



Libyan Parents' Attitudes Towards Bilingualism

مواقف وأراء أولياء الأمور حول ازدواجية اللغة

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Abstract

In our globalized world, the demand and desire to Learn English is increasing. In Benghazi, individuals seek different educational institutions to enhance their English. Some parents choose to enrol their children in bilingual schools that provide education in both English and Arabic. The success of such education is influenced by a myriad of factors. One influential factor is attitudes towards bilingualism and bilingual education. Thus this study aims at exploring the attitudes of 119 parents whose children study at two bilingual schools in Benghazi. A questionnaire that consisted of 16 items was used to gauge parents' attitudes. The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics including the mean and standard deviation. The statistical results illustrated that parents have positive attitudes towards bilingualism.

Key Words: language attitudes, holistic bilingualism, fractional bilingualism, bilingual schools, Benghazi

ملخص الدراسة

في ظل الاستخدام الواسع للغة الإنجليزية أصبحت هناك حاجة ملحة لتعلمها، مما دفع الكثير من الأفراد بمدينة بنغازي للاتجاه إلى المعاهد والمؤسسات التعليمية المختلفة للالتحاق بها لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية، كذلك فإن العديد من أولياء الأمور يميلون إلى تسجيل أبنائهم في مدارس دولية توفر تعليم مزدوج باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية، ويعتمد نجاح هذه المؤسسات في تعليم اللغة على العديد من المؤثرات منها على سبيل المثال مواقف الطلبة وأولياء أمورهم من ازدواجيه اللغة؛ لذلك فإن هدف هذه الدراسة هو استقصاء مواقف وآراء 119 ولي أمر لأطفال يدرسون في مدارس دولية. تم استخدام استبانة مكونة من ست عشرة نقطة لجمع المعلومات اللازمة ثم تم تحليل هذه البيانات باستخدام الإحصاء الوصفي وحساب المتوسط والانحراف المعياري، وقد أظهرت النتائج المتحصل عليها أن مواقف وآراء أولياء الأمور كانت إيجابية نحو ازدواجيه اللغة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: المواقف تجاه تعلم اللغة، ثنائية اللغة الشاملة، ثنائية اللغة الجزئية، مدارس دولية، بنغازي.

Introduction

Language constitutes a foundation for interaction not only within communities but also between countries despite their varying first languages. Thus there is a need for a lingua franca to facilitate understanding and communication between individuals of different language backgrounds. Moreover, due to the wide spread of English worldwide today, it is considered a leading language. Mackenzie (2007) states that English is increasingly dominating international business, scientific conferences in addition to official international communication. Similarly, in Libya, English is the prominent foreign language taught, learnt and used. There is an observable demand for studying English that is provided through language centres which supply English Language courses and private schools that offer additional English curriculums either instead of or in addition to *English of Libya* which is the curriculum chosen by Libya's Ministry of Education.

In 2011, the first bilingual school in Benghazi was founded. This school provided bilingual education in both the English language and the Arabic language. English was the medium of instruction for the majority of the school subjects including science, math and social studies while Arabic studies and Islamic studies were taught in Arabic. In recent years, the numbers of these schools have risen. As of 2024, the numbers of these schools have increased up to thirteen bilingual schools in Benghazi alone (Jumma, 2024).

Learning English is essential, and the success of language learning is influenced by a number of individual differences including the learner's motivation, personality, age and attitude (Cook, 1991; and Ellis, 2004); Moreover, the social context can influence language learning (Saville-Troike, 2012). Acknowledging both the roles of these individual differences and the social context in learning English, this paper seeks to investigate parental attitudes towards bilingual education.

Literature Review

The success of language learning has been investigated from different viewpoints. This paper will focus mainly on attitudes as an effective contributor to language learning. Thus both the attitudes of parents and the attitudes of students themselves towards second language learning will be discussed.

