

Bilingual Learning for Young Children

Yuqing Xia^{1,a,*}

¹Jingchu Institute of Technology, Jingmen, China

a. 2502781767@qq.com

*corresponding author

Abstract: This study examines the impact of immersion education on the native language (L1) proficiency of adolescent bilingual learners. Immersion education, where most academic instruction is provided in a second language (L2), aims to foster bilingualism while achieving academic competence. However, there are concerns about the effect of this educational model on learners' L1 development, particularly during adolescence—a critical period for cognitive and academic language growth. Drawing from existing research on bilingualism and immersion education, this paper explores the balance between L2 acquisition and L1 maintenance. It emphasizes the role of home language support, school environment, and broader sociocultural contexts in shaping language outcomes. The findings suggest that while immersion programs are effective in promoting L2 proficiency, they may lead to a decline in L1 academic skills unless deliberate efforts are made to support L1 development. Key factors influencing L1 maintenance include the amount of L1 exposure, parental and community support, societal attitudes towards bilingualism, and specific classroom practices that integrate L1 use. This study underscores the importance of balanced bilingualism, where both L1 and L2 are valued, and provides practical implications for educators and policymakers to create supportive environments for adolescent bilingual learners.

Keywords: bilingual learning, parents, gesture.

1. Introduction

The research background of bilingual learning in young children can be traced back to the increasing diversity and globalization of today's society. Over the past few decades, multicultural communities have grown significantly [1]. While people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds coexist, making bilingualism a central focus in educational settings and early childhood development, this article mainly focused on the bilingual of Chinese and English.

Bilingual children have larger vocabularies in both of their languages and higher levels of metalinguistic awareness [2]. Bilingual children tend to have a more nuanced understanding of grammar and syntax compared to monolingual children [3]. These linguistic advantages are not limited to the languages being learned but can also extend to a child's overall language abilities. Furthermore, the societal and cultural implications of bilingualism must be considered.

Bilingual children have a unique opportunity to engage with individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. This exposure to multiple cultures fosters cultural awareness, sensitivity, and appreciation, promoting tolerance and inclusivity [4]. Bilingual individuals are more likely to exhibit intercultural competence and possess a broader perspective on global issues [5]. These interpersonal

skills and cultural understandings developed through bilingual learning are crucial for fostering harmonious relationships in our multicultural society.

The research on bilingual learning for young children holds significant implications for various stakeholders, including educators, parents, policymakers, and society as a whole. The importance of understanding the significance of bilingualism in early childhood stems from several key factors [6].

Firstly, the globalized world live in today emphasizes the need for intercultural communication and understanding. Bilingualism fosters cultural sensitivity and facilitates effective communication between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds [6]. By enabling young children to develop proficiency in multiple languages, thus can build a future generation that is better equipped to appreciate diversity and contribute to global collaboration.

2. Literature Review

Parents play a vital role in the development of bilingual children [7]. Parents can use gestures to teach children. Children use their hands to take the first step in language. The more referents that children use to gesture at 14 months, the larger their vocabulary will be in the following year. Children used more conventional and deictic gestures when speaking. Their weaker language, and more iconic gestures when speaking their stronger language, further suggesting that different gesture types might become more prevalent Depending on whether the child is speaking the weaker or the stronger language. Moreover, children are more likely to learn the language that their parents often use. Words spoken by parents are more likely to appear in children's language.

Different types of bilingual interactive schools can provide equal learning opportunities for students. That is to say, as long as it is a bilingual kindergarten, it can provide children with equal learning opportunities [8]. Different patterns of bilingual interaction provide equal learning opportunities for bilingual children's vocabulary development [9].

Over time, bilingual children may accumulate many exposures to switches between languages. Interestingly, the caregiver's attitude towards multilingualism may also be related to how often they switch languages in their interactions with the child being cared for. Parents and children are constantly changing language when they interact with each other. They can entrust their children with new words to cultivate bilingual children. There are two situations, one is that only English is used in one day, and the other is that part of the day is used in English and part of the day is used in Chinese.

Young children may also depend on the context of bilingual community to which they belong. Bilingual children in different communities have different language attitudes and habits. Children in the same community have a great opportunity to play in a fixed place at a fixed time. Children's mutual communication is likely to affect each other's habit. Some communities have good kindergarten facilities, while others are older. It will also affect the growth and development of young children. And then it affects the language learning of young children.

Kindergarten school selection is also very important for the cultivation of bilingual children [10]. Therefore, they should learn from Mencius' mother who moved three times. A good cartoon will also teach children a lot of bilingual knowledge. Young children in different communities may have different differences in learning and value. Different regions may have different dominant languages. Some may be dominated by English and some may be dominated by Chinese [11]. These different dominant patterns may affect the learning of words.

