Persistent myths and misconceptions about second language acquisition: A study of English teachers in international schools in Semarang

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Abstract

Myths and misconceptions about Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is vital for creating effective learning environments, particularly in bilingual education settings. Many bilingual schools and early childhood education in Semarang implement the English learning in their curriculum. This research aims to describe the myths and misconceptions about the acquisition of a second language among English teachers in bilingual or international school and provide recommendations on the implementation of second language learning. This research employs the descriptive qualitative method with 17 teachers as the participants from 7 international schools in Semarang City. This study adopts a descriptive qualitative research design, aiming to explore and describe the perceptions, beliefs, and misconceptions about second language acquisition (SLA) among English teachers. The data sources include questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and unstructured observations involving 17 teachers from 7 international schools in Semarang City and surrounding areas. The methodological approach follows Sandelowski,'s (2000) model of qualitative description, which emphasizes providing a comprehensive, low-inference summary of events or experiences in everyday terms. For the data analysis, the study uses descriptive statistical analysis for the questionnaire data and Miles and Huberman's interactive model for qualitative data, involving data reduction, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. This results, based on questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews with teachers, revealed that many believe second language acquisition should begin early, as grammar mastery and accurate pronunciation are more easily achieved at a young age. They also hold that an effective way to learn a second language is to plunge children directly into a second language environment. In the cognitive aspect, the mastery of the second language depends on the parents' level of English mastery. The teachers also agree that grammar is not so important for a good command of English. Further researches are needed to study the misconceptions among bilingual school administrators.

Keywords: *Second Language Acquisition (SLA); language learning myths; bilingual education; early childhood language learning*

INTRODUCTION

Currently, there are approximately 30 international schools in Semarang City that organize bilingual programs with English as the language of instruction in the classroom and the language of communication between students. Those international schools are also called bilingual schools because they use two languages in academic and non-academic activities in the school environment. The purpose of establishing an international school or bilingual school is to provide education of international quality, prepare students to have competence and become fluent in English or other foreign languages, and provide access to various educational programs, including dual-degree programs or opportunities to study or continue studying abroad. The implementation of this bilingual classroom program contains implications, among others, the early introduction of English or other foreign languages, the use of English as the instructional language for all subjects, and the use of dominant foreign languages (Vallejo, 2018). Many children around the world grow up bilingual (Grosjean, 2021, Schott et al., 2022) and must manage concurrent knowledge of two languages.

In the midst of the pros and cons of teaching foreign languages to elementary school children in several Southeast Asian countries, it turns out that there are still myths and misconceptions about second language acquisition in elementary school children and early childhood education. The results of recent research show that the recognition and mastery of foreign languages too early can threaten the mastery of the first language which has cognitive, affective and sociocultural aspects that are important for children's self-development. The intuitive assumptions of bilingual teachers and school administrators are often wrong, and children can be disadvantaged if teachers have unrealistic expectations and an inaccurate understanding of the second language learning process and its relationship to the acquisition of other academic skills and knowledge. For this reason, it is necessary to emphasize the importance of teachers to understand that the acquisition of a second language must be done in early childhood. Although the role of teachers is very important in children's lives, their influence is limited in the classroom. Therefore, recommendations are urgently needed for policy makers and program implementers so that they understand the needs of these young English learners. An understanding of the process and level of language proficiency will help teachers tailor teaching to meet the needs of different groups of learners. Students will benefit from everything teachers do to support the development of their language skills while teaching them grade-level content. Nowadays, more and more English learning processes take place in early childhood settings. Early exposure to English is very important as it is crucial for learners to acquire English language at early age as English is a global language that is used in basically everything not only in the level of primary and secondary level (Akcay, Butuner, & Arikan, 2015). According to various studies in the field of neurology, it is proven that 50% of children's intelligence is formed within the first 4 years (Williams et al., 2019).

Therefore, teachers must understand best practices in teaching English at an early age and understand policies regarding English teaching at an early age because the role of teachers is very important (instrumental) in providing advocacy, information and planning changes at the level of policy and

implementation. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the process by which individuals learn a language other than their native language. This field of study encompasses various aspects of language learning, including cognitive, social, and cultural dimensions (Gass & Selinker, 2015). To promote successful Second Language Acquisition (SLA), explicit language instruction and comprehensible language input play an important role (Loewen and Sato, 2018). The spoken classroom interactions that teachers facilitate are a crucial tool in making instruction beneficial to language learning (Johnston et al., 2016). Therefore, the spoken language of both teacher and learners in the classroom plays a central role for language acquisition (Konig et al., 2016).

