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**Review of the Doctoral Thesis  
of Idit Perelmuter M.Sc.  
title: Educational Situations of Bilingual Students with Learning Disabilities  
at School Hand in Hand. The Case Study  
supervisor: dr hab. Danuta Kopeć, prof. UAM**

## **Introduction**

The dissertation of Idit Perelmuter contains 409 pages, 9 chapters, 11 tables and one figure. Her research is based on large number of references (27 pages), related to the topic. The dissertation has contemporary aspects of bilingual education with its respect to students with learning disabilities described by the research objectives. The dissertation is written in English.

The thesis deals with the topic of the educational situation of bilingual students with learning disabilities in the contexts of the bilingual elementary school and the diversity of Israeli society. The research is relied on a case study of the school of the Hand in Hand Association. The theoretical frameworks for the study are built by the use of the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner including its three main systems: the chronosystem, the macrosystem and the microsystem. As the Author of the dissertation notices in the introductory part of her work, despite of the fact that Israel is called a country of immigration still there is a relatively small number of studies referred to the educational situations of bilingual students with learning disabilities. Therefore, one of the aims of the study is to fill that gap. Moreover, the conducted research is claimed to be an inspiration for further research in the field. It also contains recommendations in the area of broadly understood pedagogical practice. As a result, it may offer an useful insight into the field of bilingual education and disabilities study to other researches, teachers, social workers and anyone who is particularly interested in the topic.

## Structure of the Thesis

The study consists of four main parts: theoretical frameworks, methodological foundations, results and findings, and recommendations. The first part discusses such topics as bilingualism, learning disabilities and the periodization of childhood from the viewpoint of the literature. It provides a set of necessary ideas about the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner and the Multidimensional Developmental Model that are used for research. In addition to a theoretical background of the study, it offers a guide on Israeli society and its educational system that allows to get a better understanding of the divisions and challenges that exist therein.

The first chapter is titled as *Bilingualism in the view of the subject literature* and it includes a broad introduction to different bilingual child approaches. The Author focuses her attention on child's environment and family language strategies (subchapters 1.2.1 and 1.2.2). She discusses advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism (subchapter 1.1.3). She also explores educational language policy with its focus on approaches and programs in bilingual education for students (subchapters 1.3.1 and 1.3.2).

In the second chapter *Learning disabilities in the view of the subject literature*, the Author provides crucial background information that help understanding definitions and different dimensions of learning disabilities. She differentiates various types of learning disabilities (subchapter 2.2), offers characteristics of the functioning of students with learning disabilities (subchapter 2.3) and describes the role of the family environment (subchapter 2.4). In conclusion she explores learning disabilities in reference to the two crucial for her research approaches - the Multidimensional Developmental Model (subchapter 2.5.1) and the ecological theory of Bronfenbrenner (subchapter 2.5.2).

The third chapter is dedicated to five main areas of child development such as biological, cognitive, emotional, moral and social (subchapters from 3.2 to 3.6). The goal of the chapter is to introduce important features of childhood in the school age period.

The fourth chapter provides general information on Israeli society in relation to its diversity. The Author talks about different dimensions of collective identities in Israeli society (subchapter 4.1) and she discusses over the idea of multiculturalism in respect of Israeli experiences (subchapter 4.2).

The fifth chapter is the last theoretical chapter and it deals with the education system in Israel. The purpose of the chapter is to describe the structure of the education system concerning issues related to special needs education (subchapter 5.2) and bilingual education

(subchapter 5.4). In particular the Author tries to examine the education system from a minority perspective.

The sixth chapter focuses on the methodology of the study. The main objectives of the study are to describe and analyze the educational situations of bilingual students with learning disabilities in the elementary school of the Hand in Hand Association from the perspectives of different actors such as students, parents and teachers and from formal/informal insights into functions of the school. The Author addresses four research questions. The main research question is what are the educational situations of bilingual students with learning disabilities in the elementary school of the Hand in Hand Association? Other three detailed research questions are devoted to the three systems by Bronfenbrenner – chronosystem, macrosystem and microsystem. The presented research is conducted according to qualitative research approaches. It means that the Author makes the choice for qualitative methods such as the case study concerning the analysis of documents and in-depth interviews. She claims that the analysis of documents is relied on critical discourse analyses. She also presents the map of analyzed documents, divided into two categories – chronosystem and macrosystem, with regard to the period of the coronavirus and overall contexts of the educational system in Israel. The Author conducts 47 interviews in total (principals - 4, teachers - 22, parents – 11 and students – 10). She gives background information on interviewees and provides necessary details on the research strategy of interviewing. In conclusion, she talks about the ethical dilemmas during the research.

The seventh chapter offers result and findings that come from the analysis of documents. The structure of the subchapters is organized according to research aims and questions. In addition to the chosen methodology of the research, the Author tries to examine very carefully the nature of bilingual education and structure of bilingual school, especially by separating it into parts in reference to Bronfenbrenner's three systems in order to explain it. The chapter is very rich in information, but it has a logical and clear partition nevertheless.

The eight chapter gives us an opportunity to hear the voices of different actors and therefore, I personally appreciate it much. In the chapter, the Author addresses four factors: formal, personal, environmental, teaching and support. Each factor is examined and related to experiences of different actors such as students, parents, teachers and other educational staff. The chapter is huge, because it contains above 100 pages. Likewise, the previous chapter, it contains a large portion of information and the Author tries to explore each factor in detail with her full attention.

Finally, the ninth chapter is dedicated to conclusions and recommendations. The examination of the conclusions gives the impression of work that the Author completed. It also covers the research aims and questions. However, for educational studies, a recommendation part of the dissertation always plays an important role in evaluating its value. It must be highlighted that the Author produces a large number of recommendations according to analyzed parts of the system. Moreover, some of them are directly addressed to educational agendas concerning the Ministry of Education. Indeed, the recommendations have a number of interesting suggestions that educational policy holders can benefit from.

### **Summary and conclusion**

This thesis represents a great deal of work and it has contemporary and significant aspects of bilingual education described by nine chapters. Moreover, the topic is important not only for academic purposes but for practical approaches as well. Therefore, different actors of the educational system can use the results achieved in this dissertation for future developments.

The following positive points can be emphasized:

1. The research subject is unique for the area of bilingual education, because of its focus on students with learning disabilities.
2. The provided analyses fully correspond to the all aims of the thesis.
3. The methodology of the study is consistent, corrected and used appropriated.
4. The results are well described.
5. The literature references are rich and correctly cited.

The following points have to be mentioned as potential weakness of the thesis:

1. In my copy, the Author repeats the same paragraph twice (p. VI).
2. The Author gives different numbers of student interviewees, once it is 10, and then 12 (p. 142).
3. It seems that some information in theoretical parts are quite unnecessary, because they are not needed and used in other parts of the dissertation. For instance, in the subchapter 3.4 the Author describes the model of psychosexual development by Freud in detail, but it is never used for her research itself. Therefore, I strongly recommend to review the theoretical part of the dissertation before its possible publication.

## **Final Evaluation Statement**

Overall I find this thesis well-written. The results are well presented and their interpretation is correct. This thesis is ready to be defended orally and meets the requirements laid down for the degree of Ph.D. in education by the statutes in the Journal of Laws of the Republic of Poland (art. 13 ustawy z dnia 14 marca 2003 r. o stopniach i tytule naukowym oraz o stopniach i tytule w zakresie sztuki Dziennik Ustaw nr 65, poz. 595, z późn. zm.).

*Julian Albański*