BILINGUAL STUDENTS SELF-REGULATION AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

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Abstract: Bilingualism is a controversial and ever expanding phenomenon.In this study, the performances and strategies of self-regulated learning of two distinct bilingual groups, natural bilingual students and educational bilingual students, were compared.The information of the quantitative and descriptive research was obtained by the survey method.The instruments were three questionnaires: one adapted from Ryan &Collinn's (1989) Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) and two from the authors' set of Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ).The results of the research show that the effective use of self-regulation strategies for learning helps bilingual students obtaining significant academic performance due to the management of these strategies.

Keywords: *sequential and simultaneousbilinguals; self-regulated learning; academicsuccess;*

Introduction

Nowadays, learning two or more languages is no longer a novelty in a world where migration has become an extremely common phenomenon, thus expanding and promoting linguistic diversity by means of technology. The topic of bilingualism, under its various forms, has been frequently discussed in the literature.Therefore, from a social point of view, research shows that in the early twentieth century, in France, a person who spoke two different languages fluently was associated with migration and was considered inferior to the linguistic majority (Irvine, 1998; Garcia, 2006).From an educational point of view, things were no different as students were punished for using a foreign dialect or accent in speechand, in schools.Different rules were imposed to prevent the use of minority languages (Young, 2010).

In the literature, bilingualism has generally been associated with terms such as "cognitive confusion" (Vygotsky, 1962), "semantic weakness" (Benevelli, 2010) or even, language disorder, often leading to school failure. In recent years, however, it has been shown that this "linguistic upheaval" is actually just a normal manifestation of the child as a reaction to the accumulation of verbal stimuli that flow concomitantly upon him.

The views on the theme of bilingualism thus gravitate towards positive aspects, focusing on the cognitive flexibility of the bilinguals, on their control and execution functions, on their attention and self-management ofproblems (ASHA, 2015), on extended socialization and a strong impact on shaping identity (Tódor and Desgi, 2016).

However, the most important benefit of bilingualism, increasingly noticed by researchers in recent years, is that it can be an indicator of school success or even a factor in school performance (Peal and Lambert, 1962).From this point of view, recent studies on the topic of bilingual students illustrate under the form of comparisons between monolingual and bilingual students the fact that the latter achieve significantly better school results than the former when they resort to self-regulated learning strategies, such as careful management of time devoted to learning, selection of personalized learning methods, andproper organization of space for learning activities (Ardasheva, Wang, Adesope,&Valentine, 2017;Freihofner, Smala, & Campbell, 2016).

The controversies and the diversity of the specialized studies carried out on this topic represented the impulse of placing the process in the more elaborate frame of a current

scientific research, in which the emphasis would be laid on the comparison based on the use of self-regulated learning strategies of two groups of students with different forms of bilingualism (simultaneous bilinguals who acquired two different languages simultaneously, from birth, and sequential bilinguals who learned the first language within the family, and the second one in school).

The theoretical foundation of the research is based on the self-regulation model developed by Zimmerman (1998), made up of three elements: self-reflection, planning, and performance control, which illustrates that self-regulation is a true, constantly evolving cyclical process. The author insists on theconnection between self-regulated learning and school success, drawing attention to the importance of the variables involved in regards tothe management of time spent with learning activities, the use of learning methods and tothe establishment of a learning goal or a feeling of effectiveness.

Purpose of study

Starting from the premises of the specialized literature, the aim of the paper is to compare simultaneous bilingual students with sequential bilingual students in order to establish a relation between their level of self-regulated learning processes and their school success in Romanian educational environment.

Research Hypotheses

The general hypothesis assumes that the use of self-regulated learning strategies represents an instrument for achieving school success in Romanian language, especially regarding simultaneous bilingual students. This hypothesis can be discussed under two different headings which claim that:

H1. We assume that there are significant differences between simultaneous bilingual students and sequential bilingual students, regarding the use of self-regulation strategies for learning.

H2. We assume that sequential bilingual students achieve better school results in Romanian language, compared to the natural / simultaneous bilingual students.

Methods

The research method employed in this study is the survey, which attempts to highlight the strategies of self-regulated learning of bilingual students, the linguistic background of the students, as well as the school climate. The method is addressed to a numerically significant sample (173 bilingual students).

