shed light on the identities that were or were being attributed to them based on their interactions as they negotiated and re-negotiated their positions in implementing the school's language policy. To properly establish a school language policy that includes not just teachers or school administration but also students as language policy actors, this study aids in mind-mapping the students' voices and identities (Finardi, K. R., & Guimarães, 2019; Martin-Beltrán, 2010). The most recent study paves the way for further research on positioning issues that affect students' identities, particularly high school students in bilingual settings where English is the instructional language.

The implication of this study stimulate and inspire more studies in Indonesian bilingual schools and other institutions that have adopted a foreign language teaching and learning policy, especially those without any experiences involving students' voices in formulating school language policy. This study interest anyone engaged in educational research in secondary or higher education, policymaking and lobbying in the non-profit and public sectors, leadership and governance in schools, and teaching and learning practices in the classrooms. Future studies may broaden the use of Positioning Theory as an analytical lens to investigate student-teacher identity positioning in the classroom to have a more profound knowledge of student-teacher interaction in the classroom.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This study applies the positioning theory to link the identity positionality of students impacted by the school language policy. The current study seeks to fill the gap in the limited body of research relating to the notions of student voices and identity positionality, mainly in Indonesian bilingual education policy. The study illuminates the EFL learning strategies utilized by bilingual high school students in Indonesia to develop their identities. The recent study allows them to explore their roles as language policy actors. The findings share students' positive and negative voices toward the implemented language policy at the school. They position themselves as passive and active English users in recognizing their identity positionality.

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