

**The Impact of Taiwan's Bilingual Education Policy on Indigenous Students:
Language, Identity, and Learning Challenges**

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Abstract

This study critically examines Taiwan's 2030 Bilingual Nation policy and its impact on indigenous students. It explores how the dominance of Mandarin and English affects indigenous language preservation, identity formation, and learning equity. Findings highlight linguistic marginalization, identity conflicts, and additional educational barriers faced by indigenous learners.

Keywords: Bilingual education; Indigenous students; Language policy; Identity; Educational inequality

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The purpose of this study is to investigate the consequences of Taiwan's bilingual education policy on indigenous students, with a particular focus on three key dimensions: language sustainability, identity construction, and learning opportunities. While the 2030 Bilingual Nation policy aims to enhance national competitiveness by strengthening English proficiency, it simultaneously reshapes the linguistic hierarchy in Taiwan, positioning English and Mandarin as dominant languages.

This study seeks to answer the following research questions:

- How does Taiwan's bilingual education policy influence the development and preservation of indigenous languages?
- What is the relationship between language use and identity formation among indigenous students?
- What additional learning challenges do indigenous students face under a Mandarin-English bilingual system?

Drawing on existing policy analysis and sociolinguistic perspectives, this research aims to provide a critical understanding of how national language policies can unintentionally marginalize minority groups. The study also attempts to highlight the tension between globalization (English dominance) and localization (indigenous language preservation), emphasizing the need for more inclusive and culturally responsive educational practices.

Research Methods

This study adopts a qualitative policy analysis approach, supported by literature review and critical discourse analysis. Data sources include government policy documents related to Taiwan's Bilingual Nation 2030 initiative, as well as academic literature on bilingual education, indigenous language preservation, and language ideology.

The analysis is structured into three thematic areas: (1) Language impact, (2) Identity challenges, and (3) Learning disadvantages. First, policy documents were examined to identify how bilingual education is conceptualized and implemented in Taiwan. Particular attention was given to the prioritization of English and Mandarin, as indicated in national policy frameworks. Second, relevant literature was reviewed to explore the sociolinguistic implications of language policy. Studies discussing Mandarin dominance, multilingual transitions, and indigenous language decline were analyzed to understand historical and structural factors shaping language use. Third, a critical discourse analysis was conducted to examine how language ideologies are embedded in educational practices. This includes examining how English is associated with education and prestige, Mandarin with daily communication, and indigenous languages with personal identity and family contexts.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal three major issues: language marginalization, identity conflict, and learning disadvantage. First, the bilingual education policy contributes to the diminishing use of indigenous languages. Although Taiwan has transitioned from a Mandarin-only system to a multilingual and now bilingual framework, the current policy primarily promotes Mandarin and English, leaving indigenous languages

underrepresented. Bilingual education is often defined narrowly as “English + Mandarin,” which implicitly excludes indigenous languages from the educational mainstream. This shift reinforces linguistic hierarchy and accelerates language loss among indigenous communities.

Second, the policy creates identity challenges for indigenous students. Language plays a crucial role in shaping cultural identity. Indigenous students often experience confusion regarding language use across different contexts—English in education, Mandarin in social life, and indigenous languages within family settings. This fragmented linguistic experience leads to identity uncertainty, ideological conflict, and social stigma. For example, speaking English and Mandarin is often associated with higher social status, while indigenous languages may be stigmatized, resulting in reduced confidence among indigenous learners.

Third, indigenous students face additional learning difficulties under the bilingual education system. The implementation of English-medium instruction (EMI) increases cognitive and linguistic demands, particularly for students who are already navigating multiple languages. Indigenous students encounter challenges such as limited English learning resources, insufficient teacher support, and cultural mismatches between Western-oriented curricula and indigenous knowledge systems. These factors contribute to educational inequality and lower academic performance.

Overall, the findings suggest that while the bilingual policy aims to promote global competitiveness, it may inadvertently deepen social and educational disparities. The dominance of English and Mandarin not only marginalizes indigenous languages but

also disrupts identity formation and creates additional barriers to learning. Therefore, policymakers must reconsider the current approach and adopt a more inclusive multilingual framework that values all languages equally.