



NURTURING YOUNG MINDS: THE BENEFITS AND BARRIERS OF SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

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Abstract *In the areas of education, linguistics, and cognitive science, the process of learning a second language (L2) throughout childhood has been widely studied and debated. Because of the brain's increased flexibility, which enables more flexibility in taking in and remembering language information, childhood is frequently regarded as an essential age for language learning. Speaking more than one language has become essential in many academic, professional, and cultural situations as civilizations become more interconnected through globalization. With a focus on cognitive, social, and cultural aspects, this paper aims to explore all of the benefits of early exposure to a second language while also addressing the main challenges that students may face. Learning a second language has several cognitive benefits, including improved memory storage, improved mental flexibility, and improved problem-solving abilities. Socially, bilingualism helps kids navigate multicultural settings more easily by fostering better communication skills, empathy, and a greater understanding of cultural diversity. Early exposure to a second language helps broaden a child's perspective and foster tolerance and inclusivity by assisting them in comprehending and appreciating the customs, beliefs, and viewpoints of many societies.*

Keywords: *Second language, Children, Benefit, Challenge, Strategy*

Abstrak Dalam bidang pendidikan, linguistik, dan ilmu kognitif, proses pembelajaran bahasa kedua (L2) sepanjang masa kanak-kanak telah banyak dipelajari dan diperdebatkan. Karena otak semakin fleksibel, yang memungkinkan lebih banyak fleksibilitas dalam menyerap dan mengingat informasi bahasa, masa kanak-kanak sering dianggap sebagai usia yang penting untuk pembelajaran bahasa. Berbicara lebih dari satu bahasa telah menjadi penting dalam banyak situasi akademis, profesional, dan budaya karena peradaban menjadi lebih saling terhubung melalui globalisasi. Dengan fokus pada aspek kognitif, sosial, dan budaya, makalah ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi semua manfaat dari paparan awal terhadap bahasa kedua sekaligus mengatasi tantangan utama yang mungkin dihadapi siswa. Mempelajari bahasa kedua memiliki beberapa manfaat kognitif, termasuk peningkatan penyimpanan memori, peningkatan fleksibilitas mental, dan peningkatan kemampuan memecahkan masalah. Secara sosial, bilingualisme membantu anak-anak menavigasi lingkungan multikultural dengan lebih mudah dengan menumbuhkan keterampilan komunikasi yang lebih baik, empati, dan pemahaman yang lebih besar tentang keragaman budaya. Paparan awal terhadap bahasa kedua membantu memperluas perspektif anak dan menumbuhkan toleransi dan inklusivitas dengan membantu mereka memahami dan menghargai adat istiadat, kepercayaan, dan sudut pandang banyak masyarakat.

Kata Kunci: Bahasa Kedua, Anak, Manfaat, Tantangan, Strategi

INTRODUCTION

Second language (L2) learning during childhood is one of the most fascinating topics in the fields of education and linguistics. Many experts believe that learning the language before the age of ten years allow children to speak correct and fluent as an indigenous person. Therefore, whatever the earlier children become familiar with foreign language, he have better chance to speak proficiency. On the other hand language learning, except native language, can provide develop a lifelong ability to more communicate with others.

One of the important advantages of mastering a foreign language is access to better job opportunities and the person will find deeper understanding to their own culture and other nations. Including the benefits of knowing a foreign language in today's society, enhancing economic competitiveness in the external surface, improving global communications and maintains and manage political and security interests of a country. Today's parents know the importance of being bilingual. Now they just need to know where to turn for assistance in finding fun and affordable bilingual products that will bring the target language into their child's life. The internet has made their search much easier than five years ago. Look for bilingual programs that allow you to sample their visual or audio products on line so that you get a good feel for the content and style of the language learning within that particular program. Despite its great potential, learning a second language during childhood comes with its own set of challenges. Children frequently face obstacles such as a lack of environmental support, limited access to quality learning resources, and difficulties in balancing their first language (L1) with L2. These challenges can hinder their progress and potentially discourage them from continuing their language learning journey. Therefore, this study seeks to explore the benefits, challenges, and strategies that can support second language learning during childhood. By addressing these aspects, this research aims to provide insights into how the process can be optimized to achieve successful outcomes.

