

# Switching Tongues: A Case Study on Early Bilingualism in a Filipino-Cebuano Context

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**Abstract:** *Early bilingualism is shaped by mental process, social relationship, and environmental conditions. This qualitative case study explored the bilingual experiences of a child growing up in a Filipino–Cebuano environment, focusing on language use in daily communication, learning, and social interaction. Data were collected through caregiver interviews and naturalistic observations, then analyzed thematically. Results showed that the child, a sequential bilingual, displayed age-appropriate development across cognitive, social-emotional, communicative, motor, and self-help domains. Language use varied by context: Filipino was mainly used with parents, Cebuano with grandparents and the community, and both languages during play. The child exhibited functional and situational code-switching, often using short sentences in both languages, full sentences in Cebuano, and Filipino more frequently for polite expressions. Key influences on bilingual development included parental language modeling, the home and community environment, media exposure, and the child’s positive view of bilingualism. Caregivers supported bilingual development by modeling, explaining, and maintaining a rich linguistic environment. These results emphasize the critical role of consistent and supported bilingual exposure. In supporting similar learners, caregivers should integrate both languages in daily life and clarify language use. Educators and schools are encouraged to promote bilingualism through inclusive materials and culturally responsive programs.*

**Keywords—bilingualism; Filipino–Cebuano; single case study; early childhood; code-switching**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Early bilingual language development emerges from the dynamic interaction of mental process, social relationship, and environmental conditions (Schaller & Rauh, 2017). Language acquisition is fundamental to human development, supporting communication, cognitive growth, and cultural identity (Miller et al., 2023). In the Philippines, with its 170+ native languages (Osoblivaia, 2023), most children have been introduced to various languages from childhood, which frequently involve Filipino, English, and Cebuano (Lewis, Simons, & Fennig, 2013).

Filipino is the Philippines’ nationally recognized language, as well as the formal language of instruction together with English, in which predominantly used in education and mass media, while Cebuano is widely used by more than 20 million individuals— is still the prevalent tongue in the Visayas and Mindanao areas. This makes Filipino–Cebuano a prevalent bilingual pairing, particularly in regions like Zamboanga Sibugay (Dreisbach, J. L., & Demeterio, F. P. A., 2020). In such environments, bilingualism often develops naturally through daily exposure (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams, 2013).

Early bilingualism can present both opportunities and challenges for children (Kavak, Ş., 2020). Empirical research substantiates the positive cognitive outcomes of ability to speak two including improved linguistic understanding, a strong capacity to control concentration, and an established level of executive function, cultural awareness, and soft

skills. The young bilingual speakers have better task switching ability, working memory, and problem-solving strategies, which is due to the constant cognitive pressure of having two different linguistic systems at the same time awareness (Ali, 2023; Tekyi-Arhin, 2023; Tabellion, 2024). However, a number of these issues are still in existence. The bilinguals can also attain a smaller vocabulary in either language, have long word retrieval delays and transitional issues in early growth (Bialystok, 2017; Bialystok, Craik, & Luk, 2012). These language patterns, occasionally erroneously, ascribed to speech delays or disorders, especially in a monolingual-dominant context.

The Bilingual Education is grounded in the 1987 Philippine Constitution and the National Board of Education Resolution No. 73-7 (1973), outlines the Philippine policy bilingualism in school, which was put into effect by Department Order No. 25, (1974) serve as the foundation for bilingual education in the Philippines. This framework supports all levels of students to be develop proficiency in both Filipino and English. Additionally, regional languages serve as supplementary media, especially for early literacy (DO 52, s. 1987). Moreover, with the aim of improving literacy, cultural identity, and inclusive learning, the Department Order No. 16 (2012) institutionalized the policy for mother tongue-based multilingual education, which placed a strong emphasis on native languages in early education, cultural identity, and inclusive learning environment (Nishanthi, 2020). Despite these initiatives, some educators and caregivers continue to have false beliefs about bilingualism, leading to early referrals

for speech therapy or evaluations because they believe it may be a contributing factor to developmental delays (Eslit, 2017).

While international and local literature strongly supports bilingual development, few studies focus on young Filipino–Cebuano bilinguals. Existing research and policy often emphasize Filipino–English pairings, aligned with educational priorities (DO 52, s. 1987), leaving regional language pairings underrepresented. This gap is particularly concerning given the linguistic realities of communities like Zamboanga Sibugay, where daily life involves multiple local languages such as Cebuano, Filipino, Chavacano, Subanen, and English, which presents both opportunities and challenges in early childhood development on how children acquire, use, and switch between their two languages in daily life.

This study addresses that gap through a case-based exploration of a child in a Filipino–Cebuano bilingual household, focusing on language acquisition, code-switching, and caregiver support in a real-world context.

