

Investigating Multilingual Education in Early Childhood Education in Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how early childhood educators in Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, perceive and implement multilingual education in their daily classroom practices. Employing a descriptive qualitative design within an interpretivist paradigm, the research seeks to understand how multilingual education is conceptualized, enacted, and shaped by the sociocultural dynamics of early childhood settings. Data were generated through classroom observations, interviews with six teachers and twelve parents, and document analysis, and were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's six-phase thematic analysis framework. The findings reveal that multilingual education is understood not merely as an instructional method but as a culturally situated, emotionally responsive, and pedagogically strategic practice. Educators perceive multilingualism, particularly the integration of Sasak and Indonesian, as vital for fostering children's emotional security, enhancing comprehension, and sustaining cultural heritage. In practice, multilingual education is enacted through mixed-medium instruction, fluid translanguaging, the integration of local oral genres, and play-based bilingual activities. These strategies collectively create a rich linguistic ecology that affirms children's identities while supporting cognitive and socio-emotional development. Future research should extend this inquiry by examining children's perspectives, exploring longitudinal impacts of multilingual exposure, and analysing institutional and policy factors that shape multilingual practices across diverse early childhood settings in Indonesia.

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Introduction

Multilingual education has gained substantial prominence in global early childhood education (ECE) discourse, particularly in linguistically diverse regions such as Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Given the area's heterogeneous ethnic and linguistic composition, examining how multilingual practices are integrated into early learning environments is essential. In Indonesia, ECE plays a pivotal role in shaping children's developmental pathways by establishing core linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional competencies that support later academic achievement. Empirical studies suggest that exposure to multiple languages during early childhood enhances cognitive flexibility, cultural awareness, and social adaptability. Accordingly, implementing multilingual education in Central Lombok is not only developmentally beneficial but also aligned with the sociocultural realities of Indonesia's diverse communities (Fitriani, 2023). This

approach also corresponds with the global educational trends that promote multilingual learning as essential for preparing children to navigate an increasingly interconnected world (Zheng, 2025).

In recent years, the roles of bilingualism and multilingualism in early childhood development have been extensively examined across diverse educational contexts. Existing research demonstrates that multilingual education fosters not only enhanced linguistic competence but also improved cognitive functioning and strengthened social integration, thereby preparing children to participate effectively in multicultural environments (Díaz et al., 2022). In Central Lombok, where multiple indigenous languages coexist with the national language, Bahasa Indonesia, early childhood education must respond to this linguistic diversity to support meaningful learning while preserving cultural identity. This study aimed at investigating how early childhood educators in Central Lombok West Nusa Tenggara perceive and implement multilingual education in their daily classroom practice. In this context, “multilingual education” refers to pedagogical approaches that purposefully incorporate multiple languages into the teaching learning process, aligning instructional methods with both the region’s linguistic landscape and its broader cultural fabric (Lange et al., 2022). In addition, model frameworks for multilingual education play a crucial role in shaping pedagogical approaches within early childhood settings. Current literature highlight the need for responsive learning environments that draw on children’s linguistic resources while fostering intercultural dialogue (Park, 2023). Such frameworks address learners’ diverse linguistic needs and cultural contexts, thereby cultivating inclusive classrooms that support identity formation and social cohesion. In Central Lombok, multilingual educational practices additionally contribute to broader developmental goals, including stunting prevention and health promotion, reflecting the region’s socio economic conditions that closely tie educational outcomes to health indicators (Ain et al., 2022; Suparji et al., 2024). Furthermore, integrating local wisdom through multilingual instruction enriches the curriculum by anchoring learning materials in children’s lived experiences and immediate environments (Fitriani, 2023).

Furthermore, A growing body of research highlights the importance of equipping early childhood educators with adequate training in multilingual pedagogies to effectively support young learners. Variations in teacher preparedness can substantially influence the quality of multilingual instruction, with implications for both educational equity and developmental outcomes (Egert et al., 2021; Zheng, 2025). Considering the educators’ beliefs about multilingualism shape the experiences of bilingual and multilingual children, examining these beliefs within the context of Central Lombok is essential (Sit, 2022). In addition, Global scholarship also emphasizes the significance of parental involvement and community engagement in multilingual education, as family participation not only reinforces language development at home but also strengthens community-based appreciation for linguistic diversity (Lange et al., 2022; Chaemchoy, 2023). Aligning home practices with institutional educational philosophies can establish a comprehensive support system that extends learning beyond the classroom and fosters a broader multilingual ethos. By systematically analysing existing models of multilingual education in Central Lombok, this study seeks to contribute to the broader knowledge base on early childhood education in culturally diverse settings. In order to achieve the research objectives, a significant key question is addressed through this study, it is how do early childhood educators in Central Lombok West Nusa Tenggara perceive and implement multilingual education in their daily classroom practice.

1. What is Multilingual Education?

Multilingual education encompasses not only an instructional approach that integrates multiple languages into teaching and learning but also a broader educational orientation that reflects systemic commitments to linguistic diversity. In this context, it is categorized as an instructional approach because it prioritizes the strategic use of learners’ mother tongues alongside community and global languages, ensuring that classroom practices actively support and respond to the multilingual realities of the student population. A key component of this approach is translanguaging, which enables students to draw on their full linguistic repertoire as a cognitive and communicative resource. Research shows that translanguaging can strengthen

comprehension and critical thinking by allowing learners to access and process content through the languages most meaningful to them (Chaika, 2023). For instance, past study in secondary education further demonstrate that translanguaging encourages pedagogical practices that acknowledge students' multilingual realities, thereby fostering greater inclusivity and classroom participation (Meij et al., 2020).