1.2 Problem Statement

- a. What are the benefits of learning a second language as a child?
- b. What challenges do kids face when learning up a second language?
- c. What strategies can be used to improve the learning of a second language in childhood?

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- a. Identify the benefits of developing a second language in childhood from a cultural, social, and cognitive perspective.
- b. Analyse the main challenges that kids face when learning a second language.
- c. Give recommendations on how parents and teachers could motivate children to learn a second language.

1.4 Important of the Study

- a. Academic Important: By providing a better understanding of the factors affecting the process, this study will hopefully improve the body of knowledge on learning a second language in children.

- b. Applied Important: The goal of this study is to give parents and teachers useful advice on how to support kids' success in learning a second language. Parents may encourage the overall growth of kids and improve their language skills by using effective actions.

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focuses on children between the ages of 5 and 12 who are learning a second language. It highlights the cognitive, social, environmental, and educational elements that affect language acquisition success. The study also looks at how parents, teachers, and the community at large can help create the best possible learning environment for kids.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of Second Language Acquisition

Stephan Krashen's Monitor Model of second language acquisition is as follows: In the acquisition/learning hypothesis learners acquire language as a result of being exposed to language samples in a similar manner children acquire their first language with conscious awareness to form. In contrast, we learn through conscious attention to form and rule learning; more language is acquired than learned. The monitor hypothesis suggests that second language users access what they already have acquired when interacting in spontaneous communication. They can use learned rules and patterns as a 'monitor' or editor; this allows them to make minor changes and fine tune what the already acquired system produced. This monitoring occurs only when the speaker or writer has ample time, is diligent about producing correct language, and has learnt the rules. The natural order hypothesis states that, like first language acquisition, acquiring a second language unfolds in predictable sequences. Language rules easiest to state (and hence to learn) are not necessarily the first to be acquired. The comprehensible input hypothesis states that language acquisition happens when a learner is exposed to comprehensible language and contains $[i+1]$. The 'i' representing the language level already acquired. The '1' as a metaphor for language (Grammatical forms, aspects of pronunciation and words) that is a step beyond the learner's level. The affective filter hypothesis attempts to explain why some people who after being exposed to a large quantity of comprehensible input do not acquire language successfully. This 'affective filter' is a metaphorical barrier preventing learners from language acquisition when appropriate input is available. Affect refers to anxious feelings or negative attitude that may be associated with poor learning outcomes. An anxious, tense, or bored learner may filter out input, thereby making it unavailable for acquisition.

Another important framework is the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967), which asserts that children have a heightened capacity for language learning before puberty due to the brain's plasticity. During this critical period, the neural mechanisms associated with language acquisition are most flexible, making it easier for children to absorb and master new languages. Beyond this period, the ability to learn a language may still exist but with greater effort and less efficiency.

Social Interactionist theories also emphasize the importance of interaction in language learning. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

suggests that children learn best when guided by more knowledgeable individuals, such as parents, teachers, or peers, in activities slightly beyond their independent capabilities.

2.2 Benefits of Second Language Learning

Around the world today, there are more and more children and adults who, for personal, aesthetic, academic and economic reasons, are becoming multilingual. It is a fact that there are more bilingual brains on the planet than monolingual ones. Whether it be to find new literatures, friends or business markets, or to maintain a connection with the historic past of a heritage language, there are many reasons to learn something of a second language. Students learn that cultural practices vary around the world. They learn respect for members of other cultures and speakers of other languages. It has been argued that it is much more difficult to be judgemental of an individual you know than it is to be judgemental of an unknown group.

