

Language of Instruction in Indonesian Bilingual Early Childhood Education

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Abstract—More than 700 languages are spoken in Indonesia. However, based on the 1945 Constitution, Chapter XV, Article 36, the state language is Indonesian. Therefore, Indonesian is the official teaching language at all levels of education, including the early childhood education (ECE) level. However, this provision is challenging to implement because many young children in Indonesia do not understand Indonesian; they generally speak their mother tongue instead. For example, in West Java, Sundanese is considered the mother tongue and is spoken by most of the population. Consequently, ECE teachers are required to develop strategies to fulfil the requirements for using Indonesian as the language of instruction for students who do not understand Indonesian. The ECE teachers' strategy is to use Indonesian as the language of instruction in accordance with stipulations but incorporate Sundanese so that their students can understand what they are conveying. Implementing this strategy involves code mixing and code switching between Indonesian and Sundanese. ECE teachers follow these methods not to alter the grammar of the two languages but to provide a bridge for their students to understand the teaching material and eventually be able to speak Indonesian.

Index Terms—language of instruction, Indonesian bilingual, early childhood education learning

I. INTRODUCTION

According to the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, Chapter XV, Article 36, the state language of Indonesia is Indonesian. Consequently, Indonesian is the official language used in state administration, including education. Thus, Indonesian is the official language of instruction at every education level. Hence, every child starting school is required to use Indonesian. However, aside from Indonesian, more than 700 regional languages are spoken as first languages in Indonesia (Desmirasari & Oktavia, 2022, p. 114; Rusyana & Rohmah, 2024, p. 237). Early childhood education (ECE) students who primarily speak regional languages and do not master Indonesian have difficulty communicating when they start school; they do not understand Indonesian as the language of instruction. Therefore, in addition to mastering basic teaching skills, ECE teachers in Indonesia must also know how to overcome obstacles arising due to linguistic diversity among their students.

Rudimentary teaching skills are vital for ECE teachers to effectively engage their students in learning. These skills provide the foundation for creating a positive and productive classroom environment that helps students develop academically and personally. Mastering these essential skills enables teachers to meet their students' varying needs and learning styles, ultimately improving academic outcomes and overall student success (Orlich, 2010, p. 9). These fundamental teaching skills cover various abilities, such as classroom management, lesson planning, communication with students and parents, and creating a supportive and stimulating learning environment. By mastering these basic teaching skills, ECE teachers can create a positive and enriching educational experience for their students, providing a strong foundation for their future academic success (Rosidah et al., 2024, p. 166). Therefore, through their expertise, ECE teachers play a significant role in laying the foundation for children's academic and personal success.

Ultimately, mastery of these skills not only benefits the students in their care but also contributes to the overall

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success of the ECE system (Seprie, 2024, p. 47; Martinah, 2023, p. 131).

In addition to mastering basic teaching skills, ECE teachers in Indonesia are often required to learn the local language to accommodate students whose first language is not Indonesian, the official language of instruction in schools. Since such ECE students have difficulty communicating in Indonesian, ECE teachers in certain areas must master their students' first language so that they can translate Indonesian words into the regional language during the initial learning process. According to Rusyana, a child's first language is a suitable language of instruction (Rusyana, 1984, p. 37). Therefore, Sundanese should be the language of instruction in ECE in the regencies or cities of Bogor, Cianjur, Depok, and Garut, particularly for students who have not yet mastered Indonesian.

Regarding ECE students' understanding of Indonesian, Eva Maulidia and Rachma Hasibuan investigated the effectiveness of the Total Physical Response method for teaching Indonesian vocabulary skills to children aged 5–6 years at the Dharma Wanita Karangpuri and RA Bahrul Ulum Kindergartens (Maulidia & Hasibuan, 2021, p. 819). Further research was conducted by Nurhayati, Bastiana, and Jenny in 'Improving Children's Language Skills Through Games of Imitating Letters from Natural Media in Kindergarten Negeri Pembina Bantaeng Regency, South Sulawesi' (Nurhayati et al., 2021, pp. 21–27). Although both studies examine students' Indonesian language skills, they differ from this research, as they do not describe the students' first language background – whether it has the same background as the language of instruction in kindergarten or ECE (i.e., Indonesian). Research conducted in Spain, investigating differences in language abilities among students aged 10–11 years learning English as a second language, considered the differences between the students' first language backgrounds and the language studied. In this case, students who did not master English were assisted using virtual reality (Dooly et al., 2023, p. 321).