### 1.1 Literature Review

Bilingualism in early childhood has long fascinated scholars across disciplines such as linguists, psychologists, educators and anthropologists. Classic theories of language acquisition provide foundational insights. Chomsky's nativist theory (1965) argues that humans possess a natural mental system that enables children to learn language supporting the development of verbal competence across all environment. In contrast, Skinner's behaviorist model (1957) emphasizes language as a learned behavior through reinforcement and imitation—especially relevant in bilingual contexts wherein diverse language inputs shape development. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) stresses the foundational influence of societal and cultural context, wherein language develops by means of guided communication with more knowledgeable individuals (e.g., parents, grandparents, uncle, siblings, peers). Bilingual scholars like Cummins (1979) extend these theories with models such as the dual-iceberg theory, which illustrates how surface features of two languages may differ, while cognitive foundations remain shared and interdependent.

Linguistic variation between Cebuano and Filipino (Tagalog-based) is shaped by cultural and historical influences. Although Cebuano continues to dominate in casual, day-to-day communication, younger generations are more frequently using Filipino and English in formal settings, reflecting broader societal shifts and the rising value of English in education and employment (Dreisbach & Demeterio, 2020). Despite this trend, Cebuano remains central in emotional expression, family interaction, and personal development. Among children, these dynamic fosters flexible multilingual practices such as blending, borrowing, and code-switching. However, due to limited child-centered research on local bilingual pairs, these behaviors are often misunderstood. There is a notable absence of case-based study that explores the varied, real-world implications of bilingual in household settings. This absence underlines the importance of doing

extensively tailored study in order to comprehend how bilingualism occurs among Filipino communities' daily customs and behaviors.

### 1.2 Research Objectives

This study aimed to:

1. Describe the developmental and socio-linguistic profile of a Filipino–Cebuano bilingual child.
2. Explore contexts in which the child uses each language.
3. Analyze how the child switches between Filipino and Cebuano in daily communication.
4. Identify common vocabulary and sentence patterns in each language.
5. Examine the sociocultural and environmental factors influencing bilingual development.
6. Understand how caregivers reinforce or respond to bilingual language use.

### 1.3 Theoretical Framework

This study incorporates three academic paradigms such as Social Learning Theory (Bandura), Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky), and Operant Conditioning (Skinner) to explain how Filipino-Cebuano bilingualism emerged during early developmental stage. Together, these frameworks emphasize the role of observation, cultural interaction, and reinforcement upon the language practices of children.

The Social Learning Theory by Bandura presented the argument that children learn to speak a language by not only depending on the systematic teaching of the language but also by modeling what to say by what they have heard people talking. The Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky, stated that language development is socially based on interaction and culturally situated. The Operant Conditioning theory proposed by Skinner imagines language learning as being dependent upon the reinforcement of language learning as a conditioned behavior.

### 1.4 Significance of the Study

This study increases early childhood bilingual studies by offering insight on a child's everyday language behaviors in local Filipino-Cebuano contexts. It can help Caregivers recognize that switching of language is a common component of development in bilingual. Educators better support bilingual learners by distinguishing typical bilingual patterns from speech delays and avoid mistaking them for learning problems. It also offers practical ideas on how to help children express themselves in both Filipino and Cebuano. Schools improve language programs and materials in multilingual settings. This study aims to strengthen local methods of instruction by advancing the broader body of research on bilingual language development by providing a case-based, contextual view of Filipino-Cebuano bilingual acquisition.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

A qualitative methodology, specifically a single case study design was administered for this study to probe bilingual language acquisition in a Filipino-Filipino-Cebuano-speaking child undergoing a linguistic transition within a Bisaya-dominant household. The single case study methodology was selected for its strength in generating in-depth, contextually grounded understandings of language development in naturalistic environments (Duff, 2014). This design prioritizes detailed narrative accounts, interpretive analysis, and sensitivity to environmental and sociocultural influences—features particularly well-suited to research on early childhood language development, where individual context and lived experience are central to linguistic outcomes (Hecker, J., & Kalpokas, N., 2024).

### 2.2 Research Environment

The research was conducted in the Philippines, specifically in Zamboanga Sibugay within the child's current home environment, where the child currently lives with grandparents being the main caregivers. Its surrounding is largely Cebuano-speaking as opposed to the previously Filipino-speaking environment of the child. The data were collected in naturalistic environments, i.e., during the family routine and within family interaction, which has helped to conduct an authentic evaluation of the language exposure change and its impact on bilingual development.

### 2.3 Research Participant

The participant, referred to by the pseudonym ZiPee, is a five-year-old child who previously lived in a Filipino-speaking environment and now resides with grandparents in a Cebuano-speaking household. ZiPee was purposefully selected considering the following characteristics that are consistent with the study's goals: (1) Developmental Stage, is at five years old, the child is within the critical window for language acquisition, cognitive assimilation, and sociolinguistic adaptation. (2) Bilingual Exposure, the child is immersed in both Filipino as his first language and Cebuano as his second language. (3) Linguistic Transition, the child recently relocated to a Bisaya-dominant environment, offering a unique lens for studying bilingual development.