Participants

The target population is represented by a number of 173 students enrolled in the cycle of Romanian middle school education (grades V-VIII), aged between 10 and 15 years (Figure 1. Ethnic structure of the group). This group was also divided into two distinct groups, chosen nonrandomized, taking into account the ethnicity of the groups, as follows:Group 1 (G1) was composed of a number of 72 Romanian students (they successively acquired Romanian (L1) at home and German (L2) at school and Group 2 (G2) was made up of 101 students, ethnic Hungarians (they acquired Hungarian and Romanian in natural context, simultaneously).
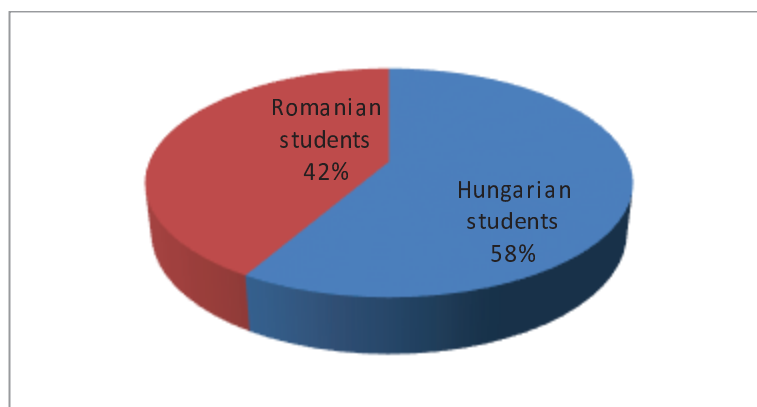
Figure 1. Ethnic structure of the group

Research tools

The survey method uses a number of three questionnaires: one adapted from Ryan &Collinn's (1989) Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A) and two from the authors' set of *Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ):*

The questionnaire meant to identify the level of self-regulated learning of bilingual students' - developed according to the SRQ-A model (Ryan &Collinn, 1989).The questionnaire comprises 16 items (7-step Likert scale in which 1 is not true, 7 is very true) and is created to identify the methods or strategies used for more effective learning.

Learning Self-Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-L) - developed by Collinn (1989).The questionnaire consists of 33 items with 7-point Likert scale responses, as well as closed and open answers, and its main target is the description of the students' language performance. Also, the questionnaire aims to describe the linguistic evolution of the student and draws the distinction between L1 and L2, at the level of reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

The Learning Climate Questionnaire (LCQ) - adapted from Ryan &Collinn's (1989) model.The questionnaire comprises 15 items with 7-step Likert scale responses (1-strongly disagree, 7-strongly agree), and aims to analyse the environment wherethe learning activity takes place andto identify the stimulating factors of learning.

Findings and Results

To verify if there are differences between the two groups of subjects regarding the performance at the Romanian language subject (common language for both groups from birth and 20% covered in school by both groups) under the influence of self-regulated learning strategies, we used thenonparametric statisticalMann-Whitney U Test for two independent samples and for the normally distributed, quantitative variables, it was applied the Independent – Sample T test.

Regarding the variable of self-regulated learning strategies, the dispersion of results across the whole variable indicates significant differences of $p = 0.00$ ($p < 0.05$) between the median ranks of the results of the two groups of participants, resulting in a significant Mann-Whitney U coefficientvalue, where U= 3050.500, z = - 1.804, p<0.05 (Table 1. Differences between groups in terms of strategies of self-regulated learning). Therefore,sequential bilinguals students had lower results (Mdn = 4.7) compared with the results obtained by simultaneous bilingual students (Mdn = 5.06).

Table 1.Differences between groups in terms of strategies of self-regulated learning

Self-regulated learning strategies	Mean Rank	Mann-Whitney U	Asymp.Significance level (Sig.)

G1	78,87		
G2	92,80	3050.500	p<0,05

To test the first hypothesis, we transformed 5 of the most representative items of the questionnaire regarding the identification of the level of self-regulated learning, into independent variables, which constitute subscales of the self-regulation questionnaire. Thus, subscale A verifies the frequency with which the bilingual students from the two groups resort to tutoring to enhance their learning. Subscale B involves identifying the extra-time intervals that bilinguals spend with the language acquired.

Subscale C identifies the situations in which bilinguals resort to solving tasks in the second language, with external assistance. Subscale D verifies the frequency with which the bilinguals use Internet sources with text translation functions in solving the tasks in the second language. Subscale E involves identifying situations in which bilinguals repress certain behaviours in order to maintain constant attention.

According to the results of the research, sequential bilinguals resort more often to after-school tutoring in order to self-regulate the learning activity (M = 4.20), compared to simultaneous bilingual students (M = 3.01), the differences being significant (p <0.01).

Regarding time management and planning in learning, simultaneous bilingual students from G1 present a higher average of the answers (M = 4.89), as opposed to sequential bilingual students (M = 4.29). From the point of view of self-regulation by requesting external assistance, the statistical results indicate that G1 has a lower average (M = 3.79), as opposed to G2 students with an average of M = 4.60 (Table 2. Differences between groups in terms of self-regulated learning strategies).

