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Academic Value of Bilingual Education: Factors in Learning on Culture and Language

Burhan OZFIDAN¹

Abstract

Bilingual education influences the academic achievement of students in a positive way. Building bridges between two languages in education benefits students by developing confidence and fluency in using written and oral second language for academic accomplishment and for daily communication. The purpose of this study is to investigate how a bilingual education program effects the minority groups' academic achievements. An explanatory sequential mixed method was used for this study. Triangulation was used in both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study to minimize prejudice and enhance honesty regarding the social phenomenon studied. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to examine the parameters to reveal academic achievements within a bilingual education context. For quantitative data collection, 140 participants responded the survey questions. For qualitative data collection, 12 participants were interviewed. Results indicated that bilingual education would help build stronger relationships between different ethnic groups and have a positive effect on all the academic achievement of minority students. Academic achievement is vital for minority people because, if they are not going to be educated or attend a university, they might be unable find a job and be involved in the community.

Keywords: academic achievement, bilingual education, culture, language.

Introduction

A bilingual education program conserves minority people's cultural heritage, linguistic knowledge, religious, and ethnic identity. It increases minority students' educational success, promotes peace among different ethnic groups, and brings equality in schooling (Krashen, 2000). A bilingual education program could build stronger relationships between different ethnic groups. One's mother language is an inseparable element of one's culture and everyone has the right to learn his or

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her mother tongue according to the respondents (Ozfidan, Burlbaw, & Kuo, 2016; Kaya, 2015; Schüler-Meyer, 2017). A bilingual education program might help minority people to become more involved society. Adapting a bilingual program could influence positively school accomplishments of minority students and help them gain self-confidence (Cummins, 2001). Receiving such an efficient and growing education could help students develop provide intercultural communication and thus increase peace within the society (Cummins, 1991; Ugurlu, & Ozfidan, 2015).

Receiving an education in a mother tongue may influence the academic achievement of students in a positive way. According to Cummins (2001), “the right to learn one’s mother tongue and to receive an education in one’s mother tongue is rights guaranteed by international agreements” (p. 23). The historical background of minority groups in Turkey indicates that their ethnicity did not cause any segregation between any different ethnic groups (DISA, 2011). Education in a mother tongue will not segregate Turkey, but rather it may promote synergy between majority and minority groups (Kaya & Aydin, 2013; Faltis, 2014). Calislar (2009) said that mother tongue education is a part of human rights. According to UNESCO (1974), speaking a language does not cause any sort of separation and discrimination, asserting that “human rights and fundamental freedoms... are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion” (p. 24). With respect to the language question and the respective roles of the majority language and of the native language, UNESCO said: “the members of national minorities have the right to carry on their own educational activities, including... the use or the teaching of their own language, provided... that this right is not exercised in a manner which prevents the members of these minorities from understanding the culture and language of the community as a whole and from participating in its activities (UNESCO, 1974, article 5, p. 124)”.

Calislar (2009) argued that education in mother tongue is an “irrefutable” and “legitimate” right. Many minority peoples in Turkey want to protect and use their language as an active and efficacious language. In addition, Calislar (2009) affirmed that minority people do not want to protect their language on an individual basis, but rather desire the state to protect it. This demand has slowly spread among the broader minority communities. They want to improve their language, culture, and traditions since it has an affirmative influence on academic success. Building bridges between two languages in education benefits students by developing confidence and fluency in using written and oral second language for academic accomplishment and for daily communication (UNESCO, 2003). The purpose of this study is to investigate how a bilingual education program effects the minority groups’ academic achievements. An explanatory sequential mixed method was used for this study.

