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Developmental Benefits and Challenges of Early Bilingualism and Multilingualism

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Developmental Benefits and Challenges of Early Bilingualism and Multilingualism

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the thesis and its aims

The following thesis is a study of the developmental benefits and challenges of speaking two or more languages at once from an early age. The thesis will examine the beliefs of 16 young Norwegian adults, between the ages of 18 and 40, who have all been bi- or multilingual from before the age of seven. The study will be conducted with the purpose of learning what cognitive, linguistic and cultural benefits or challenges Norwegian adults have experienced through the years of growing up exposed to two or more languages.

Across the whole planet, bilingualism is known as a familiar phenomenon. In fact, in large parts of the world, using more than one language on a daily basis is a necessity. Some countries, like Sri Lanka for example, even have two official languages (Krulatz, Dahl & Flognfeldt, 2018, p. 54). There are countless of young children across the globe who grow up speaking two languages simultaneously from an early age (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013, p. 95). Furthermore, ultimately, individuals might ask themselves whether the ability to speak two languages from an early age is proven to be beneficial or rather challenging for those who possess the skill.

This research paper aims to investigate a set of research questions, including whether there exist any developmental cultural, cognitive and linguistic benefits for individuals who are bilingual or multilingual from an early age, and if that is the case, to identify specific advantages. In contrast, the research paper will also aim to shed light on potential developmental challenges of speaking two languages at once as a child.

1.2 Thesis outline

With the purpose of providing answers to the research questions, the thesis will contain a "theory" section. The theory section will be partitioned into three separate segments. Firstly, it will look to shed light on relevant theoretical background regarding bi- and multilingualism and the potential benefits and challenges that comes with it. Secondly, the theory section aims to present information from a selection of previous relevant studies concerning potential

advantages and obstacles associated with early bi- and multilingualism, Lastly, the theory section will look to include other suitable literature that discusses or defines bi- or multilingualism.

In additional efforts to provide answers to the research questions, the research paper will include a third chapter, named "methodology". The methodology section will look to indicate how the research questions will be attempted to be answered through the selected research method, in this instance, a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be carried out with help from 16 young bi- and multilingual adults, to identify their beliefs related to potential benefits and challenges that comes with early bi- and multilingualism.

The fourth chapter, "findings", will showcase the detailed data obtained from the questionnaire. Proceeding further, the "discussion" section of the thesis will discuss the results gathered from the questionnaire. Lastly, the thesis will include a "conclusion" chapter. This chapter will provide a summary of selected information gathered in the paper. Furthermore, it will shed light on the achievements of the analysis, as well as its limitations.

2. Theory

2.1 Introduction

The theory chapter will be structured into three different parts. To begin with, it will provide insight into the relevant theoretical background surrounding bilingualism. Secondly, this section will aim to showcase results from relevant previous studies regarding the potential advantages and challenges connected to early bi- and multilingualism. Finally, the theory section will include additional relevant literature that addresses the potential advantages and disadvantages of early bi- and multilingualism.

2.2 Brief historical overview – Scandinavia and Multilingualism

As the research paper aims to discover what advantages and disadvantages adults experience in relation to early bi- and multilingualism, it is relevant to understand why and how countries identify as multilingual communities, with Scandinavia being used as an example.

Historically speaking, Scandinavian countries have been multilingual communities for centuries. The diversity of languages spoken in these countries is a result of immigration, motivated by economic, political and social factors (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 20).

2.3 How languages are learned and different types of language learning

There are different ways in which languages are learned. In this thesis, various terms related to language learning will be used. Therefore, it is important to define these terms precisely and get a clear understanding of what they mean.

"First language", often abbreviated as "L1" refers to the first language which a person learns in life. The first language often remains that person´s most comfortable language and the one in which they have the highest linguistic competence throughout life. Moreover, the "second language", often abbreviated "L2", is the language learned following very early childhood. The L2 can be learned later in childhood, as an adolescent, or as an adult (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 32).

The term first language is also used synonymously with the term "mother tongue", according to Krulatz et al. The latter refers to the language which a person has spoken since early childhood, but which also holds the connotation that this is the language that carries culture and family traditions. For many children, the mother tongue is the first language and the "home language", which refers to the language(s) spoken by the person´s family at home (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 31-32).

A considerable proportion of children worldwide are exposed to multiple languages in their early developmental years, and the rationales for this are multifarious. For instance, such exposure may stem from being raised by parents who speak dissimilar languages or from frequent interactions with people who utilize languages distinct from those spoken at home (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 55).

