



Language Fluency for Bilingual Students: The Saudi Context

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ABSTRACT

As the number of bilingual students in Saudi Arabia continues to grow, it is important to determine how this could impact language fluency. This study explored bilingualism and language fluency among Saudi Arabian students. Specifically, it aimed to determine the impact of bilingualism on language fluency. In doing so, it explored some of the strategies that could be used to enhance fluency as more students continue to learn a second or even third language. Qualitative research methodology was used because it is generally applied to collect data that is descriptive of people's experiences to understand meaning from the perspective of the participants. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. For this study, a total of 15 teachers who educate elementary students in Saudi Arabia were selected randomly from a pool of a purposively selected population. The coding process revealed three major themes: the impact of bilingualism on language fluency, the main benefits of bilingualism among students, and the major factors that affect language fluency. The conclusion highlights steps that can be taken to enhance language fluency as the number of bilingual (and multilingual) students continues to rise.

KEYWORDS

Bilingualism, monolingual, fluency, cognitive development, learning skills, ability of students, thematic analysis, bilingual students

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1. Bilingual Education in Saudi Arabia

The word "bilingual" refers to a person who can speak two languages (Hamers and Blanc, 2000), and according to the Linguistic Society of America (2022), the ability to do so is referred to as bilingualism. Some people become bilingual by acquiring two languages simultaneously in childhood while others learn a second language later in life (LSA, 2022). In the second scenario, individuals may acquire a second language by interacting and/or living with people who speak the language, using available resources by themselves, or learning in school. Language fluency, however, could be described as the degree of proficiency in a language. Essentially, this is the extent to which an individual can communicate smoothly and effectively in a given language. Although there are different definitions of the term, according to Samifanni (2020), many instructors agree that it centers on the smoothness and ease of language utilization by learners and speakers. Given that most people are fluent in their native or first language, the term is commonly used with respect to a second language (Almarshedi, 2021). As Ho (2018) explains, "fluency is an expectation for anyone who wishes to be competent in a target language that they have spent their time and efforts to acquire it" (p. 15). Therefore, the focus is mostly on the second language, which takes some level of effort to acquire compared to the first language.

As with any other area of learning, acquiring a second language can contribute to the holistic attainment of an individual's goals in life. It has also been largely influenced by globalization and interrelated factors that have contributed to the sharing of different cultures and an appreciation for new languages for the purpose of better communication (Alnofaie, 2017). In Saudi Arabia, a number of social and economic factors continue to influence bilingualism, including the growing number of expatriates in the country, its place in the Group of Twenty (G20), and professional and academic development (Alnofaie, 2017). However, the rising number of students pursuing their education abroad and scholarships seems to be the main contributing factor among students (Alnofaie, 2017; Almarshedi, 2021). Due to significant investment in foreign education through hefty scholarships, there has been a great need to learn the English

language for communication (Almarshedi, 2021). English is the most dominant foreign language in many Saudi Universities in comparison to other languages. With over 29 government universities, 38 private universities, and colleges as well as other training institutions that provide an intensive English preparatory year program, the number of bilingual students in the country has only continued to grow (Alharbi, 2022). Alharbi (2022) notes that "English is seen as a prestigious attribute both inside and outside of the classroom, and as a consequence, there is an ever-growing demand for it in the Kingdom" (p. 2). As the preparatory year program continues to take effect, the number of bilingual students in the country can only be expected to increase in the coming years.

Although bilingualism has many advantages, especially for students seeking to study abroad, language fluency is vital if they are to communicate and explain themselves effectively. As Yang (2014) points out, fluency is a vital component of communication competence. By exploring language fluency for bilingual students in Saudi Arabia, this study highlighted some of the strategies that could be used to enhance fluency and consequently enhance competence and proper utilization of language.

2. Theoretical Framework (Constructionism)

This study was guided by the constructionism theory by Seymour Papert. In an address at a conference of educators in Japan in the 1980s, Papert described constructionism as "Giving children good things to do so that they can learn by doing much better than they could before" (Papert, 1980, p. 4). Therefore, the theory places emphasis on the learner's conscious active participation in the activity that results in the development of knowledge. One of the most commonly used examples is of building sandcastles. Rather than passively observing others doing this, an individual is said to learn more effectively when he or she is consciously and actively involved in constructing sandcastles (Papert and Harel, 1991). This idea is supported by a recent study where actively engaged students were found to learn more than others who learned through the traditional model (Deslauriers *et al.*, 2019). In fact, based on a number of other

studies, Deslauriers *et al.* (2019) learned that active teaching strategies resulted in increased lecture attendance, increased student engagement, and better student acquisition of expert attitudes toward college-level science courses. Thus, the approach recommends the active participation of students in given activities as the best strategy to learn and build on existing knowledge.

