J-LALITE
ISSN 2723-3561 e-ISSN 2723-357X

J-Lalite: Journal of English Studies
Vol. 4 No. 1, June 2023, pp. 35-50
DOI: 10.20884/1.jes.2023.4.1.8525
Available at http://jos.unsoed.ac.id/index.php/jes/index

Raising Bilingual Children in Home Environment of Brunei: A Study on Vocabulary Acquisition

Atiyah Roslan
Universiti Brunei Darussalam
noratiyahroslan@gmail.com

Article History:
First Received:
14/04/2023

Final Revision:
22/06/2023

Available online:
30/06/2023

Abstract. This study aims to contribute to current research on bilingual children's vocabulary studies and the home environment. It explored how home environments affected children's L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition. The children in this small-scale study (n=40) were exposed to Brunei Malay (L1) alongside English (L2) from a young age, classifying the children as bilingual first-language learners (BFL). This study examines the children's L1 and L2 language development and it used vocabulary knowledge as a measuring tool for data analysis. It also considers the home environment and parental role as factors contributing to the children's language progress. As a result, this study found positive correlations between children's L1 and L2 receptive and active vocabulary knowledge. It also found the children's L1 and L2 interaction at home with family members. Conversely, the findings shown that there was no significant difference between the responses of 5 and 6 year old children in their L1 and L2 comprehension as well as production tests. This study also found that children who performed well in L1 and L2 vocabulary tests come from households that were open to bilingualism. In addition, parents were open to bilingualism for their children with the condition that the children prioritised their L1 more than L2. The main motive for bilingualism for their children was to enhance their communication skills and increase their chances of future employment. Hence, parents' perception of L1 and L2 is crucial because it shapes the language usages that were exposed to the children at home.

Keywords: *Brunei; bilingualism; Bilingual First Language Acquisition; vocabulary acquisition; parental role; language use at home.*

INTRODUCTION

A bilingual household is relatively typical today. Such household is the place where children are exposed to more than just one language at home. While L1 indicates one's first language, L2 or a second language is defined as any language besides L1, usually used for academics, business, or administration (Mitchell, R., Myles, F., & Marsden, E., 2013; Crystal, 1997). However, in the present day, L2 carries a much more straightforward reason for its acquisition to begin at an early age. Research shows the importance of home environment and parental involvement in children's language development, as interacting with family members can improve their vocabulary (Beals and Tabors, 1995). Often home environment and family members are the children's first language exposure, making home "a safe and stimulating environment that promotes interaction and communication" (Bower, 2014, p.104) to optimise their overall development in their early years.

Furthermore, Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural Theory emphasises socialising within the environment and the individuals' role in stimulating interactions. These two components contribute to the children's language acquisition, providing the space for language progress. The learner can enhance their language skills by learning from others who have more knowledge than them (also known as More Knowledgeable Other or MKO). In return, MKO can guide and correct the learners if needed. Parents and older siblings hold the role of MKO to the children at home because they learn from interacting with their family members. Households welcoming L1 and L2 interaction at home are more likely to produce bilingual children. Thus, the children are more likely to be fluent in both languages faster when exposed to L1 and L2 as they have more time to practice them.

In the case of bilingual children in Brunei, most children are exposed to both Brunei Malay (L1) and English (L2) from a young age, and some are even introduced to them before their formal education begins. This type of language acquisition is also defined as bilingual first language acquisition or BFLA, which is described as acquiring L1 and L2 simultaneously when children are exposed to both languages at a young age (Genesee and Nicoladis, 2006). In some cases, the children have already learned L1 and, later on, L2, all before age three. Other studies have also referred to them as dual-language learners (e.g., Rivera Pérez, Hart, and Lund, 2021).

In a nutshell, Malay and English are highly regarded in Brunei. This is especially evident in the nation's education system, where the Ministry of Education has implemented a bilingual education system. Aside from language subjects, other subjects are to be taught in English, such as Mathematics, Science, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) from Primary Level onwards (Ministry of Education, 2013). By doing so, an emphasis on bilingualism at a young age is set in which it is almost inevitable for a child to remain monolingual as both Malay and English are used in school. However, it is essential to distinguish that *Bahasa Melayu* or Standard Malay is the variation of Malay that is taught in school. Standard Malay is also commonly used for administration and media purposes (see Martin, 1992 & McLellan et al., 2016). In contrast, Brunei Malay is widely used in casual interactions among Bruneians.

An example of the language situation in Brunei can be extracted from Salbrina & Zayani's (2021) description of an interaction between a mother and her child, which was dominantly English. In this interaction, it is noted that the child spoke almost English monolingually, whereas the mother had instances of Malay. They also stated that English-only interaction is uncommon amongst Bruneians, while bilingual use of Brunei Malay and English is more common in most conversations. The previous description of the interaction between mother and daughter highlighted the early introduction of English from home and parents providing an encouraging space for their children to develop their L2.

