

## Students' Perceptions of the Use of English at a Bilingual Setting Based on Their Kindergarten Language Background

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This research investigated what students with English-kindergarten, Indonesian-kindergarten, and English-Indonesian-kindergarten background perceived regarding the use of English at a bilingual school. The study adopted a qualitative case design and took place at one of private primary schools in Jakarta. There were 27 participants (14 males and 13 females) being involved in this research. They were 21 students of grade one, 3 students of grade two, and 3 students of grade three. Most students with English-kindergarten background gave positive perceptions of the use of English, while most students with Indonesian-kindergarten background had negative perceptions of the use of English. Students with bilingual kindergarten background gave positive perceptions of the use of English at bilingual school. The findings can show that there is a correlation between students' previous exposure to a foreign language and their future preference for the language used as the medium of teaching-learning processes. This study can contribute to the policy making of schools which intend to adopt bilingual education.

*Keywords:* students' perceptions, bilingual education

*Riset ini meneliti persepsi para siswa dengan latar belakang pendidikan berbeda terhadap penggunaan bahasa Inggris di sekolah dengan pengantar dwi bahasa. Para siswa tersebut berasal dari TK (Taman Kanak-Kanak) berbahasa pengantar Inggris, Indonesia, dan Inggris-Indonesia. Riset yang mengadopsi kualitatif studi kasus ini mengambil tempat di salah satu Sekolah Dasar swasta di Jakarta. 27 siswa (14 pria dan 13 wanita) berpartisipasi dalam riset ini. 21 siswa berasal dari kelas satu, 3 siswa kelas dua, dan 3 siswa kelas tiga. Sebagian besar siswa dengan latar belakang TK berbahasa pengantar Inggris memberikan persepsi positif terhadap penggunaan bahasa Inggris, sedangkan siswa yang berasal dari TK berbahasa pengantar Indonesia memberikan persepsi negatif. Siswa yang berasal dari TK berbahasa pengantar Inggris-Indonesia juga memberikan persepsi positif. Penemuan studi ini menunjukkan adanya hubungan antara latar belakang pendidikan bahasa dan persepsi siswa terhadap penggunaan bahasa tersebut di kemudian hari sebagai media proses belajar-mengajar. Riset ini dapat memberikan kontribusi terhadap pengambilan kebijakan di sekolah-sekolah yang ingin menerapkan pendidikan dwi bahasa.*

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## INTRODUCTION

English, which is considered to be an important language to get involved in this ever-globalising world, needs more attention, especially in the education sector in Indonesia. The importance of English has been the attention of education authority in this country. This is showed by a government document stating the objective of teaching English at senior secondary school level: promoting communication skills in spoken and written English in which the skills include listening, speaking, reading and writing (The Ministry of Education).

This objective doesn't seem to have been fully achieved. This can be shown by the fact that most students, including university students, cannot use English to communicate. This may be due to a very limited exposure and opportunity to use the language. Krashen (as cited in Sears, 1998) states that a prerequisite of successful second language learning for students is a sufficient target language exposure. Responding to this problem, many bilingual schools emerge to provide more opportunity for students to learn and use English at school due to the environment in Indonesia that does not provide a sufficient chance to use English.

One bilingual school which comes up currently in Jakarta, Indonesia is Nizamia Andalusia Primary School (NAPS). This school uses both Indonesian and English as the medium of instruction in teaching-learning activities. This school applies English as a daily instructional language to make students have more exposures and opportunities to use English. English is not the goal of this school, but it is used as a tool to study math, science, and social studies. The assistant principal reported three points regarding the use of English in the school: teacher and students were expected to use English in their daily activities, math and science are fully taught in English, and social studies for certain grades are taught in English.

According to the first grade teachers at NAPS, the percentage of the use of English and Indonesian in teaching and learning activity for science, math, and English is about 60% and 40%. According to the grade 2 teachers, the percentage is equal. On the other hand, the average percentage of the use of English and Indonesian in grade 3 is about 83% and 16%. Grade 4 teachers use 92% English, while grade 5 teachers uses 83% English in teaching math, science and English. The total average use of English-Indonesian in those subjects at the school is about 73.8% - 26.2%.

