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Navigating Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 Policy: Unveiling Teachers' Glocalization Efforts and Agency

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Cover Page Footnote

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Navigating Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 Policy: Unveiling Teachers' Glocalization Efforts and Agency

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As a strategic initiative aimed to enhance English communication skills and bolster the global competitiveness of the general population, Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 Policy takes place at the intersection of neoliberalism, globalization, and the global spread of the English language. The neoliberal framing of Taiwan's language education policy has exerted powerful influences on teacher education, teacher hiring practices, curricular design, assessment, and other school practices. While the neoliberalist influences are prevalent among countries in the Global South, responses and resistance may take many forms embedded in specific sociocultural contexts. The reflection discussed here examines the challenges faced by teachers in Taiwan as they navigate globalization and explores the strategies they develop to balance global and local elements. We describe the perspectives of six Taiwanese teachers who strive for agency and voice, particularly in integrating global and local factors into their practices. Thematic analysis suggested teachers' practices as a dynamic and adaptive process, while demonstrating their agency, creativity, and multilingual awareness within the complexities of language teaching in a culturally and linguistically diverse world.

Keywords: Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 policy; neoliberalism; Sustaining Development Goals; glocalization; teacher agency

The 2030 Bilingual Policy is Taiwan's national initiative aimed at boosting English proficiency and integrating bilingual education into public services and the school curriculum, positioning the country to thrive in a globalized economy (National Development Council, 2018). The primary objective of languaging planning, based on Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 policy, is to strengthen English communication skills among the general population, thereby enhancing their global competitiveness. Taiwan is a small island located at the junction of the northwestern Pacific Ocean, with a dense population of 23.3 million (FocusEconomics, 2024) concentrated in the western part of the island. This country experiences a profound sense of crisis stemming from its

precarious geopolitical situation particularly due to the territorial claims by the People's Republic of China (PRC) to the northwest.

Consequently, pursuing international engagement in a neoliberal era, where global competition hinges on the employability of its people, has become a national priority for Taiwan. In this context, English education, valued as both cultural and economic capital, plays a crucial role in its strategic policy-making (Chang, 2022). The promotion of English proficiency has been elevated to Taiwan's highest educational priority in today's globalized era.

Since the English policy's introduction in 2018, the Taiwanese government has actively undertaken efforts to revamp teacher education, redesign curriculum and instruction, and implement assessments (National Development Council, 2018, 2021). Additionally, stimulus funding has been utilized to intensify government oversight of the education system, all with the aim of improving English language proficiency throughout the island. The ongoing reform in Taiwan's education system, characterized by a balanced blend of robust centralization and adaptable local autonomy, produces diverse outcomes concerning the educational quality, autonomy of teachers, and inclusivity and equity among the student population. Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 plan represents a significant and deliberate initiative to advance English education in Taiwan and serves as a valuable case study for understanding how local teachers and students navigate and interpret a bilingual language policy situated at the intersection of globalization, neoliberalism, transculturation processes, and local autonomy.

The term "bilingual education" carries different meanings and arrangements based on sociocultural contexts, often shaped by social factors, political ideologies, and national agendas (Flores & García, 2017; May, 2017). In Taiwan, the government has recently implemented its own bilingual education policy to "build upon Taiwan's advantages as a Mandarin-speaking nation" and "enhance young people's English communication capabilities" (National Development Council, 2021, p. 1). The vision of the Bilingual 2030 policy is to "optimize bilingual conditions in a balanced manner" (p. 8), strategically using English as a medium of instruction to boost its citizens' future employability in a globalized world. The goal is to create a bilingual country where English and Mandarin are used effectively, allowing individuals to leverage both languages in today's competitive environment (p. 21).

Within this article our primary objective is to delve into the discourse that emerges from and the practices shaped by Taiwan's bilingual education policies, which function as contact zones influenced by various geopolitical forces. We apply the framework of glocalization, a concept introduced by Robertson (1995), which captures the complex interplay between globalization and localization. As this term gains increasing relevance, it highlights the potential for adaptation and transformation, emphasizing the agency of individuals navigating both processes (Chen, 2024). Through this lens, we aim to obtain a holistic comprehension of how these policies impact the aspirations for agency and expression among stakeholders. We documented the endeavors of six local teachers as they strive to incorporate local concerns and globalization, through the integration of United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their curriculum design and classroom activities. We portray how these

teachers exercise their agency and showcase their creativity in navigating the intricate landscape surrounding Taiwan's reform of bilingual education.

In the following sections, we begin with a literature review of the theoretical framework used to examine the complex ecology of Taiwan's educational environment, with a particular focus on how glocalization serves as a strategy for asserting autonomy and agency in the face of neoliberal influence. Next, we outline the research questions guiding our discussion and identify the steps employed to explore these questions. Finally, we offer insights into how Taiwan's bilingual education policies are shaped by the interplay of global and local dynamics framed by our conversations with the informants and the scholarly literature.

Literature Review

Contextualizing Taiwan's Educational Reform in the Era of Neoliberalism

As the most dominant ideology of the current world order, neoliberalism has profoundly influenced Taiwan's policy development in all domains, including its educational policies and practices (Chang, 2022; Chen et al., 2020; Chen & Tsou, 2021). Following Kubota (2021), we understand neoliberalism as an ideology that links economic benefits to education, thereby commodifying individual skills and abilities cultivated through the educational process. This perspective profoundly influences how education is approached, often aligning it with standardized benchmarks and governmental regulations aimed at enhancing the nation's economic well-being.

As a result of adopting neoliberal ideologies, an integral part of Taiwan's policy development is to effectively align education policies with workforce development and economic growth. The official government paper "Blueprint for Developing Taiwan into a Bilingual Nation by 2030" (National Development Council, 2018) manifested this mindset clearly. The document starts out with a sentence that strongly suggests the direct link between English proficiency and economic growth: "how to raise citizens' English ability to a more internationally competitive level has become a vital issue common to all non-English speaking countries. Taiwan certainly cannot exempt itself from this" (p. 1).

In view of the relationship between neoliberalism and education, some authors note that the dominant status of English as a global language is intricately intertwined with the West's neoliberalist agenda (Chen, 2024; Kubota, 2021). The ubiquitous presence of neoliberal ethos is further heightened by the fact that today's information and knowledge industry is primarily coded in English. In her seminal study (2021) on the interplay of neoliberalism and the rise of global English, Kubota argues that learning English is the *sine qua non* of global and individual success in every sphere of life, including politics, culture, business, and education.