To date, a study has not investigated bilingual children's vocabulary development and its link to the home environment in Brunei. However, it is emphasised numerously by previous research that the home environment is an influential space to develop one's language skills. This is because the children are surrounded by people they are familiar with and are more likely to interact with them. Baharuddin (2017) has found that children's vocabulary acquisition occurs incidentally when they are more exposed to a language. Providing a supportive environment for bilingual language use is also essential. Another study has noted that it is due to the informal and casual setting the home environment offers, which encourages children to acquire vocabulary much easier than in formal places such as schools (Al-Zoubi, 2018). He further stated that incidentally acquiring vocabulary is the most effective method for children to build their vocabulary knowledge; hence, he suggests that home is an ideal environment.

Thordardottir's (2011) study confirms a strong correlation between language exposure and vocabulary performance when investigating receptive and productive vocabulary of 5-year-old monolingual and bilingual children of French and English. In contrast, she also compared bilingual children with early- and late-onset and found no significant difference in their vocabulary skills despite having equal language exposure to both languages. These findings further emphasised that exposure to language, instead of age, is a key factor in vocabulary acquisition for bilingual children.

Parents' attitudes towards L1 and L2 affect their children's language rules at home, as noted by Lee et al. (2015). Their research of parental attitudes, beliefs and intended behaviours from Mexican mothers in the United States of America with Spanish (L1) and English (L2) found that parents support bilingualism for their children. They believed that being fluent in English widens their children's employment options while simultaneously being fluent in Spanish preserves their culture. The researchers also noted that besides home and school environment, the parents' past experiences with bilingualism affected their choice to encourage their children to be proficient in Spanish and English. As such, parents' attitudes towards bilingualism can impact children's home exposure to L1 and L2.

Besides parental influence, other family members can also contribute to the children's vocabulary development. Salbrina and Noor Hasharina (2021) have found that grandparents carry the role of L1 maintenance, indirectly encouraging their bilingual children to practice L1 when conversing with them. In addition, the significance of older siblings to their younger siblings' language development is impactful. Tsinivits and Unsworth (2021) investigated the influence of older siblings on their younger siblings in Greek-Dutch families, whereby Greek (L1) is the minority language of the community while Dutch (L2) is the official language.

Their study highlights that children with older siblings have higher comprehension and production vocabulary skills and morphosyntactic complexity in their L2 than first-born children. With that, older siblings could promote the use of L2 with their younger siblings.

Interestingly, some studies have raised concerns about whether introducing two languages from a young age can result in L1 neglect. A study has found that L2 language preference, especially among the younger generation, could lead to Monolingual English in Brunei if the trend continues (Salbrina, 2020). This is fascinating, considering that despite having English as their L2, they also prefer using it in conversations with their L1. Previous studies have clarified that second language acquisition does not replace L1 knowledge; rather, L2 knowledge builds on top of L1 knowledge (Cummins, 2001). Nevertheless, relating this statement to the concern of L1 neglect due to L2 preference, it is plausible that this concern stems from either the lack of L1 practice or more L2 exposure than L1 that is evident in the younger generation's daily interaction. Uncertainty about children's use of language is a common trait that parents face when raising bilingual children (see de Houwer, 2007), because they fear the lack of effort for L1 maintenance that they witness in their children. Furthermore, these claims highlight the impact of language exposure and how it affects one's language use and preference.

The abovementioned studies show the overall image of how children's language fluency may depend on their environment and the individuals they often communicate with. The studies also underscore the possibility of L2 dominance amongst Bruneians in the future and provide a glimpse of parents' attitudes toward their children's language use. The present study contributes to the current literature by investigating Bruneian children's vocabulary knowledge to measure their L1 and L2 skills, and find its correlation to the home environment.

Therefore, this article compares L1 and L2 vocabulary and the use of L1 and L2 in social interactions between family members and children. The reason behind this comparison is to explore how the home environment contributes to the children’s L1 and L2 vocabulary acquisition among Bruneian Malay families. In addition, this article considers how parents’ attitudes towards bilingualism for their children shape vocabulary skills based on the languages they use at home. As inspired by Thordardottir’s (2011) study which investigated children’s language exposure as well as age as factors to their vocabulary development, this study also includes examining age by comparing the vocabulary progress of children aged 5 and 6.

RESEARCH METHOD

Participants and Procedure

The participants in this study were bilingual children (n=40) of Brunei Malay (L1) and English (L2) in the age range of 5:4 to 6:4. As part of the study's prerequisite, the participants could understand both Brunei Malay and English. In addition, according to parents’ responses in the questionnaire, all participants use both languages to a certain degree at home.

All participants were exposed to L2 at an early age, classifying them as bilingual first-language learners. Data collection for this study consisted of a questionnaire

on language use at home which parents were tasked to complete and an experiment that examined the children's L1 and L2 vocabulary knowledge in comprehension and production skills.