Most students at NAPS completed their kindergarten education from the same institution. However, along with the school's progress and gaining trust from public, it has started accepting students from various kindergarten schools. Some students come from kindergarten schools in which English is used as a medium of instruction, and some don't. As a result, the students at the school are various in terms of their language background. This, however, creates some problems. For example, English designed to be used in math, science, and social studies for teaching-learning processes cannot always be implemented smoothly. Another example of the problem happened when the researcher taught ICT (Information and Communications Technology) to grade 2 students through English; some students could not understand the instruction. This study is therefore interested in investigating the students' perceptions of the use of English in this bilingual primary school. The results of this study are expected to give insights for policy-making to not only the institution but also other institutions in the Indonesian context which

have similar condition.

Some studies on students' perceptions of bilingual education have been done (Griego-Jones, 1994; Tina, Zaim, & Syafei, 2013; Tsukamoto, 2011). Tsukamoto (2011), for example, investigated students' perceptions of the use of English in a Japanese school. The study asked whether students appreciated the complete use of English and liked/disliked teacher's English use in the classroom. The study found that students appreciated the use of English and gave positive responses by stating that it helped improve their listening and speaking skills.

Griego-Jones (1994) conducted a study on 10 kindergarten students' perceptions of Two-Way bilingual school programs. "The goal of Two-Way programs is to bring Spanish speakers and English speakers to full bilingualism" (p. 2). The study aimed to find students' attitudes toward Spanish and English used in bilingual classroom setting. The data collected from daily journal writing, observations, and personal interviews over six months showed that students perceived English was more legitimate school language than Spanish even though the purpose of the program was to encourage the development of both languages.

Tina, Zaim, and Syafei (2013) conducted a study on students' perceptions of the use of English in an Indonesian school that was targeted to have an international standard. The medium of instruction in the teaching-learning processes was Indonesian and English, which were implemented in different percentages in each level. At the first level, the use of English and Indonesian was 25%-75%. At the second level, it was 50%-50%, while it became 75% English and 25% Indonesian in the third level. The participants of the research were 74, with the methods used were questionnaire and interview. The study found that students were interested in using English and willing to improve their ability. They were pleased to study and felt challenged in learning. They also felt motivated to learn language in bilingual setting. The study showed that students had positive perceptions of the use of English in bilingual school.

The abovementioned studies investigated the students' perceptions of bilingual education. However, the studies did not inform students' educational background, whether the students came from bilingual schools or not. There may be different perceptions if students have experienced this kind of education. This study therefore attempts to investigate the students' perceptions of bilingual education based on their educational background coming from bilingual and monolingual education.

## **METHOD**

This qualitative case study was conducted at NAPS. The study attempted to find the students' perceptions of the use of English correlated with their language background at kindergarten school and was aimed to answer whether English-kindergarten, Indonesian-kindergarten, and bilingual-kindergarten background affected students' perceptions of the use of English in bilingual school. There were 27 students (14 males and 13 males) participating in the study. 21 students were from grade one; six students were from grade two and three.

Regarding the participants' kindergarten education, the researcher looked at the school document to know the students' language background and selected the participants. The distribution of participants was equal. There were 9 students from English-kindergarten school, 9 students from Indonesian-kindergarten school, and 9 students from bilingual-kindergarten

school. They were grouped into three categories: Indonesian, English, and Bilingual (Indonesian & English).

Interview was conducted to find the following information: the perceptions of the use of English at school, the perceptions of the use of English and Indonesian, the language preferred to talk with friends, and the language preferred to talk with teachers. Semi-structured interview was adopted, allowing the researcher to develop the necessary points related to the topic and to dig more information from the participants without losing the context of the interview.

Four main questions formed the basis for the interview: What do you think about learning through English? What do you think of learning in two languages at school? What language do you prefer to talk with your friends? What language do you prefer to talk with your teachers? The interview was recorded and transcribed to find the emerging themes. Also, the interview was conducted at a friendly atmosphere in order to make the kids feel at ease.

