

UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCE
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT



Universidad de El Salvador
Hacia la libertad por la cultura

GRADUATION WORK

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES THAT KIDS HAVE AT THE TIME THEY ARE
LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE TO BECOME BILINGUAL

TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF
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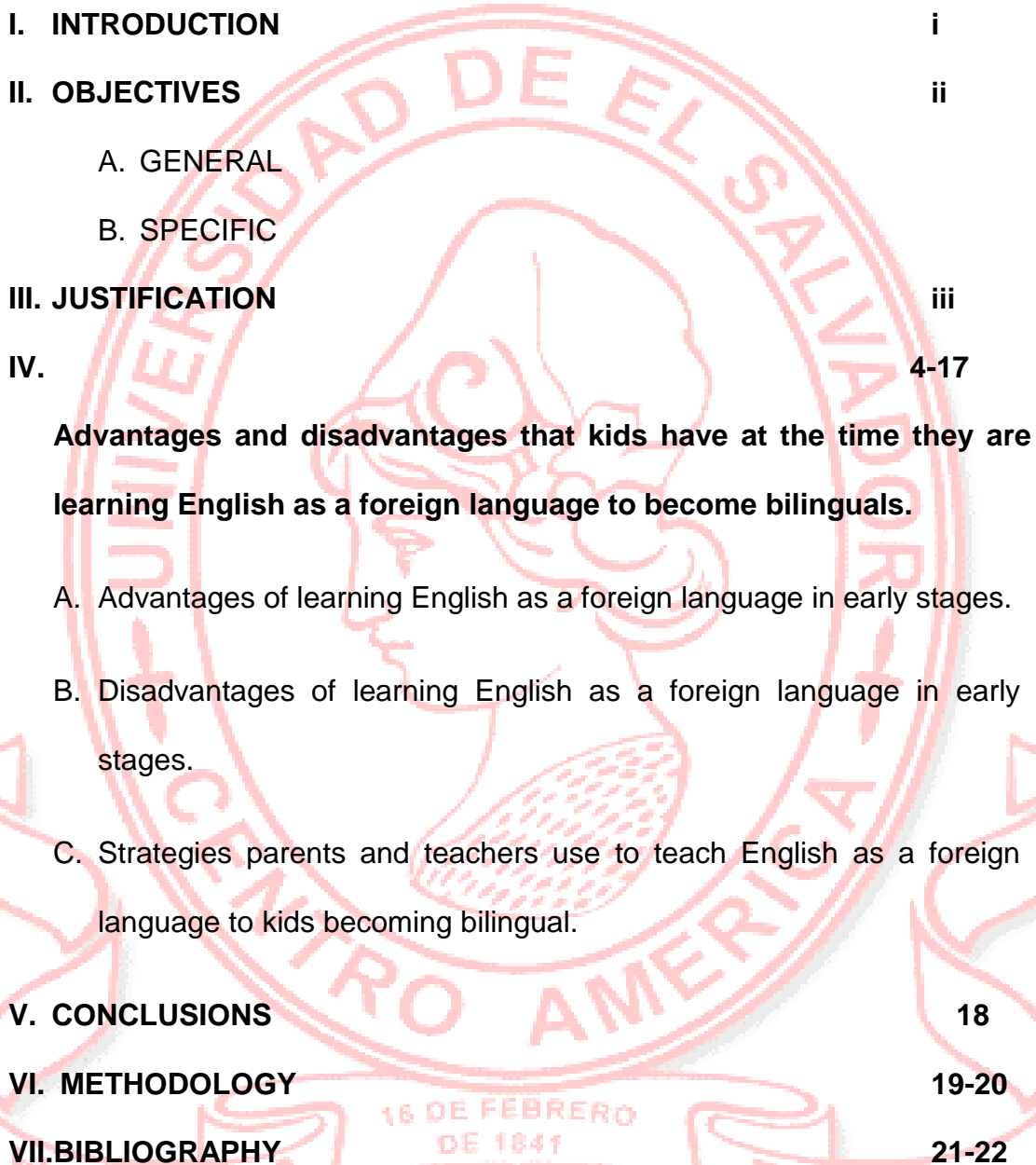
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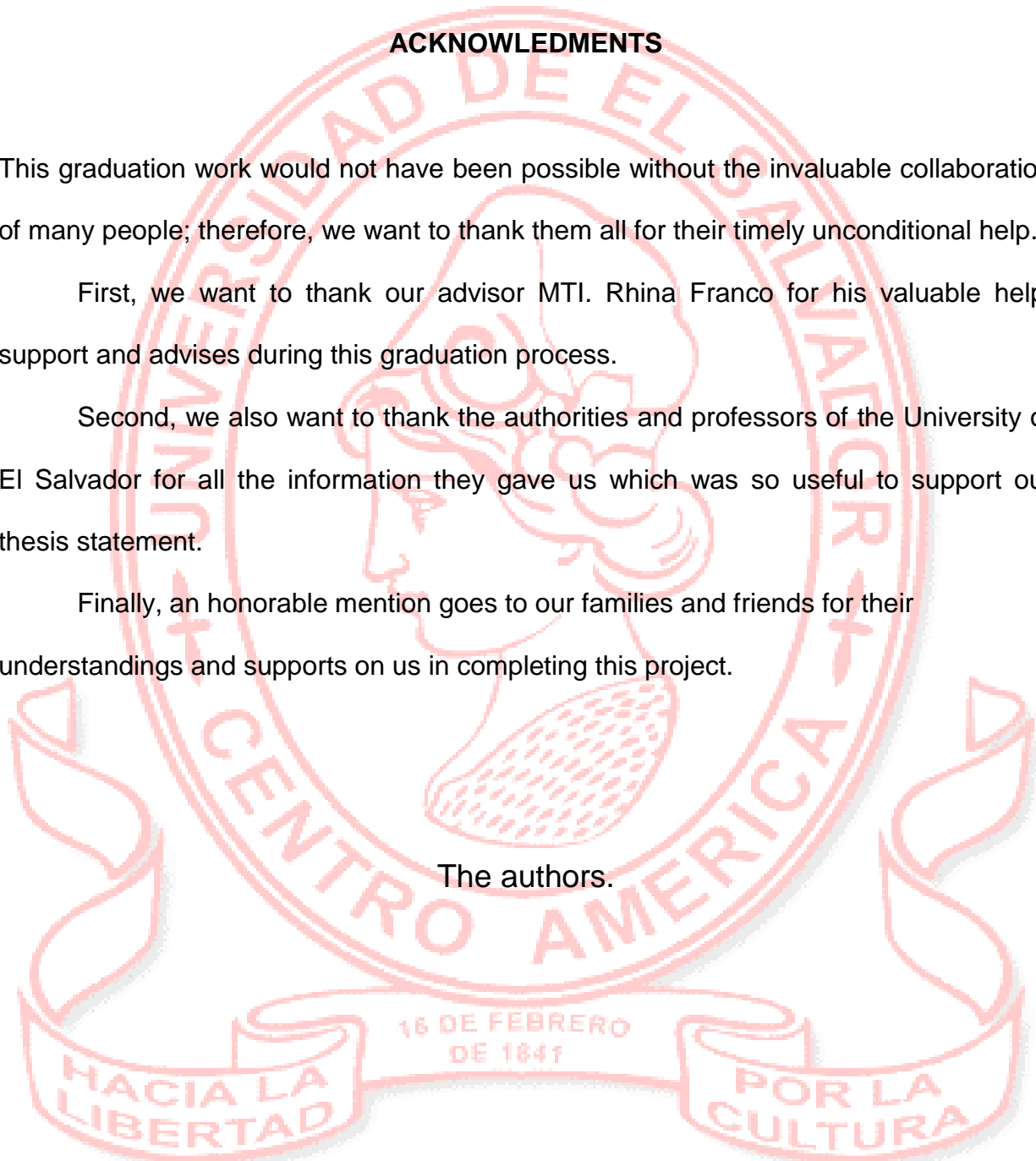
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I dedicate this essay