This framework constitutes a comprehensive educational framework that intentionally integrates multiple languages into teaching and learning, acknowledging and responding to the linguistic diversity present within contemporary classrooms. This approach not only addresses the linguistic needs of multilingual learners but also seeks to advance their cognitive, cultural, and socio emotional development within an increasingly interconnected world. As global migration and cultural exchange continue to shape student populations, multilingual education offers a model that values learners' varied language proficiencies as assets that enrich classroom interaction and support deeper learning. A central aim of this approach is to facilitate meaningful communication and understanding, enabling students to draw on their linguistic repertoires as resources. Evidence suggests that the effectiveness of multilingual education depends on several key institutional factors, including strong school leadership, well prepared teachers, and a clear pedagogical vision (Kirss et al., 2021; Polat & Lange, 2025), all of which contribute to enhanced academic outcomes and more engaged learning environments (Omidire & Ayob, 2020).

Additionally, multilingual education not only strengthens learners' linguistic competence but also cultivates intercultural understanding and social cohesion by embedding multiple languages within the curriculum. This approach fosters an inclusive learning environment that acknowledges and values students' linguistic heritages while equipping them for participation in an increasingly globalized world. Pedagogical strategies such as translanguaging, which encourage students to draw fluidly on their full linguistic repertoires, have been shown to enhance communication and comprehension (Mouboua et al., 2024). Teachers play a central role in enacting these practices, yet many continue to face challenges related to insufficient training and limited instructional resources, which can constrain the effectiveness of multilingual education (Amin et al., 2024). Overall, multilingual education supports linguistic development while promoting culturally responsive and socially cohesive educational settings that enable students to thrive in multicultural contexts.

2. Theoretical Foundation of Multilingual Education

The theoretical foundation of multilingual education is rooted in broader societal shifts toward linguistic diversity and multiculturalism that increasingly characterize contemporary classrooms. This perspective acknowledges that learners bring rich linguistic repertoires shaped by their cultural backgrounds and lived experiences, challenging traditional monolingual assumptions in education. As global migration intensifies and communities become more interconnected, educators are compelled to reconsider language practices and embrace approaches that view students' native languages as valuable pedagogical assets. Multilingual education promotes cognitive, social, and emotional development by drawing on these linguistic resources (Mulaudzi, 2024; Mouboua et al., 2024). Moreover, the multilingual turn in education calls for pedagogical practices that acknowledge and validate the multilingual identities of students, moving beyond monolingual norms that have historically dominated language education frameworks (Huckle, 2021; Cenoz & Gorter, 2022). By incorporating students' linguistic strengths, multilingual education fosters an inclusive and equitable learning environment that enhances academic performance and enriches cultural understanding among peers (Jacob & Warschauer, 2023).

At the core of multilingual education is the concept of translanguaging, a dynamic pedagogical approach that encourages learners to mobilize their full linguistic repertoires throughout the learning process. Translanguaging facilitates fluid movement between languages, enabling students to draw on prior linguistic knowledge to more effectively engage with new ideas and content (Ayob & Omidire, 2021; Slaughter & Cross, 2020). By challenging rigid language boundaries,

this approach highlights the interconnected nature of linguistic competencies and supports more authentic meaning-making. Empirical studies demonstrate that translanguaging practices foster inclusive and supportive classroom environments, strengthening multilingual learners' sense of belonging and identity (White et al., 2023). However, the successful implementation of translanguaging pedagogies depends on comprehensive teacher training that prepares educators to manage the complexities of multilingual classrooms. Teacher preparedness is essential, as educators must balance curricular demands with the diverse linguistic profiles of their students (Gogolin, 2021; Son, 2024). Robust professional development initiatives are therefore crucial for empowering teachers to embrace and sustain multilingualism as a valuable educational resource.

Although the theoretical foundations of multilingual education are well established, the implementation of these principles often encounters significant challenges. Resistance to multilingual pedagogies frequently rooted in entrenched monolingual ideologies within educational institutions can impede efforts to enact transformative practices (Bisai & Singh, 2020; Cruz, 2022). To address these barriers, coherent policy frameworks that explicitly support multilingualism are essential for guiding instructional practices and ensuring that educators receive adequate resources and institutional backing. Research demonstrates that multilingual models are most successful in contexts where policies recognize linguistic diversity and intentionally integrate multiple languages into curriculum design (Edlich, 2020; Santoso & Hamied, 2022). Ultimately, the effective realization of multilingual education requires sustained collaboration among educators, policymakers, and community stakeholders who are committed to cultivating inclusive learning environments that affirm students' linguistic identities and advance their academic achievement.

3. Global Perspective on Multilingual Education in Early Childhood

The importance of multilingual education in early childhood settings, particularly in regions such as Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, has gained increasing attention within global educational discourse. Emerging research demonstrates that early exposure to multiple languages supports notable cognitive advantages, including enhanced problem solving abilities, greater cognitive flexibility, and improved overall academic performance (Cumberbatch & Cumberbatch, 2024; Alisoy, 2024). Beyond individual cognitive development, multilingualism equips young learners with essential competencies for navigating an interconnected and globalized society. Accordingly, the adoption of multilingual educational frameworks in early childhood institutions in Central Lombok not only enriches children's cognitive growth but also aligns with international priorities that emphasize inclusive, culturally responsive, and linguistically diverse pedagogical practices.

