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PARENT AND TEACHER BELIEFS REGARDING BILINGUALISM

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Abstract

This study investigated how parents and teachers view bilingualism. It also examined how books can enhance language development and literacy skills of children who are acquiring languages simultaneously. Data was collected in a Head Start Center and a public school in South Texas. The participants included fifteen parents whose children's ages ranged from three to four years and twelve teachers. The results suggest that teachers and parents strongly agreed that their children should speak, read and write in two languages. The results also confirm that classroom practices such as storybook reading, reading aloud to children, and exposure to books can enhance second language learning (Roberts, 2008). However, both teachers and parents strongly agreed with the idea that education in English only can lead to a better life and that children get confused when learning content in English and Spanish.

Introduction

People who speak two or more languages are described as having “higher levels of metalinguistic awareness, greater and earlier awareness of language structure, wider perspectives, and more social skills” (Paneque & Barbetta, 2006). Educators, especially bilingual education teachers, play a critical role in the cognitive development of their students. Research suggests two views of how teachers perceive bilingualism. Some researchers believe that bilingual teachers are supportive of bilingual education, and that their practices show that they practice effective strategies for students whose language is not the majority (Garcia, 1996). However, according to Lauder (1994) bilingual education teachers can also have misconceptions about English Language Learners’ (ELLs) ability to learn. “Teachers beliefs are reflected in the teacher’s performance expectations and in the nature of curriculum assignments, pace, interaction, and general teaching style” (Flores, 2001, pp. 279). Therefore, it is imperative that we examine the beliefs and attitudes teachers have about bilingualism. Most parents who come from minority groups genuinely care about their children’s academic success. “Education is highly regarded as the social and economic equalizer and as a prerequisite to improving

the social and economic status of Latinos” (Darder, Torres, & Guitierrez, 1997, pp. 68). Parents also play a vital role in their children’s education and are often thought as their first educators. Therefore, it is also imperative that we examine the parents’ perceptions and beliefs on bilingualism.

Books also can play a key role in learning two languages simultaneously. A study conducted in London by Sneddon (2008) reported that bilingual children of primary school age became literate in English and in their home language by reading dual language books provided by the school. In a geographic area that is heavily populated with children who speak Spanish or English and Spanish, parents and educators need to recognize the importance of reading books in the classroom and at home to further enhance language development and to develop biliteracy. Children who are exposed to books on a daily basis have the opportunity to expand their receptive and expressive vocabulary (Mol, Bus, de Jong, & Smeets, 2008).

This study investigated how parents and teachers view bilingualism and how books can enhance language development and literacy skills of children who are acquiring languages simultaneously. Data for this study was collected in three Head Start Centers in an area known as South Texas in the most Southern tip of Texas and in an Early Childhood Center in Mercedes, Texas. The participants in this study included fifteen (15) parents whose childrens’ ages ranged from three to four years and twelve (12) teachers. The study addressed the importance and the need for book reading and the role that books play in enhancing dual language development and early biliteracy.

The following research questions were used to guide the research:

- 1.) Is there a difference between means for parents and teachers?
- 2.) Is there a difference among means for beliefs?
- 3.) Is there a difference among cell means for group affiliation and beliefs?

Bilingualism

The meaning of bilingualism can vary from person to person. There are also misconceptions about being bilingual. Being bilingual does not necessarily entail knowing two or more languages. Baker (2001) found that by categorizing someone as bilingual because they are able to speak two languages is vague. One may be able to speak one language more fluently than another, or be able to read and write in one language and speak in another. The distinction between bilingualism is language ability and language use. Language ability can be categorized in four ways: listening, speaking, reading and writing. Listening and reading are receptive skills and speaking and writing are expressive or productive skills (Baker, 2001). A person may have an ability that is more developed than another. Language use is also another distinction of bilingualism. How one uses language and chooses which language to use varies within different contexts. The opportunity to use both languages continually changes from one situation to the next. "Pronunciation, extent of vocabulary, correctness of grammar, the ability to convey exact meanings in different situations in variation of styles" requires the speaker to use both receptive and expressive skills (Baker, 2001, pp. 5). For example, how one speaks in a store may differ from how one speaks to a professor.

Prior to 1960, being bilingual was thought to be an educational handicap (Otto, 2010). According to Otto, many educators believed that children who were learning a second language would lose the ability to speak their first language; this is known as subtractive bilingualism. However, educators have realized that one can learn a second language while continuing to develop their home language; this is known as additive bilingualism (Otto, 2010).