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the process of becoming a bilingual individual many situations take place that can help or cause difficulties, these situations will affect the successful achievement of the goals. Considering this, people involved in the teaching-learning process must be aware of the variety of factors (advantages-disadvantages) that influence students' behavior and performance within the language.

To explain these factors it was important to remark what is the definition of some terms like bilingualism, mother tongue, second language, cultural understandings, among other areas related with the process of learning a foreign language. Besides that, it was fundamental to cite how these factors work or function on children.

The paper contextualizes real situations that occur to children at the moment of learning a foreign language in order to create a picture on reader's mind of the aspects that affect children either positively or negatively on their own learning process. Moreover, it was important to define both of the terms learning and acquisition in order to make a distinction between them and do not get confuse in how and when is the moment they occur.

Aspects such as bilingualism, interpersonal relationships, cultural understanding, self-esteem, self-confidence, economical aspects, socio-cognitive and socio-emotional development, personality, behavior, and interpersonal relationships among others were considered and analyzed with regard to discriminate advantages and disadvantages. Also, to see if both advantages and disadvantages are meaningful on children's foreign language learning process were consulted within the essay.

At the end, Conclusions on these facts were given towards to expand knowledge on people involved in the topic to improve processes in learning English as a second or foreign language particularly on children becoming bilinguals.

Finally, this paper contains general and specific objectives that are the ones which guide the whole project. Besides, a justification is provided in order to present the

relevance of the topic. It also contains an argumentative essay about advantages and disadvantages that kids have at the time they are learning English as a foreign language to become bilinguals. The methodology was designed in six steps that help to reach the complete purpose of the paper, starting from the selection of the topic and ending with the final paper. Finally, the bibliography used is included.

II. OBJECTIVES

General objectives:

- To find out advantages and disadvantages that bilingual kids have at the time they are learning English as a foreign language.
- To describe strategies parents and teachers use to teach a foreign language to children.

Specific objectives:

- To find out if the disadvantages are meaningful at the time kids are learning English as a foreign language to become bilinguals.
- To list the advantages and disadvantages that kids have at the time of learning English as a foreign language.

III. JUSTIFICATION

This bibliographical investigation about problems and benefits kids have at the time they are learning English as a foreign language to become bilinguals has been considered because in El Salvador just few people have investigated about this important issue within the process of acquiring a foreign language. Considering that bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages fluently, it becomes in one of the strongest tools to grow in areas such as cultural, personal, professional, and academic contexts in order to succeed in whichever human activity within this globalize world.

As everybody knows kids are the future of the nations and learning a second or foreign language in early stages provides them some advantages like strengthen thinking, better interpersonal relationships, opens cultural spaces, increases linguistic abilities and cognitive flexibility among others. That is why, it is relevant to diagnose and describe these aspects (verbal abilities, cognition, cultural issues, career opportunities, general reasoning, and interpersonal relationships among others) in order to bring and analyze advantages that can be useful at the moment of acquiring a foreign language and also disadvantages that can be avoided through this analysis in order to improve the natural process of acquiring a new language.

This topic is an area of relevant importance for Psychologists, English teachers, neurologists, linguists, school directors and worldwide governments, because the acquisition of a second or foreign language through teaching in schools has been found to be an immense failure in all countries. The reason is that the second language is being considered as a subject like others, ignoring the natural process of acquisition of language. (Scovel T, 1999).

Concerning the myth that young children are the best foreign or second language learners, specialists in the area claim that adolescents and adults are in many ways better at learning a new language than children, except in the area of pronunciation. (Lic. Susana Judith de Quintanilla, 2009); on the other hand, there are some

psychologists that say that the best age to learn a new language is around zero to seven years old because they are able to easily absorb the information. So, children are the bases to research the advantages and disadvantages on this paper. At the end, readers will know about some problems and benefits (advantages and disadvantages) their kids handle with through the process of becoming bilingual in early stages.

IV. Advantages and disadvantages that kids have at the time they are learning English as a foreign language to become bilinguals.

Nowadays, in this globalized world, it is important for every individual to learn and to communicate in different languages to succeed within any society. That is why people from every country including El Salvador are interested in learning a second or foreign language. Many people everywhere use languages as a resource to educate children in their early years because there are some advantages when learning to speak two or more different languages when still being a child. Learning a second or foreign language as a child can have, as has been stated before, many advantages, but also it can present some disadvantages. For instance, the child might start to speak 3 - 6 months later than children who do not if they start learning the language since they are born; the child might also mix languages temporarily; at school age the child will face an added academic load such as: reading and writing which will require additional effort from the parents who at some point should learn the language, too.

The ability to speak in two different languages is known as bilingualism. According to Rampton, B. (1990) "Bilingual describes a learner who uses two or more languages to communicate. There are various interpretations with regard to attitude, proficiency and use but, Bilingualism itself is the ability to use two languages". It means that bilingualism is the ability to understand and express two languages fluently (in this case Spanish and English), no matter if the speaker manages the four macro skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. According to Uriel Weinreich (1968), one of the "fathers" of bilingual studies and

a bilingual himself, in his renowned book *Languages in Contact* he writes "The practice of alternately using two languages will be called bilingualism and the person involved, bilingual".

