

The Relationship between Bilingualism, Kindergarten Years and English Literacy of First Graders in Jordan

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Abstract: This study aims at investigating the relationship between bilingualism, and kindergarten enrolment years before formal schooling on the one hand, and learning English as a new language among the first graders in Jordan on the other. The study was conducted over one whole semester detecting the progress of a sample of 1012 first graders in public schools in several areas in Jordan where there are communities who speak more than one language. The results revealed that students who did not attend KG seemed to be low achievers, while bilinguals' achievement was lower than monolinguals' at this level. On the other hand bilingual students who attended KG for one or two years achieved a slightly better results but statistically insignificant in learning English. These results were interpreted in the light of language distance and the language behaviour of code shifting from one language to another. (**Keywords:** bilingual, monolingual, kindergarten).

Introduction

More and more individuals are becoming bilingual or even polyglot in order to have better chances in modern life. Yet bilingualism is not something that simply happens and raising kids to be fluent in more than one language requires great effort from the parents and the school. Brown (1994:52-66) in his discussion of first and second language acquisition by children and adults from the neurological, psychomotor, cognitive, affective, and linguistic considerations, came up with different required abilities and capabilities of each age group for learning a language.

English is effectively the language of international discourse and has gained the status of international lingua franca. Internet and globalization have accelerated the process of using English almost everywhere as a second or foreign language.

Consequently, teaching English as a foreign language has become one of the major issues both to governments and individuals.

The ability to master a second or foreign language is associated with several factors related to the individual, to the material and methods of teaching and learning, and to the properties of the learned language. Sumru (2004:277).

It has been noticed that minorities use their own native languages in addition to the mainstream society language.

العلاقة بين التعدد اللغوي وسنوات الروضة وبين تعلم اللغة الانجليزية عند تلاميذ الصف الأول الابتدائي في الأردن

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ملخص: هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من العلاقة بين التعدد اللغوي وسنوات الالتحاق بالروضة ما قبل المدرسة وبين تعلم اللغة الانجليزية كلغة جديدة من قبل تلاميذ الصف الأول الابتدائي في الأردن. طبقت الدراسة لمدة فصل دراسي كامل على عينة من تلاميذ الصف الأول الابتدائي بلغت 1012 تلميذا في مدراس رسمية من عدة مناطق في الأردن يتواجد فيها متحدثون بلغات أخرى غير العربية. دلت النتائج على أن التلاميذ الذين لم يلتحقوا بالروضة كانوا أقل مستوى في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية بشكل عام، مبينة أن متعددي اللغة كانوا أقل مستوى من أحاديي اللغة. بينما أظهر متعددو اللغة نتائج أفضل قليلا في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية من أحاديي اللغة ممن التحقوا بالروضة لمدة سنة أو سنتين. فسرت نتائج الدراسة في ضوء المسافة بين اللغات والقدرة على التحويل الرمزي من لغة إلى أخرى. (الكلمات المفتاحية: متعدد اللغات، أحادي اللغة، الروضة)

The kids of these communities are already bilingual and are situated among the majority of monolingual children learning English as a second or foreign language. Inter-lingual families, as they are called by Yamamoto (2002:531) are the families in which two or more languages are used and potentially provide their children with bilingual environments, which allow the learners to practice the languages verbally and mentally, shifting from one language to the other without losing the focus. This linguistic behavior is called Code Switching (CS) Nilep (2006:1).

Learner of a foreign or second language is thought to have difficulty in learning a new language for many reasons. Some of these reasons are related to the properties of his native language and the learned language, such as pronunciation and vocabulary. Finegan (2004) shed light on the history of languages, referring to the fact that languages change over time, and that these changes lead to different dialects and languages, which explains the similarities and differences between languages. For example "the common source of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit..... (including English and its German relatives, and French and Spanish and their Romance relatives) is Proto-Indo-European. A parent language and the daughter language that have developed from it are collectively referred to as a language family" (Finegan 2004, 449). Language distance's effect on learning a second/foreign language was discussed by Corder (1981), he considered that the mother tongue acts differentially as a facilitating agent.

