



The association between bilingual development and mental health: Investigating the unaccompanied refugee children's viewpoints

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Abstract:

The present qualitative study aimed in exploring the relations between second language (L2) development, and mental health among young refugees (those unaccompanied by a legal caretaker), living in Sweden. These children share the likelihood of having experienced interrupted education because of war and conflict in their countries of origin, flight and potential stay in refugee camps prior to migrating to Sweden; resulting in delayed development of their academic language. Upon arrival in their destination country, refugee minors are required to learn a new language, within both social and academic dimensions as a main facilitator of educational achievement and integration into the mainstream society. Eight Dari-speaking refugee minors from Afghanistan (between 16 to 18 years old) were gone through in-depth semi-structured interviews where their viewpoints about different aspects of bilingualism (language learning strategies, first language (L1) maintenance and use) and possible relations between bilingualism and mental health were explored. The results were revolved around three major themes: lack of enthusiasm among children to practice and maintain Dari language, associations between dual language practice and maintenance and mental health (via boosting self-esteem and assertiveness), and the need for delivering instruction in L1 in schools. These results suggest that dual language development relates to children's mental health and that it is worthy to invest on instructing L1 together with L2 for these group of children who are especially imbalanced in the level of proficiency in their social and academic aspects of L1.

Biography:

Niloufar Jalali-Moghadam has a PhD in cognitive psychology. Her research field entails bilingualism and cognition in immigrant children. Currently, she conducts research and teaching



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