

**Review Article**

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## The debate upon acquiring Bilingualism brings excessive advantages or burdensome to young Learners

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### **Abstract**

Nowadays, controversy of bilingual education system program still exist. Bilingualism remains as an issue particularly whether or not it is appropriate to be taught for young learners. Learning two languages in the same time is seen to create damaging effect into confusion for children in their age. In spite of the criticism, there are advantages which is offered from bilingual education. Seeing on how bilinguals have good deals as across many aspects such as cognitive control and linguistic knowledge whose the learners are better in problem solving and high order thinking skills, the purpose of the study is going to focus on how bilingualism is suitable or not to learn for young learners. Since young learners are in the golden age to acquire new language, linguistic knowledge and cognitive skills are effective enough to be taught. Therefore, the study focuses more on the discussion of previous research on whether or not bilingualism give difficulties or advantages to children. It will discuss by introducing English to young learners who will meet benefits or problems of bilingualism in early childhood.

**Keywords:** Bilingual education; bilingualism; young learners; second language; early childhood.

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### **1. Introduction**

The effectiveness of bilingual education in Indonesia is critically needed in order to compete with the global competition. As non-English speaking people, learners have to deal more of English as their second language. An effort has been made to have bilingual system education addressing English as the important factors to increase the quality of education in world class. The bilingual program has started from early childhood until high school level of education. It is aimed to introduce English as early as possible so that learners achieve comprehensive knowledge. Bilingual education is the most effective way to promote English language skills in young learners since their age development is the critical age or golden age to absorb the language effortlessly. This is in line with the idea that economic globalization resulted the use of English [1] which leads to some thought that it is important to teach English from the early stage of learning stage [2]. In the same time, young learners not only develop language skills in their first language but also acquire a second language. Researchers believe that, instead of being a problem, the process of acquiring two languages from a very early age has cognitive as well as social benefits [3]. However, there have been questions about whether bilingual education programs were appropriate for all children or whether they were an exclusive option best suited for high-achieving students [4]. Kohnert argued that bilingualism is complex from linguistic or other cognitive challenges. Bilingualism leads into the level of language and cognitive burden for children. In order to show whether or not bilingualism give difficulties or advantages to children, the purpose of this study is to show some research on how bilingual learning program issue works in

young learners[5]. Through this review, there will be seen some evidences that bilingualism brings advantages or burdensome to learners in young age.

Early age, children learn the first language from their family and social interaction context. It is the children's fundamental setting where the environment as their process to acquire first language. Children are good language learners because they are "genetically predisposition for language learning" [6]. It means that children learn language effortlessly because it is part of their natural development. When the young children enter bilingual school education setting, it is the beginning of acquiring the process of second language. Bilingual school starts review the process of thinking of second-language acquisition in order to provide the appropriate linguistic knowledge in early young learners. At present, because of modern scientific knowledge, the point of view of bilingualism has changed that the language is seen as an interference such as barriers to children's academic and intellectual development. Nevertheless, the interference is accepted as training for the brain which is constant and well work in solving some problems. Chilla, Solveig et all [6] state that this mind exercise significantly strengthens the cognitive muscles of the brain. Through learning second language in bilingual school, the learners get the competence that Pavlenko [7] to mean "the unconscious knowledge a speaker has of the linguistic, sociolinguistic, and communicative principles that allow the interpretation and use of a particular language." Thus, immersing children to bilingual school might be necessary in order to effectively acquire English as second language.

Though, the success of second language acquisition, exclusive focus on quantitative English inputs might not be sufficient [8]. Wang's study clearly warns that in situation where societal linguistic inputs are lacking, the quality of inputs, then, should become the primary focus. Wang who successfully raises trilingual children with English, Chinese, and French points the importance of quality of inputs to the success of language acquisition. From Wang's studies, it can be learned that for the language instincts to function optimally in second language acquisition, children need to be exposed to the second language as much as to their mother tongue. Bilingual individual can have different capabilities in each language and thus bilingualism has complex issue that can have different output [9]. Baker points out how the term bilingual education is a simplistic label for a complex phenomenon. This complexity is evidence also from the wide array of terms to describe children that have not adequate skill in the second language used at school [10].