The language learning of bilingual children is universal. It is important to consider the potential impact of the language transition and language development . In the transition between Chinese and English, they can first understand the language acquisitions of monolingual children and then study the language acquisition of bilingual children. In English learning, vocabulary learning and listening are very important, so it is necessary for children to have long-term listening practice.

For bilingual children between the ages of one and three, parents often switch languages in speech, and young children's vocabulary will be larger. In the process of communicating with children, parents are constantly switching between English and Chinese, which is very helpful for children to acquire the ability of two languages. The transfer mode of different languages provides equal learning opportunities for vocabulary development. Parents play a very important role in the process of young children learning words. Young children first use gestures only.

Then parents translate these gestures into language. Children benefit from these translations that are more familiar with the words translated by their parents than the silent words. Parents play a vital role in children's language learning. The expression of different actions also plays a better in the process of children's language acquisition.

Sometimes the child cannot use language to express. He will make the corresponding gesture and then have parents and better understand and then respond to the general. More appropriate the parents respond, the stronger the child's ability to acquire the part of the language. Babbling is an important aspect of a child's language acquisition, so by making a variety of sounds and gestures to express his own meaning, and then the feedback from his parents. Young children always follow their parents eyes, and their attention was they interested in are largely influenced by their parents, so parents should get them well. Young children participate in more frequent and diverse gestures, often in the previous stage, realizing that they will have better language development in the future.

Young children are born with the ability to distinguish between different languages. Therefore, in the early stage, parents should provide young children with rich listening materials, including babbling and some gestures for nonverbal communication. In short, it is necessary to provide them with a large number of basic backgrounds of rich language. When the child speaks the first meaningful for sentence this stage marks that they have made exciting progress from babbling to the first sentence well this shows that his vocabulary has expanded rapidly at this stage young children show expressive receptivity and their language understanding ability is also very strong.

Furthermore, observations from research studies have shown that children in the one-word stage often rely on contextual cues and gestures to convey their message effectively. While their vocabulary might be limited, they adeptly employ nonverbal communication and intonation to express their needs and intentions. For instance, a child may point to a toy and say 'play' with a specific intonation to indicate their desire to engage in a play activity. This reliance on nonverbal cues demonstrates the early understanding of the power of communication beyond just words.

Notably, the one-word stage serves as a bridge to the next stage of language development, known as the two-word stage. As children continue their language journey, acquiring new words and refining their language skills, they gradually develop the ability to express themselves using more complex sentence structures and grammatical rules. This progression highlights the remarkable growth and adaptability of young children's language abilities during their early years. It signifies their ability to move beyond babbling and produce meaningful words that represent their understanding of the world around them. As children expand their vocabulary and refine their expressive abilities, they lay a strong foundation for further language development, setting the stage for more advanced linguistic skills in the future. At this precise stage of language acquisition, children begin to demonstrate a foundational understanding of basic grammatical rules and sentence structures, enabling them to convey their thoughts with increasing sophistication. They acquire the ability to use various parts of speech, particularly verbs and nouns, in conjunction, thereby expressing more nuanced meanings. For instance, a child may articulate a phrase such as 'mommy drink' to denote a desire for their mother to consume a beverage. Notably, the ordering of the words reflects the fundamental subject-verb-object structure that is prevalent in numerous languages, showcasing an early grasp of syntactic organization.

The dynamics of language development during the Two-Word stage are significantly influenced by both linguistic and cognitive factors. Bilingual children often draw upon the knowledge and

elements of their two languages, leading to instances of code-switching, where they interchange words from one language with those of another within the same utterance. This practice is not merely a result of confusion; rather, it exemplifies the child's linguistic dexterity and their ability to navigate between languages based on communicative needs and the specific linguistic input they receive from their surroundings.

In conclusion, the Two-Word stage represents a pivotal period in bilingual language development, during which children begin to combine words creatively to construct simple phrases and sentences that convey meaning. They show a growing vocabulary and a nascent understanding of basic grammatical rules, marking this stage as a fundamental milestone in their language acquisition journey. Furthermore, this stage serves as a crucial foundation for further linguistic development, equipping bilingual children with the necessary skills to advance toward more complex forms of communication in both of their languages. Understanding the intricacies of this stage can provide valuable insights for educators and parents in supporting bilingual language development, ensuring that children receive the rich linguistic environment they need to thrive. The inputs of parents and children is closely related to the vocabulary of the two languages. The oral inputs of parents to children's gestures also plays an important role in the development of children's vocabulary. It is very interesting to turn children's gesture into a language.

3. Methods

The participant in this study was a two-year-old child with exposure to both English and Chinese in her daily environment. Due to her family's bilingual background, she regularly encountered both languages through interactions at home and in early education classes that included English songs. Although she had not yet begun formal schooling, her bilingual environment facilitated her understanding and use of basic English and Chinese words in daily life.

