



THE IMPACT OF EARLY EXPOSURE TO THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE ON THE ACQUISITION OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE OF STUDENTS IN GRADES 1-5- TEACHER'S PERCEPTIONS IN KOSOVO

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to investigate and present the impact that early exposure to the English language has on the acquisition of the native language. To conduct this research, a quantitative research methodology will be used. The population of this study consists of teachers of grades 1-5 in urban public primary schools in Kosovo. The instrument that will be used for this research is the questionnaire. With Likert scale questions and open ended questions. The findings of this study indicate that early exposure to the English language causes numerous difficulties in the native language, such as: fluency in speaking, understanding of concepts, concentration and interest during the learning process, reduced self-confidence in speaking, and other difficulties stemming from communication and related to it. Based on this research, we conclude that early exposure to the English language negatively impacts the performance of students in grades 1-5 in school.

Key words: english language, first language, contact, the influence

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly globalized world, the role of the English language as a dominant international language has permeated educational systems worldwide, including Kosovo. The balance between promoting early bilingualism and ensuring strong foundational skills in students' native languages has become a crucial focus for teachers. This study investigates how teachers of grades 1-5 in Kosovo perceive the impact of early exposure to the English language on students' acquisition and development of their native language. Through their perceptions, we aim to understand how this dual-language learning environment affects literacy skills, communication abilities, and cognitive development in young learners. While early bilingualism is associated with various cognitive and academic advantages, this study also raises concerns about how it may affect the

development of students' native language skills, particularly in the critical early years of language acquisition. Research on early bilingualism suggests that learning two languages simultaneously can enhance cognitive flexibility, metalinguistic awareness, and executive functioning in children (1). However, other studies warn that early exposure to a second language, especially a dominant language like English, may interfere with a child's first language acquisition, potentially leading to a decrease in native language skills (2). This is especially important in contexts where the native language is spoken less frequently or is less supported in educational settings. The perceptions of these teachers provide valuable insights into how early exposure to English influences the acquisition of the native language among students in grades 1-5. What are the teachers' perceptions of the difficulties that students exposed to early English language learning manifest in acquiring their native language? What are the academic and social differences observed in the classroom between students who have difficulties with

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their native language and those who do not? This study aims to answer these questions to draw accurate conclusions and provide recommendations that facilitate the teaching and learning process, creating new opportunities for simultaneous learning of both languages without undermining the native language and its focus. Communication is the process of transmitting information from one person to another. Communication can be verbal (spoken) and non-verbal (gestures, body language, and written language). Communication skills are vital for a child's overall social and emotional development, thereby building their self-confidence. Children need good communication skills at various stages of life in different environments, some of which include school, college, and social gatherings. Students with special needs, as well as those who have difficulties with their native language, exhibit a wide range of communication deficits; thus, it is essential for teachers to identify and understand those areas of difficulty and help them develop skills within the classroom structure. Teachers play a vital role in developing their communication skills in a classroom setting. Today, schools have undergone changes in their systems and structures, programs, and ideas. Kosovo is one of the countries with the longest transition periods and is also among the developing countries. As such, it has been part of numerous reforms and changes in its educational system undertaken to improve quality. These reforms and almost all provided recommendations emphasize the structural aspect of the system and how the processes, curriculum changes, and improvements in teaching methods function. In our schools today, the focus is on teacher-student, teacher-parent, and vice versa relationships in both cases, as well as the school-community relationship. Certainly, these relationships are very important and meaningful for the school, but it is evident that another equally important element has been overlooked: the relationship among teachers, which involves creating a positive climate of collaboration and the exchange of experiences among them. In contemporary and international studies, this is seen as a strong point in improving school performance (3). Schools are complex, dynamic systems that require effective communication to meet the various needs of their stakeholders. Communication is essential for maintaining healthy relationships among students, educators, and parents. Creating effective communication practices in schools requires understanding the characteristics of communication, including common benefits and barriers. The three critical components of effective communication—trust, transparency, and active listening—build the necessary

