Benefits of being Bilingual and the positive effects on your child

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Abstract

Being bilingual means one is able to speak, understand, and write two languages. There are numerous myths of bilingualism affecting individuals negatively. In reality, being bilingual is proven to have a positive effect on intellectual growth. One’s brain is required to work harder when they have two languages to learn and comprehend. Being bilingual comes with endless benefits such as, interacting with other cultures and increased likelihood of receiving a job. Most businesses and medical agencies prefer applicants who are bilingual, this allows them to interact and connect with other patients and business owners. Hiring a bilingual spokesperson also helps them save money on translators. Not only does bilingualism affect your intellectuality, it also influences your physical health. This paper will address the benefits of being bilingual, as well as the myths.
Benefits of being Bilingual and the positive effects on your child

The world has over six thousand and five hundred languages, but sadly only twenty one percent of Americans can speak another language other than English. Although, this number is increasing which means America is rapidly growing. Americans are learning to become more accustomed to hearing and learning more languages. Looking at it from a professional stance or an academic stance, bilingualism is considered a big achievement that comes with multiple benefits. Most bilingual people have learned this second language from a very young age, although some speakers have learned it more recently. According to free dictionary (2016), the definition of bilingualism is “using or able to use two languages, especially with equal or nearly equal fluency or using two languages in some proportion in order to facilitate learning by students who have a native proficiency in one language and are acquiring proficiency in the other” (para.1). Being bilingual is vital, especially today, because it allows people to work globally, increases job opportunities, and it opens the door to a new culture.

Workforce

From a business standpoint bilingualism is beneficial because, many businesses and individuals associate with their workers and customers globally. Bilingualism allows you to engage with different types of people, which can increase the amount of clients one can receive. Also, if you can speak another language it adds to your skills, making you more reliable for the business. Being a reliable source in a company almost guarantees your spot in the business. Another plus of being bilingual in the corporate world is that higher pay or rank is offered to people who know multiple languages. Most companies also offer benefits, alongside extra care for you because you are an asset to the company. Companies do this because it’s harder to find people who can fluently speak another language, and can handle chaotic situations. Studies have shown that
bilingual people have better task switching capacities because of their acquired ability to inhibit one language while using another (Vince, 2016). Bilingual adults certainly have a clear edge in the business world. By being able to communicate in two languages, you have twice as many opportunities to land a great job.

The corporate world is one of the fastest growing industries in the world, but the medical world is just as important. According to David Geffen School of Medicine (2016) a critical part of practicing medicine is communication with patients and their family members (para.1). In today’s multicultural world, being bilingual in medicine can help mitigate the challenges that patients and their families may face if they do not speak English. While discussing sensitive matters such as treatment options and end-of-life care, it is comforting to speak in one’s primary language (Durning, 2016, para.2). When a physician brings an interpreter, she is inviting a third person into the discussion. “This person, who is unknown to the family, comes in and is not the person they’ve been in contact with, it’s basically having an added stranger involved in the care” (as cited in Durning, 2016, para.4). This can make the situation awkward or tense, but with a bilingual physician the family would be able to discuss with ease.

**Children**

Being bilingual has a positive effect on intellectual growth and enhances a child’s mental development (Center for Applied Linguistics [CAL], 2009). When learning two different languages, multiple regions of one’s brain are stimulated, causing the brain to work harder than average. In other words, speaking two languages forces your brain to recognize two different language systems. Many researchers set
Bilingualism

lingual, arithmetical and physical tasks for one hundred and twenty-one students, aged around nine, in Scotland, Sardinia, and Italy. They found that sixty-two bilingual children were significantly more successful in the tasks set for them. They also assessed the children’s vocabulary, they did not test for their knowledge of words but for their understanding of words (CAL, 2009). There was a marked difference in the level of detail and richness in description from the bilingual children.

Bilingual adults and children seem to have social and emotional benefits as well. These include being able to internalize negative states such as anxiety, aggression, anger, loneliness or low self-esteem less frequently (CAL, 2009). They have greater tolerance for diversity and are less prejudice.

Children raised bilingual are more likely to show tolerance for other cultures at a young age. They play more easily with children who do not speak their language or who come from different socioeconomic backgrounds, and are more likely to show an interest in socializing beyond their established circle. In early childhood, this helps greatly with school, which focuses heavily on social skills in the lower grades. It can also help prevent disciplinary needs later in life more tolerant children are, overall, better-behaved children. Bilingualism promotes overall cognitive development because a bilingual individual encounters the world from two different language perspectives, which prevents them from having a limited experience. Bilingual children are more likely to have an interest in the cultures that speak their second language, whether it is a “heritage” language or not. Bilingual children are also able to make new friends and create strong relationships in their second language—an important personal skill in our increasingly diverse society. Finally, recent research has also found that children raised in bilingual households show better self-control (Kovács and Mehler, 2009), which is a vital indicator of
school success. This interest allows bilingual children and adults to communicate and connect with people of the same language. Becoming bilingual supports children to maintain strong ties with their entire family, culture, and community. These are key parts of children developing an identity. This can manifest early in life as an active interest in different educational avenues. Museums, fairs and street festivals, and even just visits to neighborhoods will have an inherent interest to bilingual children that monolingual children may not share. This extended way of thinking facilitates the approach to cognitive problems and higher level of abstract thinking.