In terms of self-regulation through the use of the Internet, we also found out significant differences (p <0.01) between the two groups, where the G1 median is only M = 3.86, compared to the G2 median which is at a value of M = 4.55. In terms of self-regulation by means of attentional control, the results are again in favour of G2 with an average of M = 5.40, G1 presenting an average of M = 4.89 (p <0.05).

Table 2. Differences between groups in terms of self-regulated learning strategies

Items SRQ-A	Participants	Mean	SD	T	df	Significance level (p)
After-school tutoring	72	4.20	2.37	3.47	171	0.00
	101	3.01	2.09			
Time management	72	4.29	1.98	-1.38	171	0.04
	101	4.89	1.82			
Request for external assistance	72	3.79	2.10	-2.74	171	0.00
	101	4.60	1.77			
Internet use	72	3.86	1.77	-2.48	171	0.01
	101	4.55	1.84			
Attentional control	72	4.89	1.76	-1.95	171	0.04
	101	5.40	1.61			

Hypothesis 1 is confirmed by indicating that in fact, bilingual students naturally resort to more

strategies for self-regulated learning, as opposed to sequential bilinguals, where self-regulation by means of after-school tutoring prevails.

As far as the second hypothesis of the research is concerned, the dispersion of results on the variable regarding performanceatthe Romanian language subject also indicates significant differences p= 0.00 between the means of the results of the two groups, (t (161) = 2.55, p <0.01).

Table 3.Differences between groups regarding the performance at the Romanian language

Groups of participants	Number of participants (N)	Mean	SD	T	df	Significance level (p)
Sequential bilinguals (G1)	70	8.40	1.40	2.55	159	0.01
Simultaneous bilinguals (G2)	91	7.69	1.74			

The data obtained in the research showed that hypothesis 2 is confirmed, proving that sequential bilingual students have higher grades in Romanianlanguage subject (M = 8.40), compared to simultaneous bilingual students (M = 7.69). Despite the fact that Romanian comes with a common lexical background for both groups since birth, the statistical differences are significant with p = 0.00 (Table 3.Differences between groups regarding the performance at the Romanianlanguage).

According to the results of the research, simultaneous bilingual students resort more often to self-regulated learning strategies (time management, requesting external assistance, use of websites with text translation function, attentional control), as opposed to sequential bilingual students whose main strategies are tutoring hours. Thus, we can infer that sequential bilinguals rely on external support for self-regulated learning, while the others most often resort to strategies of independent work, research, and discovery.

On the other hand, regarding the performance at the Romanian language subject, the results of the research indicate that although both groups know this language from birth and both groups study it in proportion of only 20% in school, sequential bilingual students achieve better school results in this discipline. However, we note that, despite the differences between the groups' average, simultaneous bilingual students do not score low school results, their average being 7.72, compared to that of sequential bilinguals, which is 8.70. In this case, however, we can say that the use of self-regulated learning strategies represents a considerable support in obtaining good school results.

Limits

Regarding the application of the research tools, difficulties can be encountered regarding the degree of understanding of the questionnaires statements by the participating students. This is why it is very important to ensure the continuous presence of at least one translator during the entire activity of applying the instruments.

Moreover, the construction of the questionnaires indicates that their lengthcan eventually lead to fatigue, monotony or the tendency to provide answers without reading the entire statement, which, in turn, leads to false answers.

At the same time, the analysis of school success in terms of school results declared by the participating students through the questionnaire does not prove the truthfulness of these results in the absence of direct consultation of the students' grades.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The results of the research offer new pedagogical perspectives in working with bilingual students. According to these results, it seems that the form of bilingualism indeed influences the need to use less and less self-regulated learning strategies for second language acquisition. Thus, simultaneous bilingual students use more self-regulated learning strategies in the study of the second language due to the need to balance the language skills of the two languages acquired simultaneously in childhood, while sequential bilinguals, who already have a well-founded first language, can easily focus on the second one without having to constantly resort to self-regulation strategies.

Regarding the school results at the Romanian language subject, common to both groups, even if sequential bilinguals achieve better results, with averages between 9 and 10, the results of simultaneous bilinguals are not insignificant (average between 7 and 8), which proves that the frequent use of self-regulation strategies is, however, a considerable tool in achieving a good to very good level of success in the second language proficiency. This also proves that bilingual students are not students with speech disorders, but students capable of self-regulation and capable of achieving significant school results.

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