Based on the above studies, research concerning the language of instruction in Sundanese–Indonesian bilingual ECE is feasible. This research was conducted in ECE institutions throughout the regencies and cities of Bogor, Cianjur, Depok, and Garut, on students with heterogeneous language backgrounds, particularly Sundanese–Indonesian backgrounds.

The aim of this research is to describe the language of instruction used by ECE teachers for students who do not understand Indonesian. The findings can help provide an alternative teaching method for ECE teachers in other areas who experience similar obstacles.

II. METHOD

This article is the result of qualitative descriptive research using purposive sampling according to Sugiyono (Sugiyono, 2017, p. 16). Data were collected through a questionnaire distributed to ECE teachers in the regencies or cities of Bogor, Cianjur, Depok, and Garut via Google Form in September 2024. Overall, 187 teachers completed the questionnaire. Data were also collected from the recorded conversations of 50 ECE teachers and students in the Pameungpeuk District, Garut, in early February 2025. The collected data were recorded, classified, and analysed using the determining element sorting technique (Sudaryanto, 1993, pp. 142–143). Classification was based on teachers who taught ECE students whose first language was Indonesian and teachers who taught kindergarten students who did not understand Indonesian. Data from teachers who taught ECE students whose first language was Indonesian were discarded because they did not support the research objectives. Data from teachers who taught ECE students who did not understand Indonesian were analysed further. Teachers' use of languages other than Indonesian during lessons was analysed. Transfer from the use of Indonesian to Sundanese and vice versa was analysed by sorting clause elements, morphemes, and phonemes. The clause element sorting technique was used to analyse language transfer at the syntactic level. The word element or morpheme sorting technique was used to analyse language transfer at the morphological level. The phoneme element sorting technique was used to analyse language transfer in phonology. The tools for analysing the determining elements used the General Indonesian Dictionary (Badudu, 1994, pp. 409, 603, 625, 908), the General Dictionary of Sundanese Language (Committee for the Dictionary of the Sundanese Language and Literature Institute, 1983, pp. 208, 225), Sundanese language theory (Sudaryat, 1991, pp. 38–102), theories on first language (B1) and second language (B2; Tarigan, 1988, p. 7; Chaer, 2003, p. 261; Dardjowidjojo, 2003, p. 228; Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998, p. 603; Nurbiana Dhieni, 2021, p. 2.4; Anggita Bella Afrilla Nasution, 2024, p. 8871; Cinta Yulistra Tindaon, 2024, p. 347; Cintana, 2024, p. 515), and interferensi (Weinreich, 1970, p. 4).

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A. Early Childhood Education Teacher Data Based on the Use of Instructional Language

In total, 187 ECE teachers throughout the regencies or cities of Bogor, Cianjur, Depok, and Garut completed the questionnaire. The distribution of the respondents is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1
ECE TEACHER DATA BASED ON USE OF INSTRUCTIONAL LANGUAGE

No	Regency/City	Number of teachers	Language of instruction		Percentage usage of mixed Indonesian + Sundanese	
			Indonesian	Mixed Indonesian + Sundanese	Per Area	Interregional
1	Bogor	68	35	33	49	17
2	Cianjur	6	0	6	100	36
3	Depok	63	43	20	32	11
4	Garut	50	0	50	100	36
	Total	187	78	109	-	100

Table 1 shows that 187 ECE teachers in the Bogor regency or city, the Cianjur regency, Depok city, and the Garut regency completed the questionnaire. Of the 187 respondents, 78 (42%) used Indonesian as the language of instruction, and 109 (58%) used a mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese, indicating that more ECE teachers used a mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese than Indonesian alone, as illustrated in Figure 1.

