

EXPLORING STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF BILINGUAL PROGRAM'S IMPACT ON ENGAGEMENT IN EFL CLASSROOM

Sabilla Aprilia Zulfah^{1*}, Heni Novitasari²
¹sabillapriliala0@gmail.com, ²henisalman.17@gmail.com

UNIVERSITAS MUHAMMADIYAH PROF. DR. HAMKA

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ABSTRACT

The increasing use of English as a global language over the past few decades has significantly increased its use worldwide, including in Indonesia. Despite its importance, limited research has focused on the role of bilingual education in enhancing student engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. This study aims to explore students' perceptions regarding the impact of the bilingual education program on their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class at Al Azhar 19 Cibubur Islamic Junior High School. The study employed a qualitative descriptive research approach. Data were collected using questionnaires, involving 60 students from bilingual classes as respondents. The data were then analyzed to determine the extent of engagement in three domains. The findings revealed that the bilingual education program positively influenced students' engagement, with 25% of respondents indicating strong cognitive engagement, 39% demonstrating emotional engagement, and 37% showing behavioral engagement. These results highlight the program's potential in fostering active participation and motivation in EFL learning environments.

Keywords: Bilingual Program, EFL Classroom, Students' Perception

A. INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English is recognized as a foreign language (EFL), meaning it is taught in formal educational settings but rarely used outside the classroom. According to Larasati, et al. (2022) English for Foreign Languages (EFL) is the study of English by those for whom it is not their first language. In contexts where English is not the native tongue, it is categorized as EFL. This situation limits students' opportunities to communicate in English outside the classroom, as the language is rarely used in daily interactions. EFL learning typically occurs in formal classroom settings, focusing on developing language proficiency within structured environments. To address this limitation, bilingual programs provide more opportunities for students to practice English in real-world contexts. These programs integrate English into various subjects, enabling students to use the language beyond English classes and helping them overcome language-related challenges.

Moreover, In Indonesia, bilingual education has gained popularity and is viewed as a mark of distinction among schools. Bilingual systems are used in many schools for both teaching and learning. The government, through the Department of National Education, has implemented a bilingual program in which several subjects are taught in English. This is based on Law No. 20 of 2003, Article 50, Paragraph 3, on the national education system which states the government and/or local governments organize at least one education unit at all levels of education to be developed into an international standard education unit. As noted by Ma'ruf & Sari (2020) that this has led many schools to improve the quality of the education system in which mathematics, biology, chemical science, and science are among the subjects where English is the main language of instruction. The purpose of program is to generate the graduates with a high level of English proficiency as well as graduates with high levels of competence in the specific subject areas including mathematics, chemistry, biology and physics depending on the direction those subjects are developing in. The use of English in areas apart from English encourages bilingual programs which have become a major of innovation known as subjects across the curriculum.

According to Genessee & Gandara (1999), bilingual education involves delivering instruction in two languages, thereby enhancing students' ability to learn both their native and target languages. In other words, Bilingual education enables students to receive instruction in two languages (Ahmad et al., 2018). In many countries, including Indonesia, bilingual programs are implemented from early childhood through high school to ensure students gain comprehensive language skills. Anjarini et al. (2020) highlight that young learner, being in a critical period for language acquisition, particularly benefit from bilingual education in developing their English language proficiency. Moreover, proficiency in multiple languages provides a competitive advantage in an increasingly globalized world by facilitating intercultural communication and cooperation. Thus, by integrating ESL into bilingual programs, students can effectively acquire a second language while achieving high proficiency in English-speaking environments.

In addition, Liu (2017) claims that a bilingual environment significantly impacts English language acquisition by enabling students and teachers to communicate in both their native language and the target language. Furthermore, a bilingual education system emphasizes English as a key component in raising the standard of instruction to a world-class level. It is supported by the statement of Masduqi (2020 in Baker, 2011) who emphasizes the importance of developing both a student's native language and target language in order to achieve overall academic success. His theory proposes that proficiency in a first language serves as a foundation for learning a second language, thereby facilitating cognitive and academic development. This principle underpins many successful bilingual programs worldwide. This approach helps to bridge the distinction between what they learn in the classroom and what they say in everyday life by improving their language skills and making them feel more comfortable speaking in English and social situations. In addition, Zein et al. (2020) emphasize the input hypothesis, which highlights the importance of providing comprehensible input that is slightly above the learner's current proficiency level. Bilingual programs align with this hypothesis by offering structured exposure to both languages, ensuring consistent language development while simultaneously fostering confidence and reducing anxiety. As a result, the concept of bilingualism is becoming increasingly popular in educational settings.