However, the influence of neoliberalism and the ongoing restructuring of Taiwan's education system based on neoliberal principles have brought about changes in the language dynamics, placing greater emphasis on English while reinforcing its dominant status both within Taiwan and on the international stage. This shift in language dynamics, brought about by the new direction of the current bilingual reform, provides the important contextual framework for this study.

Chun-Ying Wu's comprehensive review of Taiwan's language policies and planning offers valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of cultures and languages influenced by the ongoing reform (Wu, 2021). According to Wu, there has been a gradual shift in language policy orientation from "Mandarin-only" to "Mandarin-plus," with some local languages, such as Holo, Hakka, and Austronesian languages making their initial appearance in the elementary school curriculum in 2001 due to mother tongue education requirements. Additionally, the globalization of domestic service and other industries has resulted in an increased number of children from foreign workers and professionals, contributing to the growing cultural and linguistic diversity in Taiwan's shifting educational landscapes (Hsia, 2021). In schools with a sizable number of students of Southeast Asian heritages, mother tongue education would involve Vietnamese, Indonesian, Cambodian, etc. However, in practice, mother tongue education was often limited to one session per week as required by the Ministry of Education (MOE; National Development Council, 2021).

While the linguistic landscape has become increasingly diverse due to shifts in the economic labor market, English education has gained unprecedented emphasis, reflecting its critical role in supporting the nation's ongoing economic growth. In tandem with this development, English education was introduced nationwide at the elementary level to address the disparities in students' access to English instruction. It is within this diverse linguistic context that English made its historical entry to Taiwan's educational system. Since then local teachers are required to use English as the medium of instruction for academic subjects. This initiative is part of the language policy first known as Bilingual Nation 2030 (National Development Council, 2018), aimed at enhancing Taiwan's global competitiveness by achieving English-Mandarin bilingualism throughout the country by 2030. This influential document explains that the plan seeks to move beyond teaching English as a stand-alone academic subject and instead utilize English as a medium of instruction for teaching and learning various subjects. By 2024, it was anticipated that sixty percent of primary and secondary schools nationwide will adopt English-only instruction in English classes, and one in every seven schools will implement bilingual instruction in specific fields and subjects. At the time this article's publication no data was available to confirm if this goal was achieved or not.

Glocalizing Taiwan's Bilingual Education

We use glocalization to refer to a global phenomenon that encompasses both universal and particular aspects, as described by several scholars (Lin, 2016; Tsui, 2020). It serves as a framework for understanding how individual entities establish connections between the local and the global while adapting and adopting new literacies within diverse cultural settings (Chen, 2024). Coined by Roland Robertson in 1995, the term "glocal" was introduced to redefine the concept of "global" in order to better capture the complexities of our current world. In the context of Taiwan's bilingual education reform, glocalization offers teachers a perspective for their everyday teaching practices that acknowledges the interplay between local and global factors, without artificially segregating them.

Glocalization highlights how people relate to one another linguistically, culturally, cognitively, and socially within their ever-changing social environments (Chen, 2024). This viewpoint rejects the notion of a monolithic and uniform global culture or force that assimilates local cultures. Instead, it acknowledges glocalization as a multi-dimensional and at times contradictory phenomenon, involving a dialectical relationship between the global and the local. Consequently, the concept of glocalization assumes a dynamic negotiation between the global and the local, wherein the local appropriates beneficial elements from the global while employing strategies to maintain its unique identity (Lin, 2016).

For instance, in response to the dynamic nature of Taiwan's language landscape and the widespread use of English as the dominant global language, educators in Taiwan have been actively striving to create comprehensive and effective instructional approaches that aim to address the diverse needs of students while also aligning with the mandates set by the MOE. Numerous educators recognize the need for classrooms to adjust to emerging technological platforms and evolving educational trends (Chen, 2024; Lin, 2016; Tsui, 2020). Consequently, it has become essential to reshape educational practices to incorporate both global and local dimensions. This adaptation empowers both teachers and students to navigate the complex dynamics of contemporary societies, which are increasingly characterized by glocalization. The concept of glocalization aptly captures the interplay between global influences and local contexts within Taiwan's educational ecology as the 2030 Bilingual Education policies continue to unfold (Chen, 2024; Chen & Tsou, 2021; Featherstone, 2020).

When adopting a global outlook, some educators in Taiwan recognize the importance of transcending the narrow framing of Taiwan's bilingual education and instead connecting it to Taiwan's global competitiveness and sustainability (Chen et al., 2020; Chen & Tsou, 2021; Coudenys, et al., 2022). Their objective is to cultivate curriculum designs and instructional strategies that encourage a more profound comprehension of global issues, while appreciating and integrating local knowledge and cultural contexts.

Through the lens of glocalization, we aim to challenge the reductionist logic and discourse that portrays the current bilingual reform as a mere uncritical borrowing of practices from the West or blindly following global English trends (Graham et al., 2021). Instead, we seek to uncover the complex and multidimensional perspectives embedded within the practices of local teachers as they navigate the diverse forces that shape today's culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms (Sia & Chern, 2023; Tsou, 2021).

Through an examination of practices of six local teachers who actively embrace global trends while simultaneously recognizing and incorporating Taiwan's cultural and linguistic resources as valuable assets in their classrooms, we explore teachers' agency, autonomy, and creativity in integrating global and local elements and how local needs in diverse contexts inform various approaches to bilingual education. A central focal point is dedicated to understanding how teachers incorporate and welcome various SDGs into their teaching techniques, which we elaborate on in the following section.

Sustaining Development Goals as Glocalization

The SDGs were introduced by the United Nations in 2015 as a set of 17 specific objectives aimed at addressing global issues and promoting global well-being. They have rapidly gained traction and been incorporated into the developmental agendas of various countries, including Taiwan, where SDGs have become part of government policies, particularly concerning economic development. The SDGs view the future of humanity as inherently interconnected, emphasizing the need for collective action involving all citizens of the planet.

The concept of development has evolved over time, as exemplified by the framework of the SDGs. Previously, development focused primarily on economic aspects, but the need for a more sustainable approach became gradually evident. The notion of integral ecology, which encompasses not only economic factors but also sociological, environmental, and educational dimensions, has led to the paradigm of Sustainable Development Goals (Zamora-Polo & Sánchez-Martín, 2019).

