

Does being bilingual make children more focused? Study says no

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Bilingual children do not have more advantages than monolingual children when it comes to executive function, which includes remembering instructions, controlling responses, and shifting swiftly

between tasks, according to a new study published in *PLOS One*.

The study, "No evidence for effects of Turkish immigrant [children's](#) bilingualism on executive functions," was coauthored by two UT faculty members: Nils Jaekel, clinical assistant professor of theory and practice in [teacher education](#), and Julia Jaekel, associate professor of child and family studies, together with Jessica Willard and Birgit Leyendecker, researchers from the Ruhr-University in Bochum, Germany.

"The research of executive functions is important because they have direct application to success in both real-life and academic situations," said Julia Jaekel.

For their research, the scientists used a computer test to compare the executive function of two groups of children between the ages of five and 15 living in the German Ruhr region. The first group consisted of 242 children who spoke both Turkish and German, and the other group consisted of 95 children who spoke only German.

The test measured the time bilingual and [monolingual children](#) took to correctly respond to computer-based problems and stimuli. The results showed no difference in the [executive functions](#) of the two groups.

The researchers also considered children's German and Turkish vocabulary size and exposure to both languages, factors for which previous studies on the topic had been criticized for lacking.

Does this mean there's no value in speaking more than one language? Not exactly, said Nils Jaekel: "Although [bilingual children](#) are not necessarily more focused than monolingual children, speaking another language can provide other social opportunities along the way. However, it is important to continue the research on this topic so parents, educators, and policymakers do not overpromise on the benefits of

speaking a second language."

More information: Nils Jaekel et al, No evidence for effects of Turkish immigrant children's bilingualism on executive functions, *PLOS ONE* (2019). [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0209981](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0209981)

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