

Bilingualism and the Need for Early EFL Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Abstract. This research article deals with the issue of bilingualism with particular reference to the need for early EFL education in the Saudi educational system. It consists of two main parts. In the first part, a comprehensive picture of the phenomenon of bilingualism is depicted by providing definitions, listing the main causes of bilingualism and referring to its general benefits. The second part of the article deals with the controversial issue of starting Arabic-English bilingualism for the Saudi children at the first years of childhood displaying opponent and proponent viewpoints of that matter. The article concludes with an argument in favor of EFL education within the Saudi educational system illustrating the need for introducing EFL to the Saudi children at an early age due to the many benefits and advantages it yields.

Introduction

Many people all over the world consider bilinguals to be exceptional. However, nearly half of the world's population speaks more than one language. Grosjean (1982) confirms that bilingualism exists in every country of the world, in every class of society, and is clearly demonstrated in different age groups. In an increasingly diversified world, more and more young children find themselves in a bilingual or even multilingual environment. Saunders (1988) stresses the idea that due to the job changes that involve moving to different parts of the world, parents are usually overwhelmed by the linguistic demands imposed on them and their children because of different life circumstances.

The significance of bilingualism in childhood evolves from two important facts. Firstly, it can contribute to our understanding of principles of language learning and acquisition in general and thus can help us, as language teaching professionals, better plan our teaching strategies and techniques. To illustrate, if investigating bilingualism in young age reveals some substantially valuable concepts about this linguistic phenomenon, such concepts can be of much help to language curricula writers and

developers. Secondly, some outcomes of the intended investigation of this phenomenon may also solve critical issues related to the teaching of English as a foreign language in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It can offer solutions concerning the important issue of *age* in language learning; at what age should English be introduced to our children? In other words, is it advisable to help our children become Arabic-English bilinguals as early as possible, or should the teaching of English be delayed to a later age as what is currently adopted in our educational system? Moreover, the investigation of bilingualism in young age can help us in finding an answer to the question of how far interference between Arabic and English, as two typically unrelated languages that come from two distant language families, affects bilingualism and to what extent this can guide us when designing English language syllabi for Arabic language learners.

For the above illustrated reasons, my investigation of bilingualism will be organized in a certain manner. First, I will begin with defining bilingualism stating its main causes, its general benefits and its major types in an attempt to grasp a comprehensive view of this important linguistic phenomenon. Then, I will deal with the issue of EFL education illustrating

faulty beliefs about bilingualism and providing support for the adoption of EFL education in the Saudi educational system at an early age. Finally, I will argue in favor of EFL education for children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia due to the many advantages it can contribute to the Saudi educational context.

Definitions of Bilingualism and Other Related Terms

The definition of bilingualism is an arbitrary one. There are different connotations for different people. Finding a precise definition of bilingualism is not an easy task; the word seems to have as many definitions as experts trying to define it.

Bloomfield (1935) defines bilingualism as a native-like control of two languages. This definition is too narrow and does not include people without native command of both languages. Due to the narrow nature of this definition, very few people all over the world would be labeled "bilingual".

Haugen (1969) gives a broad definition of the bilingual phenomenon. He states that bilingualism begins when a speaker of one language becomes able to produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language. According to this definition, young children who speak Arabic and, due to school instruction for instance, start to produce meaningful utterances in English would be qualified as "bilinguals".

McLaughlin (1984) defines bilingualism as the ability to produce complete and meaningful utterances in two languages. Although bilingual children may be more fluent in one language in certain contexts than in the other language, they can produce complete and meaningful utterances in both. According to the Bilingual Families website, bilingualism is defined as the ability to communicate naturally and fluently in more than one language in all areas of life.

Although many definitions of bilingualism have been suggested, the definition adopted in this article includes these of Haugen (1969) and McLaughlin (1984) stated above. It is, in a way or another, quite similar to the one obtained from the Bilingual Families website.

Since we are in the process of defining bilingualism, it is necessary to differentiate between two sets of terms that are of great value for understanding bilingualism. The first set is successive versus simultaneous bilingualism, whereas the second is related to additive versus subtractive bilingualism. The first set refers to the specific time when a second

language is introduced to a person. That is, if the two languages are introduced to the child from the beginning of life, bilingualism in this case is simultaneous. On the other side, if the child learns one language first then the other, bilingualism in this case is successive. As for the second set, it stresses the socio-cultural aspects of learning two languages. To illustrate, if a child is allowed to develop a certain language he is learning in a community where both languages and cultures are valued, then the child is most likely to develop additive bilingualism in the sense that the second (L2) language and culture are added to the first (L1) language and culture and both L1 and L2 complement and enrich each other. On the other hand, subtractive bilingualism means that the child learns a second language at the expense of the first, and in this case the learning of L2 deletes or "subtracts" L1. This article adopts the successive additive bilingualism and NOT the simultaneous subtractive one.