The effective implementation of bilingual and multilingual education requires a solid understanding of pedagogical approaches that accommodate diverse linguistic needs. Strategies such as translanguaging have been shown to support language development in bilingual and multilingual children by validating their home languages and facilitating smoother transitions to the dominant instructional language (Pontier et al., 2020; Yun et al., 2025). To enact these approaches effectively, early childhood educators in Central Lombok must possess the requisite skills and theoretical grounding. Teachers' beliefs about multilingualism play a crucial role in shaping their instructional practices; thus, fostering positive attitudes toward multilingual education is essential (Zheng, 2025). This underscores the need for comprehensive teacher training programs that integrate global pedagogical insights while respecting local linguistic diversity.

Cultivating a multilingual educational environment inherently fosters greater socio-cultural awareness and inclusivity among young learners. Exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives enables children to develop a deeper understanding of their immediate communities as well as the broader world (Díaz et al., 2022; Stavans & Jessner, 2022). This emphasis aligns with the increasing recognition that multilingual curricula play a vital role in promoting social equity

and challenging entrenched cultural biases in education (Salem et al., 2020). In Central Lombok, where multiple local languages and dialects coexist, adopting a multilingual framework can empower children from varied backgrounds by positioning their cultural and linguistic heritage as valuable assets. Supporting multilingual education in early childhood thus addresses learners' immediate linguistic needs while contributing to long-term societal outcomes, including enhanced cross-cultural communication and stronger community cohesion.

4. Language Policy and Pedagogical Practice in Indonesia

In Indonesia, the implementation of multilingual education in early childhood is deeply shaped by national policies that acknowledge and promote the country's extensive linguistic diversity. Through frameworks such as the Kurikulum Merdeka, these policies emphasize the integration of local languages alongside Bahasa Indonesia, thereby validating children varied linguistic backgrounds and supporting inclusive pedagogical practices suited to an archipelago where more than 707 languages are spoken (Nugraheni et al., 2023). The importance of local languages is particularly salient in areas like Malang, Bali, and Central Lombok, where distinct cultural identities can inform teaching methods. For instance, teachers in Bali often utilize Balinese alongside Bahasa Indonesia to enhance engagement and comprehension in their classrooms, facilitating smoother transitions between languages and fostering cultural appreciation (Marwah et al., 2025). Similarly, in Central Lombok, instructional strategies have been observed that prioritize the integration of the local Sasak language in communication with younger learners, illustrating a practical application of the multilingual policy (Fauziah, 2025).

The experiences of educators and students across these regions underscore both the challenges and opportunities inherent in implementing national language policies. Teachers frequently navigate tensions between the multilingual ideals promoted in national frameworks and the monolingual practices that continue to dominate classroom instruction. This tension is evident in Malang, where some educator's express reluctance to use local dialects due to concerns about their own language proficiency or uncertainty regarding policy guidelines. Research indicates that many still adopt a Bahasa Indonesia centric approach, driven by fears that multilingual practices may be perceived as inadequate mastery of the national language (Romadhona, 2025). Such resistance can limit the pedagogical potential of translanguaging, an approach that integrates learners' home languages with the target instructional language to enhance comprehension and engagement (Pontier et al., 2020). Conversely, in Bali and Central Lombok, a growing number of educators are beginning to implement translanguaging strategies that draw on both local and official languages, thus fostering more inclusive learning environments that reflect students' linguistic and cultural identities (Sugiharto, 2024).

The effectiveness of multilingual education is closely tied to teachers' attitudes and instructional practices, which play a pivotal role in shaping student learning and engagement. Research indicates that educators who adopt flexible language policies and intentionally incorporate students' linguistic repertoires into daily classroom interactions are more successful in creating inclusive environments that support multilingual learners (Nurseha, 2025). Translanguaging, for instance, has emerged as a powerful pedagogical tool in early childhood settings, facilitating the integration of content knowledge with language development while reinforcing children's cultural identities (Saud, 2023). Nonetheless, to realize this vision, consistent professional development and support for teachers are crucial to enhance their multilingual awareness and instructional strategies. Thus, while the national frameworks lay the groundwork for multilingual education in Indonesia, the classroom realities across regions like Malang, Bali, and Central Lombok demand adaptive practices that reflect local contexts and foster an environment where children's linguistic diversity can flourish.

5. Community, Culture, and Challenges in Multilingual Early Childhood Education

Multilingual education in early childhood settings is particularly significant in Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, where local culture and community dynamics play a central role in shaping pedagogical practices and learning outcomes. The Sasak language, widely spoken across the region, functions not only as a means of communication but also as a vital conduit for cultural transmission. Integrating multilingual education enables children to engage meaningfully with their cultural heritage while simultaneously developing proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia, thereby strengthening their sense of identity and belonging. Research demonstrates that bilingual instruction combining local dialects with the national language supports cognitive development and challenges the constraints of monolingual approaches that often overlook local traditions (Hafiz et al., 2022). In contrast to Bali where Balinese and English frequently dominate classroom interactions Central Lombok places greater emphasis on the Sasak language, fostering pride in local identity within an increasingly globalized context (Rahayu et al., 2023).