### **3. Review and Discussion**

Based on the present review, four research journals have been examined to evaluate the outcomes of bilingual education program for language from the literacy levels, academic achievement, and appropriateness for young learners. There are "Issues of TEYL in Indonesian and What Parent Can Do About It" [8], "Establishing English-Indonesian Bilinguals in Indonesia: From Theory to Practice" [11], "Language Related Outcomes of Bilingual Education in Preschool and Primary School" [12], and "Benefits of Bilingualism in Early Childhood: A Booster of Teaching English to Young Learners" By R. Fransiska. The discussion of bilingualism issue consist of two points which is development of linguistic and cognitive knowledge in bilingual education and is bilingual education suitable for young learners?

#### *3.1. Development of linguistic and cognitive knowledge in bilingual education*

Lazzarino's study [12] aims to describe bilingual educational program used in preschool and primary school and to examine their outcomes related to language skill acquisition, both for the home language (L1) as well as the school language (L2). Results showed a predominance of the transitional bilingual education (TBE) and two-way immersion (TWI) models in bilingual education. The study consisted of a systematic literature review which has main limitation of the present study. Language related outcomes confirmed the finding from previous literature that bilingual education doesn't inhibit L2 acquisition. The influence of the first language is among the most cited theoretical notions in bilingual education and in second language acquisition. Cummins [4] proposed the interdependence hypothesis. He proposes that, for a bilingual student, positive transfer between L1 and L2 occurs only when a certain level of proficiency in L1 is reached. This should be especially true for the academic

proficiency level required by the school. The possibility of a positive transfer between L1 and L2 and the threshold hypothesis provide a strong rationale to support bilingual education programs [10].

In a similar study of the advantages being bilinguals, Margana [11] that have the study to explore the theoretical framework of the establishment of the English-Indonesian bilinguals in Indonesia which is then supported by some practices of how to raise the English-Indonesian bilinguals. The study resulted that bilinguals, instead of facing from a mental distraction or language barriers, could perform the strong capability to manage language employment in some communication practices. The theories Margana's took from several researchers supported the exploring of her study. Peal and Lambert in Saunders state that being bilinguals could result in 'the maximally intellectual functioning' so that they are able to perform better. Mostly, bilinguals show a positive effect on the intelligence and confer the cognitive advantages on the part of the bilinguals compared to the monolingual. In reference to the above statement, it is clear that being bilinguals including English-Indonesian bilinguals is advantageous in nature as it could establish the heterogeneous mental lexicon on the part of the bilinguals' mind which is of great importance in deconstructing and constructing the language units used in the different contexts. Furthermore, Martin-Rhee and Bialystok [13] convince that a bilingual performs better in executing the language control system than does a monolingual on the grounds that a bilingual does not develop a separate and overlapping control system but a single control system. The control system enables a bilingual to alternate from one language to another language depending on the tasks that the learner encounters. Another additional study has shown that bilingual is more proficient than monolingual in solving several types of mental puzzles. Psychologists Ellen Bialystok and Michelle Martin-Rhee tried to prove this in a survey. They ask for bilingual and monolingual preschoolers to sort objects of various shapes and colors. The first task is relatively easy, but when tasks become more challenging, bilingual is faster.

Also, Fransiska has study that is aimed to highlight the phenomenon of teaching English to young learners in Indonesia in relation to benefits of being bilingual. The result of article's discussion upon being bilingual is that there are many advantages of bilingualism in early childhood. Bilingualism gives benefit on cognitive, social-emotional, and academic/career advantages toward the children. Also, children who are raised in bilingual environment have been found to be better competence than their monolingual peers at focusing on a task while tuning out disruption. Their capability to concentrate is better than no bilingual. In reference to the above discussion, it is evident that developing bilingual program in Indonesia has great importance since the result of some research create learners that can cope with any problems that they may encounter in global contexts. This implies that the establishment of English-Indonesian bilinguals confer a great number of advantages in terms of the development of language attainment, cognitive development, and concept mediation across language.

### *3.2 Is bilingual education suitable for young learners?*

Under the study of "Benefits of Bilingualism in Early Childhood: A Booster of Teaching English to Young Learners", the result is strongest in people who learned a second language before five and in those who are most capable in their second language. Fransiska's finding implies that being bilingual from an early age significantly alters the brain's structure of the human. Early years is the golden moment to introduce a second language; any language. Considering the benefits of bilingualism, the government should encourage elementary and kindergarten school to explore more the use English in their classes, in fun way, indeed. Being bilingual gives many advantages for children especially for their future particularly if they could master English from young age. Similar to the study, Zacharias [8] state in her article that the most cited reason for early English acquisition might be age. There is a widely held belief that age positively correlates with the success of second language acquisition. Many immigrant narratives might shape up this belief. Most of people have heard or been told stories of immigrant parents who struggle with learning English while their children effortlessly "pick up" the language.