3. Problem Statement and Significance of the Study

As the number of bilingual students in Saudi Arabia continues to grow, it is important to determine how this could impact fluency. In a preliminary study conducted before the main study, the findings revealed that while the majority of students were learning English as a second language, their proficiency was generally poor. For monolingual students, however, this was not a major issue. In the study, participants (eight primary students) were asked four questions: How many languages do you speak? How often do you use each language in your daily life? How confident do you feel when speaking each language? Do you feel that being bilingual has helped you in your academic performance? The majority (75 percent) of students reported learning English as a second language and 67 percent of those reported using both languages (Arabic and English) daily. However, only two of the students reported confidence in speaking each language. Lastly, five out of the total eight felt that being bilingual helped in their academic performance. When asked about the types of resources they had to help with their fluency in both languages, all the students mentioned story books as well as video and audio recordings. In contrast, monolingual students were confident and fluent using one language, although there was no reported difference regarding performance. These findings are comparable to those of several previous studies. In a study conducted by Sandoval, Gollan, Ferreira, and Salmon (2010), the findings revealed that compared to monolinguals, bilingual students exhibited less dominance in language fluency, which was characterized by slower responses and fewer correct responses. Marsh, Hansson, Sörman, and Ljungberg (2019), on the other hand, stated that for the most part, bilinguals have some disadvantages when it comes to lexical access compared to their monolingual counterparts. In Saudi Arabia, language fluency, especially regarding English, is still poor despite the implementation of a variety of strategies aimed at promoting bilingualism (Alshammari, 2022).

Like many other studies, this study explored the impact of bilingualism on fluency from the perspective of teachers. In addition, this study aimed to investigate the impact of bilingualism on various aspects of language development and academic performance, such as cognitive development, language acquisition, social and cultural implications, and learning environment, with a novel approach that does not repeat previous studies. Moreover, the study will provide new insights and valuable contributions to the field of bilingualism and language development by having explored under-researched aspects of bilingualism, such as the impact on self-esteem and confidence, and examining the influence of specific cultural or social factors unique to Saudi Arabia that can also impact fluency. This research has significant implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers interested in promoting language competence and cross-cultural understanding among bilingual students in Saudi Arabia.

4. Research Questions

- What is the impact of bilingualism on language fluency, academic performance, and cognitive development?
- How do bilingual students learn new languages, and what strategies can enhance language acquisition?
- What support is available for bilingual students, and how does it

impact language fluency and overall student success?

- What are the benefits for bilingual students at the primary level?

5. Purpose of the Study

This study explored bilingualism and language fluency among students in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of bilingualism on language fluency. In addition, it also explored the impact of bilingualism on several outcomes, including academic performance and cognitive development, the latter of which can impact fluency. The study also explored strategies that can enhance language acquisition and fluency as well as the support that is available to bilingual students. Through this research, this study aimed to provide insights and recommendations for educators, policymakers, and other stakeholders to promote and support bilingualism in the educational context in Saudi Arabia.

6. Definition of Terms

- **Bilingualism:** The ability of students to speak and understand two different languages fluently. A good example of this is the ability of students in Saudi Arabia to speak both Arabic and English (Alsulami, 2017).
- **Monolingual:** The ability of students to speak and understand only one language. This can refer to the ability of the student to only speak Arabic or English but not both (Jenkins, 2010).
- **Fluency (or Proficiency):** A student's ability to speak a language with ease, accuracy, and confidence, using appropriate vocabulary and grammar (Duris and Koffi, 2020).
- **Cognitive Development:** The process of developing thinking and learning skills, including perception, attention, memory, language, and problem-solving (Alshahrani, 2017).

