

Parents' and Teachers' Views on Academic Performance among Multilingual Young Learners

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ABSTRACT

This research focuses on young learners with multi-language ability, Indonesian & English, in its implementation at both school and home. This study examined how young students can speak Indonesian and English fluently as well as how it affects their academic performance at school. The main sources of information in this study were parents and teachers. Data were collected from 1 tuition center and 1 elementary school in Manado. The data included questionnaire, interview notes from both parents and teachers, along with researcher's observation notes. Academic performance of students is measured based on semester report from schools and quarterly report from tutoring consisting of 3 subjects, English, Science, and math. Those subjects selected are considered as preeminent subject by teachers and parents. The research results factors supporting young learners be able to speak more than one language and how multilingualism affects the academic performance of young learners at school on those 3 selected subjects.

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1. Introduction

According to research in the field of neuroscience, the process of cognitive maturation is what drives language development. Predispositions for language acquisition are already present by the 29th week of pregnancy, Eliot and Syc, (2008) and they have an impact on all aspects of mental development (Piper, 1998). Before the first word is said, a specific stage of cognitive development must be reached (McLean and Snyder-McLean, 1978). A youngster uses their linguistic ability to transfer their intended or experienced thinking onto another person's attention through vocal production, physical reaction, or gesture. The main form of communication for children with regular development is speech, which is also a sign of cognitive function. Important problems concerning learning two or more language systems simultaneously in childhood are raised by the rapid language development in the early years (Eliot & Syc, 2008; Huang et al., 2022; Rahman, 2016; Hasnia et al., 2022). A clearer understanding of how young children develop, use, and manage two or more languages as they process and express themselves in their daily functioning as well as in formal school learning is necessary given the importance of verbal language use as a medium for communication and for learning in school curricula.

Teachers in the classroom might ask if multilingual children's brains are so occupied with language that there is little room left for other cognitive functions. Even though some studies found no difference Karlson et al., (2015) and other studies even found some benefits for learning in multiple languages Armstrong and Rogers, (1997), research on school performance has tended to show bilingual and multilingual children performing at lower rates compared to English monolingual children (Hernández et al., 1994). In some developing nations, parents encourage their kids to learn English and spend a lot of money doing so. Such parents think that the only way to succeed academically is to learn English at a young age. A multilingual youngster obviously speaks and comprehends several languages, a criterion that has not always been applied in studies on how well multilingual kids do in school (Ray, 2021; Pupynina & Aralova, 2021; Andini, 2017). The study's target population was kids who could speak two or more languages with ease. However, these studies often overlook the unique linguistic abilities of multilingual children, focusing instead on academic outcomes without considering the broader cognitive and cultural benefits of multilingualism.

It's important to note that the target population of such studies should encompass children who fluently speak multiple languages, a criterion sometimes overlooked. Multilingual youngsters possess a rich linguistic repertoire, which

has not always been adequately accounted for in research examining their academic performance (Chakravarthi et al., 2021; Rahman & Weda, 2018; Aswad et al., 2019). By considering the proficiency and ease with which these children navigate multiple languages, researchers can better understand the complex interplay between language acquisition, cognitive development, and academic achievement in multilingual contexts.

The study is placed in relation to three key notions or conceptualizations of early language acquisition. In order to help their brains develop, young children need to be exposed to stimulating situations, according to research in neuroscience (Berk, 2014). The first three years of life seem to be the most crucial for both brain development and language learning. Second, the majority of kids can pick up two or more languages without experiencing any cognitive deficits (Petito et al., 2001). Thirdly, truly multilingual youngsters pick up the several languages organically from their surroundings and use them to meet their daily needs, such as learning for school. According to Piaget's constructivism theory of learning and Vygotsky's social-cultural theory of learning, children learn the languages they need to get by in their contexts by utilizing both their immediate surroundings (spontaneous play) and parental support (scaffolding).

2. Methodology

Children who already spoke two or more languages fluently were the focus of the study's sample of participants. 6 classrooms from a tuition center and a school with students ages 9 to 12 were studied. A bigger group of 130 kids was studied, which included a total of 27 bilingual kids. Data from the questionnaire revealed the children's history, interactions with their families and communities, and general multilingualism. Parent interviews aided in highlighting pursuits and interactions that had a direct bearing on studying English, Math, and Science outside of the classroom. The study looked at factors that lead to learning multiple languages at a young age, as well as how fluency in multiple languages relates to students' performance on schoolwork and whether using multiple languages to learn academic material has any benefits or drawbacks.

