

# Benefits of Bilingualism: Best Practices for Families

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# Background

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Eliza Akua Thompson is an associate professor at the University of Maryland where she also teaches courses in clinical speech language pathology. Her research examines the intersectionality of race, culture, language and disability, including the role of children's socioeconomic status and language exposure in their neural and cognitive development. Previously, Eliza completed a bachelor's degree in Speech & Hearing Science from the George Washington Master's Degree from Howard University where she studied language acquisition in children. Eliza also has two post graduate certificates in Special Education and Bilingual speech language pathology from Teachers College-Columbia University. She also trained as a Speech-Language Pathologist and currently serves as the Director of Study Abroad Programs in the Department of Hearing and Speech Sciences.

Eliza will lead her third cohort of students to Ghana next year for the course she created, Global Perspectives in Service Learning.



# Research & Clinical Interests

HESP-GPS:  
Global Perspectives in Service  
Learning is the department's  
study abroad program with two  
focal tenants:

1. Innovative Clinical Training
2. Cultural Competence



# Research & Clinical interests

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Research interests focus on Applied Linguistics and Language Education as well as the neural plasticity that accompanies early childhood language interventions.



# Myth #1

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Raising my child in more than one language will lower his/her ability to understand and/or use spoken language.



## Myth #2

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Raising my child in more than one language causes additional language delay.



## Myth # 4

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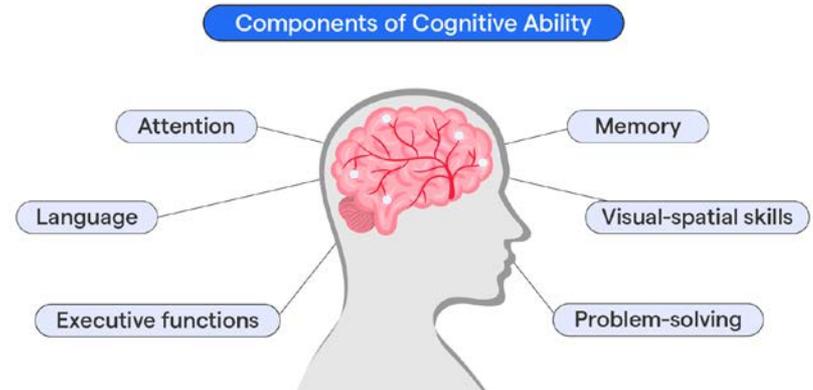
It is better for my child to speak English more than local languages because he/she will do better academically.



# Myth #3

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Raising my child in more than one language decreases his/her cognitive ability.



# Research on Bilingualism

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- Learning more than one language is an asset to individuals, families, and our entire society. Early childhood teachers can share the benefits of bilingualism with families and their communities, find ways to support children's home languages, and encourage families to keep their language strong.



# Research on Bilingualism

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- Developing the child's home language provides the foundation for reading and writing, preparing children to be biliterate. Researchers have found many benefits to being bilingual and biliterate. Next, I will discuss a few.



# Cognitive Development

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Individuals who are bilingual and biliterate switch between two different language systems. Their brains are very active and flexible. Research also shows that, compared to their non-bilingual peers, bilingual people have an easier time:

- understanding math concepts and solving word problems;
- developing strong thinking skills;
- using logic; focusing, remembering, and making decisions;
- thinking about language; and
- learning other languages.



# Social-Emotional Development

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Being bilingual supports children in maintaining strong ties with their family, culture, and community. Research has found that babies raised in bilingual households show better self-control, a key indicator of school success.



# School Readiness/Learning

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• Bilingual and multilingual children benefit academically from knowing more than one language in many ways. Because they are able to switch between languages, they develop more flexible approaches to thinking through problems.

- The ability to read and think in two (or more) different languages promotes higher levels of abstract thought, which is important in learning.



# Long-Term Success of Bilingualism

- One-half to two-thirds of adults around the world speak at least two languages. In today's global society, they have many advantages. Globally, bilingual and biliterate adults have more job opportunities than monolingual adults.





## Benefits of Bilingualism

# Benefits of Bilingualism

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- More Frequent use of gestures
- Higher accuracy levels in identifying social cues in language.



# Benefits of Bilingualism

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Greater opportunity to interact with all family members.



# Benefits of Bilingualism

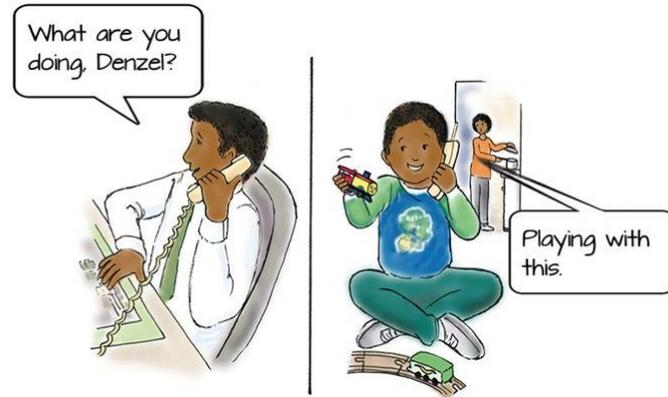
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- Better Ability to switch between two tasks.
- Better performance on Theory of Mind Tasks



# What is Theory of Mind?

Ability to understand that another person has a different perspective; It's also the ability to attribute various mental states (e.g. emotions, interests, desires) to one's self and others.





# Best practices for Bilingual Families

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- Read with your child: Reading books together can improve vocabulary as well as develop better reading skills.

# Best practices for Bilingual Families

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- Play language-rich games that practice giving and receiving information in local languages.





# Bilingual Language Development

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- MYTH:
- Speaking two or more languages to a child can “confuse” them so it better to speak only one.

FACT:

ALL Children are capable of learning multiple languages including children with developmental delays and learning disabilities



# Bilingual Language Development

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## MYTH:

Young bilingual children are delayed in learning language compared to peers who only speak 1 language.

## FACT:

Bilingualism DOES NOT cause language delays, and has actually been shown to improve children's ability to learn new words, identify sounds and problem-solve.

# Bilingual Language development

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MYTH:

Bilingual children should NOT mix parts of the languages they speak.

FACT:

“trans-languageing” occurs when individuals mix aspects of the languages they speak. It helps to build cultural and meta-linguistic (meaning) awareness)



# Bilingual Language Development

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## MYTH:

Children become bilingual just by listening to people around them speaking the language.

## FACT:

LEarning LAnguage is an active process that requires many opportunities for children to practice communication in context with others. Listening and responding are both crucial for linguistic competence and fluency.



# Conclusions

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BEING  
BILINGUAL  
IS A  
SUPER  
POWER



# Questions?

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