2.4 Defining bilingualism, multilingualism and the different types of bilingualism

The world common phenomenon that is "bilingualism" has historically been defined in various ways. Interestingly, author Andrew Cohen claims that the terms "bilingualism" and "bilingual" are frequently used without being adequately defined (Øzerk, 2016, p. 95).

English Professor Anna Krulatz defines bilingualism as "the ability to use two languages" (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 53). On the other hand, writer Colin Baker claims that defining exactly who is or is not bilingual is essentially "elusive" and "ultimately impossible" (Baker, 2001, p. 15). Furthermore, Author Anthony Liddicoat claims that due to the existence of many individuals who speak two languages, but who do not exhibit "native-like" control in both languages, it is challenging to know exactly how fluent a person must be in both languages for them to be classified as bilingual (Liddicoat, 1991, p. 1).

According to Liddicoat there are different types of bilingualism. He mentions "simultaneous" and "successive" bilingualism. Liddicoat explains that when two languages are learned simultaneously by a child, it is referred to as "simultaneous bilingualism" and both languages can be considered the child´s first languages. On the contrary, if a child learns a second language after fully learning a first language, it is called "successive bilingualism" (Liddicoat, 1991, p. 5). After gaining more knowledge of how children acquire language, some people believe that simultaneous bilingualism is in fact the only "true" bilingualism (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 55).

According to Krulatz et al., in the case of a child being a successive bilingual, there is a risk of becoming an "unbalanced bilingual" over time, meaning they no longer have equal competence in two languages. For instance, if a child has learned a first language from their parents, which is not the language spoken in the country or community they find themselves in, the first- or home language will likely come to play a smaller role in their lives as they grow up. As the child reaches school age, they will likely be heavily exposed to the community language, used in schools and probably within friend groups. If this happens, there exists a risk that competence in the home language will be lost or weakened over time. A such loss is referred to as "substrative bilingualism". In contrast, if the home language is

maintained in order to help the child develop in both languages, it is referred to as "additive bilingualism" (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 57).

Independent on if it is simultaneous bilingualism or successive bilingualism, when a child acquires two languages at the same time, they are commonly referred to as an "early bilingual", explains Krulatz et al. (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 57).

When an individual has the ability to use more than two languages, it is referred to as multilingualism. Similarly to bilinguals, individuals can be multilingual in simultaneous or successive, subtractive or additive and early or late ways (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 53).

2.5 Code-switching and code-mixing

"Code-switching" and "code-mixing" are terms commonly used within the topics of multilingualism and bilingualism. As both terms will be addressed later in the thesis, it is important to get a clear understanding of what they mean and how they associate with multilingual and bilingual individuals.

Code-switching means switching between different languages during a conversation. It is very common for bi- and multilinguals. Although some may believe code-switching is a sign of poor competence in each of the languages spoken - this is not true, according to Krulatz et al. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Code-switching has been found to be a sign of high competence in both languages involved (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 64). For instance, if two siblings are having a conversation where they mix both their L1 and L2 in the same sentences, it means they are utilizing their multilingual competence. Code-switching normally occurs when all participants in a conversation have knowledge of the different languages being used (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 65).

One of the main ways that bi- or multilingual speakers utilize code-switching is to indicate a switch in context. In order to provide cues to listeners about how to understand a particular utterance, speakers may switch language (Nilep, 2020, p. 8).

The term "code-mixing" holds a similar meaning to code-switching, although instead of switching back and forth between two languages in a sentence, code-mixing refers to when someone is mixing in a word or idea from another language (Baker, 2001, p. 101).

2.6 Translanguaging

Translanguaging is another phenomenon that involves the intentional and dynamic use of two or more languages by bi- or multilingual people. Although similar, translanguaging is theoretically distinct from code-switching, according to Krulatz et al. Lately, some researchers have been critical of the term "code-switching", as they feel it implies the existence of two or more separate languages in the mind of a bi- or multilingual. A new term, "translanguaging", is based on the assumption that the languages known by the bi- or multilinguals "are not stored separately in the brain but are interdependent and rely on a common foundation" (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 138). Multilingual people choose which languages to use based on the specific situation. This is essentially translanguaging (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 138).

