

Peer Review

Review of: "Language Policy and Student Language Identities in Bilingual Classrooms: A Hong Kong Primary School"

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This contribution investigates how a Hong Kong bilingual primary school's language policy interacts with students' language practices and identities. In a context where most pupils are Cantonese-speaking but the school promotes bilingualism in English and Putonghua, the authors explore how institutional policies reflect and shape language hierarchies. Using classroom observations and student interviews in two bilingual classes (Years 3 and 5), the researchers combine quantitative analysis of classroom language use with qualitative thematic analysis of pupils' reflections.

The study finds a clear mismatch between the school's bilingual policy and classroom language repertoires. Despite an official emphasis on equal exposure to English and Putonghua, English overwhelmingly dominates classroom talk and student preference, while Cantonese—the pupils' home language—is largely absent or restricted to social contexts. Students perceive Cantonese as having lower status, describing it as "not allowed in class" and linking English with "happiness" and Putonghua with difficulty. These patterns reproduce broader social hierarchies, where English is associated with prestige and opportunity, and Putonghua with political and cultural authority. The authors argue that such policies, by excluding Cantonese, fail to recognise the students' linguistic and cultural identities, limiting their sense of belonging and agency. The study concludes that a bilingual policy that disregards multilingual realities risks constraining learning and participation, and that inclusive practices valuing all linguistic resources are needed.

Points of strength

The article's points of strength lie in its clarity of purpose, its solid theoretical framing (drawing on bilingualism, identity theory, and language ideology), and its integration of qualitative and quantitative methods. The combination of classroom data with student voices provides a compelling, grounded view of how policy translates into lived experience. The paper also makes a valuable contribution by highlighting tensions between policy discourse, classroom practice, and student identity in Hong Kong's post-colonial linguistic landscape. The nuanced discussion of "language hegemony" and "positional identities" connects the micro level of classroom practice to wider sociopolitical structures.

Limitations

The sample size—two classes and six focal students—limits generalisability, and the analysis, while detailed, remains descriptive rather than interpretive in places. The authors could have developed their conceptual discussion of translanguaging or identity negotiation further, linking student agency and language practices more explicitly to pedagogical implications. Moreover, the policy critique would benefit from closer engagement with teacher perspectives, since teacher beliefs are key mediators of policy enactment.

Recommendations for future research about the presented topic

- Incorporating teacher interviews or reflections in order to triangulate findings.
- Expanding on translanguaging pedagogies as an inclusive alternative to a separated model of bilingualism in language education.
- Exploring longitudinal effects of policy on identity formation beyond primary years.
- Including visual or tabular summaries of policy–practice gaps for clarity.

Declarations

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.