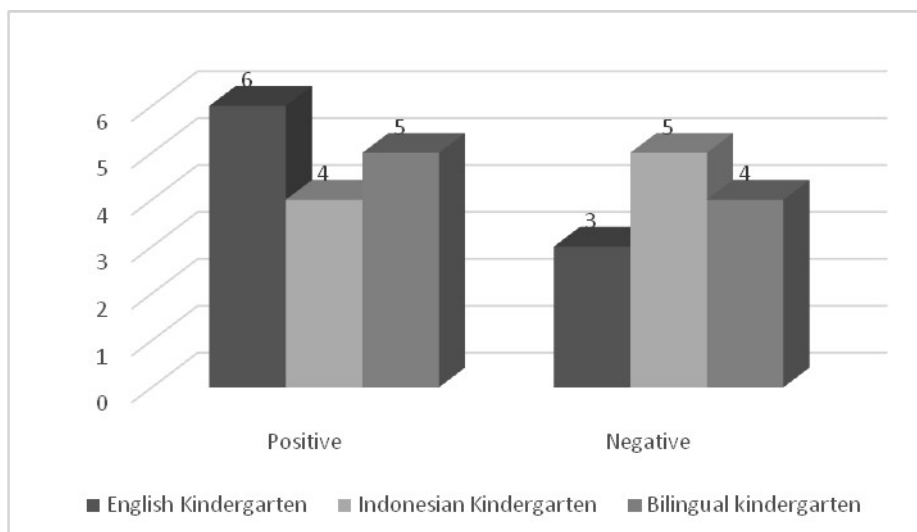
## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Findings

There were two perceptions obtained from the data: positive and negative perceptions. Positive perception refers to perceptions that show positive, good, and affirmative values, responses, and feedbacks toward the use of English at school, while negative perception refers to perceptions that show negative, bad, and refusing responses and feedbacks toward the use of English.

The first question asked to the participants was “What do you think about learning by using English?” This question was given to find feeling, opinion, and expression toward the use of English at school. The results of the interviews showed that 15 students (6 English, 4 Indonesian, 5 bilingual kindergarten background) gave positive perceptions toward the use of English at school. On the other hand, the negative perceptions were expressed by 12 participants: 5 students with Indonesian-kindergarten, 4 students with bilingual-kindergarten, and 3 students with English-kindergarten background. The figure below illustrates the students’ perceptions of the use of English.

*Figure 1: Perceptions of the use of English*



The interview results of the students with Indonesian-kindergarten background show that 5 out of 9 students gave negative feedback toward the use of English. Their perception may be due to the lack of English ability, and they needed additional course to improve their English. The perceptions could indicate that they were not ready to study math and science through English. This case gave impact to their answers toward the use of two languages (English and Indonesian) at school. They mostly perceived positive responses toward the use of the two languages because it was helpful; however, they needed translation to understand the instructions.

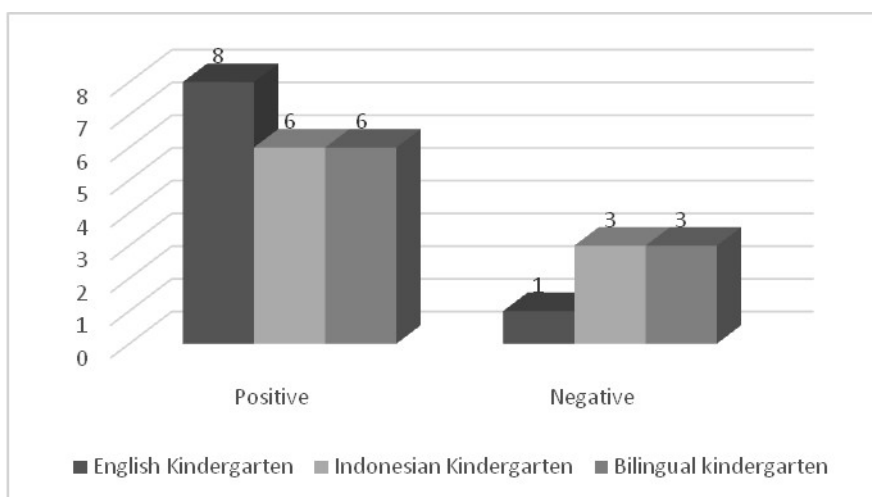
Surprisingly, there were 4 students with Indonesian-kindergarten background who gave a positive view on the use of English at school. This is because they had prepared themselves by taking an English learning program. The four participants informed that they took an English course before they enrolled at school. Therefore, they could accept English. This could show that English preparation influences students' perception. The following table lists the percentages of the students' perceptions of English.

