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Original Article

The Impact of Foreign Language Proficiency on Career Development for Spanish-English Bilinguals in Cebu

Niera Rel Juntilla Surio*, *Ian Jarabelo

Author Information:

University of San Jose-Recoletos, Cebu City, Philippines

Correspondence:
nierarel@gmail.com

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Abstract. This study explores the role of foreign language proficiency, specifically Spanish-English bilingualism, in shaping career perceptions among bilinguals in Cebu. Despite the growing demand for bilingual professionals in industries such as Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) and finance, the correlation between bilingualism and career advancement remains underexplored. The research aims to examine the challenges faced by Spanish-English bilinguals in utilizing their language skills effectively and the impact on their career development. A qualitative research approach was used, involving in-depth interviews with 10 Spanish-English bilinguals working in various sectors in Cebu, including BPO and customer service. The findings reveal that while bilingual professionals possess strong foundational skills, they face challenges, including limited access to mentorship, recognition disparities, and communication barriers in professional settings. Despite these obstacles, bilingualism offers significant advantages, including expanded career opportunities, higher salaries, and enhanced professional development. The study highlights that targeted support programs, mentorship, and better recognition are essential to fully harness the potential of bilingual employees. This research contributes to understanding the career dynamics of bilingual professionals, emphasizing the need for inclusive strategies to bridge the gap between language proficiency and workplace success.

Keywords: *Bilingualism; Career development; Communication barriers; Foreign language proficiency; Professional development.*

Foreign language proficiency, particularly bilingualism, plays an increasingly important role in career development in today's globalized economy. Spanish-English bilingualism, in particular, has emerged as a significant asset across industries, including Business Process Outsourcing (BPO), tourism, and finance, particularly in regions with growing multilingual workforces, such as Cebu. In Cebu, Spanish-speaking employees have become valuable assets due to the demand for bilingual professionals serving Spanish-speaking clients from Spain, Mexico, and South America. As a result, the ability to effectively communicate in both Spanish and English provides bilingual employees with distinct career advantages, including access to better job opportunities, higher salaries, and professional growth (Kesbi, 2017; Simonsen, 2021).

While research has examined bilingualism's cognitive benefits (Nuri, 2020) and its importance in global business settings (Porras et al., 2020), there remains a gap in understanding how foreign language proficiency directly impacts the career perceptions and development of bilingual professionals in Cebu. Recent studies have

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highlighted the growing demand for bilingual employees, yet many individuals still struggle to leverage their language skills effectively in the workplace (Chen, 2020). Despite the increasing recognition of bilingualism as an asset, there is limited research on the challenges bilingual employees face and how these challenges affect their professional advancement (Alisoy, 2021; Ahamed, 2025).

In Cebu, Spanish-English bilinguals often encounter communication barriers, limited access to mentorship, and disparities in workplace recognition. These challenges, while common among bilinguals, have yet to be comprehensively studied in the context of the Cebuano workforce. The lack of exploration of how bilingualism influences career growth creates a gap in the literature that this study aims to address. By examining the career perceptions of Spanish-English bilinguals in Cebu, this study seeks to better understand the practical implications of bilingualism on career development, including job opportunities, salary growth, and professional development.

The purpose of this study is to explore the role of foreign language proficiency, specifically Spanish-English bilingualism, in shaping the career perceptions and opportunities of bilinguals in Cebu. This research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the advantages and challenges that bilingual professionals face, with the ultimate goal of providing recommendations to enhance career development strategies and support systems for bilingual employees.

Theoretical Background

This study is grounded in the Linguistic Capital theory by the sociolinguist Pierre Bourdieu and in pragmatics, a branch of linguistics. Exploring how foreign language influences career development among bilinguals, examining the broader implications of linguistics in bilingualism, and how Spanish bilingual employees leverage their English skills to enhance their perceived employability and career prospects. The ability to speak a foreign language gives an individual an advantage, especially in career opportunities, and provides a sense of social identity. The Spanish and English languages are seen as forms of capital that individuals can leverage for social mobility, employment, and status. Linguistic capital theory provides a framework for understanding how Spanish-English bilinguals assign value to their language competencies, how these competencies are recognized or rewarded by employers, and the implications for career perceptions.

