

# *The Impact of Early Family Environment on Children's Creativity*

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**Abstract:** With the rise of artificial intelligence and the increase in social demand, creativity has increasingly become a competitive factor for individuals. Therefore, the impact of early family environments on children's creativity development, especially the psychological one, is further emphasized. However, there is still a research gap in the impact of different parenting styles and different language environments on children's creativity. This article uses literature analysis to study the impact of bilingual family environment and ancestral dominated family environment on children's creativity. Among them, intergenerational education usually has a negative influence on children's creativity due to the educational limitations of the grandparent, while bilingual education can cultivate children's unique ways of thinking, thus playing a positive role in developing children's creativity. Parents and grandparents should pay attention to choosing positive strategies when creating an early family environment for their children, in order to strengthen the generation of positive effects and reduce the impact of negative effects.

**Keywords:** creativity, family environment, intergenerational education, bilingual education

## 1. Introduction

Creativity has a great impact on the reform and advancement of human politics, culture, and economy since ancient times. And with the development of science and technology and the steady improvement of AI performance, more and more grassroots workers are facing the risk of being replaced. Human beings seem to have to face new challenges every day. Therefore, creativity will increasingly become an influential competitive factor for individuals and the countries. At the same time, from the conclusions of various creativity models, like the systems model of creativity from Csikszentmihalyi, the development of creativity is inseparable from individual's living environment, while the impact of early family environment plays a foundation role in cultivating children's creativity [1]. These years, the family environment in China is becoming increasingly diverse. Grandparents caregivers and three generations living together are still very common. At the same time, with the advancement of globalization, the number of transnational families is increasing. Is there still any room for improvement in the traditional Chinese family structure? And, is the increasingly valued bilingual environment able to bring positive effects on children's creativity as parents wish? This article will focus on discussing the impact of bilingual environments and intergenerational child rearing on children's creativity.

## 2. Concept Definition

### 2.1. Creativity

Creativity is widely recognized as the ability to generate valuable ideas, products, and solutions, which is the highest form of thinking and labor skills [2]. At first, most people believed that creativity was the patent of a small number of geniuses. However, with the in-depth exploration of creativity, people gradually realize that creativity is actually a skill that can be learned and improved [3]. Research has shown that in addition to intrinsic motivation, related domain skills, and creative skills, the environment is also an indivisible part of creativity [3]. Lerner's Developmental Contextualism believes that individual development is achieved through the dynamic interaction between individuals and their contexts. The scenarios here include the physical environment, social members, time dimensions, and the individual in itself.

In the psychological literature, divergent thinking is often used as a synonym for creativity [3]. Therefore, divergent thinking tests are always used as a tool to assess creativity [4]. There are two well-known divergent thinking tests: the Abbreviated Torrance Test for Adults and the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking, and the results of creativity are evaluated based on the fluency, originality, flexibility, and refinement of the responses [5].

It is widely believed that creativity is influenced by age and gender. Creativity tends to decline with age. Girls have better verbal creativity, while boys have better performance in graphic creation [3]. Of course, there is still a vast exploration space for the complexity of creativity.

### 2.2. Early Family Environment

Although the early family environment usually refers to the physical and living environment constructed by parents, recent researches have increasingly emphasized the impact of the psychological environment on children, such as parent-child activities, educational behavior, and the family atmosphere [6]. The dominant factor of the family psychological atmosphere is the attitude and behavior of parents and their children in the process of parenting [3].

The early family environment that shapes children's learning and development can be summarized into three dimensions: learning environment, family climate, and educational beliefs. Learning environment focuses on the stimulation of language and words, while family climate emphasizes emotional assistance from elders. Finally, educational beliefs are the expectations children feel from their elders for their future [7].

