

Bilingual Education and Its Reflection on Performance in Standardized Testing

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Abstract: This research study examines the balance between the native language and English language at international schools that offer bilingual education. The performance in language standardized testing has been analyzed to learn more about students' language skills in terms of language skills (i.e., foundational, literacy and literature, and vocabulary use) compared to what is expected at their ages. The gender, educational level, the kind of language course (i.e., language use and reading) were considered to examine whether bilingualism leads them to proficiency or distraction. Random dataset samples of a total of 1131 students from different international schools offering bilingual K-12 have been collected for this research study. A Chi-square analysis was run to examine the correlation between gender, educational levels, and the taken courses from one side and vocabulary use scores, foundational skills scores, and literacy and literature scores from another side. The results showed that female students at bilingual schools are more likely to have low scores, elementary school students are more likely to have low scores, and students in reading are more likely to have low scores.

Keywords: English Language; Bilingual Education; Standardized Testing.

I. Introduction

Bilingual education is an option for parents who want their kids to maintain their native languages and master English as an international language. Regardless of the details and patterns, it could be stated that bilingual education is basically an educational approach where academic content is taught in two languages, in native and second languages. Different amounts of both languages are given attention based on the learning outcomes. This balance between the native language and English language has been questionable and whether bilingualism leads K-12 students to proficiency in both languages and to distraction that makes them end up with no mastered language (Mohr, K et al., 2018).

In fact, bilingual education programs are also known as dual language programs. In these programs, students in classrooms have exposure to a mixture of speakers for each language. For instance, this could be done in 90/10 model, where 90% of the teaching in the early childhood level is delivered in students' native language and 10% is in their second language. As students are growing up, this proportion gradually changes to an equal exposure where students practice half the time in their native language and the other half in the second language. Another existing model is the 50/50 model where the school day is evenly distributed between the two languages right from the start kids' educational journey (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004).

Since standardized testing in English-speaking countries is usually in English, there is a push to maximize the exposure to learning English. Proponents of this advocate for structured English learning in which students spend most of the school day learning English with scaffolded supports

(Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2004). In bilingual education, teachers could use different methods of teaching to correct students' language errors. For example, they could utilize recasting that takes in repeating the students' statement with corrections, without clearly telling the students about any mistakes they made. Another method is explicit correction, where teachers clearly point out the error in the students' statement (Fleta Guillén, M, 2018).

II. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research study was to examine the balance between the native language and English language at international schools that offer bilingual education. As the performance in language standardized testing is practically very important for students in their steps after graduating from high school, this research study aimed to analyze bilingual education students' language skills in terms of foundational skills, literacy and literature, and vocabulary use based on the what is expected at their different ages. The gender, educational level, the kind of language course (i.e., language use and reading) were considered to examine whether bilingualism leads them to proficiency or distraction.

III. Research Question

Based on the purpose of the research study, the following research question was addressed: To what extent are students' language skills (i.e., foundational, literacy and literature, and vocabulary use) high as expected in their age, in terms of their gender, educational level, the kind of language course (i.e., language use and reading)?

IV. Literature Review

The impact of language integration in students' curricula is apparent and remarkable (Alomair, 2023). This designated bilingual educational systems that have been increasing attention to several communicative behaviors (Alharbi, 2022). In fact, it is seen in many places in the world that English proficiency opens doors to a world of opportunities. English language speakers are more enabled to engage with global knowledge and resources. Thus, it became vibrant that schools implement proper language teaching (Alhowail & Albaqami, 2024) that offers early exposure to English, which is a key pillar that combines the academic and professional success (Hyder, 2024).

Research studies found that there is a strong correlation between language proficiency and learning accomplishment at all different levels of education. This means that students with high language proficiency in more than one language tend to outperform their mono-lingual peers in critical thinking and literacy skills. The cognitive flexibility received through language education helps students to think critically and also to solve problems effectively. This assured that language proficiency can hugely foster cultural understanding and empathy. By being proficient in more than one language, students can communicate with others from diverse backgrounds bridging cultural gaps. This cultural competence is crucial in this globalized world (Navarro et al., 2022).