Understanding SLA is crucial for educators, particularly those teaching in bilingual or multilingual contexts, as it directly impacts teaching methodologies, curriculum design, and student outcomes. A comprehensive understanding of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is essential for educators to dispel myths and misconceptions that may hinder effective teaching practices. However, the persistence of these myths among teachers can often be attributed to several underlying factors, such as limited exposure to formal training in SLA during pre-service education, reliance on anecdotal experiences rather than empirical research, and a lack of access to ongoing professional development. In many cases, teachers may also inherit outdated beliefs from their own educational backgrounds or from school cultures that prioritise fluency over foundational understanding of language development. Without sufficient knowledge of linguistic theories and evidence-based practices, educators may continue to rely on intuitive but inaccurate assumptions about how children acquire a second language. For instance, many believe that language learning is a linear process, but research indicates that it is often non-linear and influenced by various factors, including motivation, cultural background, and individual learning styles.

A comprehensive understanding of SLA is essential for educators to dispel myths and misconceptions that may hinder effective teaching practices. For instance, many believe that language learning is a linear process, but research indicates that it is often non-linear and influenced by various factors, including motivation, cultural background, and individual learning styles. The complexities of language acquisition involve not only cognitive processes but also social interactions and cultural contexts that shape how individuals learn and use a second language. This underscores the necessity for educators to adopt a holistic approach to language teaching that considers both the cognitive and social dimensions of learning (Vallejo, 2018).

The acquisition of a second language takes place after the first language or mother tongue has been fully developed (Hoque, E. 2017). A key factor in accelerating second language learning is a strong foundation in the first language. Prominent researchers such as Jim Cummins, Catherine Snow, Lily Wong Filmore, and Stephen Krashen have explored this subject extensively. Their studies generally agree that achieving advanced fluency in a second language takes approximately five to seven years for individuals with well-developed first language skills. However, for those with weaker proficiency in their native language, attaining advanced fluency may require seven to ten

years.

According to Silva & Kucer (2016), every English learner has a distinct linguistic and educational background, which influences their language acquisition process. Teachers may become frustrated when students appear fluent due to their strong social English skills but struggle to engage in academic tasks and discussions. Educators who acknowledge the importance of developing academic language proficiency will be better prepared to support students in achieving academic success.

Addressing myths and misconceptions about SLA is vital for creating effective learning environments, particularly in bilingual education settings. Misunderstandings can lead to ineffective teaching practices, hinder student progress, and create negative learning experiences. However, the extent to which teachers are aware of current SLA research and theories varies significantly. Many educators, especially in bilingual or international school contexts, lack formal academic grounding in applied linguistics or second language pedagogy. This limited awareness often leads them to adopt intuitive, experience-based approaches rather than research-informed strategies. As a result, their pedagogical beliefs may be shaped more by personal observations, institutional traditions, or popular misconceptions than by evidence-based insights into language learning processes. Greater familiarity with current SLA research could empower teachers to critically evaluate existing practices, adopt more effective instructional methods, and respond more accurately to learners' needs. Some common myths and misconceptions in the previous studies are as follows:

Children learn languages more easily and quickly than adults

The first myth is children learn languages more easily and quickly than adults. The oversimplified claim about language acquisition overlooks the complexity of the process, making it unlikely to be entirely accurate. While it is true that young children often appear to acquire languages more effortlessly than adults, it is essential to examine the origins of this perception and its actual implications. One clear advantage children have is in pronunciation—they tend to recognize and replicate foreign sounds with ease. However, pronunciation is just one small component of language learning and does not fully reflect overall proficiency.

Archibald (2017) points out that predicting a person's overall language competence—such as their understanding of syntax, cohesion, and sociolinguistics—based solely on their age of acquisition is quite challenging. Since pronunciation is one of the most noticeable aspects of language use, clear pronunciation can create the illusion of greater proficiency, while poor pronunciation can obscure strong linguistic knowledge.

