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## **Comparación de la autoeficacia de los estudiantes bilingües hacia las habilidades de habla turca con respecto al estatus socioeconómico\***


### **Comparison of bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills with respect to socio-economic status\***

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#### **Abstract**

Equity in education refers to the accessibility of educational opportunities by the students from disadvantaged groups in the society as well as the other groups. Socio-economic status is evidently one of the most dominant factors defining advantaged and disadvantaged social groups. On the other hand, bilingualism may either be an educational advantage or a disadvantage in different conditions. This study is a causal-comparative survey aiming to investigate the relationship between bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills and the socio-economic status of their families. The study was conducted on 1763 bilingual students studying in middle schools located in several districts in Izmir where bilingual people commonly live. Participants' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills was measured by Bilingual Students' Self-efficacy toward Turkish Speaking Skills Scale including 10 Likert-type items. Participants' socioeconomic status was measured by a series of items about their parents' educational and occupational status and family income. Data were analyzed by using Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA and the findings showed that there are significant differences in bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills between low and high socioeconomic status and between low and medium socioeconomic status.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, self-efficacy, speaking skill, socioeconomics, Turkish language, Turkey

#### **Resumen**

La equidad en la educación se refiere a la accesibilidad a las oportunidades educativas por parte

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de los estudiantes de los grupos desfavorecidos de la sociedad, así como de los otros grupos. El estatus socioeconómico es evidentemente uno de los factores más dominantes que definen a los grupos sociales favorecidos y desfavorecidos. Por otro lado, el bilingüismo puede ser una ventaja educativa o una desventaja en diferentes condiciones. Este estudio es una encuesta causal-comparativa que tiene como objetivo investigar la relación entre la autoeficacia de los estudiantes bilingües hacia las habilidades de habla turca y el estatus socioeconómico de sus familias. El estudio se llevó a cabo en 1763 estudiantes bilingües que estudian en escuelas intermedias ubicadas en varios distritos de Izmir, donde comúnmente viven personas bilingües. La autoeficacia de los participantes hacia las habilidades de habla turca se midió mediante la Autoeficacia de los estudiantes bilingües hacia la Escala de habilidades de habla turca que incluye 10 ítems de tipo Likert. El estado socioeconómico de los participantes se midió mediante una serie de elementos sobre el estado educativo y ocupacional de sus padres y los ingresos familiares. Los datos se analizaron mediante el ANOVA de Kruskal-Wallis y los hallazgos mostraron que existen diferencias significativas en la autoeficacia de los estudiantes bilingües hacia las habilidades de habla turca entre el nivel socioeconómico bajo y alto y entre el nivel socioeconómico bajo y medio.

Palabras clave: bilingüismo, autoeficacia, habilidad para hablar, socioeconomía, lengua turca, Turquía

### **Introduction**

Language is a basic intellectual instrument for comprehending the social environment and expressing ideas and thoughts, which is mostly developed during infancy and childhood. Four basic language skills, which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, have an undeniable effect on success in school. A child having well-developed language skills in early childhood will expectedly have a high readiness for learning activities in school. Therefore, developing language skills is crucial for achieving academic success in school. There are several situations influencing language skills, such as bilingualism, which is simply defined as the acquisition of two or more languages at the same time or consecutively (Romaine, 2009). In different cases, bilingualism may have a positive or negative contribution to academic achievement. In either case, bilingual students may have specific needs in the teaching/learning process.

Among the four language skills, speaking may be the most affected by bilingualism because it consists of psychomotor skills as well as cognitive skills (Romaine, 2009). Speaking two languages fluently is not an easy task even for a child in a multicultural environment. In some cases, bilingual individuals may not have equal proficiency in two languages. Having difficulties in speaking the language of formal education has expectedly negative effects on participation in the school activities and consequently on school success.

Besides language skills, academic achievement in school is affected by several other cognitive and affective factors. One of the most important affective factors influencing

academic achievement is self-efficacy, which is defined as one's belief about him/herself of accomplishing any behaviors (Bandura, 1977). In literature, it is evident that there is a high correlation between self-efficacy and academic achievement. In this context, language skills and self-efficacy are both essential components of success in school.