Teachers of foreign languages know firsthand the importance of enabling students to experience the feeling of being comfortable with being uncomfortable. Yo Azama, a teacher of Japanese at North Salinas High School in Salinas, California, and a former National Language Teacher of the Year, describes the process he sees his own students going through as they embark on the journey toward global competence:

I think curious learners, whether young or old, take themselves far beyond their comfort zones. Once they become curious, they are usually busy focusing on the topic—so without realizing it, they seem to reach well beyond their perceived capabilities. As a teacher, I try to be mindful about providing opportunities to spark their interest, even if it means pushing my students out of their comfortable, usual ways of thinking. Initially, students might find the new concepts strange or uncomfortable, but soon after, they find there are endless possibilities for the used-to-be-the-only-way perspective, which frees them from their prior narrow viewpoint. Showing students how language learning can tie into career aspirations is also critical. ACTFL believes that no matter what sector of the work world students find interesting, language skills will be an asset. This is why one aspect of the Lead with Languages campaign encourages students not currently studying a language. Empowering students to speak up for language education can also help change public attitudes. Both the Lead with Languages campaign and the America's Languages report feature powerful testimonials from students and young people who are invested in gaining proficiency in languages other than English. For example, Dana Banks, formerly the deputy chief of mission at the U.S. Embassy in Lomé, Togo, earned her bachelor's degree in political science from Spelman College, followed by several advanced degrees, fellowships, and assignments overseas with the Department of State. Proficient in French, Haitian Creole, and Thai, Banks attributes her international success to her extensive international education: "My education aided me in understanding other cultures... I think it's important for Americans to have the knowledge and foreign language skills of other cultures because the world is indeed interconnected through the Internet, through advances in travel and communication—the world is moving at a fast pace."

2.2.1 Cognitive Benefits

- a. **Enhanced Executive Functioning:** Children who speak two languages often show better problem-solving abilities, improved mental adaptability, and the

ability to switch between tasks quickly. The frontal lobe of the brain, which develops stronger in bilingual learners, is connected to these executive tasks.

- b. Improved Metalinguistic Awareness: Children who acquire a second language are more prepared to study and consider linguistic patterns, which leads to a deeper understanding of the ways in which language functions.
- c. Long-Term Benefits and Cognitive Reserve: Research shows that bilingualism can delay the beginning of age-related cognitive decline, including disorders like dementia. Over time, a more adaptable brain is a result of mental flexibility gained from learning two languages.

2.2.2 Social and Cultural Benefits

- a. Intercultural Competence: Learning a second language improves cultural sensitivity and empathy. It enhances a child's ability to navigate diverse environments by helping them understand and appreciate a variety of different perspectives.
- b. Global Communication: People who are bilingual can interact with individuals from various linguistic and cultural backgrounds effectively, creating opportunities for partnerships, travel, and international relationships.

2.2.3 Academic Benefits

- a. Improved Academic Performance: Because bilingual kids have stronger cognitive capacities, they frequently perform better in subjects like science, arithmetic, and reading.
- b. Access to International Opportunities: Children who are fluent in a second language can take advantage of educational opportunities overseas, including exchange programs and international schools.

2.3 Challenges in Second Language Learning

2.3.1 Environmental Challenges

- a. Limited Resources in Rural Areas: Children who live in underprivileged or rural areas often lack access to resources for learning a second language, including trained teachers.
- b. Unsupportive Learning Environments: Children may find it difficult to practice and retain what they have learned if they are not in an environment that promotes the active use of the second language.

2.3.2 Balancing L1 and L2

- a. Issues with Language Dominance: One language often takes over, which may result in decreased skill or even loss in the other.
- b. Excessive Code-Switching: Although bilinguals naturally transition between languages, frequent and improper code-switching may delay the development of fluency in either language.

2.3.3 Psychological Factors

- a. Language Anxiety: Children may be hesitant to practice speaking in the second language because they feel anxious or insecure about making mistakes.
- b. Low Motivation: Children may lose interest in learning the language if they don't receive enough support or have clear objectives, which might delay their overall development.

2.4 Effective Strategies for Second Language Learning

2.4.1 Immersive Approaches

One of the best methods for learning a second language is immersion. Immersion environments, including language camps, bilingual classrooms, or cultural exchanges, expose kids to the target language in authentic, everyday situations. Their internalization of the language becomes more natural and intuitive as a result of this continuous exposure.