The study has been challenged with an obstacle throughout data collection, mainly following the strict Covid-19 standard operating procedure set by the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education. Hence, this study underwent two phases. The first phase occurred during the online learning period, whereby data was collected via an online platform for both the experiment and questionnaire. Meanwhile, the data collected during the second phasewas done when the school reopens to the public, allowing the experiment to be completed with face-to-face interaction and online and printed questionnaires.

Questionnaire for Parents

The questionnaire aims to extract information on direct language use at home. Parents were asked to rate their children's use and understanding of L1 and L2 using a Likert scale for the first two sections. Parents were also asked questions concerning the individuals the children interact with, the language used during interactions, and how often they spend time with these individuals. The final section also asked parents to rate the importance of being fluent in Brunei Malay and English for the children and to justify their reasoning.

The parents needed to complete the questionnaire because it consisted of participation consent approval, stating that parents were aware of and agreed to their children's involvement in the experiment, which was also recorded for reviewing purposes. Initially, the questionnaire was done in English; however, due to a lack of responses from parents, it was translated into Standard Malay. By doing so, parents had the option to choose whichever languages they were more comfortable with.

Vocabulary Experiment

Children's receptive and active vocabulary knowledge were tested in comprehension and production skills. The experiment was done in two sessions: in Brunei Malay and English. These two sessions must be done consecutively to ensure the reliability of the data collected from the students from the same day's vocabulary knowledge. Before beginning the experiment, the instructor gave explicit instructions to the students to follow the language. If the instructor used Brunei Malay, the students were expected to follow, and the same instruction applied to the English session of the experiment. The instructor needed to be mindful of her language in the experiment because it could encourage the children to code-switch and to mimic the instructor. By instructing the children to follow the language set, the instructor had to be aware of any code-switching instances the children made on their own, as it reflected a preference for either language.

For the online interview and for the vocabulary experiment, parents were asked to select a time and date that were convenient for the parents and their children via a Zoom meeting. The experiment began with Brunei Malay, and then English as the language of instruction. Parents were allowed to stay throughout the interview, but they were reminded to let their children answering the questions themselves. As for face-to-face interviews, the schools provided quiet rooms to ensure the

children were able to focus on the vocabulary tests. Before conducting the online and face-to-face interviews, parents were asked for their consent to record the interview session for reviewing purposes.

All of the materials for the vocabulary tests were made into a PowerPoint form, with each slide showcased each category, and each item was visually presented. This PowerPoint was screen-shared with the children for the online interview, while the slides were displayed using the instructor's iPad for the face-to-face interview.

Comprehension Test

The comprehension test consists of five categories: fruits, vegetables, household items, kitchen items, and places in Brunei. Each category has a total of five items: 1) two target items; 2) three distractors. This can be seen in the following table: -

Table 1. Materials Used in Comprehension Test

Categories	***Target Items***	***Distractors***
Fruits	pineapple/*nanas* and watermelon/*sikui*	Banana/*pisang,* grapes/*anggur,* and coconut/*kelapa*
Vegetables	Carrots/*lobak* and cucumber/*timun*	Corn/*jagung*, onion/*bawang*, and pumpkin/*labu*
Household Items	Umbrella/*payung* and blanket/*selimut*	Toothbrush/*berus gigi*, pillow/*bantal*, and hairbrush/*sisir*,
Kitchen Items	Plates/*piring* and knife/*pisau*	Fork/*garfu*, cup/*cawan*, and spoon/*sudu*,
Places in Brunei	Bridge/*jembatan* and mosque/*masjid*	Market/*pasar*, beach/*pantai*, and hospital/*hospital*

Production Test

The production test consists of four categories: stationery, household items, parts of the body, and animals. Two words were selected for stationery and household items, whereas four target items were chosen for parts of the body and animals. The production test can be seen as elaborated below:

Table 2. Materials Used in Production Test

Categories	***Target Items***
Stationery	Peraut/*sharpener* and scissors/*gunting*
Household Items	Clock/*jam* and kasut/*shoes*
Parts of the body	Ear/*telinga*, elbow/*siku*, and hand/*tangan*, chin/*dagu.*
Animals	Elephant/*gajah*, duck/*itik*, tiger/*harimau* and bear/*beruang*

Analysing Data

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used in this test to see the correlation between parents' responses from the questionnaire with the children's vocabulary performance from the experiment. A closer investigation of the children's responses was also used for analysis. In addition, parents' attitudes toward L1 and L2 were also compared with their children's vocabulary responses. By doing so, it examines whether parents' language attitudes can influence their children's bilingual language fluency. This study also takes into consideration that age is a factor in the children's L1 and L2 vocabulary development. Therefore, a t-test analysis was used to compare the responses of 5- and 6-year-old children for their comprehension and production tests.