In all student and school-related factors affecting success, one of the most powerful variables explaining academic achievement is socio-economic status. Being a member of a family having many educational resources and high income have a great contribution to the success in school. Large scale international educational survey studies report a strong relationship between socio-economic status and academic achievement (OECD, 2016). Therefore, in the context of this rationale describing some crucial factors affecting success in school, this study aims to investigate bilingual middle school students' self-efficacy toward speaking skills with respect to socio-economic status.

### ***Bilingualism***

The word bilingual is formed by adding Latin prefix “bi” which means “two” and “lingual” meaning “having language”. Concerning this structure, bilingual simply is an adjective describing the situation of an individual who has two languages. In literature, bilingualism has several definitions emphasizing different aspects of it. For instance, bilingualism is the status that a person can control two languages natively (Bloomfield, 1933). According to Haugen (1953), bilingualism is the situation where an individual can produce meaningful utterances in his/her second language as well. Differently, bilingualism is the situation in which a person can comprehend a second language without producing meaningful utterances (Diebold, 1964). As seen in these definitions, a bilingual person's proficiency level may be different in two languages.

In educational settings, bilingual students' proficiency level in the formal language of education is very crucial for school success and other school-related variables such as attitude and self-efficacy. In other words, having high proficiency in language skills is a definite advantage for getting high achievement in school courses (Kastner & Hildman, 2001). However, failure of a bilingual student in school is not necessarily because of low proficiency in the formal language of education. In some countries, bilingual students, who are good at both mother and formal languages equivalently, may be the members of subgroups in the society facing socio-economic issues (Calvo & Bialystok, 2014). In such cases, students' low success in school may have some other reasons, such as the lack of home educational resources and family support. Therefore, educational problems of bilingual students should be investigated concerning not only their language proficiency levels but also their socio-economic status.

### ***Speaking skill***

Speaking skill that is one of four basic language skills is a well-defined concept in literature. According to Demirel (1999), speaking skill is a basic language skill that provides transmission of thoughts, emotions, and knowledge through several meaningful sounds. Similarly, Adalı (2003) identifies that speaking skill is used to transmit messages formed by mental and intellectual effort. In addition, Mercan (2007) defines speaking skills as a psychomotor skill including cognitive and affective input behaviors for transmitting emotions, thoughts, and requests with some voices to the receiver. According to Güneş (2014), speaking skill is language skill to transmit knowledge constructed in mind with several mental processes.

Speaking is one of the most common channels for communication in the schools. In other words, social life in the schools and teaching/learning activities in the classrooms are mostly based on speaking (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Therefore, assessing and developing students' speaking skills are crucial for success in the school. Besides, language teachers have an important role in enhancing students' speaking skills for professional life.

### ***Self-efficacy***

Self-efficacy is one of the key concepts of social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura. According to this theory, individuals learn by the help of the interaction with their social environment as well as the cognitive skills that they have. Self-efficacy is defined as one's belief that he/she has the ability to accomplish a task (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy has four sources, namely; mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and emotional-psychological state. As the most powerful source of self-efficacy, mastery experiences are individuals' direct experiences about the task. On the other hand, vicarious experiences are one's observations of other people in the social environment accomplishing the task. Verbal persuasion is the encouragement of influential people such as parents and teachers. As the last source of self-efficacy, the emotional-psychological state (e. g. depression and stress) expectedly have positive or negative effects on self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy, which is a general psychological construct, may also be defined and measured for specific tasks (Smith, Kass, Rotunda, & Schneider, 2006), such as science self-efficacy, math self-efficacy, digital self-efficacy, or self-efficacy toward language skills. In this study, bilingual students' self-efficacy toward speaking skills was focused for the investigation as a dependent variable.

### ***Socio-economic status***

Socio-economic status (SES) is one of the most common and crucial constructs in social sciences generally quantified by family income, parental education level, and occupational status (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002; Marks, 2011). Similarly, socio-economic status is defined as a variable based on several indicators, such as income, occupation, and education level (Thompson & Hickey, 2008). In educational research, socio-economic status is found to be one of the most powerful variables explaining school success (White, 1982). Besides, family socio-economic status has a crucial impact on an individual's language skills (Keklik, 2009; Uslu, 2017; Geoffroy et al., 2007; Pan et al., 2017).