According to Bandura's social learning theory, as the initial teachers of children, parents and other elders' behaviors, educational patterns, and educational attainment can greatly affect their children's growth. Children's creativity is more likely to be fostered in the family with a permissive style and has greater support for their children's creativity than other characteristics [2]. Researches show that parents' autonomous support and control are two main aspects that affect creativity. Control is divided into psychological control and behavioral control, which often have a negative impact on children's creativity, while autonomous support encourages children to make decisions based on their own choices, which has a positive effect [3].

## 3. Intergenerational Child Rearing

Influenced by the traditional concept of large families and the implementation of the one child policy in 1978, many studies have shown that three generations living together and intergenerational child rearing are a very common phenomenon in China [8]. Also, With the growth of life expectancy and the increase in the participation rate of married women in labor, the phenomenon of grandparents

taking care of children has increased in various countries around the world [9]. As a result, society is increasingly concerned about the special impact that grandparents can have on children.

Intergenerational child rearing means grandparents live with their grandchildren and are responsible for their primary or total educational responsibilities [8]. Others also believe that intergenerative child rearing should be more broadly defined as involving grandparents as helpers, but its definition is closer to co-parenting [8]. In addition to traditional concepts and the impact of parents' work, the reasons for intergenerational parenting also include the death of parents and the failure to assume responsibility for upbringing [8]. For example, parents are divorced and unwilling to support their children, parents are imprisoned and sentenced, parents are prone to violence and abuse, parents themselves are still minors, therefore, they are unable to take care of the children.

### **3.1. Previous Research**

#### **3.1.1. Impact on Children's Mood, Health and Socialization**

Several studies have shown that children under the care of their grandparents are more likely to develop sleep disorders and dietary behavioral problems. And their physical activity levels, including gross motor and fine motor abilities, are weaker than those of their parents' children. On the psychological side, due to the limitations of the ancestors themselves, such as lower education levels and the preference for sons over daughters, it is more likely to hinder children's early intellectual development and lead them to the lack of safe attachment. At the same time, because grandparents tend to coddle and foster children more than their parents, this can lead to children's egocentric irritability, which will affect their social skills [10]. However, some studies suggest that the patience and richer life experiences of grandparents can instead promote children's social development and are significantly superior to single-parent families [8].

#### **3.1.2. The Impact of Grandparents' Resources on Children**

Grandparents' human resources, psychological resources, and other capital will follow the Markov process to pass on to their grandchildren and have influences [8]. Markov process is a random process in which past information has been saved to the present state. In other words, grandparents with better resources can make their grandchildren produce better results through their parents' generation. The three types of resources owned by grandparents that are believed to have an impact on children's education are economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital [8]. Some studies have shown that in families dominated by parents, although the resources of grandparents are positively correlated with the development of children, they cannot form a direct link. But the study also believes that when parents withdraw from the core of educating their children, the resources of their grandparents will replace their parents as a direct impact [9].

### **3.2. The Impact on Children's Creativity**

#### **3.2.1. Negative Impact of Grandparents' Parenting Styles on Children's Creativity**

Researches have shown that due to the influence of compensation psychology and escrow status, grandparents' attention to children's physical condition and behavioral training goes far beyond the cultivation of children's learning and creativity. At the same time, grandparents tend to use coercive commands to control children's behavior and psychology. Grandparents' desire for control is stronger in the families that are brought up through generations than in other families, which makes their behavioral constraints more likely to cause children to exhibit inhibitory tendencies. In such a family environment, children tend to become sensitive and self-disciplined. Although this can make them

appear mature, they lag behind in the development of autonomy and creativity. But when reducing the conflict between grandparents and grandchildren, making the grandparents consciously reduce control behavior, this adverse impact can be effectively mitigated [8].