relationship for engaging in communication (4). Excellence in education stems from high-quality relationships with stakeholders, and the key to building these relationships is communication (5). Communication fosters positive school cultures where staff can adapt to and embrace change. Enhancing skills across all components of effective communication reduces the anxiety associated with various topics. Trust is essential for building strong relationships among stakeholders (6). Communication occurs at all times, in all situations, and in various places, including schools. The school is a place where students build their connections and interactions with one another and also with their teachers. During the teaching and learning process, knowledge is transferred from teachers to students. Effective communication is necessary to ensure that everything functions smoothly. For the transfer of knowledge to be as clear and reliable as possible, students must have a good understanding of the language spoken by the teacher and vice versa. Effective communication in the classroom will lead to successful teaching and learning processes. However, to achieve this, both teachers and students may face several difficulties. There are various types of communication strategies that can be employed by teachers and students if apparent difficulties in understanding the language or expressing it are noticed. On the other hand, communication strategies can also pose challenges for communicators, such as topic avoidance and misunderstanding of messages, or even improper and incorrect understanding of knowledge during the teaching process (7). When a foreign language is more present than the native language for students, both students and teachers may encounter communication problems. Based on the aforementioned explanation, it can be said that communication strategies play a significant role in classroom communication. Communication strategies help both students and teachers communicate, facilitating students in explaining better what they mean (8). Effective communication enables support and individualized differentiation, meeting the diverse needs of students. It enhances parental involvement, creating a collaborative approach to student success. Communication also promotes social and emotional development while fostering critical communication skills for students' future endeavors (9). Communication acts as a channel for the flow of knowledge and information within the educational ecosystem. Through effective communication, educators can convey complex concepts in a clear and understandable manner. Well-structured lessons, engaging presentations, and articulate explanations enable students to comprehend and assimilate new ideas.

Furthermore, effective communication ensures that important instructions, tasks, and expectations are communicated accurately, minimizing confusion and enhancing overall learning outcomes. Open and transparent communication between teachers and students builds strong relationships that are conducive to learning. When students feel comfortable expressing their thoughts, concerns, and questions, it fosters an environment of trust and mutual respect. Teachers who actively listen, provide constructive feedback, and communicate sensitivity create a supportive space where students feel valued and motivated. Positive teacher-student relationships promote a sense of belonging, increasing student engagement and academic achievement. An important element of communication in teaching is the use of instructional materials. We have all heard the saying, "What I hear, I forget; what I see, I remember; what I do, I understand." Pictures, written posters, and practical demonstrations enhance communication, and we should utilize them as much as possible. Most of us have access to paper, posters, a blackboard, or an overhead projector. We can use these tools to prepare instructional aids for our lessons, such as summaries of important facts or figures and diagrams. Overhead projectors are particularly useful because they allow us to engage with our students while using them (10). This is especially important in a classroom where there are students who face difficulties with their native language. The use of these instructional materials significantly facilitates understanding and allows students to feel not inferior, but rather actively engaged in the learning process. The first step in strategic communication is to understand your students and their needs, interests, values, and expectations. Teachers can achieve this by observing, actively listening, asking questions, and observing their behavior and reactions. Knowing the students will help the teacher adjust the style, tone, language, and content of

communication to suit their preferences and motivations. It will also help avoid misunderstandings, conflicts, and barriers that could harm your relationships. Communication is a vital skill for any teacher, but especially for those working with students who have difficulties understanding the native language at the appropriate level. Whether you are teaching a class of typical students, in a special educational environment, or in a mixed setting, the teacher must adapt their communication style to meet the diverse needs and abilities of their students. According to (11), some of the tips and strategies to be used for effective communication with students include:

- Know your students.
- Use clear and simple language.
- Include multiple ways of communicating.
- Provide structure and consistency.
- Be flexible and responsive.
- Collaborate with others.
- Be the first to share your personal experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This is a mixed method study that uses a questionnaire with Likert scale questions and an open ended question as a tool for data collection. The questionnaire allows respondents to answer a set number of questions related to the topic of the study and their perceptions. The final version of the questionnaire consists of four groups of fields with a total of twenty questions. Participants included 100 teachers working with grades I-V in the rural areas of the municipality of Pristina (**Table 1**). The sample selection was random, and data collection took place throughout June 2024. The questionnaire was administered in physical form. Initially, we selected 20 schools in the municipality of Pristina, and then we chose 5 teachers from each parallel (grade) in each school from grades 1-5. After obtaining the necessary data and entering it into SPSS, the data was analyzed in detail.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics of the participants

