A study on the contributions of second language education to language development in pre-school period

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Abstract

In this study, Turkish language processing skills of the 6 ages children attending preschool education in Turkish and a in secondary language were investigated. The study was conducted between 6 years old 100 children attending SHCEK and Ministry of National Education private pre-schools located in İzmir province and kinder gardens and the parents of all children were also given a questionnaire to obtain personal information concerning the family. In the study, Language Processing Test was used to gather the data. Language Processing Test has seven sub-tests. In analysing the data, One-Way Anova, t test were used and 0.05 value was taken as significant. The findings show the difference between children attending preschool education only in Turkish and in a second language. There is no significant difference in Language Processing Skills of the 6 year old preschool children attending education in Turkish and in a second language in terms of their father education status, mother’s job status and number of sister/brother. There is a significant difference in favour of 6 year old children attending education in second language in “Naming”, “Defining the function”, “Similarity”, “Difference” and “Features” subtests and overall.

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1. Introduction

Language development is one of the most important milestones that occur during the preschool years (Adams 1990; Dickinson and Tabors 2001). From birth to about the age of five, children acquire about 10,000 vocabulary words (Childers and Tomasello 2002).

According to Karacan (2000); Biological, neurological, psychosocial, psychosexual and cognitive development effects each other in the developmental period. Language development is an important part of this coordinated development and learning process which begins after birth. All babies start to learn language by the means of speech sounds in their own language. Language development is closely related with brain maturation and by the age of 3 an almost maturated language acquisition is expected.

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Language is the mean of thought and behaviour. People can express ideas and feelings to each other and transfer knowledge and thought by using language. The most important function of language is; people communicate each other. In recent years learning another language means learning a culture. Language is not only a milestone of communication; language has become a way of learning a new culture recently.

Language is inextricably entwined with our mental life, our perceiving, our remembering, our attending, our comprehending, our thinking, in short, all of our attempts to make sense of our experience in the world (Lindfors, 1991).

The issue of language development has become a lively topic of modern child psychology researches. Because the language skills of children have been developed recently. Language development is one of the most important milestones that occurs during the preschool years (Adams 1990; Dickinson and Tabors 2001). Children acquire about 10,000 vocabulary words from birth to about the age of five, (Childers and Tomasello 2002). During this time, children begin with one word and learn to communicate in complex sentences. A recent study by Lupan (2005) involved; children are so curious between three and five years old, so children can learn a second language in an enjoyable way.

According to Yazıcı, İter and Glover (2010) children acquire a range of social, cultural and family values through the mother tongue. It is thought that; children use language to express their feelings during social contact and to communicate with others (Mussen, Conger, and Kagan 1990) and language mediates the learning of social rules and cultural values (Piyade 1990). The mother tongue shapes children’s social life and behaviour (Aytemiz 2000). Current research indicates that high-quality preschool experiences can have a positive impact on children’s language and emergent literacy skills (Barnett 2007).

Children brought up in a bilingual and multicultural environment experience two different types of language-learning experience: first-language acquisition and second-language acquisition. First-language acquisition takes place from birth with parents and close family, which Piyade (1990) calls the process of mother-tongue learning. The second-language acquisition process is different from learning the mother tongue, occurring in situations that the child experiences outside the home. Using two languages for communication is known as bilingualism (Türker 2000). Research indicates many advantages to bilingualism. Access to two languages may accelerate the development of metalinguistic skills (Vygotsky 1962). Bilingualism can enhance the performance of spatial tasks (McLeay 2003), cognitive flexibility, analytical strategies and creative thinking, and promote skills of communication and thinking that fit the broader aims of education (Olmedo 2003). These are benefits not only for minority language speakers, but also for majority language speakers, as they too can develop bilingualism (Yazıcı, İter and Glover 2010).

Children learn a second language better when they have a good grasp of their mother tongue (Cummins 2001). Schools and kindergartens with bilingual programmes help to develop the mother tongue whilst advancing children’s abilities in the language of schooling. Bilingual education supports children’s personal development and assists a positive exchange between the two languages and cultures. This can contribute to self-esteem and mutual respect (Yazıcı, İter and Glover 2010).

Krashen, Long and Scarcella (1979), investigated the foreign language learners in different ages. They compared two groups which learned a second language different ages. They found that adults or people who started to learn a second language after childhood, achieve the language learning process. On the other hand, children show high
performance without accent problem. They found that the language learner children’s vocabulary, phonological awareness are more significant.