For example, consider a family that moves from Thailand to the U.S.—a 34-year-old father with a university degree and his four-year-old son. The father enrolls in an intensive English course, while the child attends an American preschool. After a year, the father has likely acquired around 3,000 words, along with various grammatical structures, and can hold conversations in everyday settings. However, due to his native language's different writing system, his pronunciation might still be difficult to understand, and his writing could

contain errors. Meanwhile, the child may have learned around 1,000 words, slightly fewer than his native English-speaking peers, and speaks with near-native pronunciation. Because he is not yet learning written language, his communication appears effortless in social settings.

Observers might conclude that the child has acquired English much faster than the father. However, in reality, the father has learned significantly more in terms of vocabulary and linguistic structures. The misconception arises because pronunciation is often mistaken for overall fluency, overshadowing the substantial progress made by older learners.

Numerous studies have challenged the assumption that younger children naturally acquire languages more easily. For instance, (Hartshorne et al., 2018) studied native English speakers learning Dutch and found that children aged 3 to 5 performed the worst across all language skill categories. In contrast, older children, teenagers, and adults outperformed the youngest group, with 12- to 15-year-olds demonstrating the fastest progress in all areas.

Contrary to the popular belief that younger individuals are more adept at acquiring new languages, research has shown that older learners often demonstrate superior academic performance in various aspects of language learning. According to Spinner and Gass (2019), older learners tend to outperform their younger counterparts in overall academic achievement.

It takes only 1–2 years to acquire English

The second myth is it takes 1-2 years to acquire the English language. The misconception that young learners effortlessly acquire languages has, at times, resulted in them not receiving the necessary language support in schools. The reasoning behind this misconception is that if children naturally "pick up" languages, there is no need to invest in specialized language programs. However, research on immigrant children in public schools challenges this assumption.

Zhang (2022), a leading expert in childhood language acquisition, introduced the concepts of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). BICS, which refers to everyday conversational skills, typically develops within 1-2 years. However, CALP—the academic language needed to understand textbooks and classroom instruction—takes significantly longer, often 5-7 years for children to reach the level of their native-speaking peers.

This timeline applies to adults as well. Grisso (2018) found that achieving academic proficiency in a second language, takes 5 to 7 years. The key takeaway is that mastering a second language is a long-term process, regardless of age. It requires sustained effort, proper support, and realistic expectations.

Children will learn English faster if parents speak English at home

The third myth is children will learn English faster if parents speak English at home. The myth suggests that if increased exposure to English always leads to better language acquisition, then parents should exclusively speak English at home to accelerate their child's learning. However, research indicates that more English is not necessarily better, and there are several reasons why maintaining the native language at home is beneficial.

First, a study by Genesee (2015), consistently show that children who continue developing their first language perform better in all aspects of learning. Strong first-language skills support second-language acquisition and overall academic success.

Second, whether parents should speak English at home depends on their proficiency. If their English skills are limited, the language input their child receives may be inaccurate or overly simplistic. This can restrict meaningful conversations about complex topics, such as school issues or cultural discussions, which are crucial for a child's cognitive and emotional development.

Most importantly, parents should prioritize their role as caregivers rather than language instructors. Their primary responsibility is to nurture and guide their children using the language in which they can communicate most effectively. Language can be learned at any age, but childhood is a critical period for emotional and social development, which should not be compromised for the sake of learning English. Of course, context matters. If a child is learning English in a non-English-speaking country and the parents are fluent, speaking English at home might not pose a risk to their native language development. In such cases, using English at home may even be beneficial.

Ultimately, parents should carefully consider their decision before switching to English at home. Unless there is a strong, justified reason, maintaining the native language is usually the best choice for a child's overall development.

The more English children are exposed to at school, the faster they'll learn

The fourth myth is the more children are immersed in English at school, the faster they will learn English. This myth is closely related to the previous one, which assumes that more exposure to a second language (L2) automatically leads to better learning outcomes. Following this logic, an all-English school environment should be the most effective approach. However, research suggests otherwise—more exposure does not always equate to better learning. In fact, strong evidence supports the importance of first language (L1) instruction in second language acquisition.

Observational evidence that English learners in dual-language immersion programs outperform English learners in English-only programs (Valentino & Reardon, 2015). Their research demonstrated that enrichment dual-language education helps close the academic achievement gap for both L2 learners and native-speaking students who started below grade level. Notably,

this model was the only one proven to fully eliminate the achievement gap, whereas remedial, English-only programs only led to partial improvements.