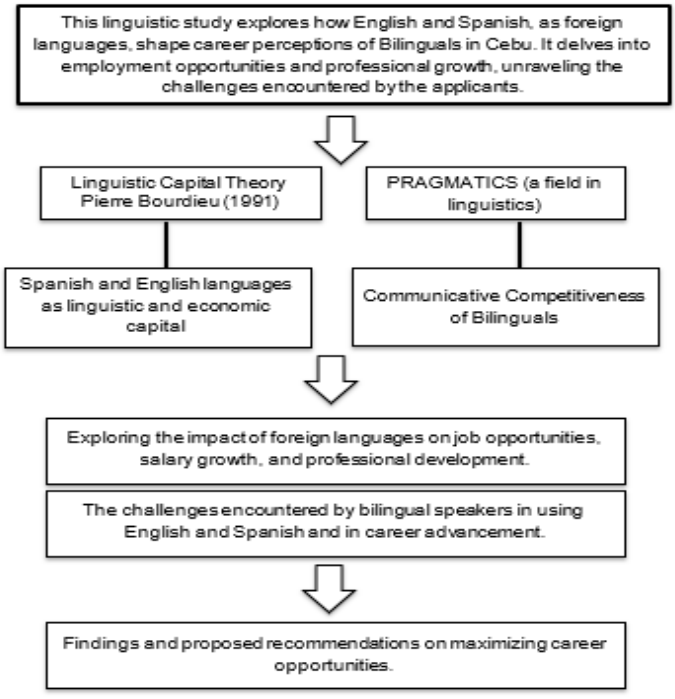


Figure 1. *Theoretical framework*

In addition, since Cebuano Spanish bilinguals are not native speakers of English or Spanish, they may face miscommunication and encounter new jargon or vocabulary, which is why the study of pragmatics in linguistics is important. Communication is one of the key roles of Bilingual employees; they often shift between English and Spanish depending on the task, the professional setting, or the purpose (e.g., English for business emails, calls, or translation tasks). Therefore, most Bilinguals rely on context to find meaning. These theories provide a framework for understanding how bilinguals perceive their foreign language skills in professional advancement.

Linguistic Capital Theory

Linguistic Capital theory views language as a form of capital that can be exchanged for cultural and economic advantages, reinforcing social hierarchies. Bourdieu's theory proposes four types of capital—economic, social, symbolic, and cultural—which can be used to understand issues of inequality, particularly in language practices in areas such as education and the workplace. He introduces the concept of "habitus," which refers to dispositions and values shaping an individual's actions and perceptions, influenced by their environment (Ramsey, 2025). This habitus is evident in language, as different languages and dialects reflect cultural identity and community. Language, particularly English, has become a powerful tool in the globalized world, acting as a bridge for communication across countries and cultures. English serves as the lingua franca of business and the economy, providing a competitive edge across industries such as customer service, technology, and research (Stephn, Guriro, & Halepota, 2021). Proficiency in English, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, is critical for job seekers, as job interviews and assessments are often conducted in English, making it essential for career advancement (Stephn, Guriro, & Halepota, 2021).

Bilingualism not only offers cognitive and cultural benefits but also plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's professional identity. In countries like India, English is both a bridge language and a marker of social status, creating a linguistic hierarchy in which English speakers hold advantages over non-English speakers, reflecting postcolonial and globalized influences (Alisoy, 2021). The ability to speak multiple languages, including English and other regional languages, has become increasingly valuable globally, with bilingual professionals gaining an edge in multicultural settings. As Nuri (2020) states, bilingualism is becoming a global norm, opening doors to new career opportunities. Bilinguals contribute significantly to workplace success, enhancing communication, creativity, and problem-solving abilities, particularly in leadership roles, where they bridge cultural and linguistic gaps and foster inclusive environments (Ahamed, 2025).