2.7 Advantages of bilingualism and multilingualism – Previous research and literature

According to Krulatz et al. there are numerous advantages that comes with being able to speak two or more languages. For instance, Krulatz et al. mentions the ability to understand and take part in conversations in more than one language as an "enjoyable" advantage, as it brings the opportunity to interact with different people who can help contribute to your own "personal growth" (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 83). Furthermore, Krulatz et al. mentions cognitive flexibility as an argued benefit of bilingualism. Data obtained from previous studies have showed that due to being exposed to two or more languages during the course of their lives, multilingual and bilingual individuals are more flexible, better at controlling their attention and greater at ignoring unnecessary information when completing linguistic tasks, as opposed to monolingual individuals (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 83). Additionally, multilinguals and bilinguals have been revealed to do well when challenged to learn yet another language. According to Krulatz et al., bi- and multilingual individuals tend to look for similarities and differences in relation to the languages they already know when learning a new language.

Multilinguals more so than bilinguals, due to their wider existing vocabulary (Krulatz et al., 2018, p. 84). Similarly to Krulatz et al., Professor Åsta Haukås from the University of Bergen points towards several benefits with being bilingual, such as being more cognitively flexible, longer concentration levels, higher scores on intelligence tests and lower risks of dementia (Haukås, 2023).

With the purpose of further investigating the effects of bilingualism and multilingualism on young individuals, Haukås, together with colleagues Storto and Tjurikova, carried out a research where over 500 Norwegian secondary school students took part, with the majority being multilingual children. The research method conducted was a questionnaire. The results showed among other things that the majority of the students felt that knowledge of more than two languages was an advantage when learning an additional language. Furthermore, the questionnaire revealed that the students believed being multilingual helped them understand things in different ways and that it benefitted them when learning other subjects in school (Haukås, 2023).

Other studies have revealed that bilingualism and multilingualism can also prove to be beneficial in other areas. Culturally speaking, previous studies have discovered that bilingual children tend to maintain strong ties with their family, culture and ethnic identity. Additionally, it provides an opportunity to gather knowledge from different cultures and gain access to their history, art and literature (Gunnerud, 2021, p. 14). Moreover, Gunnerud claims that bilingualism can lead to advantages in the job market in relation to both salary and position within the employment hierarchy (Gunnerud, 2021, p. 14).

2.8 Challenges of bilingualism and multilingualism – Previous research and literature

Although research showcase numerous developmental benefits of early bilingualism and multilingualism, there are also challenges and disadvantages connected to the terms. For instance, it has been suggested that bilingual individuals have poorer language skills in both their languages. Bilingual learners have less exposure to each of their languages than monolingual learners do. Therefore, their opportunities of learning are divided between their

languages, hence why they tend to know fewer words in each language (Gunnerud, 2021, p. 14, 17).

Other challenges that are common for bilingual or multilingual individuals include apparent delay in language acquisition. Furthermore, multilinguals and bilinguals risk frequent confusion between the languages they speak due to "interference of the several phonological, lexical and grammatical systems" (Ardila, 2012, p. 100). Correspondingly to Gunnerud, Ardila mentions a possible decrease in vocabulary in the several spoken languages as a challenge for multilinguals. (Ardila, 2012, p. 100).

In conclusion, whilst the theory shows evidence of multiple advantages in relation to early bilingualism and multilingualism, previous research and literature reveals a number of challenges and disadvantages that may come with it, such as language confusion, decreased vocabulary, and overall poorer language skills in comparison to monolinguals.

3. Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In the following section, the methodology of the research paper will be presented. The methodology section of the research paper will introduce the questionnaire that will be carried out with the purpose of obtaining data that can help answer the research questions. Although parts of the research questions can be answered to some degree through previous research and literature, this specific questionnaire aims to discover what developmental benefits and challenges bi- and multilinguals experience specifically in Norway. The data will be obtained from 16 early bi- or multilingual volunteers, all aged between 18 and 40 years old. Furthermore, this section of the thesis aims to look at advantages and disadvantages with the chosen research method.

3.2 Background information

A group of 16 young bi- and multilingual adults, who are all between the ages of 18 to 40, will participate in the questionnaire. All the participants have been bi- or multilingual from before the age of seven and have grown up exposed to a home language, spoken with their parents at home, in addition to their community language, which in this case is Norwegian. The specific age of each participant, sex and mother tongue has been completely anonymized through the anonymous version of "Nettskjema" in order to protect each contributor's identity in any direct or indirect way possible. This has been conducted in line with NSD/Sikt´s security guidelines.