In their study, "remedial models" referred to full-English programs where students received separate ESL instruction instead of being taught in a bilingual setting. Contrary to common belief, these full-English models did not accelerate language learning. Instead, dual-language education proved to be a more effective and balanced approach for supporting both L1 and L2 development.

Multilingual children lag behind in academic and language skills

The fifth myth is multilingual children are usually lag behind peers in academic and language skills. Research shows that growing up in a high-quality multilingual environment provides cognitive, social, and economic benefits. Research from several fields suggests that there are many benefits associated with multilingualism, such as increased cognitive flexibility and working memory (Antoniou, 2019), creativity (Fürst & Grin, 2021), and increased academic performance (Rutgers et al., 2021).

Multilinguals seem to have increased metalinguistic awareness, and they show better developed metacognitive skills related to using language learning strategies more efficiently (Cenoz, 2020; Hofer and Jessner, 2019). In addition to cognitive effects and benefits for language learning, scholars emphasise the increased open-mindedness and intercultural understanding related advantages of multilingualism (Benzehaf, 2021); (Fürst & Grin 2021); (Tiurikova et. al, 2021).

Neuroscientific research further supports these findings, revealing that multilingual children have greater brain tissue density in regions associated with memory, language, and attention, particularly when exposed to a second language before the age of five (McCabe et al., 2013). Neuroimaging studies have also shown that diverse multilingual experience is associated with adaptations in brain regions such as the putamen and the cerebellum (Gullifer et al., 2021; Gullifer & Titone, 2021; Marin-Marin et al., 2022; Pliatsikas, 2020). In addition, Kim & Plotka (2016) suggest that multilingualism enhances the brain's ability to transfer information to the prefrontal cortex, the area responsible for executive functions. They argue that multilingualism essentially "trains the brain" to function more efficiently when handling complex and competing information.

By those previous studies show the myths and misconceptions of SLA in English language teaching, the researchers want to describe and debunk myths and misconceptions that are common among bilingual school teachers. In addition, this study will also recommend and show the implications of research on second language learning in children for classroom teachers so that teachers will no longer have unrealistic expectations and inaccurate understanding of the second language learning process and its relationship with the acquisition of other academic skills and knowledge.

METHOD

This study used a descriptive qualitative research design, which aimed to describe and interpret participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences regarding second language acquisition (SLA) without manipulating variables.

Descriptive qualitative research was especially suited for exploring social phenomena and understanding the meanings participants assigned to their experiences in natural settings (Sandelowski, 2000). This approach allowed for the use of everyday language in reporting findings, which was beneficial for presenting educational insights in a clear and accessible way

This study employed a descriptive qualitative design to examine participants' perceptions, beliefs, and experiences regarding second language acquisition (SLA) without manipulating variables. This approach was well-suited for exploring social phenomena and understanding the meanings participants attributed to their experiences in natural contexts (Sandelowski, 2000). The use of everyday language in reporting findings facilitated the clear and accessible presentation of educational insights.

To enhance the richness of the data, this study triangulated three primary data sources: (1) questionnaires, which identified general beliefs; (2) semi-structured interviews, which captured deeper insights and underlying reasoning; and (3) unstructured observations, which provided an understanding of actual classroom practices. This triangulation strengthened the credibility and validity of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2018).

The participants of this study were English teachers from bilingual schools in Semarang City. Although the entire population of 25 schools was targeted as the research sample to enhance the representativeness of the findings, only 17 teachers from 7 bilingual schools completed the questionnaire during the distribution phase.

The research was conducted over a six-month period, from July to December 2024. The research location encompassed key elements, including the physical setting, participants, and significant events or activities that took place (Santosa, 2017). These factors ensured that the research environment aligned with the study's objectives and provided relevant contextual data.

Therefore, all bilingual schools in Semarang City were used as research subjects. The research was conducted by distributing questionnaires to teachers. The research sites comprised seven international schools, namely Cambridge Based School, Gandhi Memorial Intercontinental School, SD Mondial, SMP Mondial, SMP Semesta 2, TK Maria Regina, and SD Maria Regina. To obtain valid data, the researchers employed triangulation of data collection techniques, namely questionnaires, interviews, and observations.