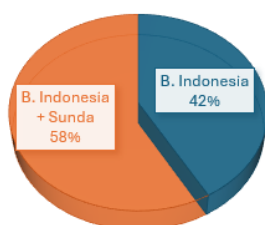


Figure 1. Percentage of ECE Teachers Using Indonesian and a Mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese as the Language of Instruction Throughout the Research Area

This finding indicates that 58% of the ECE students in the sample have not mastered Indonesian, the official language of instruction in school. Hence, Indonesian is not the first language in 58% of the ECE students. Since the study location was West Java, most of the ECE students spoke Sundanese as their first language. Therefore, the ECE teachers used a mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese as the language of instruction. This strategy is justified because a child's first language is a suitable language of instruction (Rusyana, 1984, p. 37).

Table 1 reveals that a low percentage of ECE teachers used a mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese as the language of instruction in Bogor and Depok than in Cianjur and Garut. This finding indicates that Sundanese is less dominant in the Bogor and Depok areas, which border Jakarta, the nation's capital, compared to Cianjur and Garut, which border Bandung, where the use of Sundanese remains dominant (Rusyana & Rohmah, 2024, p. 244). Figure 2 provides a comparison of the combined use of Indonesian and Sundanese in the Bogor, Depok, Cianjur, and Garut regions.

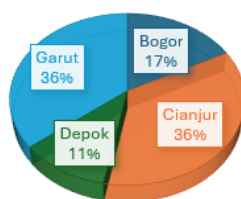


Figure 2. Percentage of ECE Teachers Using Combined Indonesian and Sundanese as the Language of Instruction in Each Study Area

B. Data on the Introductory Language for Mixed Indonesian–Sundanese Learning

As discussed in the methodology section, the data concerning the ECE teachers who used a mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese as the language of instruction was analysed. The results are summarised in Table 2.

TABLE 2
SUNDANESE LANGUAGE USED IN INDONESIAN SPEECH FOR INTRODUCTION TO LEARNING IN ECE

No	Number of teachers	Sundanese Language Used		
		Word	Frequency	Number of sentences
1	109	111	1,134	25

Referring to Sudaryat, the Sundanese language that appears in Indonesian language instruction by ECE teachers comprises 111 words and 25 sentences. These words and sentences are embedded in ECE teachers' Indonesian speech when they teach their students, as in the following examples:

'Ke sini *Bageur*, ke depan'.* ('Ke sini Anak Baik, ke depan'.)
English translation: Come here to the front. Good boy.

‘Murid ibu *mah* tidak ada yang *bangor*’.* (‘Murid ibu tidak ada yang nakal’.)
English translation: None of my students are naughty.

‘Besok kita lanjutkan, ya. *Énjing*’.* (‘Besok kita lanjutkan, ya. Besok’.)
English translation: We’ll continue tomorrow, okay. Tomorrow.

*Note: Indonesian terms are written in normal font, and Sundanese terms are written in bold and italic fonts.

In total, the 111 words appeared 1,334 times. Of the 111 words that appeared, 17 were in the adjective category, with a frequency of occurrence of 162 times; 29 were in the noun category, with a frequency of occurrence of 83 times; and 65 were in the verb category, with a frequency of occurrence of 1,089 times (Sudaryat, 1991, p. 84). Thirty of the 111 words are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3
SUNDANESE WORDS THAT APPEAR IN INDONESIAN SPEECH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