Pragmatics

Pragmatics, the study of how context contributes to meaning, plays a crucial role in bilingualism, as each language has its own set of pragmatic rules and cultural norms. The Spanish language, for example, has different grammatical rules than English, including verb conjugations and tense modifications. Learning these norms helps bilinguals communicate effectively and avoid cultural misunderstandings (Dipta, Virgiyanti, & Fachriza, 2021).

Pragmatics not only improves linguistic competence but is also essential for developing higher-level communication skills, particularly in intercultural settings (Dipta, Virgiyanti, & Fachriza, 2021). Research shows that multilingualism offers significant career advantages, with bilinguals highly sought after by employers for their ability to communicate across linguistic and cultural boundaries, thereby enhancing their employability and earnings (Ee, Mouboua, & Atobatele, 2024). In the Philippines, bilinguals commonly engage in code-switching, particularly in Taglish, which reflects their cultural and linguistic flexibility. Studies show that bilingualism enhances customer service and fosters trust, making bilingual employees valuable assets across sectors, especially in multinational environments (Porras, Ee, & Gandara, 2020).

Bilingualism provides a distinct advantage in the global job market, particularly in sectors such as international business, where bilingual professionals are essential for negotiations, understanding market nuances, and establishing relationships with global clients (Nuri, 2020). As globalization continues to influence the economic landscape, bilingual individuals are increasingly valued for their ability to bridge linguistic and cultural divides. Additionally, bilingualism contributes to social and economic mobility, helping individuals access better career opportunities and achieve higher salaries. The economic and social benefits of bilingualism are further reinforced by the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 8 and 10, which focus on promoting decent work and economic growth, and reducing inequalities. Bilingual employees, particularly those proficient in languages with high social and economic value, such as English and Spanish, have an edge in an interconnected world that increasingly values linguistic diversity.

Statement of the Problem

This research was conducted to identify the role of foreign languages, specifically English and Spanish, in career perceptions of Bilinguals in Cebu. Specifically, it seeks to address the following questions:

1. What is the impact of Foreign Language Skills on bilingual speakers' career development in terms of:
    1.1 Job opportunities
    1.2 Salary growth
    1.3 Professional development

2. What are the challenges encountered by bilingual speakers in career development?

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the experiences and perceptions of Spanish-English bilinguals regarding their career development. The core property of qualitative research is that it examines how people make sense of their concrete, real-life experiences, interpreting them in their own minds and words (Cropley, 2015). Qualitative research aims to gain insights into how people experience, structure, and interpret the world in their daily lives, including interactions with others (Cropley, 2015). While qualitative research does not have a single inventor, it has been developed and adapted over time. In this study, Norman Denzin's 1994 qualitative research approach is used, which laid the foundation for interpretive techniques such as interviews, narratives, and open-ended questionnaires. This approach helps understand bilinguals' perceptions and interprets the role of foreign language skills in their professional lives.

Sources of Data and Participants

The primary data sources for this study are Spanish-English bilingual individuals working in Cebu. There were 9 participants were selected through purposive sampling, ensuring they are employed as bilingual employees and have career-related experiences influenced by their foreign language proficiency. The participants come from various professional backgrounds, including education, business process outsourcing (BPO), finance, and other multilingual sectors. Data was gathered through an open-ended questionnaire, allowing participants to express their insights, perceptions, and challenges in using foreign languages (Spanish and English) in their career development. The depth and context of their responses contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the role of foreign language as a form of linguistic capital for a Bilingual in Cebu.