Despite the documented benefits of multilingual education, educators in Central Lombok confront substantial contextual challenges shaped by socioeconomic conditions, community language attitudes, and unequal access to educational resources. Although national policies advocate the integration of local languages into early education, implementation remains inconsistent, resulting in gaps between policy intent and classroom practice. In East Java, for instance, efforts to promote local languages such as Javanese alongside the national language have been more systematically embedded within the curriculum, whereas in Central Lombok, progress is impeded by limited teacher training and insufficient community engagement (Jannah & Hidayat, 2024). Cultural perceptions further complicate these efforts: while Javanese students are often encouraged to maintain their dialect, the intergenerational transmission of the Sasak language is increasingly at risk as younger generations gravitate toward Indonesian and English, viewing them as markers of modernity and social mobility (Habibi, 2022). These dynamics underscore the complex linguistic terrain that educators must navigate in promoting multilingual education.

Comparatively, Bali and East Java exhibit stronger community involvement and cultural engagement, supported by more established networks that reinforce multilingual education. In Bali, the influence of the tourism sector creates a dynamic intersection of local culture and international languages, which educators draw upon to connect students' lived experiences with curricular content (Slamet et al., 2022). Central Lombok, however, continues to face infrastructural limitations and limited institutional support for traditional practices, affecting the quality of children's learning environments. Although initiatives that emphasize local wisdom and cultural heritage aim to enrich educational experiences in Lombok, these efforts require significant strengthening to achieve the level of consistency observed in Bali and East Java (Rahayu & Yanis, 2023). Thus, prioritizing community and parental engagement is essential for advancing multilingual education in Central Lombok, requiring a holistic understanding of the cultural, socioeconomic, and educational contexts that shape children's learning experiences.

Method

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design situated within an interpretivist paradigm to examine how multilingual education is conceptualized, enacted, and shaped by sociocultural dynamics in early childhood settings across Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara (Alhoussawi, 2023). A qualitative approach was well suited to the study's objective of understanding multilingual practices not simply as instructional strategies, but as socially constructed phenomena embedded in local cultural identities, linguistic ecologies, and community values (L.Cohen et al., 2007). This approach enabled the researcher to capture the nuanced interplay among language, culture, and identity that characterizes multilingual education in the region, dimensions that cannot be adequately understood through quantitative methods.

Data were collected from six Early Childhood Education (ECE) centres selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation from both rural and semi-urban communities where Sasak and Bahasa Indonesia function as primary languages of daily interaction. The participant group consisted of 6 early childhood educators, 12 parents, and four community or education stakeholders involved in curriculum decision-making or language policy implementation. Over a ten-week period, three qualitative strategies were employed: non participant classroom observations, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations enabled close examination of naturally occurring language use, including teacher–child interaction, peer communication, code-switching patterns, and the integration of culturally grounded practices within classroom routines, with field notes documenting linguistic behaviours, instructional approaches, and contextual features such as materials, language displays, and cultural artefacts. Semi-structured in-depth interviews each lasting 40 to 60 minutes and audio-recorded with consent were conducted with educators, parents, and stakeholders to explore their interpretations of multilingual education, their beliefs about children’s language development, and their perceived challenges regarding pedagogy, resources, and institutional support. Document analysis of lesson plans, school policies, thematic learning materials, and government curriculum guidelines provided additional insights into how multilingual principles are formally articulated or implicitly embedded within institutional practices.

The data-gathering process prioritised ethical research conduct and cultural sensitivity. All participants received a clear explanation of the study’s aims, confidentiality measures, and their right to withdraw at any time, after which written informed consent was obtained from educators and stakeholders, while parents provided consent for their children. Throughout the ten-week period, the researcher maintained reflexive field notes to minimise personal bias and ensure interpretations remained grounded in participants’ lived experiences. The use of multiple qualitative methods strengthened the study’s dependability and credibility through triangulation across data sources and participant groups. Classroom observations illuminated everyday linguistic practices, interviews revealed the beliefs underpinning those practices, and document analysis clarified institutional expectations, collectively producing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of multilingual education in Central Lombok.

Data analysis employed Braun and Clarke’s six-phase thematic analysis framework, which is well suited for qualitative investigations seeking to identify patterns of meaning across diverse sources of evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process began with familiarisation, during which interview transcripts, field notes, and institutional documents were repeatedly reviewed to gain an initial sense of key ideas. This was followed by systematic coding, where segments of text were labelled according to recurring concepts such as language practices, teacher beliefs, parental engagement, cultural identity, and structural constraints. In the third phase, these codes were compared and clustered into preliminary themes, which were subsequently reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence, analytic clarity, and alignment with the research questions. Themes were then defined and named to delineate their conceptual boundaries and significance for understanding multilingual education in early childhood contexts. The final phase involved synthesising the thematic findings into an integrated analytical narrative that illuminated the sociocultural and pedagogical dynamics shaping multilingual practices in Central Lombok’s ECE settings (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Triangulation across observations, interviews, and documents enhanced the credibility of the analysis, while reflexive engagement enabled the researcher to remain attentive to cultural and linguistic nuances. Through this rigorous analytical procedure, the study captured the context-dependent ways in which multilingual education is interpreted, negotiated, and enacted within local early childhood learning environments.

Result and Discussion

Based on the data gathered, there are two emerging themes which correspond to the research questions. The first theme is an educator’s conception of multilingual education in ECE that

delineate the educator' perception or ideas of multilingual education in early childhood education in Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara. It includes the three themes: multilingualism as pedagogical strategy, Multilingualism as a scaffold for comprehension, and multilingual education for cultural preservation. The second theme is daily classroom practice of multilingual education in ECE uncover how multilingual education implemented in early childhood education in Central Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara captured from the daily classroom practice of the selected school in this research. This theme includes four themes: Mix-medium instruction, translanguaging and code switching as pedagogical tools, use of local oral genres for learning, and play-based bilingual activities.

