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THE ROLE OF BILINGUALISM IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT

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Introduction

Bilingualism has become an increasingly significant subject of study in modern linguistics and pedagogy due to the growing globalization and intercultural communication. Millions of children around the world grow up in bilingual or multilingual environments, which raises questions about the effects of bilingualism on language acquisition and cognitive abilities. While some researchers once assumed that bilingualism might delay linguistic development, recent studies demonstrate that bilingual individuals often show cognitive advantages, such as improved executive functions, greater mental flexibility, and enhanced problem-solving skills.

Relevance of the Study

The relevance of this study lies in the need to better understand how bilingualism influences both linguistic and cognitive development. In today’s interconnected world, bilingualism is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a social and educational asset. Exploring its impact provides valuable insights for language teaching, curriculum design, and educational policies.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this research is to analyze the influence of bilingualism on language acquisition and to evaluate its cognitive benefits in children and adults.

Methods

The study is based on a literature review of publications from 2010–2024 retrieved from Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Key terms such as “bilingualism,” “language acquisition,” “cognitive development,” and “second language learning” were used. Empirical studies, experimental research, and meta-analyses were included.

Results

Findings indicate that bilingual children may initially show slower vocabulary acquisition in each language compared to monolingual peers, but they quickly catch up and often surpass them in metalinguistic awareness. Cognitive research shows that bilinguals perform better on tasks involving attention control, working memory, and task-switching. In addition, bilingualism fosters intercultural competence and adaptability in social contexts.

Discussion

The analysis suggests that the cognitive benefits of bilingualism outweigh the temporary delays sometimes observed in early language acquisition. Teachers and parents should recognize bilingualism as an advantage rather than an obstacle. Moreover, educational systems should promote bilingual programs to enhance linguistic competence and cognitive flexibility.

Conclusion

Bilingualism positively affects both language acquisition and cognitive development. It fosters linguistic awareness, improves executive functions, and strengthens intercultural communication skills. Supporting bilingual education can therefore play a vital role in preparing students for academic success and global citizenship.