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Multilingual education and social equity: A comparative study of integration policies in multicultural societies

Patricia Diane Mouboua ^{1,*}, Fadeke Adeola Atobatele ² and Olateju Temitope Akintayo ³

¹ *Seymour Dual Language Academy, Syracuse City School District, USA.*

² *Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, University of Texas, Arlington, USA.*

³ *University of Nebraska Lincoln, USA.*

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of multilingual education and social equity in multicultural societies, focusing on implementing integration policies and multilingual education practices. Through case studies, policy analysis, and literature review, the study identifies common challenges multicultural societies face in promoting educational and social equity, such as language barriers, cultural differences, and socioeconomic disparities. It highlights the importance of comprehensive integration and multilingual education policies in addressing these challenges and fostering inclusive learning environments. The paper also provides recommendations for improving integration policies and multilingual education practices, including equitable funding, culturally responsive pedagogy, language support services, community engagement, and anti-discrimination measures. The study underscores the significance of multilingual education and social equity in creating more equitable and inclusive societies, emphasizing the value of linguistic diversity, cultural understanding, and equal opportunities for all students. The paper highlights the significance of understanding and addressing the complexities surrounding multilingual education and social equity in multicultural societies. It emphasizes the importance of comprehensive policies and practices that promote inclusive education environments while acknowledging the challenges faced in their implementation. The abstract sets the stage for further exploration into these crucial areas of education policy and practice by providing recommendations for policy improvement and emphasizing the value of linguistic diversity and cultural understanding. Multilingual education and social equity are critical components of inclusive education systems in multicultural societies. This paper focuses on the necessity of considering both educational policy and practice aspects. Acknowledging the challenges faced in implementing integration policies and multilingual education practices, the study encourages policymakers and educators to prioritize developing and implementing comprehensive strategies.

Keywords: Education; Equity; Policy; Multilingualism; Integration; Multiculturalism

1. Introduction

This approach acknowledges linguistic diversity as an asset and provides a practical framework for supporting the development of proficiency in multiple languages among students. Multilingual education encompasses a range of models, including bilingual education, immersion programs, and language maintenance programs (Alshihry, 2024.).

The rationale behind multilingual education lies in its potential to promote linguistic and cultural diversity, enhance cognitive development, and improve educational outcomes for students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Multilingual education refers to educational programs that utilize multiple languages as mediums of instruction or as subjects of study (Wong et al., 2024).

* Corresponding author: Patricia Diane Mouboua.

Research has shown that multilingualism offers cognitive benefits, such as enhanced problem-solving skills, creativity, and flexibility in thinking. Additionally, multilingual education can facilitate the preservation and revitalization of indigenous and minority languages, contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage and identity (Foley, 2024). Despite its potential benefits, multilingual education poses challenges, particularly in contexts where linguistic diversity is not adequately supported or valued.

Implementing effective multilingual education programs requires careful planning, resource allocation, and support for teachers and students. Moreover, addressing the needs of linguistically diverse students requires a holistic approach considering language proficiency, cultural background, and socioeconomic status (Tagliatalata, 2024). Social equity in education refers to fairness and justice in distributing educational opportunities and resources, ensuring all students have access to high-quality education regardless of their background or circumstances.

Achieving social equity in education ensures fairness in educational opportunities, promotes inclusive societies, reduces inequalities, and fosters social mobility (Lyu, 2024). As a powerful social institution, education shapes individuals' life chances and opportunities, influencing their social, economic, and political outcomes. However, disparities in access to education, educational quality, and educational outcomes persist, particularly among marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, language, disability, and geographic location can significantly impact students' access to educational opportunities and their chances of academic success (Benson, 2024).

Addressing social equity in education requires addressing systemic barriers and inequities perpetuating educational disparities. It includes ensuring equitable funding and resource allocation, supporting marginalized students, promoting inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogies, and addressing implicit biases and discrimination within educational systems (Kilag et al., 2024). Multicultural societies are characterized by cultural diversity, with people from different cultural, ethnic, linguistic, and religious backgrounds coexisting within the same social and political context.

