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Teaching Bilingual to Young Learners: The Pros and Cons

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Abstract

Saat ini, pendidikan bilingual sangat diminati oleh anak-anak Indonesia. Mereka mengenal bahasa kedua (Bahasa Inggris) di rumah mereka dan juga di sekolah. Meskipun masih ada beberapa kepercayaan yang salah di masyarakat, terkait pengajaran bilingual ini, beberapa orang tua tetap berpegang pada keyakinan bahwa bilingualisme baik untuk pertumbuhan anak mereka—baik secara kognitif maupun verbal. Artikel ini berfokus pada beberapa pro dan kontra yang tersebar luas di antara orang tua. Penelitian ini dilakukan dengan pendekatan literatur. Terdapat tiga hal ppro dan kontra mengenai bilingualisme pada awal kehidupan dibahas di sini, dengan penjelasan ilmiah dari para ahli. Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa bilingualisme mendorong kinerja yang lebih baik dalam perkembangan bahasa anak-anak dan sekaligus memperkuat fungsi eksekutif anak-anak. Hasil penelitian dianalisis berdasarkan hasil literature review.

Kata Kunci: *Bilingualism, young learners, language development*

Abstrak

These days, bilingual education is highly sought for Indonesian kids. They are exposed to the second language in their homes in addition to receiving it in school. Even though there are still some false beliefs in society, some parents stick to their beliefs because they think bilingualism is good for their kids' growth—both cognitively and verbally. The article focuses on several pros and cons that parents are disseminating. The specific basis for this research was a review of the literature. The five prevalent misunderstandings regarding bilingualism in early life were addressed here, with expert scientific explanations provided. The results show that bilingualism promotes both better performance for the children's language development and concurrently robust executive functioning in children. Findings are analyzed in light of pertinent research and provided an explanation using.

Keyword: *Bilingualism, young learners, language development*

INTRODUCTION

The ability to speak two languages in everyday interactions is known as bilingualism (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). Nowadays, bilingualism is a common practice among people nowadays. Children speaking more than one language in their daily lives has become extremely widespread. According to Edward (2004), the majority of individuals on the planet are multilingual, having learned at least two languages. The pace increases because global human interaction is becoming both more intense and boundless at the same time. Furthermore, the ability to speak two languages in everyday interactions is known as bilingualism (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). Similarly, those who can regularly speak in two or more languages or dialects are considered bilingual, according to Baker (2001). It is predicted that one in three people in this world is bilingual or multilingual (Wei, 2000).

Despite the ongoing dispute, bilingualism is growing more and more popular among parents these days, not just in Indonesia but all across the world. Due to their natural ability to speak both their native tongue and Indonesian, the majority of people in Indonesia are multilingual. Additionally, there are a lot of bilinguals in various US states. For instance, it is anticipated that in California, more than 50% of youngsters will become bilingual—that is, speak more than one language—in the next 12 years (García, McLaughlin, Spodek, & Saracho, 1995). There is still much to be learned about bilingualism, and conversations about it are ongoing. Parents are quite worried about this situation, particularly those whose children have been multilingual in their daily lives and who hail from middle-class homes (Bialystok, 2016). It is unavoidable, therefore, that there are false beliefs regarding this issue among the international community. The majority of misconceptions regarding this trend are based solely on myths rather than on scientific data. Many individuals believe that bilingual education for young children will just harm their cognitive and language development.

When it comes to school context, English continues to be considered a foreign language that will confuse students in early childhood. English was previously taught to students in Indonesian primary schools, and many kindergartens as well. English is no longer taught in elementary schools by the government, nevertheless, as it is thought to be a demanding and challenging topic for young students. Additionally, it is thought that teaching English to young children may lead to bilingualism, which will negatively affect the kids. The phenomenon in other country, like Malaysia, is entirely different. The country encourages its students to start learning English as soon as possible since it is also their second language at the same time. The majority of kindergarten programs even provide English as a topic to their students and make English as their daily language to communicate.