Methodology

This study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed method, conducted in two phases: a quantitative phase followed by a qualitative phase. For the purposes of breadth and an in-depth comprehension, a mixed method approach was used to collect, analyze, and “mix” both quantitative and qualitative methods. Both data reflected parallel information. Both the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed to examine the parameters necessary to develop a bilingual education curriculum in Turkey. The rationale for this method was that the quantitative data and the following qualitative data analysis would lead to a better general understanding of the research issue (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003; Creswell, 2007). The quantitative data is summarized in statistical results; the qualitative data supported these results by discovering the views of participants on a potential bilingual education program in Turkey. The quantitative results were used to choose appropriate participants for the qualitative study. For the purposes of breadth and an in-depth understanding, the study used a mixed method approach to collect, analyze, and mix both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Settings and Participants

The subjects for the quantitative and qualitative portions were a voluntary sample of K-12 teachers and scholars from Turkey and the United States. Many of the participants had the experience of attending other language acquisition programs either in other institutions in the United States, European countries, or in Turkey. For quantitative data collection, a survey link was sent to more than 1000 people and 140 participants responded. Participants included 96 males and 44 females. For qualitative data collection, 12 participants were interviewed; 6 of whom were Turkish and the other 6 had ethnic backgrounds other than Turkish. In accordance with the IRB guidelines of Texas A&M University (reference # 043138) (Appendix A), the participations were voluntary, and they could drop out at any phase of the study if they did not want to continue.

Reliability and Validity

Triangulation was used in both the quantitative and qualitative parts of the study to minimize prejudice and enhance honesty regarding the social phenomenon studied. To achieve this, reliability and validity scores were used for quantitative data analysis, and applied trustworthiness criteria of qualitative data analysis including credibility, transferability, and dependability for the qualitative part of the study. The accuracy, reliability, and validity of research findings enrich data collection techniques (Creswell, & Plano-Clark, 2011). Eventually, according to Harrell and Bradley (2009), the use of reliability and validity assist in accomplishing the goal of carrying out high-quality research with trustworthy outcomes.

Table 1 indicates that Cronbach's alpha internal consistency measure was found to be high across all 13 items ($\alpha = .98$). For Cronbach's alpha, a minimum value of .70 is considered acceptable (Nunnally, 1978). Hence, the survey instrument was reliable. Likewise, academicians who are experts in the field of bilingual education in Turkey and the United States reviewed the questionnaires for content/face validity. The results for validity in the survey indicated a statistically significant correlation. The correlation ($r_s = .520, p = .000$) can be considered to be a moderate/medium correlation (.40 -.60). (See Laerd Statistics, n.d.) Therefore, this questionnaire was found to have content validity.

Table 1. Reliability statistics

Cronbach's alpha	N of Items
.984	13

Data Collection and Analysis

For both the survey and the interview, a consent form was emailed to participants. At the end of the survey instrument, a section was included for all participants to indicate whether they wished to contribute further to the study through an interview. No individual was coerced to participate in the interview. Descriptive analysis was used to describe the basic features of the data and to provide simple summaries about the sample and the measures in the study. Data that was interval in nature was reported in means and standard deviations.

Findings

The quantitative data was collected from the survey instrument, and the results were reported in the quantitative data findings. The qualitative data was collected from the interview instrument, and the results were reported in the qualitative data findings.

Results of Quantitative Data Analysis

Table 2 below presents descriptive findings highlighting important points about the academic value of bilingual education. This table emphasizes students whose Turkish is not good enough to start school often do not continue their education (*Item 1*). Integrating minority group language courses in education might help minority students become successful in their education and reinforce their ethnic identity (*Items 2 and 3*). The children of different ethnic groups may lose fluency in their native language if courses are not offered in their native language (*Item 4*). Therefore, a bilingual education program in Turkey might increase the fluency

and confidence of students in a second language for everyday communication and academic learning (*Items 5, 6, and 7*). This table also highlights that bilingual education builds strong relationships between different ethnic groups and has a positive effect on the academic achievement of all students (*Items 8 and 9*). Respondents said that bilingual education would contribute to the reduction of socio-economic inequalities and provide an opportunity for equal access to education for students having a different mother tongue than that of most students (*Items 10 and 11*). It will also foster interpersonal communication by means of its ability to bring individuals of diverse cultural backgrounds together (*Items 12 and 13*).