In multicultural societies, integration policies aim to promote social cohesion, respect for diversity, and equal opportunities for all members of society. Integration policies encompass a range of measures to facilitate the social, economic, and political inclusion of diverse populations. These may include language policies, education policies, employment programs, housing policies, anti-discrimination laws, and cultural integration initiatives. Integration policies aim to create inclusive societies where individuals from diverse backgrounds can participate fully and contribute to society (Djajanto, 2024).

However, the effectiveness of integration policies is a complex matter. It varies depending on factors such as political context, social attitudes toward diversity, and institutional support for multiculturalism. In some cases, integration policies may face challenges such as resistance from majority groups, inadequate resources, and competing political agendas. Moreover, the success of integration policies is not just about their implementation but also about the extent to which they address the root causes of inequality and exclusion and promote genuine social inclusion and equality of opportunity.

1.1. Multilingual Education Policies

Multilingual education, a powerful tool, refers to educational programs that utilize multiple languages as mediums of instruction or as subjects of study. The primary goal of multilingual education is to empower students by supporting the development of proficiency in multiple languages, thereby promoting linguistic diversity, cultural understanding, and academic success (Talukder & Barner, 2024). Multilingual education aims to develop students' proficiency in more than one language, enabling them to communicate effectively and engage with diverse linguistic and cultural communities.

Multilingual education can contribute significantly to preserving and revitalizing indigenous and minority languages, fostering a sense of pride and identity among linguistic minority groups. Research has shown that bilingual and multilingual individuals often demonstrate enhanced cognitive skills, such as problem-solving, critical thinking, and metalinguistic awareness, compared to monolinguals (Tiawati et al., 2024). This enhanced cognitive ability can lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of different cultures, fostering a more inclusive and diverse society.

Multilingual education has been linked to improved academic performance, particularly in literacy, numeracy, and academic achievement across various subjects (Ganesan & Morales, 2024). By valuing and affirming linguistic diversity, multilingual education promotes social inclusion and equity, ensuring all students have equal opportunities to access education and succeed academically. Multilingual education policies vary depending on factors such as the linguistic

diversity of the population, historical and political contexts, and educational philosophies. However, several common approaches to multilingual education can be observed.

Bilingual education programs provide instruction in two languages, typically the language of instruction and a minority or heritage language spoken by students (qizi et al., 2024). These programs aim to develop students' language proficiency while promoting academic achievement and cultural understanding. Language immersion programs immerse students in a second or foreign language, providing instruction primarily or exclusively in the target language.

Immersion programs are designed to foster bilingualism and biliteracy by creating an immersive language learning environment. Heritage language education focuses on maintaining and developing proficiency in the language(s) spoken by students' families or communities. These programs aim to preserve linguistic and cultural heritage while supporting students' academic success and identity development (Norbekova, 2024).

Transitional bilingual education programs provide instruction in students' native language(s) while gradually transitioning to instruction in the majority language. These programs are created to support student's academic development while they acquire proficiency in the majority language. Dual language programs integrate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds and provide instruction in both the majority and target languages. These programs promote bilingualism, illiteracy, and cross-cultural competence among all students (Normatova, 2024).

Canada is a shining example of successful bilingual education policies, particularly in the province of Quebec, where French and English are both official languages. The Quebec education system offers French immersion programs for English-speaking students and English immersion programs for French-speaking students, aiming to develop bilingualism and promote cultural understanding. Switzerland, another success story, has a multilingual education system that reflects the country's linguistic diversity, with four official languages: German, French, Italian, and Romansh. The Swiss education system provides instruction in multiple languages, with students typically learning at least two languages besides their native language (Tao and Yu, 2024). These success stories should inspire policymakers to consider the potential benefits of multilingual education in their own contexts.

Singapore has a bilingual education policy that promotes proficiency in English and a mother tongue language (e.g., Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil) among students. Bilingualism is a cornerstone of Singapore's education system, with students receiving instruction in both languages to develop proficiency in reading, writing, and speaking. These case studies illustrate different approaches to multilingual education and highlight how countries address linguistic diversity and promote bilingualism and multiculturalism in education (Cenoz & Gorter, 2024).