The final term that should be explained here is Early EFL Education. It clearly means the teaching of English as a foreign language to children at an early age (about 5 or 6 years). This term should be differentiated from the term Bilingual Education which means the use of two languages as means of instruction within a certain educational system in an attempt to bilingually raise the children of the community.

Historical and Contextual Overview: What Does Research Reveal?

During the past hundred years, the researchers' attitude towards the phenomenon of bilingualism has gone through some fundamental changes. At the beginning of the 20th century, researchers and scientists thought that the use of a foreign or a second language with a young child at home is an unforgivable crime. The situation was so gloomy that those scientists and researchers believed that introducing a second or a foreign language to a little child was one of the main reasons for mental retardation in children.

However, with the huge advancement in research methods and increased knowledge of the subject, educators, language professionals and researchers now tend to agree that bilingualism is a great asset to both the child and the society. The bilingual phenomenon has become so much popular to the extent that even monolingual parents who do not live in a bilingual community are so much keen on putting their children into kindergarten and school immersion programs in an attempt to nurture the children's linguistic capabilities and to give them a head's start in life.

During the past three decades in particular, there has been quite a lot of research interest in bilingualism as a psycholinguistic case for young children. The reason behind this growing interest is the controversial nature of bilingualism, especially during the early stages of childhood. This controversy is caused by a number of important questions. First, how deliberate or subconscious is the bilingual activity? Second, are the two languages acquired (or even learnt) simultaneously or sequentially? Third, what is the effect of bilingualism on other cognitive activities? For example, does the learning (or even acquisition) of a second language other than one's mother tongue facilitates or hinders other cognitive skills in children? Fourth, what is the effect of the setting or the environment in which the bilingual activity takes place? And, how far does it affect the degree of bilinguality in young age?

Most of the research conducted on bilingualism in young age was much more concerned with the effect of this phenomenon on the linguistic as well as the cognitive abilities of young children, and with the differences between the bilingual children and their monolingual peers in terms of linguistic and cognitive development. For example, Ben-Zeev (1977) studied the difference between monolingual and bilingual children on a symbol substitution task. The subjects of the study were 96 children whose ages ranged from 5 to 8 years, and all of them were from middle-class backgrounds. The study subjects were asked to substitute one meaningful word with another in a fixed sentence. The results of the study showed that bilingual children had more understanding of the arbitrary relation between a certain word and its referent. Monolingual children, in contrast, had difficulty in separating the word from its referent. The researcher interpreted her results more indicative of the notion that bilingual children have a more analytical attitude toward language than their monolingual peers. Finally, the researcher concludes that bilingual children's acquisition (or learning) of two languages that have two different linguistic systems made them better processors of verbal linguistic tasks than monolingual children.

In another study, the Italian linguist Ricciardelli (1992) investigated the relationship between bilingualism and cognitive development. The researcher wanted to test two hypotheses in her study. The first hypothesis was that bilinguals who have a high level of proficiency in two languages would perform better than bilinguals and monolinguals that have a high proficiency level in only one language. The second hypothesis was that bilinguals with a low proficiency level in both languages would perform

worse than bilinguals who have a high proficiency level in at least one language or monolinguals. The researcher designed word discrimination, word length, and word substitution tasks in an attempt to measure the cognitive development of the study subjects. The study results supported the researcher's two hypotheses. That is, the cognitive measures of the bilinguals with a high level of proficiency in both languages were superior to those of low-proficiency bilinguals or monolinguals. Furthermore, low-proficiency bilinguals performed more poorly on the cognitive measures than the high-proficiency bilinguals or the monolinguals.

In a third study conducted by Oller (1995), the researcher compared groups of children who grew up with both Spanish and English versus a group of children who spoke only English. The study findings showed that the bilingual group spoke English better than the monolingual group or the English-only group. However, Oller (1995) explains that the results of the study are only applicable to children who learn English and Spanish simultaneously at an early age, and he also interprets the results as indicative of a positive advantageous role for early bilingualism.

In a study similar to the previous one, Yeni-Konshian (1995) looked at children who moved from Korea to the United States between the ages of 2 and 24 years. The results indicated that children who began speaking English between the ages of 6 and 8 years were proficient at neither Korean nor English. The researcher concludes from the study that early bilingual education is good, whereas later bilingual education does not help that much.