*Table 1: Percentages of students' perceptions of the use of English*

Kindergarten Language	Students' Perceptions	
	Positive	Negative
English	22.2%	11.1%
Indonesian	14.8%	18.5%
Bilingual	18.5%	14.8%
<b>Total</b>	55.6%	44.4%

The second question asked was “What do you think of learning through two languages (English & Indonesian)?” 20 participants gave positive responses toward the use of English and Indonesian in school. The number of students who gave positive feedback was higher than those who did not. They were 6 students with Indonesian-kindergarten background, 6 students with bilingual-kindergarten background, and 8 students with English-kindergarten background. In contrast, there were 7 students who gave negative perceptions about the use of English and Indonesian at school. 4 students of them preferred to use Indonesian. They were 2 students with bilingual-kindergarten background and 2 students with Indonesian-kindergarten background. The students' perceptions of using the two languages can be seen in the following figure:

Figure 2: Perceptions of the use of English and Indonesian (bilingual)



There was a significant difference between positive and negative feedback toward the implementation of bilingual. According to the interview results, bilingual implementation was mostly helpful for students to understand instruction. Many students gave positive feedback toward bilingual implementation because it was important for them with limited English proficiency. On the other hand, students coming from English-kindergarten background did not find a problem. That may be the reason why the number of students with Indonesian-kindergarten background, English-kindergarten background, and bilingual-kindergarten background who gave positive feedback was not so different. In contrast, a number of students who gave negative opinions toward the use of the two languages were a few. One of the reasons was because they were not good at one language. For example, students with bilingual-kindergarten background stated that the use of English gave them confusion so that the use of Indonesian only was more comfortable.

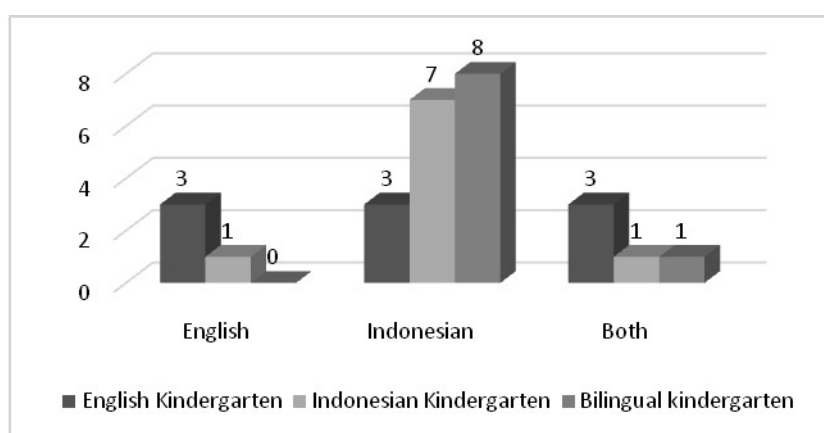
Different perception was conveyed by students with English-kindergarten background. They preferred the use of English only, without Indonesian or translation (combination). However, an unpredicted finding came from a student with Indonesian-kindergarten background. He preferred English to Indonesian. This is because he took an English course before joining the school, and he may feel very comfortable with the language.

