

Impact of Upbringing Children in A Bilingual and Multilingual Environment in Azerbaijan, Baku

 **Munavvar Sahib Asgarova**

Baku Engineering University, muasgarova@beu.edu.az

<https://doi.org/10.69760/aghel.02500117>

Keywords

bilingualism
multilingualism
cognitive development
cultural identity
parental strategies

Abstract

The study is based on the analysis of the processes of bilingual and multilingual upbringing of children from families living in Baku and the suburbs of Baku, whose mother tongue is Azerbaijani. The study examined the influence of the current environment on the mental and social development of children. The information obtained after the survey, interview, and observation is the basis of the study. The study aimed to shed light on the positive and negative effects of bilingual and multilingual parenting processes on children and laid the groundwork for larger-scale research in the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Raising children in an environment where more than one language is spoken has pros and cons. First, this is manifested in the formation of a strong memory in children. At the same time, these children also have powerful problem-solving skills and are able to do multiple tasks at the same time. Having the opportunity to get to know different cultures, these children can easily adapt to various environments. Knowing more than one language also helps them in their future education and career life.

However, their language development can progress more slowly in the beginning. Of course, there may be few opportunities to speak all languages at the same time with equal fluency. Therefore, it is very important to maintain and maintain a balance between languages.

1.2 Problem statement

At present, the modern world both provides and encourages the raising of children in a multilingual environment. Although the current situation generates a series of advantages, it generates a series of difficulties for both the parent, the child and the teacher, which are yet to be resolved.

Delays in language development do not change the fact that not all languages can be spoken at the same level, leaving behind the mother tongue development of the second language, as well as the fact that the child may be successful in social and academic environments in the future. Because each new language learned also means a new culture, which is also a factor that directly supports the development of the child.



This is an open access article under the
Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Knowing the advantages and disadvantages of raising children in a bilingual and multilingual environment and taking steps in this regard allows for an increase in the working capacity and success rate of both the parent and the language tutor. In a practical environment, potential problems can easily find their solution.

1.3 Research Objectives

This article aims to understand the advantages and disadvantages of raising children in a bilingual and multilingual environment. Below, the objectives are outlined in a more specific way.

1. Mental development-analysis of the effects of children in bilingual and multilingual environments on mental skills such as memory, problem-solving, multifunctionality
2. Language development – assessment of the positive and negative effects on language development when exposed to more than one language
3. Academic success – analysis of factors affecting the academic success of bilingual and multilingual children
4. Social and emotional differences – a study of the role of multilingual parenting on children's social adaptation and emotional balance
5. Cultural identity-analysis of the position and relationship of a child raised in a multilingual environment in society
6. Parenting strategies - methods that parents who aim for their children to speak two or more languages can use
7. Long-term effects-analysis of the effects of bilingual and multilingual environments on children's future social lives and careers
8. Support mechanisms-methods for anticipating and preventing problems that children may encounter during language learning

1.4 Research questions

1. What differences arise when comparing the mental development of children raised in a bilingual and multilingual environment with children raised in a monolingual environment?
2. How does learning more than one language affect a child's social and emotional development?
3. What factors are crucial in the academic success of bilingual and multilingual children?
4. What are the risks of language delay in a bilingual or multilingual environment and how can they be prevented?
5. What should parents do to ensure the balanced development of children in both languages?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Raising children in a bilingual and multilingual environment is a topic of interest to many people. Articles about the benefits of raising such children are often found. At the same time, several writings do not ignore the difficulties that this entails. This section will discuss the pros and cons of raising children in a multilingual environment, proceeding from the positions of different specialists.

2.1 Benefits of raising children in a multilingual environment

One of the most important benefits of learning multiple languages is the positive impact on mental development. According to renowned psychologist Ellen Bialystok, children who are exposed to more than one language are more successful in problem-solving, memory, and task-shifting (Bialystok, 2011). These skills not only lead to academic success, but also increase the ability to adapt to real life.

François Grosjean, a specialist in the field of psycholinguistics, positively assesses the role of bilingualism in the understanding of cultural consciousness. These children are more capable than others to understand



and respect different cultures. This directly proves that the feeling of empathy in them is stronger than in others. This, in turn, is a fine example in terms of global adaptation (Grosjean, 2010).

From a social perspective, bilingualism, of course, has an undeniable role in the development of communication skills. Jim Cummins, who has proven his expertise in the field, argues that children who learn more than one language have outstanding comprehension abilities, and this, in turn, justifies the concept of awareness in both the native language and the second language (Cummins, 2000).