7. Literature Review

7.1. History and Significance of Bilingual Education in Saudi Arabia:

Although there are non-Arab communities in Saudi Arabia who have maintained their mother tongues and also speak Arabic, English remains the most common second language in the country (Alnofaie, 2017). As a result, the majority of bilingual students in the country speak Arabic and English. The introduction of English in the country can be traced back to the late 1920s (Alshahrani, 2016). While it is debatable as to when exactly this happened, researchers agree that the economic relationship between Saudi Arabia and the United States (USA) was the primary driving force behind it. As Alshahrani (2016) explained, "The discovery of oil in the early 1930s had a great influence on the teaching and learning of English in the country" (p. 44). However, Alshahrani (2016) asserted that at the time, the language was not well received because it was perceived as a threat to the customs and culture of the country. In the 1930s, the Scholarship Preparation School (SPS) was used to promote the teaching of English in a bid to prepare students traveling abroad for a Western education. In the late 1950s, other languages such as French were also introduced at the intermediate level of the education system but did not succeed like English, which continued to gain a higher status among foreign learned languages (Alshahrani, 2016).

Over the years, a number of policies and practices have also been put in place to encourage learning English as a second language. Between 1970 and 2001, for instance, English was introduced to the main public schools in the country for the seventh grade. In private schools, students could learn English as early as the first grade (Alshahrani, 2016). Many of the universities established in the 1970s also had their own English departments as well as language centers and translation institutes. In the 1990s, globalization also played a vital role in promoting increased teaching and use of English in the country as a means of capturing service industry positions among other

positions within core industries (Alshahrani, 2016).

With new goals to achieve and a desire for Saudi Arabia to become less dependent on oil, the education system has experienced significant transformation characterized by an increase in private and public universities as well as increased interest in areas like medical engineering and other sciences. Similarly, there is more interest in the English language, which is viewed as the main medium through which instruction in these fields is delivered (Alshahrani, 2016). As Massri (2019) points out, "the English language has gained the status of a mandatory language in the Saudi higher education institutions" (p. 220). Through programs like the preparatory year program, students also have the chance to learn and improve their English before joining higher education institutions. By improving their use of this second language, students are prepared to not only study abroad but to also be in a position to properly interact and work with other experts across different industries (Alshahrani, 2016; Aldosari and Al Sultan, 2017).

7.2. Advantages and Challenges of Bilingualism:

According to Alshahrani (2016), the Saudi government has continued to heavily promote English in the country, resulting in significant development in the way that the language is taught. As mentioned, this was made possible through the introduction and implementation of various programs and policies in the education system throughout the country. This has also contributed to the development of new trends and insights aimed at enhancing the teaching and learning of the new language (Alshahrani, 2016).

For many students, learning abroad is one of the biggest factors motivating bilingualism. Bilingualism (especially learning English) therefore plays an important role in ensuring that the majority of these students get the opportunity they seek in other parts of the world and particularly the USA. According to Alkaabi (2016), the number of Saudi Arabian students in the USA has increased dramatically. Given that understanding English is one of the main requirements to obtain admission, a lot of students are learning English as a second language. The study also found that students who learn English generally exhibit higher motivation, positive attitudes, and willingness to learn.

Although bilingualism has a number of benefits, fluency is still a major issue. This problem has largely been attributed to the lack of authentic situations/scenarios outside the classroom that would allow students to effectively practice their skills (Alharbi, 2015). As a result, students may be unable to communicate effectively using their second (or third) language when needed. Even after studying English for many years, Alhaisoni (2013) explains that students achieve little with regard to proficiency, which can be demoralizing for both the teachers and students. Other factors shown to contribute to this issue include students finding a mismatch between their native and foreign language, use of ineffective teaching methods by teachers, and potential conflict between the local culture and the foreign language (Nelson, Salmeen, and Alyalak, 2019). Therefore, though bilingualism has its advantages, there is a need to address factors that affect fluency which can undermine these benefits.

7.3. Bilingualism and Fluency:

Many studies have also investigated the impact of bilingualism on fluency while comparing fluency between bilingual and monolingual learners. In a study that was conducted by Sandoval *et al.* (2010), monolingual participants performed better in fluency compared to bilingual participants. This result was attributed to interferences between the languages causing the individual to become less fluent when using the second language. Since they had to perform a "dual tasks," compared to monolinguals who only used one language,

bilinguals produced fewer correct responses and were slower in their initial responses. However, a study by Patra (2020) showed that bilinguals generally performed well in letter fluency tasks compared to monolinguals. In another study, the performance of bilingual students in vocabulary and verbal fluency was in the average range, while monolingual students performed relatively better (Portocarrero, Burright, and Donovan, 2007). Although bilingual students did not perform as well as monolingual students, researchers noticed that they were more likely to perform better if they had started learning the language at an early age. This indicates that learning a language from an early age, similar to how the native language was learned, has a significant impact on fluency.