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His language distance hypothesis therefore, says that: "where the mother tongue is formally similar to the target language, the learner will pass more rapidly along the developmental continuum (or some parts of it) than where it differs. Corder (1981: 101)

The current study focuses on the effect of the language behavior of CS and the distance between the native language and the foreign language on learning a foreign language by bilingual children compared to monolingual children who are learning English in Jordan.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the difference in the ability to learn English between monolingual and bilingual children in Jordan in the first year of school, related to their knowledge of another language or the pre-school years of KG. The monolingual Jordanian first graders' ability to learn English was compared to the ability of the Jordanian children from Chechen and Circassian origins, who are considered bilingual children as they acquire their native language and Arabic as well before school.

Problem of the Study

Although Jordan is an Arab state and Arabic is its formal language, there are some non-Arab Jordanian minorities living within the mainstream community. Population in Jordan according to the statistics of the Department of General Statistics of 2004 is over five millions, 4-5% of this population are Jordanians from other ethnic origins such as Chechens, Circassians, Arminians, Kurds, and others. These groups speak their own native languages at homes, and Arabic as the formal language in everyday life. Children of these communities are bilinguals before they start school. They receive the same treatment at schools as Jordanian Arab monolingual children do.

The problem of the study lies in the following question: Is there any difference in learning English as a foreign language among monolingual and bilingual first graders related to their previous knowledge of another language or to KG years? This main question branches out into two:

- Is there a significant difference between the bilingual and the monolingual first graders in the growth of English literacy?
- Is there a significant difference between monolingual and bilingual first graders in the growth of English literacy related to KG years?

Significance of the Study

Teaching and learning English as a foreign language is studied thoroughly by Arab scholars from different aspects. Bilingualism seems to be neglected or seldom in the research field of TEFL. Although there are different ethnic communities living in Jordan and the Arab World, studies on bilingualism are somehow rare. The researcher claims that related literature was

rather rare in Jordan or in the Arab World, but a wide variety of studies were found worldwide.

The significance of this study stems from its expected contribution in the studies about acquisition and learning English as a foreign language at the early stage and pre-school stage, and studies related to bilingualism as well.

Definition of Terms

Bilingualism

It is the ability to speak two languages. Kornakov (1997) referred to the definition offered by Weinreich (1968:1), one of the fathers of bilingual studies and a bilingual himself, as the most famous definition of bilingualism: "The practice of alternately using two languages will be called BILINGUALISM, and the person involved, BILINGUAL".

For the purpose of this study, children were considered bilingual according to three facts; first, their original ethnic group; second, a letter from their parents affirming their knowledge of their mother tongue as the language used in their homes; and third, the students' ability to communicate with their peers in the classroom in Arabic. To assure this point, the study was conducted in the second semester of the school year 2007/2008 in order to give more time to these children to use Arabic.

The monolingual children referred to in this study are the Jordanian children who only speak Arabic language as their native/mother tongue.

Review of Related Studies

A wide range of related literature has been found in the field of learning a foreign language by children. The effect of bilingualism on learning a new language was tackled from different perspectives in these studies. Chung (2006) investigated CS in his study on Korean-English bilinguals, examining the purposes of CS and how it was used as a communicative strategy between Korean-English bilinguals. Data analysis indicated that CS could be brought about and shaped by the dynamics of the relationship of the speaker-addressee and by cultural features embedded in the Korean language. The analysis also proved that CS functions as a communicative strategy for facilitating family communication by lowering language barriers as well as by consolidating cultural identity.

The cultural issue among multicultural/multilingual students was discussed by Almarza (2005), showing the effectiveness of an immersion course that followed a realistic approach on pre-service teachers' deconstruction of negative and preconceived notions held about culturally and linguistically diverse students, providing persuasive accounts on the positive effects the course's approach had on both their multicultural perceptions and their ability to connect theory with practice.

MacSwan (2005) inquired whether children enrolled in a bilingual education program learn English in a reasonable amount of time, and whether older

children learn English faster than younger children. The comparisons suggested that children in bilingual education programs learn English as fast as or even faster than children in all-English programs, and that older school-age children in the study sample learn English faster than younger children.

Reyes (2004) found that CS occurred both within and across turns among school children's conversation. The older children's switches were more frequent and were deployed for a wider variety of functions than the younger children's. These results challenged the negative view that CS by children who were learning two languages was due to lack of proficiency, instead, they supported the view that it was used as a strategy to extend their communicative competence during peer interaction.