English is also taught as a second language in Malaysia, where it is extensively utilized for public speaking, education, and other purposes. The government has also started introducing new curricula to support the advancement of English language proficiency in order to motivate the younger generation to be more competitive in today's and tomorrow's global society. Additionally, the government prioritizes bilingualism (Bahasa Malaysia and English) in order to guarantee pupils' English language fluency.

In another case, in USA, Bilingualism is perceived in the United States as an attempt to provide children with the chance to acquire a second language at an early age (King & Fogle, 2006). The schools introduce Spanish and French to the early year students. Due to the overwhelming desire of parents for their children to be bilingual, there is a rapid expansion of two-way bilingual education programs, which teach both languages children two languages (Center for Applied Linguistics, 2005). It is assumed that a supported education program helps to continue bilingualism when it is established in the family. Starting with videos, flashcards, and books in the target language, parents could help their kids learn the language. This article will talk about the pros and cons that are arise among parents and majority of people in Indonesia.

Research Questions

This research is aimed to answer some of the pros and cons that has been spread out among parents lately. They are:

1. What effects does bilingual education have on a child's cognitive growth?
2. Does bilingual show better performance?
3. Is language delay caused by early teaching of bilingualism?

Since these questions remain unanswered among parents nowadays, so this writing will try to elaborate it briefly.

4. Will bilingual children perform better than adult learners?
5. Should parents of bilingual children only speak one language to kids?

RESEARCH METHOD

This research is conducted with literature approach which involved finding, reading, analyzing, evaluating, and summarizing scholarly works (journals and articles) about bilingualism in early life. All of the significant theories were gathered and recorded in a note in order to assess the data. This study aids in the identification of problems and research gaps as well as teaching the researchers about the nature and history of the subject. Finally,

the researcher draw conclusions from their investigation. The analysis then being explained to give better understanding on the research question given above.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. What effects does bilingual education have on a child's cognitive growth?

Many parents frequently wonder when it is best to start teaching their kids a second language. The inquiry pertains to whether the extra language education would facilitate or impede their child's cognitive growth. Some people may view bilingualism as a need or way of life (consider families where family members speak many languages), but for many others, making the option might raise a lot of concerns about how it will impact their child's cognitive development.

When it comes to bilingual educational materials, the main worry of most parents is whether or not their child will become confused when exposed to a second language at a young age, which is a crucial period for language acquisition. Given the importance of communication skills for the proper development of almost all other cognitive learning processes in an individual's life, it is understandable why parents should be concerned about anything that might impede their child's ability to learn languages. So, the question is: Are these worries about cognitive delays legitimate, or are they based on out-of-date scientific results? The most recent research has demonstrated that bilingual children benefit greatly in terms of cognitive development. In addition to the fact that the theory of confusion has been refuted, studies have shown that children who learn a second (or third) language in their early school years have significantly higher levels of overall learning comprehension, as well as more developed moral senses and problem-solving skills than their monolingual peers.

According to the Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development (EECD), "Research has shown that, contrary to what many people once believed, bilingualism does not trigger confusion, has no inherent negative impact on children's development, and even has some socio-cognitive advantages." These benefits manifest as higher levels of intellectual focus, improved test scores overall, improved problem-solving ability, an enhanced awareness of nonverbal context, and generally more malleable cognitive capacities. Put differently, new research has demonstrated that early bilingual education not only has no detrimental effects on cognitive development but also offers a host of priceless advantages.

2. Does bilingual children show better performance?

Bilinguals frequently have several advantages, particularly when it comes to social comprehension. Given that bilingual youngsters are typically exposed to a wide variety of languages and speakers of those languages, this is not remarkable. Furthermore, according to Yow and Markman (2011), bilingual kids typically have an improved capacity for differentiating language elements, such as voice tonality.

