



The North African Journal of Scientific Publishing (NAJSP)

مجلة شمال إفريقيا للنشر العلمي (NAJSP)

EISSN: 2959-4820

Volume 1, Issue 3, July-September 2023, Page No: 80-84

Website: <https://najsp.com/index.php/home/index>

SJIFactor 2023: 3.733

ISI 2023: 0.383

The Impact of Acquiring a Second Language on Cognitive Development

Mohamed Abdulla Ahmida Abdulnabi*

Higher Institute of Science and Technology Zuwetina, Libya

*Corresponding author: mohamedahmida1982@gmail.com

Received: May 29, 2023

Accepted: August 02, 2023

Published: August 07, 2023

Abstract:

It is vital to understand bilingualism to explain the benefits of having that skill in today's global society. Second language acquisition or bilingualism can be defined as the ability to understand and speak two languages fluently. The term can also be used to outline a society or individuals, and it might occur naturally under various environments or using guided instructions. A person may have equal proficiency in both languages, or one may remain to be dominant. There can be many theories connected to second language acquisition but all agree that mastering the basic components of a language is to understand that language. The essay will evaluate these differences and definitions and outline the role of teachers in second language acquisition. It will also cover the development of a child's cognitive abilities and learning, along with acquiring a second language. After that, it will discuss the benefits and implications of speaking more than one language and investigates how schools and families might assist in learning other languages.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Cognitive Development, Bilingualism.

Cite this article as: M. A. A. Abdulnabi, "The Impact of Acquiring a Second Language on Cognitive Development," *The North African Journal of Scientific Publishing (NAJSP)*, vol. 1, no. 3, pp. 80–84, July-September 2023

Publisher's Note: African Academy of Advanced Studies – AAAS stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



Copyright: © 2023 by the authors. Licensee The North African Journal of Scientific Publishing (NAJSP), Libya. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

أثر اكتساب لغة ثانية على التطور المعرفي

محمد عبد الله حميده عبد النبي*
المعهد العالي للعلوم والتكنولوجيا الزويتينة، ليبيا

الملخص

من الضروري فهم ثنائية اللغة لشرح فوائد امتلاك هذه المهارة في المجتمع العالمي اليوم. يمكن تعريف اكتساب اللغة الثانية أو ثنائية اللغة على أنها القدرة على فهم وتحدث لغتين بطلاقة. يمكن أيضًا استخدام المصطلح لتحديد الخطوط العريضة لمجتمع أو أفراد، وقد يحدث بشكل طبيعي في بيئات مختلفة أو باستخدام إرشادات موجهة. قد يكون لدى الشخص إتقان متساوٍ في كلتا اللغتين، أو قد يظل أحدهما مهيمنًا. يمكن أن يكون هناك العديد من النظريات المرتبطة باكتساب اللغة الثانية، لكن يتفق الجميع على أن إتقان المكونات الأساسية للغة هو فهم تلك اللغة. سيقدم المقال هذه الاختلافات والتعريفات ويحدد دور المعلمين في اكتساب اللغة الثانية. وسيغطي أيضًا تنمية القدرات المعرفية للطفل وتعلمه جنبًا إلى جنب مع اكتساب لغة

ثانية. بعد ذلك، سيناقش البرنامج فوائد وآثار التحدث بأكثر من لغة ويبحث في الكيفية التي يمكن أن تساعد بها المدارس والأسر في تعلم لغات أخرى.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اكتساب اللغة الثانية، التطور المعرفي، ثنائية اللغة.