Acquiring a second language can be achieved through various routes. It is important to look at the social context in which the child learns the additional language (Baker, 2001). Ortega (2009) found that there are both naturalistic and instructed contexts. Children who acquire their second language through their community, friends, caregivers, and any informal opportunity are learning a language through a naturalistic context. Individuals who are acquiring an additional language in a structured and formal setting through lessons or at a university are learning in an instructed context. The two types of second language acquisition that Baker (2001) identifies are simultaneous and sequential childhood bilingualism. Sequential bilingualism, also referred to as successive bilingualism, is when children acquire their second language after the age of three (Otto, 2010). Simultaneous language acquisition is when a child learns two or more languages at the same time before the age of three.

Baker (2001) found four basic dimensions of how children acquire two languages simultaneously: the language(s) that the parent(s) speak to the child, the language(s) in which the parent(s) speak to the child in practice, the language(s) in which other caregivers speak to the child, and lastly the language(s) in which the child is exposed to through the community. These dimensions vary in each family and in each situation.

Benefits of Bilingualism

A study done by Laurent and Martinot (2010) focused on whether early learning of a second language had a significant impact on the development of phonological awareness, also referred to as metaphonological. The study showed that “children exposed to early second language learning would appear to display more highly developed metaphonological abilities than monolingual children undergoing traditional schooling” (Laurent & Martinot, 2010, p. 448). Bruck and Genesee (1995) conducted a study in which they compared English-French young bilinguals and their English-speaking monolingual counterparts from kindergarten to first grade in multiple phonological tasks. In explaining the early metalinguistic advantages young bilinguals have, they stated that bilingualism provides a type of contrastive linguistic instruction, consequently, bilingual children can compare and analyze the structural aspects of language in more advanced ways than monolinguals.

Parents' Attitude Towards Bilingualism

Parents play a vital role in their children's development and learning. It is important for educators to look at how parents view bilingualism in order to better serve their children. Research suggests that parents want their children to be bilingual for the cognitive and academic advantages as well as to learn English, all while preserving their mother tongue (Lindholm-Leary, 2001). A study conducted by Orellana, Ek, and Hernandez (2000) found that parents had many reasons why they wanted their children to be proficient in English. Some of the reasons included: more success in school, better opportunities in employment, and the children would be treated better if they could speak English. Similar findings were found in a study conducted by Worthy and Rodriguez-Galindo (2006) that included parents who wanted their children to take advantage of every opportunity that the United States had to offer. They wanted more for their children. English was essential to thrive and do well in school, getting a job, and fitting into the United States society. Parents also wanted their children to learn English to help their younger siblings who were also receiving English instruction. Whiting and Feinauer (2011) identified the following six reasons why parents wanted their children to be enrolled in a bilingual program: bilingualism/biliteracy, educational experiences, future and career opportunities, cultural immersion/diversity, preserving heritage, and proximity to their home. Ninety-two (92%) of parents stated that having their children become bilingual and biliterate was their primary reason for choosing a bilingual program. Parents not only want them to learn English but be bilingual (Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006; Whiting & Feinauer, 2011). Parents believe that being able to communicate to friends and family and maintaining the culture of their home country is very important.

“Parents agreed that being bilingual was the apex of language learning” (Worthy & Rodriguez-Galindo, 2006, pp. 589).

Teachers’ Attitude Towards Bilingualism

Research has suggested that teacher attitudes affect student attitudes and influence their teaching practices (Flores, 2001). Because students spend the majority of their day at school with their teachers, it is important to understand how teachers view bilingualism in order to provide professional development or training. It is also important to clear up any misperceptions about bilingualism teacher may have. Ball and Lardner (1997) found that teachers who have a lack of respect for their students’ home language leads to “negative attitudes towards the children who spoke it, that in effect, their attitudes constituted a language barrier impeding students’ educational progress” (p. 472). Teachers, however, who show a genuine interest in the student’s home language and treat it as a valuable asset show positive effects on the desire of the students to maintain their home language (Franquiz & de la Luz Reyes, 1998). In a study conducted by Shin and Krashen (1996) teachers’ perceptions of bilingualism were positive. There was a strong acceptance of bilingual education and they agreed that that subject-matter instruction in their first language helps the child learn subject matter better in English.

Method

Procedures

The instrument used to survey the parents consisted of 17 items: 3 items measured demographics, 13 items measured the responder's perception towards bilingualism, and 1 item asked what they thought could improve student achievement. The instrument used to survey the teachers consisted of 16 items: 3 items for demographics, 12 items to measure their perception towards bilingualism, and 1 item asking what they thought could improve student achievement. Each statement was assessed using a 5 point Likert Scale. Questionnaire Items 4, 8, 10, 11, and 14 were reverse coded because of the items' negative wording.

Teachers serving as contacts at the schools were asked to distribute the questionnaires to their students' parents. The participants were asked to voluntarily complete the survey at their leisure and return it the teacher.

