
English achievements of Turkish and German speaking children in a regular and a bilingual elementary school program in Germany

Anja Steinlen & Thorsten Piske

Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg

anja.steinlen@fau.de, thorsten.piske@fau.de

In many countries, the number of children with a heritage language background is steadily increasing. In Germany, approximately 40% of all children under the age of 10 now have immigrant status (Statistisches Bundesamt 2020), and there are often overlaps between immigrant status, heritage group status, low socio-economic status, and linguistic and ethnic background (e.g., Autor:innengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung 2024). Studies focusing on various aspects of English as a foreign language in regular school programs have generally shown that children with a Turkish background achieve lower scores than their German peers (e.g., McElvany et al. 2023). However, the effects of intensive German-English bilingual elementary programs on the English reading, listening, receptive grammar, and vocabulary proficiency of Turkish-speaking children have not yet been investigated.

In this study, we present data from 80 fourth grade children who completed English tests on reading and listening (Little et al. 2003), receptive vocabulary (Dunn et al. 1997), and grammar (Bishop 2003). Half attended an intensive bilingual program, and half attended a regular program. Each group included equal numbers of children with either a German or Turkish background, matched for socio-economic status (based on a parental questionnaire) and cognitive background (Raven 1976).

Results showed no significant differences between children with a Turkish and German background. However, children in the bilingual program outperformed their peers in the regular program, regardless of their language background. These findings support the idea that foreign language programs, especially intensive ones, benefit children of diverse linguistic backgrounds. Finally, the results are discussed in relation to models of transfer in L3 acquisition (e.g., Rothman et al. 2019).

References. Autor:innengruppe Bildungsberichterstattung (2024). *Bildung in Deutschland kompakt 2024*. Bielefeld: wbv. • Bishop D. (2003). Test for reception of grammar. Pearson. • Dunn, L., L. M. Dunn, C. Whetton & J. Burley (1997). The British picture vocabulary scale II. NFER-Nelson. • Little, D., B.L. Simpson & B.F. Catibusic (2003). *Primary School Assessment Kit*. Integrate Ireland Language and Training. • McElvany, N., R. Lorenz, A. Frey, F. Goldhammer, A. Schilcher & T. C. Stubbe (2023). IGLU 2021. Waxmann. • Raven, J. (1976³). *Standard progressive matrices*. Harcourt. • Rothman, J., J. Alonso & E. Puig-Mayenco (eds., 2019). *Third language acquisition and linguistic transfer*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. • Statistisches Bundesamt (2020). *Bevölkerung mit Migrationshintergrund: Ergebnisse des Mikrozensus 2019*. Destatis.