Introduction

Language is among the most critical aspects associated with our lives. It is used to communicate with others while enjoying, transmitting a message, and acquiring new information. A multicultural and diverse society characterizes the 21st century, with an uptick in children learning English as a second language (D'Souza et al., 2020). Many people are also developing a second language through learning from parents or cultivating it in school. However, there are various misconceptions among some people who believe that acquiring a second language can be harmful to an individual. Others view bilingualism as a risk and discourage individuals from using a language that is not dominant. Regardless, there are several benefits of acquiring a second language where one can enjoy other cultures, read, and watch interesting foreign movies (D'Souza et al., 2020). Moreover, these benefits enhance one's cultural affiliation and expand one's cognitive capabilities. As a result, it is essential to make sure that the activities in the classroom investigate the methodology behind the acquisition of a second language and the fundamentals upon which it is built.

It is vital to understand bilingualism to explain the benefits of having that skill in today's global society. As a result, this essay will cover the development of a child's cognitive abilities and learning along with acquiring a second language. After that, it will discuss the implications of speaking more than one language and investigates how schools and families might assist in learning other languages. Generally, a person is considered bilingual if they can communicate in two languages, one of which is not their native tongue, and have at least one of the following linguistic abilities in the second language: speaking, listening, reading, and writing (Kaushanskaya & Prior, 2015). It is always possible to pick up one's first language without ever having to attend school. Picking up another language occurs if a child is brought up by parents who only speak one language in a community where most of the population speaks another language. It is also possible when parents who are fluent in more than one language bring up their child in a household where only one language is spoken predominantly.

Key benefits of having a second language skill

A child who grows up in a multilingual environment has a greater chance of developing bilingualism than a child not presented in such an environment. They boost the possibility that the child will become multilingual if the child is brought up in an environment where another language is spoken. When someone learns and uses a vocabulary because it is necessary at the moment or because of the surroundings, this is an example of language development that takes place within the context of the situation (Kaushanskaya & Prior, 2015). For the duration of a vocational trip, for example, a person may educate themselves in the native language to improve their ability to interact with the wait staff while making their order. In this case, all the individual must do to communicate in the other language, whether the master is basic correspondence skills. One can also learn a second language without losing proficiency in their original language, which may be the case with children of immigrants. They can quickly and efficiently take up the fundamentals of the second language. According to Jean Piaget's theory of intellectual development, a child's cognitive development quickens at certain ages. It expands into new areas as the child gains experience using their cognitive abilities (Bialystok & Werker, 2017). As a result, teachers in primary and secondary schools require a solid understanding of the process of cognitive development in children and the child's acquisition of their first language to organize, carry out, and evaluate second language acquisition appropriately.

The theories of language learning developed by Vygotsky are possibly the single most influential school of thought that supports acquiring a second language. It suggests that there are four separate periods in developing ideas and language. The stages are pre-intellectual intelligence, which occurs while language is still nonverbal; practical intelligence; outward symbolic representation; and internalization of symbols (Valian, 2015). These stages describe how cognitive development in children occurs, how they may pick up their first language, and how they might learn several languages and become multilingual. According to this theory, a child first uses language for "external social interaction;" nevertheless, with time, language evolves into an essential part of the child's intellectual growth and development (Perani & Abutalebi, 2015). A child has a "zone of proximal development," which refers to the activities range they can do on their own and with the supervision of an experienced teacher, adult, or another more capable child. The concept explains parent and teacher roles and those close to the child's play when it comes to supporting a child in learning a language and developing fluency.

When children first start school, they already possess a wide range of linguistic talents due to the diverse range of learning experiences they have previously experienced. Therefore, teachers need to recognize and respect this aspect of their student's learning. By doing so, they would be able to enhance the child's "culture capital." A youngster's language experiences at school differ from those at home (Perani & Abutalebi, 2015). At home, for instance, children are more likely to start conversations with adults. It is not usually the case that a child has special educational needs just because they are learning a second language. Similarly, just because a youngster has limited competence in English does not always suggest that they have difficulties with their cognitive capacities or their capacity to learn new things. As a result, the classroom must have an environment conducive to students expressing their multicultural perspectives and thoughts. Students have such an understanding that the same idea may be understood in a variety of ways, depending on both the context in which it is communicated and the language that is used to express it.

