

## The Evaluation of Monolingual and Bilingual Students' Writing Skills in Fifth Grade of Secondary School Comparatively

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### ABSTRACT

This study was conducted to determine the writing skills of bilingual students whose mother tongue is Kurdish and monolingual students whose mother tongue is Turkish in the fifth grade of secondary school. More specifically, the story and essay writing skills of bilingual students are compared with the writing skills of monolingual students based on their reading habits and their parents' educational backgrounds. The research is a descriptive study based on scanning model and aims to reveal the current situation as it is. The study group of the research consists of a total of 104 fifth grade secondary school students, 52 bilingual and 52 monolingual, studying in 4 different secondary schools in the central district of İpekyolu in Van, Turkey. In order to determine students' writing skills, stories and essays were written to them at different times in one lesson hour (average forty minutes). The stories were evaluated according to the Story Writing Evaluation Form (İzdeş, 2011). The essays were evaluated according to the Written Expression Rating Scale (Deniz, 2003). According to the results of Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal - Wallis-H tests, monolingual students outperformed bilingual students in both story and essay writing. While a significant difference was found between bilingual and monolingual students' essay and story writing skills, no significant difference was found in terms of parents' education status or the number of books their parents read. The findings have interesting implications for the researchers and teachers in the area.

**Key words:** Mother Tongue, Bilingualism, Writing Skills, Educational Levels of Parents and Reading Books

### INTRODUCTION

Human is a social being by nature. Language enables people to live together, socialize and become civilized. Language is a versatile, highly developed system that enables emotions, thoughts and desires to be transferred to others by making use of elements and rules that are common in terms of sound and meaning in a society (Aksan, 1977). Language can be said to be the outward appearance of a nation's soul, as it informs people about a nation's culture, worldview, and various qualities. At the same time, language is the expressed form of thought. According to (Özdemir, 1973); "Language is the mirror of thought, it cannot be thought without language. People can only think in a language only in their mother tongue. " Basically, language is the art of verbalizing the individual's mind for communication. The individual learns this art in the family and close environment, which is the first step of education, in their mother tongue.

One of the most basic human characteristics is that s/he can speak. The means by which man can speak is his/her mother tongue, which identifies with herself/himself and

forms the cornerstone of his/her personality. Every child has the potential to acquire the language of the community they are in from the moment they are born. With this potential, the child's first language acquired from their mother, family and close circle is their mother tongue. According to (Aksan, 1994): "Mother tongue is the language that is learned from the mother and close family circle and then from the circles that are related, descends into the subconscious of the human and creates the strongest bonds of individuals with society."

Some communities can use other languages besides their mother tongue. Such societies that can use other languages besides their mother tongue are called bilingual. According to (Ayan Ceyhan & Koçbaşı, 2009) "Bilingualism is the ability to express oneself in an understandable way in the second language. On the other hand, Aksan (1998) defines bilingualism as a "People's acquiring and using more than one language for various reasons and under different conditions or learning a second language at a level close to their mother tongue." Aksan (1988, p. 26) defines bilingualism as acquiring more than one language for various reasons and under different conditions, using that language or learning a

second language at a level close to its mother tongue. Here, beyond learning the grammar of both languages, it is a matter of gaining oral and written communicative skills in both languages. "A bilingual child should achieve the appropriate level of proficiency in this language in order to both prevent difficulties with comprehension and to affect comprehension by allowing the potential advantages of having two languages (Cummins, 1976, p. 4 as cited in Özkara, 2014).