In the field of teaching and learning, students' perceptions are crucial, as they influence how instructors design lesson plans and instructional materials. According to Ansow et al. (2022), perception is shaped by a variety of factors such as experiences, beliefs, and motives. It is inherently subjective and varies based on an individual's background. Perception can be divided into three components: cognitive, affective, and conative (Guspa & Rahmi, 2014). The cognitive component deals with information, opinions, and beliefs about a subject; the affective component pertains to feelings or emotions toward the subject; and the conative component refers to the tendency to act based on attitudes toward the subject. Understanding these components is essential in education, as it allows educators to modify students' perceptions and enhance their learning outcomes.

In the context of bilingual education, understanding students' perceptions is especially important. The bilingual program implemented by the government aims to improve the quality of education by preparing graduates who are competent in English and other subjects such as mathematics, biology, chemistry, and physics. Recognizing students' perceptions allows educators to design more effective teaching methods, creating a supportive learning environment that fosters both academic and language development. Furthermore, bilingual programs encourage innovation in teaching by incorporating English into various subjects through a cross-curriculum approach.

However, despite the growing popularity of bilingual education in Indonesia, there is limited research that specifically examines students' perceptions of bilingual programs in Indonesian junior high schools, particularly in relation to their learning experiences in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class. Previous studies have focused more on the general effectiveness of bilingual education or language acquisition in diverse settings, but not much attention has been given to understanding how students perceive their learning in bilingual programs, and how these perceptions influence their engagement with EFL. This study, therefore, aims to investigate the perceptions of bilingual program students at Al Azhar 19 Cibubur Islamic Junior High School, focusing on how these perceptions influence their learning experiences in EFL classes. Understanding these perceptions will help identify any challenges or barriers students may face in learning English through a bilingual approach, ultimately providing valuable insights for improving the bilingual program and enhancing teaching strategies.

B. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative methodology to explore students' perceptions regarding the impact of the bilingual education program on their cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) class at Al Azhar 19 Cibubur Islamic Junior High School. The instrument of this study was a questionnaire modified from Choiriah Afnisa, (2022) comprised 21 statements measuring strongly disagree (SD), disagree (D), agree (A), neutral (N), and strongly agree (SA) using the Likert scale in which the score of negative questions were 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and positive questions were 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1. The questionnaire measured three aspects of student perceptions: cognitive engagement (5 items), emotional engagement (7 items), and behavioral engagement (8 items). The questionnaire was distributed to all 60 students in the bilingual class at Al Azhar 19 Cibubur Islamic Junior High School. This study analyzed the data by using the saturated sampling technique, as the study involved the entire small population. In analyzing the data, the steps carried out included examining and calculating the score of each answer chosen by students

on the questionnaires, presenting them in the form of percentages, and using descriptive statistics to determine the mean and standard deviation for each item. The sample provided the study requirements due to its bilingual classroom environment and the writer's deliberate decision to identify and to select the individuals with the necessary expertise or experience to provide information.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings from the exploration of students' perceptions regarding the bilingual class (EFL) program at Cibubur Junior High School. The results identified three types of engagement as perceived by the students in the program's implementation: cognitive engagement, emotional engagement, and behavioral engagement. The following subsections provide a detailed explanation of these findings

1. Students' Cognitive Engagement

Cognitive engagement is the first type of engagement which is related to students' investment in their learning. This type of engagement was defined by Helme & Clarke (2001) as a process that involved the strategies and self-regulation.

Table 1. Students' Perceptions of the Cognitive Aspects in the Bilingual Program

Statement	SD	D	N	A	SA	Σ	%	Mean	STDEV
Cognitive									
1. The bilingual program allows me to improve my English-speaking skills	0	2	16	22	20	238	5%	4,00	0,86
2. The bilingual program helps me to do my English assignments more easily	0	3	19	27	11	226	5%	3,77	0,81
3. Using the bilingual program in the schools helped me more easily understand the material given by the English teacher.	0	5	17	23	15	228	5%	3,80	0,92
4. The bilingual program makes me acquire new English vocabulary.	2	2	7	23	26	249	5%	4,15	0,99
5. I still have difficulty in understanding the meaning of each sentence explained by the English teacher	19	21	11	6	2	226	5%	2,15	1,10

Based on the responses of 60 bilingual class students at Al Azhar 19 Islamic Junior High School Cibubur, the five questionnaire items represented the different aspects of engagement. The results showed that 22% felt their English skills improved, 27% found it easier to complete English assignments, 23% found it easier to understand the material, and another 23% learned a new vocabulary through the bilingual program. However, 6% still had the difficult understanding of sentences explained by the English teacher in class. This

indicated a general agreement between the students' perceptions and experiences that highlighted the bilingual program effectiveness in improving their English language skills.