In another study conducted by Bialystok and Majumder (1998), the aim was to test the hypothesis that linguistic tasks that require high control of attention will be better solved by bilinguals than by monolinguals. The study sample included 28 English-monolingual children, 26 English-French bilingual children, and 17 Bengali-English bilingual children who were partial bilinguals in that they were only proficient in English, but not in Bengali. The English-French bilingual children were considered balanced bilinguals in the sense that they were proficient in both languages. The study subjects were tested on cognitive, metalinguistic as well as language proficiency tasks. The results showed that the balanced bilingual children (the ones speaking English and French) demonstrated better performance on all the tasks than the unbalanced bilingual children (the ones speaking English and Bengali) and the monolingual children (the ones speaking English only).

Within the same line of thought and in a more recent study, Al-Dossari (2005) studied the effect of age on the bilingual children's ability to solve intricate linguistic tasks. The study sample included 59 children: 22 English-monolingual children and 37 Arabic-English bilingual ones. The bilingual children took language proficiency tests and were categorized "balanced" or "unbalanced" based on their test scores. The analysis of the study data showed results that were somehow contradictory to the findings of the previous studies; there were no statistically significant differences between monolingual and bilingual children due to the language experience (being monolingual, balanced bilingual, or unbalanced bilingual). However, the astonishing result was that children in grade 1 surpassed children from higher grades on all the linguistic tasks taken. This result is interpreted by the researcher to mean that there is a strong connection between age and language performance in the sense that the younger the children begin the language experience, the better language skills and performance they possess. Such interpretation is considered one of the factors that make us call for introducing an early bilingual experience to the children of our community.

Types of Bilingualism

Researchers in the area of bilingualism agree that three major type of bilingualism can be identified.

Balanced bilingualism

This type of bilingualism indicates that the bilingual person is equally proficient in the two languages across a range of situations. However, practically speaking, it is quite rare to have a bilingual with an equal proficiency in L1 and L2. So, the term practically refers to a bilingual who is slightly more proficient in one language than the other. It also means that the bilingual's competence in the two languages is compatible with his/her age in the sense that the bilingual child is described as "linguistically competent" in the two languages with regard to his age range.

Dominant bilingualism

This type of bilingualism refers to the idea that the bilingual person is more proficient in one language than in the other, which means that one language is more dominant than the other. This indicates that the dominant language is to be used in a wider range of situations than the other language. The typical case is that the native language (NL) is the one that is more dominant and the non-native

language (NNL) is the one that is less dominant. It should also be illustrated here that this type of language dominance is usually existent within the frame of successive bilingualism where the NL is acquired first (usually at home) and the NNL is acquired later (usually at school).

Semi-lingualism

This type of bilingualism signifies that bilingualism is partial in the sense that the bilingual person usually has a low proficiency level in both languages. This low proficiency level is caused by the fact that the linguistic systems of both NL and NNL are not that much developed, and that the bilingual person is unable to figure out the complexity of each of these two linguistic systems. Semi-lingualism simply means that the child is not yet linguistically mature and that much more exposure and use of both the NL and the NNL are required in order to allow the child to move to the stage of balanced bilingualism mentioned above.

The Main Causes of Bilingualism

Before talking about the phenomenon of bilingualism in more detail, I think there is a need to provide a brief account of the main causes that lead to its occurrence; the most important of them are:

Migration

The movement of people from one country to another is one of the strongest causes of bilingualism. As Fasold (1987) illustrates, when immigrants arrive to another country speaking their native language, thus they add their NL to the language situation in the host country fostering bilingualism or even multilingualism. At the same time, they learn the language of the host country, rendering themselves into bilinguals who usually communicate with each other in their NL, and with citizens of the host country in the language of that country.

Education and culture

One of the reasons people learn or acquire a foreign language is their need for another language that helps them in the field of education and culture. For example, if an Arabic-monolingual person wants to know or study the culture of an English-speaking country, that person will have to learn English first. Many students travel to other countries to pursue their studies and thus they need to learn the languages of these countries. For example, France, Germany, Britain and the United States of America have large numbers of foreign students in their colleges and

universities. The educational bilingualism is further enhanced by books and other audiovisual and written materials that are produced in a limited number of world languages, which forces students to be proficient in one of these languages. Mackey (1967) explains that in many countries around the world, to be educated means to be bilingual. In the modern age where most sciences are written in English, the learning of English for people whose native languages are different is becoming a necessity.