The questionnaires, using a Guttman scale, were administered to reveal the perceptions, concepts, and beliefs of the research subjects regarding aspects of Second Language Acquisition among bilingual teachers and school managers. This method allowed measurements to be made through a set of judgments with varying degrees of intensity, with which the respondents agreed or disagreed (Dimitrov, 2023)

The interviews were conducted to obtain information that complemented the data gathered through the questionnaires. The researchers employed a semi-structured interview format, which offered greater flexibility by allowing the interviewer to adapt the questions, phrasing, and recording methods as necessary. Unlike rigid interview formats, this approach enabled the interviewer

to take a more active role in guiding the conversation while maintaining focus on the key research topics. According to Mashuri et al. (2022), semi-structured interviews were perceived to have greater potential than other interview types, as they allowed researchers to obtain in-depth information and evidence from interviewees while remaining attentive to the study's primary focus.

Observation was needed to examine the teaching practices or management of bilingual programs and to supplement the information obtained through questionnaires and interviews. Unstructured observation was conducted without considering any structured characteristics in advance (Mazhar, 2021). This type of observation was often used in exploratory research, where the researcher sought to understand a new or unfamiliar situation. For example, observing children at play in a park and noting their interactions without a rigid framework was considered unstructured.

In the data analysis, the data were obtained from the quantitative approach and were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis to calculate the percentage of each piece of information obtained through the questionnaire. The data obtained from the qualitative approach were processed using an interactive model of analysis, which began with data reduction, followed by data display, data interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The quantitative–qualitative descriptive research approach employed in this study was expected to yield comprehensive conclusions and provide appropriate recommendations regarding second language acquisition in the implementation of bilingual schools.
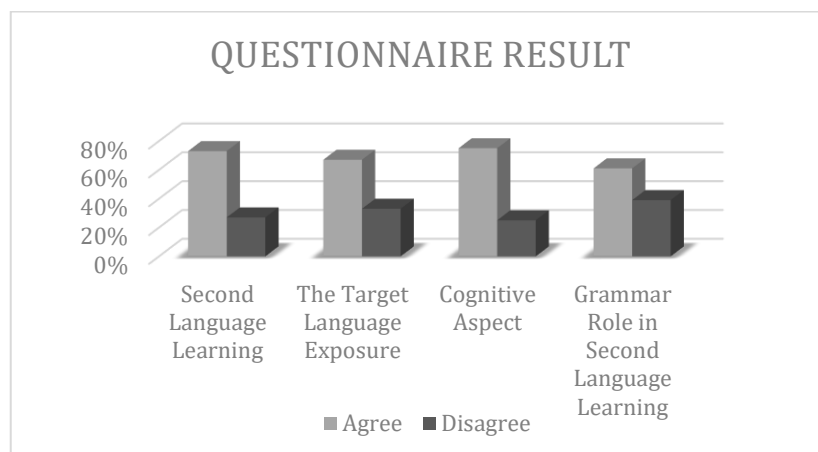
RESULTS

The purpose of this study is to debunk, describe and discuss myths or misconceptions that are common among bilingual school teachers and managers. In addition, this study will also recommend and show the implications of research on second language learning in children for classroom teachers so that teachers will no longer have unrealistic expectations and inaccurate understanding of the second language learning process and its relationship with the acquisition of other academic skills and knowledge.

The questionnaire was distributed to 17 teachers from 7 bilingual schools, namely Cambridge based School, Gandhi Memorial Intercontinental School (GMIS), Mondial Elementary School, Mondial Junior High School, SMP Semesta 2, Maria Regina Kindergarten School, Maria Regina Elementary School. The questionnaire distributed to respondents contained 20 statements with the division of 4 sub-themes, namely second language learning, exposure to target language, cognitive aspects, and the role of grammar in second language learning. The results of the questionnaire analysis are presented in the following chart:

Figure 1. *Questionnaire Result*

In the questionnaire, participants responded to 20 statements that were carefully organised into four key sub-themes: second language learning, exposure to the target language, cognitive aspects, and the role of grammar in second language acquisition. These sub-themes were developed based on recurring concepts identified in SLA literature and aimed to capture the nuanced beliefs and attitudes of teachers toward language acquisition in bilingual educational contexts. Each theme was designed to probe a specific dimension of the participants' understanding, enabling researchers to identify not only the prevalence of particular myths or misconceptions but also the patterns in how these beliefs are connected. The structured approach ensured that the questionnaire captured both surface-level opinions and deeper conceptual understandings related to SLA. This categorisation also helped facilitate a focused analysis and interpretation of the results in alignment with the objectives of the study.