Table 2. Items and percentage of participants about academic value of bilingual education

#	In my opinion,	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Language minority children whose Turkish is not enough to start school often do not continue their education.	5.71% (8)	8.57% (12)	9.29% (13)	46.43% (65)	30.00% (42)
2	Integrating different ethnic groups' language courses in schools will help them be successful in their education.	4.29% (6)	5.71% (8)	10.00% (14)	41.43% (58)	38.57% (54)
3	Integrating different ethnic groups' language courses in schools will help them reinforce their ethnic identity.	3.60% (5)	8.63% (12)	10.07% (14)	41.01% (57)	36.69% (51)
4	Different ethnic groups' children may lose fluency in their native language unless courses are not offered in their native language.	4.29% (6)	10.00% (14)	11.43% (16)	35.71% (50)	38.57% (54)
5	Children whose mother tongue is not good may encounter communication issues with their parents.	7.14% (10)	11.43% (16)	8.57% (12)	37.86% (53)	35.00% (49)
6	Bilingual education increases students' fluency in L2 for everyday communication and academic learning.	3.57% (5)	7.14% (10)	12.86% (18)	41.43% (58)	35.00% (49)
7	Bilingual education increases students' confidence in L2 for every day communication and academic learning.	5.71% (8)	10.00% (14)	12.14% (17)	40.71% (57)	31.43% (44)
8	Bilingual education builds strong relationship between different ethnic groups.	3.60% (5)	5.04% (7)	8.63% (12)	35.97% (50)	46.76% (65)
9	Access to bilingual education will have a positive effect on all students' academic achievement.	2.88% (4)	7.19% (10)	8.63% (12)	35.97% (50)	45.32% (63)
10	Bilingual education will contribute to the reduction of socio-economic inequalities.	4.35% (6)	7.97% (11)	4.35% (6)	37.68% (52)	45.65% (63)
11	Bilingual education is an opportunity for equal access to education on part of the students having a different mother tongue than the majority of students.	4.32% (6)	7.19% (10)	5.04% (7)	39.57% (55)	43.88% (61)

12	Bilingual education will foster interpersonal communication with its ability to bring individuals from different cultural backgrounds together.	4.32% (6)	7.19% (10)	6.47% (9)	38.85% (54)	43.17% (60)
13	Bilingual education will enable minority students to be more psychologically comfortable.	5.04% (7)	7.91% (11)	5.04% (7)	33.81% (47)	48.20% (67)

Note: Items 3, 8, 9, 11, 12, and 13 had 139 respondents, Item 10 had 138 respondents. All other items had 140 respondents. “1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree.”

Table 3 shows the mean scores and standard deviation values of each item in *Table 2*. The highest mean score in this table was 4.17 for “bilingual education builds strong relationship between different ethnic groups.” This emphasizes respondents believe bilingual education builds strong relationships between different ethnic groups. The lowest mean score was 3.82 for “children whose mother tongue is not good may encounter communication issues with their parents.” This highlights that children whose mother tongue is not good encounter communication issues with their parents. *Table 3* also shows that the 5th item, “children whose mother tongue is not good may encounter communication issues with their parents.” had the highest standard deviation value at 1.23, which indicates that a high level of differentiation in this item. The 8th item, which was “bilingual education builds strong relationship between different ethnic groups,” had the lowest standard deviation value with a value of 1.03. This highlights that there was a low level of differentiation. According to Bland and Altman (1996), “a high standard deviation indicates a heterogeneous group” (p. 48).

Table 3. Perception scale on the academic value of bilingual education (Mean scores and standard deviation values)