Border areas

Every country has geographical boundaries which are often shared by another country or countries. The usual situation in border areas, especially if there is a direct contact between citizens from two neighboring countries, is the creation of a group of bilingual people from both countries. The other important point to be mentioned here is that in locations near border areas, it is common to find people who are citizens of one country, but they are members of a sociocultural group based in the other. Fasold (1987) explains the reason for this by indicating that sociocultural groups do not always select their residence area, but sometimes it is just imposed on them. One good example among many of this phenomenon is the presence of French-speaking people in the northeastern states who live in the USA, but are ethnically closer to the Canadian province of Quebec.

Religion

Another important motive for bilingualism is religion. As pointed out by researchers, religion may be tied to a specific language, and the spread of the religion will make its new followers learn the language of that religion, thus enhancing bilingualism. For instance, a lot of Muslim inhabitants from non-Arabic speaking countries such as Iran, India, Pakistan and Turkey have become bilinguals in their native languages as well as Classical Arabic because they had to learn Arabic as a religion-related language. Thus, nearly all the Muslims living in non-Arabic-speaking countries are to some degree considered bilinguals.

Benefits of Bilingualism

Scientists and researchers in bilingualism agreed that the benefits of bilingualism can be grouped into 4 major categories: personal, cognitive, academic and societal.

The personal benefit

The personal benefit of bilingualism is embodied in these two important points:

1. The bilingual person has an access to two different languages and cultures, and hence to more people and resources. This definitely enriches the life experience of the bilingual person simply because he/she will be more able to communicate with different people than the monolingual person.
2. As indicated in the Bilingual Family website, when the bilingual's parents are from two different languages and cultures, knowing the language of each parent will give the bilingual child a sense of identity and belonging toward both parents and members of the extended family.

The cognitive benefit

The cognitive benefit of bilingualism is represented in these two points:

1. As illustrated earlier in Ben-Zeev's study (1977), bilingualism in children fosters metalinguistic awareness; children using two languages understand that one idea can be expressed in different ways. This provides young children with an insight into the construction and function of language. The metalinguistic awareness is an important element in the development of the children's intellectual abilities because when children shift from one language to another, they compare the two languages, which helps them to see how language as a communication system really works. This enhances conceptualization as well as analytical and creative thinking on the part of the young children.
2. As suggested by many researchers and educators mentioned in this article, bilinguals are more sensitive to non-verbal communication such as facial expressions, gestures and tone of voice.

The academic benefit

1. As mentioned earlier, young children who received foreign language instruction outperformed their monolingual peers who did not receive any language teaching.
2. As Bialystok (1991) concluded from her extensive research on bilingualism, learning a foreign language at a very young age can clearly benefit children's reading abilities.

3. There is no "critical period" for language acquisition, as had been believed; there is an advantageous period to learn a new language (Bialystok and Hakuta, 1999). It is easier and quicker for a three-year old child to reach an age of appropriate command of a new language than it is for a 13-year old teenager.

The societal benefit

We live in the age of globalization where the whole world is just like a small village. To make this globalization possible, people should be able to speak languages other than their native ones. Here comes the value of bilingualism because bilingual people in a society are the ones who connect it better to the international market. Thus, bilingual knowledge is a strong asset to the society.

Early Bilingualism: Two Different Perspectives

Before we start arguing in favor of early Arabic-English bilingualism within the Saudi educational context, it is important to refer first to some of the faulty beliefs about early bilingualism.

Attack against early bilingualism

There are some misconceptions about the linguistic phenomenon of bilingualism. These faulty beliefs and misconceptions are the basis on which opponents of bilingual education rely in their resentment of any form of the adoption of bilingual education. The most important of these faulty beliefs about bilingualism are illustrated below.

1) Learning more than one language confuses children and lowers their intelligence

The claim that bilingualism confuses children and lowers their intelligence, as stated by Kandolf on the Bilingual Families website, is supported by research studies conducted in the United States on the differences between bilingual and monolingual children in their language performance. In these research studies, monolingual children outperformed their monolingual peers. However, the problem with these research studies is that most of them were poorly designed, and the bilingual children included in the studies were recent immigrants living under stressful conditions in a form of bilingualism that is considered subtractive rather than additive, and thus it was normal for these suffering bilingual children to

score lower in language performance tests than their established relaxed monolingual counterparts. Some researchers and educators largely depended on results from the poorly-designed aforementioned studies to jump to the conclusion that bilingualism is a source of confusion for children and is an important element that leads to lowering their intelligence. However, it is a well-established fact in research that conclusions and generalizations cannot be made on the basis of faulty research designs.

