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## An Examination of Bilingual Policy in Bridging Languages in Education System

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*Image Source:* Google. (2025). [Image representing Filipino children learning in a school setting under a bilingual policy with visual cues for bridging languages and cultural identity] [Digital image]. Gemini. Prompt: Filipino children in school in Bilingual policy education system.

This policy brief examines the implementation and impact of the bilingual policy within the Philippine education system. Research suggests that while language-in-education policies are designed to promote educational access and equity, they often result in overburdened teachers, pedagogical misalignment, and the perpetuation of unintended social outcomes. The key findings reveal a complex disconnect between policy intent and classroom practice, highlighting issues in teacher training, resource allocation, curriculum alignment, and evaluation mechanisms. This brief recommends a multi-pronged approach focused on strengthening teacher competency, decentralizing curriculum development to ensure cultural responsiveness, and establishing clear metrics for policy success to ensure the bilingual policy genuinely serves as a tool for critical thinking and educational equity, rather than a barrier.

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## Introduction

Language serves not only as a medium of instruction but also as a foundation of cultural identity. In a linguistically diverse nation like the Philippines, education is a crucial instrument for fostering national cohesion, economic competitiveness, and social equity. To harness its linguistic richness, the country has long implemented a national bilingual education policy using Filipino and English as primary languages of instruction to promote both national identity and global readiness. Since the 1974 Department Order No. 25 and its 1987 revision, Filipino has been designated for the humanities and social sciences, while English remains the medium for science and mathematics. However, the post-pandemic educational landscape has placed the bilingual policy at a critical crossroads. The COVID-19 crisis intensified existing inequalities and introduced new challenges in language learning, assessment, and instructional delivery. School closures, remote learning modalities, and unequal access to digital learning widened gaps in students' proficiency in both Filipino and English (World Bank, 2022; UNICEF Philippines, 2021). Additionally, recent studies show that many Filipino learners simultaneously use two, three, or even more languages including mother tongues, regional languages, Filipino, English, and hybridized forms such as "Taglish" and "Bislish" creating multilingual environments that do not neatly align with the official bilingual policy (Cruz & Daway-Ducanes, 2023; Tupas, 2020). These multilingual realities significantly influence comprehension, instructional decision-making, and teacher language use, making consistent implementation of a strictly Filipino-English framework increasingly challenging. Despite its long institutional history, wide disparities in bilingual policy implementation persist across schools, regions, and socioeconomic contexts. Top-down mandates often overlook the lived linguistic complexities of Filipino students and teachers, leading to implementation burdens that fall most heavily on underserved communities. As research warns, language policies that fail to recognize multilingual practices may inadvertently reinforce educational inequities and produce "unintended outcomes" that disproportionately disadvantage children navigating multiple languages in daily life (Mwaniki et al., 2016; Garcia & Wei, 2024). Hankiysy and Jordan-Zachery (2024) assertion remains relevant: language policy is multifaceted and rarely produces straightforward improvements in learning outcomes. Furthermore, the increasing mobility of Filipino families whether due to internal migration, urbanization, or overseas work has expanded linguistic diversity within classrooms, causing regional dialects and additional languages to intersect with instructional practices in unpredictable ways. This demographic movement disrupts traditional assumptions about homogeneous language groups and necessitates more flexible, context-responsive language policies (Manalastas, 2023). Another emerging claim from post-pandemic research is that hybrid and digital learning environments have amplified students' exposure to global media, accelerating English dominance while simultaneously encouraging informal translanguaging online (Asian

Development Bank, 2023). This shift highlights a new tension: the need to balance English for digital participation with mother tongue and Filipino for cultural grounding and academic development. This policy brief draws from qualitative data involving teachers, school administrators, and language experts from the National Capital Region (NCR), Palawan, and Bukidnon. The findings illuminate the evolving challenges and contextual realities shaping bilingual policy implementation. The brief also offers targeted, evidence-informed recommendations to reform and strengthen the national bilingual policy so it can better respond to post-pandemic conditions, linguistic diversity, and the long-term goals of the Philippine education system.

## Key Issues

The research identifies several critical issues preventing the optimal functioning of the bilingual policy:

### 1. *Policy-Practice Disconnect*

There is a significant gap between the high-level policy directives established by educational authorities and the practical realities faced by teachers in the classroom. This forces teachers to struggle between compliance and pedagogical effectiveness, often without the necessary institutional support.

### 2. *Unintended Socio-Educational Outcomes*

While intended to increase access and equity, current language-in-education policies may instead reproduce and entrench social inequalities, as seen in contexts where English-dominant policies persist or where multilingual policies are not meaningfully implemented (Madonsela, 2024). This suggests that the implementation may be inadvertently reinforcing existing educational disparities rather than resolving them.

### 3. *Lack of Clarity in Evaluation*

The complex nature of language policy makes it challenging to understand and assess its true impact. The lack of simple, clear metrics and evaluation mechanisms prevents effective feedback loops, leaving decision-makers unaware of which aspects of the policy are succeeding and which are failing.