8. Methodology

This study was conducted using qualitative research. Qualitative research is generally used to collect data that is rich with descriptions of people's experiences. As such, it serves to demonstrate the experiences, phenomena, or context from the perspective of the affected party. Regarding qualitative research, Cleland (2017) notes that "it addresses the 'how' and 'why' research questions and enables a deeper understanding of experiences, phenomena, and context" (p. 61). Because the collected data is from the lived experiences of the individual, it is not as generalizable as quantitative data. However, it allows the reader to not only learn about the experiences of others but also determine whether these experiences are similar to theirs (Siegle, 2019). Considering this, by comparing different data sets from independent studies on the same topic, it would be possible to identify patterns that could help recognize and highlight major plot points and thus generalize the data. Using the qualitative method, the current study contributed to the existing pool of data by collecting data that represents the actual views and perspectives of the bilingual participants. Through interaction with the participants, the study also aimed to identify strategies they deem to be effective in enhancing fluency and consequently enhance competence and proper utilization of language. This was particularly important given that through their experiences, these participants are in a good position to explain what they feel they is needed to improve bilingualism among students. Moreover, the collected data could help to implement more effective strategies in the future and make it easier for younger or new students to not only learn another language (second language) but also be equally fluent in both.

8.1. Sample and Sample Selection:

Teachers of elementary students from Saudi Arabia were the primary participants of the study. As mentioned, the government of Saudi Arabia has introduced a number of programs aimed at promoting English as a second language in public schools throughout the country. For this study, a total of 15 teachers who educate elementary students in Saudi Arabia were selected randomly from a pool of a purposively selected population. The random selection was meant to ensure that the participants are not only bilingual but also potentially diverse enough to provide different viewpoints.

8.2. Data Collection Procedure:

As mentioned, data was collected through (semi-structured) interviews. In the process for collecting the data, participants were asked to sign consent forms as an indication that they were participating in the study freely. This was particularly important given that participants should know what they are participating in before they can consent. For this reason, all the participants selected were asked to agree to participate in this study. After they had reflected on the information given and signed the consent forms, data collection began. Once the dates were agreed on, interviews were conducted in

person with all the participants in the school setting. All interviews were recorded using smartphone recording features so that they could later be transcribed.

8.3. Data Analysis:

Thematic analysis was used on this qualitative data to identify patterns across the data and derive themes. Typically, the analysis process followed steps that include familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, refining and naming the themes, and producing a report. The creation of transcripts went a long way in the first step: becoming familiar with the data. Listening to and transcribing the data made it possible to reflect and think about the data and form initial thoughts. Initial codes were then generated after becoming familiar with the data and identifying related data. In the third step, themes could be identified from the initial codes. These themes were refined in step four by going over the data to find any supporting information. During the refining phase, some codes were added or removed from the themes depending on how relevant they were. These were refined, named, and labeled in step 5 before finally making a report in the last step.

9. Ethical Considerations

9.1. Informed Consent and Assent:

As mentioned, teachers of elementary students in Saudi Arabia were the primary participants for this study. Given that they were randomly selected from a purposively selected population, it was impossible to predict how they would react or be affected by the data collection process. Though the study was not expected to cause harm or any negative reactions, it was important to keep the possibility in mind. For this reason, all the participants were fully informed about the study so they could make informed decisions about whether they wished to participate. Before proceeding, all the teachers participating in the study were expected to sign the consent form to show that they freely agreed to it and understood what the study entailed. It was important to ensure that all participants exhibited competence and understood what the study involved when making this decision. In addition, participants were informed that the students could leave at any moment if they did not wish to continue. This was aimed at empowering the participants so they did not feel pressured to go through the entire process if they do not wish to.

9.2. Confidentiality and Data Safety:

Important steps were taken to ensure confidentiality. For some researchers and academics, confidentiality is considered to be one of the most vital ethical necessities (Abed, 2015). Taking this seriously ensures that the identities of participants were and are protected during and after the study so that no harm is done. In this study, private information including names, addresses, and identities were not collected. Rather, participants were identified using numbers.

All the data was well protected to prevent a scenario where the study had to be conducted a second time. The 3-2-1 model was generally preferred because it involved having three copies of the data stored in different media. In this case, data was kept in the the principal researcher's password-protected personal computer. In a scenario where one or two of these sources were affected, the data could still be retrieved from the third.

