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**BILINGUAL LITERACY AND ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

**AMONG SAMOAN BORN STUDENTS IN A NEW ZEALAND**

**SECONDARY SCHOOL.**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of Masterate in Education at Massey University.

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of bilingual students' literacy abilities and practices in a secondary school setting. Informed by Jim Cummins' writings on bilingual students' achievement in schools and by J. W. Oller's theories on language measurement, this project addresses the nature of first language reading behaviour of Samoan bilingual students in English immersion education in New Zealand. In addition, the Cummins' (Cummins, et. al. 1984) hypothesis that age 12 is the optimal age to transfer language of education and country is tested.

Research took place with Samoan born students (n=29) enrolled at the researcher's place of employment. The reading ability of students in Samoan and in English is tested through exact word scoring of a 7th word mechanical deletion cloze task, using a translated narrative text at the 12 year reading age. School records of academic achievement from the half year point are included for comparison with literacy achievement. These data were analysed with demographic details obtained from a student questionnaire. The questionnaire also provided descriptions of student reading behaviour in Samoan. Similar data is obtained from a group of NZ born Samoans (n=20) for comparison and referencing.

Reading behaviour of these students gives a high importance for Samoan language reading, yet little actual time is spent reading in that language. Both groups of students on average performed better on English cloze tests than Samoan. The NZ born students read better in English and worse in Samoan than their immigrant counterparts.

The tested hypothesis is only partially supported by the research findings. Predictions of CALP (reading) ability generated by Cummins' hypothesis are seen to a significant level,. However, none of the variables used correlated with academic achievement. Furthermore, in contrast to Cummins' predictions, a strong inverse correlation between length of residence and reading ability in the two languages is found. In other words, the longer Samoan born students are in one of the countries the better their ability in the language of that country and the weaker their ability in the other language. No such significant correlations were found among NZ born students.

Alternate theoretical explanations for the results are offered using concepts from the fields of sociology of education and socio-historic psychology. Appendices include test materials, questionnaire and interview forms. A bibliography of over 380 references is included.

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