In the sub-theme Second Language Learning, the respondents agreed as it was shown from the percentage 73%, that second language learning starts early because when children learn a second language it is more efficient and faster than adults, especially during critical periods when learning a second language can take place quickly and easily without the need for special learning. Accurate mastery of grammar and pronunciation can be achieved at an early age.

In the discussion of the target language exposure, the way to learn second language is not the same as learning a first language. The respondents who agreed with the statements are 67%. Meanwhile, learning a second language is only a matter of exposure to the target language that can provide input to children, namely deploying directly into the second language environment. This is an effective way to learn a second language.

The cognitive aspect as the third theme discussed about the mastery of the second language is to use it in learning in the classroom. The respondents who agreed were 75%. The cognitive aspect is also supported by a family environment that also used the second language in daily conversations at home. With regular practice, the second language fluency will be achieved quickly.

The role of grammar in second language learning is not so important. Those who agreed were 61%. However, grammar is still learned in the mastery of the second language because when the second language is mastered, the learner will not forget the second language and will be maintained forever. For the beginner, grammar teaching must avoid code switching or using the mother tongue because the existence of code switching will mess up the grammar of the second language being learned. Learners who were often corrected in the use of second language, the grammar will also be hampered by the mastery of the second language.

The researchers also interviewed respondents to get more accurate results related to myths or misconceptions about second language learning. (Silverman & Patterson, 2021) define semi-structured interviews as an exploratory approach that maintains a structured framework while allowing for adaptability. These interviews are typically guided by predefined topics, ensuring consistency while giving interviewers the flexibility to adjust questions based on the flow of conversation.

In addition, Al Balushi (2018), states that semi-structured interviews can be an effective tool in research because they help the researcher gain in-depth data of participants' perspectives and make sense of their lived stories and experiences as told by them. While interviewers should prepare key topics in advance, they must also remain flexible to explore emerging themes during the discussion. From the results of the interviews, the teachers (respondents) gave recommendations on the implementation of second language learning.

Effective second language learning in bilingual or international school settings requires a comprehensive and student-centred approach that integrates pedagogical, environmental, and cultural dimensions. Teachers are encouraged to adopt a wide range of innovative instructional strategies that go beyond traditional grammar-based teaching. Approaches such as project-based learning, cooperative learning, and communicative language teaching are particularly beneficial for increasing student engagement and facilitating contextual language understanding. By using varied methods, teachers can cater to different learning styles, foster collaboration among students, and create a more dynamic and interactive classroom atmosphere that supports meaningful language use.

Another key component is integrated curriculum development, where second language instruction is not treated as an isolated subject but is embedded across content areas. When students are exposed to the second language through subjects such as mathematics, science, and social studies, they begin to understand the language as a tool for learning rather than a separate academic hurdle. This cross-curricular approach not only promotes language proficiency but also enhances content mastery and critical thinking. Such integration reinforces the practical use of the language, deepens understanding, and reflects real-world applications, thus making learning more relevant and authentic for students.

Improving teacher quality is also fundamental to the success of bilingual education programs. Teachers in these settings must have strong language

proficiency and pedagogical competence to effectively deliver instruction in a second language. Unfortunately, many teachers in bilingual schools may not have received sufficient training in second language acquisition theories or methods. Continuous professional development, including workshops, certifications, and peer learning, can significantly enhance teachers' abilities to support their students. Equipping educators with up-to-date knowledge and teaching techniques ensures that they are capable of meeting diverse classroom challenges and facilitating successful language learning outcomes.

Creating a supportive school environment that promotes the use of the second language is equally important. This involves not only using the target language during instruction but also reinforcing it throughout the school through visual aids, signage, bulletin boards, announcements, and extracurricular activities. A language-rich environment helps normalise the second language and encourages students to use it in both academic and social contexts. This consistent exposure inside and outside the classroom fosters greater confidence and fluency among learners and gradually transforms the school into an immersive space that supports continuous language acquisition.

In addition, the use of information and communication technologies offers valuable opportunities to enhance second language learning. Learning applications, digital platforms, multimedia resources, and online communication tools can make lessons more engaging and interactive. These tools support independent learning and provide learners with access to authentic language input beyond the classroom setting. Technology also allows for differentiated instruction, enabling teachers to customise content and pace to suit individual learner needs. When used effectively, technology becomes a powerful complement to traditional classroom activities, helping bridge gaps and expand students' exposure to the target language.