No	Sundanese word		Substitute words in Indonesian language	English meaning	Category	F.
	Phonemes	Phonetics				
1	bageur	/bagÖr/	(anak) baik	good	Adj.	1
2	bangor	/baŋor/	nakal	naughty	Adj.	47
3	énjing	/Enjin/	besok	tomorrow	Adj.	1
4	énjing-énjing	/Enjin-Enjin/	pagi-pagi	morning	Adj.	1
5	kedeplik	/kədøplik/	tebal	thick	Adj.	1
6	lieur	/liÖr/	pusing	dizzy	Adj.	1
7	ogoan	/ogoan/	manja	spoiled	Adj.	49
8	seungit	/sÖnit/	harum	fragrant	Adj.	1
9	teu damang	/tÖ daman/	sakit	sick	Adj.	1
10	wengi	/wøngi/	malam	night	Adj.	1
11	acuk	/acuk/	baju	dress	Noun	2
12	angkeut	/aŋkÖt/	dagu	chin	Noun	1
13	anjeun	/anjÖn/	kamu	you	Noun	2
14	beuteung	/bÖtÖŋ/	perut	stomach	Noun	1
15	biwir	/biwir/	bibir	lips	Noun	1
16	buuk	/bu uk/	rambut	hair	Noun	1
17	cangkéng	/caŋkEŋ/	pinggang	waist	Noun	1
18	ceuli	/cÖli/	telinga	ear	Noun	1
19	hidep	/hidøp/	kamu	you	Noun	1
20	abdi	/abdi/	saya	I	Noun	49
21	saré	/sarE/	tidur	sleep	Verb	50
22	ceurik	/cÖrik/	menangis	cry	Verb	50
23	diacuk	/diacuk/	berpakaian	get dressed	Verb	50
24	diajar	/diajar/	belajar	study	Verb	48
25	dianduk	/dianduk/	Memakai handuk	wearing towel	Verb	47
26	dicalana	/dicalana/	bercelana	wearing trousers	Verb	46
27	diuk	/diuk/	duduk	seat	Verb	1
28	ééh	/EÉh/	buang air besar	defecate	Verb	2
29	emam	/mam/	makan	eat	Verb	51
30	eueut	/ÖÖt/	minum	drink	Verb	48

Table 3 shows that the Sundanese words used by ECE teachers when speaking introductory Indonesian fall into only three categories: adjectives, nouns, and verbs (Sudaryat, 1991, p. 84; Committee for the Dictionary of the Sundanese Language and Literature Institute, 1983, p. 225). Generally, the words used are part of basic vocabulary. The words are inserted between Indonesian sentences to help ECE students understand what their teacher is saying. When viewed from a sociolinguistic perspective, this phenomenon is classed as code mixing: inserting words from another language into the language used by the speaker (Chaer, 2003, p. 261). In this context, this phenomenon is a form of interference (Weinreich, 1970, p. 4). The interference is morphological because it occurs at the word level (Sudaryat, 1991, p. 40).

In addition to code mixing, the ECE teacher carries out code switching when speaking Indonesian. In code switching, the speaker switches from one language to another (Chaer, 2003 p. 261). Based on the data, the ECE teachers code-switched from Indonesian to Sundanese 25 times, as in the following examples:

- 1) ‘Anak-anak, kita akan belajar mengenal nama hari. *Dinten naon ayeuna?*’ (Sentence 5, Table 4)
- 2) ‘Jangan mencontek, ya! *Ulah niron!*’ (Sentence 23)
- 3) ‘Tiap hari kita harus sering belajar supaya pintar. *Unggal dinten urang kedah sering diajar supados pintar.*’ (Sentence 25)

Sentences in Sundanese that were separated from the ECE teacher's Indonesian speech are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
DATA ON CODE SWITCHING FROM INDONESIAN TO SUNDAHESE BY ECE TEACHERS