School readiness and success for children who are dual language learners (DLLs) is tied directly to mastery of their home language (Zelasko and Antunez, 2000). Bilingual children benefit academically in many ways. Because they can switch between languages, they develop more flexible approaches to thinking through problems. Their ability to read and think in two different languages promotes higher levels of abstract thought, which is critically important in learning (Diaz, 1985). The list of benefits of bilingualism is constantly growing. Current research shows that people who use more than one language appear better at ignoring irrelevant information, a benefit that seems to exist as early as seven months of age (Kovács and Mehler, 2009). Thinking in a second language frees people from biases and limited thinking (Keysar, Hayakawa, & An, 2011). Children who learn to read in their home language have a strong foundation to build upon when they learn a second language. They can easily transfer their knowledge about reading to their second language (Páez and Rinaldi, 2006).

**Medical Explanation**

Bilinguals generally score higher on tests involving creative thinking and problem solving, that’s why companies value bilingualism so much. The ability to translate abstract concepts from one language to another also develops the skill to look at tangible problems in more than one abstract
way. In fact, says cognitive neuropsychologist Jubin Abutalebi, at the University of San Raffaele in Milan, it is possible to distinguish bilingual people from monolinguals simply by looking at scans of their brains. “Bilingual people have significantly more grey matter than monolinguals in their anterior cingulate cortex, and that is because they are using it so much more often,” he says. The ACC is like a cognitive muscle, he adds: the more you use it, the stronger, bigger and more flexible it gets (Vince, 2016). According to an article on Mosaic Science (2016) bilinguals exercise their executive control all the time because their two languages are constantly competing for attention (para.8). Brain-imaging studies show that when a bilingual person is speaking in one language, their ACC is continually suppressing the urge to use words and grammar from their other language. Bilinguals can be classified into three general types of brains: compound bilingual, coordinate bilingual, and subordinate bilingual. Those who are compound bilingual developed two linguistic codes for the two languages simultaneously. In coordinate bilingual, the person learns English at school, but primarily speaks their mother tongue with friends and family. Lastly, there are subordinate bilinguals who learn a secondary language by filtering it through their primary language. Their mind is always a judgement about when and how to use the target language. Bilinguals rarely get confused between languages, but they may introduce the odd word or sentence of the other language if the person they are talking to also knows it.

Not only is bilingualism important in the business world but it also benefits your health. Studies show that an individual who is bilingual develops dementia on an average of four and a half years later than a monolingual (Alladi et al., 2013). In addition, research indicates that bilingualism may delay the onset of Alzheimer’s disease (Dreifus, 2011). A significant difference in age at onset was found across Alzheimer disease dementia as well as
Bilingualism is proven to beneficial in the long run, whether you learn the language recently or from a young age. Majority of the benefits are related to the brain, they are mental benefits instead of physical.

The purpose of the study was to determine the association between bilingualism and age at onset of dementia and its subtypes, considering potential confounding factor. Case records of six hundred and forty-eight patients with dementia, which of three hundred and ninety-one of them were bilingual (2013). The age at onset of first symptoms was compared between monolingual and bilingual groups. The influence of number of languages spoken, education, occupation, and other potentially interacting variables was examined. Overall, bilingual patients developed dementia 4.5 years later than the monolingual ones. There was no additional benefit to speaking more than 2 languages. The bilingual effect on age at dementia onset was shown independently of other potential confounding factors such as education, sex, occupation, and urban vs rural dwelling of subjects. This is the largest study so far documenting a delayed onset of dementia in bilingual patients and the first one to show it separately in different dementia subtypes. It is the first study reporting a bilingual advantage in those who are illiterate, suggesting that education is not a sufficient explanation for the observed difference. The findings are interpreted in the context of the bilingual advantages in attention and executive functions (Alladi et al., 2013).

**Counterargument**

There were warnings that bilingual children would be confused by two languages, have lower intelligence, low self-esteem, behave in deviant ways, develop a split personality and even become schizophrenic (Alladi et al., 2013). It is a view that persisted until very recently, discouraging many immigrant parents from using their own mother tongue to speak to their
children, for instance. This is despite a 1962 experiment, ignored for decades, which showed that bilingual children did better than monolinguals in both verbal and non-verbal intelligence tests. Growing up bilingual there are a lot of things that give you a disadvantage than a monolingual. Such as not being able to express yourself in only one language and constantly being confused between words. There are no proven studies that offer any disadvantages to being bilingual. Any study that has been conducted offers only the benefits to being bilingual, any disadvantage mentioned is only opinion based.

**Conclusion**

So far only twenty-one percent of the American population is bilingual, it is important that we realize the benefits of being bilingual, whether it be for yourself or your future child. Being bilingual is advantageous because it allows people to work globally, increases job opportunities, and it opens the door to a new culture. Bilingualism in any work field is a bonus because of how the companies can benefit from this. You can work globally, and travel freely without having to encounter a language barrier. Bilingualism opens many doors, whether that be to explore another culture, or the added health bonuses.
References


