

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF BEING BILINGUAL CHILDREN: A CASE STUDY

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Abstrak

Bilingualisme menggambarkan kemampuan dalam menggunakan dan memahami dua bahasa, terutama dalam komunikasi sehari-hari. Bilingualisme adalah bagaimana seseorang dapat menggunakan kedua bahasa tersebut dalam berbicara, mendengarkan, membaca, dan juga menulis yang dikaitkan dengan pengetahuan kognitif. Saat ini, bilingualisme merupakan hal yang umum dan sekitar separuh populasi dunia adalah bilingual. Hal ini disebabkan oleh faktor teknologi, ekonomi, pendidikan, dan budaya yang turut menyebabkan terjadinya kontak bahasa. Namun, pendapat masyarakat mengenai penanganan anak bilingual terbagi menjadi dua sisi yang berbeda, oleh karena itu dilakukan penelitian mengenai topik ini. Hasil analisis pendapat tersebut menghasilkan pertanyaan konsisten yang terstruktur dalam tulisan ini: (1) Apakah bilingualisme mempunyai manfaat bagi tumbuh kembang anak; (2) Apakah anak-anak bilingual lebih mungkin mengalami kesulitan berbahasa; dan (3) Perlukah orang tua mendukung anaknya menjadi bilingual. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menjadi panduan bagi orang tua dalam membantu mengembangkan perkembangan bahasa anak dengan baik. Melalui meta-analisis, hasil penelitian diperoleh setelah disimpulkan dengan menggunakan pendekatan penelitian deduktif. Sebagai hasilnya, pertumbuhan anak bilingual pada dasarnya tidak jauh berbeda dengan anak monolingual. Tantangan yang dihadapi oleh anak-anak bilingual bersifat sementara dan akan berkurang seiring berjalannya waktu ketika mereka menjadi fasih. Oleh karena itu, penting bagi orang tua untuk mendukung anak mereka dalam menguasai bahasa kedua.

Kata Kunci: bilingualisme, anak bilingual, perkembangan bahasa.

Abstract

Bilingualism describes the ability to use and understand two languages, especially in daily communication. Bilingualism is how someone can use both languages in speaking, listening, reading, and also writing which is associated with cognitive knowledge. Nowadays, bilingualism is common and about half of the world's population is bilingual. This is due to technological, economic, educational, and cultural factors that contribute to causing language contact. However, society's opinion on dealing with bilingual children is divided into two distinct opposite sides, thus research is conducted on this topic. The results of the analysis of these opinions generate consistent questions that structured this paper: (1) Does bilingualism have benefits for children's growth; (2) Are bilingual children more likely to experience language difficulties; and (3) Should parents support their children to be bilingual. This paper aims to be a guide for parents to help develop their children's language development properly. Through meta-analysis, the research results are obtained after concluding using a deductive research approach. As a result, the growth of bilingual children is basically not much different from monolingual children. The challenges faced by bilingual children are momentary and decrease over time as they become fluent. Therefore, it is important for parents to support their children in acquiring a second language.

Keywords: bilingualism, bilingual children, language development.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the globalization era, parents tend to have the desire to raise their children to be bilingual and even multilingual, because this will help their children socialize in the future. The issue is whether being a bilingual child is beneficial or will only be a challenge for the children. This issue grows two different points of view, there are

some parents believe that being bilingual is damaging to children's language development. On the other hand, other parents argue that mastering at least two languages is an advantage for children's future. However, could this belief be proven or is it just an assumption? In fact, the human brain has the ability to master more than one language in their lifetime.

Bilingualism describes the ability to use and understand two languages, especially in daily communication. Bilingualism is how someone can use both languages in speaking, listening, reading, and also writing which is associated with cognitive knowledge. Sociolinguistically, bilingualism can be interpreted as the use of two languages by a speaker in his interactions with other people alternately (Chaer & Agustina, 2010). Nowadays, bilingualism is common and it is estimated that about half of the world's population is bilingual. The number of children who are able to speak more than one language in their homes and acquire English as a second or third language has increased (Espinosa 2015). This is due to technological, economic, educational, and cultural factors that contribute to causing language contact. In 2016, European Union citizens spoke at least one foreign language indicating that they are bilingual. Especially in a country that basically has a lot of diversity of languages, it would be possible for every resident to at least speak two different languages.