RESULT

Bruneian Children's Vocabulary Performance

Comprehension Test

Children's responses for the comprehension test were recorded and grouped into three categories: 1) correct on the first attempt; 2) correct after the interviewer has given hints; 3) incorrect responses. *Table 1* compares the children's scores on vocabulary comprehension tests in Brunei Malay and English. The children could answer most of the target words effortlessly in both languages. For the L1 test, places in Brunei are ranked the easiest category to respond to out of the five categories; household and kitchen items come in second and third places, whereas fruits and vegetables as the two categories children found as the most challenging category.

Table 1 also shows the children's English comprehension test scores, in which, according to their responses, fruits and vegetables' target words are ranked as the easiest categories to answer. This is evident in the highest score for the target words "carrots" and "watermelon". Household and kitchen items categories come next in line; whereby in these categories, the children were able to answer target words such as "umbrella" and "knife" with ease, but in others, they required guidance from the instructor, such as "blanket" and "plate". Furthermore, the children found that Places in Brunei is the most challenging to answer in English, as evidenced by the least correct answers, most guidance, and incorrect responses.

In addition, when comparing children's comprehension scores in Malay and English, it is evident that the categories ranked the easiest to most difficult to answer in Malay are inverted in English. This suggests that so long as the children know the vocabulary for a particular item in either their L1 or L2.

Table 3. Children's responses for L1 and L2 comprehension test

Target Words	***Correct 1st Attempt***		***Correct after Guidance***		***Incorrect***	
	L1	**L2**	**L1**	**L2**	**L1**	**L2**
Sikui/ Watermelon	77.5%	97.5%	17.5%	2.5%	5.0%	0.0%
Nanas/Pineapple	80.0%	82.5%	12.5%	10.0%	7.5%	7.5%
Timun/Cucumber	80.0%	77.5%	20.0%	20.0%	0.0%	2.5%
Lobak/Carrot	57.5%	100.0%	32.5%	0.0%	10.0%	0.0%
Payung/Umbrella	92.5%	92.5%	7.5%	2.5%	0.0%	5.0%
Selimut/Blanket	95.0%	62.5%	5.0%	30.0%	0.0%	7.5%
Pisau/Knife	90.0%	77.5%	7.5%	22.5%	2.5%	0.0%
Piring/Plate	90.0%	67.5%	5.0%	20.0%	5.0%	12.5%
Jembatan/Bridge	80.0%	67.5%	15.0%	22.5%	5.0%	10.0%
Masjid/Mosque	100.0%	47.5%	0.0%	32.5%	0.0%	20.0%

Using t-test analysis, the findings suggest that there was no significant difference in the children's responses for L1 and L2 comprehension tests between the 5- and 6-year-old age groups, as evident in *Tables 4* and *5*.

Table 4. Mean and Standard Deviation of Age Factor in Malay Comprehension Test

Malay	***N-Value***	***Mean – 5 Years Old***	***Mean – 6 Years Old***	***SD – 5 Years Old***	***SD – 6 Years Old***	***T-Test (p-value <0.05)***
Correct 1st Attempt	40	8.2	8.7	2.28	1.78	0.40
Correct After Guidance	40	1.0	1.0	1.79	1.39	0.29
Wrong	40	0.4	0.4	1.14	0.67	1.00

Table 5 Mean and Standard Deviation of Age Factor in English Comprehension Test

English	***N-Value***	***Mean - 5 Years Old***	***Mean - 6 Years Old***	***Sd - 5 Years Old***	***Sd - 6 Years Old***	***T-Test (P-Value <0.05)***
Correct 1st Attempt	40	7.6	7.9	2.35	2.25	0.73
Correct After Guidance	40	1.8	1.5	1.86	1.82	0.67
Wrong	40	0.7	0.7	1.04	0.88	1.00

Production Test

The children's responses were grouped into four categories for the production test, similar to those used for the comprehension test with an additional category: correct in a different language. This other category is added to investigate the children's language preference and whether they switch languages apart from the language of instruction.

Table 2 showcases the children's responses when testing their L1 and L2 vocabulary production skills in the experiment. Among the twelve target words,

target words "*telinga*" (ear), "*tangan*" (hand), "*kasut*" (shoes), "gunting" (scissors), and "*jam*" (clock) have the most correct responses. In contrast, "*peraut*" (sharpener), "*siku*" (elbow), "*dagu*" (chin), and "*beruang*" (bear) have the most incorrect responses. As for the L2 test, it is evident in the table below that target words "shoes", "hand", "elephant", "bear", and "ear" have the most correct responses, while "elbow", "chin", "sharpener", and "scissors" have the most incorrect responses.

Additionally, their responses show that while they show excellent vocabulary production skills for animals, there were also instances where their first responses were incorrect due to overextension. For example, children mistakenly answered "*singa*" (lion) instead of "tiger". However, after the interviewer pointed out the striped fur in the picture and the absence of a lion's mane, some children could answer the target word correctly afterward. Similar to the L1 response for the target word "tiger", some children showed overextension between tiger and lion, despite being corrected in the L1 production session.