3.3 Questionnaire as a research method – Pros and cons

This research paper will use a questionnaire as a method to obtain data from 16 Norwegian adults between the ages of 18 and 40. The questionnaire that will be handed out to the individuals will be quantitative, including open and close ended questions. A questionnaire has been chosen as the research method because it is one of the most common research methods used when aiming to collect data. They are "easy to create, very versatile and able to gather large amount of information quickly in a form that is readily processable" (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 8). One of the biggest advantages with performing a questionnaire is cost-effectiveness. Researchers can collect extremely large pieces of data in less than an hour. If constructed well, processing the data can also be quick and quite straightforward, especially with the use of modern technology (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 6).

Although the so far description of questionnaires as a research method may make them seem like the "perfect" way to obtain data, this is not entirely correct, according to Dornyei and Taguchi. In fact, questionnaire have some serious limitations, some which have led some researchers to believe they are not "reliable or valid". It is easy to "produce unreliable and invalid data by ill-constructed questionnaires" (Dornyei & Taguchi, 2010, p. 6).

3.4 Questionnaire – Outline and structure

The questionnaire will be divided into three parts. The first part will include a very brief confirmation of the participant´s background information. In this part, the respondents are asked to hook off "yes" or "no" to the following questions:

- "Are you aged between 18 and 40?"
- "Were you bilingual or multilingual from before the age of 7?"

The second part of the questionnaire will consist of three open-ended questions, where the respondents will be asked to share:

- If (and how) being bilingual or multilingual has helped them learn English as a third language.
- Language related challenges they experience in their day-to-day life.
- Other attributes they feel they have gained from being early bi- or multilingual.

Finally, the third and last part of the questionnaire will include 19 close ended statements. The close ended statements will be divided into two parts; agree statements and frequency statements. In the agree statements, the participants will be asked to answer if they "strongly agree", "agree", "neither agree nor disagree", "disagree" or "strongly disagree" with a number of statements.

Some agree statements included in the questionnaire are:

- "Being bilingual or multilingual has helped boost my confidence"
- "Being bilingual or multilingual has improved my reading skills"

Under the frequency statements, the respondents will be asked to answer if they "very frequently", "frequently", "sometimes", "seldom" or "never" relate to a variety of statements. Some frequency statements included in the questionnaire are:

- "When in a conversation, I struggle to find specific words in any of the languages"
- "In a conversation, I get confused and start mixing the different languages as I speak"

The specific statements and questions selected in the questionnaire are chosen by the researcher with the purpose of answering the research questions in the best way possible.

4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

In the findings section of the thesis, the data obtained through the questionnaire will be introduced and presented. The results from the close-ended statements will be presented in two tables. The purpose of the data from the questionnaire is to help answer the research questions that were presented in the beginning of the thesis.

4.2 Tables and results

4.2.1 Table 1 – Agree statements

Table 1. Agree statements. (Numbers and percentages) Design inspired by: Lise Rønnestad (Rønnestad, 2015, p. 58).

A	Statements	Strongly disagree/disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Strongly agree/agree	
1.	I think that being bilingual as a child helped me when learning English.	2	12,5%	0	0%	14	87,5%
2.	I feel confident switching between the different languages I speak.	0	0%	0	0%	16	100%
3.	Being bilingual/multilingual has helped boost my confidence	1	6,3%	1	6,3%	14	87,5%
4.	Being bilingual/multilingual has improved my reading skills.	2	12,5%	2	12,5%	12	75%
5.	Being bilingual/multilingual has made me more flexible talking to other people.	0	0%	0	0%	16	100%
6.	Being bilingual/multilingual helps me understand foreign languages easier.	0	0%	1	6,3%	15	93,7%
7.	Being bilingual/multilingual means I have a stronger	0	0%	0	0%	16	100&

#	Statement					
	connection to other family members who share the same "mother tongue" as me.					
8.	Aa a bilingual/multilingual I think more rationally	2	12,5%	6	37,5%	8	50%
9.	Being bilingual/multilingual has decreased my vocabulary in the languages I speak.	6	37,5%	3	18,8%	7	43,8%
10.	Bilinguals/multilinguals have more vocabulary of their native language as compared to monolinguals. (Someone who can speak or understand only one language).	1	6,3%	2	13,3%	12	75%
11.	Being bilingual/multilingual means I struggle to fit into monolingual friend groups.	11	68,8%	2	12,5%	3	18,8%
12.	Being bilingual/multilingual gives me an advantage in the job market.	0	0%	2	12,5%	14	87,5%
13.	In school, being bilingual/multilingual means I learn new information quicker.	0	0%	6	37,5%	10	66,7%
14.	Bilinguals/multilinguals have a sharp memory.	0	0%	7	43,7%	9	56,3%
15.	In school, I feel that I am only able to showcase half (or less) of my repertoire as we´re only assessed in one language. Example: You may have knowledge of a subject in another different language (French), but you are not able to show it to the teacher as it is a Norwegian school, where they assess you based off your Norwegian linguistic abilities.	6	37,5%	3	18,8%	7	43,8%