The effect of bilingualism on children's mental abilities was detected by Foreman (2002). Constant role switching caused the brain to recruit extra neural circuits, whereas tasks that did not involve rule switching did not. The results showed that brain differences depending on when people learn a second language, and that people who were fully bilingual in French and English use the same area of the brain as an "internal dictionary," regardless of which language they were speaking. By contrast, people who were not truly bilingual, that is, who learned a second language after childhood, needed to recruit additional brain areas to find words in their non-native language, suggesting that the brain had to work harder to do this.

Perani, et al (1998) also assessed the bilingual brain proficiency and age of acquisition of the second language. A group of Italian-English bilinguals who acquired L2 after the age of 10 years (high proficiency, late acquisition bilinguals) and a group of Spanish-Catalan bilinguals who acquired L2 before the age of 4 years (high proficiency, early acquisition bilinguals) were the participants of the study. The findings suggested that, at least for pairs of L1 and L2 languages that are fairly close in which that learners attained, proficiency was more important than age of acquisition of L2.

Elder and Davies (1998) discussed the effect of language distance on the attainment of English language literacy. Subjects were grouped into 'language families', Arabic, Slavic, Chinese, Romance, Indonesian/Malay, Japanese/Korean, and Vietnamese/Khmer, according to the language spoken at home. These language families were ranked according to their distance from English using a number of classification criteria. Findings showed that the relationship between (L1) and English (L2) literacy as measured by the relevant examinations was stronger for language families which are more closely related to English. Students whose first language is closer to English performed better on the English examination than those whose first language is more distant. Other language background factors also had a significant effect on performance in English. The study concluded that while language distance exists, it cannot

be separated clearly enough from other variables to allow firm pedagogical implications to be drawn.

Kornakov (1997) aimed to answer several questions regarding bilingualism. This article comprises three main sections: languages and bilingualism, second language learning principles and questions, and bilingualism as a process: stages, phases and questions. The author posited the idea that what is characteristic of an interpreter is not his or her bilingualism as much as his or her ability to decode a message in the source language while simultaneously re-encoding it in the target language. The theory that children "are better bilinguals than adults" was analyzed from different perspectives, that despite the speed and efficiency with which children acquire language, they seemed to be rather unsophisticated in their learning process, lacking a number of skills that older learners usually have, skills which can facilitate transferring from one language to another.

How children learn a new language was studied by McGlothlin (1997), his concern was divided into two parts; the environment, that surrounds the student, and the different strategies that the student uses in his attempt to increase his language skills. The results showed that the child was not interested in language for its own sake, he was not disturbed by the language he did not understand, he enjoyed the repetitive events of his life, and used this enjoyment to help him learn. It was found that the child used his natural desire to participate in the life around to help him learn the new language, and his success in communication built confidence and brought ingenuity to language learning.

Rosenberg (1996) focused on the idea that raising kids to be successful in more than one language requires careful planning. In concordance with the reasons for choosing to raise bilingual kids, the researcher defined types of childhood bilingualism as simultaneous learning, and sequential or successive bilingualism, each of which is affected by certain factors related to parents and community's ability, use of languages, and consistency of learning. Rosenberg referred to pre-adolescence age as the suitable age for learning another language.

Begley (1996) reviewed previous research on how children learn during early childhood. Referring to Kuhl (1991), learning a second language after, rather than with the first is so difficult, so that a child taught a second language after the age of ten or so is unlikely ever to speak it like a native. Another significant finding of Kuhl's work explained why related languages such as Spanish and French were easier to learn than unrelated ones.

The reviewed literature sheds light on the issues related to the phenomenon of bilingualism from different perspectives. The results of the studies show that the most suitable age to learn another language is early childhood through pre-adolescence years. Some studies were concerned about teaching programs suitable for second language learners, taking into

consideration their needs to communicate, ability to learn a second language, teaching-learning strategies employed, and the cultural differences between the languages. Other studies reflected on the mental abilities of bilingual individuals, while other studies focused on the reasons behind the children's ability to learn a new language better than adults. The distance between the native and the foreign language and its impact on the fluency of the learner were illustrated in this review, along with the preconceived notions held about culturally and linguistically diverse individuals. These studies provide a rich background for the current study which is concerned with bilingualism from a different perspective. Here, the studied children are already bilingual and are introduced to a third language at their early stage of life and schooling, which makes a difference between the reviewed literature and the current study.