Research Instruments

The primary instrument used in this study is a researcher-designed questionnaire developed specifically to gather qualitative data from Spanish-English bilingual participants. The questionnaire includes open-ended questions that explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges related to their career development, particularly the role of foreign languages in shaping professional opportunities. Sections cover demographic information, career development (focusing on job opportunities, salary growth, and professional development), and challenges or barriers to career growth. While the test items were researcher-made, they were informed by established frameworks in career development (Super, 1990) and bilingualism (Ahamed, 2025). The instrument's validity was ensured through expert review, which confirmed that the questions were clear, relevant, and aligned with the research objectives. To assess reliability, the questionnaire was piloted with a small sample of bilingual participants, and adjustments were made based on their feedback to improve clarity and consistency.

Data Gathering

Data for this study were collected through an online questionnaire, distributed via email to Spanish-English bilingual participants. The questionnaire, available in both Google Forms and Microsoft Word formats, was designed to allow participants to complete it at their own pace, providing flexibility. The data collection process took place over a set period, with follow-up reminders sent to ensure timely responses. The medium of data collection was entirely online, making it convenient for participants to engage with the study remotely. Responses were systematically organized for coding and thematic analysis, with findings presented in the study's conclusion.

Data Analysis

The analysis in this study follows Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework for thematic analysis, which includes: Step 1 – Familiarizing yourself with the data, Step 2 – Generating initial codes, Step 3 – Searching for themes, Step

4 – Reviewing themes, Step 5 – Defining and naming themes, and Step 6 – Producing the report. This method is highly flexible and effective for analyzing qualitative data, allowing the identification of meaningful patterns and themes that answer the research questions or highlight key issues (Braun & Clarke, 2006). NVivo software was used to facilitate data analysis, providing a systematic approach to coding and organizing the data. NVivo's ability to handle large volumes of qualitative data ensured a more reliable and efficient analysis process. The use of NVivo enhances the study's validity by ensuring consistency in coding and theme identification. Reliability is also strengthened by the software's ability to consistently store, organize, and retrieve data, enabling a transparent and replicable analysis process. This approach ensures that the findings are both robust and grounded in the data.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical responsibility was prioritized throughout the study to ensure participants' insights were respected. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were made aware of the study's purpose before completing the questionnaire. Anonymity and privacy were maintained, with no personal information included to guarantee confidentiality. The study was designed to avoid any harm, particularly social, emotional, or reputational, and questions were framed to prevent discomfort. Data was collected solely for academic purposes, focusing on participants' perceptions and experiences. Efforts were made to respect cultural diversity, ensuring an inclusive and unbiased approach. The researcher ensured objectivity and transparency, with no conflicts of interest influencing the study.

Results and Discussion

The Themes Under Career Development of Bilingual Speakers

This section presents qualitative data on the perceptions of Spanish-English bilingual speakers in Cebu regarding their career development. The participants' experiences are categorized into four key themes: career opportunities, professional development, financial rewards, and challenges faced as bilinguals. These insights deepen the understanding of how bilingualism influences career development, offering a clearer picture of the advantages and difficulties bilingual speakers encounter in the workplace. The analysis of these themes enhances the exploration of bilingualism's impact on career growth and opportunities for bilingual speakers in Cebu.

Theme 1: Expanding Career Horizons

The theme "Expanding Career Horizons" highlights the diverse career opportunities available to bilingual speakers, particularly those proficient in English and Spanish, in various industries such as education, healthcare, and customer service. Bilingualism has become a valuable asset in the globalized workforce, with employers prioritizing bilingual candidates for their ability to communicate effectively and collaborate across cultural boundaries. Studies show that organizations in sectors such as finance and healthcare highly value bilingual skills, recognizing their contributions to team dynamics and service quality (Simonsen, 2021). Participants in the study noted that speaking both English and Spanish has opened up more career opportunities, making them more adaptable and culturally knowledgeable, and enabling them to address workplace challenges more effectively.