Gardner (1968) stressed the effect that student attitudes have on the success of language learning based on a series of research including Gardner (1960), Gardner & Lambert (1959), Lambert, Gardner, Olton & Tunstall (1960) and Gardner (1968). Furthermore, Baker (1992) recognizes that parents' attitudes towards bilingualism affect not only their children's attitudes towards learning but also their academic success at school. Gardner (1985) discussed the role that parents play in their children's language learning. He focused on the parents' attitudes and distinguished an active role and a passive role that parents could play. Gardner (1968) details the active role of a parent as that who motivates their child and extends help when needed. They also oversee their child's progress and provide praise when their child is successful. On the other side, parents can project a negative active role if they gave negative comments towards learning a language. In addition, Gardner (1968) describes the passive role of parents which is reflected in their attitudes towards the second language community whether positive or negative which in turn affects the child's integrative motivation and thus learning.

Burstall (1975) conducted a longitudinal study which investigated the teaching process of French in England and Wales for students at the primary level. The study periodically tested the students' language outcome. In this study which extended for ten years, the students received daily lessons in French using age appropriate lessons. He concluded that the parents' and students' positive attitudes towards French may have led to greater Second Language proficiency within students (Burstall, 2008). Moreover, students participating in that study gave comments that demonstrate the effect of their parents' attitudes on their own attitudes whether positively or negatively (Gardner, 1985).

Hosseinpour, Yazdani, and Yarahmadi, (2015) studied the relationship between Iranian parents' involvement, attitude and educational background and their children's academic achievement. A questionnaire was answered by the parents of 70 primary school

girls to gain an understanding of parental involvement and attitudes. Moreover, the students took an achievement test. The study analysed the data and found a high correlation between the parents' attitudes, involvement and educational background with the students' academic achievement.

Similarly, Ali (2022) investigated parental motivation and attitudes of secondary students in Nigeria using similar tools. The research concluded that parents' attitudes significantly affect the students' academic achievements. Furthermore, Mack (2013) explored parental attitudes towards their children studying the Irish language. Parents of children studying at Irish-medium schools were given questionnaires and interviews to attain their attitudes. One of the conclusions of this study was that the positive attitudes of parents towards Irish education yielded positive results in fostering bilingualism within their children.

Also, Jang (2012) studied the attitudes of 218 Korean parents. Their children study at an elementary school that provides bilingual education. This study used a modified version of Baker's (1992) questionnaire. This research concluded that the vast majority of the parents displayed positive attitudes towards both a holistic view and a fractional view of bilingualism. Their attitudes favoured the holistic view, however, more than they did the fractional view.

With the effect of both student and parent attitudes being established by previous research, this paper aims at investigating the attitudes of Libyan parents whose children are enrolled in bilingual schools.

Methodology

This study strived to investigate parental attitudes. This was initiated through posing the following question:

1. What are the parents' attitudes towards a holistic view of bilingualism?
2. What are the students' attitudes towards a fractional view of bilingualism?

For the purpose of answering the above questions, two bilingual schools in Benghazi, namely International School Benghazi and Al-Ryada International School, were randomly selected to participate in this study. Within each bilingual school, four classes were again randomly selected. A number of 300 surveys for parents were given to the students at both schools to take home for one of their parents to complete. The response rate yielded from the questionnaires was 40% equating to 119 participants. Although some of the parents forgot or neglected to complete the questionnaire. Therefore, only five statements had total participant answers that were a little less than 119.

The instrument used in this study was a questionnaire. The items of this questionnaire were based on a five-point Likert scale which was arranged as follows (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, 5= Strongly agree). The questionnaire determined the parents' attitudes towards bilingualism and was adapted from Jang (2012) and Baker (1992). It was translated into Arabic to ensure that parents' answers were not affected by their comprehension of the questionnaire items. The translated questionnaire was revised by two professors at the University of Benghazi to ensure its

accurate translation. The research instrument consists of two sections; The first sought demographic information while the second section was a Likert-type questionnaire encompassing 16 items. Items from 1 to 8 reflected a holistic view of bilingualism. These items contained positive words regarding complimentary relationships between Arabic and English. Thus high scores would indicate favourable attitudes towards bilingualism. Items from 9 to 16 reflected a fractional view of bilingualism and contained unfavourable words regarding competitive relationships between Arabic and English; as a result, the scores of this section of the questionnaire were reverse-coded. As a consequence, high scores would indicate positive attitudes towards bilingualism.

