

The ability to communicate in two languages at the same time is known as bilingualism. If a person is able to speak or understand more than two different languages, they are considered to be multilingual. Although it may appear that learning two languages is a difficult process for children, it is believed that children can learn two languages just as quickly as they can learn one language. In most cases, a child's first language will be the language spoken in their household, and they will learn a second language (typically English for bilingual children in the UK) through the influence of their school and their community. In this essay, I shall examine whether or not being bilingual has any influence whatsoever on the IQ of a child. Does the ability to speak more than one language indicate a higher level of intelligence, or does it impair or slow down the acquisition of the two? Although some academics feel that being multilingual has a detrimental effect on a child's development, others believe that it may boost a child's IQ as well as their social abilities. In order to convey both sides of this debate, I will mostly be using Baker C.'s (2014) *A Parents and Teachers Guide to Bilingualism and Multilingual Matter*, in addition to a few other related articles.

The practice of studying two languages at the same time has a certain amount of social stigma attached to it. Some academics contend that it may lead to confusion in a youngster or slow down their capacity to acquire both languages to their fullest degree. Some academics, on the other hand, have stated that there is no correlative data to support the concept that learning many languages at once is problematic.

As De Houwer summarizes, *"There is no scientific evidence to date that hearing two or more languages leads to delays or disorders in language acquisition. Many, many children throughout the world grow up with two or more languages from infancy without showing any signs of language delays or disorder"* (1999).

C. Baker also highlights the worry about children developing slower in both languages but has not necessarily listed it as a negative as, in his case, he found that this is due to other factors. In the case of spelling and grammar if mistakes are being made constantly in both languages that could be a sign of learning difficulties such as

dyslexia. If it's more to do with speech, it could be a sign of one or more languages being underutilised within the child's environment.

*Spellings in one language seem imitated when writing the second. This is only a temporary stage that is ironed out as experience of reading and writing grows. If there are constant spelling errors (with dyslexia excepted), the primary cause is likely to be a lack of reading and writing practice and stimulation, rather than anything to do with bilingualism.*²

Having said that, there is a discussion going on about the implications of bilingualism in the classroom and early childhood education. Some children experience difficulties during their first years of school, particularly if they come from a home or country where the primary language utilised in the educational system (for the purpose of this article, I will concentrate on English) is not spoken. This is especially true for children who come from a home or country in which English is not spoken. Because of this, dual language students frequently fail to recognise questions and other social cues in a number of different contexts. Since different grammatical structures are utilised in some of the languages that are being taught, there is also concern regarding an increase in the number of grammatical errors.

'It has been claimed that children simultaneously acquiring two languages go through an initial stage when they are unable to differentiate between their two languages. Such claims have been based on the observation that at times virtually all bilingual children mix elements (e.g. lexical, morphological) from their two languages in the same utterance.'³

This could lead to a reduction in how much they are able to learn on top of adding extra stress and, in some cases, taking away the confidence of some students. C Baker also seconded this thought process within his studies stating

'There are always worries and anxieties in a child's physical, social, personality and health development. There is no such a thing as a trouble-free child. Therefore, raising children to speak two languages is not going to be trouble free.'⁴

Another factor to consider is code switching. Studies on the development of bilingualism in childhood have shown that virtually all children blend aspects of the two languages that they are learning. This has resulted in the assertion that children who speak more than one language have only a single language system in the beginning stages of their education. Code mixing has the potential to have an effect on every aspect of a child's linguistic development, including its phonetic, lexical, phrasal, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic components. Adults are just as likely as children to mix up the codes. Research on the phenomenon of code-mixing or switching in adult bilinguals has been carried out in a number of different studies. Despite this, there are a number of key differences between the two. Changing languages as an adult is subject to certain regulations. This has led researchers to believe that a child is only actually able to develop one language path at a time.

As stated in my essay introduction, I will be exploring what C Baker believes are the positives and negatives of being bi/multilingual. Within *A Parents and Teachers Guide to Bilingualism and Multilingual Matter*, C baker explores both sides finding in his research more positives than negatives when it comes to the matter of bilingualism/multilingualism.

In his research, he found that there are six main advantages to the acquisition of multiple languages and when broken down, there are ten in total.

[...] *'There are many advantages and very few disadvantages in becoming bilingual.'* [...]

Communication Advantages

1. *Wider communication.*
2. *Literacy in two languages.*

Cultural Advantages

3. *Boarder enculturation, a deeper multiculturalism, and 'two languages' worlds of experience.*
4. *Greater tolerance of differences among people and appreciation of their diversity.*

Cognitive Advantages

5. *Thinking benefits.*

Character Advantages

6. *Raised self-esteem.*
7. *Security in identity, multiple identities.*

Character Advantages

8. *Increased curriculum achievement.*
9. *Easier to learn a third language.*

Cash Advantages

10. *Economics and employment benefits.* 5

C Baker is one of the many researchers who believe that learning additional languages positively impacts a child's intelligence level. This could be due to the fact that they are exposed to more cultures (mother tongue and home language), which will increase their social awareness, as in many cases, languages come with their own sense of humor, respect for hierarchy, and situational awareness. He also notes that through his studies he has found that it also has a positive effect on a child's thinking ability. This is due to having two (or more, in the case of multilingual children) words for the same word. A person who is multilingual may be able to think more fluidly, flexibly, and creatively because of the somewhat diverse connections that are associated with each word. The ability to switch back and forth between two languages can help a person develop a greater awareness of language and a more sensitive approach to communication.

