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Writing and Lexical Development of Indonesian Bilingual Children Studying in Australian Primary Schools

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Abstract

This article discusses the evidence of individual differences among the Indonesian bilingual children in their writing and lexical development in Australian primary schools. It employs a longitudinal ethnographic approach collecting data on how the children's levels of bilingual writing and lexical development reflect differences in the approaches they have been exposed to in the school context and their individual differences in age and learning styles. Research result demonstrates that the two Indonesian bilingual children in the process of becoming bilingual demonstrate some marked individual differences toward their bilingual writing and lexical development in Australian school context. These differences appear to relate to the types of experience and support the children have in the school and these are impacted on by the attitudes towards the use of L1 of their mainstream classroom teachers.

Keywords: writing, bilingualism, biliteracy, lexical development

Introduction

Biliteracy and bilingual development have become the recent debates among scholars globally. Biliteracy and bilingual development can be traced from ecological perspectives (Hornberger, 2017) and the narrative account of family biliteracy and bilingual development (Kabuto, 2017). These bilingual researchers argue the importance of becoming bilingual and biliterate individual in responding the current globalisation trend. For this reason, the investigation on the issue of bilingualism and biliteracy development is further important to be conducted.

The research on bilingualism and biliteracy development for Indonesian learners have been conducted in several areas. For example, Abduh & Andrew (2017) studied adult bilingualism and biliteracy; Abduh, Rosmaladewi, & Basri, (2018) investigated awareness and commitment to bilingualism and internationalisation; Rosmaladewi & Abduh (2017) investigated collaborative language culture that support biliteracy and bilingual development of learners; Ramly & Abduh, (2018) investigated language and assesment; and Hudriati, Patak, & Basri (2018) explored assessing Indonesian students' writing. Despite these previous studies, there is still limited research that focuses on the lexical development of Indonesian bilingual children in English speaking environment. In addition, Creese and Martin (2003) point out, there has been little research into the inter-connections between

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languages and their users in the classroom context. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap. This article presents lexical development of Indonesian bilingual children in Australian primary school contexts.

The research question to be addressed in this study is: How does the children's level of knowledge about, interest in and approach to supporting bilingualism and biliteracy impact on their bilingual writing development in Australian literacy classroom?

Literature Review

Despite there are numerous studies in lexical development of bilingual learners, the authors choose four relevant previous studies: a longitudinal ethnographic study on teachers attitude to support the development of biliteracy (Jafar, 2010); an in-depth case study on factors affecting biliteracy and bilingual development of learners (Abduh, 2018); the importance of classroom environment in supporting bilingual and biliteracy development (Palmer & Martínez, 2016) and activities that can enhance students' biliteracy and bilingual development (Song, 2016).

Jafar (2010) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic study on teachers' roles and attitude in supporting biliteracy development within Australian contexts. Jafar indicated that the role of mainstream teachers in supporting children's biliteracy development and bilingualism in a public primary school where English is the medium of instruction is significantly essential in building biliteracy development. Jafar recommended a further research of Indonesian children within different setting and larger participants.

Abduh (2018) carried out an in-depth case study on factors affecting biliteracy and bilingual development of learners. Abduh commented that, besides teachers' roles, curriculum, leadership, school visions, collaboration and partnership and assessment were important factors in developing learners' biliteracy and bilingual development. This study concluded that the more interactive and interconnecting factors, the better the result of learners biliteracy development. Abduh also suggested that for non-English speaking environment, it is important to fully immerse learners within the target language as much as they can.

Palmer & Martínez (2016) observed the importance of classroom environment in supporting bilingual and biliteracy development. They argued that "classrooms need to be hybridity in diverse communities... need to be places that allow and encourage—code-switching, translating, and other dynamic bilingual practice" (p. 4). This indicates that the opportunity and

spaces that are provided within classroom environment helps students build their bilingual and biliteracy development.

Song(2016) investigated several activities that can enhance students' biliteracy and bilingual development. Song found out that activities such as group works that collaborate students from cultural backgrounds, bilingual family pictures and festivals, repeated readings and retelling bilingual pictorial story-telling books can support the development of learner biliteracy skills. The research suggested that the adoption and adaption of such similar bilingual activities can assists students to be bilingual learners.