Schools follow different strategies to enhance English exposure. For example, Alnajdi (2022) stated that incorporating interactive language learning activities into curricula can make English learning an amusing experience. Also, Essa and Harvey (2022) referred to group discussions and role-playing as activities that encourage students to practice communication competences in

real-world situations. Another strategy used by schools is immersion programs. Students can appreciate the language background and narrowly define the speech relevance, which native speakers frequently implement in their daily lives (Mhlongo et al., 2023). Elaborately organizing cultural immersion programs could facilitate English learning in a meaningful way (Munkebye & Gericke, 2022).

According to Muklas and others (2024), one of the main factors to deal with the ambiguity in teaching and learning is the class-rated obvious gap among different students. This really shows that students hailing from disadvantaged economic circumstances usually face barriers that impede their academic progress, which can manifest in the form of lack of familial support. Since students are socially and economically different, implementing diverse strategies for different language programs can ensure that students receive an equal opportunity to succeed (Hancock et al., 2022). There is a real need to incorporate methods of teaching that cater to individual differences, which leads to inclusive and equitable learning opportunities (Intang et al., 2023).

A research study conducted by Khawaji (2023) explored the effect of language education on remedying uneven bilingual proficiency among students in K-12 schools. It referred to the effective instructional strategies that can address the main challenges. Through a combination of language immersion, interactive learning experiences, and cultural integration, students became consistently exposed to rich language situations that deepen selective language development (Khawaji, 2023). As indicated, students may struggle with expressing themselves effectively, engaging in meaningful interactions, and understanding complex concepts (Alahmari & Alkulaib, 2024).

At some schools, it is believed that the language diversity adds richness to the educational experience. Through utilizing the language background and inclusive culture, students have an interactive workplace where their voices are heard and valued (ElJishi et al., 2022). As educators seek cultivate language growth in diverse educational settings, it becomes crucial to understand the inherent blankness of uneven bilingual proficiency. Educators can employ varied strategies to help language learners at different levels.

Obstacles can be eliminated or overcome by designing personalized language plans for interactive learning activities, which is gained when schools hold support programs including language enrichment classes and one-on-one tutoring. This should encourage a growth among language learners, which is a key to overcome proficiency challenges (Korenar et al., 2023). By balancing bilingual education, teachers can reconcile more inclusive and effective contexts that are more suitable for student needs (Alshammari & Sultan, 2024). Language skills significantly improved through effort and perseverance could help students to build resilience and better face linguistic challenges (Genesee, 2022).

In accordance, language learning is a complicated task that has linguistic and cultural acquisition. For example, in the Arab world, K-12 students navigate between Arabic and English to balance a delicate and thus to make sure that integral language ability exists in both languages (Alharbi & Alqefari, 2022). This bilingual skill can cause an uneven development if not managed appropriately. It is crucial for teachers to implement tailored language programs that give attention to individual student needs (López-Medina, 2024). By customizing the personal learning experience, teachers become able to minimize specific language gaps and to increase overall proficiency (Otto et al., 2023).

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This brings a persuasive argument that bilingual proficiency is hard to turn into a one-size-fits-all line. It requires that schools consider each student's unique language journey and offer the adequate support that can steadily deal with the language learning complexities (Siepmann & Cañado, 2022). This defends that balancing language learning proficiency is a complex yet rewarding attempt. Through critical analysis and synthesis, K-12 schools can squeeze the language and culture diversity by motivating their students to unlock their full potential in order to succeed in a bilingual world where a projection of success is positive and expected by the different environments surrounding the student.

Fumen and Kwasau (2022) wrote about an integral approach that combines language learning with real-world applications and therefore can significantly develop bilingual proficiency among students. By utilizing experiential learning activities and expressive interactions in both Arabic and English, students establish greater engagement in their language development. The insights and implications received from such research findings could inspire educators and policy makers to prioritize a balanced approach. This should encourage K-12 schools to initiate more inclusive and supportive learning surroundings that meet all students' individual differences and requirements regardless of their language and cultural backgrounds. In the case that a language and cultural diversity successfully took place, schools could empower their students to excel in bilingual education and prepare them for success in an increasingly globalized world (Grenoble & Osipov, 2023).