KP1 stated that: "*Since there aren't many Spanish bilingual speakers in Cebu, the job market for this skill isn't too crowded, which has given me more job opportunities.*"

The participants highlighted that one significant factor contributing to their expanded job opportunities in Cebu is the relatively small number of Spanish bilingual speakers in the region. As one participant explained, "Since there aren't many Spanish bilingual speakers in Cebu, the job market for this skill isn't too crowded, which has given me more job opportunities." This scarcity creates a competitive advantage for bilinguals, a sentiment shared by most participants in the study. Additionally, bilingual professionals are often seen as more competitive due to their strong problem-solving abilities and cultural sensitivity, which are essential traits in today's diverse workplaces (Howe, Salo, & Montgomery, 2024). The limited pool of bilingual individuals makes them highly valuable across industries, enabling them to enhance team performance and solidify their roles as indispensable assets within organizations.

KP9 shared that: "*Being able to speak, write, and understand Spanish fluently gives me higher chances of getting hired as compared to others with minimal proficiency.*"

The statement highlights the competitive advantage bilingual speakers have in the job market compared to non-

bilingual candidates. As one participant explained, "(Spanish fluency) gives me a higher chance of getting hired compared to those with minimal proficiency." This reflects both the tangible advantage bilingual applicants hold and the increased confidence they feel in securing employment. Beyond global opportunities, bilingualism offers additional benefits in employment, especially when compared to employees with more general skill sets. Companies are increasingly recognizing the importance of language skills, not only for direct client interactions but also for fostering an inclusive workplace that serves diverse customer bases. This recognition is often reflected in policies that promote bilingual hiring, such as offering language allowances or assigning bilingual professionals to roles requiring their expertise (Meyer, 2024).

KP4 stated that: "*Being a Spanish-English bilingual can lead to higher salaries because they have a language premium that English-only speakers do not have.*"

The term "language premium" refers to the language training allowance provided to bilingual employees, a benefit reported by the majority of participants in this study. While not all participants had access to this benefit, a significant portion enjoyed this advantage, which largely depends on company policies. The inclusion of bilingual professionals across industries has prompted organizations to explore how language skills can enhance service delivery. Studies show that bilingual employees help overcome language barriers and improve customer service by understanding clients' needs and cultural nuances (Meyer, 2024). This highlights how bilingualism benefits both individuals and organizations, positioning bilinguals as key contributors in delivering superior customer service, fostering trust, and building stronger client relationships. While Spanish proficiency often sets bilinguals apart from other candidates, strong English skills remain equally essential for optimizing workplace performance.

KP6 expressed: "*Yes, proficiency in both English and Spanish as foreign language skills has a significant impact on career growth and advancement. Being bilingual allows me to communicate effectively, which opens up more opportunities for collaboration and networking.*"

The participant explained that although candidates place significant value on their Spanish proficiency, maintaining a high level of English fluency is essential for effective collaboration and expanding professional networks, particularly as English is the primary business language used by most companies in Cebu. English-Spanish bilingualism has attracted significant attention for its cognitive, cultural, and economic benefits. With the growing interconnection of the global economy, the need for bilingual professionals adept at navigating diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes is steadily increasing. The value of bilingualism goes far beyond effective communication, offering cognitive advantages, expanded career opportunities, and the capacity to participate in culturally enriching exchanges.

Theme 2: Fueling Professional Development

The second theme, "Fueling Professional Development," focuses on the accessibility of training and further education to enhance bilinguals' existing skill sets and ensure the continued quality of their professional abilities. This includes exposure to exclusive experiences, advanced studies, and mentorships. Therefore, this section reflects the perspectives of bilinguals on how companies prioritize and support professional development across industries.

Bilingualism fosters cultural competence, enabling individuals to form meaningful connections with people from diverse backgrounds. Bilingual professionals often bring valuable insights into the values and expectations of both cultures they engage with, equipping them to navigate complex social dynamics with ease (Hosen & Khatun, 2021). Studies indicate that bilingualism enhances communication skills, a sought-after asset in professional fields such as finance, healthcare, and education, where strong interpersonal abilities are essential (Simonsen, 2021). Effective communication with clients, colleagues, and stakeholders in multiple languages greatly bolsters a bilingual individual's professional reputation and career advancement opportunities.