2.2 Difficult aspects of raising children in a multilingual environment

In addition to the above advantages, raising children in a bilingual and multilingual environment can bring with it a number of difficulties. Developmental psychologist Erika Hoff states that bilingual children develop their word stocks more slowly than their monolingual peers. His research shows that although the general word stock is equivalent among languages, the issue of delay is evident when we take a single language (Hoff, 2018).

In addition, Antonella Sorace considers that achieving success in a balanced way in all her languages can rarely occur. Based on his research, we can say that, depending on the environment and the level of exposure, in children, basically, one language is more pressing, which in some cases can make the fluent use of the other language difficult (Sorace, 2007).

Stefan Krashen, on the other hand, focused on the importance of adequate exposure every year. His input hypothesis notes the importance of information transmitted in a natural form in an appropriate, understandable way to that language for a language learner to learn a new language naturally. He states that children need to be actively exposed to these languages in order to master fluent speech in more than one language. In order to overcome this difficulty, active use of these languages is necessary (Krashen, 1985).

2.3 Building a balance between advantages and disadvantages

Given these different views, we can point out that achieving success in raising a bilingual and multilingual child is directly related to how to manage difficulties. It is important to strive to create a balance between languages. (Grosjean, 2010) emphasizes the importance of creating an environment of exposure to language by adopting the strategy of families “one parent, one language”. (Sorace, 2007), however, believes that society and schools themselves can support such processes through educational programs that support minority languages.

(Hoff, 2018), however, offers a model that prioritizes quality over quantity. Both languages continuously emphasize the effectiveness of language exposure. (Cummins, 2000), on the other hand, argues that a positive attitude towards all languages within the family increases motivation and self-confidence in children.

From the foregoing, we can conclude that raising children in a bilingual and multilingual environment has many advantages from a mental, social and cultural point of view. But these advantages include language delays, inter-language imbalance, etc. is able to create a basis for some difficulties. Referring to the opinions of experts such as Bialystok, Grosjean, Cummins, Hoff, Sorace and Krashen, we can say that parents and language educators can use a series of strategies to overcome other obstacles that come to light, in addition to providing these benefits. Success is rooted in creating a supportive and balanced language environment.



3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

This study was conducted among 20 families living in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku and the suburbs of Baku, whose mother tongue is Azerbaijani. The study aimed to find the pros and cons of parenting in a bilingual or multilingual environment for children. Using both quantitative and qualitative research methods, the mixed method was applied. Digital data includes metrics on the language competencies of families and children, while descriptive data includes data collected through interviews.

3.2 Participants

The survey was attended by 20 families living in the capital of Azerbaijan, Baku and the suburbs, whose native language is Azerbaijani. In 14 of these families, the second language is Russian, in 6-English. There are a total of 38 children in these families. These children speak a second language as well as their mother tongue, Azerbaijani. 26 children have some difficulties in speaking both languages, while 12 children are fluent in both languages. Of the 26 children mentioned above, 9 speak Russian better than Azerbaijani. But in both languages, they violate grammatical and lexical norms. Their parents note that since they received a Russian-speaking education, they spoke more Russian at home, which caused the children to have difficulties with both languages.

3.3 Data collection

The data collection period consists of 3 stages.

1. Questionnaires: - a questionnaire survey was conducted in order to collect information about children's language learning periods, the language spoken at home and the problems that children face.
2. Interview: - an interview was conducted with families on language learning via the online platform.
3. Observation: - the language used by children at home has been monitored and recorded.

3.4 Data analysis

The collected data were evaluated using both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods.

1. Digital data: the data obtained from the questionnaires were statistically evaluated using SPSS. Differences and problems in children's language skills are determined by descriptive statistics.
2. Descriptive data: interview and observation data were analyzed using the content analysis method. The information received from the participants was classified based on the subject categories. Based on these analyzes, problems and success strategies have been identified.

These methods have laid the foundation for a better understanding of the difficulties that children face in a bilingual or multilingual environment and the strategies for solving these problems.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data obtained from this study show that children who grow up in a bilingual and multilingual environment have a number of difficulties as well as preferences. The effects of upbringing in this way were assessed on the language choice of families, the language skills and social integration of children.



4.1 Advantages

1. Mental development-the study shows that children with two or more language use skills are more attentive than others, and at the same time their analytical skills differ from their peers in a good sense.
2. Worldview-bilingual children are able to acquire significant knowledge of both their native language and the second language. This allows children to be one step ahead in matters of interaction with different cultures and cultural diversity. In the course of the study, intercultural differences were noticeable, especially during the observation of children who spoke Azerbaijani and Russian.
3. Social skills and connections – multilingual individuals adapt more quickly to the environment and communicate with others in a more comfortable way. The study also shows that these children have a wide social circle, they have friends who speak both Azerbaijani and second languages separately. Among them, there are children who are members of various language clubs.
4. Career opportunities-parents of children are hopeful that their children will build a career in a more comfortable way in the future. They think that being able to speak more than one language will create a huge advantage for them in the business field in the future, since these children have a linguistic advantage in the business competition.