Writing skill, which is one of the basic language skill, develops slowly compared to other language skills and requires many exercises (Demirel, 1999). Writing is the language skill that students often have the most difficulty with. This situation arises from psychological, grammatical and cognitive problems experienced in the writing process. These problems are usually follows: inability to pay attention while writing, making lots of simple mistakes, inability to create a writing plan, misspelling words, not being able to give the development of the event properly, not being able to perform sentence and paragraph transitions properly, poor vocabulary, misspelling of many words frequently making language and spelling mistakes, making random sentences, not knowing the meanings of words enough, not being able to form and interpret ideas (Akyol, 2006). It is known that students' difficulties in developing writing skills are not only due to the problems arising from the nature of writing. Due to the lack of applied studies in mother tongue skills and due to fact that Students' creative abilities are not sufficiently developed; it occurs negative effects on the students' ability to think, be creative and communicate effectively and this emerges as the problems of Turkish teaching, which are especially emphasized in the literature (Sever, 2004, cited in Maltepe, 2006). Although bilingual children experience these problems for writing skills, they also experience the difficulty of different the language of education being from their mother tongue. Because the bilingual children living in our country are given education in the dominant language used by the society without giving mother tongue education. This situation, which is against educational opportunism, may cause the individual not to be literate at the same level as their peers. This way has a significant impact on the child's education life and also affects his / her writing skills. A person can use a language well only if he / she has full command of that language. Language mastery depends on the use of that language in education. In this regard, the research conducted by Ayan Ceyhan (2011) also supports this:

Due to the lack of special approaches for children whose mother tongue is different from Turkish in the education system, students learn to read and write late, and as a reflection of this delay, they are struggling to express themselves verbally and in writing in upper classes.

Mother tongue has a very important place in the development of emotions, thoughts and concepts for children.

Considering the cosmopolitical structure of our country, it is seen that families coming from different cultures preserve their mother tongue. It is known that especially the citizens of Kurdish origin living in the east still use Kurdish and their children learn Turkish when they come to primary school. However, since different education programs are not

implemented for bilingual children in our country, the fact that children who use their mother tongue until a certain age are faced with a different language when they start school life inevitably affects their school success. It has been observed that bilingual children start reading and writing late, have difficulties in expressing themselves (verbal - written), and have problems adapting to school life. In the light of this information, it was necessary to examine the mother language factor, one of the factors affecting the writing skills of bilingual children whose mother tongue is not Turkish. In this study, it was aimed to evaluate the writing skills of bilingual children studying in the fifth grade. In order to find an answer to the question of how well bilingual students studying in fifth grade can express themselves in written form, it is aimed to reach a result by comparing the writing skills of bilingual students with the same demographic characteristics and in the same environment with monolingual students.

### Research Questions

1. What are the writing skill levels of monolingual and bilingual students?
2. Is there a significant difference between monolingual and bilingual students' ability to write essays and stories?
3. Does the level of writing skills of monolingual and bilingual students change according to the educational level of the mother?
4. Does the level of writing skills of monolingual and bilingual students change according to the educational level of the father?
5. Does the level of writing skills of monolingual and bilingual students change according to their reading status?

### Significance of the Study

It is known that students have more difficulty in writing skill compared to other language skills, since the writing skill does not come with a natural potential to the individual, but is a skill that is learned later through education and is a skill that is learned with the school age, not in the first years of childhood. The development of language skills, especially the development of writing skills, depends on mastering the mother tongue. However, it is not possible to think about this for bilingual children living in our country. Because they are educated in a language different from their mother tongue. These children are likely to have lower academic achievement than their peers educated in their mother tongue. Mother tongue has a very important place in the development of emotions, thoughts and concepts for children. Therefore, it is not possible to consider language skills separately from the mother tongue.

It is known that various factors affect the writing skill in studies conducted on writing skill in our country. However, since the writing skills of bilingual students were not considered as a different factor in the researches, we evaluated the writing skills of bilingual students by considering the mother language factor in this study. In this study, it is expected that the mother language factor also affects the writing skill and

this effect will contribute to the literature. Therefore, in this research, we aimed to see the level of writing skills of these students by writing an essay and story to bilingual students who did not receive education in their mother tongue, and to determine whether they can express themselves in the second language in real terms.

## METHOD

Quantitative methods were followed in collecting and analyzing the data. The sampling, data collection and data analysis methods are presented in this section.

