

# Relationships between self-reflection ability and social adjustment among mono and bilingual children

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## Summary

Self-reflection, which refers to processing self-relevant information and is similar to the construct of metacognition (Flavell, 1979), is a factor receiving rather little attention in school settings. However, several studies indicate that the ability to reflect upon one's own inner states is related to different aspects of well-being (Beck, 1995; Gross & John, 2004; Harrington & Loffredo, 2011). Self-reflection is assessed via "self-reflective self-reflection assessment tools" (Sauter et al., 2010); in the current study it is suggested that self-reflection develops in accordance with the development of word meaning structure. Therefore, in assessing this we should take the level of the development of language tools into account.

One specific group in school, which may be vulnerable to psychological, social or academic problems (Wen-Jui & Chien-Chung, 2010), is bilingual children. It is not yet clear how the self-reflection ability of bilingual children, i.e., children speaking different languages at home and in school, develops. In other words, bilingual children have to reflect themselves in school settings in a foreign language; when knowing the relationship between self-reflection and well-being, it is reasonable to ask, how does self-reflection develop in the given specific group and how is it related to markers of social adjustment.

The current study explores the relationships between self-reflection, mono and bilingualism and markers of social and psychological adjustment. First, it explores which variables (cognitive and verbal ability, word meaning structure) are related, and predict better and more varied self-reflection ability. Second, it investigates which markers of adjustment are related to self-reflection ability, and when other variables are taken into account, would the self-reflection ability still remain important. Third, the study investigates how self-reflection and its development

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differs between bilingual and monolingual children. In addition, the relationships between mono and bilingualism, self-reflection ability and markers of adjustment are analysed at the individual level.

First, it was found that self-reflection ability in bilingual and monolingual groups was predicted by different factors. In the bilingual group, mathematics skills, general ability and word meaning structure were relevant; in the monolingual group, important factors included language skills and word meaning structure. The author also found that self-reflection ability and different markers of social and psychological adjustment were related across three years, reflecting previous studies that suggest the relationship between the ability to reflect one's inner states and subjective well-being. The relationship was also confirmed using regression analysis; self-reflection ability remained important in the model if other variables were taken into account, indicating that self-reflection may be one factor supporting emotional well-being, which is also worth paying attention to in the school context. However, the direction of the relationship may be questionable – it may also be hypothesised that lower popularity among peers, or lower school satisfaction, provides a poorer environment for self-reflection to develop.

Results showed that the pace of the development of self-reflection ability is somewhat slower in the bilingual group compared to monolinguals; however, this discrepancy seemed to diminish by the fifth grade. The author hypothesised that this deficiency might also be related to the markers of social adjustment. Analysis at individual level demonstrated that although there were configurations of monolingual groups with both high self-reflection ability and better social adjustment, there was a group of bilinguals for whom low self-reflection ability was combined with high school satisfaction. It may be that self-reflection ability has a different meaning in the context of adjustment in groups of different language experience – studying in the student's mother tongue versus a foreign language. It might also be that different groups possess different resources or mechanisms for coping.

*Keywords:* self-reflection ability, bilingualism, social and psychological adjustment