Participants	Gender	Work experience	Level of education	Number of students in the class
Teachers	91 F	< 25 (0 teacher)	Higher education(1)	Up to10 students (2)
	8 M	1-10 years (58 teachers)	Bachelor's (64)	11-20 students (23)
		11-20 years (23 teachers)	Master's (35)	21-30 students (27)
		Mbi 20 years (19 teachers)		Over 30 students (45)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After following the complete process of thematic analysis for open ended questions, this research identified three important themes:

difficulties expressed in the native language; negative impact on students' performance in other subjects; challenges faced by teachers regarding this phenomenon."

Table 2. Thematic Analysis

Codes	Themes
Difficulties in memorizing the Albanian alphabet; Simple grammatical rules of the Albanian language; Accurate writing in the Albanian language; Accurate reading in the Albanian language; Providing short answers; speaking slowly while not recalling the correct words; Mixing English with Albanian during usage	Students' difficulties in the native language
Performance in other subjects; Decreased self confidence; Passivity in class; Loss of motivation	Negative impact on students' performance
Full engagement of students in the learning process; Challenges in communication; Implementation of differentiated instruction.	Challenges faced by teachers regarding this phenomenon.

This thematic analysis highlights crucial insights into the challenges faced by students and teachers regarding language proficiency. The specific challenges related to the Albanian language—like memorization of the alphabet and grammatical rules—underscore the importance of language skills as foundational for academic success. It's concerning that these language difficulties not only affect communication but also hinder students' overall confidence and engagement in the classroom. On other hand the connection between language challenges and diminished performance in other subjects is particularly striking. It raises important questions about how educators can address these linguistic barriers to foster better academic outcomes and motivate students. The analysis also reveals that teachers are grappling with how to effectively support students dealing with these language difficulties. Implementing differentiated instruction could be a key strategy, but it requires resources and training that may not always be available. Overall, there is emphasized the need for targeted nterventions and teacher support to help students overcome language barriers and enhance their learning experiences across the curriculum. Addressing these themes could significantly improve both student engagement and performance.

STUDENTS' DIFFICULTIES IN THE NATIVE LANGUAGE

These data generally represent the difficulties students face in understanding and expressing their native language, as well as other challenges related to it. Over 70% of teachers have reported that there are students in their classrooms who have difficulties with the native

language indicating that this is a widespread issue across classrooms. This high percentage suggests an urgent need for targeted language support strategies within educational settings. A striking 90% of teachers state that students struggle with using basic grammatical rules during speaking. This emphasizes not just a lack of proficiency but a fundamental challenge that affects students' ability to communicate effectively. Similarly, over 70% of students experience difficulties in writing and comprehending the Albanian language. This information provides evidence that students have significant difficulties with their native language, even at an elementary level. Also, that language difficulties are not limited to verbal communication; they extend to literacy skills as well, which are essential for success in all subjects.

More than 50% of teachers reported that students struggle to understand basic questions in Albanian, and 90% of them noted that they receive short responses from students to elementary questions, which is alarming. This can lead to disengagement and a lack of participation in class, further exacerbating the language gap.

On other hand the data shows that more than 60% of teachers of teachers reported that students mix their native language with English, highlighting a potential interference that could hinder their ability to fully develop proficiency in Albanian. The data shows that a significant number of students provide short responses to questions, indicating either a lack of confidence or limited language skills. Over 60% of teachers indicated that the same students who have

difficulties with the Albanian language also struggle in other subjects. These data lead us to understand that English negatively interferes with the native language, hindering its proper development and affects overall learning outcomes. The mixing of English with Albanian during communication may point to an emerging trend where students rely on English as a crutch, which could impede their ability to

master their native language. This interference needs to be addressed through curriculum adjustments and instructional strategies that reinforce native language use.

