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Bilingual Challenges in Early Childhood Education: Issues, Causes, and Interventions for Pre-Primary and Primary Students in Bangladesh

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Abstract:

Bilingual education is increasingly common in Bangladesh, where children are exposed to both Bangla (native language) and English (second language) from early schooling. While bilingualism enhances cognitive development and global competence, pre-primary and primary learners often face significant challenges, including language confusion, reduced fluency, and socio-emotional stress. This study explores the linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural issues faced by young bilingual learners, identifies underlying causes, and proposes pedagogical interventions. Findings indicate that inadequate teacher training, curriculum misalignment, societal pressure for English proficiency, and limited learning resources contribute to language anxiety and hinder communicative competence. Evidence-based strategies such as scaffolded bilingual instruction, play-based learning, teacher professional development, and parental engagement are recommended. Implementing these interventions can foster balanced bilingual development, enhance learning outcomes, and support early childhood language confidence in the Bangladeshi context.

Keywords: Bilingualism, Early Childhood Education, Pre-Primary Education, Primary Education, Bangladesh, Language Learning Challenges, Pedagogical Interventions.

1. Introduction

Bilingual education is increasingly prevalent in Bangladesh due to the growing demand for English proficiency alongside the maintenance of Bangla, the mother tongue. Early exposure to two languages can enhance cognitive flexibility, problem-solving skills, and socio-cultural awareness. However, young learners at the pre-primary and primary levels often encounter challenges in acquiring and using two languages simultaneously. Traditional teacher-centered instruction, rote learning, and limited resources exacerbate these difficulties. Understanding the challenges, their causes, and effective interventions is crucial for improving bilingual education outcomes for young learners.

2. Literature Review

Research indicates that bilingual education offers cognitive, social, and academic benefits when implemented effectively (Cummins, 2000; Baker, 2011). Common challenges include code-mixing, language interference, and socio-emotional stress (García & Wei, 2014). In the Bangladeshi context, studies reveal that inadequate teacher training, societal pressure, and curriculum inconsistency hinder English learning in early education (Hamid et al., 2013; Rahman, 2018).

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3. Bilingual Challenges for Pre-Primary and Primary Students

Table 1: Key Bilingual Challenges and Examples

Challenge Category	Description	Examples in Bangladeshi Context
Linguistic	Code-mixing and confusion between Bangla and English	Students mix words while speaking or writing
Linguistic	Reduced fluency in English	Limited vocabulary, hesitant speech
Cognitive	Difficulty in syntax and pronunciation	Struggle with English sentence structures
Socio-Emotional	Language anxiety	Fear of making mistakes in English
Socio-Emotional	Reduced engagement	Lack of interest in classroom activities
Cultural	Identity tension	Preference for English affects confidence in Bangla

4. Causes of Challenges

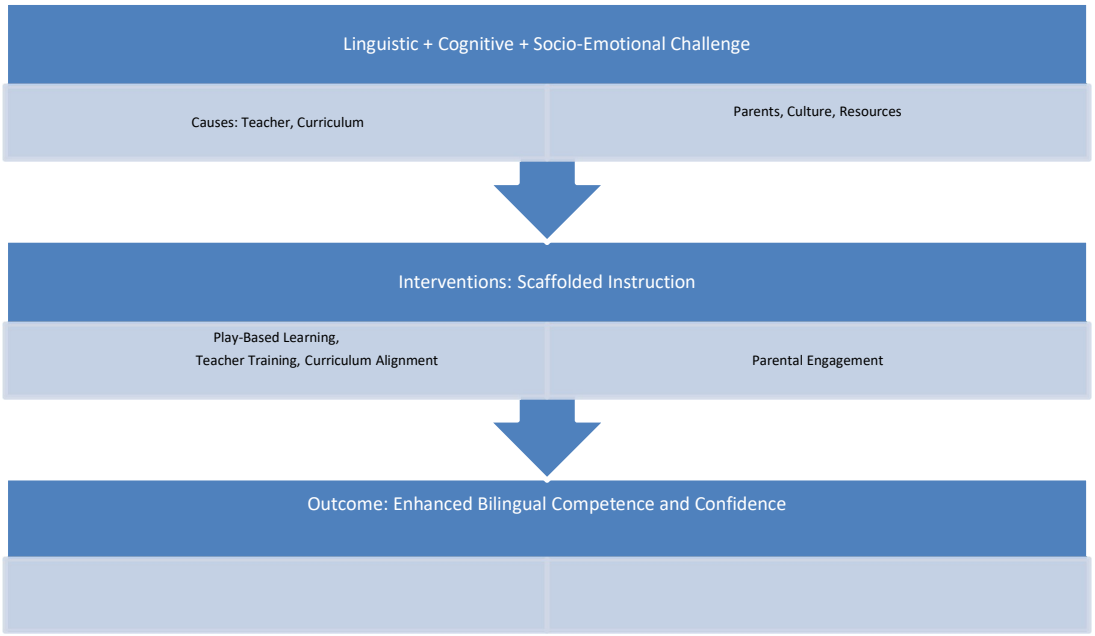
- Teacher Preparedness: Lack of professional training in bilingual pedagogy and child-centered approaches.
- Curriculum Design: Inconsistent bilingual curricula without clear progression.
- Parental Pressure: Emphasis on rote learning and English performance.
- Socio-Cultural Factors: English is linked to social mobility, increasing stress.
- Resource Scarcity: Limited bilingual materials, storybooks, and play-based resources.

5. Pedagogical Interventions

Table 2: Suggested Interventions for Bilingual Challenges

Challenge	**Intervention Strategy**	**Implementation Example**
Language Confusion	Scaffolded bilingual instruction	Gradual introduction of English through songs and storytelling
Reduced Fluency	Play-based and experiential learning	Role-plays, games, interactive activities
Language Anxiety	Teacher training in child psychology	Workshops on supportive teaching strategies
Curriculum Mismatch	Curriculum alignment	Structured bilingual progression across subjects
Parental Pressure	Parental engagement programs	Guidance on balanced language support at home

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Bilingual Challenges and Interventions



6. Conclusion

Bilingual education in Bangladesh presents both opportunities and challenges for pre-primary and primary learners. Addressing linguistic, cognitive, and socio-emotional difficulties requires multi-faceted interventions, including teacher training, curriculum development, parental engagement, and resource enhancement. Implementing scaffolded, context-sensitive strategies can improve language proficiency, confidence, and overall learning outcomes, fostering balanced bilingual development in early childhood education.

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