10. Thematic Data Analysis

10.1. Results:

Table 1: The data analysis of interviews

| Focus of Interview Questions | Sample Answers | Participants |
|---|--|---|
| Differences in fluency between bilingual and monolingual students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilingual students are not very fluent with their second language Long use of second language affects fluency in the first Bilinguals try or are more fluent in both languages There is little to no difference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, 15 Teacher: 2 Teachers: 7, 10, 12, 13, 14 Teachers: 8, 11 Teachers: 1, 11, 14 |
| Ease of learning new language (bilingual students) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It depends on the student Bilingual students have an easier time | Teachers: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 12, 13, 15 |
| Types of support available for bilingual students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology; Audio and video recordings, class presentation Story books, reading aloud, dialogue and discussions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers: 1, 3, 4, 6, 8, 11, 14, 15 Teachers: 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15 |
| Impact of bilingualism on academic performance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bilingual students perform better overall Not sure or no difference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13 Teachers: 9, 11, 14, 15 |
| Impact of bilingualism on ability to communicate | Bilingualism improves ability to communicate | All teachers |
| Impact of bilingualism on social and cultural development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> It improves social development It improves both social and cultural development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers: 1, 3, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14 Teachers: 2, 4, 6, 7, 10, 12, 15 |
| Impact of bilingualism on cognitive development | It improves cognitive development | All teachers agree (except Teacher 14) |
| Impact of bilingualism on vocabulary in both languages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> They have stronger vocabulary No difference or difference in just one language | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13, 14 Teachers: 2, 8, 9, 11, 15 |
| The impact of learning environment on bilingualism | Learning and practicing at home and in the community has the greatest impact | All teachers agree |
| Impact of bilingualism on confidence/self esteem | It enhances confidence and self esteem | All teachers agree (except Teacher 12) |

10.2. Major Themes:

Table 2: Themes and sub-themes

| Themes | Sub-themes | Fluency of mention |
|---|--|---|
| Impact of bilingualism on fluency Question: • What is the difference in fluency between monolingual and bilingual students? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heavy use of one language can affect fluency in another language Bilingual students try to or can be more fluent in both languages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 46.6% 33.3% |
| Main benefits of bilingualism Questions: • What is the impact of bilingualism on overall academic performance? • Do bilingual students have an easier time learning a new language? • What is the impact of bilingualism on the ability to communicate and social development? • What is the impact of bilingualism on cognitive development? • What is the impact of bilingualism on student confidence and self-esteem? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better overall performance Improved social development Improved cognitive development Improved confidence and self-esteem | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 73.3% 53.3% 93.3% 93.33% |
| Factors that affect fluency Questions: • What types of support are available for bilingual students? • How does the environment (home, community, school) affect fluency? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning methods used (reading aloud, recordings, discussions etc.) The environment: students who learn and practice regularly at home tend to be more fluent | 100% |

11. Results

For this study, a total of 10 questions were presented to the participants. During data analysis, three common themes were identified, and the questions were compressed into three main sections.

11.1. Impact of Bilingualism on Fluency:

According to 47 percent of the participants, heavy use of one language can affect fluency in another language. Therefore, a bilingual student is more likely to be fluent in a language that they use frequently than one that they use less often. As Teacher 3 explained, "Students who are bilingual may not be very fluent with the second language. As for the first language, I can't say I have noticed any difference." This suggests that all the students frequently use the first language for communication, which allows them to be more fluent with it. Teacher 6 agreed, noting that "They are all fluent with their first language. But many of the bilingual students are not very fluent in English. You must remember it is their second language, so they are

still getting used to it." A similar answer was provided by Teacher 2, who said "It all comes down to the language that is used more often. If one language is used more often than the other in these settings, fluency in the other is affected. I noticed that students who return home after living in America for a long time often face difficulties using the first language. This shows the impact of using one language for too long in any given setting."

Although heavy use of one language can affect fluency in another language, 33 percent of the teachers reported that it can help improve fluency in both languages. According to Teacher 3, bilingual students are more likely to be self-driven, which enhances their overall performance, including having a stronger vocabulary. Teacher 10 not only agreed that they are likely to perform better overall and have a stronger vocabulary but also believed that they are slightly more fluent. Teacher 13 also agreed, noting that "bilingual students, for the most part, tend to be more fluent." In addition, the teacher explained that "I would say being bilingual impacts the way students think and approach problems. You know? They learn by doing which means they are constantly creating." Ninety-three percent of the teachers also agreed that bilingualism tends to boost students' confidence and self-esteem. This boost in confidence and self-esteem is vital for student-centered learning, which can in turn enhance overall performance, including fluency in both languages.