In terms of cognitive abilities, bilinguals outperform monolinguals when switching between tasks and responding to different stimuli (Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012). When youngsters are able to focus and adjust to changes without distraction, it's known as executive functioning. When speaking, bilinguals must transition between both languages and activate them. The brain must be kept engaged in this situation, and the language that is not selected must be held.

3. Is language delay caused by early teaching of bilingualism?

The most widespread myth among parents regarding bilingualism is that it results in linguistic delay. Conversely, studies reveal that when calculating vocabulary from both languages, bilingual children's vocabulary is equal to that of monolingual children. Like monolinguals, they can correct someone if they mispronounce something or utter something obscure in one of the languages (Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams, 2013). Parents can take their children to a pediatrician or language pathologist for additional evaluation if they see any issues with their speech development.

The problem lies in the fact that not all therapists are properly trained to address the learning needs of bilingual children. As a result, bilingual children may be incorrectly diagnosed with language disorders or delays. Bilingual kids still begin talking between the ages of 8 and 15 months, even though they could start a bit later than monolingual kids (Lowry, 2016). Furthermore, multilingual babies acquire their grammar according to the same schedule and patterns as monolingual kids when they start using short sentences.

It demonstrates that bilingualism has no effect whatsoever on speech delays. The idea that multilingual kids are easily confused, that their vocabulary is divided between two languages, and that they don't completely comprehend when or how to use each language, is the source of this misconception. Speech-language pathologist Fab Leroy, M.S., CCC-SLP, of Expressible Speech Therapy, states that bilingual kids reach developmental milestones at the same time as monolingual kids. It is not the effect of learning two languages if a child has a speech or language delay; rather, it will be apparent in both languages. When a child speaks in two languages, it does not necessarily mean they are confused.

4. Will bilingual children perform better than adult learners?

Early in life, the human brain is more receptive to learning new languages. Furthermore, there are more favorable conditions for younger learners of new languages. Children will have many, varied, and fascinating opportunities to learn about the component that built up their original language because to the extensive exposure they receive while they are young. It follows that younger children are generally thought to acquire a second language more quickly and effortlessly than adults. According to the critical period hypothesis theory of language learning, which is referenced here, the human brain functions best during the early stages of development, which are generally thought to occur between birth and the ages of 12 and 13 (Long, 1990). Because of this, learning a language at this period is rather easy and results in maximum language competency (Genesee, 2009). As kids grow older, things change drastically. Unlike when kids pick up languages organically from individuals around them, they learn languages in the classroom where the grammar and vocabulary are explained to them. Although providing definitions and explanations can be helpful, they don't have the same impact as actually learning a language from experienced adults (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

Additionally, bilinguals can perform better when it comes to mastering grammar and language rules. According to Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013), bilinguals who acquire two languages from a young age are referred to as simultaneous bilinguals, whereas those who acquire a main language first and a second language later in life are referred to as sequential bilinguals. Research indicates that bilinguals who are simultaneous have a few key benefits over those who are sequential. Their accents are generally better, their vocabulary is larger, their grammatical skills are stronger, and their real-time language processing abilities are superior. However, those who learn Spanish and English from birth show an outstanding capacity for grammar analysis. For example, it might be difficult for adults and children learning Spanish after they have mastered their native tongue to grasp the complex gender in Spanish.

Even if parents have not had the opportunity to introduce their kids to bilingualism from an early age, there is still opportunity for them to do so as adults. To catch up on rigorous exposure to the target language, parents can enroll their kids in bilingual preschool or daycare. The exposure they get in the school will really help the kids to absorb more vocabulary and language structure in a better way.

5. Should parents of bilingual children only speak one language to kids?

The one-person-one-language (ODOP) approach, which was proposed more than a century ago, is one that is currently well-liked by parents (Ronjat, 1913). This approach is thought to be successful in keeping kids from becoming confused by language. De Houwer (2007), however, challenges this notion, arguing that children who receive equal exposure to both languages from a multilingual parent frequently do better in both languages. Furthermore, it is critical to remember that young infants pick up language through engaging with and listening to other speakers, according to Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams (2013). A successful multilingual home can be built on this foundation, but it is not the only one, and one-parent, one-language households can also fail. Balance issues can be one.