Table 6. Children's Responses for L1 and L2 Production Tests

Target Words	***Correct 1st Attempt***		***Correct in Different Languages***		***Correct after Guidance***		***Incorrect***	
	L1	**L2**	**L1**	**L2**	**L1**	**L2**	**L1**	**L2**
Peraut/Sharpener	52.5%	25.0%	0.0%	7.5%	12.5%	20.0%	35.0%	47.5%
Gunting/Scissors	82.5%	55.0%	10.0%	2.5%	7.5%	12.5%	0.0%	30.%
Jam/Clock	75.5%	55.0%	12.5%	5.0%	5.0%	17.5%	7.5%	22.5%
Kasut/Shoes	82.5%	85.0%	15.0%	2.5%	0.0%	7.5%	2.5%	5.0%
Telinga/Ear	95.0%	72.5%	5.0%	12.5%	0.0%	5.0%	0.0%	10.0%
Siku/Elbow	15.0%	20.0%	7.5%	5.0%	35.0%	17.5%	42.5%	57.5%
Tangan/Hand	85.0%	80.0%	10.0%	2.5%	5.0%	7.5%	0.0%	10.0%
Dagu/Chin	27.5%	27.5%	5.0%	0.0%	15.0%	12.5%	52.5%	60.0%
Gajah/Elephant	67.5%	75.0%	17.5%	17.5%	5.0%	5.0%	10.0%	2.5%
Itik/Duck	62.5%	62.5%	5.0%	5.0%	15.0%	20.0%	17.5%	12.5%
Harimau/Tiger	50%	40.0%	12.5%	5.0%	27.5%	37.5%	10.0%	17.5%
Beruang/Bear	30.0%	75.0%	17.5%	2.5%	15.0%	12.5%	37.5%	10.0%

Similar to the comprehension tests, comparisons between the 5- and 6-year-old children were analysed. The findings indicate no significant difference between 5- and 6-year-olds in their L1 and L2 production tests, as seen in *Tables 7* and *8*.

Table 7. Mean and Standard Deviation of Age Factor in Malay Production Test

Malay	***N-Value***	***Mean - 5 Years Old***	***Mean - 6 Years Old***	***SD - 5 Years Old***	***SD - 6 Years Old***	***T-Test (p-value <0.05)***
Correct 1st Attempt	40	6.5	8.0	3.03	2.38	0.090
Correct After Guidance	40	1.3	1.6	1.13	1.10	0.399
Correct In Different Languages	40	1.7	0.7	2.20	1.50	0.086
Wrong	40	2.5	1.8	1.93	1.71	0.202

Table 8. Mean and Standard Deviation of Age Factor in English Production Test

English	***N-Value***	***Mean - 5 Years Old***	***Mean - 6 Years Old***	***SD - 5 Years Old***	***SD - 6 Years Old***	***T-Test (p-value <0.05)***
Correct 1st Attempt	40	6.0	7.4	2.99	1.93	0.098
Correct After Guidance	40	1.9	1.7	1.74	1.49	0.699
Correct In Different Languages	40	0.8	0.5	1.44	0.89	0.360
Wrong	40	3.2	2.5	3.00	1.57	0.361

In brief, the children performed better in L1 and L2 comprehension tests than in production tests, which indicates that while their production skills need more practice, they can still grasp both L1 and L2 and understand the two languages. Furthermore, in comparison between L1 and L2 tests, the children performed better in L1 for both comprehension and production tests than in L2, demonstrating L1 is more dominant than L2. However, code-switching in the experiment shows they are comfortable using their L1 and L2 at a young age. It also shows that they can use both languages at their disposal.

Dominance in L1 does not necessarily mean that they acquire the vocabulary in Malay and do not know the English equivalent. As evident in the figures above, there are cases in which they were more familiar with English words than Malay. An example of this case would be the fruits and vegetables categories in L1 and L2 comprehension tests in which the children could identify the fruits and vegetables correctly in L2 than in L1. And again, in production tests with "*beruang*" and its English translation, "bear", the children found the former target word to be one of the most challenging while the latter target word to be one of the easiest to answer.

In contrast, there are cases whereby the children were more familiar with the Malay words but struggled in English, such as "*masjid*", which scored all correct responses from the children, and "mosque", which scored much lower correct answers from the children in the comprehension tests. Another example is "scissors" and "*gunting*"; the children found the latter target word easier to answer than the former.

Language Use at Home

The second half of the data collection was the questionnaire for parents, which consisted of language use at home. *Table 9* displays parents' responses to how often L1 and L2 are used at home. Based on the responses, it is evident that Malay is more likely than English, as 85% selected "always" for L1 to be used at home, while 35% chose "sometimes" for L2. Meanwhile, *Table 10* shows parents' rates of how often their children speak L1 and L2 at home. This table shows more use of L1 than L2, with 80% selecting "always" or L1 and 12.5% for L2. However, compared to Table 3, Table 4 has more responses for L2 "often", which indicates that while

the children use more L1 at home, they also use L2 more in their speech when interacting with others.