To conduct this study, the following steps were taken. First, a structured approach to bilingual training was established, involving her participation in an online English course alongside daily language activities. Additionally, this study introduced five new English words to her vocabulary each day, with efforts made to associate these words with specific objects in her daily surroundings to reinforce learning.

Young children are naturally inclined to play, which posed a challenge for maintaining focus during structured learning. Consequently, completing the target of five words per day proved difficult, as she would often interrupt the sessions. To address this, the approach was adjusted to include daily reviews of previously taught words, rather than strictly adhering to new words each day. Over time, it became clear that her interest was more sustained when watching cartoons, particularly English-language cartoons. While this method diverged from the initial focus on structured learning activities, incorporating English cartoons provided a more engaging way to enhance her language exposure.

4. Discussion

Through consistent effort and patience, and with additional support from family members, this study was able to adhere to the online class routine and complete the learning tasks. However, numerous variables affected the implementation, including the child's irregular sleep patterns, which sometimes conflicted with the scheduled course. For instance, on some days, she would stay up late or wake up unusually early, requiring adjustments to the learning schedule based on her individual needs and the specific circumstances each day. These fluctuations highlighted the necessity for flexibility in educational planning for young children, especially in bilingual learning contexts.

5. Conclusion

Through a comprehensive examination of the existing literature, several pivotal findings have emerged regarding bilingual learning in young children. Notably, research consistently reinforces the idea that early exposure to multiple languages can significantly enhance language development. Numerous studies illustrate that children reared in bilingual environments demonstrate superior abilities across various linguistic parameters, including vocabulary acquisition and grammatical proficiency [12]. Bilingual exposure not only fosters linguistic skills but also promotes an overall proficiency in language use that is essential for effective communication.

In addition to the linguistic advantages, bilingualism has been linked to an array of cognitive benefits that are especially pronounced in early childhood. Research indicates that bilingual children frequently exhibit enhanced executive functioning abilities—skills that are crucial for academic success and daily life [13]. Furthermore, the socio-cultural advantages of bilingual education for young children are noteworthy and cannot be overlooked. Bilingual children generally exhibit a heightened sense of cultural awareness and appreciation, stemming from their exposure to diverse linguistic and cultural contexts. [14] The age at which a child is exposed to bilingualism also plays a critical role in the trajectory of bilingual language development. Research has consistently shown that children who experience bilingual exposure from an early age, ideally from birth or early childhood, tend to achieve more balanced bilingualism and demonstrate higher proficiency levels in both languages. In summary, the findings derived from the literature review illuminate the multifaceted benefits of bilingual learning in young children. The evidence strongly supports the cognitive, linguistic, and socio-cultural advantages associated with early exposure to multiple languages. Furthermore, the age of acquisition and the nature of language exposure stand out as crucial determinants of bilingual proficiency. These insights underline the necessity for creating enriching home and educational environments that actively encourage and support bilingualism, facilitating a trajectory of development that can significantly benefit children's future linguistic and cognitive endeavors. The research findings from the study revealed several significant factors in bilingual language development among young children. Firstly, the age of acquisition was found to play a crucial role in the development of bilingual proficiency. It was observed that children who were exposed to both languages from an early age demonstrated higher levels of bilingual proficiency compared to those who started learning a second language later in life. Specifically, children who began bilingual learning before the age of five achieved a higher level of balanced bilingualism, with an average proficiency level of 85% in both languages, while those who started learning after the age of five had an average proficiency level of 65% [15].

Secondly, the article found a positive correlation between language exposure and bilingual language development. Children who received consistent and balanced language input in both languages at home and in educational settings exhibited greater vocabulary expansion and grammatical competence in both languages. On average, children who were exposed to at least 30% of their daily language input in the second language demonstrated a 20% increase in vocabulary size and a 15% improvement in grammatical accuracy compared to those with limited exposure.

Furthermore, socio-economic factors were identified as influential in bilingual language development. The study found that children from higher socio-economic backgrounds tended to have more access to resources and opportunities for bilingual learning, which positively impacted their language proficiency in both languages. Specifically, children from higher socio-economic backgrounds had a 30% higher chance of achieving balanced bilingualism compared to their peers from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

Moreover, the article explored the cognitive benefits of bilingual learning. It was observed that bilingual children demonstrated enhanced executive functioning skills, including better attentional

control, cognitive flexibility, and working memory. The data analysis revealed that bilingual children scored an average of 15% higher on tasks related to cognitive flexibility and working memory compared to their monolingual counterparts.

In conclusion, the article highlights the importance of early exposure to bilingual language learning, consistent language input, and supportive socio-economic factors in promoting bilingual language development among young children. The results suggest that starting bilingual learning from an early age and maintaining balanced language input can lead to greater bilingual proficiency.

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