Findings and Discussions

The data gathered from the questionnaire was analysed statistically using IBM SPSS version 21. The mean and standard deviation were used to derive answers for the two research questions. The data which is presented in Table 1 and Table 2 exhibit that parents retain high positive attitudes towards both the holistic view of bilingualism and the fractional view of bilingualism.

Research question one

1. What are the parents' attitudes towards bilingualism?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis of the parents' holistic view of Bilingualism

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank
1. I help my children to speak both Arabic and English.								
N	0	0	6	31	62	4.57	0.609	6
%	0%	0%	6.1%	31.3%	62.6%			
2. Speaking both Arabic & English helps children to be more knowledgeable about the world.								
N	0	0	1	33	65	4.65	0.501	2
%	0%	0%	1.0%	33.3%	65.7%			
3. Speaking Arabic and English is a valuable skill.								
N	0	1	2	30	66	4.63	0.582	3
%	0%	1.0%	2.0%	30.3%	66.7%			
4. If children know Arabic and English, they can have more friends and people.								

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N	0	1	9	30	59	4.48	0.705	7
%	0%	1.0%	9.1%	30.3%	59.6%			
5. Both Arabic and English should be important in Libya.								
N	0	1	1	27	70	4.68	0.550	1
%	0%	1.0%	1.0%	27.3%	70.7%			
6. Speaking Arabic and English is significant for the future of Libya.								
N	0	2	5	24	68	4.60	0.684	4
%	0%	2.0%	5.1%	24.2%	68.7%			
7. Speaking Arabic and English helps children to reach their goals.								
N	0	0	6	40	73	4.56	0.591	5
%	0%	0%	5%	33.6%	61.3%			
8. Speaking Arabic and English makes children’s lives more enjoyable.								
N	0	6	21	49	43	4.08	0.859	8
%	0%	5%	17.6%	41.2%	36.1%			
Weighted mean					4.54		Strongly agree	
Standard deviation					0.448			

The results in Table 1 shows that most parents expressed high favorable attitudes regarding the practical value of being bilingual. This is indicated by the ranks in the following items. Item 5 “Both Arabic and English should be important in Libya.” (M=4.68; SD=0.550) was ranked number 1 which probably reflects the parents’ beliefs that science, technology and education is mostly available in English. Thus, for Libya to advance as a country, Libyans need to be able to access such technology and scientific advancement. English is considered a vital tool that would improve the quality of life for Libyans. Item 2 “Speaking both Arabic and English helps children to be more knowledgeable about the world.” (M=4.65; SD=0.501) was ranked 2 which illustrates beliefs that children who are able to speak English are at an advantage due to their ability to access any knowledge and information that is presented in English. Item 3 “Speaking Arabic and English is a valuable skill.” (M=4.63; SD=0.582) was ranked 3. This presumably indicates that Libyans would find it possible to communicate with people of varying language backgrounds in situations when neither speaker is able to communicate in the others first language. Similar situations would arise when individuals travel to foreign countries. Item 6 “Speaking Arabic and English is significant for the future of Libya.” (M=4.60; SD=0.684) was ranked 4. This

could be interpreted that Libyans aspire to improve education, health care system, economy among other things. That is especially true after the political unrest that the country has been through since the toppling of the ex-president Muammar Gaddafi. The statistics of these items coincide with the findings of Jang (2012) although not in the same order.

On the other side, the lowest parental attitudes indicated were towards those items regarding the pleasurable value of bilingualism on the children's lives; item 8 "Speaking Arabic and English makes children's lives more enjoyable." ($M=4.08$; $SD=0.859$) and item 4 "If children know Arabic and English, they can have more friends and people." ($M=4.48$; $SD=0.705$).

The results show that parents have the highest favorable attitudes in relation to the instrumental value of bilingualism for their children and slightly less favorable attitudes towards the quality of life brought about by being bilingual. These results support those found by Jang (2012) that found Korean parents favor the practical advantages of bilingualism over pleasure driven from bilingualism.