### 2.4 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

The study utilized two main instruments: Naturalistic Observation Form used to record the child's language behavior and interactions during daily routines (e.g., playtime, mealtime, conversations). Semi-structured Interview Schedule employed to obtain in-depth insights from the caregiver concerning the child's language exposure, use, proficiency, and attitude. The questions underwent expert validation in the field of Psychology and Research to ensure content validity and relevance.

### 2.5 Data Gathering Procedures

The data collection process followed a systematic approach designed to explore the participant's bilingual development within the home environment. After securing ethical approval and informed consent, data collection began with: Researchers conducted several observation sessions, each lasting 10 to 30 minutes, in familiar settings such as during play and family interactions. Observations were recorded using a structured form and detailed field notes. The researcher remained unobtrusive to preserve the authenticity of behavior. No audio or video recordings were made without prior consent. After completing observations, the caregiver was interviewed using a semi-structured format. This allowed for both pre-determined and follow-up questions to better understand the child's language environment and support deeper analysis of the observed behaviors. After the data collected from observations and interviews, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) assessment of results was utilized.

### 2.6 Data Analysis

In interpreting the qualitative information collected in the study through naturalistic observations and semi-structured interviews, the study applied the Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) qualitative data analysis, which enabled the researchers in identifying the patterns and come up with the idea of bilingualism derived from individual case study. The analysis of the data occurred in a step-by-step process: (1) preparation and organization; (2) open coding (initial coding); (3) categorizing and grouping codes (axial coding); (4) identification of themes; (5) interpretation and synthesis; (6) validation of the results (trustworthiness).

The researchers transcribed interviews verbatim and reviewed observation notes, immersing themselves in the data to identify key patterns. Participant responses were coded as follows: GP1 (Grandmother), GP2 (Grandfather), TP (Teacher), and CP (Child). In the second step, the researchers conducted line-by-line coding, assigning concise labels to significant statements to capture underlying actions, feelings, or phenomena. Next, the researchers grouped related codes by identifying patterns, allowing key themes to emerge and reveal deeper insights. In the fourth step, the researchers interpreted grouped categories to identify overarching themes, revealing key findings aligned with the study's aims and research questions. The researcher then analyzed the themes using relevant concepts, linking the findings to the study's objectives and related literature. This stage clarified the findings and highlighted their relevance to early childhood language education and support. Finally, the researcher applied Merriam's four trustworthiness criteria. Triangulation and member checks ensured credibility, rich descriptions supported transferability, and an audit trail ensured dependability and confirmability. The structured analysis allowed for a nuanced understanding of how the participant uses Filipino and Cebuano in everyday contexts, supporting the research objectives.

## 2.7 Ethical Considerations

The study followed rigorous standards of ethics, protecting the confidentiality and respect of all participants. The child's caregiver provided informed permission after a comprehensive explanation of the study's aim, procedure, privacy measures, and freedom to participate or withdraw. To protect the child's confidentiality, a pseudonym was employed, and all information gathered was kept safely and only viewed by the researchers.

Given the participant's young age, only non-invasive methods—such as naturalistic observation and caregiver interviews—were employed. These interactions were conducted within familiar, everyday settings to minimize any potential discomfort or disruption. The researcher maintained a passive and non-intrusive role, allowing for the natural flow of interaction and communication to be observed authentically.

The study meticulously adhered to the basic ethical values of dignity for individuals, social and equity, as outlined in institutional research standards. The child's developmental stage was carefully considered, and all study activities were designed to prioritize the participant's well-being, comfort, and emotional stability.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### 3.1. Developmental and Socio-Linguistic Profile of the Child

The findings revealed that the child demonstrated age-appropriate holistic development across all essential domain including cognitive, communicative, emotional, social, physical, adaptive skills. He showed functional independence and strong school readiness. Linguistically, the child is a sequential bilingual: Filipino is his first and dominant language, while Cebuano was introduced after the age of four. He used both languages in daily interactions and frequently code-switches. The child's language attitude is generally positive, although some emotional discomfort is observed when he struggles to articulate himself in both languages.

### 3.2. The Use of Filipino and Cebuano across Different Contexts

Based on the observations and responses of the participants in the interview, revealed that child language used varied by context: Filipino as the primary language of parent-child communication, Cebuano as a social language at home and in the community, and Filipino & Cebuano use during play.