2.4.2 Use of Technology

Fun and interactive venues for language practice are offered by technological tools, such as language learning applications like Rosetta Stone, Babbel, and Duolingo. These resources frequently use gamification to encourage students and provide specific feedback to boost learning.

2.4.3 Parental Support

Parents are essential for supporting their kids along their language learning path. A child's development can be much faster by supporting activities including reading bilingual books, watching films in the target language, and practicing conversational skills at home. Parents can create a motivating and encouraging environment by demonstrating positive attitudes toward language acquisition.

2.4.4 Structured Instruction

Grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation can be established through language training in schools or private coaching. Lessons that are structured guarantee that kids advance systematically and receive instruction that is suitable for their level of ability.

2.5 Social and Cultural Advantages

Learning a second language during childhood provides numerous social and cultural benefits that can shape a child's personality, understanding of the world, and interpersonal relationships. The skills and awareness gained through bilingualism extend far beyond linguistic abilities and foster a deeper connection to others and their environments. Below is an in-depth exploration of these benefits:

1. Developing Superior Communication Skills

Mastering a second language enables children to communicate with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds effectively. This skill becomes particularly advantageous in diverse social settings where bilingual children can bridge gaps in understanding between people who do not share a common language. Additionally, the process of learning a new language improves their ability to listen carefully, interpret nonverbal cues, and respond appropriately. This heightened sensitivity to communication nuances allows bilingual children to excel not only in verbal exchanges but also in reading emotional and social cues, enhancing their ability to connect with others.

2. Cultivating Empathy and Cultural Understanding

When children learn a second language, they are often introduced to the traditions, values, and practices associated with the culture tied to that language. This exposure helps them develop a sense of curiosity and appreciation for different ways of life. For instance, a child learning French might also explore French cuisine, festivals, and art, enriching their understanding of French-speaking communities worldwide. By experiencing these cultural elements, children become more empathetic and

open-minded. They recognize that different people have unique worldviews, fostering respect and reducing stereotypes or prejudices. Over time, these insights shape a child's ability to interact with others in a manner that is both thoughtful and inclusive.

3. Expanding Social Circles and Building Friendships

Speaking a second language allows children to connect with peers who speak that language, providing opportunities to form friendships that might otherwise be impossible. Bilingual children are more likely to engage in multicultural activities, clubs, or exchange programs, where they can meet others from diverse cultural backgrounds. These social interactions not only broaden their perspectives but also create lasting bonds and mutual learning opportunities. For example, a child who speaks both English and Spanish might participate in bilingual storytime or sports teams, where shared experiences strengthen relationships.

4. Gaining a Global Perspective

A second language opens up a world of resources, such as books, films, music, and media, that might not be accessible in the child's native language. Through these materials, children gain insight into global issues, cultural narratives, and historical contexts that shape different societies. This expanded worldview helps children see beyond their immediate surroundings, fostering a deeper understanding of international events and global interconnectedness. It also encourages curiosity about other languages and cultures, further motivating lifelong learning.

5. Enhancing Adaptability and Social Flexibility

Children who grow up bilingual often navigate between different languages and cultural environments. This ability to switch between linguistic and cultural norms teaches them how to adapt to various social situations with ease. For instance, a bilingual child might know when to use formal expressions in one language versus casual slang in another, depending on the context. This adaptability not only makes them more socially versatile but also equips them with problem-solving skills that are valuable in personal and professional settings later in life.

6. Strengthening Identity and Sense of Belonging

For children who come from multicultural families, learning a second language can serve as a bridge to their heritage and family history. Speaking the language of their parents or grandparents helps preserve cultural traditions and deepens their sense of identity. At the same time, bilingualism allows these children to feel connected to both their home culture and the larger community. This dual identity fosters confidence, pride, and resilience, as they learn to celebrate their uniqueness while contributing to diverse environments.