Research Method

The record of L2 and L1 writing development is divided into two sections: *English* and *Indonesian* texts. The materials and analysis presented here for each child have been drawn from a range of data sources: observation, field notes, interview, reflective journal, photographs, videotaping, and portfolios. Some aspects of the children's bilingual writing development in each language to consider are vocabulary development, events and activities taken from the child's writing journal, their story writing, literacy book and other collected documents in writing over four terms of a full year. This is for the purpose of demonstrating the development in the L2 and L1 writings created by the children.

In considering each child's bilingual writing development one aspect focussed on was each child's development of English vocabulary in the texts they produced through their English writing activities in school and through homework support also at home. These texts were carefully selected by the classroom teachers and the researcher to represent the performance of each child in each term of the year and were put into his/her individual portfolio. The rubric used for portfolio selection included consideration of a range of criteria. For the texts to be included in the child's portfolio they had to have been responded by both teachers and the students, as well as us as the researchers having been present as the ethnographers at some stage during its production in order for us to have an understanding of the literacy processes covering the circumstances of its production, including in relation to the context, content, development, and media of biliteracy (Hornberger, 2004).

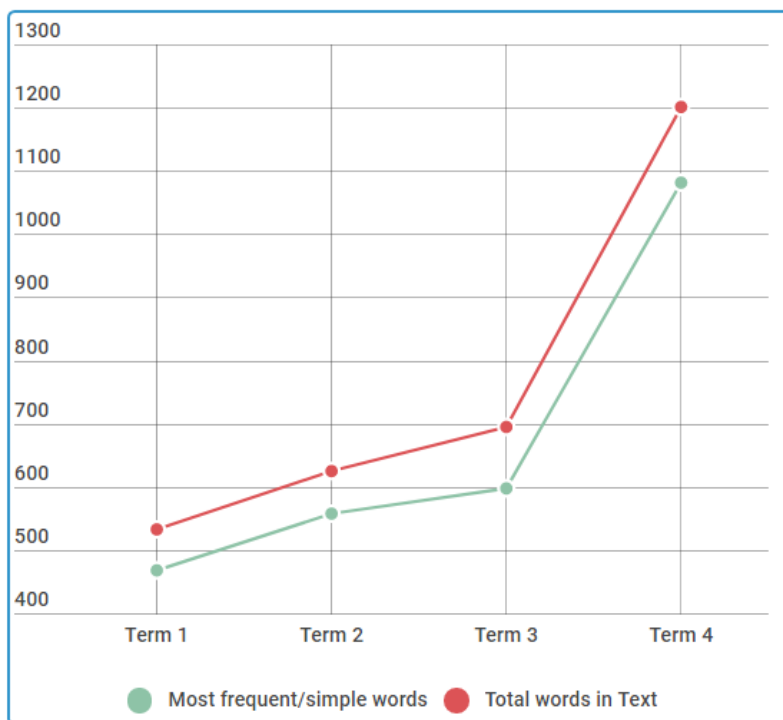


Figure 1: Haris's Bilingual Writing Development in School

Over the four terms Haris' L2 writing development is evident both in the most frequent/simple words doubling and in the average number of words also almost doubling with the growth from Term 3 to Term 4 being particularly great.

Other aspects explored were the activities and events in his writing. In Term 1, Haris read his own writing to the teacher and wrote about his ideas using simple sentence patterns that had been introduced and practised. The following sample of Haris' writing was taken from his literacy activity in the classroom where he had to write about 'what he likes and what he thinks about himself'. He expressed his meaning clearly without any spelling mistakes:

At school I like to play sport
 I am superb at art work
 I can run really fast
 I think that people should be nice
 I wish to improve at sport

I am interested at science

I like eating ice-cream (40 words)

In Term 2, Haris used some complex vocabulary items in his writing (eg. gun paint, off duty) and his sentences are much more complex than in his texts in the first term, as shown below:

I am a sailor

I eat biscuit and dried fish and cheese salted meat covered in maggots and pickled cabbage that the rats have nibbled. During the day I wash the decks, clean the gun paint off the ship or repair the ship.

Some of my friends that are off duty pick on me while I work hard.

They eat 5 pm on the lower deck away from the captain (70 words).