4.2.2 Table 2 – Frequency statements

Table 2. Frequency statements. (Numbers and percentages)

F	Statements	Never/seldom		Sometimes		Very frequently/frequently	
1.	When speaking one language, I find myself mixing in words or ideas from another language. Example (switching between Norwegian and English): "Den filmen var sykt AMAZING" eller "Hun UNFOLLOWA ham på Insta"	0	0%	4	24%	12	75%
2.	I find myself switching between two or more languages back and forth in the same sentence. Example (switching between Norwegian and English): "Ja, jeg hadde tenkt å dra på festen, but I just couldn´t be bothered"	5	31,3%	4	25%	7	43,8%
3.	In a conversation I get confused and start mixing the different languages as I speak.	10	66,7%	5	31,3%	1	6,3%
4.	When in a conversation, I struggle to find specific words in any of the languages.	6	37,5%	7	43,8%	3	18,8%

4.3 The data obtained from the open-ended questions of the questionnaire

4.3.1 How bi- or multilingualism has helped learn English as a third language

The open-ended questions that were listed in the "Questionnaire – Outline and structure" chapter obtain data which points towards supporting evidence as to why bilingual from an early age can be helpful in the process of learning English as a third language. Two of the participants explained that being bilingual increased their chances of identifying similar words and phrases from their own languages and the English language, with one stating: "I feel like being bilingual helped me learn English easier because as a bilingual person it is easier to see connections between languages and learn quicker". Another respondent said: "It

gave me a better vocabulary and because of that I got a better understanding on how words and language is". Most popularly, three respondents claimed that being bilingual helped them understand the English grammar quicker. "It has helped me since I have references from two different languages in terms of grammar", one respondent said.

4.3.2 What language related challenges do bi- or multilinguals experience in their day-to-day life

The second open-ended question, "What language related challenges do you as a bi- or multilingual experience in your day-to-day life?", revealed that there exists an acceptance of linguistic challenges that bi- or multilingual experience in the everyday life. Although some respondents to mention specific challenges, three respondents explained that they would occasionally struggle to express themselves in a way they would like ideally, due to getting confused and mixing words in the languages they speak, with one stating: "I often mix words of the different languages in my head". Two other respondents explained that it occasionally takes them longer to identify specific words they want to use, with one claiming: "I might use a few extra seconds to find an exact word that I am thinking of".

4.3.3 Other attributes gained from being bi- or multilingual from an early age

In the final open-ended question of the questionnaire, "What other attributes have you gained from being bi- or multilingual from an early age", two respondents felt that being bilingual has "helped boost their confidence". Additionally, two separate respondents claimed that knowledge of two or more languages has helped them in the job market, with one stating: "Having the ability to communicate with people in 3-4 languages and it looks good on my resume". Five respondents felt that being bi- or multilingual has allowed them to communicate with a larger number of people. "I feel like it is easier for me to relate and communicate with other bilingual people", claimed one participant.

4.4 Data obtained from the close-ended agree statements of the questionnaire

4.4.1 Bi- or multilingualism as a tool to learn English as a third language.

87,5% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "I think that being bilingual as a child has helped me when learning the English language". The remaining 12,5 % of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statements.

4.4.2 Bi- and multilinguals´ confidence regarding switching between two or more different languages

100% of the respondents either agree or strongly disagree with a statement reading "I feel confident switching between the different languages I speak".

4.4.3 Bi- and multilingualism and confidence

87,5% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual has helped boost my confidence". 6,3% of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement and the remaining 6,3% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.4.4 Bi- and multilingualism improving reading skills

75% of the respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual" has improved my reading skills". 12,5% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, whilst the remaining 12,5% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.4.5 Bi- and multilinguals´ flexibility

100% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "Being bilingual/Multilingual has made me more flexible talking to other people".

4.4.6 Bi- and multilinguals´ understanding of foreign languages

93,7% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual helps me understand foreign languages easier". The remaining 6,3% neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

4.4.7 Bi- and multilinguals´ connection to family members who share the same home language

100% of the respondents agree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual means I have a stronger connection to other family members who share the same mother tongue as me".