Parental involvement should also be considered a vital component of language development. Schools should actively engage parents by providing them with guidance on how to support second language learning at home. This may include sharing effective language activities, reading materials, or strategies for fostering communication in the target language. Moreover, involving parents in school events and activities strengthens the home-school connection and reinforces the value of bilingual education. When parents and educators work together toward common goals, students are more likely to feel supported and motivated in their language learning journey.

Furthermore, effective second language learning requires regular and constructive evaluation. Assessments should not only focus on accuracy but also on communicative competence, comprehension, and progress over time. Providing students with timely and meaningful feedback helps them understand their strengths and areas for improvement. It also encourages them to become more self-aware and reflective in their learning. In turn, teachers can use assessment data to adjust instructional strategies and provide targeted support, ensuring that students continue to develop their language skills in a structured and purposeful manner.

Cultural immersion is another powerful element in the second language classroom. Organising events such as international days, art exhibitions,

language fairs, music performances, and culinary experiences allows students to explore the cultural dimensions of the language they are learning. These activities foster a deeper connection with the language by exposing learners to the values, traditions, and social contexts of its native speakers. Cultural engagement not only enhances language retention but also nurtures curiosity, open-mindedness, and appreciation for diversity.

Flexibility in learning design is essential to accommodate students' varied backgrounds, interests, and learning preferences. Teachers should adapt their materials and methods to meet curricular goals while also addressing students' individual needs. Differentiated instruction and learner-centred planning can make lessons more meaningful and accessible. When students feel that learning is relevant and connected to their own lives, they are more likely to be motivated and invested in the learning process. This flexibility also allows educators to experiment with new techniques and refine their approaches based on classroom realities.

Lastly, increasing multicultural awareness should be an intentional goal of second language instruction. Beyond language skills, students must learn to navigate and respect cultural differences. Teaching about multicultural values and promoting intercultural communication helps students develop global competence. They learn to see language not only as a means of expression but as a bridge between cultures. This awareness fosters empathy, tolerance, and cooperation, which are essential qualities in today's interconnected world. When students understand the social and cultural relevance of language, they are more likely to use it responsibly and meaningfully in real-life interactions.

DISCUSSION

In the findings have been discussed about the result of the questionnaire and the result of the interview. The division of four sub-themes reveals the myths and misconceptions of SLA of English teachers in International schools in Semarang City.

The first sub-theme is second language learning which discussed about the starting point to learn English is in the critical period which is from the baby until around 13th. Accurate pronunciation of SLA can only be achieved in early childhood because adults who learn SLA can never get a perfect pronunciation. This discussion is in relation to the study from Syafrizal et al. (2022) and Balasta (2023) which elaborated of the classification of myths into several parts, i.e. children learn languages more easily than adults. Based on the finding for the first discussion of the second language learning, there are 73% respondents who agreed with the statements. It expressed that bilingual teachers in International schools approved with the myth that children should start as early as possible in learning SLA. It was in contrast to the study of Dey et al. (2024a). They stated that how older learners might have a more comprehensive understanding of language function, aiding in the acquisition of intricate grammatical and syntactic structures. Adults typically have greater access to resources necessary for language learning, such as classes, textbooks, and online materials. However, they may face challenges with pronunciation and accents due to established linguistic habits in their first language. This study aligns with the findings of Dey et al. (2024b) who argue that

while children may eventually reach higher levels of language proficiency, adults can leverage cognitive maturity, metalinguistic awareness, and more developed learning strategies to acquire second languages effectively, particularly in the early stages of learning.

The next discussion is exposure to target language. There are 67% respondents who agreed with the statements, namely, putting children in the environment of second language is the effective way to learn second language. Second language learning will cause a decrease in first language mastery because vocabulary and grammar (lexico-grammar) of second language will interfere with vocabulary and grammar in the first language. The study by Norrman (2024) supported the statement. His article examined how the first language knowledge influenced the second language learning, leading to transfer effects that manifest as difficulties in understanding and producing speech sounds, words, and grammatical structures in the second language. It also discussed how the SLA can influence existing knowledge in the first language, indicating a bidirectional interference between the two languages. It was in contrary to Marini et al. (2019) research. They compared 4- to 5-year-old sequential bilinguals with monolinguals on tasks assessing phonological short-term and working memory, as well as linguistic performance in L1. Bilinguals outperformed monolinguals on memory tasks and performed similarly on measures assessing articulatory skills, phonological abilities, naming, and grammatical processing in L1. These findings suggest that early L2 acquisition does not necessarily interfere with L1 development and may even confer cognitive advantages.