In Term 3 Haris wrote a short story which reflected his experience. It was quite an imaginative piece of writing that drew on his experience and topics he had been learning about:

The Adventure in the city

At Sunday in 2004 Dad and I in the city, Dad decided to go to have a picnic in national park. When we arrived we had our lunch. After lunch my Dad and my Mum felt asleep. My brother Jake and my sister Annie decided to explore Just near the Yarra river we saw a big hole. Then we went in When we were out of the big hole. We were in Gold fields. Then one miner found a gold. He put it in the museum. Then we tried to get gold (97 words)

In the fourth term, Haris used chronological order markers, *first*, *second*, *after*, *next*, to structure sequences in his writing. . Whilst the tenses were quite mixed as can be seen in the following writing, this was nevertheless quite an ambitious and sophisticated story:

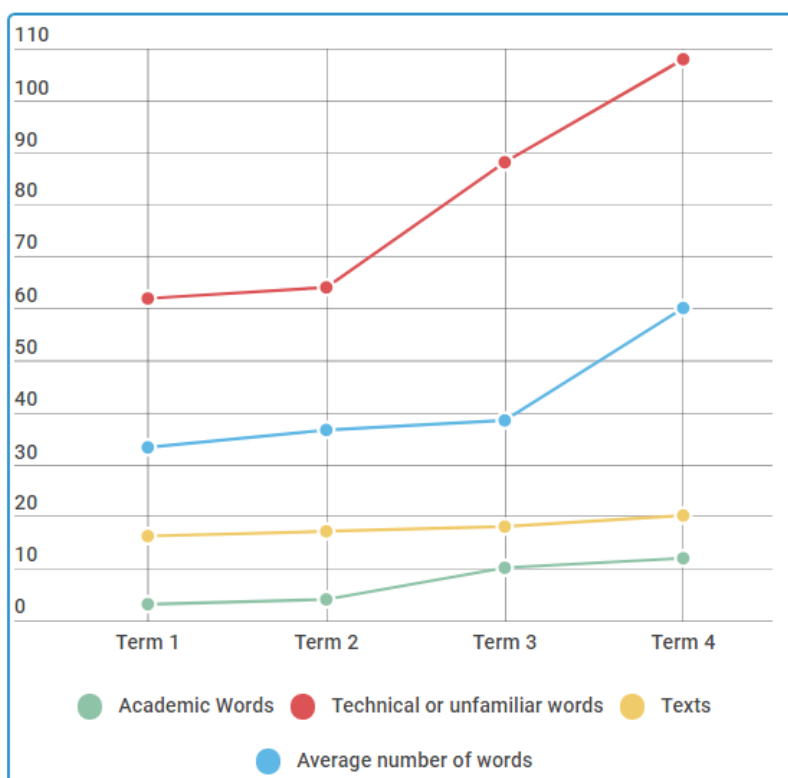
My best birthday

On September the eleventh it was my birthday.

That is tomorrow so I asked my mum if I could go to the shop to buy the ingredients for the cake. “Mum could I go to the shop with you”, I asked. “ Yes, you could come with me to the shop”, said mum.

First we brought chocolate for the cover. Second we brought icing for the inside. Next we brought flour, lollies, balloons, birthday candles, and a birthday present. We then went home to make the cake, hang up the balloons and get ready for the party. Mum signaled that it is time for sleeping, so we slept at 11 o’clock. Tomorrow my friends came to my house for the party, first we played hide and seek. After I was it in that game we played tigi. In there we played with a ball. After that we went home to eat the cake. After that I open my present box. I got 10 toys another 10 is books about Australia and I got a globe (186 words).

The evidence of the selected texts exhibited above from the first to the fourth terms provides more detailed support to the numerical data in Table 3.1.



Haris also started to develop his L1 writing in the third and fourth terms that I was observing him, when he was exposed to a different classroom teacher, Robinson, a senior classroom teacher in the school. Robinson has been categorised as a teacher who is strongly supportive of biliteracy and bilingualism. He was flexible in his classroom practices and encouraged the children to be creative in their literacy learning. In the case of Haris, as a non-native English speaker with a limited vocabulary in English, Robinson approached him in the classroom suggesting that Haris could write first in his L1, and then write it up in English. According to Robinson, this would be easier for Haris since he would already have the ideas to write in English. This was the start of Haris producing L1 writing texts over the second half of the year and this experience and encouragement was pivotal for his L1 literacy development at school as shown below in one of the text samples produced by Haris. This sample was taken from Haris' L1 writing portfolio and is about his weekend activity:

Akhirpekan	Weekend
<p>Harisabtusayatinggal di rumahsekitar jam 2 siangsayabermain tennis meja. Sayamenangmelawan ayah saya. Setelahitu, kami makansiangdenganbayamcampurkentang. Sayasukabayamdengankentangtetapitidakden gankuekentang. Setelah itu kami pergiketempatbelanja di kota. Kemudian kami pergikerumahtemankarenadiaakanpulangeke Indonesia. Di sanaagakmembosankantetapikitabermain play station. Besoknyasayatinggal d rumahlagi kami adapestadirumahdansayabermain di computer sampai jam 3 siang. Kita pergikekiosuntukbeliberbagaijenismakananke mudiankitapulangerumah.</p>	<p>Weekend</p> <p>On Saturday, I stayed at home. At around two a clock I played table tennis with my Dad. I won the table tennis game versus my Dad. After that we had lunch with spinach mixed with potato. I like spinach with potato, but not with the potato cake. Then we visited a friend who would go home Indonesia. We got bored there, but we played the Play Station. The following day, I stayed at home again because we had party at home and I played in the computer until on three o'clock. We went to the Milk bar to buy varieties of food to bring home (Translation).</p>

This sample of L1 writing demonstrates that Haris had developed his capacity to express himself in writing in L1 to a level far beyond that which he had at the time that he left his Indonesian school about a year previous to this. The sentences are very well connected from

one to the other using connectors such as “setelah itu (after that), kemudian (then), tetapi (but)”. It appears that this level of sophistication in structuring his L1 writing has been influenced by his experiences in the first two terms at school in Australia being encouraged to express himself in English using Australian pedagogical approaches to encouraging school-related literacy practices. Haris seems to have been able to transfer literacy strategies and skills from L2 into L1 and vice versa.

Wendy: Age: 8.2 years Grade: 3 Time in Australia at Term 1: 18 months

Wendy was eight years and two months old at the commencement of the study and she was living temporarily in Australia. She had resided in Australia for about one and a half years when I started approaching her to participate in the research and was studying in Grade 3. She was with her older sister who was studying in Year 7, and they were the dependent children of their mother. They expected to be staying in Australia for about four years with irregular visits from their father, who worked in Indonesia.

Wendy’s Bilingual Writing Development in School

Wendy progressed significantly in her L2 writing over the four terms that I was observing her. This development can be seen both in the growth in her vocabulary and in the number of texts (see Table 3.2 below).

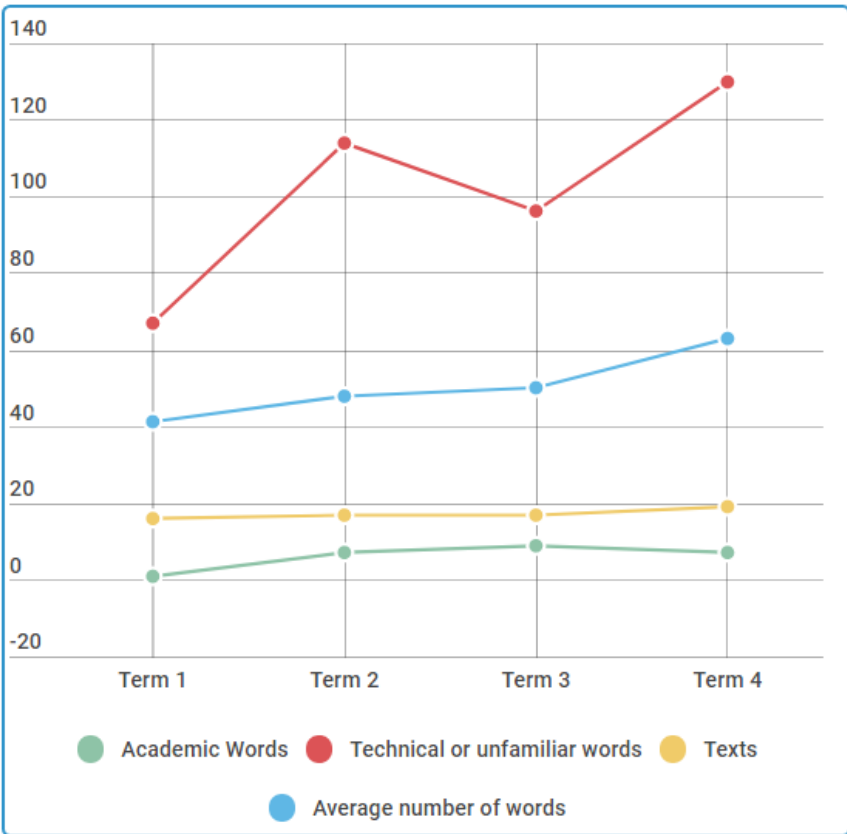
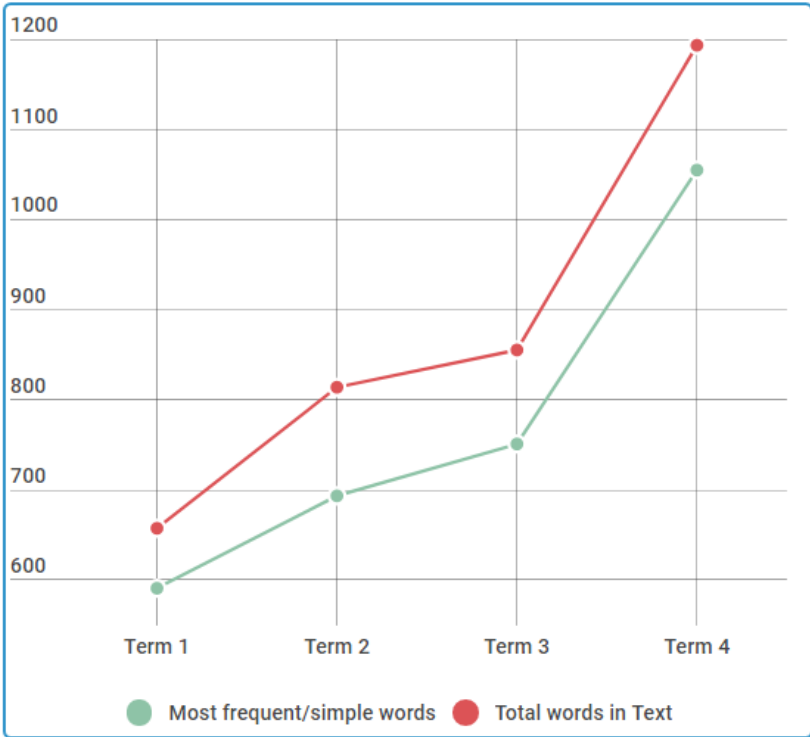