Integrating SDGs into Taiwan's traditional school culture, which is primarily driven by test-oriented approaches, can be challenging. The main obstacle lies in establishing supportive structures for this new construct, where sustainability and integral ecology harmoniously enhance the collective efforts to improve human living conditions. The holistic philosophy underlying the SDGs acknowledges that addressing global issues must be accompanied by educational strategies and awareness-building efforts, such as addressing climate change and preserving natural resources like rivers and forests (United Nations, 2015).

Education plays a significant role in driving relevant changes and transitions, especially when endorsed by the United Nations as a global imperative. It has been recognized that formal education should incorporate elements that promote understanding of the SDGs and their practical implementation in everyday classrooms. Furthermore, respecting cultural diversity is considered a crucial value in SDGs educational policy, with the understanding that the SDGs should adapt to the cultural context of different regions. Cultural diversity and contextual differences shape the distinct challenges and opportunities within each society or community (Chang & Lien, 2020). Considering cultural diversity and contextual differences during SDG implementation fosters sustainable development that respects and engages with diverse perspectives and the specific needs of various communities and regions. In the next section we present the questions that guided the current study and the steps taken to explore them.

Exploration of Educators Perspectives

In countries such as Taiwan, where English is not the native language, the impact of neoliberalism, the widespread use of Global English, and the imbalanced dynamics between the global and local spheres have led several educational reforms. Paradoxically these reforms often perpetuate the status quo of English as the *lingua franca*, which can come at the cost of local cultural and linguistic diversity. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intricate interplay between neoliberalism, globalization, and local autonomy in Taiwan's context, it is essential to examine the

concepts of agency, culture, and creativity of teachers who are at the forefront of the bilingual education reform. To achieve this goal we posed the following questions:

Question 1. How do local teachers actively engage with Taiwan's "bilingual education" policy, navigating global trends while adapting to their local contexts?

Question 2. How do teachers integrate local resources, cultures, and knowledge while effectively addressing the imperative of glocalizing Taiwan's bilingual education?

Question 3. How do teachers demonstrate their agency and creativity in implementing the bilingual education policy within their everyday teaching contexts and classrooms?

Our discussion centers on the perspectives of six local teachers in Taiwan as they navigate the complexities of Taiwan's bilingual education policy, globalization, neoliberal aspirations, and local autonomy through the lens of glocalization.

Author's Positionality

We are two Taiwanese scholars currently teaching in a higher education institution in the United States (US). We grew up during a time in Taiwan when English language learning was primarily focused on decontextualized skills and grammar translation. We both experienced Taiwan's test-driven culture, exemplified by the prevalence of *Buxiban* (cram schools) reflecting parents' neoliberal aspirations for their children's success. These schools are specialized institutions focused on intensive test preparation. They played a significant role in helping students succeed, particularly in standardized exams. English proficiency was seen as a cultural capital necessary for global competitiveness.

As products of Taiwan's neoliberal aspirations who were trained in Western pedagogical methodologies, we are acutely aware of English hegemony and the complex interplay between global and local dynamics in Taiwan's bilingual policy. Also, our perspectives are shaped by our contrasting experiences with the deficit-oriented approach towards bilingual learners in the US school system. We recognize the connection of Taiwan's current reform to its traditional heritage while also embracing the potential and opportunities it presents for developing critically-oriented practices that creatively integrate global forces and address local elements and needs. Through closer collaboration with local teacher practitioners in Taiwan, we have gained valuable insights into analyzing the contextual factors that influence the development of local teachers' practices within sociocultural, political, and historical contexts.

Exploration Process

We invited teachers to be interviewed who were identified through our professional networks, primarily through Facebook, where we had been following their profiles and activities over time. Their Facebook posts, particularly those showcasing student activities both inside and outside the classroom, offered us valuable glimpses into the complex ecology of Taiwan's bilingual education development. Some posts highlighted their exceptional efforts to integrate important global and local elements into bilingual education, all while aligning with Taiwan's broader global educational vision.

Our connection with these teachers began during the pandemic around 2021, when we started following their profiles, which gradually drew our attention to their work. A few of these educators were individuals we had the chance to meet in person during separate visits to Taiwan in the summer of 2022 and 2023. We were able to meet briefly, during summer break, which limited our access to their classrooms. As a result, all interviews were conducted via zoom in 2023 due to the logistical challenges posed by the geographic distance. Although we do not have access to their demographic information here we identify the informants current teaching and administrative positions.

Teacher A currently works as Director of the Resource Center for English teaching and learning housed at a school district in the outskirts of Taipei.

Teacher B is currently Director of Academic Affairs at a public elementary school in Taichung, in Central Taiwan.

Teacher C is a Junior High School English teacher at a school located on the outskirts of Taipei.

Teacher D is a Junior High School English Teacher at a school located on the outskirts of Taipei. In addition, she is in charge of recruiting and training foreign teachers.

Teacher E is a bilingual Art & Craft teacher at an elementary school on the outskirts of Taipei.

Teacher F is an elementary English teacher at a school located on the outskirts of Taichung.

Building on the foundational work of Clarke and Braun (2017), we aimed to gain a rich and nuanced understanding of the diverse educational practices and approaches emerging within Taiwan's bilingual education development. As explained below, in addition to conducting interviews with the six Taiwanese teachers, we surveyed their social media activities.

To explore the six teachers' experience of integrating local resources, cultures, and knowledge in supporting student success while navigating the trend of internationalization, we documented one conversation with each using semi-structured questions. We provided each participating teacher with the same initial set of questions (see the Appendix), but the conversation with them was itself flexible and followed the natural flow of dialogue. The primary language used was Mandarin. However, given Taiwan's multilingual context, we also allowed for the use of translanguaging practices as teachers naturally incorporated multiple languages during the conversation, including Mandarin and Taiwan local dialects.

Each conversation took place in Zoom and was recorded. To ensure accessibility for a global audience, we transcribed all of them into English. Most of the teachers were proficient in English to varying degrees, but they felt more comfortable and expressive using Mandarin. Both the original Mandarin transcripts and the English translations of selected paragraphs were shared with each teacher via Google Drive.