4.4.8 Bi- and multilinguals and rational thinking

50 % of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement Aa a bilingual/multilingual I think more rationally". 12,5% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, whilst the remaining 37,5% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.4.9 Bi- and multilingualism and decreased vocabulary

43,8% of the respondents either agree or strongly disagree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual has decreased my vocabulary in the languages I speak". 37,5% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, whilst the remaining 18,8% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.4.10 Bi- and multilinguals´ vocabulary compared to monolinguals

75% of the respondents either agree or strongly disagree with the statement "Bilinguals/multilinguals have more vocabulary of their native language as compared to monolinguals». 6,3% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, whilst the remaining 13,3% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.4.11 Bi- and multilinguals and monolingual friend groups

18,8% of the respondents either agree or strongly disagree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual means I struggle to fit into monolingual friend groups». 68,8% of the

respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the claim, whilst the remaining 12,5% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.4.12 Bi- and multilingualism and the job market

87,5% of the respondents either agree or strongly disagree with the statement "Being bilingual/multilingual gives me an advantage in the job market". The remaining 12,5% neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

4.4.13 Bi- and multilinguals´ and quick learning

66,7% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "In school, being bilingual/multilingual means I learn new information quicker». The remaining 37,5% neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

4.4.14 Bi- and multilingualism and sharp memory

56,3% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "Bilinguals/multilinguals have a sharp memory". The remaining 43,7% of the respondents neither agree nor disagree with the statement.

4.4.15 Bi- and multilinguals and knowledge expression in school

43,7% of the respondents either agree or strongly agree with the statement "In school, I feel that I am only able to showcase half (or less) of my repertoire as we´re only assessed in one language. Example: You may have knowledge of a subject in another different language (French), but you are not able to show it to the teacher as it is a Norwegian school, where they assess you based off your Norwegian linguistic abilities". 37,5% of the respondents either disagree or strongly disagree with the statement, whilst the remaining 18,8% neither agree nor disagree with it.

4.5 Data obtained from the close-ended frequency statements of the questionnaire

4.5.1 Bi- and multilinguals and code-mixing

75% of the respondents either frequently or very frequently relate to the statement "When speaking one language, I find myself mixing in words or ideas from another language. Example (switching between Norwegian and English): "Den filmen var sykt AMAZING" eller "Hun UNFOLLOWA ham på Insta". The remaining 24% of the respondents sometime relate to the statement.

4.5.2 Bi- and multilinguals and code-switching

43,7% of the respondents either frequently or very frequently relate to the statement "I find myself switching between two or more languages back and forth in the same sentence. Example (switching between Norwegian and English): "Ja, jeg hadde tenkt å dra på festen, but I just couldn´t be bothered". 31,1% of the respondents either never or seldom relate to the statement, whilst the remaining 25% sometimes relate to it.

4.5.3 Bi- and multilinguals and language confusion

6,3% of the respondents either frequently or very frequently relate to the statement "In a conversation I get confused and start mixing the different languages as I speak". 66,7% of the respondent either never or seldom relate to the statement, whilst the remaining 31,3% sometimes relate to it.

4.5.4 Bi- and multilinguals and language struggle

18,8% of the respondents either frequently or very frequently relate to the statement "When in a conversation, I struggle to find specific words in any of the languages". 37,5% of the respondents never or seldom relate to the statement, whilst the remaining 43,8% sometimes relate to it.

5. Discussion

5.1 Introduction

The "discussion" chapter of the thesis will discuss the findings and results carried out from the questionnaire in light of previous relevant research and literature presented in the theory and methodology sections of the paper. Furthermore, the discussion chapter will aim to provide answers to the research questions by taking into consideration all information put forward in the multiple chapters of the thesis so far.