Subjects: Parents and Teachers

There are 27 subjects participating in the present study, 15 parents and 12 teachers. These fifteen parents, all of which are female, responded to the survey about their attitudes toward bilingualism. Their age range was from 20-59 years of age with 6.5% of the parents falling into the 20-25 age range, 40% fell into the 25-29 age range, 20% were 30-39 years old, 27% were between the ages of 40-49, and 6.5% were in the 50-59 age range. Their level of education varied as follows: 20% of parents had less than a High School diploma, 27% had a High School diploma or GED equivalent, 26% had some college, including vocational/technical college, and 27% had a Bachelor's degree. The return rate of the surveys was high at 76%.

A total of 12 teachers (1 male, 11 females) participated in the survey. Their ages ranged from 20-59 years. Twenty-five percent (25%) were between the ages of 20-25, 33% were between the ages of 25-29, 25% were between 30-39, and 17% were between 50-59 years of age. Their highest level of education varied as follows: 8% held a Bachelor's degree with an ACP Teaching Certificate, 50% had a Bachelor's degree from a four year teacher preparation program, and 33% had a Master of Education degree. The return rate was 100%.

Analysis

A two way (2 X 8) factorial ANOVA was conducted to identify if there were differences between means for group affiliation (parents and teachers), the among means for beliefs, and a cell effect between the groups and the beliefs. The assumptions for the present analysis are random sampling, normality of distribution, homogeneity of variance, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and sphericity. The following null hypotheses were tested with an F distribution with a working alpha level of .025 and a reporting alpha of .05 (Box, 1954). There is no difference between groups, parents and teachers. There is no difference among beliefs. There is no difference among cell means for groups and beliefs.

Results

The analysis indicated that there are no difference between means for groups, parents and teachers, and there are no difference among cell means for group affiliation and beliefs. There is a difference, however, among means for beliefs ($p < .05$) (see Table 1).

Table 1
Two-way (2 X 4) factorial ANOVA with one between subjects factor groups and one within subjects factor beliefs

Source of Variation	SS	df Usual	df Conservative**	MS	F
Between subjects	61.09	1		8.01	3.77
Between group error b	53.08	25		2.12	
Within subjects	183.99				
Trials/Beliefs	80.40	7	1	80.40	20.52*
Group "error" w	5.63	7	1	5.63	1.44
	97.96	175	25	3.92	
Total	245.08				

* $p < .05$

** *The assumption of sphericity could not be assumed and thus lower-bound conservative df were used.*

Teachers and parents strongly agreed with the idea that their children/students should speak, read and write in two languages. Moreover, they believed that being surrounded by a print-rich environment and exposure to books can enhance their second language acquisition. However, both teachers and parents strongly agreed with the idea that education in English only can lead to a better life. They also strongly agreed with the belief that children get confused when learning content in English and Spanish (see Table 2).

As is shown in Table 2, the means for the beliefs or perceptions of both teachers and parents vary. The means for the belief of education in English only can lead to a better life and that children get confused when learning content in English and Spanish are significantly lower than the other six beliefs. There is an empirical basis for combining the derivation of beliefs 1 and 5 and test them against beliefs 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8. The difference between 1 and 5 beliefs combined mean and the remaining beliefs combined mean is made by utilizing the Scheffé procedure. This derived F value of 3.76 indicates that there is a difference of the combined beliefs when tested against the remaining beliefs.

Table 2
Scheffé Procedure for Pairwise Mean Comparisons between trials/beliefs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
	2.78	4.55	4.27	4.49	3.43	4.36	4.45	4.62
1 2.78		*	*	*	-	*	*	*
2 4.55			-	-	*	-	-	-
3 4.27				-	*	-	-	-
4 4.49					*	-	-	-
5 3.43						*	*	*
6 4.36							-	-
7 4.45								-
8 4.62								

* $p < .05$

Key:

#	Beliefs	Means
1	Believes education in English Only Leads to a Better Life	2.78
2	Believes education in English and Spanish Leads to a Better Life	4.55
3	Believes that children should speak two languages	4.27
4	Wants their children to speak two languages	4.49
5	Believes children get confused when learning content in English and Spanish	3.43
6	Believes children should read and write in two languages	4.36
7	Believes that children can learn two languages by reading and being surrounded by a print rich environment	4.45
8	Believes storybook reading, read-a-louds, and exposure to books enhance second language acquisition	4.62

Discussion and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to examine parents' and teachers' beliefs of bilingualism. We argued that there is a great need for educators and caregivers to recognize the benefits of bilingualism. The results showed that parents' beliefs and teachers' beliefs did not differ regarding bilingualism. The results also indicated that there was no interaction between, parents' and teachers' beliefs. In spite of the fact that teachers' and parents' strong, positive beliefs about bilingualism, they have negative beliefs regarding some related issues. For example, the findings show that parents and teachers believe that education in English only can lead to a successful life. Their responses showed that children get confused when learning content in English and

Spanish simultaneously. As is stated in this study, teachers and parents attitudes towards bilingualism can influence their teaching and parenting practices. Given that the majority of the students in South Texas are English Language Learners, these attitudes and beliefs may lead a teacher to implement ineffective teaching practices with students that may benefit from instruction in their native language.