Research question two

2. What are the students' attitudes towards a fractional view of bilingualism?

Table 2: Descriptive Analysis of the parents' fractional view of Bilingualism

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean	Standard deviation	Rank
9. Children only become bilinguals if they learn both Arabic and English from childhood and have no accent.*								
N	63	46	7	2	1	1.59	0.753	8
%	52.9%	38.7%	5.9%	1.7%	.8%			
10. It is impossible to speak both Arabic and English well.*								
N	0	12	9	39	59	4.22	0.967	5
%	0%	10.1%	7.6%	32.8%	49.6%			
11. Children have to concentrate on only Arabic as their native language instead of learning English.*								
N	2	19	16	54	28	3.73	1.047	7
%	1.7%	16.0%	13.4%	45.4%	23.5%			

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12. Children who speak English are not real Libyans.*								
N	0	0	1	42	76	4.63	0.502	3
%	0%	0%	.8%	35.3%	63.9%			
13. Children have to forget Arabic in order to learn English well.*								
N	1	0	0	18	100	4.82	0.504	1
%	.8%	0%	0%	15.1%	84.0%			
14. If children are not going to live abroad, they don't need to learn English.*								
N	1	0	1	29	88	4.71	0.573	2
%	.8%	0%	.8%	24.4%	73.9%			
15. If children learn both Arabic and English, they will suffer in the future.*								
N	4	3	0	23	89	4.60	0.896	4
%	3.4%	2.5%	0%	19.3%	74.8%			
16. The more English children use, the worse their Arabic will become.*								
N	1	11	16	41	50	4.08	1.001	6
%	.8%	9.2%	13.4%	34.5%	42.0%			
Weighted mean					4.0452		Agree	
Standard deviation					.38467			

Note. *These statements were reverse-coded; (1=strongly disagree; 2=disagree; 3=neutral; 4=agree; 5=strongly agree).

All the statements in Table 2 were reverse-coded due to negative nature of the words chosen in the questionnaire items. The results indicated that parental attitudes towards a fractional view of bilingualism were generally a little less approving. This is apparent in item 13 "Children have to forget Arabic in order to learn English well." (M=4.82; SD=0.504) which holds rank 1. It could be presumed that parents have no fear of their children losing Arabic since it is the national language of Libya and is used for all social functions. The second ranked statement was item 14 "If children are not going to live abroad, they don't need to learn English." (M=4.71; SD=0.573). It could be interpreted that parents believe that the English language is not restricted in use to English speaking countries; rather language travels beyond its borders through television and the internet

including social platforms. Item12 “Children who speak English are not real Libyans.” (M=4.63; SD=0.502) was ranked number 3 indicating that patriotism does not correlate with bilingualism. Item15 “If children learn both Arabic and English, they will suffer in the future.” (M=4.60; SD=0.896) and item 10 “It is impossible to speak both Arabic and English well.” (M=4.22; SD=0.967) held no true value to parents.

Moreover, parents disagreed with the two statements that indicated students would face problems when learning two languages simultaneously. Parents, thus, demonstrate attitudes that veer towards additive bilingualism rather than subtractive bilingualism. In item 16 “The more English children use, the worse their Arabic will become.” (M=4.08; SD=1.001), the mean score indicates that parents do not believe Arabic would be negatively affected by the acquisition of English which could be attributed to the abundant contexts where Arabic is used. The standard deviation is slightly high indicating a probability that some parents might fear Arabic literacy being affected by English literacy which are provided at educational contexts; more specifically the skills of reading and writing. Spoken Arabic surrounds the students in abundance unlike the requirement to read or write. This interpretation is further enhanced by the parents’ attitudes towards item 11 “Children have to concentrate on only Arabic as their native language instead of learning English.” (M=3.73; SD=1.047) which was ranked 7. These attitudes contradict those reported by Jang (2012) where parents feared the loss of the first language at the expense of English.

Parental attitudes sharply diverged in item 9 “Children only become bilinguals if they learn both Arabic and English from childhood and have no accent” (M=1.59; SD=0.753). The vast majority of parents either strongly agreed or just agreed indicating that they perceive early bilingual education and accurate pronunciation as an integral part of bilingualism which explains the tendency of enrolling children at bilingual schools from kindergarten.

