



How to raise bilingual children: an exploration of methods and strategies suggested for parents.

Viktorie Luzova

University of Roehampton, School of Education

Abstract

Bilingualism is a worldwide phenomena on which previous research was done, investigating its benefits, effects and methods to raise children bilingually. However, there are many discrepancies throughout the literature and research. This research investigates the methods and strategies suggested for parents to raise bilingual children. It aims to discover what methods and strategies are popular amongst parents' perspectives, followed by a comparison to literature and research. This is a small scale study using a mixed approach, both quantitative and qualitative elements. Documentary and social media analysis method was implemented, analysing five samples: three parents' blogs and two parental guides. The main findings of this study revealed that one person-one language, reading and media and community activities are popular and suggested methods and strategies to use to raise bilingual children. These methods and strategies were suggested not only by the parents in the data, but also by literature and research. However, some literature contradicts these findings. It further found a gap in the literature and research in using play as a method to raise bilingual children, highlighting the importance of further research to fill in this gap.

Introduction

Bilingualism is a worldwide phenomenon with statistics estimating that half of the world's population is bilingual (Ansaldo et al., 2008; Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006; Crystal, 2003). Moreover, the number of bilingual children is increasing every day, due to many factors such as migration, intermarriages, education, available resources, and freedom to travel (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2013; Grosjean, 1982; Lee et al., 2015). Bilingualism is present in all countries, social classes and age groups (Ansaldo et al., 2008; Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006; Crystal, 2003; Grosjean, 1982).

At present, where the multiculturalism in the world increases, it is vital that parents, Early Years practitioners and society overall have knowledge on how to bring up children bilingually. Bilingualism is a journey that needs to be supported by the child's environment (DeHouwer, 1999; Paradowski & Bator, 2016). My research will contribute to the field of Early Childhood Studies by examining methods and strategies suggested and educating Early Years practitioners about how to support bilingualism in children.

Throughout this report, the terms *method* and *strategy* are frequently used. These terms are used as synonyms representing specific methods and strategies to develop bilingualism in

children. However, the methodology chapter uses the term *method* as a tool used to collect the data.

Literature review

Bilingualism is a native-like competence and ability to use two languages (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2006; Robinson & Bellay, 2016). A *bilingual* individual is a person who uses two languages, who can speak, understand and read in the two languages (Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Robinson & Bellay, 2016; Schwartz, 2011). There are two kinds of bilingualism: active and passive. Active bilingualism means that the child speaks and uses both of the languages. It is also called balanced bilingualism. Passive bilingualism is when the child is fluent only in one language, but he or she understands the other language. This is also named receptive (Vera, 2011). Although bilingualism is divided into active and passive bilingualism, there are many levels or degrees of bilingualism, hence it is thought of as a continuum (Garau & Vidal, 2001).

Malaguzzi emphasized that parents are the child's first teacher (Malaguzzi in Edwards et al., 1998). They are the first, main resource and role-models for their child, and thus their involvement and support of bilingualism in the child is crucial (Brown, 2011 in Kwon, 2017; Paradowski & Bator, 2016). Therefore, their knowledge of language development, and their language input impacts and determines the language development of their child and influences their interaction (Paradowski & Bator, 2016; Rowe, 2008 in Lee et al., 2015). In addition, as Vygotsky emphasized, children learn and develop through social interactions not only with parents, but also with other adults and children too, so although parents are most important in their children's language development, other people around the child also shape the child's language development (Nutbrown & Clough, 2014; Veer, 2007).

Strategies for bilingual children suggested by the literature

When examining the literature and previous research in the subject, a number of methods and strategies have been recommended for parents or have been suggested by parents to support bilingual children.