11.2. Benefits of Bilingualism:

Although 46 percent of the teachers reported bilingualism having a negative impact on fluency in one language, a number of benefits were also identified. According to 73 percent of the teachers, bilingualism was associated with better overall academic performance. As Teacher 3 reported, "They are likely to perform better. I believe it is because they are more self-driven." Although Teacher 11 was not convinced that bilingualism was directly responsible for overall better performance, she noted that bilingual students were among the brightest students in her class. Ninety-three percent of the participants also reported that bilingualism has a positive impact on cognitive development, confidence, and self-esteem, which can help explain better overall academic performance. As Teacher 4 stated, "In developing their knowledge of the second language, they also enhance their ability to think and understand. This translates well in other areas of study." Teacher 9 agreed, noting that "I suppose it helps students concentrate, think, and try to understand." Although a majority of teachers reported that bilingualism has a positive impact on cognitive development and consequently on overall performance in academics, some of the teachers disagreed. For instance, Teacher 14 noted that "I think it is the cognitive development of the student that will influence how well they learn a new language." Essentially, the teacher felt that the level of cognitive development among the students influenced their ability to learn new languages and their level of fluency. Lastly, 53 percent of the teachers reported bilingualism having a positive impact on social development and ability to communicate. Regarding social development, Teacher 3 explained that "Socially, yes. They are more likely to engage others in conversations using either language, so that helps." As for communication, the teacher stated that "I think they are in a position to communicate more effectively." These views were shared by more than half of the participants in the study.

11.3. Factors That Affect Fluency:

While heavy utilization of one language can negatively affect fluency in another language, there are two main factors that influence the outcome: the environment and type of support used to enhance fluency. Regarding the second language, all the participating teachers agreed that students who learn and practice regularly at home or in

the community are more likely to be fluent. According to Teacher 12, "Learning at home or with others in their communities has the greatest impact. This is because they also get the opportunity to practice more often which adds to what they learn at school." This, however, is also dependent on the quality of language used by those around them. According to Teacher 10, it becomes much easier for the student to learn two languages if the parent is bilingual. Teacher 6 added to this by saying "In my experience, it is the students whose parents or family members are bilingual who tend to be more fluent. For that reason, I believe that learning at home and in the community is very beneficial." This was further supported by Teacher 11 who explained "Some have parents or relatives who use a second language very well, so for them it comes naturally." The type of support provided also has a direct impact on fluency. All the teachers reported using a variety of tools to help improve fluency among the students. These included story books, audio and video recordings, reading aloud, and discussions among others. These tools are aimed at helping the students learn and practice to continue improving. As Teacher 7 explained, "For both languages, we have a wide array of tools to help the students. The school continues to update the material to ensure that students have the best resources to learn and perfect their fluency." Although these tools are important for student learning, it was also clear that this had to be complemented by practicing and learning at home and in the community through communication and interaction with others.

12. Discussion

Results of the study generated three major themes: the impact of bilingualism on fluency, the main benefits of bilingualism, and the factors that affect fluency. While benefits of bilingualism and factors affecting fluency may seem to deviate from the primary objective of the study, they help explain how some of the other factors related to bilingualism positively or negatively affect fluency among students. These themes are discussed in detail in this section.

According to the study that was conducted by Sandoval *et al.* (2010), monolingual students were shown to perform better in fluency compared to bilingual students. This was attributed to the fact that bilingual students had to perform a dual task, where using one language interfered with fluency in the other. Similar results were reported by Portocarrero *et al.* (2007), where monolinguals were found to perform relatively better in fluency compared to bilingual students. According to Patra (2020), however, bilingual students are likely to perform better in letter fluency tasks. In this study, the majority of teachers (Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 9) noticed that bilingual students were more likely to be less fluent in the second language (English). This could be attributed to the fact that the students are still young and have not gotten used to learning a new language. As Teacher 6 explained "many of the bilingual students are not very fluent in English. You must remember it is their second language, so they are still getting used to it."