These results are broadly consistent with those found for bilingual education programs for young learners. In one of the first studies on this issue, Genesee [14] examined the role of IQ as measured by

a standardized test on the development of French second-language abilities for children who were learning French either through immersion or foreign language instruction in school. The main result was that IQ was related to reading ability and language use for all children, but there was no association between IQ and overall communication ability; children at all levels of intelligence communicated with similar effectiveness. Importantly, there were no interactions with the type of program in which children were learning French: low IQ children in the immersion and foreign language program performed similarly to each other on all language and cognitive measures, in both cases performing more poorly than children with higher IQ scores in both programs. Thus, there was no evidence of any negative effect of participation in an immersion program for children whose measured intelligence was below average.

Few studies also have investigated this question in the context of bilingual education, perhaps because children with language impairment are widely discouraged from attending bilingual education programs, but an early study by Bruck [15] assessed language and cognitive outcomes for children in kindergarten and first grade in French immersion programs, some of whom had been diagnosed with language impairment. These were Anglophone children being educated through French, and linguistic measures for both French and English were included. The crucial comparison was the progress found for language-impaired children in the French immersion program and similar children in a mainstream English instruction program. There were no significant differences between these groups. Even though these children struggled, they did not struggle more than they would if they were in the bilingual program.

In a review of studies that have examined the effect of various risk factors on children's response to bilingual education, Genesee and Fortune [16] found no case in which the bilingual education program contributed to lower academic outcomes for these children than for similar children in monolingual programs. Therefore, bilingual education program is suitable and effective for young learners since it doesn't give negative impact toward children. Introducing English as second language as early as could be to young learner is appropriate in order to acquire or absorb new language efficiently.

In contrast, based on result from Lazzarino [12], the results emerged from this systematic review of the literature showed a predominance of two approaches, namely transitional and two-way immersion programs. A lack of detail in the description concerning the implementation of this program emerged also from the present study. Moreover, a certain confusion and ambiguity in the denominations used to describe bilingual problems have been found. Regarding the outcome related to language proficiency, the results from this review suggest that following a bilingual program doesn't inhibit the acquisition of the second language. However, the advantages of these programs are more difficult to show, and numerous studies found no significant statistical differences between bilingual and monolingual programs. This could be imputed to methodological limitations in this area of research that still needs to be addressed, as well as to the tendency of some study to concentrate mostly on the outcomes related to the L2.

The influence of the L1 is among the most cited theoretical notions in bilingual education and in second language acquisition in general [17], [10], even though a comprehensive theory of transfer is still missing [18]. Butler [18] identified several factors involved in the cross-linguistic transfer, the most important being: (1) language distance, in terms of similarities between L1 and L2; (2) developmental stage; (3) age; and (4) sociolinguistic factors. While L1:L2 ratios are certainly a valid metric to compare and describe bilingual programs, a more detailed discussion on the content and methods of these programs will certainly help to determine what works and what doesn't in a more detailed way. Finally, it is confirmed the existence of a research gap concerning bilingual education in preschool.

#### **4. Conclusions**

In most evaluation research for bilingual educational program, the conclusion tends to converge on a dualistic answer in which the program is considered to be either effective or not, or more or less effective than alternative program. In one side, when successful, bilingual education offers a unique opportunity to convey the resources to sustain a valuable lifestyle asset. Also, bilingual program makes advantages for the learners in linguistics and cognitive knowledge. Nevertheless, future research should focus on covering the gap of research in preschool as well as design more high-quality research to address the problematic issue. In Indonesian context specifically, concern over teaching quality is imperative. Many people misleading in assuming that the teaching of English to young learners might be less demanding linguistically compared to adults. Perhaps, this is the reasons why in Indonesia, the teachers of young learners are most often recruited from English [teaching] Department which orients toward teaching English to adults. The underlying assumption might be teachers who are qualified to teach English to adults were automatically deemed to be qualified to teach young learners. Although this assumption has largely been challenged, this common belief still remains. Seeing in this light, However, to what extent has bilingual program accommodated the need of TEYL (Teaching English for Young Learners), most importantly, bilingual young learners, needs to be further explored and studied.

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