2.6 Challenges in Learning a Second Language in Childhood

Although learning a second language during childhood is often praised for its numerous cognitive, social, and cultural benefits, the process is not without its difficulties. Children, parents, and educators frequently encounter obstacles that can hinder progress and affect motivation. These challenges arise from various sources, including environmental limitations, individual differences, and social dynamics. Below is a detailed exploration of these challenges:

A. Insufficient Exposure to the Target Language

One of the most significant hurdles in learning a second language is the lack of consistent exposure to it. Language acquisition thrives on immersion, yet many children do not have the opportunity to interact regularly with native speakers or engage in environments where the language is naturally spoken. For instance, children learning a language in a classroom may only spend a few hours per week practicing it, which is not enough to develop fluency. Moreover, when the target language is not commonly used in their community, children may struggle to retain vocabulary and grammar rules because they do not have practical opportunities to apply them in real-life situations. This limited exposure slows down progress and reduces their confidence in using the language.

B. Balancing First and Second Language Development

For young children, especially those still mastering their native language, the introduction of a second language can sometimes create confusion or delay in overall language development. In some cases, children may mix elements of both languages, such as using words from one language within the sentence structure of another. This phenomenon, known as code-switching, is a natural part of bilingual development but may concern parents or educators unfamiliar with the process. Additionally, if too much emphasis is placed on the second language, the child's proficiency in their first language might stagnate. This is particularly challenging in immigrant families where maintaining cultural and linguistic heritage is essential. Balancing the development of both languages requires careful planning to ensure that neither language is neglected.

C. Maintaining Motivation and Interest

Learning a second language is a long-term commitment that requires consistent effort and engagement, which can be difficult for young children who may not see the immediate value of their efforts. If the learning process becomes monotonous or overly academic, children may lose interest. For example, repetitive drills or memorization tasks might frustrate them, leading to a lack of enthusiasm for continuing the language. Children are more likely to feel motivated when the language is connected to enjoyable activities, such as games, music, or stories. However, when this connection is missing, maintaining their engagement becomes a significant challenge, especially if they face setbacks or struggle with the language.

D. Limited Access to Quality Resources

Not all children have access to the same level of resources for learning a second language. In some areas, especially rural or underserved communities, there may be a shortage of qualified language teachers, appropriate learning materials, or immersive programs. For families seeking to teach their children less commonly spoken languages, finding resources tailored to those languages can be even more difficult. Furthermore, the cost of private tutoring, language classes, or educational tools may create barriers for families with limited financial means. This disparity in access to resources can affect a child's ability to make consistent progress, potentially leading to frustration or feelings of inadequacy.

E. Social Pressures and Fear of Making Mistakes

Children learning a second language often face social challenges, particularly in environments where their peers may not value or understand the effort required to learn

another language. For instance, a child might feel embarrassed to speak the language in front of others due to fear of making mistakes or being teased for their pronunciation. This fear can discourage children from practicing the language openly, which is essential for building fluency. In some cases, children from bilingual or immigrant families may feel pressure to conform to the dominant language of their peers, leading them to reject or downplay their second language to fit in.

F. Cognitive and Emotional Strain

The process of learning a second language is mentally demanding, requiring children to memorize new vocabulary, understand unfamiliar grammatical structures, and develop proper pronunciation. For young learners, balancing these demands with other academic and extracurricular responsibilities can feel overwhelming. This cognitive strain may manifest as frustration, especially if the child feels they are not making progress quickly enough. Emotional challenges, such as feeling left behind compared to peers or experiencing a lack of support, can further complicate the learning process. For some children, this combination of cognitive and emotional stress can lead to a loss of confidence or a reluctance to continue learning the language.