Being a bilingual speaker can represent having many opportunities in life that those who are not bilingual can miss because of the fact of not knowing a second language. For this reason, many people nowadays are "entering the world of languages"; however, for adults learning a second language can be more difficult than for children.

Although children face difficulties when learning a second or foreign language, it seems to be easier for them to master two or more languages at the same time. Knowing the advantages and the disadvantages of learning two languages or becoming bilingual since the child is born can bring some light to parents at home and to teachers at school on how to deal with this; so that the child can learn both languages in an appropriate way.

A. Advantages of learning English as a foreign language in early stages.

There are some advantages that bilingual children have when they learn English as a foreign or second language. A remarkable advantage is that bilingualism trains children to focus their attention on the relevant variables in the context, particularly information that is ambiguous or contradictory. Increased cognitive abilities may help children to develop the necessary skills that are thought to be involved in effective communication. For example, knowing two words that name the same concept like: "nice and great" could

help children develop the understanding that an object or event can be represented in more than one way, which could support children's understanding of other people's perspectives.

"Research has shown that after 10 or 12 years old the brain handles language differently because until then it is constantly making neurological connections. As children we process language in the frontal lobe of the brain. But if we learn a language as a teenager or adult, the brain has to 'scramble' to find storage space somewhere else. So in simple terms, learning languages as a child the brain absorbs them readily, after that it requires much harder work." (National Literacy Trust 2007 - [Developing Language for Life.](#))

The first advantage of learning another language as a child has been shown to enhance cultural understanding because children are exposed to other cultures. Masayo Yamamoto (2001) in his book "Language Use in Interlingual Families" says that "bilingualism is useful to cross cultural understanding". So, being able to speak to people from different countries and cultures exposes the child to different ways of thinking. This is supported by Anwei Feng in her book Bilingual Education (2007) that says "bilingual education may be the best way to truly improve students' communicative competence. Bilingual education aims to teach language use and to enable students to learn another system of cultures and way of thinking". As a result, culture becomes a tool for children to learn early the language, and ways to communicate him/her-self. In addition, many studies have been carried out to determine the impact of bilingual upbringing on thinking capabilities and the interesting result is that bilingual children think more flexibly.

The second advantage of learning a new language is that it helps kids to build new relationships. Communication is a core part of human relationships. So, while young children certainly find and use many forms of non-verbal communication to interact and play with each other, language is a key enabler to new friendships. According to Silke Rehman (2010) in her book "Make your Child Multilingual" she says that "Bilingual children build bridges to new relationships because they have the capability: they can talk to diverse people, they build different sorts of relationships, and they can be the bridge between two kids who can't talk to each other, they can actually translate and help out". That means, speaking the language of those around you is the bridge to connecting with them. Bilingual children not only act as a language or culture bridge, they also become very aware of their special gift. This consciousness transfers into their self-image and forms part of their self-identity, part of how they see themselves and how they define who they are. According to Silke Rehman (2010) "bilingualism creates confident and makes children found their identities and that improves their self steam".

A third advantage of learning a new language is the improvement of self – esteem and self – confidence on them (bilingual kids). Knowing more than one language helps your child to adapt easily to different language environments thereby increasing his/her self-esteem and self-confidence. According to Edith Harding-Esch and Philip Riley (in the book *The Bilingual Family: A Handbook for Parents*) "Bilingualism provides access and exposure to various cultures all over the world. They can enjoy the treasure of idioms, history music, folk stories, literature and poetry in various cultures". Different people will judge

them differently. However, the combination of them all points to the most important advantage overall: becoming bilingual involves the whole child, not just his/her language but also their socio-emotional, cognitive and cultural aspects. Becoming bilingual defines the identity of a child, his sense of security and status, his/her self-esteem and self-image and it boosts a child's self-confidence.

Another advantage of bilingual kids is that they have potential economic advantages. According to Li Wei (in his book *The Bilingualism Reader*) "A person with two languages may have a wider portfolio of jobs available. As economic trade barriers fall, as international relationships become closer, as unions and partnerships across nations become more widespread an increasing number of jobs are likely to require a person to be bilingual or multilingual". That means that knowing languages is a real asset when it comes to employment opportunities. So, it turns into an economic benefit or income to bilingual individuals.