1. Educator's Conception of Multilingual Education in ECEE

1.1 Multilingualism as Pedagogical Strategy

Educators in Central Lombok conceptualize multilingual education as a critical pedagogical approach that reinforces children's cultural identities, alleviates anxieties associated with the transition into formal schooling, and fosters emotional security through the strategic use of home languages, particularly Sasak. Across the six participating early childhood centres, teachers consistently expressed strong support for multilingual practices, viewing first-language knowledge as a vital foundation for children's emotional comfort during early learning. Interview data illustrate the centrality of the home language in facilitating adaptation, with educators describing how initial interactions conducted in Sasak help children feel recognised, understood, and psychologically secure as Indonesian is gradually introduced. Teachers further emphasized that multilingual practices reflect the linguistic realities of children's homes, enabling those with limited proficiency in Indonesian to participate more confidently and with reduced stress. Several educators noted observable improvements in children's relaxation, engagement, and willingness to communicate when Sasak is incorporated, particularly during moments of emotional distress or cognitive overload. Moreover, multilingual interactions were seen as supporting interpersonal relationships and strengthening children's sense of belonging. As one teacher explained, integrating local stories, songs, and cultural expressions not only facilitates communication but also nurtures pride in linguistic heritage, contributing to a more inclusive and emotionally responsive learning environment.

This finding aligns strongly with global scholarship that highlights the socio-emotional significance of multilingual education in early childhood settings. A substantial body of international research demonstrates that the incorporation of home languages within educational environments fosters emotionally responsive learning spaces that affirm children's identities and alleviate the psychological pressures commonly associated with linguistic transition (Díaz et al., 2022). Scholars further contend that multilingual pedagogies enhance teacher child relationships, support children's comfort during the adaptation period, and improve engagement by acknowledging and validating their linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Stavans & Jessner, 2022). Early childhood language theorists similarly argue that emotional security is foundational for effective learning, suggesting that the use of home languages functions as an affective bridge that supports children as they navigate unfamiliar routines, expectations, and communicative demands within formal schooling (Cumberbatch & Cumberbatch, 2024). These theoretical insights are clearly reflected in the perspectives of teachers in this study, who frequently characterised multilingual practices as mechanisms for "softening the atmosphere" or "opening the child's heart," thereby underscoring the relational and affective dimensions of language use. For these educators, multilingualism is not merely a cognitive or instructional resource but a means of cultivating trust, alleviating anxiety, and strengthening children's sense of belonging. Taken together, the findings demonstrate that multilingual education in Central Lombok ECE settings operates simultaneously as a pedagogical strategy and a socio-emotional support system, aligning closely with contemporary discussions on culturally sustaining, identity-affirming, and emotionally responsive approaches to early childhood education.

1.2 Multilingual as a Scaffold for Comprehension

Teachers described multilingual education as a pivotal strategy for strengthening children's comprehension and engagement within early instructional contexts. They emphasized that children's greater early fluency in Sasak makes it an essential pedagogical resource, particularly when introducing unfamiliar or conceptually demanding material. Interview accounts indicate that children demonstrate clearer understanding and more sustained participation when explanations incorporate Sasak or involve fluid movement between Sasak and Indonesian. Teachers consistently observed that this linguistic flexibility supports smoother conceptual processing and reduces cognitive strain during learning activities. Besides, Educators further framed multilingual practice as a meaningful bridge between home and school, enabling children to connect classroom content with familiar linguistic experiences. One teacher explained that using Sasak terms helps anchor new information, fostering a sense of continuity as children transition toward broader Indonesian proficiency. Other participants echoed this view, noting improvements in children's attention, confidence, and overall engagement when Sasak is employed to clarify or scaffold instructional interactions. Collectively, these accounts underscore teachers' belief that local-language integration is pedagogically indispensable for promoting equitable learning opportunities.

The findings of this study align closely with translanguaging theory, which emphasizes the value of allowing children to utilize their entire linguistic repertoires to construct meaning and engage in academic tasks. For instance, by permitting young learners to think, process, and respond in their dominant language Sasak in this case, teachers can significantly reduce the cognitive load associated with foundational literacy and numeracy activities. This practice streamlines the learning process, enhancing efficiency and comprehension during academic instruction, particularly in multilingual contexts (Wagner, 2021; Wunseh, 2023). Similar strategies have been documented in diverse educational landscapes, including Malaysia and South Africa, where the intentional use of local languages within formal instruction has proven beneficial in enhancing understanding amidst broader national or global curricula (Slaughter & Cross, 2020). Moreover, the recognition of Indonesian as the formal medium of instruction, complemented by Sasak, demonstrates a concerted effort to integrate local linguistic resources in educational practices. This approach mirrors findings from various multilingual settings and reveals a significant shift towards a more inclusive pedagogy that resonates with the multilingual turn in education (Sohn et al., 2022). In other studies, it has been indicated that educators' acknowledgment of multilingual methodologies reflects a conceptual shift towards appreciating the cognitive and emotional roles played by students' native languages (Norro, 2022). This inclusive strategy advocates for the advancement of professional development initiatives to fully embody these principles within educational settings, emphasizing the necessity for structured, curriculum-aligned pedagogical strategies rather than sporadic language use in classrooms (Osorio, 2020).