Preschool-age may have special challenges in early language learning and development. As preschoolers, they are asked to develop language and literacy skills even as they are still developing those skills in their home language. Language researchers consider second language acquisition to be an additive process, that is, a child need not lose his home language to learn a second language. Rather, a child will add the second language to his or her repertoire (Cummins, 1979). Research has shown that young children use the same skills to learn home language as second language. Research also indicates that the skills in home language learning transfer to the acquisition of the second language (Huennekens and Xu, 2010).

According to Yazıcı, İlter and Glover (2010), recent researches carried out in several countries, bilingual programmes have a positive effect on second-language learning and children’s self-confidence. The mother tongue plays an important role in developing children’s problem-solving, comprehension and analytical skills (Aytemiz 2000). The development of knowledge in both languages has a positive effect on children’s opportunities to express their feelings, thoughts, interests and needs (Clark 2002). In Sevinc and Önkol (2009)’s study it is observed that bilingual children use their reasoning skills and those abilities and strategies required for a meaningful communication between individuals in a much more conscious, purposeful and discriminative manner in comparison to the monolingual children. Also, being bilingual accelerates cognitive development and facilitates usage of the language as a tool in reasoning.

Several studies have revealed that second language education in preschool period is very important by contrast, McLaughlin argues that second language education in preschool period affects the language development negatively. There is some thought that children who may appear to be learning a second language very quickly at a very young age (before the age of 5), accompanied by the loss of their first language, have really replaced the first language with the second language (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1994). Many researchers believe that there is little benefit and potential harm in introducing a second language at a very young age unless caregivers are careful to maintain both languages as equally important and valuable (Clark, 2000). According to Sevinc and Önkol (2000) it is considered advantageous that second language acquisition is achieved in early ages (Kilimci, 1998). The generalisability of much published research on this issue is incompatible. In Turkey the investigations about this issue aren’t sufficient.

According to Yılmaz (2007), there is real concern that if children do not fully acquire their first language, they may have difficulty later in becoming fully literate and academically proficient in the second language. The interactive relationship between language and cognitive growth is important. Preserving and strengthening the home language supports the continuity of cognitive growth. Cognitive development will not be interrupted when children and parents use the language they know best. Experience and ideas must be familiar and meaningful to the child to be learned.

Everything acquired in the first language (academic skills, literacy development, concept formation, subject knowledge, and learning strategies) will transfer to the second language. As children are learning the second language, they are drawing on the background and experience they have available to them from their first language. Collier believes that the skills children develop in their first language form the foundation they must have to be academically successful in their second language (Clark, 2000).
2. Data Collection Tools

Language Processing Scale and Parent Questionnaire Form were used as data collection tools. The Language Processing Scale is consisted of “Denomination, Function Identification, Evocation, Grouping, Similarity, Difference and Feature Identification” sub dimensions, respectively. To study language developments of 6 year old boys and girls attending preschool education institutions and primary school first grade; Language Processing Scale was adapted to Turkish culture by Sevinç & Eskinazi (2004) which was initially developed by Richard and Hanner based on Luria’s “Brain Organization Theory”.

3. Findings

Table 1-Is there any difference between 6 year old children receiving education in second language and only in Turkish in terms of language processing skills?

| Education Language | n   | X   | ss  | t    | sd  | p*      |
|--------------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|---------|
| Denomination       |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 43,24 | 1,02 | 6,972 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 45,21 | 1,76 |       |     |         |
| Function           |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 43,68 | 1,56 | 5,036 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 45,28 | 1,60 |       |     |         |
| Identification     |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 43,68 | 1,56 | 4,719 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 45,23 | 1,72 |       |     |         |
| Evocation          |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 11,72 | .73  | 10,46 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 13,13 | .58  |       |     |         |
| Grouping           |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 15,46 | 2,39 | 19,08 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 23,43 | 1,64 |       |     |         |
| Similarity         |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 14,37 | 2,55 | 20,80 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 23,43 | 1,64 |       |     |         |
| Difference         |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 52,94 | 6,83 | 16,35 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 73,00 | 5,12 |       |     |         |
| Feature            |     |     |     |      |     |         |
| Turkish            | 46  | 225,11 | 14,60 | 19,05 | 98  | .000*   |
| Second language    | 54  | 268,73 | 5,70 |       |     |         |

Turkish language processing skills of the children at the ages of 6 receiving education only in Turkish and in two languages at the level of preschool education indicate a significant difference at the level of .05. Language processing skills of 6 years old children indicate significant differences at the level of .01 according to native language/second language usage. According to arithmetic means, in all traits, those children learning second language had higher points than those children who receiving education only in Turkish. In the light of data which were obtained here, it is concluded that the children receiving education in second language are more successful in language processing than those children receiving education only in Turkish.

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