Society's opinion in dealing with bilingual children is divided into two distinct opposite sides, therefore the research is conducted on this topic, especially focusing on the basis of bilingual language learning in children. This paper aims to discuss the benefits and challenges that are faced by bilingual children in the social and school environment. First, by reviewing the effects of bilingual ability on brain function performance, including emotional control and memory. Furthermore, discusses how speaking ability changes after acquiring a second language. Lastly, it investigates the long-term effects of children mastering more than one language. The results of the analysis generate consistent questions which structured this paper,

1. Does bilingualism have benefits for children's growth?
2. Are bilingual children more likely to experience language difficulties?
3. Should parents support their children to be bilingual?

METHODOLOGY

According to sociolinguistic experts, sociolinguistic studies tend to be more qualitative. Qualitative research was research that aimed to understand phenomena that focused on the behavior, perceptions, motivations, and actions experienced by research subjects then described in the form of words and language, in particular natural contexts, and by utilizing various natural methods. The purpose of this qualitative research was to explain a phenomenon profusely by collecting a lot of data, which showed the importance of the phenomenon being studied. Therefore, a qualitative approach was chosen to discuss the problems in this study.

This paper used library research where data was collected after analyzing various articles and journals on the same topic. Research topics revolved around children who grow up in countries where there is more than one language. This was because those children would have a high probability of becoming bilingual. Through meta-analysis, the research results were obtained after concluding using a deductive research approach. Then that was elucidated to make it easier to understand the results of the research so that this paper can be a guide for parents to help develop their children's language development properly.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Benefits of Bilingualism in Children's Growth

Fundamentally, the growth of bilingual children is the same as monolingual children. However, there are several benefits that bilingual children acquire as their language experience influences cognitive function during their growth. Bilingual children indicate better cognitive skill performance in comparing two things and finding differences. They are able to respond correctly and respond more quickly because they are used to doing this sort of thing when acquiring two languages.

In some cases, bilingual children appear to have better skills in comprehending others' thoughts, desires, viewpoints, and preferences compared to monolingual children. Bilingual children also have high sensitivity to particular features of communication such as tone of voice (Yow & Markman, 2011). Furthermore, bilingual children also tend to be able to make a general or broad statement of information from one event to the next, indicating that they are advantaged in long-term memory. Sensitivity to the language environment is dominated by bilingual children because bilingual children have a tendency to try to learn other languages (become multilingual) which allows them to survive in the future such as getting broader social relations and employment opportunities.

One of the most important benefits of being bilingual children is that experience will make them easier to learn various languages which are important for their social life such as when school, making friends from various backgrounds, traveling, communicating with extended family members, interacting with foreigners, and even learning of other culture and history (Heinlein and Williams 2013). This portrays that being bilingual is beneficial for children's social understanding. In addition, bilingual children have more choices in possessing communication and are more sensitive to the choice of language they use in different contexts.

Daubert and Ramani (in 2019), created a comparison study between 74 bilinguals and monolinguals

by completing a non-verbal working memory test and a metathetical test involving addition, identifying numbers, and also comparing non-symbolic quantities. The results indicate that bilingual children showed higher scores on the addition and number identification tests. It is concluded that bilingual children's improving working memory has a positive impact on the development of mathematics. According to research conducted by cognitive neuroscientists, in the early days of human babies' life have a vast innate capacity to hear, process, and learn multiple languages. The babies are already capable of distinguishing the phonology (or sounds) in each language that is perceived into separate language categories (Heinlein and Williams 2013). By comprehending the sounds, bilingual children will be able to know what language is spoken in every language-processing situation whereas monolinguals who only speak one language certainly do not have this ability.

Whatever language bilingual children acquire, they will experience some of these benefits compared to monolingual children. Bilingual children grow up gaining more knowledge from the two languages they acquire. Becoming bilingual also leads to brain training by constantly switching back and forth between both languages. Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that bilingualism is not the only experience that provides cognitive advantages. Similar cognitive gains can also be obtained with other types of training.