Table 2: Percentages of students' perceptions of the use of English and Indonesian

Kindergarten Language	Students' Perceptions	
	Positive	Negative
English	29.6%	3.7%
Indonesian	22.2%	11.1%
Bilingual	22.2%	11.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>74.1%</b>	<b>25.9%</b>

With regard to the third question asking “What language do you prefer to talk with your friends?” 18 students preferred to use Indonesian. They were 7 students with Indonesian-kindergarten background, 8 students with bilingual-kindergarten background, and 3 students with English-kindergarten background. On the other hand, there were 4 participants who preferred to use English to speak with their friends. They were 3 students with English-kindergarten background and 1 student with bilingual-kindergarten background. Meanwhile 5 participants informed that they liked using both English and Indonesian to talk with their friends. They were 3 students with English-kindergarten background, 1 student with bilingual-kindergarten background, and 1 student coming from Indonesian-kindergarten background. The figure below illustrates the students’ language preference when talking with their friends.

Figure 3. Language preferred to communicate with Friends



Based on the interview, many students preferred to use Indonesian to talk with their friends. It was possibly affected by the language used in their kindergarten background. In addition, dominant language used by the students in the class might become a factor of their perceptions. A number of students with limited English speaking ability may also be one of the issues affecting the result. Students commonly would not prefer a language at which they were not good. The table below is the percentages of students’ language preference when talking with their friends.

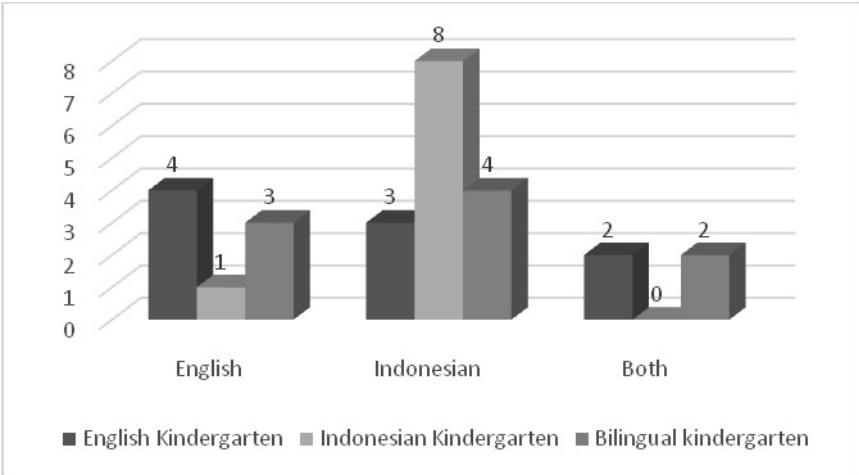
Table 3: Percentages of students’ language preference when talking with friends

Language used in Kindergarten	Language Preference		
	English	Indonesian	Both
English	11.1%	11.1%	11.1%
Indonesian	3.7%	25.9%	3.7%
Bilingual	0%	29.6%	3.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.8%</b>	<b>66.7%</b>	<b>18.5%</b>

The final main question asked to students was “What language do you prefer to talk with your teachers?” 15 students preferred to use Indonesian to talk with their teachers. They were

8 students with Indonesian-kindergarten background, 4 students with bilingual-kindergarten background, and 3 students with English-kindergarten background. On the other hand, 8 students preferred English; they were 3 students with bilingual-kindergarten background, 4 students with English-kindergarten background, and 1 student with Indonesian-kindergarten background. In addition, 4 students liked to use both English and Indonesian to talk with their teachers. They were 2 students with bilingual-kindergarten background and 2 students with English-kindergarten background, as can be seen in the figure below:

Figure 4: Students' language preference when talking with teachers



The figure above was not really different from that of students' language preference when talking with their friends. As has been mentioned, a student with Indonesian-kindergarten school background who preferred to use English to speak with teachers may be affected by his taking English course before enrolling to this bilingual school. Moreover, eight students with Indonesian-kindergarten background and four students with bilingual-kindergarten background who preferred to use Indonesian could be due to their low English speaking ability. On the other hand, 2 students with English-kindergarten background and 2 students with bilingual-kindergarten background who preferred to use both English and Indonesian can be because they were good at the two languages. The table below illustrates the percentages of students' language preference when talking with teachers.