G. Individual Differences in Language Learning Ability

Every child learns at their own pace, and some children may find language learning more difficult than others due to factors such as memory retention, learning styles, or natural aptitude for language acquisition. For instance, a child who struggles with auditory processing might find it challenging to distinguish sounds in a new language, while another child may excel in reading and writing but struggle with speaking. These individual differences mean that a one-size-fits-all approach to language instruction is rarely effective. Children who face greater difficulties may require additional support, patience, and tailored teaching methods to succeed.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study uses a case study method and a qualitative descriptive methodology. Children ages 5 to 12 who are learning a second language in a bilingual school environment can be carefully studied thanks to the qualitative aspect of this study. By focusing on one case, this study seeks to offer an in-depth understanding of the elements affecting children's second language acquisition (SLA), such as the roles of parents, teachers, and the learning environment. The goal of the descriptive portion of the study is to illustrate the relationships and dynamics that are seen in bilingual classrooms in real life. Because it provides insights into the benefits and challenges faced, this design is especially appropriate for revealing the complicated nature of SLA in children.

3.2 Data Collection Techniques

3.2.1 Interviews

Three main categories are interviewed: children, parents, and teachers.

- **Teachers:** The interviews with teachers focus on their strategies, methods, and challenges in supporting the acquisition of a second language. They offer opinions on students' development as well as insights on curriculum design and classroom procedures.
- **Parents:** The purpose of parental interviews is to investigate how families support second language acquisition (SLA), including at-home language actions, attitudes toward bilingualism, and the difficulties parents have in supporting their kids' education.
- **Children:** The purpose of the interviews with children is to gain insight into their own experiences, perspectives, and reasons for learning a second language. To make sure the kids feel comfortable expressing their opinions, straightforward, developmentally appropriate questions are used.

3.2.2 Observations

The purpose of classroom observations is to record interactions and teaching methods in bilingual environments in real time. As the researcher notes:

- Teaching methods used by teachers to present and strengthen the second language. The participation and participation of kids in language-related activities.
- Interactions between peers and the casual use of L2, like in group talks or during playtime.
- To learn how kids move between their first language (L1) and second language (L2) in useful, real-world situations, daily interactions at school are also monitored.

3.2.3 Documentation

In addition to the original data sources, relevant papers are gathered and reviewed. These include lesson plans and curriculum for schools that specify the format of teaching second languages. Student progress reports and language evaluations. Academic articles and earlier research that potentially support the results.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Second language as a child has major benefits for social interaction, academic performance, and cognitive development, among other areas. Early second language acquisition helps children improve their communication, cultural awareness, and

problem-solving skills—all of which are critical in the connected world of today. The process of learning a second language is not without difficulties, though. A child's development may be hampered by psychological obstacles like fear, a lack of access to high-quality learning materials, and the requirement for regular practice. Effective teaching techniques, encouraging surroundings, and teamwork between parents and teachers are some of the well-thought-out tactics needed to overcome these challenges. This guarantees that kids can minimize any potential challenges while optimizing the benefits of learning a second language.

4.2 Recommendations

4.2.1 Recommendations for Teachers

Teachers need to embrace communication-based teaching strategies that prioritize participation and real-world language use. Children are encouraged to fully and meaningfully interact with the second language through strategies including playing a role, storytelling, and group discussions. Another essential component of education is the incorporation of technology. Children can practice and improve their abilities on interactive and captivating platforms made possible by tools such as multimedia resources, internet games, and language learning applications. In order to enhance conventional teaching techniques, teachers need to choose and incorporate these resources into their lesson plans. Additionally, creating an immersive learning environment in the classroom where the second language is often used for activities and instruction aids in children's confidence and fluency development. Their communication abilities are further strengthened by promoting interaction between peers in the target language.

4.2.2 Recommendations for Parents

When it comes to helping their children learn a second language, parents are crucial. Parents should: Take part in multilingual activities, including watching movies, reading books, or playing games in the second language, to foster a supportive atmosphere at home. By combining the second language into everyday activities, you can promote conversation practice. Children's motivation and confidence can be increased by showing a positive attitude toward bilingualism. In order to stay updated on their child's development and spot any areas that might need further help, parents and teachers should also speak on a regular schedule. Giving students access to extra learning

resources, such as flashcards, instructional applications, or internet sites, can improve their educational experience even more.

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