In multicultural and multilingual societies, bilingualism as an idea is a common phenomenon (Saran, 2024). In such a society, students often do not struggle dealing with an uneven language skill (Paragae & Paper, 2023). For instance, it was concluded that if a balanced approach to language instruction

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incorporates both languages equally in the curriculum, an improvement among students' language proficiency should be noticed. This indicates that facing the uneven language proficiency by knowing how to intervene very well should support students in achieving balanced bilingual proficiency. By using effective teaching strategies identified via experimental studies, educators could assist students in developing equal proficiency in bilingual education and in ultimately allowing them to immerse themselves into bicultural context.

With a strong emphasis on both Arabic and English languages, students in the Arab world should be able to pilot dual language contextual settings (Meakins, 2023). In an empirical research study, the results revealed promising outcomes showing a significant improvement in students' bilingual proficiency levels (Hua, 2022). By adopting a targeted approach that focuses on students' language and cultural strengths and weaknesses, educators could help students to have a more inclusive learning classroom. In fact, the results showed that educators can effectively address uneven language development through innovative approaches and tailored interventions.

In an experimental research study, Ikonne and Enwere (2024) discussed the implementation of targeted interventions and how they support students in balancing their bilingual education. Through adopting creative instructional strategies and school language programs, the students develop their language skills and minimize the cultural gap in language development. The research study emphasized that considering the bilingual proficiency development as a priority and implementing evidence-based practices could make it easier for teachers to establish an inclusive and effective learning environment that enriches all students. The research study also implied that balancing the bilingual education is a real challenge that requires strategic interventions and

a serious commitment to those students who need support during their personal language development period.

Despite that, uneven language development could happen when one language takes superiority over the other language, which easily leads to imbalances in language proficiency levels and therefore does not help the student to master the languages eventually. Additionally, the research study identified that uneven language development could badly affect students' performance and skills. When the first language is favored over the other language, students might start struggling to effectively express themselves in both languages at the same time, which should lead to bigger challenges in comprehension and communication. To address a serious critical issue like this, teachers in K-12 schools and especially language teachers can implement targeted strategies to provide equal exposure to both languages. In addition to that, bilingual education could teach students in two languages in two different modalities: A spoken or written language as well as a signed language. This type of bilingual education is serving students with special needs (Zamsha & Adamiuk, 2021).

A research study conducted by Alotaibi and Alamri (2022) suggested that bilingual proficiency positively impacts cognitive development. The ability or skill to switch or mix between more than one language should promote executive functional skills like attention control, thoughts regulation, and task-switching. The research study clarified the important role of academic success in enhancing cognitive development and increasing career opportunities. This academic success is based on language education that enriches the learning experience and prepares students in and for multi-cultural societies. Embracing English language learning prepares students with helpful skills.

Moreover, providing high quality bilingual education promotes inclusivity, cultural immersion, and global competence. Bilingual education is a powerful tool that allows students to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world academically and professionally. This success is more likely to happen when graduates apply for a job at a reputable organization. However, some students may face challenges in bilingual education at the same time. K-12 schools are called to offer adequate support to help their students in overcoming language barriers and achieving academic success.

Kroll and Mendoza (2022) claimed that Dictado methodology is an ideal technique as it can firmly break language barriers. By giving consistent practice and feedback during dictation exercises for instance, students could improve their four core language skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing) in both languages. Actually, this integration of the Dictado methodology should enrich the classroom setting and offer a dynamic and interactive learning experience. Also, it should boost student engagement and give more attention to individual learning attitudes. Not only that, but the Dictado methodology also provides a tailored approach to language learning by letting each learner progress at their own speed, which is an important point that schools need to consider in their language programs. Such a personalized learning experience maximizes students' potential to develop their language skills and obtain bilingual proficiency.