In summary, the collective mean and standard deviation in Table 2 indicate that parents do not fear that Arabic will be negatively affected or lost as an expense of bilingual education and bilingualism (M=4.0452; SD=.38467).

Recommendations and Limitations

This study sought to probe parents’ attitudes towards the bilingual education of their children. The results of this study indicated that parents held strong holistic attitudes towards bilingualism. This result supports that of Hosseinpour, Yazdani, and Yarahmadi, (2015), Ali (2022), Mack (2013) and Jang, (2012). Parents who enroll their children in bilingual schools tend to have positive attitudes towards bilingualism.

At the onset of this research, the aim was not only to gain an understanding of parental attitudes towards bilingualism, but also to correlate those parental attitudes with their children’s academic achievements to better perceive the effect of the latter on the former. However, due to the privacy policy of the participating schools, it was not possible to gain access to students’ grades, and that investigation was excluded from the research goals.

That being clarified, it should be noted that the results of previous research also proved that the positive attitudes of parents led to enhanced academic performance (Hosseinpour, Yazdani, and Yarahmadi, 2015; Ali, 2022; Mack, 2013; and Jang, 2012).

Thus it is recommended that future research be carried out to investigate attitudes of both parents and students, in addition to, correlating those attitudes with the students' academic achievements in both the subjects taught in English and those taught in Arabic to better comprehend the effect of attitudes on bilingual education.

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Appendix

استبيان لمعرفة موقف الاهل من تعلم أطفالهم اللغة الإنجليزية

أولياء الأمور الافاضل،

أنا حالياً اقوم بدراسة حول التعليم المزدوج في بنغازي .اتمني ان تمنحوني قليلاً من وقتكم للإجابة على هذا الاستبيان الذي يستتبط مواقف أولياء الامور حول ازدواجيه اللغة (التحدث بلغتين).

أنا شاكرة لكم تعاونكم معي .

الشق الأول:

معلومات ديموغرافية

ضع دائرة حول الرقم الذي يعبر عنك.

(1) ولي أمر الطالب:

أ. الأب

ب. الأم

(2) المستوى التعليمي لولي الأمر

أ. الثانوي

ب. الثانوي

ج. ماجستير

د. دكتوراه

(3) كم لغة تتكلم؟

أ. لغة واحدة

ب. لغتين إثنين

ج. ثلاث لغات

د. أكثر من ثلاثة

(4) هل قامت الاسرة بالسفر الي الخارج سابقا؟

أ. نعم

ب. لا

الشق الثاني:

آراء ولي الامر حول ازدواجيه اللغة

قراء الجمل الاتية ثم ضع علامه (✓) في الخانة التي تعبر عن رايك.

أخالف بشدة	أخالف	محايد	أتفق	أتفق بشدة	
					1 أساعد أطفالى بالتحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية.
					2 التحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية يساعدا الاطفال لكي يكونوا أكثر معرفة بالعالم.
					3 التحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية يعتبر مهارة قيمه.
					4 معرفة اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية يساعدا الاطفال على تكوين صداقات أكثر والاندماج مع الناس
					5 يجب أن تكون كلتا اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية مهمتان في ليبيا
					6 التحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية ضروري لمستقبل ليبيا
					7 التحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية يساعدا الاطفال على تحقيق أهدافهم
					8 التحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية يجعل حياة الاطفال أكثر مرحاً
					9 الأطفال يصبحون ثنائيي اللغة في حالة تعلمهم للغتين العربية والإنجليزية منذ الصغر
					10 من المستحيل التحدث باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية بطلاقة

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					يجب على الاطفال التركيز على اللغة العربية عوضا عن تعلم اللغة الانجليزية	11
					الأطفال الذين يتحدثون الإنجليزية ليسوا ليبيين	12
					يجب على الأطفال نسيان اللغة العربية ليتمكنوا من تعلم اللغة الانجليزية	13
					لا يحتاج الأطفال لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية لأنهم لن يعيشوا خارج ليبيا	14
					في حال تعلم الأطفال اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية سيعانون في المستقبل	15
					كلما استخدم الأطفال الإنجليزية سيؤثر ذلك سلباً على لغتهم العربية	16