The data acquired from the students' answers to the five statements provided the insightful information about their bilingual program experiences, especially as it was related to the development of their English language skills. This finding was consistent with Sopi (2023) The analysis indicated that the majority of students had the positive perception of the bilingual program. The students were confident that the program would help improve their English language skills. Additionally, 42 out of 60 students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement indicating that a large majority of students reported that the bilingual program had positively impacted their English-speaking skills. According Saputri (2022) the programs primary goal was to promote proficiency in both Indonesian and English through the use of a bilingual education model. Its goal was to help students become more proficient in both Indonesian and English while preparing them for post-secondary education.

In addition, the questionnaire data showed that students were generally satisfied with the program support to improve their English language skills. This is indicated by the fact that most students (17% strongly agreed and 63% agreed) said that the program helped them complete their English assignments. However, 20% of students responded neutrally, and 10% disagreed that they had difficulty in understanding the English subject matter. Although the standard deviation around 24.4 percent indicated that students differed in understanding the material, the average score of 75.4% indicated the high satisfaction. This showed that the program is successful treatment in some ways, but there are still limitations. Moreover, the questionnaire data showed that the students felt a positive impact with the bilingual program due to their English vocabulary improvement. Most students (15% strongly agreed and 55% agreed) stated that the program really helped them expand their English vocabulary. A highlight of the program strength was vocabulary comprehension as indicated by the highest mean score of 4.15.

2. Students' Emotional Engagement

Emotional engagement, often referred to as the affective aspect, pertains to the feelings and emotional connections students have within the learning environment. This type of engagement plays a crucial role in shaping how students perceive and respond to their educational experiences. Philp & Duchesne (2016) define emotional engagement as students' feelings of connection (or disconnection) with class activities, their teacher, and their friends. The students' perceptions of the affective aspects were analyzed to understand their emotional engagement in the bilingual program. The detailed results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Students' Perceptions of the Affective Aspects in the Bilingual Program

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Σ	%	Mean	STDEV
Affective									
6. I feel comfortable and enjoy the bilingual program at school.	0	1	12	19	28	254	5%	4,23	0,83

8. The bilingual program makes me more confident when learning English in class.	0	0	26	20	14	228	5%	3,80	0,80
9. The bilingual program can reduce my anxiety in learning English	1	2	25	23	9	217	5%	3,62	0,85
10. I feel cool when I use English in and outside the schools.	2	5	18	18	17	223	5%	3,72	1,08
11. It is easier for me to understand English videos by participating bilingual program.	1	3	22	21	13	222	5%	3,70	0,93
12. I feel bored when implementing the bilingual program.	14	24	17	4	0	225	5%	2,17	0,89
13. I feel that the bilingual program at school hinders other learning.	28	19	10	2	0	250	5%	1,75	0,86

Based on the 60 students' responses in bilingual classes at Al Azhar 19 Islamic Junior High School Cibubur, six questionnaire items represented engagement. The majority of students indicated a positive impact of the bilingual program. The survey revealed that 19% of participants had enjoyed the program, 20% had felt more confident in class, 23% had felt more relaxed when learning English, 18% had felt more confident for speaking English both at school and outside of it, and 21% had found it easier to understand English videos. The students believed that the bilingual program had reduced their anxiety about learning English. However, 4% had found the boring program, and 2% had felt it interfered with their learning in other subjects.

In short, there was a clear correlation in every instance of learning. The study showed that students' emotional engagement is significantly positive with the statement items. "The bilingual program made me more confident when learning English in class," receiving the highest percentage of agreement. A total of 19% admitted that they felt comfortable and enjoyed the bilingual program at school. This indicated that the bilingual program was not only effective in improving language skills, but students also felt more confident and experienced the reduced anxiety when learning English. According to Sopi (2023), confidence was an essential aspect when it was related to speaking a foreign language. These findings aligned with Safei, et al. (2023) who revealed that the bilingual education program had been excellent. The study indicated multiple benefits for both educators and learners. This program required the use of English for both teachers and students, even though the subjects being taught were mathematics and science.