One person-one language (OPOL)

The OPOL method takes place when one parent speaks only the majority language, and the other parent speaks only the minority language to the child. This method is very common and

yet the opinions about its effectiveness vary. King & Fogle and DeHouwer (2006) argue that this method is not very effective, stating that it has not proven to have good results in developing two languages in the child, but rather supports passive bilingualism (also in DeHouwer, 2007). However, Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001) states that this method is effective, showing the best results on bilingual development. Moreover, according to a research study with 37 parents of bilingual children, this method was identified as effective and in fact, most used amongst the parents (Paradowski & Bator, 2016). The reasons given are the least effort and least confusion in the child (Lanza, 2004); consistency (Park, 2008 and Döpke, 1992) and the development of metalinguistic awareness (Clyna, 1987; Lanza, 1997 in Takeuchi, 2006).

One language-one environment (OLOE)

The OLOE method, also known as the minority language at home method occurs when both parents speak only one, minority language with the child. This method has shown positive effects on the child's active bilingualism (King & Fogle, 2006; DeHouwer, 2007; Fantini, 1985). This method aims to somewhat balance the input and development of the minority language compared to the majority language that surrounds the child in every other environment apart from the home (Mancilla-Martinez & Kieffer, 2010). A research study by Schwartz et al. (2011) revealed that parents who use this method choose it because they fear that the minority language would otherwise be forgotten or would not develop at all, if not spoken at home. However, this result is contentious as it could be argued that out of the 37 families which participated, only parents from two families shared the same mother tongue, and two parents were monolingual, therefore they cannot explore other methods and strategies that could be found more effective. Despite this, the study revealed the importance of reading, explained in a following paragraph.

Expressed guess strategy

This strategy means that parents clarify their child's language by asking the child questions, most usually a yes/no questions, that the child is able to answer (Garau & Vidal, 2001; Döpke, 1992; Vera, 2011). It is suggested for parents to ask semi-open answer questions to encourage the child to speak more in the desired language (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004).

Minimal Grasp / Not understanding strategy

This strategy means that parents support the child's language development by telling him or her that they do not understand which, in turn, motivates and encourages the child to amend

his or her speech and repeat what he or she said correctly (Garau & Vidal, 2001; Dopke, 1992; Vera, 2011). This strategy is also used when parents want the child to practice or develop the less competent language, by asking the child to repeat what he or she said in the less competent language (Barron-Hauwaert, 2004).

Repetition / Translation Strategy

This strategy occurs when parents repeat what their child says in one language in the other language (Garau & Vidal, 2001; Dopke, 1992; Vera, 2011). Although this strategy does not directly encourage the child to speak, research suggests that the child often repeats what the parent said in the other language, being encouraged to verbal production (Lanza, 2004).

Bilingual Discourse Strategy

A highly emphasized strategy used to support the development of both languages but mainly the minority language to make sure it is not forgotten is the Bilingual Discourse Strategy – parents and the child having a conversation using both languages (Lanza, 1997). However, this strategy was later negatively criticised, suggesting it is an ‘order for translation’, as the parent requires the child to speak in the language which the child is less competent in (Lanza, 2004:269). This puts pressure on the child, which can lead to demotivation to speak and learn the language (Lanza, 2004).

Community activities

Looking for early years settings supporting the use of the native language in children, organising play dates with other children speaking the same community/minority language, visiting countries that speak the minority language, attending cultural activities supporting the family’s culture & language (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2016). Hiring an Au pair/nanny who is native speaker to the language they cannot speak but want the child to learn is also suggested (Paradowski & Bator, 2016).

Reading & media

The study by Paradowski & Bator found that the majority, to be precise 36 out of 37 families use reading in one or both languages to support bilingualism in their children (Paradowski & Bator, 2016). Other research studies are in agreement, finding that parents’ commonly used methods are reading books, watching videos, TV programmes, cartoons, movies, music and

so on in one or both languages to support their children's bilingualism (Hu et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Kwon, 2017).

Error correction

Another method used by parents is error correction. Parents believe this is an effective way to enhance the child's linguistic skills (Paradowski & Bator, 2016). However, the research shows little or no positive effect of this method on children's bilingual development and does not prevent the errors from happening again (Krashen, 2003). What's more, the literature suggests that error correction can lower the child's confidence and demotivate the child from speaking the language (Gonzalez in Ferlazzo, 2016).

