

Associations between bilingualism and executive function in children with autism spectrum disorder

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Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is associated with marked heterogeneity in executive function (EF) abilities. The concept of 'bilingual advantage' suggests individuals fluent in two languages develop cognitive advantages, particularly within the EF domain. Current research has produced mixed results with some studies reporting a bilingual advantage and others failing to replicate. Bilingualism in children with ASD is understudied, as clinical practitioners often advise against teaching two languages to these children. However, recent research suggests no negative effects of bilingualism in children with ASD. In fact, emerging studies suggest that bilingualism may ameliorate EF difficulties in children with ASD. Here, we examined the relationship between bilingualism and EF abilities in 63 typically developing (TD) children and 53 children with ASD. A 2 language (Bilingual vs Monolingual) x 2 diagnosis (ASD vs TD) ANOVA was conducted on Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (BRIEF) scores and individual scales of inhibition, emotional control, and shifting. We find no bilingual advantage in TD children but demonstrate a protective effect whereby bilingual children with ASD experience less EF difficulties than monolingual children with ASD.