The first key theme is Filipino as the Primary Language of Parent-Child Communication. From birth to age four, Filipino was the child's dominant language, shaped by his parents' consistent use of it since his parent is Filipino-speaking as well as the environment. Despite now living with his grandparents, he still uses Filipino during calls with his parents, reinforcing it as his foundational language and main medium of parent-child interaction. This is evident in the

interview responses of the participants coded as GP, who stated:

“Sa iyang mama ug papa manawag tagalog siya”, “Permanente na iyang papa’g mama, pero sa diri ra sa kuan... iyahang Lola ug Lolo Bisaya na iyang isulti” (Whenever his parents call, he always speaks in Filipino. But with his grandparents, he speaks in Cebuano.) – GP1

The second theme is Cebuano as a Social Language at Home and in the Community. While Filipino remains central in parent-child communication, Cebuano dominates the child's daily environment—spoken by grandparents, peers, neighbors, and some school staff. Immersion in this Cebuano-speaking setting supports his growing fluency and ease with the language, even though it was learned after Filipino. This is evident in the observations where the child was engaged in casual conversations with his uncle and grandparent, and made the following statements: “Naa siya kwarta. Dili ko. Unsa man. Balon nako ni” (He has money. I’d rather not. This is my pocket money.), and “La, tagpiso ni? Duha piso noh?” (La, is this one peso each?” “Two for one peso).

This is also further supported by the interview responses of participant coded GP, who said:

“Diri sa balay...sagul Bisaya ug tagalog. Pero makuan jod niya...Bisaya na jod iyang kuan...magkuanan niya katapusan ra ga tagalog. Sa iyahang kaibigan...sa atoa Lolo ug Lola...Tito. Ug isturyahan ug bisaya...iyaha gyapon Lola’g Lolo, Tito, iyang kaibigan...iyang amigo” (Here at home, it's a mix of Bisaya and Filipino. He can speak Bisaya, but he often ends his sentences in Filipino. He speaks Bisaya to his grandparents, uncle, and even his friend.) – GP1

The third theme highlights the Flexible Use of Filipino and Cebuano During Play. Play emerges as a significant context where the child fluidly alternates between the two languages. His language choice during play varies based on the activity, the play partner, and the situational demands. Whether engaging in solitary or peer-directed activities, the child exhibits strategic code-switching that reflects not only his bilingual capacity but also his sociolinguistic awareness. This is reflected in the statement of participant coded GP during the interview:

“Moistorya man siyag ing-ana...talagsa ra mokuan ug istorya pero kung siya jod magdula-dula diri, katong nagdula siya gahapon tagalog pod kaayo siya” (Sometime he speaks Cebuano, but whenever he is playing, he speaks Filipino) – GP1

“*Tagalog, usahay pod Bisaya mag istorya siya ra isa.*” (Filipino, sometimes he speak Cebuano when he is alone) – GP2

These results support the Albert Bandura's Social Learning Theory (1963), underscoring social interplay's vital function in imitating behavior, and monitoring in the development of knowledge process. The child's exposure to many communication models throughout his surroundings shapes the way he uses language. He demonstrates how linguistic behavior is learned through modeling and modified in response to social expectations by alternating both Filipino

and Cebuano regardless of the situation. Dual language acquisition is therefore profoundly connected to relationships and society in addition to cognitive.

### 3.3. The Child Code-Switching between Filipino and Cebuano

Based on observations and participant responses, the data illustrated the child's shifting use of Filipino and Cebuano across diverse social and linguistic contexts. Findings revealed that the child engaged in both functional and situational code-switching, and code-switching due to limited vocabulary or articulation difficulties.

The first theme, Functional Code-Switching, highlights the child's purposeful use of both Filipino and Cebuano to meet specific communicative needs. Language choices are not random but influenced by context, listener, and clarity of expression. The child switches language into Filipino or code-switch within a sentence to convey meaning effectively, especially when expressing a need. This is evident on one of the responses of participant in the interview coded GP2, who said that:

“Sagol bisaya ug tagalog pag naa syay kinahanglan. Pananglitan pag naa syay gusto, magbisaya ug tagalog na sya” (He mixes Cebuano and Filipino whenever he has a need. For example, when he wants something, he starts speaking in both Cebuano and Filipino) – GP2

This is further evident in the observation during a casual conversation with the child's uncle and grandfather, in which the child stated the following:

“Hingi ako pera, balon ko bukas. Balon nako ni. Hingi ko bente. Ahh dili ko. Akin na. Lo, sige na ba. Hingi na ako kwarta ba.” (Give me money, for my allowance for tomorrow. This is my allowance. I'm asking for twenty pesos only. Give it to me Lo, please. I'm asking for money) - CP

The second theme, Situational Code-Switching, reflects the child's ability to adjust language use based on social context and the identity of the interlocutor. He consistently speaks Filipino with his parents and Cebuano with grandparents, peers, and community members. This pattern indicates sociolinguistic awareness, as the child tailors his language to fit the norms and expectations of different settings. Such code-switching is guided by external cues, demonstrating his growing communicative competence across both languages. This is apparent in the interview response of the participant coded GP1, who said that:

“Kaun pag magistorya sya sa iyang mama ug papa mag tagalog sya, pero diri sa amo mag Cebuano sya. Kabalo sya kung unsay gamiton nya”. (When he talks to his mother and father, he speaks in Filipino, but here with us, he speaks in Cebuano. He knows which language to use.) – GP1

This is also evident in the observation conducted during a casual conversation with the child's uncle and grandfather, in which the child said the following:

“Pag di dagdag kan-on mo, ako nga dagdag ko kan-on ko duha. (If you're not adding more rice, I will. I've already had

to servings), and “Ganyan siya, maglingkod ang babaye, ang lalaki tayo tayo ra” (That's how it goes — girls sit down, but boys just stand when they pee) – CP

The third theme, Code-Switching Due to Limited Vocabulary or Articulation Difficulties, reflects the child's use of language alternation as a compensatory strategy. Code-switching in this context arises from lexical gaps or articulation challenges, not language delay. It demonstrates the child's adaptive communication skills and developing expressive vocabulary in both languages. Evidence of this can be found in the interview with participant coded GP, who remarked:

“Sagol...sagol ug istorya. Dili man siya makakuan gyud ug tanan gyud nga kuan tanan nga bisaya. Bisay-on niya dili pod siya tanan makakuan makaistorya, sagulan jod niya ug tagalog.” (It's mixed when he is speaking. He can't speak fully in Bisaya; he always mixes it with Filipino.) -GP1

“Hmm... more gyud siya sa filipino hmm ooh naay siguro naay words murag .. Unsa gani to iyang gitubag sa akoo ay murag number bato nga word nga murag gibisaya nya ang pag kuan sa akoo pero ang oo ug kanang hindi bisaya iyang kuan sa akoo sa halip na hindi dili ang gi kuan nya dili gyud siya consistent mukalit lang gyud ug kuan hehehe” (He really speaks more in Filipino. There was one time he responded in Bisaya. He's not consistent — he mixes the languages) – TP

“Kay dili man siya ka...dili man siya makakuan kompleto ug istoryha kay tagalog man siya, dili siya ka kompleto ug istorya ug Bisaya ug tagalog...sagol jod ug Bisaya pero kuan na jod dagahan na jod iyang masabtan sa bisaya” (He can't really speak in full sentences because he mostly speaks Tagalog. He can't complete a sentence fully in either Bisaya or Tagalog — his speech is really mixed. But now, he understands a lot more in Bisaya.) – GP2

These findings support Ramadan, Mu'in, and Arini (2019), who note that code-switching is a common communicative strategy among bilinguals. It involves shifting between languages within a conversation to clarify meaning, emphasize points, or express emotions. The child in this study showed both functional and situational code-switching, reflecting how bilingual use is shaped by context, word availability, and emotional needs.

### 3.4. Vocabulary and Sentence Patterns in Each Language

Drawn from the observations and interview responses of the participants related to the child's use of vocabulary and sentence constructions in both Filipino and Cebuano, it was found out that child commonly uses short sentences in both languages, demonstrates the ability to form complete sentences in Cebuano, and prefers Filipino when making polite requests.

One notable theme is Consistent Use of Short Sentences in Both Languages. The child typically communicates using brief, simple sentences, reflecting limited vocabulary and developing syntax. This pattern, seen in both Filipino and Cebuano, suggests a foundational stage of bilingual language acquisition and is developmentally appropriate. This is evident in the interview responses of the participant coded as

GP, and is also reflected in both Filipino and Cebuano utterances, where the child's responses are often limited to one to four words, respectively.

"Naay kompleto ug mubo ra" (Some are in complete sentence, and some are short.) – GP1

"Makakompleto pod siya...ug istory ug Bisaya. Kuan ra dili ra taas, mubo ra" (He can also complete a sentence in Bisaya, but it's not long — just short ones.) – GP2

"Kanang kong makastart sya ug tagalog mo tagalog na siya mao akong naobserbaran pero sa sa kanang sa mubo lang nga sentence pero kong mutubag rapud siya na kanang mudirect lang siya ug tubag sa akoa usa usa lang ka word bisaya ang eh response. (What I've observed is that once he starts speaking in Filipino, he continues in Tagalog, especially in short sentences. But when he responds directly to me, he usually just gives one-word answers in Cebuano) – TP

This pattern was further observed during the interaction recorded in the observation conducted where the child provided the following statements in Filipino and Cebuano, respectively: "Naa siya kwarta" (He has money), "Bigyan mo ako" (Give me some)

Another theme is the Ability to Produce Complete Sentences in Cebuano. While the child uses short sentences in both languages, he shows greater fluency and syntactic control in Cebuano. This reflects deeper familiarity, likely due to frequent use in daily interactions with family and community. Consistent, context-rich exposure appears to support his stronger linguistic competence in Cebuano, highlighting the role of environment in bilingual development. This is strengthened by the interview response of the participant coded GP1, who provide the statement:

"Kabalo mana sya ug Bisaya. Makakompleto man siya sa Bisaya pero usahay mubo ra pod" (She knows how to speak Bisaya. She can form complete sentences in Bisaya, but sometimes they're a bit short.) – GP1

This pattern is further observed in the observation conducted during casual conversation with his grandparents and uncle, who said the following:

"Di na hutdon kan-on Tito, di ka inom coke. Ako lang noh?" (Tito, if you don't finish your food, no ice cream or coke for you. Only I give to have ice cream and coke because I ate a lot) -CP

"Di hutdon ulam mo, di ka kaon ice cream. Di kakaon coke. Ako ra kaon ice cream, coke kase daghan ko kaon duha" (If you don't finish your food, you can't have ice cream. You also can't have Coke. Only I get to eat ice cream and drink Coke because I ate a lot) - CP

The third theme is Use of Filipino for Polite Requests. The child consistently uses Filipino when making respectful or polite requests, especially with adults. This suggests an association between Filipino and formality, likely shaped by parental language use, media, or school exposure. Even in Cebuano-speaking environments, he prefers Filipino for polite expressions, showing an emerging sense of pragmatic appropriateness in social interactions. This point is illustrated

by the interview with the participant coded GP, who mentioned

"Pagmangayo na sya magtagalog na sya. Moingun siyag La bilhan mo ako ng kuan ng masarap na ulam" (When he needs something, he speaks in Filipino. He would say, 'Grandma, buy me something... a delicious dish'.) – GP1

"Ana siya nga bili La, bili ice cream La, bili mangga La" (He would say, 'Buy some ice cream and mangoes, La') – GP2

The child shows greater linguistic dominance in Cebuano, evidenced by consistent use of complete sentences, unlike the fragmented expressions in Filipino. Although Filipino was the first language, its use is now limited to polite or formal contexts, reflecting pragmatic awareness shaped by social influences. This shift likely results from reduced exposure and increased use of Cebuano since age four.

These results are consistent with the comprehensive research and synthesis by Román and Gómez-Gómez (2022), demonstrated that the amount and duration of contact with another language frequently causes adjustments to how individuals with bilingualism understand and use their mother tongue. Greater adjustments to first-language usage were associated with short engagement to a second tongue. Furthermore, the Fitton et al. (2023) study lends credence to the notion as bilingual young people's expansion of vocabulary is a reflection of how they received encounter with the language that is used most often. Additionally, there was a lack of correlation between supremacy and overall lexicon quantity, highlighting the difficulty of multilingual linguistic acquisition.

### 3.5. Factors Influencing to a Child's Bilingualism

The participants' interview responses highlighted the various factors influencing the child's bilingual development, the results revealed that parental language use, is environmental language use (home, school, community), media exposure, and child's positive attitude toward dual language use all interactively contribute to the child's linguistic development. Parental Language Use emerged as a key factor shaping the child's bilingual development, particularly in establishing Filipino as the foundational language. As the child's earliest and most consistent language models, the parents' use of Filipino in daily routines—from giving instructions to emotional expression—fostered early vocabulary acquisition and syntactic development. This sustained exposure from infancy to around age four facilitated fluency and ease in Filipino, especially in parent-child interactions, reflecting a strong linguistic and emotional tie to the parents; native language. This is illustrated in the interview response of the participant coded GP, who said:

"Sa iyang mama ug papa manawag tagalog siya" "Permanente na iyang papa'g mama, pero sa diri ra sa kuan... iyahang Lola ug Lolo Bisaya na iyang isulti" (Whenever his parents call, he always speaks in Filipino. But with his grandparents, he speaks in Cebuano.) – GP1

The second emergent theme is Environmental Language Use across Home, School, and Community settings. Within the

household, Cebuano was predominantly spoken by extended family members, creating a bilingual environment that immersed the child in everyday Cebuano interactions—through mealtimes, chores, play, and instruction. These experiences facilitated the acquisition of Cebuano vocabulary, sentence structures, and conversational patterns. Beyond the home, the community and school further reinforced Cebuano use through natural, socially embedded interactions. The child's enrollment in a Cebuano-medium school and regular peer engagement strengthened functional bilingualism and pragmatic competence. This consistent exposure enabled the child to navigate both Filipino and Cebuano effectively, adapting language use based on context, interlocutor, and communicative intent, while also acquiring culturally appropriate discourse styles. This is evident in the interview response of the participant, whose code is GP, who said that:

“Diri sa balay...sagol Bisaya ug tagalog. Pero makuan jod niya...Bisaya na jod iyang kuan...magkuanan niya katapusan ra ga tagalog. Sa iyahang kaibigan...sa atoa Lolo ug Lola...Tito.”, “Isturyahan ug bisaya..iyaha gyapon Lola'g Lolo, Tito, iyang kaibigan...iyang amigo” “Here at home, it's a mix of Bisaya and Filipino. He can speak Bisaya, but he often ends his sentences in Filipino. He speaks Bisaya to his grandparents, uncle, and even his friend.) -GP1

“Sa akoa pagmo-esturya ko kay mostly bisaya man gud akong kuan kay daghan man ang bisaya pero makaobserve manka nga eh sagol nako english , tagalog bisaya tulo gyud ka language maliban lang sa maguindanao kay di man gyud ko kabalo di pud ko kasabot.” (When I speak, I mostly use Cebuano because most of the people I talk to are Cebuano. But you'll notice that I also mix in English and Filipino—so I actually use three languages, except for Maguindanaoan, because I really don't know or understand it) – TP

A third theme, Media Exposure, served as a supplementary source for the child's Filipino and Cebuano development. TV shows, music, and songs—especially those shared by the caregivers—helped expand vocabulary, improve pronunciation, and support syntax. Media also reinforced language from daily interactions and introduced idiomatic expressions, enriching the child's overall language skills. It was observed when the child sings a song in both languages (“Ako si Takuri”, “Ako ay may Lobo”) during the interaction with the grandparents. This is also apparent in the response of the participants in the interview coded as GP, who said that:

“Nakaapekto...ang tv kay makasabot man siyag tv kay tagalog man, wala may Bisaya” (It had an effect... the TV, because he understands it—it's in Filipino since there's no Cebuano on TV.) – GP1

“Kato si takuri...kato rai yang kuanon sa eskwelahan. Pero ug siya ra magkanta-kanta tagalog na siya” (He sings Cebuano like ‘Ako si Takuri’ that's the only thing he uses at school. But when he sings by himself, it's in Tagalog.) – GP1  
The final theme is the Child's Positive Attitude toward Dual Language Use. The child showed motivation, adaptability,

and confidence in using both Filipino and Cebuano, even when facing challenges. This positive outlook supported flexible language use across settings and demonstrated growing metalinguistic awareness and communicative resilience. This is evident in the interview response of the participant coded GP, who said the following:

“Confident jod siya kay gusto man gyud siya makasabot jod ug Bisaya. Kabalo...kabalo. Kabalo jod siya kay maningkamot man nga kuan maningkamot man jod siyag isturyag Bisaya, dayun kung dili na siya makakuan iya manang tagalogon” (He's really confident because he truly wants to understand Cebuano. He truly makes an effort to speak Cebuano, and if he can't express something, he switches to Filipino.) – GP1

The results are parallel to the study of Evi, et. al, (2023), where thorough investigation identified a number of outside influences influencing the emergence of bilingual languages. Bilingual learning has been shown to be significantly aided by financial status, psychosocial environment, and linguistic exposure in society, within the house, alongside education, in addition to parent involvement. Additionally, it was demonstrated that personal variables such as mental flexibility and enthusiasm for learning proved essential for promoting a bilingual acquisition. Similar to this, Arnaus Gil et al. (2020) emphasized the essential of consistent support from parents as well as language imitation along with continuous parental engagement to fostering bilingual proficiency among young.

### 3.6. Caregivers' Role in Supporting and Reinforcing Bilingual Language Use

Derived from the interview responses of the participants concerning the strategies employed by caregivers to support and reinforce the child's use of both Filipino and Cebuano, the findings revealed that modeling bilingual language use, providing parental guidance and explanations, and demonstrating a positive attitude toward bilingualism were key strategies utilized to promote and sustain the child's bilingual development.

A key theme is Modeling Bilingual Use, wherein caregivers intentionally and consistently demonstrate appropriate use of both Filipino and Cebuano in everyday contexts. Beyond mere exposure, they actively guide the child through natural interactions—such as meals, routines, play, and storytelling—while offering gentle corrections when needed. This responsive modeling supports the child's grasp of grammar, contextual language use, and communicative function, fostering both linguistic competence and confidence in bilingual expression. This is evident in the interview response of the participant coded as GP, who provided the statement:

“Permanente na iyang papa'g mama, pero sa diri ra sa kuan.... iyahang Lola ug Lolo Bisaya na iyang isulti” (He always speaks Filipino to his parents, but here at home, he speaks Cebuano to his grandparents) – GP1

The second theme, Parental Guidance and Explanation, highlights the active role of caregivers in the child's bilingual

development. Instead of relying solely on exposure, they provide explanations, translations, and paraphrasing to support understanding. Through repetition, elaboration, and context-based examples, caregivers tailor their input to the child's level, encouraging curiosity and reflective learning. This intentional support promotes metalinguistic awareness and strengthens bilingual fluency. This is evident in the interview response of the participant whose code is GP, who said that:

“Ohh...ingun na ZiPee ayaw naka mag-istoryag kanang tagalog ZiPee, Bisaya na imong istorya diri kay bisaya na para makasabot ka... Istoryahan siya ug unsa iyahang giistorya. Pananglitan mo ana siya La bili ko La yelo La. Ignun siya, ZiPee ayaw pag-ignag yelo ZiPee kay anng tag-iya sa imong gipalitan tindahan di kasabot yelo dili kapalit” (I told ZiPee not to speak Filipino, just Cebuano, because the others only understand Cebuano. We try to explain it to him. Like when he says, 'La, I'll buy yelo,' we tell him, 'Don't say yelo (ice)—the store owner might not understand you.') – GP1

A third theme, Caregivers' Positive Attitude toward Bilingualism, emphasizes the emotional and motivational support shaping the child's language development. Caregivers see bilingualism as a valuable asset and actively encourage both Filipino and Cebuano use. They view code-switching as natural, affirming the child's efforts rather than correcting them. This supportive approach boosts the child's confidence and reinforces the importance of bilingualism in the family and community. This is evident in the interview response of the participant whose code is GP, who said that:

“Makaayo, kay makaistorya gud siya. Makaistorya man siya masabtan man iyang giistorya. Masabtan man iyang istorya ug moistorya siya. Pananglitan kung moistorya siyag Bisaya, ohh insakto man istorya niyag Bisaya ug sa Filipino pod.” (It's a good thing because he can really speak. He can express himself and people can understand what he's saying. For example, when he speaks Cebuano, he says it correctly—his Cebuano is accurate, and so is his Filipino. He can speak both) -GP1

“Okay ra kay makasabot man gud ang bata ug istorya sa iyang giistorya.... Bisaya gani ug tagalog” (It's fine because the child can understand the language being spoken—both Cebuano and Filipino.) – GP2

These findings provided additional support to the study conducted by Zheng, Degotardi, and Djonov (2021) who identified effective multilingual support and reinforcement such as language blending, communicative-supportive practices, linguistic support strategies, and culture-sensitive caretaking. Similarly, Sitepu (2021) emphasizes the diverse ways in which caretakers influence multilingual formation as oversight bodies, motivating factors, supporters, and providers of information. Collectively, these studies demonstrate that caregiver participation encompasses a wide range of interpersonal, educational, and psychological strategies that effectively promote and maintain a child's multilingual development, going above linguistic acquisition.

#### 4. LIMITATIONS

Whilst the research gives helpful perspectives on bilingual language development in a Filipino-Cebuano context, certain limitations need to be noted. First, the single-case design hinders broader application of findings as the experiences and language patterns observed may not reflect those of other bilingual children. Second, although rich data were gathered through naturalistic observation and caregiver interviews, these methods are prone to observer bias and selective recall, and the absence of standardized linguistic assessments may have constrained objectivity. Third, uncontrollable environmental factors, such as media exposure, peer interaction, and larger societal impacts, could not have been adequately accounted for. Finally, the study's small span may have missed long-term shifts in language competency. Nonetheless, the findings add significantly to the understanding of the early bilingual development and suggest to future study opportunities with larger, more varied groups.

#### 5. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the child exhibits age-appropriate development across intellectual, verbal, psychosocial, physical, and adaptive skills and identified as a sequential bilingual. His language use is context-driven—Filipino is spoken primarily with parents, while Cebuano is used socially at home and in the community. During play and daily interactions, he mixes both languages and switches between them functionally, situationally, or due to limited vocabulary. The child commonly uses short sentences in both languages, demonstrates the ability to form complete sentences in Cebuano, and prefers Filipino when making polite requests. While Filipino was the child's first language, current evidence indicates Cebuano as the dominant language. This is evident in the child's more fluent sentence construction, frequent and functional use of Cebuano in daily interactions, and the limited use of Filipino mainly for polite expressions.

Moreover, his bilingual development is shaped by several key factors, including parental language use, bilingual language input, in the home and community, media engagement, and his positive attitude toward bilingualism. Caregivers play a vital role by modeling both languages, offering guidance, and fostering a supportive environment that reinforces bilingual language use. To further support and enhance the bilingual abilities of children in similar contexts, the caregivers are required to play an active, modeling role wherefore they use both Filipino and Cebuano using natural and everyday communication, as well as, encourage children to code-switch by providing positive reinforcement to them through gentle corrections and clarifications, without any negative attitudes towards using a mix of languages. It is suggested that the teachers gain a highly informed knowledge of normal bilingual tendencies and include in their classroom practice, routine, stories, and engaging activities that will build the

language understanding and expression. Schools are supposed to invest in practical teacher education training programs oriented around the multilingual education techniques and avenues in addition to provision of culturally applicable instructions materials that consider the linguistic realities of the learners.

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