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## Bilingualism: Challenges and Prospects on Teacher Training Students

Tavakkol Qanilou<sup>1</sup>, Elham Kavandi<sup>2</sup>

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1. Department of English Language Teaching, Farhangian University.

Email: t.qanilou@gmail.com

2. Assistant Professor, Department of English Language Teaching, Farhangian University.

Email: e.kavandi@cfu.ac.ir

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**Abstract** – To better invest the needs of bilingualism and the core role it may have, this study manifests the positive relationship between bilingualism and further success. Bilingualism may be associated with better social skills and students' well-being in schools (Chang et al, 2007). The present study attempts to explore the perspectives of random samples of Iranians toward bilingualism in educational system. They commented a positive attitude toward their first language in a way that bilingualism is important for them and will be utilized in any situation. They try to be in touch with their culture and language, as it is one important part of their identity.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, educational system, culture, ethnic groups

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The number of people who are speaking more than one language is increasing everywhere in the world. According to Trask (1999), about 70 percent of the people in the world are bilingual. The efforts have given rise to conflicting results for inequity and discrimination in social integration and political representation, as the official hegemonic model has not been failed to conform. One of the multilingual countries where several languages coexist is Iran.

It is very important to achieve exclusive and uniform model of national identity rather than national unity itself. Accepting the concept of mosaic of various linguistic and cultural communities would guarantee the necessary national unity. Farsi is the predominant language of culture and literature and is spoken by 59 percent of people. Farsi is the official language but is not the only language spoken in all regions. The languages of ethnic groups include Turkish, Kurdish, Luri, Balochi, and Arabic that are spoken in various bilingual regions. In spite of the fact of the acceptance of bilingualism, multiculturalism and ethnic diversity, the heritage languages which have been evolved greatly and suddenly, would not be appreciated as facts of national life. Farsi is the only language of official use at all levels of education. Although many Iranians are multilingual, bilingual, the regional languages are used in certain conditions and contexts, like home, outside, sport, and wholly as local culture.

Intercultural communication has shielded bicultural approach by speaking agreement and acceding in terms of new attitudes, fostering consideration, appreciating diversity, rejection of discrimination, stronger ties of binding the members of multi-ethnic societies. For many speech communities, the majority language is learned as a second language through formal

education, while for others it may be their first language, acquired naturally (Baugh, 1997). This can be problematic, because “most schools advocate the dominant literate and linguistic norms of a given society and some students will not acquire the most influential linguistic standards” (Baugh, 1997, p. 33). As Farsi is the dominant language in Iran and it is the language of learning and teaching, the learners from the minority language background will be at a disadvantage problem. Luo and Wiseman (2000) point out that bilinguals face a difficult dilemma; in order to maintain the ethnic culture and in-group cohesiveness, it is necessary learn the mother tongue, while at the same time, they must learn the dominant language to excel in society. To meet both of these needs, a sustainable level of bilingualism is necessary. Language planners and policy makers should scrutinize the issue from different perspectives and solve the problem of heritage. Intercultural outlook seems to involve linguistics and education into interdisciplinary approach aimed at promoting innovation and social change.

## **2. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

Current debates often focus on the specific nature of the tasks (Paap & Greenberg, 2013), less attention has been paid to the characteristics of the bilingual speakers and their bilingualism. Many studies have declared that bilinguals have an advantage over monolinguals. The evidence for this claim appears in the studies with children (Biaystok & Martin, 2004), young adults (Costa, Hernández, & Sebastián-Gallés, 2008), and older adults (Gold, Kim, Johnson, Kryscio, & Smith, 2013), and task-switching (Prior & MacWhinney, 2010) paradigms.

Classical bilingualism is a simultaneous or early consecutive childhood acquisition and balanced command of two or more languages. Languages of ethnic minorities are in danger of dying off because of tendency among speakers to shift from their heritage languages to dominant language in any society. It is not clear to what extent bilingualism effects individuals who acquire their second language in late childhood or adulthood without reaching native-like proficiency. The finding in late-acquisition bilingualism has conflicting results so far. Some studies states a bilingual advantage in early acquisition bilinguals, while some others discovered in early as well as late bilinguals (Pelham & Abrams, 2014).

Lambert (2008) maintains that if such attitudes (i.e., the preference among the families to use the majority language with their children) occur across successive generations, heritage language(s) will rapidly decline. Wu (2005) declares that the children have some disregarding problems with peer relationships when they reach school age. They may lose notice to their culture as well as their ethnic language, because they become victims of language shift. In order to counter this loss and maintain ethno-linguistic identities among younger generations, it is essential not only for minority groups to emphasize the use of their ethnic language within the family unit, but to expand ethnic language-speaking to their group peer relationships and to the wider community (Luo & Wiseman, 2000).

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1. Procedure

The present study attempted to explore the perspectives of random samples of Iranians toward bilingualism in educational system. This issue yield insights into language planning and language policy in Iran. The following question was investigated:

- What is the general perspective toward bilingualism in Iran?