Additional information about the teachers and their practices was drawn whenever possible from posts in their Facebook pages. Many teachers have used

Facebook to share ideas and resources and engage in informal professional development that is “participant-driven, practical, collaborative” (Rutherford, 2010, p. 60). Facebook posts often include self-reported information, photos and others’ comments. These posts could address the shortcomings of informants’ memories and biases (Kosinski et al., 2015). They presented rich information complementary to the recorded conversation with each teacher to support their perspectives about the unfolding of Taiwan’s Bilingual 2030 policy (National Development Council, 2021).

Their posts varied widely, including snapshots of student activities, many of which took place outside the classroom. For example, one post highlighted a kayaking excursion on the community river with Japanese teachers and students during a cultural exchange visit. Another post featured announcements of professional development workshops provided by the city’s Department of Education, where teachers were trained to help students explore Taiwan’s environment, such as its waterways.

The teachers’ posts were generally categorized into three types: (1) personal matters, (2) student learning activities—which included a wide range of classroom snapshots, broadly defined to encompass any student engagement in learning as part of the school curriculum—and (3) professional development or learning-related content. For instance, within category (1), which was the least common, Teacher A shared a humorous post featuring her basking in the sun with her “hottie” pet—a black dog stylishly sporting a bandana around his neck, or a playful account of savoring the famed Brooklyn bagel while attending a teacher training conference in New York. In category (2), Teacher B posted a video of students presenting the playground safety rules they had developed. Meanwhile, category (3) included posts from Teacher C, who attended training sessions on the city’s waterways, exploring topics such as the origins of the water supply, water management, and the challenges of water waste. For the purpose of this exploration, we specifically excluded posts falling under categories (1) and (3), concentrating solely on category (2), which made up the majority of the participating teachers’ Facebook activity. We listened to the recordings of the conversations independently for further reflection and analysis. Next, we shared our reflections on a shared Google Document and engaged in sequential writing, responding to each other’s comments, asking probing questions, and facilitating each other’s reflection. We employed an iterative process, Clarke and Braun’s (2017), in which we analyzed the transcripts. Analysis included two rounds of thematically coding the data. Initially we aimed for a holistic understanding of teachers’ interpretation of the bilingual education policies of Taiwan’s government and what they perceive as the opportunities and challenges in accordance with their interpretation. Subsequently, we conducted a closer examination of all instances related to the questions guiding our exploration. In the next section, we present and discuss what we learned.

Findings

Teacher Perception of Taiwan's Bilingual 2030 Policy

Defining Taiwan's Bilingual Education Policy

The interpretation and definition of the bilingual policy vary significantly among teacher practitioners, ranging from those who fully embrace it to those who are reserved or skeptical. Out of the six teachers we talked with, five teachers agreed that bilingual education in Taiwan needs to be connected to internationalization. They view bilingual education not only as a means of achieving proficiency in two languages but also as a crucial element in Taiwan's overall national development. They believe that education should play an integral role in shaping the nation's strategic direction, and they aim to collaborate with strategic partners to strengthen Taiwan's international standing in today's globalized world.

For instance, Teacher C sees her own growth as a bilingual teacher as an ongoing process of internationalizing her classroom. She is driven to expand her classroom beyond traditional boundaries and help students establish cultural connections with their global counterparts through virtual exchanges. In the beginning, these exchanges mainly involved discussing superficial topics such as favorite food and holiday celebrations. To foster deeper student interaction, she has recently endeavored to integrate SDGs into her lesson plans. She firmly believes that SDGs provide tangible and realistic goals, promoting multidimensional and interdisciplinary planning and facilitating cross-cultural collaboration.

Additionally, the SDGs facilitate cross-cultural collaboration, enabling students to engage with global issues on a local level. By integrating the SDGs into their practices, teachers and students learn to “glocalize” these goals, adapting global concepts to their local contexts (Zamora-Polo & Sánchez-Martín, 2019).

Teachers A, B, and D also agree that Taiwan's bilingual education should be linked to internationalization through virtual exchanges or cross-cultural dialogues and collaboration. They emphasize that such interactions not only offer students an opportunity to practice English but also provide them with authentic purposes for learning. According to Teacher D, previously, students lacked motivation to learn English as they perceived little real-life application once outside the classroom, where Chinese language dominates. This lack of purpose often made them question the value of their English learning.

Bilingual Education Policy and its Discontent

Even those who support the bilingual education policy express discontent with certain aspects of the policy. While most of the teachers interviewed endorse the goals and general framework of the policy, they perceive it as a top-down approach to the complex education reform that lacks clarity and thorough planning. The government allows for local autonomy and provides universities with funding opportunities to offer local teacher training workshops and support school projects aligned with the overarching goal. This approach has resulted in a diverse and dynamic landscape for bilingual education in Taiwan. However, it has also led to a decentralized and inconsistent implementation of the policy across different practices, highlighting the

need for further integration, clarification, and articulation. In discussing the rollout of the bilingual education policy, Teacher A commented:

The government lacked a clear understanding of what “bilingual teaching” entails. Instead, they repeatedly directed us to CLIL, which stands for Content Language Integrated Learning. Initially, the plan was to introduce bilingual teaching starting with more hands-on subjects like Arts and Crafts, and gradually expand to include natural sciences. However, different professors held varying opinions on the matter. Some argued that teaching content subjects in English was too challenging, and children wouldn't be able to keep up. In response, the government shifted its stance, stating that if the material was too difficult for students to comprehend, teachers were not required to teach in English. There were frequent changes in the government's directory, which created significant challenges for those of us who actually teach at the forefront!

In Taiwan, as Teacher A notes, bilingual classrooms now utilize various approaches, including immersion, English Medium Instruction (EMI), and Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Chen et al., 2020). These approaches differ in their use of English and their educational objectives, depending on the setting, context, and grade level.

In the Taiwanese context, “Immersion” is often understood as an educational approach associated with a “No Chinese-speaking” policy, widely used for young children learning English at the preschool level. EMI is predominantly implemented in higher education institutions, referring to the use of English as the primary language for teaching academic subjects, aiming to improve students' English proficiency and universities' international competitiveness. CLIL is presented as an approach to implementing bilingual education in Taiwan's primary and secondary schools, as encouraged by Taiwan's Ministry of Education. This approach integrates content and language learning in a way that can potentially embrace multicultural awareness and utilize local linguistic resources.