### **Methodology**

As a part of an extensive Ph. D. research, this study questions the differences of seventh-grade bilingual students' self-efficacy toward speaking skills with respect to their socio-economic status by using correlational research model and causal-comparative research method. In other words, this study is a causal-comparative survey study investigating the relationship between self-efficacy toward speaking skill and socio-economic status. In this study, self-efficacy toward speaking skill was measured by a Likert type scale constructed by the researcher within a Ph. D. research. On the other hand, socio-economic status was measured by using several demographic items. These instruments were implemented to a large group of bilingual students who study at middle school. Data collected from the sample were analyzed by using appropriate quantitative analyses.

### ***Sampling***

The sample of this study, that is selected by using purposive sampling method, is formed by 1763 bilingual seventh-grade students studying at 20 middle schools located in the districts Cigli, Menemen, Bayrakli, Konak, Karabaglar, and Buca where bilingual families live prevalently in Izmir. The reason why the purposive sampling was performed while selecting the sample is that bilingual students are the members of a specific group that should be picked from all students. The districts and the schools were carefully selected through the review of the formal documents and interviews with the school principals. The sample includes 875 female and 888 male students. This sample is considered to represent the population of all seventh-grade bilingual students in the selected districts.

### ***Instruments***

Seventh-grade bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills (BSTS), which is the dependent variable of this study, was measured by Bilingual Students' Self-efficacy toward the Turkish Speaking Skills Scale including 10 Likert-type items. The final version of

this scale was constructed by the researcher in the scope of an extensive Ph. D. research through two pilot implementations with the help of expert supervision. To guarantee the validity and reliability of this instrument, data collected in the pilot studies were used to detect and fix the problematic items. The items in the final version of the scale are listed below.

1. I express my emotions by speaking in Turkish lessons.
2. I pronounce the words correctly in Turkish lessons.
3. I express my memories by speaking in Turkish lessons.
4. I speak with correct intonation in Turkish lessons.
5. I express my thoughts by speaking in Turkish lessons.
6. I speak convincingly in any topics in Turkish lessons.
7. I speak with correct emphasis in Turkish lessons.
8. I participate the discussion activities in Turkish lessons.
9. I speak with daily life examples in Turkish lessons.
10. I speak fluently in Turkish lessons.

Students' socioeconomic status (SES), which is the independent variable of the study, was measured by a series of items in the personal information form. The items measuring students' SES asked their parents' educational and occupational status and family income. Data from these three items in the personal information form were statistically combined to construct a latent variable of SES.

### ***Data collection procedures***

Data collection includes two pilot implementations and the main implementation. Pilot implementations were performed to construct the final version of Bilingual Students' Self-efficacy toward Turkish Speaking Skills Scale. Data gathered in the pilot implementations were used to detect problematic items in the initial item pool of the scale. Based on data from the pilot studies, some of the problematic items were removed and some of them were fixed. In the main implementation, ten items in the final version of Bilingual Students' Self-efficacy toward the Turkish Speaking Skills Scale was implemented to 1763 seventh grade bilingual students studying at 20 middle schools located in several districts in Izmir.

### ***Variables***

The dependent variable of this study is bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills (BSTS), which is measured and calculated through the items in Bilingual

Students' Self-efficacy toward Turkish Speaking Skills Scale. BSTS is defined as a continuous variable in the interval scale of measurement. On the other hand, the independent variable of the study is socio-economic status (SES), which is measured through the items in the personal information form, such as parents' education level and family income. SES is a categorical variable with three hierarchical categories (low, medium, and high) in the ordinal scale of measurement.

### *Analysis*

This is a correlational survey study in which Bilingual Students' Self-efficacy toward the Turkish Speaking Skills Scale and a personal information form were implemented to a large group of the bilingual middle school students to quantitative data. In addition to descriptive statistics, some inferential statistical analyses were performed in the data including some parametric assumption verification tests. Firstly, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were performed to check the shape of the distribution of the data. Due to the violation of the assumption of normal distribution, Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA was performed to compare bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills among socioeconomic status groups. SPSS 21 statistical software package was used to perform these statistical analyses.

## **Results**

It was mentioned above that this study is a correlational survey aiming to investigate the relationship between bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills (BSTS) and their socio-economic status (SES) through the comparison among the levels of socioeconomic status in the sample.