Table 3. *Students' difficulties in the native language*

	1	2	3	4	5
In the class where I teach, I have encountered students who have difficulties with their native language.	32	45	10	6	2
Students express difficulties in remembering the alphabet in their native language.	21	42	20	15	2
Students express difficulties in using grammatical rules during speaking.	44	49	3	4	0
Students express difficulties in writing their native language.	29	47	13	11	0
Students express difficulties in comprehension while reading in their native language.	39	35	17	7	2
The difficulties expressed by students in their academic performance across various subjects are evident.	27	39	16	18	0
The student does not understand the question posed by the teacher, even though the question is presented very clearly and understandably.	19	33	28	18	2
The student responds to simple questions with short answers.	46	50	2	2	0
The student makes grammatical errors while speaking, confusing tenses, numbers, gender, etc.	34	32	14	19	1
The student speaks slowly, struggling to remember the right words at that moment.	27	39	15	18	1
During speaking, the student mixes their native language with English.	21	37	23	15	4

1- Strongly agree 2- Agree 3-Neutral 4-Disagree 5- Strongly

Challenges faced by teachers regarding this phenomenon

Certainly, throughout this process, teachers also express their difficulties during the teaching process concerning these students. The data indicate that over 70% of teachers report that learning English before mastering the native language negatively impacts students' academic performance. Moreover, more than 50% of teachers have reported that this factor also adversely affects other subjects, further contributing to a decrease in students' self-confidence and their participation in other classes. Many teachers reported that they did not receive sufficient training in language acquisition strategies, making it challenging for them to support students who struggle with language proficiency. Without proper

professional development, teachers feel ill-equipped to address these needs. More than 50 % of teachers often face a diverse classroom with varying levels of language proficiency. This diversity can complicate lesson planning and delivery, as teachers must find ways to engage both native speakers and those with limited proficiency. Some teachers also reported for assessment difficulties regarding evaluating students' understanding and progress, it can be challenging when language barriers are present. Also over 60 % of teachers have challenges for balancing language and content. Teachers often have to balance the need to teach content with the necessity of improving language skills. This dual focus can lead to tension in lesson planning and execution,

making it hard to meet both objectives effectively.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The study demonstrates that:

- A significant number of students in grades 1-5 experience difficulties with their native language as a result of early exposure to the English language during their formative years.
- These difficulties primarily manifest in speaking and writing their native language, often with noticeable and elementary errors.
- Furthermore, students tend to mix their native language with English during communication.
- The same students who experience these difficulties express challenges in other subjects that require comprehension and speaking skills.
- Based on this data, we conclude that these students exhibit lower self-confidence and are more passive during lessons, as they rarely feel prepared to provide clear and complete responses.
- Teachers find it challenging to fully engage these students in lessons and feel as though they are unable to elicit students' knowledge on various academic aspects, simply because communication with them is challenging.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMANDATIONS

Through this study, we aimed to highlight teachers' attitudes towards the impact of early exposure to the English language on the acquisition of the native language among students in grades 1-5. Considering the complexity of the teaching process, the conclusions we have reached are not definitive statements that require no further discussion; rather, they are assertions that approach the truth of our study and lead to answers for which we conducted this research. From our findings, we have developed the following recommendations, which we believe will assist teachers in the teaching process and students in the learning process:

- Implement training program applications focused on bilingual education, helping teachers understand the dynamics of language acquisition and the importance of promoting both the native language and English for students.
- Provide additional resources, such as language support programs, teaching sessions, or language seminars for students

who exhibit difficulties in their native language due to early exposure to English.

- Create peer learning groups where students can practice their native language with their peers, fostering confidence and communication skills.
- Implement assessment methods that evaluate proficiency in both languages, allowing teachers to identify areas where students may need additional support in their native language.
- Increase community awareness of the importance of preserving the native language and how it can coexist with learning English, promoting a positive attitude toward both languages.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank the school for allowing me to collaborate with the teachers for the realization of this research. I also thank the teachers who agreed to participate in this survey and in the scheduled interviews.

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