2) Bilingualism delays language development

The claim here is that bilingualism is responsible for delaying the linguistic development of bilingual children. Such a claim is based on the notion that bilingual children's brains have a more processing load than their monolingual peers due to the idea that in bilingual children, the processing system is handling two languages at the same time, whereas in monolingual children that system is handling only one language. As a refutation of this claim, research studies on bilingualism confirm that if bilingual children have a regularly-rich exposure to both languages, they can definitely reach the same linguistic development as their monolingual peers. So, the key element in the issue of language development is not the number of languages (whether one or two languages), but it is the issue of language exposure; that is, it is the quantity and the quality of language exposure, and not how many languages that determine the stage of linguistic development a certain monolingual or bilingual child will reach.

3) Bilingual children never become as proficient in either language as monolinguals

Because in some cases, bilingual children have less access and exposure to each language, they never become as proficient in either language as their monolingual counterparts. This claim is some how refuted as bilingual children can definitely reach the same proficiency, grammatically, phonologically and lexically, as their monolingual peers (as indicated by the researcher in the first section of the article). Thus, we should not be deceived by the general assumption that monolinguals' lexicon in the native language is much more varied than that of bilinguals. This situation is a temporary one that is caused by the fact that bilinguals are in the process of building two various lexical systems of two languages, and that most probably their cumulative lexicon of both L1 and L2 is even more than monolinguals' L1 lexicon.

4) Bilingualism makes children develop split personalities

Another faulty belief related to bilingualism is that it causes the bilingual child to develop a sense of split personalities; that is, the child feels that he/she has two different personalities. Each personality is associated with each language. Some people go to the extreme by claiming that this sense seriously affects the child's loyalty to the native language and culture. This claim is simply refuted by stressing the idea that language and culture are strongly related and that developing two different personalities in bilingualism is normal due to the fact that every language has a particular set of cultural norms and standards, and thus it is normal for different language users to assume different roles when they are using different languages. However, this idea of role assumptions does not in any way mean that the bilingual child has two diverse personalities and that he/she should be locked in a mental house. This phenomenon should be understood with ease and relaxation; that is, it is a normal behavior that only means that the bilingual child has more cultural knowledge and flexibility than his/her monolingual peer.

5) Real bilinguals never mix their language

The final misconception regarding bilingualism is that real bilinguals never mix the two languages, and when they do, it only means that the children are in total chaos and confusion. This is totally untrue. This linguistic phenomenon is called code-switching. As researchers mentioned earlier in applied linguistics indicate, code-switching is a conscious linguistic device that is adopted by language users to serve a number of purposes such as:

- changing the topic
- accommodating a new party in the conversation
- maintaining certain social roles

In fact, it has been shown that the use of two languages in one sentence by bilinguals reveals a great deal of linguistic skill (Romaine, 1995). Therefore, we cannot say that code-switching is a sign of linguistic confusion. Rather, it is a planned linguistic behavior that serves a number of functions. In the following section of the article, I will illustrate the support given for early bilingualism and bilingual education in an attempt to call for EFL education for young children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Support for early bilingualism

De Houwer (1995) explains that there are a number of points that support the need for bilingual education in childhood. They can be summarized in the following points.

1) Bilingualism is not a cause of language disorder or language delay

As illustrated earlier, there is no scientific evidence to date that hearing two languages or using two languages as means of instruction at school lead to delays or disorder in language acquisition. The claim that monolingual children are better language acquirers or learners is no longer valid. Many children all over the world grow up bilingually without showing any indications of language delay or disorders. There is practically visible evidence that there is no causal relationship between bilingualism and language learning problems. Thus, introducing English as a second language of instruction in KSA schools will not cause problems in the children's learning of L1, as a lot of teachers and educators argue. To the contrary, it has been found out that in educational settings, building on the children's skills in L1 definitely help their learning of L2.

2) Bilingualism is a rich source for cognitive advantages

Bilingualism in childhood yields a lot of cognitive advantages. Most of these advantages were listed when talking about the general benefits of bilingualism. Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) describe the knowledge of two languages as more than the sum of its parts. They illustrate that the mind of the bilingual child is so much enriched by the fact that it is attached to two different linguistic systems and two different ways of expression, which makes that mind more able to figure out the arbitrariness of language and how the language system really works. Bialystok (1991) adds that bilingualism gives the bilingual a "special awareness" of linguistic operations and a more analytical orientation to language.