Given that Taiwan's bilingual education initiative is still in its early stages, teachers have yet to fully grasp the intricacies of the three primary approaches — Immersion, CLIL, and EMI—and their implementation remains inconsistently defined. Among these, CLIL, in particular, stands out as an approach that is still in its developmental phase in Taiwan's educational landscape. As a result, schools and teachers encounter numerous challenges in effectively implementing CLIL. These include difficulties in curriculum design that integrates content and language learning, a lack of established teaching methodologies suited to local contexts, and limited availability of authentic and culturally relevant instructional materials. Furthermore, there are significant gaps in assessment practices for evaluating the dual goals of content and language proficiency. Administrative support for CLIL teacher training programs is also insufficient, hindering teachers from gaining the specialized skills and confidence required to adopt this approach successfully (Huang & Tsou, 2023).

Although their understanding of how these approaches are applied in Western contexts may be limited, local teachers endeavor to adapt these methods in ways that are critically attuned to their sociocultural realities. For example, Teacher A's response

above demonstrates how local educators engage with Western educational frameworks with an open yet critical lens. This approach underscores a conscious effort to practice “innovative borrowing” (Tsai, 2021), thoughtfully integrating external methods while preserving cultural relevance and contextual appropriateness in their teaching practices.

Similarly, Teacher F talked about how in practice, this policy has encountered several obstacles, including lack of qualified teachers, incentives, or co-planning time that made her doubtful about the effectiveness of the policy. As a result, when there is not enough support and time for the local teachers, teachers end up teaching diluted content, which eventually creates a detrimental effect on students' overall academic performance in a test-driven education system. Teacher F explained:

When academic subjects have to be taught in English, we can only superficially touch upon simple content. While we don't need to use all English to teach and it should be okay with 70% English, it's already hard for higher grade students to comprehend the content even if it is taught in Chinese. In the end, Taiwan is still very test-driven and students need to rely on their parents or cram schools to do well in the exams. It's impossible to just rely on teachers [to do well on exams].

It should be noted that Teacher F's opinions are situated within a school context in which the school leaders were not invested in providing support for the implementation of the bilingual policy. This teacher believed that the school leaders' lack of investment is related to their lack of English proficiency and interest in seeking out resources to promote bilingual education. The interpretation of the policy varies considerably, highlighting the existence of significant disparities. How individual teachers perceive and interpret the policy often mirrors the diverse contexts, school environments, and leadership surrounding its implementation. These factors, in turn, influence how teachers respond to the policy and impact their motivation to support it.

Challenges Facing Implementing Bilingual Education

Content and Language Integration

The journey towards achieving bilingual education has been fraught with obstacles, particularly in the higher grades where the content becomes more demanding. Given Taiwan's test-driven culture, teachers experience the pressure to teach according to test requirements, while students face the pressure of preparing for college and careers. All the teachers we interviewed share the belief that implementing full-fledged bilingual education in major content subjects, especially at higher grades, is currently unfeasible. Instead, bilingual education is currently limited to arts, music, and crafts subjects where students experience less pressure and also have a genuine interest. Teacher D emphasizes the importance of gradual implementation and starting with pilot studies, stating: “We cannot launch a project all at once; we need time to reflect and make improvements as we progress”.

Currently, there is no consensus or coherent set of guidelines for integrating content and language in Taiwan. Although the government has endorsed the CLIL framework, its definition remains ambiguous, leading to varied interpretations among professors. Nevertheless, most participating teachers agree that, regardless of

approaches and subjects, balancing content learning with student needs should be a priority.

CLIL, which originated in Europe, must be adapted to Taiwan's unique educational environment, which requires time for teachers to fully understand, process, examine, and address students' specific needs. Teachers' agency and critical awareness should be fostered and respected when incorporating Western pedagogical methods into Taiwan, with a focus on local needs. The ultimate goal is to enhance students' understanding of subjects or disciplines, using English as a tool for communication, learning, and meaning making rather than the primary focus. Teacher D elaborates:

There are some teachers who simply translate the text into English or teach the content in English, but this approach can be confusing for students who are not yet proficient in the language. It is important to ensure that the content is delivered in a way that aligns with the students' level of understanding. We must concentrate on how students *learn*. This is how I understand CLIL: each subject requires a different approach and methodology for teaching. To create an effective language learning environment, we need to carefully consider what Professor Wen-Li Tsou called 4 Cs: Content, Communication, Cognition, and Culture, including the context of the lesson. Only when taking these factors into account can we create a meaningful and holistic approach to language learning that supports students' overall learning experience.

The Sustainability of Foreign Faculty Force

One important Bilingual 2030 policy objective (National Development Council, 2021) is for all public primary and secondary schools nationwide to have foreign English teachers or part-time foreign English teaching assistants by 2030. The recruitment of foreign teachers aims to diversify the language learning environment and enhance English proficiency. According to Teacher D, foreign teachers are required to hold certification in a specific content area, although uncertified individuals may be considered for employment as teacher assistants. One-third of a foreign teacher's teaching workload is dedicated to teaching English, while the remaining two-thirds are allocated for co-teaching with content area teachers. The success of collaboration in co-teaching situations depends on factors such as personality compatibility, allocated planning time, teachers' communication skills, motivation, and the support provided by school leadership.

Teacher D suggests that strategically pairing local teachers with international teachers can yield different outcomes, requiring deliberation in the pairing process. According to this teacher, the ideal combination involves pairing an English-speaking teacher with strong content area expertise alongside a competent local teacher, which can transform classroom dynamics. It is important to note that the purpose is not merely for foreign teachers to teach English but to create a need for both teachers and students to use English authentically within an ecological system.

Coming from a school with leadership not invested in bilingual education, Teacher F talked about foreign teachers' inability to co-teach or co-plan with local teachers at her school. After multiple failed collaborations between foreign and local content teachers, the foreign teachers will mostly teach on their own in the new

academic year and only co-teach with an English teacher, like Teacher F. Doing so is believed to prevent miscommunication between content and foreign teachers. Teacher F talked about her frustration of working with foreign teachers with an exaggerated estimate of 1 out of 100 or 1 out of 50 foreign teachers that she worked with is good. She limited the benefits of having foreign teachers at school to providing students the opportunity to speak in English with them. This illustrates that in order for foreign teachers to be effective teachers in implementing bilingual education in Taiwan, much needs to be done.