### The Model of the Research

This study is a descriptive study based on scanning model. Scanning models are research approaches that aim to describe a past or present situation as it exists. What is wanted to be known exists and is there. The important thing is to observe properly and specify it (Karasar, 2014). In this study, writing skills of bilingual students were evaluated. The data were analyzed descriptively and digitized. Comments are made on numerical data.

### Participants

The group of study consists of 104 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from Husrev Paşa, Vankulu, İlknur Ilıcalı and Rekabet Kurumu Secondary Schools in Van. The purpose of choosing the study group from Husrev Paşa, Vankulu, İlknur Ilıcalı and Rekabet Kurumu Secondary Schools is that bilingual (Turkish-Kurdish) students and monolingual (Turkish) students will be comfortably present in the same classroom environment and the educational levels of these schools are close to each other.

### Data Collection Tools

The data of the study consists of the stories and essays written by fifth grade students (104) studying in four different schools in Van province; the student information forms they fill out. Data about the story writing skill were collected using the Story Writing Evaluation Form developed by İzdeş (2011). The data in essay writing were obtained through the Written Expression Evaluation Scale developed by Deniz (2003). The information form was also used to determine the mother tongue of the students and the educational status of their parents.

### Analysis of Data

This study is a document analysis study. The data of the study were analyzed by digitizing. Yıldırım and Şimşek (2011) state that the purpose of digitizing qualitative data is to increase reliability and validity, to reduce bias, to make comparisons and to allow re-testing. SPSS 21.0 Program was used to analyze the data. Mann Whitney-U and Kruskal - Wallis-H tests were used for the main problem and sub-problems of the study.

## RESULTS

This section contains the findings of the research and interpretations on the findings in the order of the research questions mentioned earlier.

### Monolingual and Bilingual Students' Level of Writing Skills

The first research question focused on the monolingual and bilingual students' level of writing skills the results of which are presented in Table 1.

When the table is examined, it is seen that the arithmetic average of the essay and story writing skill scores of monolingual students is higher than the bilingual students.

### Comparison of Monolingual and Bilingual Students' Essay and Story Writing Skills

The second research question compared the monolingual and bilingual students' writing skills. Table 2 summarizes the descriptive and inferential statistics results for comparison of students' essay writing skills.

As seen in Table 2, a significant difference was found in students' essay writing skills in favor of monolinguals ( $U=1042.5, p<.05$ ). In addition, the monolingual and bilingual students' story writing skills are reported in Table 3.

As seen in Table 3, a significant difference was found in students' story-writing skills in favor of monolinguals ( $U=869.5, p<.05$ ).

### Effect of Mother's Education Level on Monolingual And Bilingual Students' Writing Skills

The third research question addressed the effect of mother's education level on monolingual and bilingual students' essay writing skills (Table 4).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics results of bilingual students' essay and story writing

	N	M	SD
Bilingual (Essay)	52	54.65	19.878
Monolingual (Essay)	52	63.36	19.464
Bilingual (Story)	52	2.40	0.798
Monolingual (Story)	52	2.90	0.773

**Table 2.** Comparison of monolingual and bilingual students' essay writing skills

Group	N	Mean rank	Rank Sum	U	p
Bilingual	52	46.55	2420.50	1042.5	.044
Monolingual	52	58.45	3039.50		

**Table 3.** Comparison of monolingual and bilingual students' story writing skills

Group	N	Mean rank	Rank Sum	U	p
Bilingual	52	43.22	2247.5	869.5	.010
Monolingual	52	61.78	3212.5		

The analysis results show that the scores of bilingual students on the essay writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational level of the mother [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52)=14.247,  $p<.05$ ]. Furthermore, the results of testing the influence of mother's education level on monolingual students' writing skills are summarized in Table 5.