However, despite positive attitudes from educators towards multilingual pedagogy, the findings indicate a notable gap between their theoretical understanding and practical application. Teachers often recognize the benefits of multilingual instruction but may engage in spontaneous practices rather than implement cohesive strategies tailored to the curriculum (Miya, 2022). This misalignment underscores the importance of ongoing professional development and institutional support to bridge the divide between theory and classroom practice, ensuring that teachers are well-equipped to foster an environment that authentically reflects and utilizes the linguistic diversity present in their classrooms (Slaughter & Cross, 2020). By embracing a translanguaging framework, educators can facilitate language learning that is not only effective but also revitalizes the multilingual identities of their students, thereby promoting a richer academic experience (Elshafie & Zhang, 2024).

1.3 Multilingual Education for Cultural Preservation

Educators in the Sasak community consistently articulate a heightened sense of cultural responsibility in relation to the preservation of the Sasak language within early childhood education. Their concerns stem from the observable decline in intergenerational transmission, particularly as younger parents increasingly favour Indonesian as the primary language of the home. This shift reflects broader sociolinguistic dynamics documented in the literature, where national and global linguistic pressures accelerate the marginalisation of local heritage languages (Hafiz et al., 2022). The growing preference for Indonesian is frequently associated with parental aspirations for mobility and academic success, yet it simultaneously contributes to the erosion of cultural identity embedded within minority linguistic traditions. Scholars argue that the displacement of indigenous languages compromises communal continuity, weakening the symbolic and affective ties that connect younger generations to their cultural roots (Sugianto & Hasby, 2023). Against this backdrop, Sasak educators recognise that early childhood settings have become increasingly critical for maintaining linguistic diversity, particularly as family-based language transmission diminishes within contemporary sociocultural contexts. This recognition further reinforces their commitment to integrating Sasak meaningfully across daily pedagogical practices today Teachers also report that children are entering school with noticeably reduced proficiency in Sasak, a trend they link to shifting linguistic practices in the home. Many educators observe that parents view Indonesian as more academically advantageous, thereby limiting children's exposure to their heritage language during crucial developmental years. One teacher noted that children often possess only "very limited Sasak vocabulary," a situation that underscores educators' belief that schools now occupy an essential position in sustaining local linguistic traditions. This perspective mirrors broader research identifying early childhood institutions as pivotal agents in the maintenance and revitalisation of minority languages, particularly in contexts where societal pressures challenge linguistic diversity (Sugianto & Hasby, 2023). As family-based transmission weakens, educators increasingly integrate Sasak through storytelling, songs, and routine interactions, emphasising its cultural and pedagogical significance. Scholars argue that such intentional incorporation of heritage languages not only strengthens children's linguistic repertoires but also reinforces their cultural identity and sense of belonging. In recognising these dynamics, teachers affirm the need to position multilingual education as a response to cultural and linguistic shifts within the Sasak community.

Several teachers reported a noticeable shift in family language practices, observing that many young parents "rarely speak Sasak anymore," resulting in children experiencing difficulties with even basic heritage-language instructions. This pattern corresponds with existing studies indicating declining home-language use as families increasingly adopt socially and economically dominant languages such as Indonesian (Cumberbatch & Cumberbatch, 2024; Sugianto & Hasby, 2023). In response, educators have begun integrating Sasak more deliberately into early childhood curricula through songs, storytelling, and routine classroom interactions. Such pedagogical strategies reflect a conscious attempt to counteract diminishing linguistic exposure and revitalise Sasak within formal learning environments (Hafiz et al., 2022). These efforts demonstrate educators' recognition of the school as a central space for sustaining heritage language practices. Educators further emphasised that multilingual practices play a crucial role in supporting cultural continuity. One teacher noted that the use of Sasak in early childhood settings extends beyond functional communication and represents an essential means of preserving cultural identity. This perception aligns with scholarly work highlighting the significance of heritage languages in shaping cultural identity formation within multilingual societies (Hafiz et al., 2022). Classroom observations also revealed increasing confidence among children as they gradually engaged more actively with Sasak, illustrating the school's capacity to enhance language pride and competence. This finding resonates with research asserting that structured early exposure is vital for minority language revitalisation (Elshafie & Zhang, 2024). Consequently, early childhood education functions as a key arena for both academic development and cultural preservation.

2. Daily Classroom Practice of Multilingual Education in ECE

2.1 Mix-Medium Instruction

In Central Lombok, teachers adopt a mixed-medium instructional approach that integrates Sasak, Bahasa Indonesia, and English throughout daily classroom interactions. This multilingual practice aligns with a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of home languages in early childhood education (ECE), where children's native languages play a critical role in emotional bonding, cultural continuity, and conceptual scaffolding, particularly during informal communication (Samuelsson, 2022; Csillik & Golubeva, 2020). Within this context, Sasak serves as a foundational linguistic resource that enables young learners to anchor new concepts in familiar cultural and linguistic frameworks. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate that incorporating home languages enhances children's confidence, encourages active participation, and strengthens engagement in classroom activities (Kwihangana, 2021). Bahasa Indonesia operates primarily as the formal instructional medium, reflecting national language policies that position it as the principal language of literacy development and curricular delivery. It is widely employed for structured lessons, whole-class instruction, and classroom transitions, thereby supporting coherence and alignment with expectations in early primary education (Liando et al., 2023; KA & Ambarini, 2022). English, by contrast, is introduced more informally through songs, basic vocabulary, and thematic learning activities. This approach is consistent with evidence suggesting that early exposure to English fosters phonological awareness and nurtures intercultural understanding among young children (Yang et al., 2022).