Support of a second language not spoken by parents

A common thing parents suggest to do to support the development of the language that they do not speak is the hiring of an Au pair who is a native speaker of the language they (the parents) cannot speak but nevertheless want the child to learn (Paradowski & Bator, 2016). In order to maintain the child's first language, it is also very beneficial if the parents use One Language – One Environment method, meaning that they only speak with the child in their first language at home and the second language only in the Early Years setting (DeHouwer, 2007; King & Fogle, 2006; Kwon, 2017; Lee et al., 2015). It is suggested that in order to understand their children, parents should be bilingual too (Lee et al., 2015).

Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative approach were used intending to obtain richer, deeper and more reliable understanding of my research and its findings (Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) and they are highly suitable when using blogs as a source of data (Cohen et al., 2018). I use charts and colour coding to facilitate the discovery of the frequency of each method and strategy used (Aliaga & Gunderson, 2000 cited in Muijs, 2011:1).

Qualitative research 'involves an in-depth understanding of human behaviour' and 'relies on reasons behind various aspects of behaviour', and therefore it requires small, focused, carefully selected samples (Bryman, 2012:98). This was obtained by comparing and analysing each of the methods and strategies suggested for parents in the data collected.

Methods for data collection

Documents are a useful research tool, often used to ‘create a certain kind of predictability’, which in my research means the documents (parental guides) predict what methods are suggested and good to use (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004:61; Mukherji & Albon, 2018).

Documents are written texts, including diaries, books, newspapers, government reports, and so on (May, 2011; Mukherji & Albon, 2018). The documents I selected are open-published, therefore public (May, 2011). The advantage of using documents is that they are non-reactive, which means they were not written specifically for social research, and therefore the data is more valid (Bryman, 2016:546). I selected two documents. These are two guides for parents to raise bilingual children, with one written 17 years before the other one, therefore there is a time gap which should be considered when analysing the data.

Blog is a type of social media and online texts, it is a mix of written text and images, therefore blog can be ‘regarded as a ‘document’ in the same way as a paper-based text’ (Denscombe, 2010 in Mukherji & Albon, 2018:293). Blogs allow the authors to express their opinions freely and reflect on their real-life experiences (Cohen et al., 2018). Blogs are, like all other data such as interviews or observations, produced in a specific context (Mukherji & Albon, 2018). The samples were selected through non-probability, purposive, criterion-based sampling procedure, based on the criterion of blogs written by parents who are raising bilingual children (Bryman, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2012). Another criterion for selection is samples in the UK/England which is local and helps to delimit the sample and have a context better to compare from one country.

The blogs are already published in public domain, and accessible without having to create account to log in the website. Therefore, I do not need a permission and informed consent to use them in my research (Eysenbach & Till, 2001; Stevens et al., 2015).

Findings

Content analysis was used to ‘quantify content in terms of predetermined categories’ or themes (Bryman, 2016:283). I analyse the frequency of specific methods and strategies (the themes). Coding was a crucial part of content analysis to discover the frequency of the methods and strategies (Bryman, 2016). As this research implements the deductive approach, nine themes were established and predetermined according to the literature review findings. However, throughout my data, an emerging topic was identified: play. This is therefore an additional emerging theme No. 10.

The themes are as following:

Table 1. Strategies encountered in the data analysed

1.	One person-one language
2.	One language-one environment
3.	Expressed Guess Strategy
4.	Minimal Grasp / Not understanding strategy
5.	Repetition / Translation Strategy
6.	Bilingual Discourse Strategy
7.	Reading & Media
8.	Error correction
9.	Community activities
10.	Play

The colour coding method was implemented to ease analysing the frequency. The themes reveal what methods and strategies are popular and suggested to use, from the most popular to the least.