4.2 Disadvantages

1. Speech delay-a study shows that children who speak two or more languages may have speech retardation, sometimes being able to confuse these languages later in speech. And this, in some cases, can cause some difficulties in expressing themselves. In particular, in languages with different language structures, this can manifest itself more.
2. Effect on academic performance – this is shown mainly in written speech. For example, the alphabetic graphics in Azerbaijani and Russian are different, which can lead to confusion in writing.
3. The problem of intercultural identity – they are able to experience some difficulties in feeling in what environment they belong to. In fact, they carry the characteristics of both cultures, so from the emotional aspect, the desire to belong to a specific place is capable of causing them difficulties.
4. Parental expectations and pressures – one of the nuances that stands out during the study is that few parents expect their children to speak English even better. And the potential that the child is able to reveal is in sight. And for the development of a second language, time is needed. This process can also create emotional tension in children in some cases. In order not to increase the level of stress in children, such pressure should be avoided.

4.3 Discussion

These proofs show that raising children in bilingual and multilingual environments leads to both opportunities and problems. Even if positive influences such as mental development, worldview, social skills and career opportunities stand out, deficits are not limited to negative factors such as speech retardation and personality problems.

The study emphasizes the importance of parents consciously supporting children during the language learning process. Games and social activities which are aimed at promoting language usage may be recommended. At the same time, the opportunities that bilingual and multilingual upbringing will create in future business careers are striking. In future research, a more comprehensive approach can be applied to examine these results in a broader framework.



4.4 Challenges and limitations

This study is aimed at understanding the difficulties and benefits of Azerbaijani children who grow up in a bilingual or multilingual environment but there are also a number of difficulties in the study of such a complex subject.

The 20 families included in the study do not have the capacity to fully represent various socio-economic and cultural groups in Baku. This circumstance limits the generalization of research results. The questionnaires and interview formats fail to provide sufficient detail to fully understand language learning processes. Although standardized tests are used to assess language abilities, it is evident that these tests do not fully reflect the actual use of language by children.

The study was conducted in a limited number of cases (with 20 families and 38 children). Working with a wider group of participants can make the results more comprehensive. The study was limited to families in Baku and did not take into account the experience of families in different geographical regions. Only Azerbaijani, Russian and English were included in the study, and the study was unable to track children's long-term language development and record changes over time.

4.5 Recommendations

The generalization of the data obtained could improve if future research involves a wider range of participants from different socio-economic and cultural groups. It is advisable that studies be carried out over a longer period of time in order to monitor the language development of children and obtain more detailed conclusions about the language learning process. Working with families from other regions outside Baku can improve the quality of research. By organizing awareness campaigns on raising bilingual or multilingual children, strategies for supporting children's language development can be proposed for parents.

5. CONCLUSION

This study gave significant results on the processes of bilingual and multilingual upbringing of children in Baku families. Data from the study revealed both positive and negative aspects of bilingual parenting's impact on children.

The main result of the study is that children who grow up in a multilingual environment experience cognitive development benefits and an increased ability to adapt to different cultures. However, problems such as speech delay, personality confusion and high expectations of parents indicate that this process must be handled carefully.

As a result, bilingual and multilingual parenting opens up many opportunities and responsibilities for both children and families. Parents play a crucial role in adopting strategies that support children's individual abilities and potential. Future research may allow us to examine these findings more deeply with broader groups and long-term monitoring techniques.

REFERENCES

1. Bialystok, E. (2011). Reshaping the Mind: The Benefits of Bilingualism. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 15(6), 240–250.
2. Grosjean, F. (2010). *Bilingual: Life and Reality*. Harvard University Press.
3. Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, Power, and Pedagogy: Bilingual Children in the Crossfire*. Multilingual Matters.



4. Hoff, E. (2018). Bilingual Development in Early Childhood. *Child Development Perspectives*, 12(2), 80–86.
5. Sorace, A. (2007). Bilingualism and Language Development: The Role of Input. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 10(5), 507–524.
6. Krashen, S. (1985). *The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications*. Longman.

Received: 27.01.2025

Revised: 28.01.2025

Accepted: 28.01.2025

Published: 01.02.2025



This is an open access article under the
Creative Commons Attribution-
NonCommercial 4.0 International License

Acta Globalis Humanitatis et Linguarum
ISSN 3030-1718