Analysis results show that the scores of monolingual students on the essay writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational level of the mother [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52) =16.168,  $p<.05$ ]. Next, the effect of mother's education level on bilingual students' essay writing skills was examined (Table 6).

The results show that the scores of bilingual students on the story-writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational status of the mother [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52)=17.308,  $p<.05$ ].

The results of the analysis in Table 7 show that the scores of monolingual students on the story-writing skills test differ significantly according to the education level of the mother [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52)=15.667,  $p<.05$ ].

**Table 4.** Effect of mother's education level on bilingual students' essay writing skills

Mother's Education Status	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	$p$	$p$
Illiterate (a)	10	18.10	4	14.247	.007	a-b .7 b-d .03
Primary school graduate (b)	12	18.83				a-c .1 b-e .02
Secondary school graduate (c)	15	28.20				a-d .08 c-d .3
High school graduate (d)	13	34.77				a-e .03 c-e .1
College graduate (e)	2	48.00				b-c .1 d-e .06

**Table 5.** Effect of mother's education level on monolingual students' essay writing skills

Mother's Education Status	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	$p$	$p$
Illiterate (a)	10	15.35	4	16.168	.003	a-b .02 b-d .04
Primary school graduate (b)	12	24.04				a-c .06 b-e .02
Secondary school graduate (c)	15	24.37				a-d .002 c-d .02
High school graduate (d)	13	36.19				a-e .03 c-e .02
College graduate (e)	2	50.00				b-c .9 d-e .08

**Effect of Father's Education Level on Monolingual And Bilingual Students' Writing Skills**

The next research question was in relation to the influence of father's education level on monolingual and bilingual students' writing skills. As the results in Table 8 show, the scores of bilingual students on the essay writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational status of the father [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52) =18.870,  $p<.05$ ].

Furthermore, the results of analysis showed that the scores of monolingual students on the essay writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational status of the father [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52)=11.073,  $p<.05$ ] (Table 9).

Analysis results in Table 10 show that the scores of students on the story writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational status of the father [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52)=13.082,  $p<.05$ ].

As the results in Table 11 show, the scores of monolingual students on the story writing skills test differ significantly according to the educational status of the father [ $\chi^2$  (sd=4, n=52)=11.458,  $p<.05$ ].

**Table 6.** Effect of mother's education level on bilingual students' essay writing skills

Mother Education Status	N	Mean rank	Sd	$\chi^2$	$p$	$p$
Illiterate (a)	10	19.10	4	17.308	.002	a-b ,61 b-d ,01
Primary school graduate (b)	12	18.96				a-c ,19 b-e ,08
Secondary school graduate (c)	15	25.87				a-d ,01 c-d ,01
High school graduate (d)	13	37.08				a-e ,07 c-e ,04
College graduate (e)	2	44.75				b-c ,10 d-e ,35

**Table 7.** Effect of mother's education level on monolingual students' story writing skills

Mother Education Status	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	$p$	$p$
Illiterate (a)	10	14.00	4	15.667	.003	a-b .04 b-d .02
Primary school graduate (b)	12	24.29				a-c .01 b-e .16
Secondary school graduate (c)	15	27.60				a-d .01 c-d .11
High school graduate (d)	13	35.19				a-e .0 c-e .31
College graduate (e)	2	37.50				b-c .49 d-e .76

**Effect of Monolingual and Bilingual Students' Reading Status on Their Writing Skills**

The final research question addressed the effect of the students' reading habits on their writing skills. As the results in Table 12 indicate, the scores of monolingual students in

**Table 8.** Effect of father's education level on bilingual students' essay writing skills

Father's Education Status	N	Mean rank	Sd	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Illiterate (a)	4	12.50	4	18.870	.001	a-b .30 b-d .06
Primary school graduate (b)	4	15.50				a-c .52 b-e .07
Secondary school graduate (c)	11	16.18				a-d .04 c-d .02
High school graduate (d)	18	29.39				a-e .01 c-e .01
College graduate (e)	15	37.27				b-c .84 d-e .18