In addition, a significant challenge faced in Taiwan's bilingual education efforts is the short-term nature of employment for most foreign teachers, particularly those recruited through programs like Fulbright. This results in a substantial amount of energy being invested in training new teachers, only to see them leave at the end of the year. Ensuring continuity and sustainability of knowledge and experience remains an ongoing struggle in Taiwan's bilingual education endeavors.

Navigating Cultural and Linguistic Diversity Within the System

Given that one of the major push backs to the Bilingual 2030 policy (National Development Council, 2018) from the local academics is its threat to local cultural and linguistic diversity in Taiwan, our participants were asked to reflect on this policy and its impact on local cultures and languages. Teachers from schools with more robust bilingual education view the policy as opening up an opportunity for students to explore local cultures and languages and present them to the world (See some examples of local culture-based curriculum in the next section). In other words, bilingual education in these schools carves out space for the students to learn more about their immediate communities and English is the medium through which they learn to introduce their local cultures to the world. According to Teacher C, bilingual education is in close line with the 12-Year Curriculum Guidelines (also known as "the 108 Curriculum") that adopts a holistic approach to education and encourages schools to delineate their own courses based on the school visions. Taken together, teachers can design lessons that are cross-disciplinary and take students to explore their immediate communities in depth. As a result, teacher C believed that bilingual education promotes students' appreciations of different cultures, including local cultures.

However, for Teacher F who worked at a school with little leadership support for bilingual education, she expressed concerns about learning subject matter in English because it not only significantly impeded students' content comprehension but also compromised their Chinese language skills. According to her, the demand of the 12-Year Curriculum Guidelines for Chinese reading comprehension is very high and Chinese Language Art exams have a strong emphasis on long texts. However, with the push for more English instruction at school, it means that students will need more time to study English and their time to develop ability to read long paragraphs in Chinese is taken away.

Furthermore, in response to parents' expectation of more English education, Teacher F's school will increase English education to three sessions per week for upper grades while mother tongue education remains only one session per week, meeting the minimum MOE requirement. With the unbalanced time allocation of English and

mother tongue education, Teacher F viewed this policy as exhibiting excessive ambition at the expense of linguistic diversity and contradicting the best interests of students. Notably, Teacher F emphasized that the policy disproportionately impacts students in rural areas struggling with academic language development in Chinese. Without a strong foundation in Chinese, their access to content is limited, ultimately affecting their academic success.

Glocalization of Taiwan's Bilingual Education Through the Lens of SDGs

The prevailing sentiment among the teachers we interviewed is that bilingual education must be closely connected to internationalization. Internationalization entails continuous efforts, capacity building, and the establishment of networks. To illustrate this, here are a few examples of Taiwan's SDG Curricula with a focus on internationalization:

Example 1: River Tracing and Community Tracing

In order to inspire the next generation of environmental advocates, teachers at Taipei Wanfu Elementary School developed a school project titled "Rivers in our Community", through which children learned about the importance of nature and the potential harm humans can do to its life. Due to Taiwan's internationalization efforts, it is quite common for schools to romanize their names into English. Foreign English teachers researched and learned about the important roles of rivers in Taiwan's history and how cities' developments are linked along the rivers (Figure 1). They then incorporated what they learned in developing a learning unit, which included a field trip to the river.

Activities included: teachers, students with parents' help moved hand-made canoes to a river; students took notes while teachers explained the impacts of rivers on the environment; then, as a class they discussed how rivers can affect people, animals, and plants. The project incorporated English learning in the environmental study as well as successfully galvanized community support to increase awareness of rivers and the surrounding environment. This learning unit is also an apt example of how teachers in Taiwan sought to navigate the tides of globalization and neoliberalism and instead engage students in meaningful and authentic learning with active, fun local elements in the problem-based learning approach.

Figure 1

Discussing the ecology of the river



Example 2: Lunch Around the World Project

The English education at Shan Shi Elementary School is embedded in its international and cross-curricular education. Teachers of different subjects work closely with English specialists to create lessons in which English mediates students' learning. A series of lessons on lunch around the world consists of students learning about lunch in different countries through videos, making some dishes at school (mac and cheese, tacos, hamburgers, etc.) (Figure 2), setting tables for serving western food, talking to a sushi chef and a retired diplomat. In the end, this project is integrated with art, social studies, health education, and language arts. The students have the opportunity to not only learn about different cultures but share their school lunches with their sister schools in Japan, Korea, and Israel through videos. The school also welcomes international students in a nearby university to come to interact with students during lunch time. The school started the curriculum with a few classes but strives to make this into a school-wide event. This is an example of how teachers utilize the local community resources to help students find some relevance to learning English and feel connected to the world.

Figure 2

Panini and Mac and Cheese cooking classes



Example 3: Saving Broad-tailed Swallowtail

To preserve Taiwan's endangered species, particularly the rare and endangered butterfly known as the "Broad-tailed Swallowtail," Fuhe Elementary School in New Taipei City has initiated a project aimed at raising awareness about its endangered status. The destruction of forests in Taiwan to make way for highways has resulted in the loss of the butterfly's original habitat, specifically the sassafras trees, which have seen a significant decline in numbers. By protecting the sassafras habitat, the Broad-tailed Swallowtail can have sufficient food and space to reproduce, making efforts in their conservation crucial.

In the past, Taiwan earned the nickname "Butterfly Kingdom" from the international community, not only due to the abundance and diversity of butterflies in the country but also because of a thriving "butterfly processing industry." Butterfly specimens were exported for profit, contributing to Taiwan's foreign exchange in the 1950s and 1960s. However, with increased environmental awareness in recent years, the capturing of butterflies is no longer allowed as it once was.

In response to SDG #13, the Climate Action Project, Fuhe Junior High School has launched campaigns to protect the Taiwanese Broad-tailed Swallowtail (Figure 3). The school has even incorporated the butterfly into their school badge, aiming to inspire collective concern for ecological conservation and remind the public of the significance of preserving biodiversity in each region.

Figure 3

A poster outlining the goal of Fuhe Junior High School's climate Action project



Discussion

Question 1. How do local teachers actively engage with Taiwan's "bilingual education" policy, navigating global trends while adapting to their local contexts?