Methodology

This study used the quasi-experimental method for studying the ability and capability of the participants. Over one semester of the school year 2007/2008, the pupils progress in learning English was detected by their teachers.

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of grade one pupils from six elementary public schools, chosen from six different areas in Jordan according to the density of ethnic groups within these communities (Chechen and Circassian). The pupils were considered bilingual according to their ethnic group, and a letter from their parents assuring their knowledge of the mother tongue.

Other variables such as the social and economic situation of the pupils were neutralized. The Average Jordanian families usually send their children to public schools, on the other hand, the ethnic communities have their own private schools, but as mentioned, the average families cannot afford their tuitions. For this, the economic factors of the pupils could be neutralized because they attend the same level of schools. Also the locations of these schools show the equality in social situations of these pupils, as they attend the nearest school to their homes. The population in these areas is already mixed, there are different ethnic families living in the same area experiencing normal social interaction. The difference appears only inside their homes. The social factor could be neutralized accordingly.

Another factor is that all public schools use the same curriculum and their teachers receive the same training. All the participants received the same treatment inside the schools, which also lead to neutralizing this factor.

The schools chosen for this study were as follows:

- One school from Zarka – 5 sections.
- One school from Sukhneh – 4 sections.
- One school from Amman/Marj Al-Hamam – 6 sections.

- One school from Amman/Jabal Attaj – 4 sections.
- One school from Amman/Wadi Esseer – 4 sections.
- One school from Al-Azraq – 4 sections.

Table (1) illustrates the distribution of the subjects of the study.

Table (1) Distribution of the Subjects of the Study

Variables	Value Label	Number	
Lingual	monolingual	m	645
	bilingual	b	367
KG Level	none	none	117
	KG1	Kg1	323
	KG2	Kg2	572
			1012
			Total

The total number of pupils was 1012, as 645 of them were monolingual speaking only Arabic, and 367 bilingual speaking Arabic and another ethnic language (Chechen or Circassian), but not English. Among them, 117 have not been to KG prior to formal schooling, 323 of the total number attended one year at KG, and 572 spent two years at KG.

The Instrument

Two forms were designed for collecting data for this study. The first one was designed to get information about the pupils on the languages acquired before schooling, and the number of years they attended KG. The second was designed to measure pupils' English language literacy growth during the second semester of their first school year. The two forms were designed for the purpose of collecting data on the progress of the participants during the second semester of the school year 2007/2008.

The first form (Appendix 1) is a table designed for the teacher to fill in with information about the class. Each pupil was given a number and was described according to his/her ethnic group (according to the parents letter), and whether he/she is in the lingual column as bilingual (B) or monolingual (M). According to KG years, each pupil was given a sub-category distinction in the KG column as (0) no KG years to those who had not attended kindergarten, (KG1) to those who attended KG for one year, and (KG2) to those who attended KG for two years.

The second form (Appendix 2) used the number given to the student according to the first form, to be assessed by the English language teacher on literacy growth on vocabulary, reading, writing, listening, and speaking, by giving grades to each language component each month throughout the second semester of the school year 2007/2008. Teachers were trained to evaluate the progress of each student by giving marks from 0 to 3 each month on each component (vocabulary, writing, reading, listening, and speaking). The researcher visited the schools every other week for follow up.

Validity of the instrument was obtained by consulting a panel of experts of three English teachers of grade one at the public schools other than the participating schools, 2 English Language advisors from the Ministry of Education in Jordan, and two faculty members (Faculty of Education) at the universities. Their remarks were taken into consideration. The reliability of the instrument was assured by analysing data collected during the first semester of the same school year. 57 pupils from two first grade sections at Fatima Al-Zahra Basic School, other than the participating sections in the study, were evaluated using the two forms. Data was analyzed using Cronbach Alpha that resulted in 0.823, which is acceptable for the purpose of the study.

The Findings

Data were analyzed using SPSS program. Tables (2a) and (2b) show the means and the standard deviation of the pupils' marks ranging from 0-3.