### 4. *Insufficient Teacher Preparation for Bilingual and Multilingual Pedagogy*

Teachers continue to shoulder the burden of navigating multiple languages without adequate training, support, or clear guidelines. Many feel unprepared to manage translanguaging practices, adjust language use during instruction, and differentiate lessons in linguistically diverse classrooms. This lack of professional development undermines consistent and equitable implementation.

### 5. *Teacher Overburdening and Lack of Support*

The demand for implementing a strict bilingual policy often leads to teachers feeling "over-burdened," as they are required to navigate the complexities of language selection, content



translation, and assessment without adequate specialized training or locally appropriate materials.

6. *Post-Pandemic Widening of Language Learning Gaps*  
COVID-19 exacerbated disparities in language proficiency due to prolonged school closures, limited digital access, and uneven remote learning experiences. Students' weakened foundational literacy and varied exposure to Filipino and English have made it more difficult for teachers to implement the bilingual policy effectively, especially in early grade levels.

### Key Findings and Policy Recommendations

The key findings, distilled from an examination of the bilingual policy within the education system, indicate the following:

- *Bilingual Policy as a Barrier*

Rather than acting as a bridge to knowledge, the rigid application of the bilingual policy, particularly when divorced from local linguistic realities and teacher capacity, can become an obstacle to effective learning and critical thinking development.

- *The Medium is Not the Only Message*

The policy's focus tends to be on the language of instruction rather than the broader components of a successful language-in-education policy, which include: learning materials, curriculum design, community engagement, and teacher competencies.

- *Need for Localized Solutions*

A one-size-fits-all national policy struggles to accommodate the diverse linguistic and cultural contexts across the Philippines. Effective implementation requires a greater degree of localization and flexibility to make the policy relevant to students' lived language experiences.

- *Inadequate Teacher Training Focus*

Current teacher training programs and professional development may not sufficiently prepare educators to handle the pedagogical challenges of a bilingual classroom, specifically in adapting curriculum and materials for bridging languages effectively.

### Policy Recommendations

To transform the bilingual policy into a genuine tool for educational equity and cognitive growth, we recommend the following strategic actions:

1. *Strengthen Teacher Capacity in Bilingual Pedagogy (Professional Development)*

- **Mandate Specialized Training:** Require all teachers, especially those teaching foundation subjects, to complete a certification focusing on how to strategically integrate both languages in instruction rather than simply code-switching.
- **Resource Allocation:** Dedicate a specific budget for the development of digital and print teaching guides that offer

clear, practical strategies for implementing bridging languages in core subjects, reducing the burden of interpretation on individual teachers.

2. *Implement Context-Responsive Curriculum Development (Decentralization)*

- **Empower Regional Centers:** Grant regional and division offices greater autonomy to adapt national curriculum frameworks, allowing them to select or create learning materials that are linguistically and culturally responsive to the local student population.

- **Develop Evaluation Tools:** Create and disseminate standardized tools for local school heads to continually evaluate the effectiveness of the current language of instruction in promoting student comprehension and critical thinking, with clear mechanisms for reporting and iterative policy adjustment.

3. *Establish Clear, Measurable Policy Success Metrics (Accountability)*

- **Shift Evaluation Focus:** Move beyond simple language proficiency testing to evaluate the policy's impact on higher-order thinking skills (analyzing, evaluating, creating) in both languages.

- **Longitudinal Studies:** Fund and mandate longitudinal research to track the educational and socio-economic trajectories of students educated under different bilingual implementation models to identify best practices nationwide.

### Conclusion

The evolving landscape of language use in the Philippines underscores the urgent need to reassess and strengthen the national bilingual education policy. While the policy was originally designed to promote national identity through Filipino and global competitiveness through English, contemporary realities shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic, rapidly shifting linguistic ecologies, and increasing learner multilingualism reveal significant gaps between policy intentions and classroom realities. The study demonstrates that a rigid, top-down bilingual framework no longer aligns with the linguistic practices, needs, and challenges of Filipino learners and teachers. The findings clearly show that the success of any language-in-education policy depends on its responsiveness to context. Teachers remain central to effective implementation, yet they continue to face insufficient training, inadequate instructional resources, and conflicting expectations that hinder meaningful bilingual instruction. Likewise, students who navigate two to four languages daily require a more flexible and inclusive approach that recognizes multilingualism as an asset rather than a complication. Without addressing these mismatches, the bilingual policy risks reinforcing the very inequities it seeks to resolve. The evidence points toward the need for a more nuanced, localized, and evidence-based policy model, one that values linguistic diversity, empowers teachers with specialized training and resources, and establishes clear



mechanisms for continuous evaluation and adaptation. A reimagined bilingual policy must move beyond a narrow focus on Filipino and English as media of instruction, and instead embrace the full linguistic repertoire of learners, ensuring that language becomes a bridge rather than a barrier to understanding.

By adopting context-responsive pedagogies, strengthening teacher capacity, and institutionalizing accountability structures grounded in research, the Philippine education system can transform bilingual education into a more equitable, effective, and future-ready framework. Ultimately, an improved bilingual policy has the potential not only to enhance learning outcomes but also to uphold linguistic justice, foster national cohesion, and better equip Filipino students to thrive in an increasingly interconnected world.

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## Declaration

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6. Serve as the implementing arm for research incentives and research ethics review.

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