3) Bilingualism has important cultural gains

Since languages have different cultural orientations, the knowledge of two languages, two different systems of expressions, and having access to two different cultures through these two languages will definitely help the bilingual person to be more culturally flexible, which has very valuable gains on both the personal as well as the societal levels. On the personal level, the bilingual person is more able to respect other people and to understand their different points of views, which makes him/her a more

successful person. On the societal level, bilinguals in a society are more able to adapt to the changes happening around them and more able to build successful relations between their country and other countries.

Early EFL Education in Saudi Arabia

The idea of early Arabic-English bilingualism in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has recently become a strong source of controversy. Some scholars and educators strongly support the idea of introducing EFL to the Saudi children during the early years of childhood, while others argue that no foreign language should be introduced to the Saudi learners until they reach teenage years. Each of the teams has its own justification of the viewpoint it adopts. The famous Saudi national newspaper *Al-Watan*, in its 746th issue (2002), has interviewed people of intellect in the Kingdom regarding this matter. The results of such interviews show contrastive opinions. The proponent team see that it is necessary to start teaching English to the Saudi children at an early age because it is the first international language in the world (more than one milliard people all over the world speak it) and that English almost dominates all life aspects. The opponent team strongly rejects the idea of teaching English during the first stages of childhood as it may affect the native language, heritage and culture. In the following section of the article, both viewpoints are displayed and discussed in detail.

Proponents of early EFL education in the Saudi educational system

The proponent team sees that it is mandatory to integrate EFL education into the Saudi Educational system as early as possible. For example, Ibrahim Al-Manna, Dean of the Teachers' College in Jeddah, has stated in an interview with *Al-Watan* newspaper that EFL is a must for the Saudi children; English is an international language that allows us to have dialogue with other countries and nations and it is also the language of modern science and technology. So, it is important for our children to learn it if we are really keen on developing the Saudi nation. The important question raised by Al-Manna is how to teach that language in a manner that exploits the natural extraordinary learning capabilities our young learners are equipped with.

Al-Manna has also stated that early EFL education was applied to the Saudi children before in the year 1348 H. where the pupils studied 4 English classes per week, then reduced to 3 classes per week in the

year 1349 H. However, the whole experiment was cancelled due to the integration of both the preparatory (kindergarten) stage and the primary stage as one educational stage. Al-Manna indicates that in spite of the lack of research conducted on teaching English in this period, he does not personally think that it had any sort of impact on the mother language or culture as it continued for 13 years.

What supports Al-Manna's opinion is that even advanced countries are currently showing much interest in teaching foreign languages to its young children. For example, France, which is well-known for being so proud of its language and culture and strongly fears foreign languages especially English, has recently realized that EFL education is unavoidable, so it is now introducing it to the French children in the primary stage. Britain, which is the mother country of the English language, is currently imposing on its students two obligatory years of learning a foreign language (from the age of 14 to the age of 16). The British government has even suggested to replace these two years with 4 years (from the age of 7 to the age of 11). In the United States, where more foreign language teaching programs are available, it has been proved through a study conducted by Ricciardelli (1992) that the young children of the immigrants who learned English had better cognitive development and performed better on school tests than those who did not have any foreign language education. Apparently, the learning of English did not influence the mother tongue of the immigrants' young children.

Al-Manna also confirms that a large number of our Saudi children have already learned English during the primary stage in private schools, yet their mother tongue has never been influenced. Al-Manna concludes the interview by mentioning that the Saudi nation has its own language and culture that should be preserved, but at the same time it is important to keep in pace with the changes that are going on around us, and English is an important feature of these changes.

Another proponent voice for early EFL education in Saudi Arabia is Tarifa Al-Showaer, *Al-Watan*, in its 746th issue (2002), who works as an education supervisor at the Saudi Ministry of Education. She illustrates that it is important to teach English or any other foreign language at an early age because in childhood, the learners have some sort of mental flexibility or "plasticity of the mind" that allows them to learn subconsciously without exerting much effort. This is the stage of spontaneous readiness for language learning that we should take advantage of, and not to be terrified by the claims of "influence on

the mother language" because at the age of 5 or 6, the child's mother language is already well-established and learning a foreign language does not influence it as each of the two languages has its own separate lexicon, syntax and semantics. Al-Showaer sums up the advantages of learning English at an early age in the following points:

1. Methods of teaching in the primary stage greatly depends on illustrations making use of the child's spontaneous readiness for language learning, which accelerates the language learning process.
2. The child's acquired mother language vocabulary usually allows him/her to read and write in his/her native language clearly noticing the difference between his/her native language and the new language he/she is learning.
3. The Arabic language of those children who learnt English in the primary stage were not influenced by learning English at an early age whether in the language skills or in reading or reciting the Holy Quran, and this is a personal experience that I have no doubt about.
4. Children who learn English during the primary stage in private schools speak it much better than those who start learning it during the middle or secondary stages.
5. Most departments in colleges and universities require English language mastery because most subjects such as medicine, engineering, technology, and science are taught in English, which should make us more keen on English language education right from the beginning.