Pearson's correlation coefficient was used to investigate further the relationship between language used at home and children's vocabulary development. Positive correlations were found in children's L1 comprehension test, and L1 used at home, $r(38) = 0.4$, $p=0.011$ ($p>0.05$), and with children's L2 comprehension test and use of L2 at home, $r(38) = 0.5$, $p>0.001$. Positive correlations were also found in L1 and L2 production tests and use of L1 and L2 at home, with the scores of $r(38) = 0.40$, $p=0.012$ ($p>0.05$) for L1, and $r(38) = 0.60$, $p>0.001$ for L2.

Table 9. How often are L1 and L2 used at home

	Always	***Often***	***Sometimes***	***Rarely***	***Never***
Malay	85.0%	10.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%
English	17.0%	17.5%	35%	0.0%	10.0%

Table 10. Parents Rate How Often Children Speak Languages at Home

	Always	***Often***	***Sometimes***	***Rarely***	***Never***
Malay	80.0%	15.0%	5.0%	0.0%	0.0%
English	12.5%	32.5%	45.0%	10.0%	0.0%

Table 11 showcases the use of language when family members interact with the children. This section pays close attention to the individuals and their language use to determine whether they play a factor in the difference in language use. As evident from *Table 11*, immediate family members such as parents and siblings use Malay and English to interact with the children. Bilingual use of language also extends to same-age peers like the children's friends and cousins. However, interaction with grandparents is monolingually Malay, with the highest responses of 82.5%, except for 15% of mixing the two languages.

Table 11. Languages people use with the children at home

	Parents	***Older Siblings***	***Younger Siblings***	***Grandparents***	***Friends***	***Cousins***	***Domestic Helper***
Malay	32.5%	32.5%	40.0%	82.5%	40.0%	50.0%	30.0%
English	0.0%	5.0%	2.5%	0.0%	2.5%	7.5%	0.0%
Malay and English	67.5%	42.5%	32.5%	15.0%	57.5%	42.5%	12.5%
Others	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Not Applicable	0.0%	20.0%	25.0%	2.5%	0.0%	0.0%	57.5%

Table 12, on the other hand, shows the children's use of language when interacting with other individuals at home. There is little difference from the findings in *Table 11*, except for the slight increase in responses for bilingual use of

L1 and L2 for friends and cousins. Nevertheless, *Tables 11* and *12* indicate that not only are children exposed to L1 and L2 when socialising with family and friends, but such interactions also encourage them to respond bilingually.

Table 12. Children's language use with other individuals

	Parents	***Older Siblings***	***Younger Siblings***	***Grandparents***	***Friends***	***Cousins***	***Domestic Helper***
Malay	35.0%	35.0%	40.0%	80.0%	37.5%	50.0%	32.5%
English	0.0%	5.0%	2.5%	0.0%	2.5%	7.5%	0.0%
Malay and English	65.0%	45.0%	35.0%	20.0%	60.0%	40.0%	12.5%
Others	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Not Applicable	0.0%	15.0%	22.5%	0.0%	0.0%	2.5%	55.0%

Lastly, *Table 13* presents parents' ratings on the importance of being fluent in Malay and English for their children. While parents recognise the value of being fluent in both languages, as evident in the exceedingly high responses for "very important" of 90% (L1) and 75% (L2), parents also prioritise Malay over English. For this section, parents were also asked to explain their choice. Parents emphasise that being fluent is very important as it represents their Malay identity. Besides their Malay identity, some parents even associate L1 with Islam and culture. In addition, parents also expressed the importance of Malay for future employment as it is used in the government sector. Even so, parents also acknowledge the advantages of solid English proficiency. Given that the education system in Brunei is dominantly English, parents feel assured that their children will perform academically well if they are proficient in English.

Table 13. Important to be fluent in Malay and English

	Very Important	***Fairly Important***	***Important***	***Slightly Important***	***Not Important***
Malay	90.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
English	75.0%	10.0%	12.5%	2.5%	0.0%

The Impact of Interaction at Home on Children's L1 and L2 Vocabulary Skills

While vocabulary is not a new area of study in developmental linguistics, the lack of previous studies on vocabulary in Brunei is one of the challenges of this discussion. It is also a driving factor in contributing to the current body of knowledge. The primary goal this study is to investigate the relationship between children's vocabulary acquisition and home environment.