#	In my opinion,	Mean	SD
1	Language minority children whose Turkish is not enough to start school often do not continue their education.	3.86	1.12
2	Integrating different ethnic groups' language courses in schools will help them be successful in their education.	4.04	1.05
3	Integrating different ethnic groups' language courses in schools will help them reinforce their ethnic identity.	3.99	1.07
4	Different ethnic groups' children may lose fluency in their native language unless courses are not offered in their native language.	3.94	1.14
5	Children whose mother tongue is not good may encounter communication issues with their parents.	3.82	1.23
6	Bilingual education increases students' FLUENCY in L2 for everyday communication and academic learning.	3.97	1.05
7	Bilingual education increases students' CONFIDENCE in L2 for everyday communication and academic learning.	3.82	1.15
8	Bilingual education builds strong relationship between different ethnic groups.	4.17	1.03
9	Access to bilingual education will have a positive effect on all students' academic achievement.	4.14	1.04
10	Bilingual education will contribute to the reduction of socio-economic inequalities.	4.12	1.09
11	Bilingual education is an opportunity for equal access to education on part of the students having a different mother tongue than the majority of students.	4.12	1.08
12	Bilingual education will foster interpersonal communication with its ability to bring individuals from different cultural backgrounds together.	4.09	1.08
13	Bilingual education will enable minority students to be more psychologically comfortable.	4.12	1.14

Notes: Items 1 through 7 had 140 respondents, Items 8, 9, 11, and 13 had 139 respondents, and Item 10 had 138 respondents. "1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, and 5 = Strongly Agree."

Results of Qualitative Data Analysis

Emergent themes in the interview were coded under two subheadings: Academic Achievement and Discriminations and Political Unrest.

Academic Achievement

According to Ngai (2002), the goals of bilingual education are fostering academic achievement, assisting immigrant acculturation to a new community, enabling native speakers to learn a second language, conserving a minority group's linguistic and cultural heritage, and advancing national language resources. Both the Turkish and the interviewees who were ethnically different than the Turkish

asserted that academic achievement is vital for minority people because, if they are not going to be educated or attend a university, they might be unable find a job and be involved in the community.

Most of the interviewees, Turkish and non-Turkish, highlighted that children should reach the required level of academic proficiency in class; otherwise, they would not have a bright future. While students develop their language capabilities, they can also learn such subjects as math, science, and history. One interviewee, not Turkish, shared his memory when he was a teacher in an elementary school in Bitlis, in which the majority of population is not Turkish in eastern Turkey. He stated that:

“...Since I know Zaza, I taught every subject in Zaza. If I didn't know students' mother tongue, they would learn nothing for sure. I also taught them the Turkish language additionally. I stayed there 8 years, and most of my students learned Turkish. I am currently a faculty member in an institution in Istanbul. All my students who learned Turkish in Bitlis [a town in eastern Turkey] got admission in different universities all over Turkey. Some of them are in Istanbul in my institution, and we still keep in touch. All in all, teaching in mother tongue is very helpful for minority children's academic success. I think there should be a bilingual education model in Turkey. If I didn't teach them in two languages, I believe they wouldn't be able to get an admission from any universities”

He also highlighted that being bilingual increased the fluency and confidence of students in a second language for their academic learning and daily communication. Some Turkish interviewees also argued that all minority students in Turkey should be helped to achieve academic success, and the government should bring a local bilingual education program to places in which most of the minority people live. A common idea of all interviewees was that many different minority groups reside in Turkey, and many of them do not pursue their education because they have language issues related to their ethnic background. Access to a bilingual education program might have an affirmative outcome on the academic achievement of all minority students. One problem in Turkey today is that related to the Syrian refugee crisis. O'Hanlon (2017) found that “almost 800,000 Syrian refugee children, aged between 7-18 in Turkey are not registered in formal education programs and large numbers of youth require access to skills training, language programs and higher education” (p. 65). This was an issue that interviewees recognized. As one Turkish interviewee noted, refugee students should be helped by being taught in their native language as the main language of instruction, that social inclusion in schools should be practiced, and that these refugee students should be provided with academic support. Therefore, she stated that a bilingual education program might provide a remedy for both Syrian and the children of other minority groups in Turkey. Such a program might also positively support the academic success of minority students.

In addition to these, according to a Turkish interviewee, necessity of a bilingual education program is not a primary issue to be discussed in education system in Turkey. She stated that:

“A person who does not want to be educated cannot go to school. This is not related with anyone’s ethnic, linguistic, or cultural background. I had many friends who were ethnically different then us and who had great opportunities to get a very good education. However, most of them didn’t complete their degrees because they were thinking they would not gain much money after they complete their degree”.