3. Students' Behavioral Engagement

Behavioral engagement, also referred to as the conative aspect, relates to students' active participation and the time they dedicate to specific tasks. This type of engagement is crucial in understanding how students interact with their learning environment through observable

behaviors such as attending classes, completing assignments, and participating in discussions. The concept of academic engagement time was explored by Philp & Duchesne (2016) as well as Reschly & Christenson (2022). To explore this further, students' perceptions of the conative aspects were analyzed, revealing insights into their behavioral engagement in the bilingual program. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Students' Perceptions of the Conative Aspects in the Bilingual Program

Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	Σ	%	Mean	STDEV	
Conative										
14. With the bilingual program in the schools, I got used to implementing it anywhere.	2	3	23	23	9	214	5%	3,57	0,93	
15. The bilingual program allows me to interact easily with other people using English	1	1	18	22	18	235	5%	3,92	0,91	
16. The bilingual program strengthens my independence in learning English.	1	2	19	24	14	226	5%	3,80	0,90	
17. With the bilingual program, I am motivated to learn English more deeply	1	5	17	19	18	228	5%	3,80	1,02	
18. I can be more active in class because of the bilingual program	1	2	28	20	9	212	4%	3,57	0,85	
19. With the bilingual program, I am motivated to learn more English	1	2	20	21	16	250	5%	3,82	0,93	
20. I am able to make captions/descriptions in English (social media captions) by participating in the bilingual program	0	2	21	22	15	230	5%	3,83	0,85	
21. Many students do not use English in the classroom.	1	5	20	14	20	133	3%	3,78	1,06	

Based on the 60 students' responses in the bilingual class at Al Azhar 19 Islamic Junior High School Cibubur, eight questionnaire items represented engagement. The results showed that 23% agreed that the bilingual program helped them use English both in and outside of class. Additionally, 22% found it easier to interact with others in English, 21% became more active in class, and 22% were able to create English captions or descriptions such as on social media. Moreover, 19% felt motivated to learn English more deeply, and 24% claimed that their abilities got improvement to learn English from this program. However, 14% admitted that they did not use English in class.

Referring to the above table, it illustrated how the bilingual program affected the students' motivation and level of engagement with the language. For their additional responses, the bilingual program significantly influenced the various aspects of their language development. Based on the research findings and discussion from Putri (2023), it can be concluded that the implementation of the bilingual program at MTSN 2 Ponorogo increases the students' motivation to learn English and facilitates more deep learning. This alignment of individual strategies and the structured bilingual program highlights MTSN 2 Ponorogo comprehensive approach to English language learning, demonstrates the effectiveness of a combined individual and institutional efforts in deeper understanding and proficiency in the language.

D. CONCLUSION

This study explored students' perceptions of the bilingual education program in English learning. It was found that the program significantly influenced students' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral engagement in learning English. The results indicated that a significant number of students felt that the school bilingual program significantly enhance their English proficiency. The program proved that it is beneficial in helping the students to their complete assignments smoothly and understand the material provided by English teachers. In addition, students acquired new English vocabulary every lesson which could increase their English vocabulary, thus improved their confidence and communication skills in speaking English. Many students admitted to improve confidence and less anxiety when learning English in class indicating that the program helped them feel more relaxed and less stressed. In addition, several students experienced the increased motivation and independence in their English lessons, acknowledging that the bilingual program sparked their enthusiasm and supported their abilities to apply English in daily life situations.

Bilingual programs had several important implications. Their effectiveness in improving language proficiency and expanding vocabulary demonstrated their abilities to develop strong language skills. Reduced anxiety and increased self-confidence, the program created a more supportive learning environment, especially in learning English. The students' increased motivation and independence showed that they were more involved and active in their learning process. In addition, the program emphasis on using English in everyday situations provided some benefits that went further than just classroom lessons, helping students apply their language skills in real life. As a result, the program proved to be an important part of improving students' language skills and to enhance their educational experience. While bilingual programs have many positive implications, there are some negative aspects to consider. An emphasis on English might decrease focus on other subjects, potentially with the impact on a student's overall academic performance. In addition, some students might experience boredom or burnout. The fact that 14% of students claimed not to speak English in class indicated that the program may not be fully integrated into all learning activities. The problem of equity can arise if the program does not provide enough support for students who struggle in English, potentially disadvantaging them further. Last, the resources needed to implement and to maintain the program may affect the availability of resources for other educational initiatives. However, this study had some limitations. The majority of participants agreed on selected topics. This means that the fewest participants may have their own interest in determining the topics. When individuals chose topics, it was worthwhile to investigate the impact on students' participation.

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