Confidence for students to express themselves fluently and comprehensively could be gained through consistent practice and guided instruction (Kroll & Mendoza, 2022). By integrating Dictado approach, teachers can make their students completely confident and comfortable to excel both academically and linguistically (Snizhko, 2023). By leveraging such a creative approach, students find themselves equipped with the basic language

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skills and thrive in different multi-cultural and multi-lingual societies (Conesa, 2024). This should enhance language proficiency and promote an appreciation for cultural exchange (Wand, 2023). If well-implemented and appropriately applied, Dictado approach could transform the language education in schools (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Rios and others (2023) showed many reasons behind the observed uneven proficiency levels among K-12 students, including huge and little differences in socio-economic backgrounds, appropriate accessibility to high quality education, different personal learning experiences, and individual abilities and aptitudes to learn. The research study gave valuable insights into the factors directly and indirectly causing such a problematic issue that hinders students in K-12 schools from developing their proficiency level in bilingual education. However, it is needed to mention that the research study showed lacked detailed examination in regards of the effectiveness of intervention strategies, the role of teacher training in addressing learning gaps related to students' language proficiency, the technological effect on learning development, ... etc.

In short, it was demonstrated that the difficulties of uneven proficiency require firm attention and concerted efforts to catch the learning gaps related to language and culture. It is really crucial for educators and policy makers to keep the focus on leveraging bilingual education in K-12 schools by dividing root causes, redesigning teaching methodologies, leveraging technology as a useful tool for educational equity, and projecting a course for future educational research. Students are the future, and they are really in need of equitable and inclusive educational landscapes that consider all their language and cultural perspectives to allow them to speed it up in their leaning journey.

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V. Participants and Data Collection

Random dataset samples of a total of 1131 students from different international schools offering bilingual K-12 have been collected for this research study. The dataset consisted of 1131 bilingual school students. As shown in Table (1), 349 (30.9%) of them were male students, whereas 782 (69.1%) were female students. 815 (72.1%) of the students were elementary school students from G1 until G6. On the other hand, 316 (27.9%) of the students were middle school students from G7 until G9.

Table (1): Participants

Characteristic	N (%)
Gender	
Male	349 (30.9%)
Female	782 (69.1%)
Educational level	
Elementary School (G1-G6)	815 (72.1%)
Middle School (G7-G9)	316 (27.9%)

These students have taken courses related to language use and to reading. Their achieved grades are compared to the expected standards for their different ages; each grade has its own learning outcomes standards.

VI. Data Analysis and Results

The language skills have been clustered into three different aspects: Foundational, literacy and literature, and vocabulary use. A Chi-square analysis was run to examine the correlation between gender, educational levels, and the taken courses from a side and vocabulary use scores, foundational skills scores, and literacy and literature scores from another side. As shown in Table (2), in foundational skills, 243 students (21.5%) got low scores, 686 students (60.7%) got medium scores, and 202 students (17.9%) got high scores. In literacy and

literature, 207 students (18.3%) got low scores, 742 students (65.6%) got medium scores, and 182 students (16.1%) got high scores. Lastly, in vocabulary use, 232 students (20.5%) got low scores, 657 students (58.1%) got medium scores, and 242 students (21.4%) got high scores. This shows how most of all students in all three language aspects relatively got medium scores, and there were similar numbers of students who got high and low scores.

Table (2): Scores

Foundational Skills Scores	
Low	243 (21.5%)
Medium	686 (60.7%)
High	202 (17.9%)
Literacy and Literature Scores	
Low	207 (18.3%)
Medium	742 (65.6%)
High	182 (16.1%)
Vocabulary Use Scores	
Low	232 (20.5%)
Medium	657 (58.1%)
High	242 (21.4%)

In terms of gender, there was a significant relationship between gender and vocabulary use scores shown in Table (3), foundational skills scores shown in Table (4), and literacy and literature scores shown in Table (5), with a chi-square p-value of less than 0.001. Hence, while female students are more likely to have low scores, the proportion of male students increases as their scores increase from low to medium and high.