Opponents of early EFL education in the Saudi educational system

Those who are against early EFL education in the Saudi educational system think that English represents a strong threat to our Arabic language, culture and identity. One opponent voice is that of the Saudi writer and businesswoman Haifaa Ezzi, Al-Watan, in its 746th issue (2002), who strongly rejects any English language teaching at an early age. She justifies her opinion by saying that currently there are calls of English language education during the primary stage, but the painful fact is that when children finish the primary stage, they become proficient in neither language. "Isn't it better to focus on the Arabic language to allow the children to understand and absorb our Arabic and Islamic heritage and values?" she wonders.

Ezzi, Al-Watan, in its 746th issue (2002), adds another disadvantage of early EFL education in Saudi Arabia. This is represented in the idea that some young

children do not have any inclination to foreign language learning. Consequently, forcing such children to learn a foreign language they do not want to learn will be quite demotivating for them, and will make them feel bored and may finally lead to negative attitudes towards this language in the future or may lead to school attrition eventually. A third disadvantage of early EFL education, as seen by Ezzi, is represented in the fact that the young child is surrounded by Arabic in the environment in which he lives, so forcing him to learn English represents a violation of the child's mind and environment at the time in which he feels that this language is of no use to him; he does not use it at home with his family members, he does not communicate with it in the society, and he does not even need it to succeed at school.

Ezzi concludes by stating that EFL learning is more doable and feasible when children become adults; adults are more aware of the language learning process and of the need for the language for employment, traveling abroad and postgraduate studies, but teaching English at an early age creates some sort of disbalance in the child's mind between his native language and the new language he is unjustifiably forced to learn.

The Need for Early EFL Education in Saudi Arabia

Due to the many advantages of bilingualism that I previously pointed out, I think there is a need for EFL education for young children in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Early bilingualism will definitely render the Saudi children more culturally-flexible and will also contribute a lot to the development of their cognitive and linguistic abilities. In the current educational system employed in the country, students start learning a foreign language at the age of 13, which means that during their early stages of childhood which is marked by a lot of plasticity of the child's mind, no foreign language teaching whatsoever is employed in our governmental schools. In my point of view, which is in accordance with recent research, children in Saudi Arabia should start learning a foreign language as early as they go to school so as to make use of this critical period of childhood in which children's aptitude for language learning is at its peak. In the Saudi Arabian society, almost all children are spoken to at home in Arabic, which means that introducing another language for the young children at school is almost the only alternative for the absence

of this language at the child's home where the parents are Arabic monolinguals. Here comes an important question: what is the language that should be introduced at our schools if we are really keen on bringing up our young children bilingually? This language is definitely English for a number of important factors:

1. English is the most important international language, and it will help the society to develop and grow as it will become more able to build successful relations with other societies and learn from them.
2. In Saudi Arabia, which is considered a cosmopolitan area for people coming from different corners of the world for work and other purposes, English is somehow a lingua franca that allows the Saudi citizen to communicate with a lot of people who cannot actually speak a word of Arabic. For example, I have so many colleagues at work from the United States, United Kingdom, Australia, India, Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, Bangladesh and other nationalities who practically cannot communicate in Arabic, and thus English becomes the only way Saudi Arabians can communicate with these people.
3. Most of the subjects, especially in science specializations, are taught in English at a higher educational level, like the university level for instance. This means that if the students are good at that language, they will have better achievement in these subjects, which will shape their future to a great extent. For example, in our university, students are not admitted to top colleges such as medicine, dentistry, and pharmacy without successfully completing a preparatory program in which English is taught for two successive terms. Many students who got high grades at high school cannot join their dream colleges only because of their English performance in this preparatory program, which makes me wonder: If English is almost at every stage of the student's educational life, and if English is usually what determines the student's future, then why don't we start teaching it from a very young age and help the educational situation to improve?
4. Some degree of proficiency in English is somehow becoming mandatory for employment in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This puts more responsibility on our shoulders as educators and makes us think seriously of including English as a language of instruction in our schools if we are to plan for the future

of our young generations who will not be able to work efficiently inside or outside KSA without English.

