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Early Childhood Educators' Professional Judgement and Imagined Practice in Response to Bilingual Policy (105)

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Abstract

Across the Asia-Pacific region, bilingual education policies have increasingly been promoted as part of broader national strategies for globalization and international competitiveness. In Taiwan, the Bilingual Nation Policy (2018) has extended expectations for English exposure into early childhood education. However, this policy direction creates a fundamental tension with early childhood pedagogies that prioritize play-based learning, emotional security, and the maintenance of home languages.

This study addresses an underexplored issue: how early childhood teachers interpret and respond to bilingual policy prior to formal implementation. While existing research has primarily focused on policy enactment in primary and secondary education, limited attention has been given to how teachers construct professional judgements in the pre-enactment stage within early childhood settings.

Drawing on teacher cognition theory (Borg, 2015) and translanguaging theory (García et al., 2014), this study conceptualizes teachers as professionals who actively interpret policy through situated pedagogical reasoning. Rather than assuming direct policy enactment, this study focuses on how teachers form anticipatory interpretations that may shape future pedagogical responses.

A qualitative research design was adopted. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six experienced kindergarten teachers in public and non-profit preschools in New Taipei City,

Taiwan. All participants had more than ten years of teaching experience and were working in contexts where bilingual instruction had not yet been formally implemented. Interview data were transcribed, member-checked, and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings indicate that teachers commonly interpret bilingual policy as an extension of English education into earlier stages of schooling and as part of broader national internationalization strategies. At the same time, participants expressed concerns that formalized English instruction may conflict with the pedagogical foundations of early childhood education, particularly the emphasis on play-based interaction and holistic development.

Teachers tend to evaluate policy expectations through professional considerations such as children's emotional security, classroom interaction quality, and equitable participation. Based on these considerations, they articulate low-conflict pedagogical orientations, such as embedding limited English exposure within daily routines, songs, and play-based activities while maintaining the home language as a central resource for communication and participation.

Based on these findings, this study proposes a pre-enactment pedagogical filtering process, referring to how teachers interpret, evaluate, and selectively align policy expectations with pedagogical principles before implementation. This study contributes to the literature by shifting attention from policy enactment to pre-enactment professional judgement, highlighting how teachers' anticipatory interpretations may shape the conditions under which bilingual policy is later enacted in early childhood classrooms. The findings suggest that effective bilingual policy implementation should adopt flexible, teacher-informed approaches that respect the principles of play, linguistic diversity, and child agency.