The interview process with six different teachers revealed varying interpretations of what bilingual education entails and how it relates to the well-being and development of the nation. These responses span a wide spectrum of perspectives. Some teachers, such as Teacher C, believe that globalization and localization can form a strategic alliance through the SDGs (Zamora-Polo & Sánchez-Martín, 2019). On the other hand, there are teachers who perceive an inherent conflict between Taiwan's globalization and student needs (according to Teacher A & Teacher D), arguing that globalization has eroded the very elements that strengthen Taiwan's educational system, including native languages and local cultures (Lin, 2016).

All teachers actively evaluate the challenges involved in implementing bilingual education and recognize the needs of their students, such as the pressures of a test-driven culture and the importance of preserving cultural and linguistic heritage. Whether intentional or not, Taiwan's bilingual education policy has reinforced the dominance of English as the lingua franca. While teachers acknowledge the significance of English for students' academic and career futures, diversification of today's world is also valued, including the understanding of one's own culture and languages (Sia & Chern, 2023; Tsou, 2021).

Therefore, all six teachers strive to expose their students to diverse cultures, languages, and practices. Some (for example, Teacher A and Teacher C) have turned to virtual exchanges to expand the English learning environment. Schools actively seek opportunities to connect with other countries. Through these experiences, English language education has transformed traditional methodologies focused on reading and writing, engaging students in multimodal language learning. Furthermore, by connecting with countries such as India, Turkey, Australia, Canada, and Ukraine, teachers allow students to interact with peers from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These exchanges have heightened teachers' awareness of their own local needs, prompting proactive collaboration with international educators to tailor their teaching methods accordingly.

By framing bilingual education as "Let children see the world and let the world see Taiwan" (Teacher D), teachers have creatively integrated English and mother tongue languages. Instead of treating them as separate language systems, they are incorporated holistically into students' linguistic repertoire. While students are encouraged to develop their English skills, the focus remains on using English to express their culture, creating an organic connection between both languages in the goal of navigating and interacting with the world.

Some educators (Chang & Lien, 2020) have found that aligning with the SDGs provides a strategic approach where global and local needs can be effectively reconciled. The SDGs' emphasis on respecting local contexts and cultures has created opportunities for teachers and students to delve deeper into their communities, such as understanding endangered species (Example 3). Despite the "progress" made in

bilingual education, it is important to acknowledge that certain schools (especially those in rural areas), due to resource constraints, have been marginalized throughout this process (Chang, 2022; Tsou, 2021). These schools have witnessed firsthand how the development of bilingual education has created conflicts within their communities and impacted the daily lives of their students. The government's rushed implementation of the policy has further exacerbated existing societal gaps, intensifying the challenges faced by these marginalized schools and student populations. Consequently, their reaction may be perceived as resistance to the policy, as illustrated by the narrative of Teacher F presented in the previous section.

However, it is crucial to understand this resistance as an expression of agency and an alternative form of advocacy on behalf of the marginalized. Their resistance has compelled the government to slow down and implement the policy more thoughtfully, taking into account the existing disparities between rural and urban areas. We recognize our responsibility to amplify the voices of these marginalized communities in our research, ensuring that their perspectives are included in the overall evaluation.

The discontented voice of Teacher F holds profound significance for achieving equity in Taiwan's bilingual education, particularly for marginalized communities. These voices also have implications for fostering cultural and linguistic diversity in Taiwan. By examining the concerns expressed by marginalized groups, we gain insights into the underlying tensions and conflicts within the direction of bilingual education. This examination is crucial for a comprehensive understanding of the development of Taiwan's bilingual education.

Question 2. How do teachers integrate local resources, cultures, and knowledge while effectively addressing the imperative of glocalizing Taiwan's bilingual education?

While the policy implementation process is primarily driven from top to down, the responses from teachers are diverse and vary across regions. The three examples presented illustrate how local teachers effectively leverage global trends to integrate local resources, cultures, languages, and knowledge. For instance, through wilderness exploration in the river, the project not only helped students learn about their local habitat and the species within it but also mobilized collaboration across diverse communities. By seizing the opportunities presented by internationalization to address local needs, Teacher A, like the other teachers, strategically intersects local resources with global trends.

While adopting the SDGs as a template and common language shared by participating countries, Teacher A & Teacher C integrate content and language learning in a manner that aligns with the development of local culture and addresses local needs. For example, addressing the extinction crisis faced by Taiwan's Broad-tailed Swallowtail and Black Bear enables students to understand how globalization has negatively impacted local species and the environment. This critical examination serves as an opportunity to raise their awareness of environmental protection. Hence, internationalization goes beyond simply adopting or borrowing curricula from the West; it involves integrating, discovering, and expanding the global significance of the

local context. Taiwan's efforts to preserve the diversity of local cultures while navigating internationalization can serve as a model for others to follow.

Our data suggests that through connecting with learners from other cultures, the dual goals of localization and globalization can be achieved. Students are able to build upon their knowledge in both languages and utilize the opportunity to enhance their bilingual skills.

Question 3. How do teachers demonstrate their agency and creativity within their everyday teaching contexts and classrooms?

While the policy implementation process is centralized, it also encourages schools and teachers to adapt it to their own contexts, allowing for local autonomy. Schools have the flexibility to decide whether they want to become bilingual schools, and they are provided with incentives and support to make choices that best serve their school communities. The teachers we interviewed are not simply fulfilling requirements; they have chosen to participate because it empowers them and contributes to their personal and professional growth. Engaging in this process helps them foster resilience, flexibility, and agency, while building their capacity.

For instance, when discussing the benefits and challenges of facilitating virtual exchanges among students from different cultures, Teacher A mentioned,

In the past, it was challenging to find partners to collaborate with, especially when communication was limited to email. This proved frustrating for teachers, leading some to give up. However, the development of technology, accelerated by the COVID pandemic, has made communication much easier. Students should not be restricted to playing video games; instead, they should explore the plethora of learning opportunities offered by the online world.

The teachers we interviewed are acutely aware of the risk of reinforcing the hegemony of English and Mandarin at the expense of cultural and linguistic diversity. Their resistance takes various forms. According to Teacher F, some teachers have been critical of the government's bilingual policy and have chosen to switch to a different license that grants them more autonomy in supporting mother tongue languages. This relieves them of the pressure to teach in a language (English) they are not comfortable with while allowing them the freedom to address what they believe their students need.