It is not a secret that multilingual people will always have a wider range of career options. With the increasing globalization this is the reality now more than ever, and language knowledge will continue to gain more and more importance every day. Almost every sector is nowadays looking for people that are able to communicate in more than one language; just as an example in the following pages are looking for bilinguals www.bilingual-jobs.com, <http://www.hr.gov.nt.ca>, [Idealist.org](http://www.idealists.org), [Careerbuilder.com](http://www.careerbuilder.com), [SpanishJobs.com](http://www.spanishjobs.com), and some others in different countries around the world. Many professions today require the command of a second or third language and those who master

them, are certainly at an advantage over those who don't. Works which are very popular nowadays are call centers like: SYKES, DELL, TELEPERFORMANCE, ATENTO, TACA, BENSON and some others which employ thousands of people in the country. If we look across the whole list, there is no single most important advantage.

There are also advantages in socio-cognitive development in bilingual kids. Socio-cognitive development refers to how children change with age in terms of their abilities to think about social and communicative issues. Silke Rehman (2010). Elena Nicoladis (in her book Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development) says that "the differences are that Bilingual children achieve higher scores than monolinguals on a number of tests of cognitive ability, including mental flexibility, non-verbal problem-solving tasks, understanding the conventional origin of names, distinguishing between semantic similarity and phonetic similarity and capacity to judge the grammaticality of sentences;" that means bilinguals have the advantages to be more reasonably than monolinguals. They become more flexible at the time they are thinking, and they tend to solve problems easily and understand words by associating them to others.

A last advantage to be mentioned here is that kids obtain a better Socio-emotional development. According to Huitt, W. (2008) Socio-emotional development refers to how children change with age in terms of their processing of emotions in a social and communicative setting. Silke Rehman (2010) refers to Communication as: a core part of human relationships and while young

children certainly find and use many forms of non-verbal communication to interact and play with each other, language is a key enabler to new friendships. Speaking the language of those around you is the bridge to connecting with them". She expresses that communication is an essential part of the human life that is why bilingualism becomes important because it creates bridges to share with kids from different cultures. Clearly, bilingualism is an interchange of emotions and communication in childhood.

B. Disadvantages of learning English as a foreign language in early stages.

There are some disadvantages that Bilingual children have when they are learning English as a foreign language which are the following: the context in which the language is learned, if kids are in touch with the language since they are born, they may start speaking three to six months later; than those who are raise in a monolingual environment, children will temporally mix languages, additional effort from parents and children to encourage each other to learn the foreign language is needed. Silke Rheman (2010). Those disadvantages fortunately appear at the early process of learning the language. But, the good news is that these disadvantages are not permanent on most of the children; they can be enhanced within the process of learning the foreign language.

One of the most remarkable disadvantages that children have at the moment of being enrolled in a foreign language learning process since they are born is that they might start speaking three to six months later. Rehman says that "You can

expect your bilingual child to begin speaking about 3-6 months later than his/her monolingual peers". Monolingual children are expected to say their first 8-10 words around the age of 18 months and their first 2 word sentences around the age of 2 years. Also she recommends that "if monolingual children don't talk in the first 6 months, they have to go and ask a doctor". On the other hand, if bilingual kids do not start speaking after the extra six months there must be language confusion or a medical factor that is blocking the learning process.

Another significant disadvantage of learning a foreign language at an early age is that children will temporarily mix languages. Rehman states that "It is normal for bi-/multilingual children to mix up languages until about the age of 4. If children are lacking the right word in language A, they will borrow it from language B to communicate their message". It means that they may temporarily mix the languages affecting the way they interact or communicate their ideas or messages to others.

In addition, there are a number of variables that can affect the outcome of bilingual development, including the context in which the languages are learned. The context or environment plays an important role within the children learning process. Moreover, children should use every resource within his/her environment as a tool to take advantage of it and learn the language easily. Parents (family) and school are the most important sources within the children context to become a bilingual kid with success. Nevertheless, there are a numbers of factors at school and at home that block the process of learning a

foreign language such as: unsuccessful Attempt at Integration into Society, unavailability of Teachers, lack of classrooms, parents and teachers fluency into the foreign language, among others. (www.everythingsl.net).