5.2 Developmental benefits or early bi- and multilingualism

In the theory section various cognitive, linguistic and cultural developmental benefits of early bi- and multilingualism were identified through previous existing research and relevant literature. For instance, cognitive benefits such as greater cognitive flexibility and longer lasting concentration levels were mentioned by Krulatz et al, as well as Haukås. Noteworthy, the data obtained from the questionnaire corresponded well with those claims, as a vast majority of the Norwegian adults confirmed their positive flexibility and great memory sharpness. Another notable similarity between previous research and the examinations of the young adults was the beneficial ability to learn new languages quicker, due to a wider existing vocabulary and a great foundation in terms of looking for similar words and grammar patterns. Although the findings revealed that the respondents´ beliefs corresponded well with a number of other benefits of early bi- and multilingualism presented in the theory section, such as increased opportunities in the job market, higher reading skills and greater foundation of learning new information in school, the results also showcased a few dissimilarities between the respondents´ beliefs compared to some of the literature. Interestingly, 50% of the respondents either disagreed, strongly disagreed or neither agreed nor disagreed with the claim that knowledge of two or more languages made think more rationally. Overall, there was close to no difference in the beliefs of the respondents related to advantages of bi- and multilingualism and what the previous research and relevant literature had presented. The existing research and the findings of the thesis´ research method

strengthens the case of there being numerous developmental benefits of early bi- and multilingualism.

5.3 Developmental challenges of early bi- and multilingualism

In the theory section, a number of potential challenges associated with early bi- and multilingualism were presented. Firstly, it was highlighted that bilingual individuals have poorer language skills in their respective languages, and therefore, they tend to know fewer words in each of the languages they speak compared to monolinguals. Notably, the results gathered from the questionnaire show that the majority of the adults disagree with this claim, with 75% of the respondents contrastingly claiming they have a wider vocabulary in their native language as opposed to monolinguals. Secondly, whilst the theory section sheds light on bi- and multilinguals risk of confusion between the languages they speak, interestingly, only one respondent in the questionnaire expressed that they frequently get confused between the languages they speak when in a conversation. On the other hand, 10 respondents claimed that they never or seldom get confused in between the languages that they speak, further disproving Ardila´s claim about language confusion. Furthermore, previous research data presented in the theory section suggest that delay in language acquisition is a common challenge for bi- and multilinguals. Results from the findings chapter showed that numerous of the respondents could relate to the claim as three respondents expressed that they frequently struggle or take time to identify specific words in a conversation, whilst two respondents mentioned delay in language acquisition as major challenges in the open-ended questions of the questionnaire.

There may be several reasons for why some of the findings from the questionnaire do not necessarily match information gathered through previous research and literature. However, it has previously in the thesis been shed light on Liddicoat, who claims that it is challenging to know exactly how fluent a person must be in both languages to be classified as bilingual (Liddicoat, 1991, p 1). As the specific linguistic levels of each respondent from the questionnaire compared to those who have contributed to previous research are not known, it is hard to determine if the respondents either fall short of or exceed the language levels of those classified as "bilingual" and "multilingual" in previous research. To elaborate, if one is to follow Baker´s claim that defining exactly who is or is not bilingual is "essentially impossible" (Baker, 2001, p. 15), the level of competence by the young adults in their

respective languages and the level of competence by individuals participating in previous research in their respective languages is ultimately impossible to compare, as existing knowledge of the manner only is that they identify as bi- or multilinguals, whilst the terms do not own a scientifically correct definition.

Whilst code-mixing and code-switching is not identified a challenge, results from the findings show that 75% of the respondents either frequently or very frequently mix words from the different languages they speak in a sentence and just under 50% switch back and forth between the languages they speak within a sentence, proving slight confirmation of Krulatz´, Dahl´ and Flognfeldt´s claim that both terms are commonly performed by bi- and multilinguals (Krulatz et al,. 2018, p. 64).

6. Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The "conclusion" chapter of the thesis aims to summarize and conclude what the linguistic, cognitive and cultural developmental benefits and challenges of early bi- and multilingualism are. Additionally, it will look to shed light on both the achievements and the limitations of the data obtained.

6.2 Conclusion and research achievements

The thesis was introduced with the challenge of identifying developmental benefits and challenges of early bi- and multilingualism. The research paper has successfully completed this task by going through relevant existing literature, gathering knowledge of previous research and by carrying out a questionnaire where findings have been compared and analysed in comparison to previous research and literature. Overall, the thesis has identified several cognitive, cultural and linguistic benefits of early bi- and multilingualism, such as wide interaction opportunities, high flexibility, a solid foundation for new language learning, high confidence levels, high memory sharpness, advantages in the job market and strong family connection. The data obtained from the questionnaire corresponded well with previous research related to advantages with bi- and multilingualism. However, in contrast, the

findings from the questionnaire proved to be quite dissimilar to previous research and literature in regard to the disadvantages of early bi- and multilingualism. Interestingly, despite research showing that bi- or multilinguals may show struggles in some areas, like for example language confusion and vocabulary, data obtained from respondents prove that this is not entirely correct. Overall, the thesis concludes that while there may potentially be challenges that come with knowledge of two or more languages from an early age, the phenomenon mainly carries advantages, to different degrees.