### *Descriptive Statistics*

Before reporting the findings of inferential analysis comparing self-efficacy means between the socio-economic status groups, statistics describing the situation in the sample concerning self-efficacy scores of different groups of socio-economic status. Table 1 demonstrates self-efficacy means of the groups of socioeconomic status in the sample.

**Table 1**  
*Descriptive statistics*

SES Level	N	BSTS Mean (out of 50)
Low	861	36.969
Medium	839	37.816
High	63	39.746
Total	1763	37.471

As seen in the table above, most of the students in the sample are the members of the groups having low and medium socioeconomic status. Besides, students’ self-efficacy means seem to increase while the level of socio-economic status increases. To check whether the differences of self-efficacy between the groups of socio-economic status are statistically meaningful, further inferential analyses are needed.

***Inferential statistics***

To perform a parametric inferential analysis to compare bilingual students’ self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills (BSTS) among the groups having different levels of socioeconomic status (SES), the shape of the self-efficacy distribution in the sample was checked first to detect a possible violation of the assumption of normal distribution. Table 2 shows the findings of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests.

**Table 2**  
*The shape of self-efficacy distribution in the sample*

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	p	Statistic	df	p
BSTS	.062	17 63	<.001	.986	17 63	<.001

According to the findings of Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests, the shape of the self-efficacy distribution was found non-normal, and therefore a Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA was performed to compare bilingual students’ self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills (BSTS) among SES groups. Table 3 demonstrates the findings of Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA.



**Table 3**  
*The findings of Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA*

	$\chi^2$	df	P	Adj. R <sup>2</sup>
SES-BSTS	11.85	2	.003	.007

As seen in Table 3, the findings of Kruskal-Wallis ANOVA indicated that the equality of bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills from three different SES groups is rejected. In other words, there is a significant BSTS difference between at least two SES groups. A posthoc analysis was performed to determine among which SES groups have significant BSTS differences by using a series of Mann-Whitney U tests. In these pairwise comparisons, alpha value is divided by three and set to .017 to avoid type-1 error. Table 4 demonstrates the findings of posthoc comparisons.

**Table 4**  
*Post-hoc comparisons*

SES Levels	U	p
Low-Medium	336845	.016
Low-High	21211	.004
Medium-High	22624	.056

As seen in Table 4, a significant BSTS difference is observed between low and medium SES groups and low and high SES groups. On the other hand, it seems that there is not a significant BSTS difference between medium and high SES groups.

## Discussion

While describing social classes in society, individuals' race, ethnic origin, or language are not considered as central factors (Slavin, 2017), instead, their socio-economic status is more determinant to predict their quality of life. Maslow (1943) stated that as a bio-psycho-social

species human has a series of needs in a hierarchy and higher-level needs (e.g., self-respect, achievement and creativity) cannot be accomplished until lower-level needs (e.g., food, shelter, health and security) are supplied. In this context, it can be stated that individuals from the families with lower socio-economic status are more likely to be disadvantageous in school life due to the lack of basic needs. Socio-economic status is often measured based on family income, parental education level, and occupational status (Bradley & Corwyn, 2002). Socio-economic status is one of the most powerful variables affecting individuals' language skills, especially their speaking skills (Keklik, 2009; Uslu, 2017).

In this study, it was found that there is a significant difference in bilingual students' self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills among the groups having different socio-economic status. This difference exists especially between low SES and high SES groups, and between low SES and medium SES groups. These findings demonstrate a close relationship between these two variables and show a parallelism with the idea in the literature that the language skill which is the most influenced by SES is speaking skill among the others (Uslu, 2017). In literature, a lack of studies investigating specifically on bilingual students' speaking self efficacy and socioeconomic status. However, some studies that relate general academic self-efficacy and socioeconomic status are partially comparable to the present study. Unlike present study, Pomerantz (2016) found that bilingual undergraduate students have higher academic self efficacy than monolingual ones. In addition, Hewitt (2008) found that there is no significant difference in academic self efficacy between Hispanic bilingual English Language Learning (ELL) students and monolingual ELL students who have different socioeconomic status.