1.2. Social Equity in Education

Social equity in education refers to fairness and justice in distributing educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes, ensuring that all students have equal access to high-quality education regardless of their background or circumstances. It involves addressing disparities and barriers that prevent individuals from marginalized or disadvantaged groups from fully participating and succeeding in education. Social equity in education encompasses various dimensions, including:

Ensuring all students have equal opportunities to access education, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, ethnicity, gender, language, disability, or geographic location. Providing equitable access to high-quality educational resources, facilities, and instruction, regardless of the schools' socioeconomic status or geographic location. Promoting equitable educational outcomes, such as academic achievement, graduation rates, and post-secondary attainment, for all students, regardless of their background or circumstances (Domke et al., 2024).

Creating inclusive learning environments that value and affirm diversity, foster a sense of belonging, and support students from diverse backgrounds to thrive academically and socially. Social equity in education is significant in multicultural societies, where diverse populations with different cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic backgrounds coexist. In such societies, social equity in education is crucial in promoting social cohesion, reducing inequalities, and fostering inclusive societies. Several reasons highlight the importance of social equity in multicultural societies (Zheng et al., 2024).

Social equity ensures that all students, regardless of their background, have equal opportunities to participate and succeed in education, fostering inclusivity and celebrating diversity within schools and communities. Multicultural societies often face systemic inequalities and discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, language, and

socioeconomic status. Social equity in education addresses these inequalities by providing targeted support for marginalized and disadvantaged groups and promoting equal opportunities for all students (Probert, 2024).

Promoting equitable access to education and ensuring that all students can succeed, social equity in education contributes to social cohesion and a sense of belonging within multicultural societies, fostering understanding, tolerance, and respect for diversity. Education is a crucial driver of economic and social mobility, providing individuals with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to improve their socioeconomic status and achieve their full potential. Social equity in education ensures that all students have equal access to the resources and support they need to succeed, regardless of their background (Isakovna, 2024).

Despite the importance of social equity in education, achieving it poses several challenges, particularly in multicultural societies; structural factors such as poverty, segregation, and inadequate funding can perpetuate educational inequities and limit access to high-quality education for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Multicultural societies may face language barriers, cultural differences, and a lack of culturally responsive pedagogy, which can hinder the academic success and social inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds (Ganesan & Morales, 2024).

Implicit biases and discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, language, and socioeconomic status can influence educational policies, practices, and interactions within schools, perpetuating inequalities and limiting opportunities for marginalized groups. Inadequate access to resources such as qualified teachers, instructional materials, technology, and support services can exacerbate educational inequities and limit opportunities for students from disadvantaged backgrounds (Abuemira, 2024).

Multilingual education is vital in promoting social equity in multicultural societies by addressing linguistic diversity, fostering inclusive learning environments, and supporting the academic success of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Several ways in which multilingual education promotes social equity include addressing language barriers that can hinder academic success and social inclusion of students from linguistically diverse backgrounds (Guerrero et al., 2024).

By providing instruction in students' native languages and the majority language, multilingual education ensures that all students have equal access to educational opportunities and can fully participate in the learning process. Multilingual education values and affirms students' linguistic and cultural identities, fostering a sense of belonging and pride among linguistic minority groups (Ro'ziqulovna, 2024). By incorporating students' languages and cultural backgrounds into the curriculum, multilingual education promotes cultural diversity and inclusivity within schools and communities.

Research has shown that multilingual education can improve academic achievement, particularly among students from linguistically diverse backgrounds. By developing proficiency in multiple languages, students can access a broader range of educational resources, engage more deeply with academic content, and achieve higher levels of academic success (Razmeh, 2024). Multilingual education promotes cross-cultural competence by exposing students to different languages, cultures, and perspectives.

Multilingual education prepares students to thrive in multicultural societies and participate effectively in a globalized world by fostering an appreciation for linguistic and cultural diversity. In conclusion, social equity in education is essential for promoting inclusive, equitable, and diverse learning environments in multicultural societies. Addressing disparities, fostering inclusivity, and promoting academic success for all students, social equity in education contributes to social cohesion, economic prosperity, and individual well-being (Wu, 2024).