KP4 affirmed that: "*Being a Spanish-English bilingual opens doors for stronger, more diverse professional relationships. It enables you to network with a wider range of people, enhances communication across language barriers, and increases your opportunities for career growth both within your company and beyond.*"

The participant highlighted that their broader language proficiency makes it easier to establish networks,

expanding their communication reach and opening up relationship-building opportunities in the globalized world. Additionally, bilingualism enhances an individual's professional profile, particularly in multicultural settings where cultural awareness is as important as language skills (Ural & Dikilitaş, 2022). For instance, in healthcare, fluency in both English and Spanish is vital for building relationships with Spanish-speaking communities (Arango-Lasprilla et al., 2022). Bilingual individuals can leverage their language skills and cultural understanding to create meaningful relationships and unlock opportunities across industries, positioning themselves as valuable assets in the global workforce.

KP2 stated that: *"Bilingual employees are often given leadership roles or tasks that require direct communication with Spanish-speaking counterparts."*

This statement highlights the valuable role of bilingual speakers in the workplace, particularly in situations that require proficiency in a foreign language to facilitate effective collaboration. A significant aspect of bilinguals' leadership experience is their ability to communicate seamlessly across cultural and linguistic boundaries. This capability is especially crucial in roles requiring collaboration within multicultural teams. Bilingual leaders are often regarded as more effective and approachable by team members, thanks to their skill in navigating diverse cultural contexts and languages (Sanchez-Azanza, de la Torre, & Arnáiz, 2020). With globalization striving to bridge connections across countries and cultures, bilingual professionals play an increasingly vital role in the expansion of industries worldwide.

KP5 shared that: *"I've enhanced my communication skills, and I've strengthened my problem-solving abilities, especially when addressing concerns from patients who speak different languages."*

In addition to the economic and social benefits, bilingualism offers cognitive advantages such as enhanced problem-solving and adaptability, which support leadership roles. Bilingual individuals demonstrate advanced executive control, boosting their ability to multitask and make informed decisions in leadership settings (Tribushinina, van der Meulen, & Kormos, 2024). As one participant noted, bilingualism has enhanced their communication skills and problem-solving abilities, which are crucial for navigating leadership challenges (Montgomery, S. A., Johnson, & McDowell, 2021). These cognitive strengths, alongside bilingualism, improve career advancement opportunities, as businesses increasingly value language skills in today's diverse professional landscape. Research shows that multilingual individuals excel in communication, making them more competitive for leadership roles and professional development opportunities (Mouboua & Atobatele, 2024). Additionally, exposure to native speakers helps improve language proficiency and problem-solving abilities.

KP7 revealed: *"In many industries, especially in fields like customer service, sales, and international business, bilingual employees are in high demand and often receive better job offers, promotions, and salary increases."*

Promotion offers for bilinguals are valuable as the cognitive flexibility gained through bilingualism allows individuals to quickly adapt to changing contexts, a crucial trait for leadership roles. Their ability to navigate multiple languages fosters inclusivity, encouraging creativity and innovation by integrating diverse perspectives (Lorenzoni, Ubelis, & Jonsson, 2021). Additionally, bilingual individuals often demonstrate exceptional cognitive control and problem-solving skills, traits highly regarded in leadership positions (Frederiksen & Kroll, 2022). These qualities prompt employers to integrate language proficiency into hiring and compensation strategies, creating a work environment that values and rewards linguistic diversity. As businesses expand globally, the growing demand for bilingual professionals reinforces their importance in leadership roles, organizational hierarchies, and career advancement.

Theme 3: The Bonus Factor of Bilingualism

The theme "The Bonus Factor of Bilingualism" emphasizes the financial advantages of being bilingual, offering insights into the tangible rewards bilingual candidates receive across various industries and how these benefits impact their careers. One of the main motivators for delivering quality service is the compensation workers receive for their roles, making this aspect crucial for understanding workplace dynamics and service quality. Bilingual employees often receive higher levels of financial compensation, which significantly affects their job satisfaction, performance, and career outcomes. The connection between bilingualism and financial rewards is complex, shaped by factors including market demand, industry sectors, financial incentives, and organizational benefits.