Unsuccessful Attempt at Integration into Society is one of the biggest problems associated to bilingual education in the United States. According to Aparna Iyer “Bilingual education was deemed necessary since it was supposed to help integrate the children of immigrants and minorities into society. The system of bilingual education demanded separate teachers and classrooms and believed in gradual integration into society by allowing children to receive education in their native language for a period of 3 or more years”. This fact can switch from an advantage to a disadvantage because immigrants’ children have the opportunity to receive classes in their native language but, the process of becoming bilingual receives a negative impact making the process itself slowly.

Another factor that blocks the bilingual learning process on kids is unavailability of teachers in schools. Most of the countries in Central America have limited budgets to invest in a full bilingual education in public schools. El Salvador is not excluded from this situation. In El Salvador, public schools count only with one English teacher for the entire mass of active students. Moreover, some teachers are not assigned in their respective area of specialization. For example, an English teacher is assigned to teach science or another subject or vice versa. Consequently, kids are not getting enough English instruction to get proficient in the foreign language. It means that public schools are not interested in their students becoming bilingual; this represents a noticeable disadvantage. According to Aparna Iyer “Bilingual education requires a number

of trained teachers who are proficient in both English and their native language, assuming that Spanish is one of the mediums of instruction”.

Bilingual education is also affected by lack of classrooms. From the point of view that a foreign language education is more effective if classes are divided into levels (basic, intermediate, advance.) the lack of classrooms represents one of the hugest problems into public and private education. In El Salvador, Schools in general have students from different levels of English and it is difficult for the authorities of the schools divide them into their respective level because of the lack of classrooms. For that reason, students receive a single class covering a curriculum or topics that are not adjusted to their needs or level.

According to Aparna Lyer “There is a deficiency of classrooms that can accommodate students who require instructions in both English and their native language (Spanish). Students are expected to sit together in one class regardless of their age and the variations in the required level of education. This poses a great problem for teachers who, in addition to being well versed in two languages, have to exhibit a certain level of comfort in handling different levels of education simultaneously”. Due to this, disadvantages or blocking factors appear again in the context of children becoming bilingual.

A last disadvantage is that bilingual kids will have to handle with the added academic load that represents learning to read and to write in another language on top of the first; that means double efforts for them. If parents want children not only to speak another language but read and write it, too, they will have to provide extra tuition beyond the regular school days. According to Silke

Rehman “There's additional effort for organizing language courses, there's money and time you might need to put in. But all parents would agree that the benefits are well worth the effort”. However, for children an added academic load or extra tuition becomes bored and stressful. So, they prefer to get involved in another type of activities like practicing sports among others and because of that reason they decide to quit their bilingual education.

Advantages and disadvantages could be less or more depending on age that the second language is acquired: Deborah Weiss and James J. Dempsey explain that bilinguals perform better in their first language than in their second language in quiet and in noise. But, In January 2008 the “*Journal of the American Academy of Audiology*” made a research based on 25 proficient and language competent, bilingual speakers in which the people who participated were divided in two groups. One group with kids and another group with adolescents; the research showed that the groups which learned both languages in early years were able to express their ideas easier than the other group which was shaped by adolescents. That means that learning another language in early stages creates more opportunities to express ideas and to communicate easily despite of the disadvantages mentioned above.

C. Strategies parents and teachers use to teach English as a foreign language to kids becoming bilingual.

There are some strategies to take into account at the time of teaching English as a foreign language to kids becoming bilingual in order to prepare them to face linguistic and social challenges. It is important to do this because in that

way children learn how to express ideas in real life. Besides, Children have the necessary mental ability to look for the best way to solve situations.

According to Patton Tabors (2008), “kids struggle with understanding the goings-on in the classroom, expressing their needs, and involving themselves in play situations with their peers”. However, there are children with limited English proficiency, in that situation the teachers have to give them special treatments to make them feel socially included and encourage their language and literacy development. According to Dr. Patton and personal experiences there are some ideas to take into account at the time of teaching English as a foreign language. It is based on fact that those ideas help to develop the language more effectively on kids.

To begin with the ideas to teach an effective foreign language provided by Dr. Patton that points out that most preschoolers don't realize that there are different languages in the world, It would be important that teachers explain to their students how language is used and why languages differ from one region to another. For example, teachers could explain the importance of learning English in this globalize world, as well to make them feel how funny it is to learn English by using dynamics and strategies that encourage them to learn the language.