With respect to fluency in the second language, results of the current study seem to be in alignment with those of earlier studies. According to Sandoval *et al.* (2010), one of the main reasons bilingual students are likely to perform poorer in fluency than their counterparts is because they have to perform a "dual task." Similar sentiments were shared by Teacher 6, noting that students are still getting used to the second language which is new to them. For this reason, they are performing an additional task compared to those who only speak one language.

The majority of the teachers also explained that there was little difference between bilingual and monolingual students in fluency regarding use of the first language. From this perspective, it is evident

that increased experience or utilization of one language will have a direct impact on fluency in another. According to Teacher 2, some of the bilingual students were more fluent in the second language than they were with the first language. As she explained, "Students who have been communicating using the second language for a long time are not always very fluent with the first language." This also supports the idea that one of the factors affecting fluency is the amount of time an individual has been using a given language. In this case, prolonged experience with the second language affected fluency in the first language. Similar findings were reported in the study by Alkaabi (2016). According to the researcher, the desire to move to the USA has encouraged many students to take up English as a second language. By spending more time using the second language, students are more likely to become fluent. This perspective was shared by several teachers, including Teachers 6 and 11. According to them, the more time students spent using the second language at home with parents who were fluent, the better they were likely to be with fluency. Performance in fluency among these students can also be explained using the constructionism theory.

According to the constructionism theory, children are likely to learn better through active participation in a given activity. As he described, constructionism means "giving children good things to do so that they can learn by doing much better than they could before" (Papert, 1980, p. 4). This helps explain why some of the students are likely to be more fluent in one language than another. As mentioned, Teacher 2 explained that "Students who have been communicating using the second language for a long time are not always very fluent with the first language." Further, Teacher 6 pointed out that "many of the bilingual students are not very fluent in English. You must remember it is their second language, so they are still getting used to it." In these two cases, the teachers imply that students are more likely to be fluent in a language they are more used to and have more experience with. In a case where a student was exposed to English for a long time and was used to using it, fluency in the first language was affected because the student was not used to using it.

Although 47 percent of the participants reported that heavy use of one language has a direct negative effect on fluency in another language, 33 percent reported that bilingual students were fluent in both languages. As Teacher 13 plainly put it, "bilingual students, for the most part, tend to be more fluent." This can be attributed to a number of benefits associated with bilingualism, including increased confidence and self-esteem (93 percent of the teachers), improved cognitive development (93 percent of the teachers), improved social development (53 percent of the teachers), and better overall performance in their academics (73 percent of the teachers). These findings are also supported by the results of the study by Alkaabi (2016). In the study, the researcher discovered that bilingual students generally exhibited more motivation, positive attitudes, and willingness to learn. With such attitudes, students have the drive and momentum to continue performing better in all areas of their academics, including fluency in both languages.

With enhanced cognitive and social development as well increased confidence and self-esteem, students are likely to become more actively involved in their learning, which can result in positive outcomes in their overall academic performance. According to Teacher 3, bilingual students are likely to perform better because they are more self-driven. This also aligns with constructionism theory, which places emphasis on students' active participation in the learning process. In particular, through enhanced social development, students would feel free to interact with individuals who use either language in society or at home, which can not only help them pick up new vocabularies but also improve fluency. According to Teacher 11, students with parents or relatives who use

both languages well are more likely to be fluent in both languages than other students. Similarly, students who are more social and confident will interact with more people at home and in the community, allowing them to practice more often and improve in all areas. Using tools like video and audio recordings, story books, reading aloud, and discussions, teachers at school can then mold and guide students on how to use language properly and in a manner that promotes effective communication.

Most of the teachers also agreed that students who learn and practice a given language at home or in the community with their family or friends often were more likely to be fluent in a given language. For instance, Teacher 6 noted that "In my experience, it is the students whose parents or family members are bilingual who tend to be more fluent. For that reason, I believe that learning at home and in the community is very beneficial". This also aligns with the constructionism theory. Through active participation in these settings, the students get opportunities to learn and practice more frequently, which allows them to be more fluent. Students whose parents, relatives, or friends use English more frequently are more likely to be more fluent with the language to the point of affecting fluency in the first language. Similarly, students who have lived in a foreign country for a significant time are likely to become less fluent in their first language or even forget it altogether. As Teacher 2 explained, "If one language is used more often than the other in these settings, fluency in the other is affected. I noticed that students who return home after living in America for a long time often face difficulties using the first language. This shows the impact of using one language for too long in any given setting." Although strategies such as listening and reading aloud in class help enhance fluency, the findings imply that continued learning and practicing the language at home or in the community is essential to continue improving.

