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 Fakultas Sastra Universitas Ekasakti	JURNAL JIPS (Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Scholastic)	
	Vol. 8 No. 2 ISSN : 2579-5449 (media cetak)	E-ISSN : 2597-6540 (media online)

Teaching Second Language For Young Learners: Is Earlier Always Better?

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Abstract

These days, Indonesian children are very interested in multilingual education. Not only do they learn the second language in school, but they are also exposed to it at home. Although bilingual education has been an option for schooling for more than 50 years in many nations, there is still debate over it, particularly with regard to whether it is suitable for all students. Then, even if there are still certain misconceptions in society, some parents refuse to change because they believe bilingualism benefits their children's development on both a linguistic and cognitive level. This review looks at studies assessing how bilingual education affects students' language and literacy proficiency, academic success. Particular focus is given to variables like the environment, which influences children with bilingual education. Here, several common misconceptions about bilingualism in early life were discussed and professional scientific justifications were given. The findings demonstrate that bilingualism fosters children's concurrent robust executive functioning and improved language development.

Keywords: Bilingual, Early Childhood Education, Children, Teacher, Parents

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I INTRODUCTION

The belief that teaching a second language to children at an early age leads to better outcomes is widespread among educators and parents alike. The rationale behind this idea is that younger learners are more receptive to language acquisition, making the process smoother and more natural. However, this assumption raises important questions: Is starting earlier truly

advantageous for every child? Are there specific conditions under which early language learning might be more or less effective? This essay explores the complexities of teaching a second language to young learners, examining whether earlier is indeed always better, or if the timing of language instruction should be more carefully tailored to individual needs and contexts.

Teaching second language to young learners have been very popular in Indonesia nowadays. This practice is also called by teaching bilingual. Bilingualism, as known, is not only adapted in Indonesia but also other countries. Bilingualism is the capacity to communicate in two languages in daily situations. Being multilingual is becoming more and more frequent among people. It is now very common for children to speak more than one language in their daily lives. The majority of people on the earth are bilingual, having studied at least two languages, according to Edward (2004). The reason for the increase in pace is because human connection on a worldwide scale is getting infinitely more intensive. Moreover, bilingualism is the capacity to communicate in two languages during daily contacts (Byers-Heinlein, 2013). In a similar vein, Baker (2001) defines bilingualism as the ability to speak two or more languages or dialects on a regular basis.

The trend of bilingualism is on the rise among parents, not only within Indonesia but also across the globe, despite ongoing debates surrounding its implications. In Indonesia, multilingualism is widespread, with a large portion of the population fluent in both their indigenous language and Indonesian, which serves as their second language. This linguistic diversity is not unique to Indonesia; numerous states across the United States also exhibit substantial bilingual communities. For instance, projections indicate that within the next 12 years, over half of the children in California will become proficient in two or more languages, marking a significant shift toward bilingualism in the region (García, McLaughlin, Spodek, & Saracho, 1995).

However, bilingualism remains a complex and somewhat mysterious phenomenon, with ongoing research and discussions attempting to uncover its full range of effects and benefits. As

this topic continues to be explored, it is clear that the conversation around bilingualism is far from settled, highlighting both the promise and the challenges that come with navigating a multilingual world. Most misunderstandings about this trend stem from myths rather than actual scientific evidence. A common belief among many people is that exposing young children to bilingual education could negatively impact their cognitive and language development.

The widespread belief that children are better equipped to learn a second language when they start at an early age has been supported by numerous linguists and educational psychologists. Experts like Dr. Patricia Kuhl, who has extensively studied language acquisition, argue that young children are more adept at picking up new languages due to their brain's plasticity and sensitivity to linguistic input. However, this assumption raises critical questions: Is earlier truly better for every child, or are there circumstances where beginning later might be more advantageous? This paper will explore the complexities involved in teaching a second language to young learners, examining whether early instruction always leads to better outcomes or if the benefits depend on individual and contextual factors.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to address some of the arguments for and against that have recently been made by parents, such as:

1. What impact does bilingual education have on a child's cognitive growth?
2. Do bilinguals have superior performance?
3. Does language delay result from early bilingual education?

This writing will try to offer a brief explanation of the unanswered issues that many parents have nowadays.

II RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a literature-based approach, involving the search, review, analysis, evaluation, and summarization of academic sources such as journals and articles related to early-life bilingualism. Key theories were collected and documented to facilitate data assessment. This method helps identify issues and

research gaps while also providing the researchers with a deeper understanding of the subject's background and development. Ultimately, the researchers derive conclusions based on their findings. Ultimately, the researchers extrapolate conclusions from the meticulous inquiry. This literature-based inquiry serves as the foundation

for generating informed conclusions, offering both a comprehensive overview and a critical assessment of the research landscape, ultimately

advancing the scholarly dialogue on bilingualism in early childhood education, particularly in Indonesia

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

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

When is the optimum time for parents to begin teaching their children a second language? This is a common question. The question is whether their child's cognitive development would be aided or hindered by the additional language instruction. A lot of individuals may be concerned about how bilingualism would affect their child's cognitive development, while for many others, it may be seen as a need or way of life (just think of multilingual families).