The next component is cognitive aspects. Bilingualism in early childhood causes confusion or cognitive deficits in language learners. The best way to teach second language mastery is to use the language as a medium of instruction in the classroom. The respondents showed the agreement for 75%. In relation to this component, there are several studies analyzed this. Guiberson (2013) expressed that behaviors such as code-mixing—where bilingual children mix words from different languages in the same sentence—are often misunderstood as signs of confusion. However, this is a normal part of bilingual development and reflects children's resourcefulness in communication. It contradicted to the study of Barac et al. (2014) discussed that elaborated several cognitive advantages associated with bilingualism, such as enhanced phonological awareness, improved excecutive functions, and positive impact on working memory. The empirical evidence does not support the claim that eary bilingualism causes confusion or cognitive deficits. On the contrary, bilingualism is associated with several cognitive benefits that can positively influence a child's development.

The last discussion discussed the role of grammar in SLA. The 61% respondents agreed with the statement learning the rules or patterns of Second Language grammar is enough for proficiency in using second language. Rambe (2017) discussed that there has been a shift in the approach to language teaching from mastering grammar to a communicative-based approach. He suggests moving away from structural practice toward creating situations where language functions as a bearer of messages, thereby enhancing communicative competence. It suggested that while grammatical knowledge is foundational,

achieving true proficiency in a second language requires the integration of communicative and pragmatic competencies. This holistic approach enables learners to use the language effectively and appropriately across diverse situations.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to examine the myths and misconceptions about second language acquisition (SLA) held by English teachers in international schools in Semarang and to provide practical recommendations for improving second language teaching practices. The investigation was structured around four key themes: second language learning, exposure to the target language, cognitive aspects, and the role of grammar in SLA.

The findings reveal that a significant number of teachers still believe in widely circulated myths. First, many respondents supported the belief that young children learn languages more easily than adults. While early exposure was seen as beneficial for pronunciation and intuitive learning, this view often overlooks the advantages adults have, such as cognitive maturity and metalinguistic awareness. Second, there was a strong belief that immersion in an English-speaking environment alone is sufficient for SLA. However, this perception underestimates the need for structured language instruction and support for both first and second language development.

Third, in terms of cognitive development, most teachers agreed that using English consistently as the medium of instruction can promote fluency. Nonetheless, some teachers also believed that home exposure to English is essential, even when parental proficiency is limited—a belief that may not support long-term language development. Lastly, although grammar was considered less important by some respondents, research highlights that it remains a vital foundation for communicative competence when integrated meaningfully into instruction.

In comparing these beliefs with established SLA research, it becomes clear that gaps persist between theory and classroom understanding. The persistence of these myths may stem from limited exposure to recent linguistic research, insufficient teacher training in SLA theory, and a reliance on anecdotal teaching experiences. Therefore, it is essential to address these gaps through targeted professional development, curriculum reform, and informed school policies.

To improve second language learning in international school contexts, several recommendations emerge from this study. These include the use of varied and innovative teaching methods, integration of second language instruction across subjects, continuous teacher training, and the creation of a language-rich school environment. Furthermore, involving parents, using technology, implementing regular evaluation and feedback, and promoting cultural awareness and flexibility in instruction are all crucial in building effective bilingual programs.

In conclusion, the study successfully identified common myths and misconceptions among teachers and addressed the core research questions. It

has demonstrated that while teachers value early exposure and immersive environments, their understanding of SLA remains partially shaped by outdated beliefs. Emphasizing the importance of evidence-based practices, culturally responsive pedagogy, and sustained teacher development is key to improving language instruction and student outcomes in bilingual education settings.

AUTHOR STATEMENTS

Dr. Jafar Sodiq, M.Pd. was responsible for determining the substance of the article, ensuring data completeness, and compiling the narrative for the research and discussion results. **Theresia Cicik Sophia B., S.S., M.Pd**. was in charge of writing the article according to the template, organizing the references, and ensuring compliance with formatting standards. **Dra. Maria Yosephin Widarti L., M.Pd**. handled the proofreading process by reviewing grammar, diction, and overall language completeness to enhance the clarity and quality of the manuscript.

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