1.3. Comparative Analysis of Integration Policies

Despite these variations, several common approaches to multilingual education can be observed, each with strengths and challenges. Bilingual education programs provide instruction in two languages, typically the language of instruction and a minority or heritage language spoken by students. These programs aim to develop students' language proficiency while promoting academic achievement and cultural understanding. Examples of countries with bilingual education policies include Canada, where French and English are official languages, and India, which has numerous regional languages (Zukhra, 2024).

Language immersion programs immerse students in a second or foreign language, providing instruction primarily or exclusively in the target language. Immersion programs are designed to foster bilingualism and literacy by creating an immersive language learning environment. Examples of countries with language immersion programs include Finland,

where students can attend Swedish-language immersion schools, and the United States, where Spanish immersion programs are increasingly popular (Budiharso et al., 2024).

Heritage language education focuses on maintaining and developing proficiency in the language(s) spoken by students' families or communities. These programs aim to preserve linguistic and cultural heritage while supporting students' academic success and identity development. Examples of countries with heritage language education programs include Australia, which offers programs in Indigenous languages, and Israel, where Hebrew language education plays a central role in preserving Jewish culture and identity (Uy et al., 2024).

Transitional bilingual education programs provide instruction in students' native language(s) while gradually transitioning to instruction in the majority language. These programs are designed to support student's academic development while they acquire proficiency in the majority language. Countries with transitional bilingual education programs include Spain, where bilingual education is offered in regions with co-official languages such as Catalan and Basque, and South Africa, where bilingual education is provided in English and indigenous languages (Khalilova et al., 2024).

Dual language programs integrate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds and provide instruction in both the majority and target languages. These programs promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and cross-cultural competence among all students. Examples of countries with dual language programs include Singapore, which promotes proficiency in English as a mother tongue language, and Belgium, where Dutch-speaking and French-speaking students attend bilingual schools (Zaafour, 2024).

They can also contribute to the economic and social integration of immigrants and minority groups by providing access to education, employment, healthcare, and other essential services. Integration policies may face challenges such as resistance from majority groups, inadequate resources, and competing political agendas (Birnie, 2024). They may also perpetuate inequalities by focusing on assimilation rather than recognition of cultural diversity and by failing to address systemic barriers and discrimination faced by marginalized and disadvantaged groups (Ebirim et al., 2024).

The effectiveness of integration policies depends on factors such as political context, social attitudes toward diversity, and institutional support for multiculturalism. Policies tailored to multicultural societies' specific needs and realities are more likely to promote social equity and inclusion successfully. Despite the challenges and limitations, several successful strategies and best practices have been identified in implementing integration policies (Gonzalez & Moore, 2024).

Providing equitable access to high-quality education for all students, regardless of background, is essential for promoting social equity and inclusion. Inclusive education practices, such as differentiated instruction, culturally responsive pedagogy, and support for students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, can help address educational inequalities and promote academic success for all students. Engaging communities in the design, implementation, and evaluation of integration policies is crucial for ensuring their effectiveness and relevance (Wafa, 2024).

Community-based initiatives, such as parent involvement programs, cultural exchange events, and partnerships between schools and community organizations, can help build trust, foster collaboration, and promote social cohesion within multicultural societies (Abdullayeva & Asatullaev, 2024). Implementing anti-discrimination measures and promoting human rights and equality are essential for combating prejudice, bias, and discrimination within multicultural societies. Policies that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in education, employment, housing, and other areas can help create more equitable and inclusive societies for all members.

Language support services, such as language classes, translation, interpretation services, and bilingual education programs, can help address language barriers and facilitate the social integration of immigrants and linguistic minority groups. Language support services should be accessible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the needs of diverse populations (Messina Dahlberg and Gross, 2024).

1.4. Case Studies

The multilingual education policies in Country X prioritize preserving and promoting linguistic diversity while ensuring equitable access to education for all students. These policies include Bilingual Education Programs; Country X offers bilingual education programs that provide instruction in both the majority language and the languages spoken by

linguistic minority groups. These programs aim to develop students' language proficiency while promoting academic achievement and cultural understanding.

Language Immersion Programs. Country X also offers language immersion programs that immerse students in a second or foreign language, providing instruction primarily or exclusively in the target language. These programs are designed to foster bilingualism and biliteracy among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Country X recognizes the importance of preserving and promoting heritage languages and offers heritage language education programs that focus on maintaining and developing proficiency in the languages spoken by students' families or communities.