The focus placed on the three academic areas in the school curriculum was taken into consideration when choosing them, according to teachers and parents. An already established record of the kids' success in all of these important topics was provided by looking at the composite results on prior exams on these chosen subjects. Actual scores and, in some circumstances, performance records for each subject (English, Math, and Science) were accessible for some records. The quantitative scores were transformed into rankings in order to provide a single set of composite ranking scores for all three subjects that could be used for comparison and uniformity.

3. Result and Discussion

The results of the study revealed factors that led to and encouraged children to speak multiple languages, relationships between multilingualism and how well kids thought and communicated, and associations between multilingualism and success in particular academic subjects. The findings also highlighted the difficulties faced by multilingual children when they were required to use only their native tongue.

3.1. Factors that triggered and supported use of multiple languages

Having bilingual parents, playing with bilingual classmates, connecting with grandparents, and partaking in cultural events are some of the variables that stimulate and encourage the ability to use multiple languages fluently. The dual emphasis on both languages within the school curriculum, reading materials printed in different languages, composing games and songs in English and Indonesian were further aspects. Other helpful aspects included having a role model who spoke several languages and friends who did as well, particularly when the role models spoke the languages with pride.

Exposure to diverse linguistic environments during childhood significantly contributes to the development of bilingual proficiency. Children with bilingual parents often engage in multilingual interactions at home, fostering a natural aptitude for language switching and comprehension. Moreover, interactions with bilingual peers and extended family members, such as grandparents, offer additional opportunities for language practice and cultural exchange. Within educational settings, a dual emphasis on multiple languages in the curriculum, supplemented by reading materials and activities in different languages, further reinforces language acquisition. Having role models who fluently speak multiple languages and take pride in their linguistic abilities serves as inspiration, while friendships with multilingual individuals create supportive environments for language learning and usage. These varied experiences collectively nurture the fluency and confidence necessary for effectively navigating diverse linguistic landscapes.

3.2. Multilingual children’s thought processes

The findings indicated that youngsters were more easily understood when speaking Indonesian as opposed to English. Children were clearly using every language they knew. One teacher observed, "The kids utilize all their languages to attempt to be exact in the meaning they are sending through. When compelled to speak in only one language, particularly English, another teacher observed that "children tend to use words that interfere with the intended meaning because focus tends to be on the language, rather than the message."

It is evident that these children draw upon all available languages to convey their intended messages effectively, demonstrating a sophisticated understanding of language as a tool for communication. Moreover, the observation that restricting language use to a single language, particularly English, sometimes led to miscommunication suggests that forcing children into monolingual contexts may hinder their ability to fully express themselves and convey intended meanings. This emphasizes the importance of embracing and supporting multilingualism in educational settings to facilitate authentic and meaningful communication among diverse language learners.

Code switching was seen as a means of expressing oneself in a meaningful way. The multilingual kids combined terms from their own language with that from English. The majority of these code-switching activities involved play, but they were also used in formal classroom learning interactions with the teacher. Parents and teachers also affirmed the following: Children who use multiple languages are better able to think clearly and express themselves precisely, which in turn frees up their thought processes. Additionally, children who use multiple languages without restriction are given more freedom to express their creativity and foster their inquisitiveness.

3.3. School performance of multilingual children

Rankings of test scores are used as secondary data to determine how multilingual kids perform within their respective groups. Within a group of monolingual kids, the performance of each bilingual kid was estimated. On the score sheets of earlier tests and exams in English, Math, and Science, classroom teachers were asked to note any multilingual students who received composite scores in those subjects. In reference to the performances of the entire class, the multilingual children's scores and rankings were determined. Each multilingual child's score was emphasized along with its performance ranking. The composite scores for multilingual children's performance in English, Math, and Science are shown in Tables 1 and 2. The test results given were from a school and a tuition center. As stated in Table 1, four classrooms in the tuition center were observed.