Both languages should be spoken to kids frequently and in a range of contexts. They might not receive enough exposure for the "less important" language to spontaneously develop if they only hear it from one parent. It is particularly true that kids do o't believe they need the "less important" language when both parents speak the "more important" language. It is crucial to identify alternative exposure sources and strategies for generating need in these situations. Granparents who speak only one language can be very beneficial. Is it possible for parents to hire a paid babysitter who speaks the other language, perhaps a cousin or grandmother, to watch the kids? Do they attend a daycare or playgroup where the other language is spoken?

Infants must be regularly exposed to language, including its sounds, rhythms, vocabulary, and grammar. Their performance in both languages will improve with increased exposure. Increased exposure to vocabulary increases a child's likelihood of acquiring a language. To further increase their exposure to the language, Pearson (2008) advises kids to play with other kids who speak the same target language. When it comes to language ways that work best for early bilingual kids, the best advice is to choose any approach that promotes exposure to each child's native tongue in both high-quality and high-quantity.

Maintaining the natural state of affairs is another issue. Children are likely to resist being made to perform anything strange or embarrassing if they feel like they are being forced to. Clearly defined guidelines, such as speaking one language on some days and another on others, can be difficult to uphold and contribute to a bad attitude.

The problem of exclusion is still another. The kids will understand that whenever they speak to their father in Turkish, they are cutting off their mother from the conversation if one of the parents does not speak the other's language (let's say the American woman doesn't speak Turkish).

A few structured approaches that might be employed in this case include one-person, one-language, one-language at home, one-language outside, designated days of the week to speak a particular language, or mornings/afternoons. Parents only need to modify it to fit the dynamics of their own household (Lanza, 2004). In order for bilingual children to become fully proficient in both languages, parents and other adult caregivers must take the initiative to ensure that the children receive adequate exposure to both languages (Genesee, 2009).

When they hear two languages being spoken around them, do not they get confused? No, is the succinct response. Youngsters have an acute sensitivity to language variations. They pick up on variations between males and women's speech patterns, the distinction between kind and rude speech patterns, and other topics very fast, even if they are only exposed to one language. For kids, being multilingual is just another way that people differ from one another.

CONCLUSION

This study looked at the scientific answers to five of the most common questions parents have concerning early bilingualism. The illusions that parents hear regarding early bilingualism need to be dispelled because the research on the subject has not been validated by science (Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008). In order to support their children in becoming successful bilinguals from an early age, parents of bilingual children should simply allow their children to have sufficient exposure to the second language (L2).

In order to maintain children's mastery of balance, interaction in the first language (L1) should be maintained while they get older. In this case, more people in the community should speak the language that is not already in use (Pearson, 2008). In this instance, there are two things to consider: first, acquiring a second language at any age might be a technique to promote early development. It implies that becoming a parent is never too early or too late.

It is clear from the previous statement that multilingual kids are not confused. They combine the two languages in a process known as "code mixing," which is also done by adult bilinguals and is an indication that their bilingual brain is operating. Second,

bilingualism improves a child's verbal and cognitive development. Children's executive functioning will also be activated by learning two languages. Thirdly, there are other strategies that can be employed in addition to the one-parent, one-language approach. Parents can also use it in conjunction with other tactics, such as learning a language specifically for a location. Experts generally agree that acquiring a second language at a younger age is beneficial and has scientific validity.

Lastly, the fact that bilingual children who speak both languages have an equal vocabulary to monolingual children who speak only one language dispels myths regarding bilingual children who experience language delays. Based on the aforementioned rationale, it may be concluded that early bilingualism benefits children's language development.

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