Table 3.3 shows how Wendy’s L2 literacy production steadily increased over the year. The token for unfamiliar words produced per term doubled. Whilst the quantity of texts did not increase very much there was a 50% increase in the average length of each text.

The other aspect to consider is the activities and events in her writing. In Term 1, Wendy wrote simple words, simple sentences and simple phrases. In developing her writing skills, she used pictures to assist with her written communication and she was able to read her own writing aloud to check her structure and vocabulary.

The following sample of Wendy's writing was taken from her literacy activity in the classroom where she had to make a drama about 'Noah' that would be performed at the literacy celebration at the end of the year. She drafted the scenario of the drama as follows:

Go Noah

Let all the animals goes in the ark so they don't get wet.

Mrs. Noah helping Noah builds the ark bigger.

Angles tells Noah that he have to build a mighty ark for the rainy day.

Families: they agree what Noah says (44 words).

In the second term, Wendy wrote simple sentences to make simple requests, or express basic needs, and wrote a series of events or actions using familiar or most common vocabulary as well as producing texts in a variety of writing genres, such as letters, procedural writing, news writing etc. The following example was taken from her writing sample produced in the classroom. She wrote a letter to her friend, Ayu (pseudonym) telling her about the school activities that she had experienced. She wrote clearly connecting sentences to make a coherent narrative text as can be seen below:

Dear Ayu

It's so cool you get to do cheer leading and you get go camping.
Sometimes my friend and I do some dancing or cheer leading at school
at playtime.

Our school holiday is coming up on June 25th.

This week in art we're doing clay. We have to make a dragon or a dinosaur. I made a dragon it looks cute. We put the dinosaurs and dragons name kiln. A kiln is a special oven for a sky. Our art teacher is called Jenny W. So we have fun on your summer holidays.

From

Wendy

p.s: please write back to me (103 words).

In Term 3 Wendy wrote a short story that drew on her experience. It is a narrative recount in the first person of the events over the time when she was ill at home and is sequentially structured:

On Saturday, I was sick. So I stayed at home. I read my library book and I watched my dad's. I watched Looney Tunes back in Action, Mary-Kate and Ashley passport to Paris and I also played on the computer.

On Sunday, I stayed at home again I continued reading my library. It was two of a kind. It was a Mary-Kate and Ashley book. At 2 o'clock Nadira came to cheer me up we watched Holiday in the Sun, switching goals. They are Mary-Kate and Ashley movies. We played a little joke on Nadira and her sister Shafira. At night my family walked to my mums friend house we had dinner there (113 words).