Table (2a): Means and Standard Deviations of the Pupils' Marks

Level	lingual	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
none	m	1.96	.68204	65
	b	1.38	.65068	52
	Total	1.71	.72707	117
KG1	m	2.51	.47171	226
	b	2.61	.38721	97
	Total	2.54	.44992	323
KG2	m	2.68	.43513	354
	b	2.86	.24793	218
	Total	2.75	.38538	572
Total	m	2.55	.52152	645
	b	2.58	.62313	367
	Total	2.56	.56052	1012

The grand mean of the monolingual pupils was 2.55 out of 3 as illustrated in table 2a, while the grand mean of the bilingual pupils was 2.58, indicating that at the end of the semester the bilingual pupils achieved a slightly better results in English language learning regardless of the KG years, although they are not statistically significant.

Table (2b) Means and Standard Deviations of the Pupils' Marks

Lingual	KG level	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
m	none	1.96	.68204	65
	KG1	2.51	.47171	226
	KG2	2.68	.43513	354
	Total	2.55	.52152	645
b	none	1.38	.65068	52
	KG1	2.61	.38721	97
	KG2	2.86	.24793	218
	Total	2.58	.62313	367
Total	none	1.70	.72707	117
	KG1	2.54	.44992	323
	KG2	2.75	.38538	572
	Total	2.56	.56052	1012

As for the second variable, which is the (level) KG years the pupils have attended before formal schooling, the means show that pupils who never attended KG achieved a total mean of 1.70 out of 3, and those who attended one year at the KG obtained a total mean of 2.54 out of 3, while those who spent 2 years at the KG obtained a total mean of 2.75 regardless of the lingual situation of the pupils. Significant differences appeared more clearly between the levels of each variable. Monolingual pupils with no KG had 1.96 compared to bilinguals with no KG who had 1.38, showing better awareness to English learning. But on KG1, the bilingual pupils achieved 2.61 compared to the monolingual KG1 pupils who had 2.51. On KG2, the bilingual pupils had 2.86 against the monolinguals who had 2.68.

Table (3) illustrates the results of the two way analysis of variants of the marks of performance achieved by the pupils. The level variable (KG) showed to be significant, and the Lingual also showed to be significant. Interaction between variables was also significant.

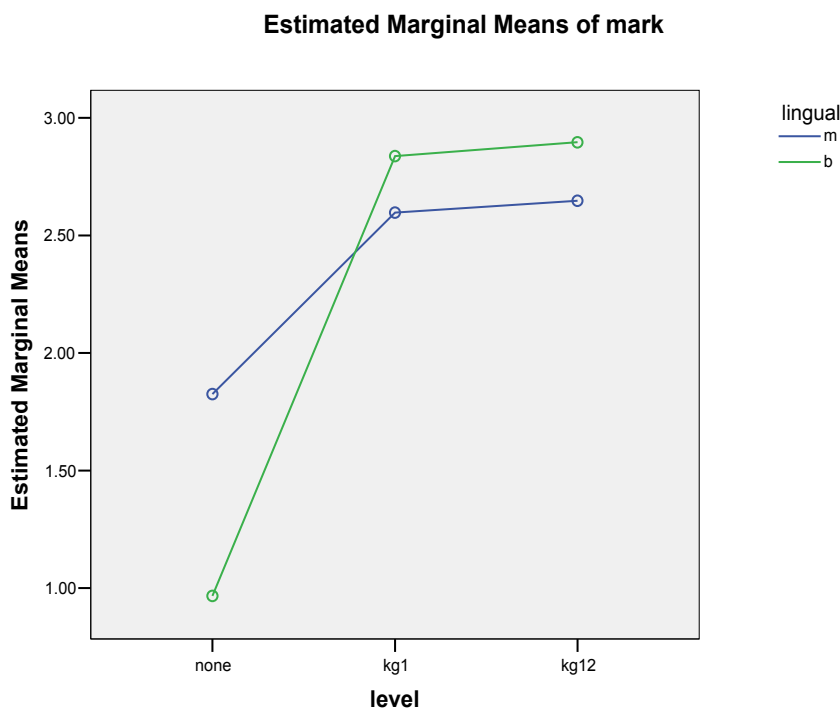
Table (3) Two-Way Analysis of Variants of marks

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Level (KG)	115.18	2	57.59	295.58	.000
Lingual	1.57	1	1.58	8.06	.005
Interaction	14.3	2	7.17	38.79	.000
Error	195.9	1006	.195		
Total	317.64	1011			

Table (4) Post-Hoc Comparison Test (Tukey Test)

	N	KG1	KG2
N = 1.7	-	.84*	1.05*
KG1= 2.54		-	.21*
KG2= 2.75			-

Figure (1) Interaction between level and lingual



According to data analysis, the answers to the study questions are as follows:

- No significant difference was found between the bilingual and the monolingual first graders in English literacy growth.
- A significant difference was found between monolingual and bilingual first graders in English literacy growth related to KG years in favor of the number of KG years.