The strategic interplay among Sasak, Bahasa Indonesia, and English closely aligns with translanguaging perspectives that view flexible, dynamic language use as an effective pedagogical resource rather than a deviation from monolingual norms (Khairunnisa & Lukmana, 2020). Translanguaging enables educators to navigate complex multilingual interactions while addressing students' diverse linguistic needs, supporting comprehension, and sustaining cultural relevance (Kwihangana, 2021). This linguistic flexibility reflects broader pedagogical trends observed in multilingual ECE settings across Indonesia and Southeast Asia, where teachers draw upon their full linguistic repertoires to clarify abstract concepts and cultivate meaningful learning experiences (Yakin et al., 2023). Research further underscores that such adaptive language practices support both cognitive and socio-emotional development by fostering inclusive, responsive, and culturally grounded learning environments (Moraru et al., 2025). Overall, the mixed-medium instructional approach employed in Central Lombok demonstrates an effective application of translanguaging pedagogy that honors local linguistic heritage while remaining consistent with national educational goals. This integrated multilingual practice ultimately strengthens young children's cognitive, linguistic, and emotional development as they navigate complex multilingual landscapes within formal educational settings.

2.2 Translanguaging and Code Switching as Pedagogical Tools

Classroom observations in multilingual early childhood settings reveal a sophisticated interplay between languages, with translanguaging and code-switching emerging as central instructional strategies. Educators alternated between Sasak and Indonesian depending on interactional demands, employing Sasak primarily for emotional support, conflict resolution, and moral guidance due to its strong cultural resonance. This pattern aligns with research indicating that indigenous languages can enhance empathy, relational warmth, and socio-emotional regulation in young learners (Ntuli & Mudau, 2024). Teachers' accounts emphasised the effectiveness of Sasak in comforting distressed children and facilitating value-based conversations, reflecting translanguaging frameworks that highlight the pedagogical benefits of drawing upon children's full linguistic repertoires (Rajasekaran & Kumar, 2020). The functional distribution of language use observed across classrooms corresponds closely with patterns documented in multilingual Indonesian contexts. Educators reported that Indonesian was predominantly utilised during structured curricular activities, particularly literacy, numeracy,

and thematic instruction, whereas Sasak was integrated through culturally grounded examples, explanations, and informal interactions. This intentional blending supports comprehension and strengthens connections between abstract concepts and children's lived experiences, a finding consistent with previous research in other regions of Indonesia (Liu, 2022; Wilson, 2020). Teachers described this linguistic fluidity as intuitive and necessary, highlighting translanguaging as an effective scaffolding mechanism for enhancing engagement and facilitating deeper conceptual understanding.

Importantly, code-switching was not perceived as a linguistic weakness but rather as a deliberate pedagogical resource that promotes accessibility, inclusivity, and cultural continuity. Educators' multilingual practices particularly evident in outdoor play, informal learning spaces, and relational interactions were found to strengthen children's cultural identities while supporting academic development. Emerging evidence indicates that such practices foster relational trust, socio-emotional well-being, and positive learning dispositions among young children (Chen et al., 2023). These findings echo insights from other multilingual contexts, where translanguaging approaches have been shown to enrich learning experiences and contribute to the preservation of heritage languages (Mulaudzi, 2024).

2.3 Use of Local Oral Genres for Learning

The integration of local oral genres such as Sasak folktales, children's songs, and rhythmic oral routines is a prominent pedagogical strategy employed within early childhood classrooms in Central Lombok. These culturally rich narrative and musical forms are intentionally woven into daily instructional activities, notably during circle time, storytelling sessions, and transitional routines. Research indicates that using familiar cultural resources, such as folkloric elements, enhances children's engagement and comprehension within pedagogical contexts (Gauvreau et al., 2021; Machmud et al., 2020). As one educator noted, incorporating Sasak folktales into circle time significantly increased attentiveness among children, thereby fostering a connection between learning and their everyday experiences (Gauvreau et al., 2021). Utilizing children's songs has been shown to aid in vocabulary retention and language acquisition. Studies support the idea that musical elements provide mnemonic devices for children, enabling them to recall new vocabulary more easily (Yetti et al., 2019). This aligns with the broader literature linking musicality and learning processes, where songs and rhymes enhance phonological awareness, which is crucial for early literacy development (Liu et al., 2024). The rhythmic nature of these oral traditions attracts children's attention and supports their language skills, making the learning environment more dynamic and responsive to their cultural backgrounds (Jitpranee et al., 2024). Sasak oral traditions play a critical role not only in academic learning but also in moral development. Folktales serve as vehicles for educating children about foundational social norms and ethical reasoning, as educators carefully select stories that reflect local values such as respect for elders and community cohesion (Gauvreau et al., 2021). Participants in interviews have indicated that these stories are not only memorable but also impactful, with children retelling them at home, thereby extending the moral teachings beyond the classroom and integrating them into family interactions (Margaretha & Haryono, 2024). Furthermore, the use of Sasak rhymes has been cited as an effective method for improving pronunciation and expressive language skills, as children feel less self-conscious when engaging with familiar sounds and structures (Cates et al., 2023). Consequently, the nightly oral traditions serve as multimodal scaffolding that weaves together rhythm, repetition, and narrative to deepen understanding and maintain engagement during classroom routines (Yetti et al., 2019).