2. Language Difficulties Experienced by Bilingual Children

On the other hand, there are some challenges that must be faced by bilingual children related to the language they acquire. One of those challenges usually happens when they experience language dominance, a condition when the children do not balance using both languages because one language is mastered faster than the other one. Therefore, the major concern that parents bear about raising children being bilingual is that it will cause confusion to children when communicating. It is worried that this could hinder the child's fluency in using language or known as DLD (Development Language Disorder). However, the United States Department of Health and Human Services (in 2022) reports that "Learning more than one language at a time does not cause DLD. The disorder can affect both multilingual children and monolingual children."

In general, monolingual children tend to have wider linguistic resources in a language than bilingual children. Hence, bilingual children may experience delays during their language development compared to monolingual children. Nevertheless, these delays are typically momentary and decrease over time as they become fluent.

Furthermore, there are no valid studies that evoked that bilingual children will experience confusion. If there is a situation where bilingual children do not know or cannot quickly recover the proper word in one language, they may borrow words from another language they master. This could be seen as a signal of the ingenuity of bilingual children rather than declare it as a signal of confusion.

Borrowing words from other languages in the case of bilingualism can be referred to as code-mixing and code-switching. Code-mixing is a condition when bilingual children mix words from two different languages that they master in the same sentence. On the other hand, code-switching is a condition when bilingual children change their language completely before returning to their dominant language. These two codes are a normal part of being bilingual and they don't use it haphazardly. Bilingual children still use code-mixing and code-switching with their common sense just as they try to obey grammar rules (Heinlein and Williams 2013).

3. The Importance of Supporting Children to be Bilingual

Children have the capacity and are neurologically prepared to learn more than one language, and cognitively they gain advantages from managing the linguistic processing required when becoming bilingual (Espinosa 2015). Parents are one of the important factors for children in supporting them to acquire a second language. Children who get positive encouragement from their parents tend to succeed more quickly in acquiring their second language compared to children who are self-taught from listening to adult conversations. Inasmuch as language development in each child can vary, therefore important to create an environment that encourages language exploration in children.

There are certain things that should be done throughout the children's bilingual journey such as being patient, consistent, and supportive. Encouraging children to become bilingual requires constant long-term exposure to both languages. This exposure shall provide more opportunities for children to practice the language and maintain positive support for language learning. Aside from parents, other family members and educators also play an important role in encouraging bilingualism by creating an environment that supports and enriches children's language development. Forcing children to be bilingual must be avoided because it will only traumatize them.

Furthermore, it's necessary to consider what techniques families can use to support children's bilingual development. Research has shown that a one-person-one-language approach can lead to the successful acquisition of the two languages, but that it does not invariably lead to

the successful acquisition of the two languages (Heinlein and Williams 2013). In addition, parents could specify time routines defined for each language such as one language applied from morning to afternoon, while another language can be used during the evening. Parents could also support children's language development by combining two languages in children's activities such as singing, reading books, exercising, and playing. This activity makes language learning interactive and enjoyable for children. During children's growth, support their language maintenance by equipping access to formal language classes, tutors, or online learning websites to assist them continue to expand their language skills and literacy in both languages.

CONCLUSION

The growth of bilingual children is basically not much different from monolingual children. The opinion of people who believe bilingualism will be more disadvantageous to children is concluded to be wrong. In fact, there are more benefits that bilingual children receive in their language development. They can respond correctly and quickly, comprehend other people better, are more sensitive to the tone of voice and distinguishing phonology, and tend to have long-term memory. However, there are also some challenges that must be faced by bilingual children which usually happens when they experience language dominance. Bilingual children more often experience confusion and delays compared to monolingual children, but these difficulties are momentary and decrease over time as they become fluent.

Childhood is the ideal time to acquire a second language and is a critical period for children's language development. Therefore, it is important for parents to support their children in acquiring a second language. For the successful development of bilingualism in children, parents must provide more opportunities for them to be exposed and speak to both languages. Finally, the benefits of being bilingual are more credibly discovered during childhood and the challenges of being bilingual are overcome as they grow up to be fluent.

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