Discussion

The findings of the study revealed some interesting results related to the difference between monolingual and bilingual children learning another language. Both monolingual and bilingual pupils started learning English from scratch, but the bilinguals were lower achievers than the monolinguals on the level of no KG years. The reason might be attributed to the less exposure to the mainstream language (Arabic) in the homes of the bilingual pupils, who may have found difficulty in fully understanding instruction in Arabic inside the classroom. This interpretation of the weak start of the bilinguals without KG is supported by the results of Rosenberg (1996), which stress the idea of the need to learn another language. Although the bilinguals are fully aware of Arabic and can use it occasionally, but the real need to learn it appears from schooling years. The fluency in Arabic is the need to schooling for the bilinguals in all disciplines including English, but not before that.

The bilingual first graders who did not attend KG, although they were familiar with Arabic (the language of instruction inside the classroom), may have suffered from some cultural barriers between their closed communities and the Jordanian Arab community, which resulted in weak achievement, as Begley (2002) alongside with the results of Almerza (2005), referred to the effect of cultural differences between languages.

However, this problem seems to have been overcome by bilinguals who attended KG1 and KG2. The results showed significant difference compared to their monolingual classroom peers of the same level of KG years. First year bilinguals with no KG started with low results than monolinguals with no KG. On the other hand, the difference between monolinguals and bilinguals in learning another language could have been caused by more than one factor. First, this result could be related to the mental abilities and the brain capacity. According to Perani, et al (1998) and Foreman (2002), bilinguals use their brains more efficiently than monolinguals, as the monolingual students did not train their brains as much as the bilingual's did while learning Arabic as their second language. Second, the distance between the learned language and the native language as discussed by Begley (1996) and Elder and Davis (1998) could have caused a difference. The fact that Chechen and Circasian languages are categorized among the Indo-European language family, according to Vagapov (1991) this distance makes them nearer to English than in the case between Arabic and English. Besides, the

fact that the sound system of both Chechen and Circassian (as Indo-European) languages help speakers of these languages to pronounce all the sounds of the European languages. On the contrary, Arabic speakers find it difficult to pronounce some of the European languages' sounds. Third, the ability of the bilingual pupils to apply the strategy of CS between languages, a skill that the monolinguals lack at this stage, seemed to be an obstacle in learning another language, while the bilingual students had trained their brains to use this skill as they used two languages in their everyday life (Arabic and their ethnic language) where the findings of Reyes (2004) and Chung (2006) support this idea.

Another related result revealed by the data analysis is that most of the first graders showed progress in English learning during a short period of time, although it was a second language to the monolinguals and a third language to the bilinguals. This result is supported by the results of other researchers Rosenberg (1996), Begley (1996), Korancov (1997), McGlothlin (1997), and MacSwan (2005), that the children learn languages more faster than adults, and the most suitable age for learning new languages is before adolescence.

Conclusion

KG years seemed to be important for monolingual and bilingual children before formal schooling, especially for learning another language. KG years proved to be effective for bilinguals who were to learn another language in order to engage in the mainstream community, and to learn a third language as well. This research showed that the more the children learn languages, the more efficient their mental abilities become, as a result of training their brains to use the CS.

Recommendations

By learning English as a foreign language, both the monolingual and bilingual children become more efficient in using their minds in learning. Thus, it is recommended that more research be conducted in this field to detect the ability to learn other disciplines by pupils at the lower basic stage. Another issue raised by this study is the importance of the KG years to be utilized in exposing children to English so as to train them to use the skill of CS. Moreover, the majority of the Arab population are becoming bilinguals, there is an urgent need to enrich the Arabic library with studies on bilingualism.

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