Recommendations

This study's findings indicate that there is a need for addressing the issues regarding bilingualism. Based on the findings and conclusions raised through this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Researchers suggest that to change and challenge these misconceptions, teachers must engage in reflective practices (Milk, Mercado, & Sapiens, 1992). Most teachers, however, may not practice critical reflection perhaps because they may not know how. Given that, professional development about reflective teaching should be offered.
2. There is also a need for parents to recognize the value of bilingualism. Head Start has a Parent Education program that emphasizes on how parents can help their young children become (and stay) bilingual. Parent may find information by visiting hhs.gov to find helpful hints regarding children being bilingual. With the assistance from the parents learning and maintaining two languages can be accomplished.

3. Parents need to model to their children the use of two languages in every day conversations. Children will in turn acquire two languages simultaneously in natural environments.
4. Research findings about the benefits of bilingualism need to be more accessible to educators and to the general public. For example, Cummins (1981) research indicates that bilingualism can enhance academic achievement and acquisition of English. Information, such as this, can be beneficial for parents and teachers.
5. Future research about parent and teacher beliefs regarding bilingualism could be conducted with a larger number of subjects. If a survey is used, such as the one used in this study, additional items should be added in order to delve deeper into the beliefs of parents and teachers.
6. Future research could be conducted with a varied population of teachers and parents. English-only speaking teachers as well as monolingual parents could be surveyed concerning their beliefs regarding bilingualism.

As Cummins (1977, 1981) has indicated, bilingualism and biliteracy leads to academic, linguistic, personal, and occupational advantages. Learning and maintaining two languages is not solely an individual process, but collaboration between teachers, parents, and administration. In conclusion, knowing teachers' and parents' beliefs regarding bilingualism is important and helpful because attitudes influence teaching and parenting practices. It is imperative that teachers and parents have the opportunities to be educated about bilingualism and effective practices regarding English Language Learners.

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Appendix
Survey of Teachers' Perception Toward Bilingualism

Part I. Demographic Information

Name _____

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

2. What is your age range?
 - a. 20-25
 - b. 25-29
 - c. 30-30
 - d. 40-49
 - e. 50-59
 - f. 60-69

3. What is your highest level of education?
 - a. Bachelor's degree/ACP Teaching Certification
 - b. Bachelor's degree
 - c. Master's degree
 - d. Doctoral degree

Part II. Perception Questions

4. Getting an education in English only can lead to a better life.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

5. Getting an education in both English and Spanish can lead to a better life.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

6. I believe that students should be able to speak in at least two languages.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

7. I want my students to speak both English and Spanish.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

8. I believe English should be the only language taught in U.S. schools.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

9. I believe bilingual teachers should provide instruction in both English and Spanish.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

10. I believe bilingual teachers should try to immerse ELL (Spanish speaking) students quickly to English only.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

11. I believe students get confused when learning content in English and Spanish.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

12. I believe that students should learn to read and write in two languages.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
13. I believe that students can learn two languages at the same time by reading books and being surrounded by a print-rich environment.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
14. Students can learn two languages only through direct instruction and repetitive activities.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree
15. I believe that storybook reading, read-a-louds, and exposure to books enhance second language learning.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly Disagree

Part III. Improvement Measures

16. Provide any suggestions you believe improves achievement of students in bilingual programs.

Survey of Parents' Perception Toward Bilingualism

Part I. Demographic Information

Name_____

1. What is your gender?
 - a. Male
 - b. Female

2. What is your age range?
 - a. 20-25
 - b. 25-29
 - c. 30-30
 - d. 40-49
 - e. 50-59
 - f. 60-69

3. What is your highest level of education?
 - a. Less than high school
 - b. High school or GED equivalent
 - c. Some college, including vocation/technical
 - d. Bachelor's degree

Part II. Perception Questions

4. I believe that getting an education in English only can lead to a better life for my child.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

5. I believe that getting an education in both English and Spanish can lead to a better life for my child.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

6. I believe speaking two languages is not difficult.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

7. I want my child to speak both English and Spanish.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

8. I believe my child gets confused when learning English and Spanish at the same time.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

9. I believe that children should learn to read and write in two languages.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

10. I believe that reading to my child has a positive impact on learning two languages at the same time.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

11. I believe that books and speaking in two languages enhances my child's oral and literacy development.
 - a. Strongly agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Neither agree nor disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Strongly Disagree

Part III. Improvement Measures

12. Provide any suggestions you believe improves achievement of students in a bilingual program.