To ensure that students are fluent in both languages, they should be used more frequently both at home and at school. According to Sandoval *et al.* (2010), bilingual students are likely to be less fluent because they have to perform a dual task compared to monolingual students. However, it is worth noting that through continued learning and practice both at school and at home as they grow, students can become fluent in both languages, particularly young students. As Papert emphasized, students learn better through active participation in an activity. Moreover, given that they are still young, learning and practicing both languages with those around them will come naturally as children always learn from their surroundings. Many of the teachers also agreed that bilingual students are more likely to be confident and have higher self-esteem. Moreover, bilingualism was reported to have a positive impact on social development among the students. By taking advantage of these aspects, teachers and parents can encourage students to interact with and actively participate in a variety of activities that contribute to their learning so that they can continue improving. In this case, students can learn from each other both at home and in school. In this case, individual students can learn from the strengths of others in either language.

13. Limitations

This study had a sample consisting of 15 elementary school teachers in Saudi Arabia. Although this number was more than enough to achieve data saturation (Guest, Bunce, and Johnson, 2006), it did not accommodate other parties who are not bilingual, including teachers, parents, and students. Inclusion of these groups would have contributed data from different perspectives and potentially shone a light on unexpected insights. However, this would have significantly expanded the sample, resulting in vast amounts of data that would have taken much more time to analyze. To mitigate this limitation, participants from the pre-selected pool were chosen randomly in an

aim to increase the diversity of the results. This was also expected to minimize bias associated with sample selection for the study.

14. Conclusion

This study aimed to determine the impact of bilingualism on fluency among students in Saudi Arabia. In the process, it also aimed to fill the gap in knowledge on how other major factors can influence the relationship between the two. As a result, this could help highlight strategies to promote bilingualism without negatively affecting fluency in both languages. Language fluency is vital in that it allows an individual to effectively explain their views and engage in constructive conversation with others. In an employment scenario, for example, effective communication is one of the most important qualities of a leader. Being able to communicate effectively and be understood requires an individual to be fluent in the language they are using. From the results, it can be argued that the effort and time employed in learning a given language will have a direct influence on the level of fluency. For this reason, many people are likely to be more fluent in their first language than a second language because they grew up learning and using the first language. However, it is also possible to foster a culture where students are fluent in both languages by exposing them from a young age. According to an article that was published by Major (2022) on the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, the number of individuals using more than one language as first languages was reported to be on the rise. The author noted that a minimum of one in four Canadians reported using at least one language aside from English and French. Although the author did not report anything on fluency, the article is a good indication that competence in one language does not necessarily have to affect fluency in another. With the right learning environment and enough practice from a young age, students can become fluent in both languages and use them effectively to communicate with each other. This is more important now than ever given that more and more students are getting the opportunity to study and work in various other parts of the world. Fluency in different languages should be encouraged to prepare students for the future.

15. Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

Although the majority of teachers reported heavy use of one language to have a negative impact on fluency in another, results also indicated that there are other important factors to consider. For example, the environment and type of support available for the students were shown to impact fluency in one or both languages. In an environment where students learn and use both languages equally, fluency in both languages is not likely to be affected. Therefore, the study indicates that being bilingual does not inherently negatively affect fluency in either language. Rather, other factors (e.g., environment, support, social skills) that come into play tend to influence how fluent a student is with either language. Therefore, to ensure that students are fluent in both languages, they should receive guidance that not only teaches them these languages but also encourages them to use both frequently in their day-to-day interactions.

Future research in the field of bilingual education should continue to explore the complex interplay of factors that influence the development of fluency in both languages among bilingual students. Specifically, researchers should investigate the effect of different types of support, such as family support, school support, community support, and peer support, on bilingual students' fluency in both languages. Additionally, researchers should explore the impact of different methods of learning on bilingual students' fluency in both languages, such as immersion programs, bilingual education

programs, and language maintenance programs. Further research is needed to understand how different types of support and learning environments interact and impact bilingual students' fluency in both languages. Finally, future research should focus on understanding how social skills such as communication and interaction influence bilingual students' fluency in both languages. By examining these factors, educators, policymakers, and researchers can gain a better understanding of how to help bilingual students achieve fluency in both languages and how to develop effective bilingual education programs that support students' linguistic and academic development.

Biography

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