KP 4 shared that: *"As a bilingual employee, I have the opportunity to work from home and hold a higher-paying role compared to non-bilinguals in my workplace." KP4 added, "In many industries, especially in fields like customer service, sales, and international business, bilingual employees are in high demand and often receive better job offers, promotions, and salary increases."*

The participant revealed that the financial compensation provided for bilinguals is competitive compared to that of non-bilingual candidates. This indicates how industries value the ability to possess this language skill set that offers them a great advantage in the job market. By emphasizing "...bilingual employees are in high demand and often receive better job offers, promotions, and salary increases," the statement showcases the advantages of being a bilingual speaker. Providing fair and substantial financial rewards to bilingual employees can strengthen their roles within organizations while promoting retention and productivity. Competitive salaries and additional financial incentives often result in increased job satisfaction, fostering greater dedication and improved performance in the workplace (Watkins & Fusch, 2021). Employers are increasingly committed to offering competitive compensation for bilingual employees, given the limited pool of candidates qualified for specific roles.

KP1 also mentioned: *"When I transitioned to a new company as a Spanish bilingual, the experience and skills I had gained allowed me to negotiate an even higher salary. Moving into a bilingual role made a huge difference in my earnings compared to my previous non-bilingual job."*

Bilingualism offers distinct advantages in the workplace, particularly in salary negotiations. Businesses actively seek bilingual professionals to expand their reach in diverse markets and strengthen client relationships, recognizing that bilingual employees enhance service quality and drive profitability (Castro & Mohedano, 2023; Dmytruk et al., 2022). This creates a clear advantage for bilingual candidates, though successful salary negotiations require an understanding of market rates for bilingual positions and a strategic presentation of one's unique skills. While bilingual employees often earn more than monolingual workers, the design of compensation packages—including both financial and non-financial components—is essential for promoting job satisfaction and productivity. As the demand for bilingual talent increases, organizations must ensure their compensation reflects the value bilingual workers bring to the global job market. By preparing thoroughly and effectively communicating their value, bilingual professionals can successfully negotiate salary increases that align with their expertise and further advance their careers.

Theme 4: The Bilingualism Paradox, Asset or Liability?

The fourth theme, "The Bilingualism Paradox: Asset or Liability?", explores the challenges and barriers faced by bilingual speakers in Cebu. While bilingual individuals benefit from their language skills, they also face various obstacles that can significantly impact their professional experiences. This section highlights the difficulties participants face and offers valuable insights into how bilingualism affects career development. Studies show that many bilingual individuals face substantial challenges in accessing mentorship, a vital element of professional growth. The lack of mentorship opportunities can intensify feelings of isolation among bilingual employees and negatively impact their career advancement (Khan et al. 20-24). This phenomenon is clearly reflected in the responses participants shared during the interviews.

KP3 mentioned: *"Bilingual employees might have fewer opportunities for leadership development if they are often viewed primarily as language specialists rather than valued members of the broader organizational leadership pipeline."*

This statement underscores one of the most significant gaps faced by bilingual speakers in Cebu. It indicates that the scarcity of mentorship opportunities poses a substantial obstacle to the professional development of bilingual employees. Organizations can address these challenges by acknowledging the specific difficulties faced by bilingual individuals and introducing tailored mentorship programs. Improving access to mentorship not only supports bilingual employees but also fosters a more inclusive and effective workplace, promoting equity and productivity across the workforce. Aside from this gap, another inevitable challenge needs to be addressed to maximize the efficiency of bilingual professionals.

KP8 reported: *"Yes, I have encountered language barriers where miscommunication impacted my work performance. For example, during a client call, I wasn't able to catch some technical terms in Spanish, which led to incorrect information being*

provided. This affected the client's experience and caused delays in resolving the issue."