Table 1. Performance of multilingual children in a tuition center

Grade/ Class	6A	6B	5	4
Number of Students	15	17	16	20
Number of Multilingual Children	5	3	3	4
Multilingual Children’s Performance in Ranking	1-7	1-9	3-8	2-14
Multilingual Children’s Performance (within Group)	Advance: 3 Intermediate: 2 Basic: 0	Advance: 1 Intermediate: 2 Basic: 0	Advance: 2 Intermediate: 0 Basic: 1	Advance: 1 Intermediate: 1 Basic: 3

Within the 4 classrooms of this tuition center, there were a total of 15 multilingual kids. 15 multilingual students were observed (representing 22.1% of the 68 students at this tuition center), and they performed within the advance 40%, intermediate 33.3%, and basic 20% ranges. Children who were monolingual, on the other hand, performed the advanced 20,5%, intermediate 26,4%, and fundamental 29,4%. Children who spoke multiple languages in this tutoring institution outperformed monolingual students overall.

A school was where two groups were seen. There were 32 and 30 children in each of these two huge classes, respectively. A overview of the findings from this school, as seen from the composite ranking scores in the three chosen subjects—English, Math, and Science—is shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Performance of multilingual children in a school

Grade/ Class	6A	6B
Number of Students	32	30
Number of Multilingual Children	7	5
Multilingual Children's Performance in Ranking	3-18	1-11
Multilingual Children's Performance (within Group)	Advance: 4 Intermediate: 3 Basic: 0	Advance: 4 Intermediate: 1 Basic: 0

In two groups, there were a total of 62 students at the school. 19% of the students—or 12—are bilingual children. 66.6% of the 12 students in this study who were observed are in the advanced stage. Surprisingly, none of the bilingual children are in the basic stage, while 33,3% are in the intermediate stage. Children who spoke only one language fared 24% better in advance, 34% better in intermediate, and 42% better in basic than multilingual kids. It is obvious that in this school, multilingual students outperformed monolingual students in terms of academic performance.

3.4. Disadvantages of using only one of the languages children spoke

Children who were obliged to utilize only one of their native languages suffered from the following drawbacks, according to the results of follow-up interviews with teachers and parents: Children's self-esteem was decreased because their uniqueness and creativity embedded in their languages were overlooked. Children's relationships with their extended families were weakened because there seemed to be no connection between what they were learning in school and what they were learning at home. Children might also have a tendency to focus solely on school requirements. There were no drawbacks to youngsters using various languages that were noted in questionnaires or interviews.

3.5. Discussion

Data from questionnaires and interviews with parents, as well as secondary data on children's performance, all lead in one particular direction, which is, support for children's multilingualism and usually strong academic performance. The information supplied and examined leads to the following conclusions:

- a) Within the informal settings of their homes and communities, children acquired numerous languages.
- b) The ability of young children to learn many languages was influenced by a number of factors, including parental multilingualism, interactions with extended family, and intergenerational interactions.
- c) The results of teacher interviews revealed that multilingual kids used all of their languages both formally and informally, outside of class as well as in class. During class, there was routine code switching.
- d) Teacher interviews revealed that when students spoke a variety of languages in class, communication was clearer than when they exclusively spoke Indonesian, the country's official language. However, classroom observations showed that Indonesian was the language that multilingual youngsters chose to express themselves the most clearly. The most challenging language for kids to express themselves in was English.
- e) The majority of the observed multilingual youngsters (65.4%) performed within the top 34% or higher of their respective groups; 21.5% performed within the upper half of their respective groups; and the remaining 13.1% performed across the spectrum, that is, from highest to lowest within the group. This indicates that, overall, 86.9% (65.4%+21.5%) of the multilingual youngsters observed performed at the 50th percentile or higher.

4. Conclusion

The results of this study emphasize the value of comprehensive learning for kids. Children require access to all educational resources, including the languages they speak, both at home and at school. The use of several languages was viewed by parents, teachers, and others as either non-existent or a good catalyst. A child's holistic learning is greatly influenced by parents and the larger family. To ensure that multilingual children learn to their fullest capacity, the predetermined school curriculum may allow for instructor freedom. Submersion is not a useful strategy for supporting young children who speak many languages, according to research (Jorden's et al., 2018). Making linkages between the languages that represent children's early learning base and their eventual exposure to the planned school curriculum must come first. Children's knowledge is widened to foster curiosity and creativity when they study ideas from various perspectives in the languages they speak. It was discovered that the young children's multilingualism and use of various languages in academic settings were valuable assets. This could aid in reducing social inequality in early schooling in Indonesia Baum and Hernandez, (2019) and other contexts with a similar language makeup.

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