After reviewing some studies in literature with relatable findings, possible reasons of findings of the present study may be speculated with the support of literature. One of the possible reasons why the bilingual students from low SES families have smaller self-efficacy toward speaking skills is that these families could not provide an appropriate atmosphere to support the development of students' language skills at home. Similarly, families with low SES could not afford a good preschool education for their children, which may be another reason why the bilingual students from these families have smaller self-efficacy toward speaking skills (Slavin, 2017). Because, a supportive home environment and a good preschool education in early childhood, which is evidently the most important period for language development, would have positive effects on students' self-efficacy toward their language skills expectedly.

Another reason why the bilingual students from low SES families have smaller self-efficacy toward speaking skills than the other two SES groups may be that school administrators and teachers have low expectations from the students who are the members of the families having low SES (Becker & Luthar, 2002; Borman & Overman, 2004). This low expectation may prevent

teachers from supporting their bilingual students' language skills, and because of teachers' low expectations and lack of support, these students may feel frustration and learned helplessness about their language skills (Hauser-Cram, Şirin & Stipek, 2003).

Possible reasons of the findings in this study were discussed above. In this regard, some suggestions about possible actions that may be useful to deal with bilingual students' language skills, and the recommendations for other researchers studying bilingualism are described in the following section. Therefore, to solve any problems in the educational system, first, they should be detected properly and described in detail. Therefore, the Ministry of National Education may measure students' language skills on a national scale periodically to detect and describe the problems related to the language skills of bilingual students from low SES families.

Early childhood education provides a great opportunity to develop children's language skills and their readiness for school. To support bilingual children's language skills and their self-efficacy toward language skills, preschool attendance of bilingual students from low SES families may be increased.

Bilingual students from low SES families need extra academic support in Turkish lessons. Therefore, Turkish education at all levels may be redesigned by curriculum reforms and in-service teacher training to support the language skills of bilingual students from low SES families. Besides, the quality of teaching-learning materials for Turkish courses, such as textbooks and audio-visuals, may be increased. Family support is extremely important for the language development of children, especially from disadvantaged groups in the society. Therefore, the Ministry of National Education may organize training programs for parents from disadvantaged groups to enhance parents' involvement in the educational system.

Equity of educational resources for language development (eg. computers, software, and audio-visuals) among all of the schools located throughout the country is profoundly crucial for the quality of language education provided for the students from disadvantaged groups in the society. Thus, the equity of educational resources for Turkish courses among all of the schools may be guaranteed by the Ministry of National Education.

Self-efficacy is a kind of self-belief providing indirect information to interpret the real success that is sometimes difficult to measure especially when the success is a performance such as speaking skill. Measuring the speaking skills of hundreds of students is a quite difficult research task. Therefore, there are a very limited number of studies focusing on bilingual students' speaking skills in literature. Researchers may conduct studies investigating the factors affecting bilingual students' speaking skills on relatively small samples. The researchers may also design and develop research-based learning activities that may be useful for supporting bilingual students' speaking skills and their self-efficacy toward this skill.

In addition to suggestions for policy makers and researchers, several limitations may be reported for this study. At first, self efficacy scale, which is used in this study as the main data collection instrument, is originally in Turkish, therefore it is not appropriate to use in English without an adaptation procedure. In addition, all participants are bilingual students who are resident in Izmir province that is a city faced with a heavy internal and external migration, therefore the results of this study can not be generalized to the other cities in Turkey. Besides, results of this study are yielded from nonparametric tests due to the non-normal shape of data distribution, therefore statistical power of the results of this study is limited.

### Conclusion

As stated earlier, in this study, it was found that bilingual students from low SES families have significantly the smallest self-efficacy toward Turkish speaking skills among the other SES groups. This finding indicates some serious equity problems in Turkish education system. Some of the possible reasons for the self-efficacy differences among different SES groups may be the lack of home resources and atmosphere to support language skills, low preschool attendance, and teachers' low expectations of success from bilingual students.

Focusing on these possible reasons may be a good starting point to solve the equity problems in Turkish education system faced by bilingual students and the other disadvantageous groups. The problems of education system directly related to economic handicaps of a country is difficult to solve in a short period of time, however increasing preschool attendance of bilingual students and teachers' awareness of bilingualism seem to be accomplishable and helpful for equity problems in education system.

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