The second idea is to pair children for tasks and activities or assign them seats at lunch and snack time. Mix up the assignments and pairings, so children interact with everyone in the class is a good exercise. For instance, Lic. Susana Hernandez suggests “if there are tables with six chairs in the kinder or in the

classroom changing students' positions each month will help them to be sociable with all their classmates". Besides, smarter or more proficient students within the language will encourage others who are not too good at it.

To introduce competitive work to the children is the third idea: Most preschool activities and books are ideal for promoting acquisition of English. For example, as M.s.D.S. Zoila Bonilla (2010) said in a personal interview "One of the books that teachers could use is the Jelly Beans one, two and three. These books include songs that help them learn the vocabulary easily; also books with short stories that improve their reading, frequent conversations with peers and teachers about topics of their interest, and small group work in particular improve the language and literacy skills of foreign-language learners". So, teachers should take advantage of this fact promoting competitive work within the classroom. For Instance, creating a competitive work in group tables and awarding winners will help students being active in class.

Try "doubling" is the fourth idea: During group activities such as cooking, describe students' actions as they happen. Providing "running commentary" allows children to not only connect words with actions but also hear the same words multiple times. Units are cover in an specific period of time. For example unit 3 that is about "My Body" children repeat the vocabulary of the body every day during the period of the unit and at the end they already know the vocabulary from the top of the head to the feet. Also this is a strategy teachers can use for those children who are slow to develop language skills.

Let kids know it is okay to speak their first language is another idea. Teachers can bring the home language into the classroom by inviting adults or older students to come and speak children's home languages with them. Also try labeling classroom objects in every language that children attending the classroom speak or also when they don't know a word they should be able to ask "how do you say.... in English?" This makes children feel confident at the time they answer due that they already know the answer because they were practicing the meaning of the words before and also they feel curiosity to learn other words by listening.

Also, we have the necessity of parents to continue speaking their native and the foreign language at home. "A child whose first language has been developed and has had long conversations in that specific language can transfer those skills to English or a foreign language," explains Dr. Tabors. "If parents don't know much English and curb use of their native language, they can't talk a lot with their children. And children need to be talking with their parents." So both languages should be practiced at home for parents and children in order to improve speaking proficiency in both of them.

To conclude, we have to say that to expose children in a bilingual environment despite the disadvantages that appear at the beginning of the process they are not permanent; and on the contrary it brings advantages not only at the moment they are learning the language, but also it has advantages as they grow up. The resources are there, and although the access to foreign language courses sometimes is not cheap, it is worth and important to guaranty children a better future.

V. CONCLUSIONS

- Children who learn two or more languages in very early stages present more significant advantages than those who are monolingual.
- Children becoming bilingual present some disadvantages at the beginning of the process of learning a foreign or second language.
- The disadvantages that children face at the moment of learning another language are not permanent: they can be improved within the process itself.
- Learning an additional language allow children to grow in areas such as cultural, personal, professional, academic, among others.
- There are some helpful strategies to prepare children to face linguistic and social challenges within a bilingual environment.

VI. METHODOLOGY

To complete the whole graduation work, a set of steps were followed. These steps are divided as follows: to begin with it was necessary to select a topic. To do that, first a list that contained some interesting topics was written. Besides, some questions were written to organize and synthesized our interest in looking for the tools needed to be studied. Then, a general statement was created to have an idea of what the authors were going to investigate. Finally, after a group discussion, a topic was chosen. The next step was searching the literature. We assembled the information that we had gotten from bibliography, interviews and internet by scanning, skimming, and mapping it to refine and expand the topic. The third was developing the argument. At this step we organized the arguments in categories and themes like “physical aspects including ages, classroom environment, resources, and others. We also selected a claim concept that described our proposition of learning a foreign language in early stages. After that was done, the fourth was surveying the literature. At this step we examined, synthesized and assembled the information gathered from different resources to describe what is known about the topic under discussion. To critique the literature was the next step. At this step we started by analyzing the information researched that answer our guiding questions. Finally, the sixth was writing the review. At this step we started to write out our thesis statement, topic sentences and an outline of the essay. After finishing the thesis statement and the outline, the first draft of the essay was written. After this was corrected a second draft was written. This included all the parts that final work should have. All these steps were followed to write

the final essay. Additionally, it was necessary the help of the advisor who was aware of the development of every step of the Literature Review.

It is important mentioning that these steps were not followed in a linear way. That means that at some points it was necessary to go back and forth those steps as in a cyclical way to revise the work before the final draft was presented.

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