Table (3): Gender and Vocabulary Use Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Vocabulary Use Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Gender	Female	Count	206	424	152	782
		% (within column)	88.8%	64.5%	62.8%	69.1%
	Male	Count	26	233	90	349
		% (within column)	11.2%	35.5%	37.2%	30.9%

Table (4): Gender and Foundational Skills Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Foundational Skills Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Gender	Female	Count	213	440	129	782
		% (within column)	87.7%	64.1%	63.9%	69.1%
	Male	Count	30	246	73	349
		% (within column)	12.3%	35.9%	36.1%	30.9%

Table (5): Gender and Literacy and Literature Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Literacy and Literature Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Gender	Female	Count	188	476	118	782
		% (within column)	90.8%	64.2%	64.8%	69.1%
	Male	Count	19	266	64	349
		% (within column)	9.2%	35.8%	35.2%	30.9%

In terms of educational levels, there was a significant relationship between elementary and middle school and vocabulary use scores shown in Table (6), foundational skills scores shown in Table (7), and literacy and literature scores shown in Table (8), with a chi-square p-value of less than 0.001. Hence, while elementary school students are more likely to have low scores, the proportion of middle school students increases as their scores increase from low to medium and high.

Table (6): Educational Levels and Vocabulary Use Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Vocabulary Use Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Educational Levels	Middle School	Count	6	152	158	316
		% (within column)	2.6%	23.1%	65.3%	27.9%
	Elementary School	Count	226	505	84	815
		% (within column)	97.4%	76.9%	34.7%	72.1%

Table (7): Educational Levels and Foundational Skills Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Foundational Skills Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Educational Levels	Middle School	Count	3	179	134	316
		% (within column)	1.2%	26.1%	66.3%	27.9%
	Elementary School	Count	240	507	68	815
		% (within column)	98.8%	73.9%	33.7%	72.1%

Table (8): Educational Levels and Literacy and Literature Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Literacy and Literature Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Educational Levels	Middle School	Count	2	178	136	316
		% (within column)	1.0%	24.0%	74.7%	27.9%
	Elementary School	Count	205	564	46	815
		% (within column)	99.0%	76.0%	25.3%	72.1%

In terms of students' performance in the courses (i.e., language use and reading) they taken, there was a significant relationship between the taken course and vocabulary use scores shown in Table (9), foundational skills scores shown in Table (10), and literacy and literature scores shown in Table (11), with a chi-square p-value of less than 0.001. Hence, while students in reading are more likely to have low scores, the proportion of students in language usage increases as their scores increase from low to medium and high.

Table (9): The Taken Courses and Vocabulary Use Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

		Vocabulary Use Scores			Total
		Low	Medium	High	

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Taken Course	Language Usage	Count	54	319	141	514
		% (within column)	23.3%	48.6%	58.3%	45.4%
	Reading	Count	178	338	101	617
		% (within column)	76.7%	51.4%	41.7%	54.6%

Table (10): The Taken Courses and Foundational Skills Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Foundational Skills Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Taken Course	Language Usage	Count	70	329	115	514
		% (within column)	28.8%	48.0%	56.9%	45.4%
	Reading	Count	173	357	87	617
		% (within column)	71.2%	52.0%	43.1%	54.6%

Table (11): The Taken Courses and Literacy and Literature Scores Chi-square p-value <0.001

			Literacy and Literature Scores			Total
			Low	Medium	High	
Taken Course	Language Usage	Count	49	368	97	514
		% (within column)	23.7%	49.6%	53.3%	45.4%
	Reading	Count	158	374	85	617
		% (within column)	76.3%	50.4%	46.7%	54.6%

In conclusion, as found in this research study, in terms of foundational skills, literacy and literature, and vocabulary use, the language skills of K-12 students at bilingual schools showed a significant relationship between gender and vocabulary use scores, foundational skills scores, and literacy and literature scores. Female students are more likely to have low scores. Also, the results showed a significant relationship between elementary and middle schools and vocabulary use scores, foundational skills scores, and literacy and literature scores. Elementary school students are more likely to have low scores. Finally, the findings showed a significant relationship between the taken course and

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vocabulary use scores, foundational skills scores, and literacy and literature scores. Students in reading are more likely to have low scores. That is stated, there is more need to review bilingual education practices and investigate students' language oral and academic skills in both languages at all different levels of education.

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