Transitional bilingual education programs are available for students learning the majority language while maintaining proficiency in their native language. These programs provide instruction in students' native language(s) while gradually transitioning to instruction in the majority language (D'Angelo, 2024). The multilingual education policies in Country X have successfully promoted social equity and inclusion by providing equitable access to education for all students, regardless of their linguistic background.

They are fostering linguistic and cultural diversity within schools and communities and promoting academic achievement and success for students from linguistic minority backgrounds. Country Y is another multicultural society with a diverse linguistic landscape. However, unlike Country X, Country Y faces significant challenges in promoting social equity and inclusion through its multilingual education policies. The multilingual education policies in Country Y are less comprehensive and may lack sufficient resources and support for students from linguistic minority backgrounds.

While some bilingual and immersion programs are available, access to these programs may be limited, particularly in rural or underserved areas (Aharoni, 2024). Limited access to high-quality education in their native language, inadequate support for bilingualism and biliteracy development, and cultural and linguistic marginalization within educational settings. Socio-economic disparities that impact educational outcomes. Despite these challenges, there are efforts underway in Country Y to improve multilingual education policies and promote social equity and inclusion.

These efforts include Increasing funding and resources for bilingual and immersion programs, providing professional development and support for teachers working with linguistically diverse students, and implementing culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive practices within schools and classrooms. They may also involve engaging communities and stakeholders in designing and implementing multilingual education policies and analyzing Key Findings and Lessons Learned from Case Studies.

Key findings and lessons can be drawn by comparing Case Study 1 and Case Study 2, such as Comprehensive Policies Lead to Better Outcomes. With its comprehensive multilingual education policies, Country X has been more successful in promoting social equity and inclusion than Country Y, where policies may be less comprehensive, and resources may be lacking. Both case studies highlight the importance of equitable access to education for all students, regardless of their linguistic background.

Access to high-quality multilingual education programs is essential for promoting social equity and ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to succeed. Engaging communities and stakeholders in designing and implementing multilingual education policies is critical for their success. In Country X, community involvement has helped to build support for multilingual education and foster collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Both countries must continue to work towards improving their multilingual education policies and practices to address the evolving needs of linguistically diverse students.

1.5. Challenges and Future Directions

Multicultural societies face challenges in implementing integration policies to promote social equity and inclusion in education. Some common challenges include Multicultural societies often have entrenched structural inequalities based on race, ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status (Medin, 2024). These inequalities can manifest in disparities in access to education, educational quality, and educational outcomes, perpetuating social inequities (Li & Shen, 2024).

Linguistic diversity can present educational challenges, particularly for students from linguistic minority backgrounds. Language barriers may hinder students' academic achievement, limit their access to educational opportunities, and contribute to feelings of exclusion and marginalization within educational settings (Van, 2024). Cultural differences among students and communities can impact educational experiences and outcomes (Khanam et al., 2024). Cultural

misunderstandings, stereotypes, and biases may create barriers to social inclusion and hinder efforts to promote diversity and equity within schools and communities.

Socio-economic disparities, including poverty, housing insecurity, and lack of access to resources, can exacerbate educational inequalities and hinder social mobility for marginalized and disadvantaged groups. Addressing socio-economic disparities is essential for promoting social equity and inclusion in education (Ogedengbe et al., 2023). Implicit biases and discrimination based on factors such as race, ethnicity, language, and socio-economic status can influence educational policies, practices, and interactions within schools, perpetuating inequalities and limiting opportunities for marginalized groups.

Ensure equitable funding and resource allocation for schools serving diverse populations, focusing on addressing the needs of marginalized and disadvantaged students (Woldegiorgis & Chiramba, 2024). It may involve redistributing resources to schools with higher concentrations of students from low-income backgrounds, investing in programs and services that support students' academic and socio-emotional needs, and providing targeted support for schools serving linguistically diverse populations (Leung et al., 2024).

