

Bilingual children who speak native language at home have higher intelligence

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Children who regularly use their native language at home while growing up in a different country have higher IQs, a new study has shown.

Research carried out by the University of Reading showed that [children](#) who spoke one [language](#) at school but practised their [native tongue](#) at home with their families scored better in intelligence tests than those who spoke only their non-native language.

The study of 100 Turkish children, aged 7-11, living in the UK used a non-verbal IQ test to compare those who spoke English at school and Turkish at home with those who spoke English at both.

Dr. Michael Daller, Associate Professor of English Language and Applied Linguistics at the University of Reading, led the study. He said: "It is easier to develop concepts at a young age in a first language and then learn a new word for it later in a different language. Children who have to learn to understand things for the first time in a less familiar language will find it much harder, so it follows that the children in our study who had done this scored lower on the IQ test.

"The research suggests parents can help their children develop their intelligence by encouraging them to use their [native language](#) at home, as this won't be supported at school."

The researchers say that native languages should be practised at [home](#) through 'meaningful communication'. This includes reading books and having conversations.

Being bilingual has been shown to have positive effects on the brain, due to the work involved in suppressing one language or the other at all times depending on the situation. Research has shown this exercising of the brain can even delay the onset of Alzheimer's disease.

The study was undertaken by Dr. Daller and Dr. Zehra Ongun at the University of Reading and presented at the BAAL Vocabulary SIG Annual Conference in July 2018. All the children in the new study were

from families where at least one parent had a university or college degree. Dr. Daller's team now intends to expand the research to cover children from a wider range of socio-economic backgrounds.

Dr. Daller said: "This study was larger than most of its kind, and unusual in that it only tested children, all of which were of similar ages and backgrounds. This means we can [read](#) into these results more than those of previous experiments.

"The next step is to make the study more comprehensive and see if our findings are similar with children from all backgrounds and age groups."

More information: F. I. M. Craik et al. Delaying the onset of Alzheimer disease: Bilingualism as a form of cognitive reserve, *Neurology* (2010). [DOI: 10.1212/WNL.0b013e3181fc2a1c](https://doi.org/10.1212/WNL.0b013e3181fc2a1c)

Provided by University of Reading

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