The primary concern of parents regarding bilingual educational materials is whether their child may experience confusion when exposed to a second language at a young age, which is an important stage in language acquisition.

It seems sense that parents would be concerned about anything that could hinder their child's capacity to learn languages, as language acquisition abilities are essential for the normal development of practically all other cognitive learning processes in an individual's life. Thus, the inquiry is: Are these concerns regarding cognitive delays warranted, or are they grounded in outdated scientific findings?

Recent studies have shown that multilingual kids have significant advantages for their cognitive development. Studies have demonstrated 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. Furthermore, the theory of confusion has been disproved.

Contrary to popular belief, bilingualism does not cause confusion, nor does it negatively affect children's development. In fact, research suggests that bilingualism may even have certain sociocognitive benefits.

Higher levels of intellectual focus, better test scores overall, better problem-solving skills, a greater awareness of nonverbal context, and generally more flexible cognitive powers are

some manifestations of these advantages. Stated differently, recent studies have shown that early bilingual education confers a number of invaluable benefits in addition to having no deleterious impacts on cognitive development.

2. Do bilinguals have superior performance?

People who are bilingual usually have a number of advantages, especially in terms of social comprehension. This is not surprising, as multilingual children are usually exposed to a large range of languages and speakers of those languages. Additionally, bilingual children usually have a better ability to distinguish between linguistic characteristics, such as voice tone (Yow and Markman, 2011). Bilinguals do better cognitively than monolinguals when moving between tasks and reacting to various inputs (Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012). Executive functioning is the ability of children to focus and adapt to changes without being distracted. Bilinguals have to switch between and use both languages when they communicate. In this case, the brain needs to be kept active and the non-selected language needs to be held.

3. Does language delay result from early bilingual education?

The most pervasive misconception among parents about bilingualism is that it causes linguistic delay. On the other hand, research indicates that bilingual children's vocabulary is equivalent to monolingual children's vocabulary when accounting for vocabulary from both languages. They can correct someone if they pronounce something incorrectly or say something unclear in one of the languages, just like monolinguals can (Byers-Heinlein and Lew-Williams, 2013). If parents see any problems with their child's speech development, they can take them to a paediatrician or language pathologist for further assessment.

The issue is that some therapists are not well equipped to meet the educational demands of children who speak two languages. Consequently,

language impairments or delays may be mistakenly diagnosed in bilingual children. Even if they may start a little later than monolingual children, bilingual children nonetheless start talking between the ages of 8 and 15 months (Lowry, 2016). Furthermore, as they begin to use brief sentences, bilingual newborns learn grammar in accordance with the same schedule and patterns as monolingual children.

It proves that bilingualism has absolutely no bearing on speech delays. This myth stems from the notion that children who are bilingual are

easily confused, that their vocabulary is split between two languages, and that they don't fully understand when or how to use each language. According to Expressible Speech Therapy's Fab Leroy, M.S., CCC-SLP, a speech-language pathologist, bilingual children attain developmental milestones concurrently with monolingual children. If a child has a speech or language delay, it will be noticeable in both languages; it is not the result of learning two languages. It's not always a sign of confusion when a child speaks two languages.

IV CONCLUSION

This study examined the scholarly responses to five of the most often asked queries by parents about early bilingualism. The research on early bilingualism has not been supported by science, so parents' misconceptions about it need to be debunked (Werker & Byers-Heinlein, 2008). All parents of bilingual children need to do is let their kids get enough exposure to the second language (L2) to help children become successful bilinguals from a young age.

As children get older, interaction in their first language (L1) should be maintained in order to preserve their command of balance. In this instance, the community should speak the language that isn't already spoken by more members (Pearson, 2008). In this case, there are two factors to think about: First, learning a second language whenever possible could be a way to encourage early development. It suggests that there is never a wrong time or place to start a family.

The previous sentence makes it quite evident that multilingual children are not confused. Adult bilinguals also integrate the two languages in a process called "code mixing," which shows that their bilingual brain is functioning. Second, multilingual education enhances a child's cognitive and verbal growth. Learning two languages will also help children's executive functioning. Thirdly, in addition to the one-parent, one-language method, there are

alternative tactics that can be used. Additionally, parents can combine it with other strategies, including learning a language unique to a place. The consensus among experts is that learning a second language early in life has scientific merit and is advantageous.

Finally, beliefs about bilingual children experiencing language deficits are dispelled by the reality that bilingual children who speak both languages have an equal vocabulary to monolingual children who speak only one language. The argument presented above suggests that early bilingualism is beneficial for kids' language development.

Parents can nevertheless encourage their children to speak the target language even if they are not native speakers by teaching them important phrases or "survival words" in their own tongues. In order to support their child's language development and help them make connections between English and their mother tongue, parents can also teach their children targeted cognates, which are words that sound similar and have comparable meanings in two languages. Before reading an animal story, for example, kids might go over English-Indonesian cognates such as "elephant-gajah". Thus how they can instill second language to their daily life and it really shows that the earlier children are exposed to second language, the better they understand it.

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