Implement culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive practices within schools and classrooms to create learning environments that value and affirm students' cultural identities, backgrounds, and experiences (Uwaoma et al., 2023). This may include incorporating diverse perspectives and resources into the curriculum, fostering positive relationships between students and teachers from diverse backgrounds, and providing professional development for educators on culturally responsive teaching practices (Uwaoma et al., 2023).

Provide language support services, such as bilingual education programs, language classes, translation and interpretation services, and multicultural counseling services, to address language barriers and facilitate the academic success and social integration of linguistically diverse students (Li, 2024). Language support services should be accessible, culturally appropriate, and responsive to the needs of diverse populations (Abraham et al., 2024). Engage communities and stakeholders in designing, implementing, and evaluating integration policies and educational initiatives.

Community-based initiatives, such as parent involvement programs, community partnerships, and cultural exchange events, can help build trust, foster collaboration, and promote social cohesion within multicultural societies (Suhaeb & Tamrin, 2024). Implement anti-discrimination measures and promote human rights and equality within educational settings (Baumgärtel and Ganty/, 2024.). This may involve raising awareness about implicit bias and discrimination, implementing policies and practices that promote diversity, equity, and inclusion, and providing training and support for educators on anti-discrimination strategies (Ullman et al., 2024).

Future research and policy development efforts could focus on the following areas to further advance social equity and inclusion in education within multicultural societies: investigating the long-term impact of integration policies on educational outcomes, social inclusion, and intergroup relations within multicultural societies (HU and CHEUNG, 2024). Longitudinal studies could help assess the effectiveness of integration policies in promoting social equity and identify areas for improvement (Afolabi et al., 2023).

Explore the intersectionality of social identities and multiple marginalizations within educational contexts. Research could examine how factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, language, disability, and socio-economic status intersect to shape students' educational experiences and outcomes and identify strategies for addressing multiple forms of marginalization (Uwaoma et al., 2023).

Explore community-based approaches to promoting social equity and inclusion in education. Research could investigate the role of community organizations, grassroots initiatives, and participatory action research in empowering communities, building social capital, and promoting collective advocacy for educational equity (Dietrich et al., 2024). Evaluate the effectiveness of integration policies and educational initiatives in multicultural societies. Policy evaluation studies could assess the implementation fidelity and outcomes (Eboigbe et al., 2023).

Compare integration policies and educational practices across multicultural societies to identify promising strategies and best practices. International comparative studies could facilitate knowledge exchange, cross-cultural learning, and collaboration among global policymakers, researchers, and practitioners working to promote social equity and inclusion in education. By addressing these areas for future research and policy development, multicultural societies can continue to advance social equity and inclusion in education and create more equitable and inclusive learning environments for all students (Tariq, 2024).

2. Conclusion

Multilingual education policies are essential for promoting social equity and inclusion in multicultural societies by addressing language barriers, supporting the academic success of linguistically diverse students, and fostering cross-cultural competence. Successful integration policies and multilingual education practices require equitable funding and resource allocation, culturally responsive pedagogy, language support services, community engagement, and anti-discrimination measures—implications of the Study for Education Policy and Practice. Education practitioners should adopt culturally responsive pedagogy and inclusive practices within schools and classrooms to create learning environments that value and affirm students' cultural identities and linguistic backgrounds. Schools and educational institutions should provide language support services, such as bilingual education programs and language classes, to address language barriers and facilitate linguistically diverse students' academic success and social integration. Community engagement and collaboration are essential for successfully implementing integration policies and multilingual education practices. Schools should actively involve communities and stakeholders in designing, implementing, and evaluating educational initiatives. Continued research and evaluation are necessary to assess the effectiveness of integration policies and multilingual education practices, identify areas for improvement, and inform evidence-based policy development and practice. Multilingual education and social equity are critical components of inclusive education systems in multicultural societies. Multilingual education and integration policies contribute to social cohesion, educational equity, and individual well-being by promoting linguistic diversity, cultural understanding, and equal opportunities for all students. As we strive to create more equitable and inclusive societies, we must recognize the value of multilingual education in promoting social equity and prioritize developing and implementing policies and practices that support the diverse needs of students from multicultural backgrounds. By investing in multilingual education and social equity, we can build more resilient, vibrant, and cohesive communities where all individuals can thrive and contribute to the common good.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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