6.3 Limitations of the research thesis

The correspondence between previous research and the research conducted in this thesis has its limitations as the linguistic competence level of each participant in any of the research has not been identified. For future research, it would be beneficial to compare bi- and multilingual individuals who share similar language abilities to those mentioned in existing literature. This would allow for a more precise comparison and analysis.

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8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Questionnaire

N Nettskjema

Questionnaire about developmental benefits and challenges of early bi- and multilingualism

Are you interested in taking part in the research project "Developmental benefits and challenges of speaking two or more languages at once as a child"?

Are you aged between 18 and 40?

Yes

Were you bilingual or multilingual from before the age of 7?

Yes

In what ways have being bilingual/multilingual helped you learn the English language?

What language-related challenges do you as a bilingual/multilingual experience in your day-to-day life?

What other attributes do you feel you have gained from being bilingual/multilingual from an early age?

I think that being bilingual as a child helped me when learning English.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

I feel confident switching between the different languages I speak.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual has helped boost my confidence

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual has improved my reading skills.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual has made me more flexible talking to other people.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual helps me understand foreign languages easier.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual means I have a stronger connection to other family members who share the same "mother tongue" as me.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

A a bilingual/multilingual I think more rationally

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual has decreased my vocabulary in the languages I speak.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Bilinguals/multilinguals have more vocabulary of their native language as compared to monolinguals. (Someone who can speak or understand only one language).

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual means I struggle to fit into monolingual friend groups.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Being bilingual/multilingual gives me an advantage in the job market.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

In school, being bilingual/multilingual means I learn new information quicker.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

Bilinguals/multilinguals have a sharp memory.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

In school, I feel that I am only able to showcase half (or less) of my repertoire as we ́re only assessed in one language. Example: You may have knowledge

of a subject in another different language (French), but you are not able to show it to the teacher as it is a Norwegian school, where they assess you based off your Norwegian linguistic abilities.

Strongly disagree Disagree Neither agree nor disagree Agree Strongly agree

When speaking one language, I find myself mixing in words or ideas from another language. Example (switching between Norwegian and English): "Den filmen var sykt AMAZING" eller "Hun UNFOLLOWA ham på Insta"

Nettskjema

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

I find myself switching between two or more languages back and forth in the same sentence. Example (switching between Norwegian and English): "Ja, jeg hadde tenkt å dra på festen, but I just couldn´t be bothered"

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

In a conversation I get confused and start mixing the different languages as I speak.

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

When in a conversation, I struggle to find specific words in any of the languages.

Never Seldom Sometimes Frequently Very frequently

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8.2 Appendix B: Information letter from NSD

Are you interested in taking part in the research project

"Developmental Benefits and Challenges of Early Bilingualism and Multilingualism"?

Purpose of the project

The purpose of this research is to learn what developmental benefits and challenges young adults experience from being bilingual/multilingual from an early age. The research will be used for a Bachelor thesis.

Which institution is responsible for the research project?

University of Satavanger

What does participation involve for you?

The method that will be used for this research is a questionnaire. You will be asked to participate and answer questions/statements from a questionnaire.

Participation is voluntary

Participation in the project is voluntary. If you chose to participate, you can withdraw your consent at any time without giving a reason. All information about you will then be made anonymous. There will be no negative consequences for you if you chose not to participate or later decide to withdraw.

Your personal privacy – how we will store and use your personal data

We will only use your personal data for the purpose(s) specified here and we will process your personal data in accordance with data protection legislation (the GDPR).

What will happen to your personal data at the end of the research project?

It will be deleted 10th of June 2023.

Your rights

So long as you can be identified in the collected data, you have the right to:

- access the personal data that is being processed about you
- request that your personal data is deleted
- request that incorrect personal data about you is corrected/rectified
- receive a copy of your personal data (data portability), and
- send a complaint to the Norwegian Data Protection Authority regarding the processing of your personal data

What gives us the right to process your personal data?

We will process your personal data based on your consent.

Where can I find out more?

If you have questions about the project, or want to exercise your rights, contact:

- *The University of Stavanger via Kristian Matic and Torill Irene Hestetræet*

Yours sincerely,

Kristian Matic (student) & Torill Irene Hestetræet (supervisor)