No	Indonesian and Sundanese Data*	Meaning	Type
1	Apa yang bisa kita lakukan? <i>Beberesih imah.</i>	Bersih-bersih rumah.	Deklaratif
	What can we do? <i>Cleaning the house.</i>	Cleaning the house	Declarative
2	Anak-anak, itu buku masih berantakan. <i>Bérésan!</i>	Beresi!	Imperatif
	Kids, those books are still a mess. <i>Tidy them up!</i>	Tidy up!	Imperative
3	Anak-anak, jangan lari-lari! <i>Calik di dinya!</i>	Duduk di situ!	Imperatif
	Kids, don't run around! <i>Sit there!</i>	Sit there!	Imperative
4	Kita akan belajar bercocok tanam. <i>Diajar pepelakan.</i>	Belajar bercocok tanam.	Deklaratif
	We will learn about farming. <i>Learn about plants.</i>	Learn to farm	Declarative
5	Anak-anak, kita akan belajar mengenal nama hari. <i>Dinten naon ayeuna?</i>	Sekarang hari apa?	Interogatif
	Children, we will learn to recognise the names of the days. <i>What day is today?</i>	What day is today?	Interrogative
6	Kok, <i>embung?</i> Kenapa tidak mau, Nak?	Kok, tidak mau?	Interogatif
	You <i>don't want</i> it? Why don't you want it?	Why don't you want it?	Interrogative
7	Anak-anak, ke mana Andri? <i>Gentraan!</i>	Panggil!	Imperatif
	Kids, where is Andri? <i>Call him!</i>	Call!	Imperative
8	Lho, masih pada kumpul? <i>Geura balik!</i>	Segera pulang!	Imperatif
	Hey, why are you still gathered here? <i>Just go home quickly!</i>	Go home quickly!	Imperative
9	Anak-anak, sudah capai? <i>Hayu urang ulin!</i>	Mari kita bermain!	Imperatif
	Are you tired, kids? <i>Let's play!</i>	Let's play!	Imperative
10	Dede tidak masuk hari ini. <i>Ka mana?</i>	Ke mana?	Interogatif
	Dede isn't coming today? <i>Where is he?</i>	Where is he?	Interrogative
11	Selamat pagi, anak-anak. <i>Kumaha damang?</i>	Apa kabar?	Interogatif
	Good morning, kids. <i>How are you?</i>	How are you?	Interrogative
12	Anak-anak, ada yang <i>ngukut hayam?</i>	... memelihara ayam?	Interogatif
	Kids, does anyone <i>pet a chicken?</i>	Pet a chicken	Interrogative
13	Ibu akan bercerita, anak-anak. <i>Regepkeun ku anjeun!</i>	Simak oleh kalian!	Imperatif
	I will tell you a story, kids. <i>Listen carefully!</i>	Listen carefully!	Imperative
14	Selamat pagi, anak-anak. Tadi <i>sarapan sareng naon?</i>	... sarapan apa?	Interogatif
	Good morning, kids. <i>What did you have for breakfast?</i>	What did you have for breakfast?	Interrogative
15	Anak-anak, itu Neni masih di luar. <i>Sauran!</i>	Panggil!	Imperatif
	Kids, Neni is still outside. <i>Call her!</i>	Call!	Imperative
16	Anak-anak, <i>taun sabaraha ayeuna?</i>	... tahun berapa sekarang?	Interogatif
	Kids, <i>what year is it now?</i>	... what year is it now?	Interrogative
17	Sekarang ini, hari Senin. <i>Tanggal sabaraha ayeuna?</i>	Tanggal berapa sekarang.	Interogatif
	Today is Monday. <i>What date is it today?</i>	What date is it today?	Interrogative
18	Aduh, mohon maaf, Ibu <i>teu apal.</i>	... tidak hapal.	Deklaratif
	I am sorry, I <i>don't remember.</i>	... don't remember	Declarative
19	Bagus, jangan lari-lari terus! <i>Teu daék cicing.</i>	Tidak mau diam.	Deklaratif
	Bagus, don't run around! Why you <i>don't want to stay still.</i>	Don't want to stay still.	Declarative
20	Ih, jangan corat-coret tembok! <i>Teu kénging!</i>	Tidak boleh!	Imperatif
	Don't scribble on the wall! <i>It is not allowed!</i>	Not allowed!	Imperative
21	Ih, bandel masih corat-coret! <i>Teu meunang!</i>	Tidak boleh!	Imperatif
	Uh, why are you stubborn, still scribbling? It's <i>not allowed!</i>	Not allowed!	Imperative
22	Tidak tahu, ya, bukan <i>teu nyaho.</i>	tidak tahu.	Deklaratif
	It should be I don't know, not <i>dunno.</i>	Don't know	Declarative
23	Jangan mencontek, ya! <i>Ulah niron!</i>	Jangan mencontek.	Imperatif
	Don't cheat, okay? <i>Don't cheat!</i>	Don't cheat	Imperative
24	Hey, hey, jangan bertengkar! <i>Ulah paséa!</i>	Jangan bertengkar	Imperatif
	Hey, hey, don't fight! <i>Don't fight!</i>	Don't fight	Imperative
25	Tiap hari kita harus sering belajar supaya pintar. <i>Unggal dinten urang kedah sering diajar supados pinter.</i>	Tiap hari kita harus sering belajar supaya pintar.	Deklaratif
	Every day we have to study as often as possible to be smart. <i>Every day we need to study as often as possible to be smart.</i>	Every day we have to study as often as possible to be smart.	Declarative