[...] bilinguals have the chance of particular advantages in thinking. Bilingual children have two or more words for each object and idea (e.g. 'kitchen' in English and 'cuisine' in French). This means that the link between a word and its concept is usually looser. Sometimes corresponding words in different languages have different connotations. 5

It can be argued, reading through C. Baker's research, that being bilingual or multilingual also increases the social intelligence of the child. They are usually more patient than monolingual (single language) learners when it comes to dealing with people who struggle with speech (lisps, speech impediments) or language.

‘ When meeting those who do not speak their language particularly well, bilinguals may be more patient listeners than monolinguals.’ 6

Growing up in a multilingual household and reading through C. Baker's book, I found a lot of questions that I wished my family had asked and answers that I wished language experts had been aware of during my childhood. Unlike the other members of my family, I am unable to speak another language, though I am trying to learn now that I am older; but unlike my cousins and other family members, I was not brought up with multiple languages. When my family moved from Nigeria to the UK, my family was repeatedly encouraged to speak only English to my siblings and me. It was strongly suggested that us learning English at school and then coming home to speak and listen to Igbo (for my mum) and French (for my dad) was the reason for my siblings and my own slow language development and learning in the classroom, was due to having many languages spoken in the household and it being better for us to focus on one.

At the time, that made sense as it was presented that learning multiple languages at once confuses children and stunts their growth; but through research now in my older years and seeing how beneficial growing up in a multilingual household in terms of I have come to my own understanding that that is not necessarily the case. As Ellen Bialystok concluded in her article titled *‘Bilingual education for young children: review of the effects and consequences’*

The conclusion is that there is no evidence for harmful effects of bilingual education and much evidence for net benefits in many domains. 8

For my family members who grew up learning and speaking both Igbo and English, they find learning a third and, in some cases (I have thirty-four 1st cousins), fourth and fifth

language easy to learn as they find it easier to split the languages in their heads as well as being able to quickly pick up on the grammar rules and different accent with little to no problems; whereas I have struggled heavily in my learning of languages, as have my other siblings. Putting learning problems to the side, I find it harder to pronounce words that don't follow the English stresses, and I find that as I try to learn a language, I am trying to translate the words and sentences directly to English. This is extremely hard to do in a language such as Igbo, as when the language is translated into English, it does not make much sense (E.g Igbo translation directly to English, a sentence may sound like 'My body it throws me water' which means I am nervous).

In terms of intelligence, it has been proven that speakers of more than one language show a high IQ than those who only speak one, but that doesn't necessarily mean that they show signs of more intelligence. It shows a sign of a larger brain capacity, but that does not directly translate to intelligence as stated within this essay, there are different types of intelligence.

One note of caution needs to be sounded. IQ tests do not measure intelligence. IQ tests measure a small sample of the broadest concept of intelligence. IQ tests are often paper and pencil tests where only "right" and "wrong" answers are allowed.⁹

In the case of my family, I found that due to their ability to speak and easily learn and understand other languages; they are more intelligent both academically and socially. This is due to having a wider variety of literature and educational information they can easily access and understand, such as French newspapers, politics etc.

In conclusion, I believe there is a positive effect of being bi/multilingual; from my research, I have found that there are economic, emotional, and intellectual advantages to the practice. With everything, there are drawbacks and challenges to overcome (such as initial shyness or accent barriers), as well as obstacles that parents and educators must overcome. They would need to work together and be conscious of keeping a

healthy balance of the languages being learned so one does not overpower the other. But just like C. Baker, I can find no major negative effect on a child's intelligence.

1

2. Baker, Colin. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (Parents' and Teachers' Guides Book 18) (p. 138- 139). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition.
3. Genesee, F et al. "Language differentiation in early bilingual development." *Journal of child language* vol. 22,3 (1995): 611-31. doi:10.1017/s0305000900009971
4. Baker, Colin. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (Parents' and Teachers' Guides Book 18) (p. 1). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition.
5. Baker, Colin. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (Parents' and Teachers' Guides Book 18) (p. 1). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition.
6. Baker, Colin. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (Parents' and Teachers' Guides Book 18) (p. 6-7). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition.
7. Baker, Colin. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (Parents' and Teachers' Guides Book 18) (p. 6). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition.
8. Ellen Bialystok (2018) Bilingual education for young children: review of the effects and consequences, *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 21:6, 666-679, DOI: [10.1080/13670050.2016.1203859](https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2016.1203859)
9. Baker, Colin. A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism (Parents' and Teachers' Guides Book 18) (p. 54). Channel View Publications. Kindle Edition