Conclusion

This article discusses the important issue of early bilingualism and bilingual education. It starts by pointing out important facts about bilingualism, as revealed by research, showing how bilingual children perform better than monolingual peers in so many respects. Then, some bilingualism and some other terms related to it such as additive vs. subtractive bilingualism, successive vs. simultaneous bilingualism, and bilingual education are clearly defined.

From a practical point of view, the article is divided into two major sections. In the first section, I try to help the reader grasp a comprehensive view of the linguistic phenomenon of bilingualism by firstly referring to the main causes that lead to its occurrence which are represented in migration, education and culture, border areas and religion. Then, I refer to the major types of bilingualism which are balanced bilingualism, dominant bilingualism and semi-bilingualism. In the last part of the first section, I provide a brief account of the general benefits of bilingualism whether on the personal or the societal levels.

The second section of the article discusses the issue of bilingual education. It starts with pointing out some of the faulty beliefs about bilingualism which are extensively used by opponents of bilingual education at an early age. Refutations of these faulty beliefs and misconceptions about bilingualism are also included. Then, I provide support for early bilingual education illustrating the many advantages it can contribute to the child's linguistic and cognitive development. In the concluding section of the article, I refer to the Saudi Arabian educational context demonstrating the need for the adoption of bilingual education in the Kingdom in an attempt to bilingually raise Saudi children. I also list the many factors that make us introduce English as a second language of instruction in our schools at an early age.

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ثنائية اللغة والحاجة إلى تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية في سن مبكرة في المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث. يعرض هذا المقال البحثي لقضية هامة وهي قضية ثنائية اللغة في سن مبكر وتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للأطفال السعوديين خلال مراحل التعليم الأولى.

يبدأ البحث بتعريف ظاهرة ثنائية اللغة وبعض المصطلحات المتعلقة بها مثل ثنائية اللغة المتزامنة أو المتتابعة، وثنائية اللغة الإحلالية التي تحل فيه لغة محل أخرى، أو ثنائية اللغة الإضافية التي تضاف فيها لغة إلى لغة أخرى موجودة أصلاً دون أن تحل محلها. يعرض البحث بعد ذلك لبعض الأبحاث والدراسات التي أجريت على ظاهرة ثنائية اللغة والتي أظهرت تفوق الأطفال ذوي اللغتين على نظرائهم من ذوي اللغة الواحدة.

ومن الناحية العملية يمكن القول بأن البحث ينقسم إلى جزأين رئيسيين. الجزء الأول من البحث يساعد القارئ على الإلمام بظاهرة الازدواج اللغوي بصورة شاملة، ولهذا فإنه يعرض معلومات عامة عن تلك الظاهرة. فعلى سبيل المثال نجد الجزء الأول من البحث يقدم نبذة مختصرة عن أهم أسباب ظاهرة الازدواج اللغوي والتي تتمثل في الهجرة والتعليم والثقافة والمناطق الحدودية والدين، ثم يعرض البحث بعد ذلك أهم أنواع ثنائية اللغة متمثلة في النوع المتوازن، والنوع المسيطر، والنوع الثالث والذي يطلق عليه شبه ثنائية اللغة. أما الفقرة الأخيرة في الجزء الأول من البحث فإنها تعرض أهم منافع ثنائية اللغة سواء للفرد أو للمجتمع.

أما الجزء الثاني من هذا المقال البحثي فإنني أعرض فيه ظاهرة ثنائية اللغة المبكرة موضعاً في بدايته بعض المعتقدات والمفاهيم الخاطئة عن ثنائية اللغة المبكرة والتي يعتمد عليها المعارضون لمثل هذا النوع من ثنائية اللغة، ثم أقوم بعد ذلك بعرض البراهين التي تدحض هذه المزاعم مبيناً جدوى وفوائد هذا النوع من ثنائية اللغة.

وفي الجزء الختامي للبحث أعرض الوضع السائد في النظام التعليمي السعودي والذي لا يبدأ فيه تدريس لغة أجنبية للتلاميذ إلا في الصف السادس من المرحلة الابتدائية، وهو سن متأخر جداً حيث تضع أهم سنوات مرحلة الطفولة التي يتميز الطفل فيها بمرونة عقلية واستعداد عالٍ للتعلم اللغوي دون الاستفادة منها. وأخيراً أعرض أهم الأسباب التي تجعلني أطلب بتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية للأطفال السعوديين في سن مبكر جداً مبيناً المنافع المتعددة التي تعود على أطفالنا وبالتالي على مجتمعنا من القيام بذلك.