**Table 9.** Effect of father's education level on monolingual students' essay writing skills

Father's Education Status	N	Mean rank	Sd	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Illiterate (a)	4	8.50	4	11.073	.026	a-b .20 b-d .10
Primary school graduate (b)	4	15.50				a-c .08 b-e .04
Secondary school graduate (c)	11	25.50				a-d .05 c-d .84
High school graduate (d)	18	25.61				a-e .02 c-e .06
College graduate (e)	15	34.90				b-c .12 d-e .07

**Table 10.** Effect of father's education level on bilingual students' story writing skills

Father's Education Status	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Illiterate (a)	4	14.63	4	13.082	.011	a-b .13 b-d .16
Primary school graduate (b)	4	14.63				a-c .21 b-e .009
Secondary school graduate (c)	11	21.86				a-d .13 c-d .30
High school graduate (d)	18	27.28				a-e .009 c-e .01
Collage graduate (e)	15	35.30				b-c .21 d-e .12

essay and story writing skills test do not significantly differ depending on the number of books they read in a year [ $\chi^2$  (sd=6, n=52)=8.575,  $p>.05$ ].

The results of the analysis show that the scores of monolingual students in the essay writing skills test do not differ significantly depending on the number of books they read in a year [ $\chi^2$  (sd=6, n=52)=7.356,  $p>.05$ ] (Table 13).

**DISCUSSION**

A statistically significant difference was found between bilingual students and monolingual students when both story writing skills and essay writing skills were examined. The

**Table 11.** Effect of father's education level on monolingual students' story writing skills

Father's Education Status	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>	<i>p</i>
Illiterate (a)	4	12.50	4	11.458	.022	a-b .50 b-d .31
Primary school graduate (b)	4	21.25				a-c .21 b-e .12
Secondary school graduate (c)	11	19.86				a-d .05 c-d .08
High school graduate (d)	18	27.58				a-e .02 c-e .007
College graduate (e)	15	34.20				b-c .90 d-e .10

**Table 12.** Bilingual students' essay and story writing skills depending on the number of books they read

The Number of Books They Read in a Year	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
Two and lower	1	19.00	6	8.575	.199
Three and more	1	9.00			
Six and more	4	18.25			
Twelve and more	9	22.39			
Twenty four and more	15	27.53			
Forty eight and more	19	27.61			
Ninety six and more	3	46.00			

**Table 13.** Monolingual students' essay and story writing skills depending on the number of books they read

The Number of Books They Read in a Year	N	Mean rank	sd	$\chi^2$	<i>p</i>
Two and lower	1	24.50	6	7.356	.289
Three and more	1	14.50			
Six and more	4	21.25			
Twelve and more	9	22.56			
Twenty four and more	15	26.94			
Forty eight and more	19	26.34			
Ninety six and more	3	47.33			

difference between the two groups was in favor of monolingual students. The reason why writing skills of bilingual students were lower than monolingual students can be attributed to their later learning of Turkish and their mother tongue being different, since the demographic characteristics of the two groups, such as the educational status of their parents, were equal. The reason why writing skills of bilingual students were lower than monolingual students can be attributed to their later learning of Turkish and their mother tongue being different, since the demographic characteristics of the two groups, such as the educational status of their parents, were equal. It is understood in this study that the importance sufficient exposure to the mother tongue in children's literacy is undeniable.

There are many studies in the relevant literature that support this finding. Zeynep Erdil (2012) studied bilingual children living in the Netherlands and monolingual children living in Turkey. Her study revealed that bilingual children's mother tongue semantic and structural skills were lower than their monolingual peers and were not at the level expected from their chronological age. This could be due to the fact that bilingual children are less likely to receive language input for their mother tongue, as they belong to a minority group in their society, compared to their monolingual peers. Additionally, Kaya Kardaş (2020) in a study of the effect of role playing activities on the Turkish speaking anxiety of bilingual students, reported that the education conducted with role-playing activities gave more positive results on the Turkish speaking anxiety of bilingual Arab students compared to the activities suggested by the Ministry of Education. This result reveals that role-playing activities should be used more frequently to relieve students' speech anxiety.

