

“Language difficulties in primary school: Comparison of bilingual and monolingual students”

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OBJECTIVE

The study of linguistic competence of bilingual individuals compared to monolinguals, although extensively researched, continues to arouse worldwide scientific interest. Previous findings have suggested that bilingualism-multilingualism plays an important role in academic development. Also, studies refer to the differences in academic achievement amongst diverse multilingual and bilingual groups. More specifically, simultaneous bilingual children seem to be on the same level with their monolingual peers in academic skills, including maths and reading. On the other hand, sequential bilingual children, whose home language is other than the school language, show mixed results regarding their scores in reading and maths, depending largely on a number of converging factors {1,2}.

The aim of this study was to compare the academic and communication-language skills of bilingual and monolingual primary school students in Greece. The research questions that arise are:

- ❖ Are there differences in academic development between bilingual and monolingual students in Greece?
- ❖ Do communication-language skills differ between bilingual and monolingual students?
- ❖ If so, in which domains of communication-language skills and academic development do they differ?

METHODS

1. Participants

Grade	Bilingual/Multilingual students	Monolingual students
1 st	16	18
2 nd	17	17
3 ^d	24	27
4 th	10	14
5 th	10	11

The sample consisted of 23 multilingual, 54 bilingual and 87 monolingual students. The participants were aged between 6 and 12 years (M=8;9, SD=2,5) and there were no exclusion criteria.

2. Materials

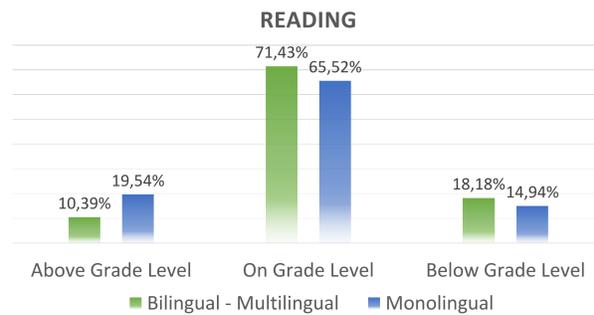
The tool that was used to examine the students' academic abilities in reading, writing and mathematics, and also to detect any language deficits was: “Detection of oral speech difficulties. A teachers' questionnaire.” which is part of the “Educational assessment for speech –language evaluation.” {3}. The aim of the questionnaire is to identify speech, language and communication difficulties in children aged between 6 and 12 years old. Teachers' complete this questionnaire according to their observation and knowledge of the child.

Statistical analysis of the data was carried out using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences)

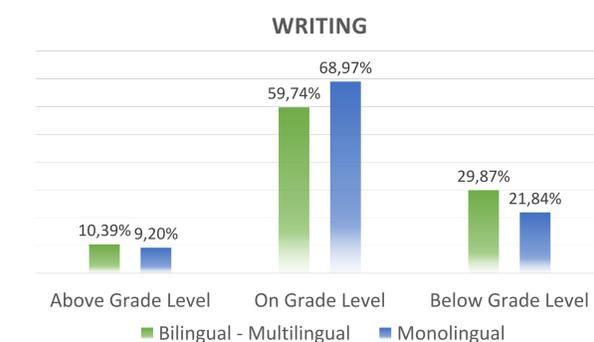
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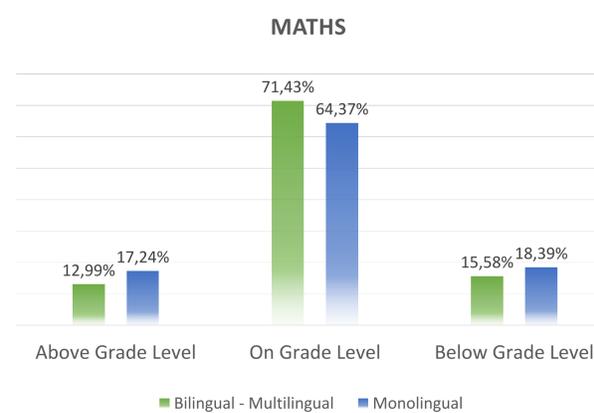
RESULTS



71.43% (N=55) of the bilingual-multilingual children's reading skills is at grade level, as well as the majority of monolingual students 65.52% (N=57).



The majority of the bilingual-multilingual students' writing skills is at grade level 59.47% (N=46), as well as the monolingual students' 68.97% (N=60).



71.43% (N=55) of the bilingual-multilingual students' maths skills is at grade level, and the majority percentage of monolingual students is also at grade level 64.37% (N=56).

CONCLUSIONS

- ❖ Results indicate that the academic skills of bilingual-multilingual compared to monolingual students are not statistically significant (p=0.061). Although, further studies are needed to verify this outcome.
- ❖ The positive academic performance of bilingual-multilingual students may be related to the fact that 60 of them attended bilingual education. Research suggests that a supportive school environment, as well as certified professionals in second language learning are key to successful bilingual education {4}.
- ❖ The questionnaire filled out by teachers, showed that both groups with language-communication skills below average: (a) require additional “time” to either comprehend or respond, (b) have inadequate vocabulary development for his/her age, (c) use inappropriate grammar/syntax.
- ❖ According to the teachers, bilingual-multilingual students with below average academic skills, tend to have notable difficulties when retelling a story and expressing ideas in a coherent manner.
- ❖ In the case of monolingual students with low academic performance, the teachers also refer to their difficulty to ask relevant questions during a discussion.
- ❖ Overall, results indicate similar language-communication difficulties between bilingual-multilingual and monolingual students with below average academic skills. Previous studies have mentioned similar findings regarding the language-communication abilities in bilinguals. More specifically, it is suggested that bilinguals do not differ from their monolingual peers who are affected by the same disorders. {5,6}

For further information

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