Some teachers leveraged the bilingual education initiative as an opportunity to develop community-based projects that integrate both localization and internationalization. For instance, Teacher E, an arts and crafts elementary teacher, designed a community storytelling project to map the cultural and linguistic diversity represented by students from 12 different countries within the school. This project enabled students to explore their own cultural heritage while building meaningful connections with the school community and international partners.

Such examples highlight how local teachers actively and creatively navigate government policies to incorporate local cultural elements while advancing students' bilingual education. These initiatives not only foster a deeper sense of cultural identity and global awareness among students but also demonstrate teachers' agency in shaping and implementing Taiwan's bilingual education policy.

Limitations

This study was constrained by several factors that limited the depth and scope of our analysis. Firstly, due to geographic limitations, only one interview was conducted with each teacher via Zoom. While we made significant efforts to thoroughly explore each participating teacher's perspectives on the topics pertaining to this study, the absence of additional interviewing sessions and onsite visits prevented us from asking more nuanced questions that may have arisen from direct observation. Had we been able to conduct the study in person, we could have observed teacher-student interactions more closely and possibly interviewed administrators as well. The lack of multiple interviewing sessions with each teacher and of onsite engagement certainly compromises the richness of the data and represents an area that could be explored in a broader, expansive study with robust instrumentation.

Additionally, our familiarity with the teachers was limited. We had only met them superficially through Facebook, which may have hindered the development of the trust necessary for deeper, more candid conversations. The process of building rapport, which is crucial for meaningful interviews, was thus not fully realized, potentially affecting the depth of the insights gathered.

Another limitation of this exploration is its temporal scope. Conducted primarily in 2023, with interviews taking place in the summer and Facebook posts spanning the entire year, the study provides a snapshot of teacher experiences and perspectives at a specific moment in time. A longitudinal study would be valuable to track how local teachers have responded to the ongoing development and complexity of Taiwan's bilingual education system, which is influenced by a range of global forces and sociocultural actors. This study only begins to scratch the surface of these dynamics.

Furthermore, this exploration did not fully explore the internal and external factors that shape the complexity of educational practices in Taiwan and, by extension, teachers' agency within this context. For instance, the impact of the Fulbright program, the introduction of foreign English teachers, and other sociocultural dynamics were not deeply examined. These factors are critical to understanding the broader context of bilingual education and require a more comprehensive approach, as well as additional resources and funding—limitations that were beyond the scope of our exploration.

Overall, while this exploration provides valuable insights into the complex ecological system of Taiwan's bilingual education and the globalization efforts of local teachers, it underscores the need for future research that addresses these limitations. Specifically, future studies should aim to expand the temporal scope, improve onsite access, use various instruments for robust data collection and analysis, and incorporate a more nuanced understanding of the broader contextual factors that shape local teachers' educational practices.

Conclusions and Implications

Neoliberalism has played a significant role in reinforcing Taiwan's test-driven educational culture and the global dominance of English. However, rather than adopting a narrow focus on strengthening English in the context of bilingual education, the teachers in this study have chosen to prioritize authentic, real-world learning

experiences for their students. The findings reveal that, in response to local resistance, the Taiwanese government has made efforts to strike a balance by incorporating mother tongue language education into its bilingual education policy. Yet, teachers in this study have not been satisfied with this policy shift alone. They have actively sought innovative ways to integrate both global and local elements into the bilingual education framework, striving to create a more holistic and contextually relevant educational experience for their students.

Specifically, teachers in this study have discovered ways to align with the government's goals for bilingual education while leveraging local resources through the lens of Sustainable Development Goals. By engaging in interdisciplinary projects that respect local contexts, they create tangible objectives and purposes for student learning.

We suggest that the agency and motivation of local teachers can play a pivotal role in driving the progress of bilingual education in Taiwan. For instance, some teachers in the study have proactively pursued virtual exchange opportunities to expand their classrooms and offer authentic learning experiences to their students. Recognizing that relying solely on foreign teachers is insufficient to diversify and strengthen Taiwan's English learning environment, these teachers have intentionally sought partnerships for virtual exchanges with a diverse array of countries—not limited to English-speaking nations. This approach fosters greater global collaboration, enriching students' learning experiences while broadening their perspectives beyond traditional language instruction.

Our work has implications not only for Taiwanese teachers who are navigating the government's response to neoliberal pressures and global English trends, but also for educators in similar Global South countries facing comparable challenges. Taiwan's approach to bilingual education exemplifies the complex interplay of local needs and global forces, offering valuable insights into the opportunities and obstacles that arise in a globalized educational landscape.

We suggest that local teachers can exercise creativity and agency in addressing these complexities emerging from Taiwan's bilingual education reform, shedding light on the evolving nature of educational reform in a globalized world. The participating teachers' ability to adapt to and innovate within these shifting conditions not only underscores the challenges faced by countries like Taiwan as they strive to globalize their education systems but also highlights the resilience of their educational practices in the face of external pressures.

Furthermore, our exploration serves to highlight the need for greater collaboration and exchange between countries, particularly those in the Global South, to share insights and foster a global dialogue around educational challenges and solutions. Such exchanges can serve to build bridges and enhance mutual understanding across different educational systems, allowing countries with similar challenges to learn from one another's teaching experiences and share resources.

One last implication for furthering research is that this exploration should also extend to the Global North, particularly in the context of increasing immigration and multicultural classrooms. In countries like the United States, teachers are often faced

with the challenge of integrating newcomers' diverse backgrounds and resources into the classroom. The glocalizing efforts seen in Global South nations, such as Taiwan's bilingual education initiatives, point to a crucial need for teachers in the Global North to recognize and understand the dynamic, transnational literacy practices that students bring with them. This understanding can help educators in different regions develop more inclusive, responsive teaching strategies that leverage the rich cultural and linguistic resources of their diverse student populations.

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Appendix

Guiding Questions for Teacher Interview

1. Could you tell me what has motivated you to become an English teacher?
2. What is your view of the aims of Taiwan's Bilingual Education "Reform"? What are some of the current successful practices, in your opinion? What impediments interfere with reaching these objectives?
3. What drove you to start working on SDG initiatives? How important do you think that is? What efforts can be taken for its continual progress? How have you gone about finding partners and resources? And how does it link content and language together? What difficulties have you encountered? How can it advance bilingual education in general?
4. Do you think bilingual training encourages cultural and linguistic diversity in this country?