Frequency

The most frequent themes were three themes suggested by all five samples: No.1 one person-one language; No. 7 reading & media; No.9 community activities. The second most frequent themes were two themes suggested by four out of five samples: No.2 one language-one environment; No.10 Emerging theme - play. Two themes were suggested by one sample only: No. 6 Bilingual Discourse Strategy; No.3 Expressed Guess Strategy. The remaining three themes were not found at any of the samples: No. 4 Minimal Grasp / Not understanding strategy; No. 5 Repetition / Translation Strategy; No. 6 Error correction. This suggests that these methods and strategies are not popular and suggested to use by any of the samples.

Table 2. The frequency of the strategies

	BLOG 1 B1	BLOG 2 B2	BLOG 3 B3	BOOK 1 K1	BOOK 2 K2	Frequency
One person-one language	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
One language-one environment	✓	✓	✓		✓	4
Expressed Guess strategy			✓			1
Minimal Grasp/Not understanding strategy						0
Reading & Media	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Bilingual Discourse Strategy			✓			1
Repetition / Translation Strategy						0
Error correction						0
Community activities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	5
Play	✓	✓		✓	✓	4

Following the findings of the frequency, three themes with the highest frequency are analysed in depth:

One person-one language

The one person-one language method was highly suggested throughout all samples, being the essential method to raise bilingual children. Every sample expressed positive feelings about using this method. This is in line with Paradowski & Bator's (2016) research, revealing that this method is effective and most used amongst the parents. This is also in agreement with Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001) who states this method is not only effective, but also showing best results on bilingual development.

All samples are in agreement that it is beneficial to separate the two languages so that each parent only speaks the chosen one to the child. They suggest that language division, boundaries and consistent language separation make it easier for the child. This is in

agreement with Park (2008) and Döpke (1992) who argue that consistency is essential for this method to be effective and successful.

The reasons given to recommend this approach was because it requires least mental exertion on the part of the child, it is easier for the child and not confusing. This is in line with Lanza (2004), suggesting that this method requires the least effort and confusion in the child.

Despite the positive views about this method, the literature also expresses negative views. King & Fogle and DeHouwer (2007) argue this method is not very effective, stating that it has not proven to have good results in developing two languages in the child. Moreover, they suggest this method rather supports passive bilingualism

Reading & media

Reading to the child and listening to music in both languages was highly recommended throughout all samples. The data suggested that reading and music are effective strategies to support the minority language development. Similarly, previous findings suggest that commonly used methods are reading books, singing songs and listening to music in one or both languages (Hu et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Kwon, 2017). However, watching TV received mixed opinions in the samples analysed.

Reading to the child was highly recommended. Factors such as making it fun and using favorite books enhance its success. Each sample expressed positive views on using reading to support bilingualism by reading in each language. This supports findings from various research studies suggesting that reading books supports the child's bilingualism, and is popular, commonly used method by parents (Hu et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Kwon, 2017; Paradowski & Bator, 2016). A significant finding was revealed in research with 37 parents, where the vast majority - 36 out of 37 families use reading in one or both languages to develop their children's bilingualism (Paradowski & Bator, 2016). Moreover, some samples suggest that reading is highly beneficial to develop and support the minority language.

Throughout the data, an emphasis was placed on frequency, clear articulation, enjoyment and choice of favourite books. Clear articulation is also emphasized by Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001) highlighting the importance of speaking correctly, clearly, without grammar and syntax errors, which prevents children from adapting these errors.

The data suggests that listening to music helps children learn new vocabulary. It is recommended to use songs that incorporate both languages. A key benefit of using music to support bilingualism seems to be its 'unnoticed learning'. Similarly, research found that listening to songs and singing is commonly practiced and recommended strategy by parents (Hu et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Kwon, 2017).