She stated that a bilingual education is not necessary for the country because all minority people have to learn Turkish and this is the official language in the country. A common idea among all the interviewees was that students should receive an education in their mother tongue; otherwise, their academic achievement might be affected negatively and they might not have a bright future. Because the cultural backgrounds of teachers and the language of the textbook are different from those of the minority students, the development of their problem-solving skills and learning experiences and their knowledge of “how things work” might be hindered (Cummins, 2000; Ozfidan, & Burlbaw, 2017).

Discriminations and Political Unrest

Linguistic and cultural rights are separate from political rights (Porter, 1990). Studies have shown that the purpose of culture is to empower the effectiveness and dignity of language instead of using language as an instrument in the service of political purposes (Lasagabaster, 2001; Ozfidan, Burlbaw, & Kuo, 2016; Hakuta, 1990; Prediger, & Zindel, 2017). The most realistic way to eliminate the discrimination between majority and minority students when they begin school is to use their mother tongue in education within a bilingual education model (UNESCO, 1974).

One faculty member, of Kurdish background, indicated that ethnic and political discrimination exists when someone is either hired or promoted in the governmental environment. He stated that:

“When I was a teacher in Istanbul, I realized that many teachers tend to hide their Arab, Kurdish, or Laz origins. Whenever I talk about my identity, I realize that the atmosphere changes suddenly. You cannot get any managerial position if you disclose your Arab, Kurdish or Laz identity. We were discriminated [against]”.

He also stated that he believed that all ethnic groups should be treated equally. He said we all are “brothers,” and this is our country. “We love our country. No one has the right to discriminate us according to our ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds.”

All interviewees stated that students who cannot speak Turkish at home (instruction is in Turkish and Turkish is their second language) have a considerably lower performance in class than their peers for whom Turkish is the language spoken at home. However, they believed that these students should not be discriminated against because of their lower performance because their language causes this problem. For example, one of the interviewees whose origin is Turkish stated that:

“... when I was working in an elementary school in Istanbul, I realized that some different minority groups’ students had very good Turkish, and they were very successful in their classes. When I talked these students’ parents, they said that they always spoke Turkish at home. I think this has a big influence on students’ achievement in their classes. In other words, children who speak Turkish at home perform at a level two years ahead of peers who do not speak Turkish at home”.

The education system in Turkey, according to the interviewees whose origins were both Turkish and other than Turkish, is used as a vehicle to indoctrinate “a single political-social ideology” that is dominant in the country and to encourage young people to adopt a particular way of thought and lifestyle. Educational rights aligning with international standards should be considered an essential goal to solve the many issues in the education system in Turkey. These interviewees also affirmed that the existing administrative and legal mechanisms in Turkey are inefficient and not understandable. Turkey does not have legislation to prohibit discrimination in educational environments such as equality among the students. One interviewee stated that “it is very difficult to reveal the full extent of discrimination that exists within the education system”.

A Turkish interviewee said that a bilingual education could prevent minority people from discrimination. He continued saying:

“Guidance teachers should work at schools attended by minority students who have different ethnic background. Teachers who are going to be employed in this position should be chosen preferably from among teachers who speak the mother tongue of children at that school as well as the official language of the country, and orientation training should be provided for these teachers before they take up their positions”.

He also highlighted that teachers who would like to teach in bilingual classrooms should be certified to be more productive. Therefore, some departments should be opened at universities to train teachers concerning how they are going to teach in bilingual classrooms and how they should act with respect to students from different ethnic groups. These methods could at least help in preventing discrimination in schooling.

An interviewee who had a different ethnical background than Turkish highlighted that minority students suffer from many challenges such as language, culture, and identity among others. He said that minority students are not being acted equally. He stated that:

“I know a school, which put different ethnic groups’ children in a different classroom. The placing of students in a separate class or row due to their ethnic origin or color should be clearly prohibited; legal proceedings should be brought against teachers and school administrators who do not observe this prohibition”.

He said that minority students should be equal to other students in school. They should not be situated in a different classroom because they are ethnically distinct from others. Most minority students who were placed in a different classroom failed and did not make any progress.