### **3.2.2. Difference in Interaction with Parents and with Grandparents**

In interacting with children, parents can give them more cognitive and interpersonal resources than the grandparents. Cognitive resources include the educational background and the intellectual stimulation for children, while interpersonal resources include verbal and physical emotional encouragement. Cognitive resources can help children understand problems, update their existing thinking patterns, and promote new ideas. Grandparents are limited by their educational level and often rely too heavily on their own experience, which make their output in knowledge and methods weaker than the parents'. Human resources play a more significant role in promoting children's creativity, as positive emotional encouragement enhances children's intrinsic development motivation and Cognitive flexibility. Although emotional support from grandparents and parents for children can achieve similar results in verbal terms, physical contact with parents can bring better emotional attitudes to children. Some experiments have shown that children's performance in the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking improves after interacting with their parents, but there is no such effect after interacting with their grandparents [8].

### **3.2.3. Impact on Children of Different Genders**

The negative impact of intergenerational education on the creative development of boys is far greater than that of girls. In creativity tests, boys living with their grandparents scored significantly lower than families dominated by their parents, while girls scored more similarly. At the same time, girls are more creative than boys when they are all nurtured by grandparents. Firstly, it is because of girls' own personality factors, such as self regulation and interpersonal skills, which help them more actively establish good relationships with their grandparents in the family. Secondly, the concept of son preference tends to lead to the overindulgence and overprotection of boys by their grandparents, thereby inhibiting their independence and creativity [8].

## **4. Bilingual Family Environment**

With the growth of floating populations among countries and the confirmation of bilingual cognitive advantages in various fields, people are paying more attention to the cultivation of bilingual family environments. Bilingual acquisition should be distinguished from second language acquisition. Bilingual acquisition refers to balanced bilingual children who acquire bilingual language in a family environment, while those who acquire bilingual language in kindergartens are referred to as second language learners [11]. In addition to immigration factors, children in some bilingual countries, like Montreal, Canada, are also more likely to have a bilingual environment. This special language environment allows children to be exposed to two sets of conceptual systems, as well as customs and values therein [5].

When faced with a multilingual environment within a family, different families will make different language choices, such as strictly following the One Parent One Language principle, or using a more flexible collaborative approach. Parents' beliefs in language can affect their own use and choice of language in life and language practice, thereby producing the effect on children's bilingual environment [12]. In addition, explicit language strategies (mandatory requirements), implicit strategies (building identity), and children's own initiative used by parents can all affect children's ultimate bilingual ability [12].

## **4.1. Previous Research**

### **4.1.1. Unique Thinking Patterns in Language Organization**

Bilinguals not only have the ability to switch from one language to another, but also can inadvertently mix two or more languages in a conversation. This is because of the cooperation, competition, and coexistence of two languages in the minds of bilinguals enable them to carry out a more complex integration. For bilinguals, different languages may be used in different ways or for different people, but this choice is made under the unconscious control of a series of factors, which is quite different from monolinguals. Therefore, language mixing is a natural result of bilinguals' thinking. Sociolinguistic studies have shown that language regulation, multiple identities, and social distance situational factors are the main reasons for this phenomenon. Although language mixing was once considered a defect, it is actually a response to an optimization strategy, and can play a positive role in the development of creativity [13].

### **4.1.2. Improvement of Non-verbal Cognitive Abilities**

There seems to be no doubt that bilinguals can possess some unique expertise in the field of language. And with the deepening of research, bilinguals have been proven to perform better than monolinguals in problem-solving, perceptual focus, divergent thinking expression, and other aspects [14]. One of the reasons why bilingualism can promote cognitive development is that multilingualism can improve executive control functions, which means bilingual children have advantages in developing control processes and processing complex stimuli. This is also because bilingual acquisition enables children to have stronger processing abilities in switching, updating, and focusing on inhibition control [4].

## **4.2. The Impact on Children's Creativity**

### **4.2.1. Positive Impact of Bilingual Environment on Children's Creativity**

Studies like Leikin's controlled experiment have shown that bilingual children have significant advantages over monolingual children in terms of originality and creativity indicators [4]. Multicultural experiences and language environments have a positive impact on creativity, and this impact may already exist in early childhood development. The unique memory structure of bilingualism enables bilinguals to better activate the correlation between conceptual features while suppressing the generation of unrelated concepts, thereby supporting the better functioning of divergent thinking [5]. Kharkhurin's research on bilinguals and monolinguals in 2017 demonstrated that bilinguals' divergent thinking is more flexible and fluent [5]. The research by Adi Japha et al. on bilingual children showing greater mutual recognition flexibility in painting also confirms the advantages of bilinguals in creative development [15]. Painting has long been widely used in the study of cognitive development, where the task of drawing nonexistent objects is a measure of mental flexibility at that age. The activity of the two language systems enables bilingual children to better understand the connections between components during the drawing process [15].