The findings have found that the importance of the home environment is due to the individuals the children frequently socialise with and the languages they use at home. The use of Brunei Malay and English evident in children's speech results from bilingual language use with family members. According to Vygotsky's theory, family members are the MKO for the children at home. A similar statement stated that Bruneians commonly use Malay and English bilingualism (Salbrina and Zayani, 2021). For this study specifically, as a result of the bilingual use of L1 and L2 at home, the children are raised as bilingual first language learners, which affects their L1 and L2 vocabulary size. This is apparent in the positive correlations between L1 and L2 receptive and active vocabulary knowledge and L1 and L2 use at home. This is mainly because they are exposed to the languages at a young age. Hence, they are more likely to learn more words and spend more time using them. Positive correlations found in this study are also the result of parents providing a stimulating environment to practice bilingualism for their children (Bower, 2014). By practising from an earlier age, they have an earlier start in developing their vocabulary knowledge from comprehension to production skills.

Furthermore, a trend is also found that bilingual use is common in interaction with the younger generation and between children and parents. As supported by Tsinivits and Unsworth (2021), whereby the older siblings promote L2 with their younger siblings, this study has found a similar finding which is more bilingual and L2 use among siblings and same-age peers, which shows that children tend to use more L2 with individuals of the same generation. Furthermore, monolingual L1 is more common when socialising with the elderly. Similarly, previous studies have noted that grandparents play an essential role in L1 maintenance (Salbrina and Noor Hasharina, 2021). Regarding the quality of their speech, one cannot rule out that language progress depends on the individual. Even though this study has found that the children's vocabulary knowledge indicates L1 dominance in general, language preference, and use variations on the individual. A few children show great L2 fluency and mediocre L1 vocabulary performance due to more L2 use at home. These children often have parents who regard English highly and prioritise excellent academic performance for them in the future.

As mentioned previously, this study has found no significant difference in age as a factor in the children's L1 and L2 comprehension and production vocabulary skills. In this case, Thordardottir (2011) also found a similar result in her study. One way to interpret this is that it is plausible to know that the absence of significant difference was due to the study's small sample and perhaps a larger sample would provide a different result. From a different perpective, as emphasised in Vygotsky's (1978) Social Cultural theory on the impact of the environment on one's learning quality, the kind of communication encouragement at home can influence a child's language skills. Therefore, it is important to consider how language skills may vary according to the individual's language exposure at home, which may differ from other households. Nevertheless, this study suggests that age is still a considerable factor in terms of examining children's vocabulary acquisition.

Bruneian Parents' Intake on Practicing Bilingualism for Their Children

Bruneians are generally encouraging and supportive of L1 and L2 fluency for their children, similar to the study by Lee et al. (2015). They acknowledge that being fluent in Malay and English at a young age will benefit the children in communication skills, academic performance, and future employment. This would explain why bilingual use of both languages is already introduced at home with immediate family members and before the children start their formal education in school. While parents in Lee et al. (2015) associate their L1 with culture, in this study, parents associate L1 with Malay identity, culture and Islam. It is believable that it is due to *ugama* (religious) schools in Brunei using Standard Malay written in Arabic script because it is the language of instruction.

On the other hand, some parents also voiced their concern that their children's L2 outperformed their L1. Parents' concern for children's L1 is also evident in Salbrina (2020), which predicted L2 dominance among Bruneians in the future. Nevertheless, these parents still desire their children to be proficient in English, but simultaneously, they cannot deny that their children's L1 quality is dissatisfactory. Besides, most parents in this study prioritise fluency in L1 over L2, as they believe their children need to improve their L1 knowledge. Parents have expressed concern that the decreased use of L1 in their children's speech affects their L1 fluency, and parents felt the children's use of L2 was the cause. Even so, parents admit the inevitability of using English when communicating with their children. This, however, contradicts the children's performance in their vocabulary tests; while in general, children performed better in L1 than in L2 tests. The current study also found that while the children show L1 dominance, they rely on L2 vocabularies in some word categories. Possibly, parents' perception of their children's lack of L1 knowledge stems from this finding.

CONCLUSION

In general, it is undeniable that Brunei Malay dominates children's language use in comparison to English in Brunei. Although no significant difference in vocabulary development between children aged 5 and 6, this study concludes that exposure to language plays an impactful role in advancing children's vocabulary skills. This study concludes that children who are bilingual L1 learners show interdependency for both Malay and English in their everyday speech. It is possible because they rely on their English vocabulary if they do not know its Malay equivalent and vice versa. Furthermore, the children's L1 dominance and the habit of L2 use in everyday speech are by-products of more L1 exposure and encouragement from bilingual interaction with family members at home. Monolingual use of L1 is strongly evident when they interacted with the elderly, whereas bilingual tendencies in speech often occur with parents, siblings and same-age peers. In addition, parents' attitude towards L1 and L2 fluency for their children indicates that they acknowledge the value of being fluent in both languages; they also prioritise L1 fluency over L2 as a reflection of their Malay identity.