*Note: Indonesian sentences are written in normal font, and Sundanese sentences are written in bold and italic fonts.

In Table 4, the 25 sentences are categorised into declarative, imperative, and interrogative sentences. Declarative sentences contain information, imperative sentences express commands, and interrogative sentences contain questions (Sudaryat, 1991, pp. 96-99).

Teachers use these sentences to

- 1) help ECE students understand the information conveyed by the teacher (declarative sentences, 1, 4, 18, 19, 22, and 25);
- 2) teach ECE students to obey the teacher's instructions (imperative sentences, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 15, 20, 21, 23, and 24); and
- 3) teach ECE students to answer the teacher's questions (interrogative sentences, 5, 6, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, and 17).

Code switching in the twenty-five sentences occurred coherently between the Indonesian and Sundanese sentences. Coherence refers to the relationship between the meaning of sentences that builds a complete discourse (Ramlan, 1993,

pp. 10-11). The meanings of the Indonesian and Sundanese sentences are very similar so that ECE students can understand what their teachers say in Indonesian speech. This close relationship in meaning is achieved in the following ways:

- 1) The teacher uses Indonesian vocabulary that is similar to or the same as Sundanese vocabulary, or commonly used in Sundanese, as in the following sentences: 1) lakukan = *lakukeun*, 2) berantakan = *pabalatak*, 3) lari-lari – commonly used in Sundanese as a substitute for the word *lumpat*, 5) nama hari – commonly used in Sundanese as a substitute for the word *namipoe*, 8) pada kumpul = *pada kumpul*, 7) mana = mana, 9) capai [capɛy] = *capé* [capɛʔ], 12) ada = *aya*, 16) anak-anak = *anak-anak/barudak*, 18) maaf = *maap*, 19) lari-lari – commonly used in Sundanese as a substitute for the word *lumpat*, 20) corat-coret tembok = *curat-corét témbok*, and 21) corat-coret tembok = *curat-corét*;
- 2) The teacher repeats the same information, questions, or orders in two languages, Indonesian and Sundanese, as in the following sentences: 6) *embung* = tidak mau, 22) tidak tahu = *teu nyaho*, 23) jangan mencontek = *ulah niron*, 24) jangan bertengkar = *ulah paséa*, and 25) Tiap hari kita harus sering belajar supaya pintar = *Unggal dinten urang kedah sering diajar supados pinter*; and
- 3) The teacher conveys information and questions in Indonesian, then follows up on the information using Sundanese, as in sentences 4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, and 17.

Aside from code switching, sentences in Sundanese that are inserted into Indonesian speech demonstrate interference (Weinreich, 1970, p. 4). Based on the classification of the determining elements (Sudaryanto, 1993, pp. 142-143), the interference is syntactic (Sudaryat, 1991, p. 74).

IV. CONCLUSION

The ECE teachers in the regencies or cities of Bogor, Cianjur, Depok, and Garut are aware that teaching delivered using a mixture of Indonesian and Sundanese involves code mixing, code switching, and interference in the two languages. The intention is not to alter the grammar of the two languages but to assist ECE students who do not understand Indonesian, the official language of instruction in Indonesia. These techniques enable teachers to successfully convey lesson material to ECE students who gradually become able to speak Indonesian.

The success of ECE teachers using these methods in West Java can inspire ECE teachers facing the same challenges in other areas to practice the same technique of combining the language of instruction with the students' first language.

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