### **4.2.2. Influencing Factors and Causes**

Creativity will be influenced by bilinguals' proficiency in both languages. Some studies suggest that creativity is positively correlated with proficiency, but some experimental results show that bilinguals with low proficiency perform better in divergent thinking because language proficiency is more influenced by selective attention [14]. In addition, due to the different frequencies of use of the two language systems, balanced bilingual users can achieve higher scores in creativity tests [4]. In addition, different ways of bilingual education, the amount of language mastered and the usage in

different fields may also have impacts on the development of children's creativity. However, research on these aspects is relatively rare or just in the infancy.

Bilingualism has a positive impact on creativity for two reasons. The first reason is that bilinguals have cognitive advantages. In the process of competing between two or more languages in mind, bilinguals have stronger executive functions and conversion abilities, which are conducive to the generation of divergent thinking and the maintenance of concentration. Secondly, because diverse values and systems enrich bilinguals' associative abilities and conceptual activation, allowing them to explore more possibilities, giving them the advantage of flexibility and originality in their thinking [4].

## 5. Suggestion

Based on the above, here propose the following views:

First of all, grandparents should communicate more about children with their parents during the process of parenting, and should master reasonable guidance methods through appropriate channels, such as schools, in order to provide children with more positive cognitive resources.

Secondly, grandparents should give children more positive feedback, and emotional support which can drive positive emotions in children. At the same time, reducing parental control over children and improving autonomy support can also help alleviate conflicts between grandparents and grandchildren, thereby promoting the development of children's creativity.

Thirdly, when building a bilingual family environment, parents should follow the rules of children's cognitive development while making appropriate choices based on their own family circumstances. Attention should be paid to the balance between the two languages in daily life and in the process of education. Parents can use implicit and explicit strategies to help children switch between two languages, thereby fostering mental flexibility. At the same time, parents should also pay attention to the system behind language and the transmission of multiculturalism, which is the foundation of bilingual children's creativity.

Finally, schools and other public education resources can more closely connect with parents to understand the special needs of intergenerational families and bilingual family environments, and also facilitate future research on whether the characteristics possessed by grandparents directly affect children's creativity, as well as the impact of different bilingual proficiency on creativity, and so on.

## 6. Conclusion

In early family environments, intergenerational child rearing has a negative impact on children's creativity, while bilingual environments are conducive to the development of children's creativity. Due to the highly controlled parenting style of grandparents, and the lack of appropriate guidance strategies, generational education often inhibits the development of children's creativity. And this negative impact is more evident in boys, because of the current preference for boys over girls, and also because girls have better personality factors. At the same time, it is difficult for grandparents to provide as much cognitive resources to their children through multiple ways as parents do, and they are naturally disadvantaged in transmitting interpersonal resources. Therefore, children's performance on creativity tests decreases after interacting with their grandparents. Bilingual environments have a positive impact on children's creative development. Compared to monolinguals, their unique thinking patterns and more diverse family environment give bilinguals cognitive advantages and broader associative abilities, which also enable them to perform better in divergent thinking flexibility and originality tests. For bilinguals themselves, proficiency and balance in both languages can have an impact on creativity. Therefore, further research and practice are needed to help grandparents reduce their negative impact on children during the education process, as well as

to find better ways to balance children's use and form bilingual thinking. In addition, due to the diversity of bilinguals, more researches are still needed on the differences in creativity exhibited by bilinguals with more language skills and different proficiency levels.

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