The author acknowledges the limitation of this study as it is a small-scale study of 40 participants. It does not represent the whole of Brunei, as the sample was only collected from one out of four districts. The author recommends a much

larger sample for future study and perhaps a closer look into family language rules and their impact on children's vocabulary size. However, despite the small-scale sample, this study can present its fascinating findings of the correlation between children's L1 and L2 vocabulary knowledge and language use at home, resulting in bilingual first language learners of Malay and English. The author also recommends future studies to investigate how further to improve children's language acquisition progress at home. Thus, this study concludes that the parental role and other family members at home as MKOs for the children can improve their children's L1 and L2 vocabulary skills.

REFERENCES

Al-Zoubi, M, S. (2018). *The Impact of Exposure to English Language on Language Acquisition*. Journal of Applied Linguistics and Language Research. 5(4), 151-162.

Baharuddin, R. (2017). *The English Vocabulary Acquisition of Students of State Junior High School 2 Prepare*. Journal of English Education and Development. 1 (1), 2597-7148.

Beals, H. & Tabor, R. (1995). *Meaningful differences in the everyday experiences of young American children*. Baltimore, MD: Paul Brookes.

Bower, V. (Ed.). (2014). *Developing early literacy 0-8: from theory to practice*. Sage.

Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (2001). *Bilingual children's mother tongue: Why is it important for education*. Retrieved on 2nd February 2021, from: https://www.academia.edu/download/49025212/bilingual_childrens_mother_tongue.pdf

De Houwer, A (2007) *Parental Language Input Patterns and Children's Bilingual Use.* Applied Psycholinguistics 28 (3): 411–424.

De Groot, A.M.B. and van Hell, J.G. (2005). The learning of foreign language vocabulary. In Kroll, J.F. and de Groot, A.M.B. (eds), *Handbook of Bilingualism.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Elsen, H. (1994). *Phonological constraints and overextensions*. First Language 14. p.305.

Genesee, F., & Nicoladis, E. (2006). Bilingual acquisition. In E. Hoff & M. Shatz (eds.), *Handbook of Language Development*, Oxford, Eng.: Blackwell.

Lee, M., Shetgiri, R., Barina, A., Tillitski, J., & Flores, G. (2015). *Raising Bilingual Children: A Qualitative Study of Parental Attitudes, Beliefs, and Intended Behaviors*. Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences. 1. 1-19. 10.1177/0739986315602669.

Lewis, M. (1993). *The lexical approach* (Vol. 1, p. 993). Hove: Language teaching publications.

Milton, J. (2009). *Measuring second language vocabulary acquisition*. Multilingual Matters.

Marchman, V. A., & Fernald, A. (2008). *Speed of word recognition and vocabulary knowledge in infancy predict cognitive and language outcomes in later childhood*. Developmental Science, 11(3), F9–F16.

Martin, P. W. (1992). *An overview of linguistic research in Brunei Darussalam*. In Dato Seri Laila Jasa Awang Haji Abu Bakar bin Haji Apong (Ed.), Sumbangsih UBD: Esei-esei mengenai negara Brunei Darussalam [Essays on Brunei Darussalam]. Bandar Seri Begawan: Brunei Darussalam: Universiti Brunei Darussalam.

McLellan, J., Noor Azam, H. O., & Deterding, D. (2016). *The language situation in Brunei Darussalam*. In H. O. Noor Azam, J. McLellan, & D. Deterding (Eds.), The use and status of language in Brunei Darussalam

Ministry of Education (2013). *The National Education System For The 21st Century*. Retrieved on 2nd February 2021, from: https://www.moe.gov.bn/spn21dl/SPN21%20ENG%20(2013)%20COMPLETE.pdf

Mitchell, R., Myles, F., & Marsden, E. (2013). Chapter 2: The recent history of second language learning research. *Second language learning theories (3rd edition, pp. 27-60). New York: Routledge*.

Rivera Pérez, J. F., Hart, R., & Lund, E. (2021). Vocabulary-learning cues used on children's bilingual programming. *Journal of Children and Media*, *15*(3), 301–319. https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2020.1802315

Salbrina, S. (2020). An English-centric monolingual Brunei? Predictions and reality. *Asian Englishes*, *00*(00), 1–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2019.1709335

Salbrina, S., & Noor Hasharina, H. (2021). The Malays of Brunei: an investigation of their family language policies. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, *0*(0), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2021.1931245

Salbrina, S., & Zayani, Z. A. (2021). *Thought Paper No. 7 Language and the Malay Muslim Identity : 7*, 1–10.

Thordardottir, E. (2011). The Relationship between Bilingual Exposure and Vocabulary Development. *International Journal of Bilingualism*, *15*(4), 426-445.

Tsinivits, D., & Unsworth, S. (2021). The impact of older siblings on bilingual toddlers' language environment and language development. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, *42*(2), 325–344. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0142716420000570

Vygotsky, L. (1978). Interaction between learning and development. From: *Mind and Society* (pp. 79-91). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Waring, R. (1997) Comparison of the receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge of some second language learners. Immaculata; The Occasional Papers of Notre Dame Seishin University, 94-114.

Wilkins, D. A. (1972). Grammatical, Situational and Notional Syllabuses.