Miscommunication is one of the biggest contributors to communication failure, leading to service ineffectiveness and collaboration difficulties. This is evident as the participant emphasized, "I have encountered language barriers where miscommunication impacted my work performance..." Bilingual individuals frequently encounter challenges in clearly expressing their ideas or understanding others due to differences in language proficiency and cultural subtleties, leading to misunderstandings. For example, bilingual professionals may blend languages or engage in code-switching to convey key concepts; however, this can occasionally lead to miscommunication when others lack the same level of linguistic fluency (Mooijman, Kootstra, & Dirks, 2018). By acknowledging these challenges and adopting effective communication strategies, organizations can foster environments that promote clarity and collaboration, leading to better outcomes for both employees and clients.

KP 3 added: "*As a bilingual, the challenges I have faced in career advancement include limited recognition, taking on extra responsibilities due to my language skills, limited opportunities for mentorship, feelings of stagnation, and not being given credit in terms of promotions or salary increases.*"

Compensation extends beyond financial remuneration to include non-monetary rewards, which play a crucial role in enhancing employee motivation and satisfaction. Studies show that non-financial incentives, such as recognition, career advancement opportunities, and a supportive work environment, significantly boost engagement among bilingual employees (Qader, 2021). Although bilingual employees often receive higher financial compensation than their monolingual counterparts, the design of these compensation packages—encompassing both financial and non-financial components—is essential for promoting satisfaction and productivity. Organizations are urged to acknowledge the distinctive contributions of bilingual workers and ensure their compensation reflects their significance in an increasingly interconnected global workforce.

KP1 shared that: "*There are higher expectations, as bilingual employees are often asked to translate or assist beyond their main role. With fewer colleagues who share the same skill, there's also limited support and mentorship. Additionally, companies tend to rely heavily on bilingual employees, which can make it difficult to transition into different roles if they always need you for Spanish-related tasks*."

Bilingual employees often face an increased sense of responsibility as language mediators, which can contribute to elevated stress levels. The high expectations of the environment stated in the first sentence, as quoted above, reflect the pressure bilinguals felt in their workplaces. It also emphasized that, "companies tend to rely heavily on bilingual employees, which can make it difficult to transition into different roles…" This indicates a feeling of stagnation and struggle in managing their workloads. The social and familial obligations of bilingual individuals can also contribute to heightened stress levels. These employees may face "acculturative stress," arising from the difficulties of adapting to a new culture and language while managing their professional responsibilities, leading to considerable emotional strain (Koo et al., 2021). Therefore, organizations should acknowledge these challenges and introduce supportive initiatives, such as language and cultural training, to create a more inclusive and less stressful work environment for bilingual employees. Meeting these needs can improve job satisfaction and performance, benefiting both the workforce and the organization as a whole.

In conclusion, bilingual employees in the workplace encounter a range of challenges influenced by societal perceptions, workplace dynamics, and personal experiences. Overcoming these challenges requires organizations to adopt a unified approach that acknowledges the importance of bilingualism and meets the specific needs of bilingual staff. This involves implementing strategies to minimize workplace discrimination and cultivate an inclusive culture that appreciates linguistic diversity.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates the crucial role of foreign language proficiency, particularly Spanish-English bilingualism, in shaping the career development of bilingual professionals in Cebu. It highlights the advantages of bilingualism, such as increased career opportunities and salary growth, while also addressing the challenges faced, including limited mentorship and communication barriers. The findings suggest that targeted support, such as mentorship programs and better recognition of bilingual skills, is essential to fully leverage the potential of bilingual employees. These insights have important implications for practice, particularly for organizations that should implement professional development initiatives and language-related incentives. Policymakers and

educational institutions can also play a key role by advocating for language proficiency programs to enhance the employability of bilinguals. Future research could further explore longitudinal career outcomes for bilingual professionals and the impact of specific language combinations on career success.

Contributions of Authors

Author 1: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis
Author 2: conceptualization, data gathering, data analysis

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