Seçkin Aydın (2013) conducted a case study on the written expression skills of bilingual Turkish students to determine the mistakes made by university students from Germany in their Turkish written expression skills. The research shows that bilingual Turkish students have serious problems with Turkish spelling and punctuation. It is pointed out that these problems stem from the state policy and the increasing distancing of bilingual students from their mother tongue and their inadequate mother tongue education.

In another study Yasin Özkara (2014) compared the Turkish vocabulary of bilingual and monolingual children in Antalya, and reported that the Turkish vocabulary of monolingual children was higher than that of Russian-Turkish bilingual children. The lower vocabulary of bilingual students is due to the fact that MEB would not offer programs for children whose mother tongue was not Turkish, and the fact that these children started reading and writing without learning to speak caused their academic achievement to be lower than their peers.

In a study on the measurement of bilingual children's language skills and threshold theory in Germany, Kutlay Yağmur (2007) discovered that the cognitive and linguistic skills of bilingual Turkish students living in Germany were lower compared to other groups because they could not get input in their native language. Contrary to the claims of the

education planners, it has been revealed that children with a very solid foundation in the mother tongue have a similar level in the second language.

Klatzer-Folmer (1996, as cited in Kutlay, 2007) also found a very close relationship between the success rates of students and their native language skills in his doctoral study in which he investigated the success rates of Turkish children in Dutch primary schools. As he observed, the Turkish skills of children with high level Dutch skills were at the top level. Likewise, a very close relationship was found between Turkish language skills and school success. The students with the highest school success have both Turkish and Dutch skills at an advanced level.

Yaman (2007) examined Turkish education and practices in schools where bilingual and multicultural students are predominant. In the practices carried out in schools with a high density of bilingual students, teachers in most schools stated that students were indifferent and unsuccessful in the lessons due to lack of language input. Yaman (2007) recommended that in order to solve this situation, new regulations be made to ensure the language development of bilingual children.

Our results also revealed a statistically significant difference in both story and essay writing skills of bilingual and monolingual students depending on the education level of their parents. In general, as the education level of both mother and father increased, the scores of bilingual students in writing skills also increased. Parents' educational status has been found to be an important factor in students' writing skills in previous studies. For example, Yasin (2014) and Sarı (2011) obtained similar results in their studies.

Our results of comparison between the students' story and essay writing skills indicated no significant differences between the students' skills in these writing genres. It is understood from here that different types of writing make no significant differences for students to express themselves in writing.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to compare the story and essay writing skills of monolingual and bilingual 5<sup>th</sup> graders. The secondary purpose of this study was to find out whether the writing skills of both bilingual students and monolingual students change according to the education level of parents. We found a statistically significant difference between bilingual students and monolingual students when both story writing skills and essay writing skills were examined. The difference between the two groups was in favor of monolingual students. It was also found that the scores of bilingual and monolingual students on the story-writing skills test differed significantly according to the educational status of the mother. It is understood from these analyses that the education level of mother and father is an important factor for literacy. The results also indicated insignificant differences in the story and essay writing skills of bilingual and monolingual students depending on the number of books they read in a year.

As previous researchers (for example, Cummins, 2003) have also noted, bilingual students must first know their first

language, that is, their mother tongue, in order to be successful in both their first language and their second language. The basic way is to teach children both their native language and the dominant language, and then, to ensure the success of the individual in their second language, the official language, is to prepare individual education programs and implement these programs systematically.

More studies that particularly focus on the learners' personality types or cognitive and learning styles may result in some interesting discoveries in the area. More in-depth studies may also shed light on the factors that contribute to differences in bilingual childrens' language skills and literacy.

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