The data expressed mixed opinions on watching TV. While B1 recommended this method suggesting it is a way for children to learn languages without realizing, K2 argued that TV is a passive medium, not allowing children to practice their language skills. While watching TV criticized for not creating direct opportunities to speak, it is emphasized to be a beneficial method helping to learn and understand new words and expressions. The reasons why these strategies are recommended include learning in an enjoyable, unnoticed and natural way while having fun. Despite the mixed views throughout the data, the literature, by contrast, only emphasized positive views on this method, suggesting that watching TV is effective in supporting bilingual learning, adding it is a great way to support the minority language at home (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2016; Hu et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2015; Kwon, 2017).

Community activities

The data highly emphasized this method, experiencing major success in their child's bilingual development. Moreover, the data suggest it is a key method in supporting the minority language development. Likewise, the research and literature found that this method is particularly useful to support the minority language.

Both my data and literature recommended to regularly travel to a country where the language you want your child to learn is spoken, meeting speakers of each language, having friends speaking each language and getting involved in cultural events of the minority language, as it provides different contexts for learning new vocabulary; hiring an Au pair/nanny speaking the minority language or the language they want the child to learn (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2016). Another method that is recommended by my data and in the literature reviewed is selecting an Early Years setting or school supporting the use of the minority language (Eisenclas & Schalley, 2016).

Play

Play in one or both languages was highly recommended throughout my data, suggesting it is fun, enjoyable, stress-free and effortless way to learn the languages. However, play was not emphasized throughout the literature reviewed. Therefore, this is an emerging theme, suggesting there is missing research on play as a method to develop bilingualism in children. This is in contrast with the majority of literature and research on Early Years development, where play is emphasized to be the main medium of learning. It is widely suggested that children learn through play (Brock et al., 2009; Bruce, 2011; Brown & Patte, 2013; Johnson et al., 1947; Moyles, 1989; Smith & Gosso, 2010; Tovey, 2007). Play based learning and its effectiveness has been supported by wide range of theorists, including Piaget, Vygotsky, Froebel, Bruner, Isaacs, Montessori and McMillan (Piaget, 1951; Vygotsky, 1978; Froebel, 1968; Jarvis, et al., 2017; Saracho, 2014; Tovey, 2007; Wood, 1915). Moreover, the Statutory Framework for The Early Years Foundation Stage for England (EYFS, 2017) emphasizes the importance of play, stating that play is one of three characteristics of effective learning (EYFS, 2017). Similarly, Early Years Learning Framework for Australia (EYLF, 2019), for example, implements learning through play, suggesting it is one of the principles of early childhood pedagogy. Therefore, the question arises as to why the research on play as a method to raise bilingual children is missing. Further research on children's bilingual development through play is needed.

It is noteworthy that three themes were not recommended throughout the data at all: Minimal Grasp / Not understanding strategy; Repetition / Translation Strategy; Error correction. While the literature recommends these methods, they were not suggested by any sample. A possible interpretation can be that these strategies are too complex and might be used by parents without them realizing.

Conclusion and recommendations

Conclusively, to answer my research question: What methods and strategies are popular and suggested to use in raising bilingual children according to literature and parents? There are three popular methods and strategies suggested to use in raising bilingual children: one person-one language, reading & media and community activities. Each of these methods and strategies was suggested by all three sources: each sample in my data, academic literature and

research. This makes it a strong argument suggesting that these three methods are effective and best to use to raise bilingual children.

It is crucial that Early Years practitioners are knowledgeable about how to support bilingualism in children. As this study focused on methods and strategies for parents to use to raise bilingual children, not all of them are applicable for use in Early Years settings. There are, however, some recommended methods that can be and ought to be implemented by practitioners in the settings, for instance: Reading & media - practitioners can read to the child in one or both languages or play music in one or both languages; they can implement the one person-one language method by just speaking in one language with the child. Play is already part of the curriculums in Early Years and therefore this method is already implemented in practice (EYFS, 2017; EYLF, 2019).

This study hopes to not only add to the existing research and literature, but also to raise awareness of the gaps proposing further research, particularly on the one person-one language method, watching TV, and last but not least, play as a powerful method to develop bilingualism in children.

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