The effective ways to learn a second language

Altering one's approach to teaching is essential for a teacher to effectively cater to the wide range of pupils that attend a classroom, each of whom brings their unique learning style and language proficiency. It is essential that reading circles, learner-led discussion groups, and cooperative learning are all included in the lesson plans. When it comes to using texts, a teacher can choose to use one since they are of good quality and because the pictures are informative and interesting (Quinteros Baumgart & Billick, 2018). It is essential to keep in mind that children benefit from having visual clues to assist them in comprehending the tale that is being told. Thus, educators should include them in their methods of instruction. They should also make it a routine to integrate classic tales into their lesson plans because many of these stories feature repetition, which tends to increase learning. By connecting to the children's lives and experiences, the teacher provides a framework for the reading material. Getting students interested in higher-order learning may also be accomplished via the use of activities such as role-playing, hot seating, and dramatic play in language learning.

In addition, the teacher could invite speakers of the second language to talk to the pupils. When the pupils study the language, the teacher is not supposed to sit back and watch. The teacher is responsible for being creative and fostering an environment conducive to learning (Bialystok, 2015). Students should be able to express the views, values, and identities that their local and global sociocultural environments have shaped due to this activity. The instructor is responsible for providing the students with meaningful experiences, such as relationships, play, and a pleasant learning environment, for shaping the students' language development. For these reasons, the instructor should understand the student's cultural background. Mainly, this can be determined by looking at the student's overall academic performance (Bialystok, 2015). From a different perspective, teachers need to pay specialized attention to these pupils so that they can recognize the boundaries of their linguistic capabilities. They are responsible for maintaining a record of the academic progress made by each student in the classroom and the aspects of each student's situation that raise questions about their capacity to learn the target language. Moreover, the teacher should be able to evaluate each student's level of proficiency in their mother language and judge whether or not the level is acceptable for the student's age. The end game is that the teacher may use the student's first-language ability to facilitate the acquisition of the second language and make the process more enjoyable for the student.

The relationship between learning a language and one's identity is yet another facet of bilingualism that is fascinating and significant. People learning a second language are often seen as having several malleable identities as they work to overcome the obstacles of acquiring that language (Bialystok, 2015). Many scenarios impact a learner's ability to become fluent in a second language. One of these scenarios is the degree of linguistic motivation that the learner receives from others around them. Therefore, whenever children use their second language to communicate, they engage in identity development and negotiation. Consequently, kids develop a stable identification position in the language, enabling them to acquire it more effectively.

Gaining competency in two languages offers a wide range of benefits. Because bilingual people pay more attention to the language's structure, meaning, and grammatical aspects, they tend to have more linguistic sensitivity and greater mental flexibility. It suggests that, compared to monolinguals, bilinguals have a greater awareness of the language requirements of the people they engage or address. The ability to communicate fluently in two or more languages expands one's professional opportunities by allowing one to function well in some cultural contexts and societies (Woumans et al., 2016). Consequently, those who speak more than one language have improved cognitive abilities, such as linguistic alternatives in subject matter analysis. As a result, a child's cognitive flexibility may be enhanced if they are proficient in two or more languages.

By forming connotations and ideas about a subject, children can better understand the environments in which they find themselves. A person who speaks many languages may develop a thinking style that is more adaptable and open to new ideas. In addition, it encourages the growth of a person's intellectual capacity and accelerates their mental evolution. Recent research has proven that people who speak two languages have a higher IQ than those who only speak one language (Woumans et al., 2016). The reason is that people have denser brains. These researchers believe learning a second language will fundamentally alter the brain and increase the time it stays intellectually sharp. Bilingual individuals have been shown to have superior mental acuity than their monolingual counterparts between the ages of 30 and 88. Therefore, being able to speak more than one language may reduce the risk of cognitive decline as people become older. In addition, bilingual people are better able to regulate their attention, which helps to minimize the age-related increase in distractibility. The reason is that bilinguals are better able to focus on tasks that are both intricate and constantly changing.