A bilingual education program, according to both Turkish and non-Turkish interviewees, could strengthen relationships and help solve conflicts between different ethnic groups. However, a Turkish interviewee stated that “ I am very positive toward a bilingual education program in Turkey, but there is no guaranty that it may cause a segregation between different ethnic groups in the future.” The education system should have goals to protect the rights of students in education and should be reformed to reflect international standards with a focus on “egalitarian, pluralistic, scientific, and democratic values.” Another Turkish interviewee stated, “politicians are against a potential bilingual education program in Turkey because they think it will cause a segregation among different ethnic groups.” He said, “over 50 countries have bilingual education programs, and we didn’t hear of segregation between any ethnic groups.” Many believe that education in a mother tongue will not lead to segregation in Turkey, but rather may promote synergy between majority and minority groups (Ozfidan, & Ugurlu, 2015; UNESCO, 1974).

An interviewee of a different background than Turkish asserted that a bilingual education program in Turkey would contribute to social justice such as equal educational rights. Bilingual education promotes equality of opportunity and acceptance of cultural diversity for students. He also emphasized that schools should clearly prohibit discriminatory treatment including harassment based on the minority background and beliefs of students. This issue should be taught to students as a subject or classroom activity and should be officially placed in school curricula to prevent this type of discriminatory treatment.

All interviewees asserted that the Turkish government should support a bilingual education program. This program could prevent minority groups from discrimination. An interviewee who is ethnically different than Turkish stated that:

“I had difficulty with understanding classes when I started the school. I needed to study very hard. But it was difficult to understand subjects that I had never seen before. I didn’t have friends because I was not able speak Turkish. They teased with my language, and they called me lazy. No one wanted to play with me. This made me feel very sad. If I didn’t want to go to the school, students teased with my language”.

These issues indicate that a bilingual education program is necessary in Turkey to protect the rights of minorities and prevent them experiencing any discrimination. Thus, according to the interviewees, the government should consider a bilingual education program to solve linguistically based discriminations and political conflicts among different ethnic groups. This bilingual education program could protect the linguistic and cultural rights minorities with the result that minority students would feel more comfortable.

Discussion

Findings reflected that minority students whose Turkish language is not good usually do not continue their education. Integrating the language courses of these students into their education might help them be successful in their education and reinforce their ethnic identity. Respondents believed that minority students were losing their mother tongue because they are only being taught in a language other than their mother tongue. Respondents believed that students who are taught in a bilingual education program would become more fluent and confident in their second language for their academic purposes. Respondents also felt that bilingual education would help build stronger relationships between different ethnic groups and have a positive effect on all the academic achievement of minority students. Bilingual education also brings socio-economic equalities and opportunities for equal access to education. In academic content courses, students should be taught in their mother tongue while they study their second language (dominant language) (Krashen, 2000). This process would enable these students to learn such subjects as math, science, and history while developing their language capabilities.

This study discussed how a bilingual education program would help minority students become more successful. According to findings, access to a bilingual education program might have a positive effect on all academic achievement of minority students. Many members of minority groups in Turkey do not pursue their education because they have language issues related to their ethnic backgrounds; therefore, they are not as academically successful as majority students. Findings indicated that students should receive education in their mother tongue; otherwise, their academic achievement might be affected negatively, and they might not have a bright future. All minority students in Turkey should be helped to achieve academic success, and the government should bring a local bilingual education program to locations in which most minority people live.

Conclusion

Participants in this study highlighted that many minority people were discriminated against because of their ethnic backgrounds in Turkey. Currently, many minority people suffer from discrimination in schools. Today, the educational system in Turkey is used as a vehicle to indoctrinate a single political-social ideology that is dominant in the country and to encourage young people to adopt a particular way of thought and lifestyle. However, no one has the right to discriminate against people according to their ethnic, religious, or political backgrounds. Bilingual education promotes equality of opportunity and the acceptance of cultural diversity and can strengthen relationships and resolve the issue of conflict between different ethnic groups.

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