In the fourth term, Wendy was exposed to more complex sentence writing. As a result, her writing samples became longer and more complex. She wrote an excellent piece of writing about her birthday:

My stupid Birthday

It was my birthday. I'm turning eight. We all ate dinner. Couple of minutes, later it was time to blow out the candles. They all sang happy birthday, and I cut the cake into twenty-nine pieces. We all had our own pieces of cake, but the stupid bit was somebody spat out a piece of cake onto my face. I knew it was my cousin. He always spits on peoples' faces and cakes, and usually one of my friends does as well. Their mum gave me the presents just because they hate me. I've just been spat at! Now one of my present is gone. At 8 o'clock I started looking at the presents. There are meant to be twenty but there's only seventeen left. I think my mean friends took there. Well, I just ask my mum for another three presents. I ask my mum she said, "no" so I asked my dad, and he said, "yes but only three! I yelled, OK! My dad gave me ticket to go to the Gold Coast in the Gold Coast dad let me go to Movie World and the Dream World. I think that's enough for my present. Three weeks later, we went to the Gold Coast. I make sure the door is locked, windows are shut and everything is put away. I checked everything. WE arrived at the Airport at 7. it was time to go the plane. It's going to be fun at Gold Coast. We arrived at 9.35 in the morning. My family and I walked to Movie world. I went on every ride, because my dad already paid \$100 for entry because we all going to Dream World. There's many things to play with and rides to play on. It is much fun than Movie World. At night we watch the movie star and singers awards. Eminem got six awards for the best rapper. The next day. We went back to Melbourne. We arrived at Melbourne at 6.45. My mean friends were right in front of my eyes. " I'm sorry...wrecked your things and stole the present from your house. We've come to fix them with you" "Alright, I'll fix them with you, " I muttered. They return my birthday presents so I have to say thanks to dad because he gave me tickets to go to Gold Coast. My best friend was going to fight them but I told them not to. So we all became best friends forever. Our mean friends became best friend. Two weeks later, my family and my best friend and I went to Gold Coast

again. We had more fun than before because there're more people to hang out with (451 words).

Wendy seemed to have no L1 writing exposure in the school context. Her classroom teacher was from English Literacy Oriented (ELO) category and strongly focused on her students' development of their writing in English. The observation of Wendy over one year did not uncover any L1 writing products produced by her at school. Wendy's L1 writing did not demonstrate any development in the Australian literacy classroom context.

Conclusion

There was a marked difference in the way the Indonesian bilingual children develop their writing and lexical in Australian primary schools. The differences related to the types of vocabularies and lexical development the children have in their writing. The two children experienced a classroom context that recognised their L1 language backgrounds by allowing their use of L1 in interaction and supported their writing in L1 as well as L2. Both had teachers who were transitionally supportive of bilingualism and biliteracy. As a result, they demonstrated a consistent development in their bilingual writing and lexical. Overall, the study has provided some specific evidence in support of (Hornberger, 2017; Kabuto, 2017) concept about the potential for educational policies and practices that preserve and develop language diversity, rather than suppressing it.

The study of lexical and writing development of bilingual children adds the global debate on the previous study on the role of teachers in classroom context to support children biliteracy development (Palmer & Martínez, 2016). In addition, the current study is relevant to ecological perspectives of biliteracy and bilingual development (Hornberger, 2017) and create implementation spaces for learning (Abduh & Rosmaladewi, 2017a; Hornberger, 2017). The research is also relevant with the previous studies in Japan on writing development (Yasuda, 2014) and learners' vocabulary size development (Lien, 2014) via extensive reading strategies.

Pedagogical implications

There are two important pedagogical implications: theoretical and practical pedagogical

implications. Theoretically, this study provides concepts for researchers and teachers to conduct further research on the area of bilingualism, bilingual education and multilingualism. The development of lexical and writing of Indonesian bilingual children in English speaking environment can be a model for developing bilingual children in other contexts, particularly the establishment of similar programs and activities within Indonesian primary school settings. For teachers, the strong support to develop bilingual ability for children can encourage them to acquire bilingual vocabulary and writing both inside class environment and outside classroom. Practically, the model that is developed in the Australian context can be applied pragmatically by teachers according to situation and needs. The measurements of children words development via software application as it is used in this article can be applied by other researchers and practitioners.

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