The role of teachers in teaching a second language and developing students' cognitive skills

The cognitive processes of students learning a second language can tune out irrelevant information and focus instead on the most important information. The executive control system found in the brains of bilingual individuals enables these individuals to communicate and comprehend information more efficiently. For instance, since they have better-developed inhibitory control, children who speak more than one language are more likely to disregard perceptual details based on the context in which it is presented and the norms that govern certain scenarios (Kalashnikova et al., 2021). People who speak more than one language think more rapidly and have a broader perspective on almost any subject or event. They also have an edge on all levels: local, regional, national, and international. It happens because they are acquainted with various cultures, beliefs, and points of view and have a broader perspective on multiple issues. They contribute to establishing policies that consider the many cultures across the country. For instance, politicians fluent in many languages have a greater chance of persuading diverse populations to modify their views and actions, which may help defuse tense political situations.

There is a connection between acquiring a second language and gaining an appreciation for other cultures. Culture and identity have a significant amount of impact on the evolution of language and are all around us, but we only see them once someone brings them to our attention (Kalashnikova et al., 2021). The language people use affects, if not wholly bears on, their capability to make sense of the world around them. It means that people engage in identity development and negotiation whenever they use their second language to communicate. Due to this, people are prompted to reevaluate their perspectives on the target language. Consequently, kids develop a stable identification position in the language, enabling them to acquire it more effectively.

Conclusion

The use of bilingualism is also connected to financial benefits. Speaking two languages significantly enhances the chances of finding a job. Due to growing globalization and diversity, numerous economic sectors and organizations are placing a higher value on bilingual individuals to expand the range of services they provide and the number of customers they serve. These sectors include the educational sector, the tourist sector, the financial sector, the aviation sector, and the public relations sector. They might use this as leverage to negotiate for a higher salary, considering the many advantages offered to companies and organizations by employees who can communicate in several languages.

References

- [1] Bialystok, E. (2015). Bilingualism and the development of executive function: The role of attention. *Child development perspectives*, 9(2), 117-121. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12116>
- [2] Bialystok, E., & Werker, J. F. (2017). The systematic effects of bilingualism on children's development. *Developmental science*, 20(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111%2Fdesc.12535>
- [3] D'Souza, D., Brady, D., Haensel, J. X., & D'Souza, H. (2020). Is mere exposure enough? The effects of bilingual environments on infant cognitive development. *Royal Society open science*, 7(2), 180191. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.180191>
- [4] Kalashnikova, M., Pejovic, J., & Carreiras, M. (2021). The effects of bilingualism on attentional processes in the first year of life. *Developmental Science*, 24(2), e13011. <https://doi.org/10.1111/desc.13011>
- [5] Kaushanskaya, M., & Prior, A. (2015). Variability in the effects of bilingualism on cognition: It is not just about cognition, it is also about bilingualism. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 18(1), 27-28. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728914000510>

- [6] Perani, D., & Abutalebi, J. (2015). Bilingualism, dementia, cognitive and Neural Reserve. *Current Opinion in Neurology*, 28(6), 618–625. <https://doi.org/10.1097/wco.0000000000000267>
- [7] Quinteros Baumgart, C., & Billick, S. B. (2018). Positive cognitive effects of bilingualism and multilingualism on cerebral function: A review. *Psychiatric Quarterly*, 89(2), 273-283. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11126-017-9532-9>
- [8] Valian, V. (2015). Bilingualism and cognition. *Bilingualism: language and cognition*, 18(1), 3-24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1366728914000522>
- [9] Woumans, E., Surmont, J., Struys, E., & Duyck, W. (2016). The longitudinal effect of bilingual immersion schooling on cognitive control and intelligence. *Language Learning*, 66(S2), 76-91. <https://doi.org/10.1111/lang.12171>