The commitment to utilizing local oral genres extends beyond merely enhancing academic outcomes; it significantly contributes to vocabulary development, cultural identity formation, and emotional grounding among children. Through continual exposure to culturally embedded forms of expression, children acquire vocabulary that resonates deeply with their community life and traditional understandings (Weatherly, 2024; Arroyo-Gallego et al., 2018). Furthermore, participation in shared oral narratives fosters a sense of belonging and cultural pride, as children

connect their school learning with familial and cultural heritage. This emotional connection reinforces children's confidence in their linguistic capabilities and validates their cultural identity within formal educational frameworks (Mafukata et al., 2019). Thus, Sasak songs, folktales, and rhymes serve not only as pedagogical instruments but also as vital means for preserving linguistic heritage and nurturing early cultural literacy.

2.4 Play-Based Bilingual Activities

In early childhood multilingual education, play corners, role-play scenarios, and musical activities serve as vital multimodal spaces for children to engage with multiple languages, including Sasak, Indonesian, English, and Arabic. These environments are intentionally designed to promote authentic, play-based engagement, facilitating language exposure and use among children. In play corners, children fluidly switch between languages during activities like "shopkeeper" and "family," utilizing whichever language feels most comfortable at the moment. This dynamic use of language exemplifies a low-stakes approach to language practice, where children can freely negotiate roles and manipulate objects to enhance their communicative competence without pressure, aligning with developmentally appropriate pedagogy (Schultz et al., 2023; Sahiruddin & Manipuspika, 2021). Teachers enhance these multilingual experiences through strategies such as labeling objects in multiple languages and utilizing visual aids like multilingual picture cards. This practice reinforces vocabulary acquisition and fosters cross-linguistic awareness. As emphasized by educators, seeing familiar items labeled in both Sasak and Indonesian encourages inquiry and attempts to use both languages, thus enriching their understanding and use of words (Etri & Pransiska, 2021; Adara, 2020). Picture cards further bolster this learning by serving as concrete visual cues that support comprehension, as students verbalize words while interacting with these materials, leading to a mixing of languages typical of their play (Cohen et al., 2023).

Dramatization in classroom settings enhances linguistic and social learning opportunities, allowing children to experience and navigate multiple languages within a contextual framework. During dramatized storytelling sessions, for example, children may greet each other in Arabic, describe objects in Indonesian, and interact in Sasak, showcasing their ability to shift language use based on context and role (Velarde & Ghani, 2019). Musical activities play a significant role in this process, as songs often incorporate repetitive and rhythmic structures that aid in language acquisition, making new vocabulary memorable and engaging. Teachers report that singing in various languages, including Sasak, Indonesian, and English, motivates children to learn and retain new words through the enjoyment of music (Adara, 2020). The Impact of Music, Song and Movements on the Language Acquisition by Preschool Children between the Ages of 48-60 (Month, 2018). Role-play activities enhance children's communicative confidence and linguistic creativity by providing a platform for experimenting with different vocabulary and language combinations. This playful engagement encourages children to adopt various personas and practice language in a safe environment where they can blend languages creatively. Hence, role-play not only fosters comfort in speaking but also cultivates a rich linguistic flexibility, crucial for navigating multicultural contexts (Latifaturrizqia et al., 2023). Altogether, the integration of multilingual practices including spontaneous language use during play, labeling objects, the use of picture cards, dramatization, and musical activities plays a fundamental role in children's linguistic, cognitive, and social development. These approaches not only enhance language proficiency but also affirm the linguistic diversity within the classroom, promoting a more holistic and culturally responsive educational experience (Okelo, 2018). By enabling children to engage with their full linguistic repertoires through interactive play, educators create a vibrant linguistic ecology that supports meaningful communication and peer collaboration (Tewelde et al., 2023).

Conclusion

This study set out to investigate how early childhood educators in Central Lombok perceive and implement multilingual education within their daily classroom practice. The findings reveal that multilingual education is conceptualized not merely as an instructional technique but as a culturally situated, emotionally responsive, and pedagogically strategic approach. Educators view multilingualism, particularly the integration of Sasak and Indonesian, as essential for nurturing children's emotional security, strengthening comprehension, and supporting cultural preservation. At the classroom level, multilingual education is enacted through mixed-medium instruction, flexible translanguaging practices, the use of local oral genres, and play-based bilingual activities, all of which create rich linguistic ecologies that affirm children's identities while promoting cognitive and socio-emotional development.

These insights highlight the need for more structured, policy-aligned support to sustain and enhance multilingual practices in early childhood education. For educators, the results point to the importance of developing intentional and curriculum-linked multilingual strategies rather than relying solely on spontaneous language use. Professional development programs should therefore prioritise training in translanguaging pedagogy, culturally responsive instruction, and heritage language revitalisation. For school leaders, the findings underscore the value of creating institutional environments that recognise and legitimise multilingual practices through resource provision, scheduling flexibility, and collaborative planning structures. Meanwhile, policymakers at the district and provincial levels are encouraged to incorporate heritage-language support into early childhood education guidelines, ensuring that multilingual pedagogies are systematically embedded within national and regional frameworks. Parents also play a crucial role, and the study suggests fostering stronger home-school partnerships to encourage the continued use of Sasak alongside Indonesian in family settings, thereby reinforcing intergenerational language transmission. Collectively, these recommendations aim to strengthen multilingual education as both a pedagogical practice and a cultural commitment, ensuring that young children in Central Lombok experience learning environments that are linguistically inclusive, emotionally supportive, and culturally grounded.

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