Table 4: Percentages of students' language preference when talking with teachers

Kindergarten Language	Language Preference		
	English	Indonesian	Both
English	14.8%	11.1%	7.4%
Indonesian	3.7%	29.6%	0%
Bilingual	11.1%	14.8%	7.4%
<b>Total</b>	<b>29.6%</b>	<b>55.6%</b>	<b>14.8%</b>



## Discussion

Students with English-kindergarten background mostly gave positive perceptions of the use of English. Besides this, they did not find a problem using both languages to speak with their friends and teachers. This can be due to their good English ability. However, there were a few students with English-kindergarten background who gave negative feedback. This is because they were a little bit afraid of making mistakes in studying Math and Science.

Four students with Indonesian-kindergarten background gave positive perceptions of the use of English. These students took an English course before enrolling at NAPS. This could be concluded that their language education was successful in making them feel comfortable in the language.

As regards students with bilingual-kindergarten background, their perceptions of the use of English was not so different from that of Indonesian. The positive perception was about 55.6%, while the negative perception was about 44.4%. It may be because they are used to using both languages at school. However, it also depends on the setting. During their study at NAPS, they preferred to use English, but they did not use it when speaking with friends since at home they are not used to using it.

The results of this research show that more than 55 percent of the participants gave positive perceptions of using English in learning. This is in agreement with the study conducted by Tsukamoto (2011) in Japan. Tsukamoto's research reported that students in a Japanese school appreciated the use of English in teaching-learning processes, and they liked to use English as their classroom language. This can show that using a foreign language could not be a problem as long as students are ready. This has been proven by a few students coming from Indonesian-kindergarten background who also preferred to use English in learning due to their language training before enrolling at the bilingual school.

On the other hand, the result of this research was in contrast with the study by Tina et al. (2013) regarding the bilingual implementation at school. Even though her study found good perceptions of the use of English, many students in her study disagreed with bilingual implementation. Findings of this study show that more than 70% of the participants agreed with the bilingual implementation. These findings can be interpreted that since students came from various background, their perceptions of bilingual implementation was also various. Unfortunately, there was very little information regarding the participants' educational background in the study by Tina et al.

Looking at the third and fourth question in which more than 50% of students preferred using Indonesian to English, it could happen due to students' kindergarten language background that was not English or the students' lack of English exposure. The perceptions might be different if students enrolling to the school were from bilingual or English kindergarten. Although most students perceived English positively, lack of confidence and English speaking ability might become obstacle for class discussion in English.

The information above can be interpreted that the implementation of bilingual education need to consider students' previous exposure to English. If the students are not ready to accept English as the medium of teaching-learning processes, they will not feel comfortable with

study. This eventually can disrupt the transfer of knowledge. However, a different approach can be done. For example, students could be given adequate language training before sitting in bilingual classes.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study investigated what students with English-kindergarten, Indonesian-kindergarten, and bilingual-kindergarten background perceived the use of English. The students gave various answers to the four main question above. Acceptance and refusal toward the use of English were derived from students with different kindergarten language backgrounds. Students without English background needed preparation to make them ready to accept the teaching of math and science using English. The findings of this study show that there was a correlation between the students' perceptions and their kindergarten language background. The language used in kindergarten was proven to affect the students' readiness in learning through English.

There are three points drawn from the study. First, the students with English-kindergarten background highly appreciated the use of English at bilingual school. They had good perceptions; it can be because they had experienced this kind of learning. Second, students with Indonesian-kindergarten background gave negative perceptions of the use of English. This could be because they were not ready to accept the lesson in English due to their low exposure to English. Third, students with bilingual-kindergarten background expresses positive perceptions of the use of English; this may be due to their similar experience at bilingual kindergarten.

There are some implications derived from this study. First, students' perceptions of bilingual implementation can contribute to the policy making for school in terms of bilingual implementation. Second, the students' perceptions could indicate that they are able to learn using English, especially for students with English or bilingual kindergarten background or for students who had taken an English course before enrolling at bilingual school. On the other hand, language training need to be given to students without adequate language skill, as experienced by most students with Indonesian-kindergarten background.

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