Generally, it is assumed that the perspectives may vary among people with different backgrounds, different positions, and different levels.

This research attempts to develop descriptive profiles of the participants. The people were selected from Zanjan Farhangian University students who were bilinguals (Turkish-Persian, Kurdish-Persian, Gilaki-Persian). The number of 50 people was selected from high school and university students. A heterogeneous sample was chosen from different layers to get a better understanding of the dynamics of attitudes which can be developed in this case.

#### 3.2. Instruments and Procedures

The questionnaire was developed based on the studies by Cazabon et al. (1993), Coady (2001), and Gibbons and Ramirez (2004). The questionnaire (with a reliability coefficient of .87), which depicted different social, personal, and usage aspects of attitude, was adapted for relevance to the Iranian context and contained 20 attitude statements that were rated on a three-item scale by the respondents: 1- Yes; 2- No; 3- Not Sure. The higher scores on this scale indicate a more favorable attitude toward bilingualism. The questionnaire was used as an initial tool as a pilot study and later refined and improved. This questionnaire was used as main source for gathering data. The data gathered was analyzed to get and generate the main categories relevant to the research question.

**Table 1: The questions related to bilingualism**

Items I think:	Yes	No	Not sure
1. Mother-tongue use in every context (e.g. school, university, home, etc.) is useful.	85%	3%	2%
2. Mother-tongue of the individuals (e.g. Turkish, Kurdish, etc.) has a positive influence on their acquisition of other languages.	79%	5%	6%
3. To have the chance to be able to communicate in more than one language is a marvelous gift that opens doors to another world (cultures, customs, traditions).	88%	2%	-
4. Bilingualism can result in higher development of knowledge and mental skills.	81%	6%	4%

5. Bilingualism can lead to practical, career related advantages in Iran.	43%	32%	25%
6. Bilingualism leads to greater understanding between different groups in Iran.	53%	20%	27%
7. It is important not to lose touch with your background culture because it is part of who you are as a person.	99%	1%	-
8. If a student is in a Farsi (as the national language) only class, s/he will learn better.	47%	20%	33%
9. If individuals develop literacy in their first language, it will facilitate the development of reading and writing in other languages like Farsi and English.	83%	15%	2%
10. All the children should have the best facilities (e.g., schooling in L1) to learn how to speak in their L1, since we should not lose our mother tongue.	62%	22%	12%
11. If a student is proficient in both his L1 and Farsi, s/he will do better in certain tasks compared to the one who knows only one language.	75%	5%	20%
12. It is good for people to maintain their native culture, as well as other culture/s.	96%	-	4%
13. I think use of different L1s in the community, especially in education would lead to greater conflicts between ethnic groups in Iran.	35%	23%	42%
14. Bilingual policy should be covered in our national curriculum development.	55%	25%	20%
15. Bilingual policy leads to greater equality of opportunity for all groups in Iran.	74%	9%	17%
16. Bilingualism and the relevant policy lead to greater national unity.	66%	9%	25%
17. Use of the L1 should be limited only to family. It should not be extended to places beyond school and education.	4%	88%	8%
18. Preserving different native languages in the communities (e.g. bilinguals regions of Iran) leads to the erosion of Iranian identity.	11%	86%	3%
19. The language policy in Iran should mainly focus on one-language only.	48%	11%	41%
20. All in all, knowledge of languages is a pathway to further success.	96%	-	4%

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The responses to the statements consisting of 20 items shield the general perspectives towards bilingualism. The ideas yield positive attitude towards bilingualism, as item number 1 dispatches widespread application and tendency towards mother tongue. Items number 2 and 3 also examine opportunities and chances people may use their mother tongue. The answers show that people tries to use more than one language because of having opportunity be accustomed to new culture, tradition, customs all over the world. Item number 4 attempts to indicate higher development of knowledge and skills through using another language which is the mother tongue. Item number 5, of course, doesn't show a high correlation between bilingualism and career related advantages. Item number 7 shows that 99% of people in educational systems in Iran use their mother tongue for not losing touch with their own background culture, as it is their identity. Item number 8 doesn't distinguish any relationship between learning better and monolingualism or bilingualism. The bilingualisms believe that developing literacy in first language will facilitate and develop their skills in learning other languages. By the way, they believe in proficiency and doing better in different tasks comparing to the person who is monolingual. It is very important for bilinguals to maintain and commemorate their native language culture. Mainly people don't believe in conflicts between different ethnic groups. However, not all of them emphasize on the bilingual policy development of curriculum and the use of relevant policy which leads to greater national unity. Bilinguals don't prefer the use of L1 in limited condition such as only to family. They privilege to extend it to places beyond school and education. The communities yield to preserve different native languages in the communities and they don't evolve in leading to the erosion of their identity. All in all, knowledge of language is a pathway to further success is the accepted statement by almost all bilingualisms.

The patterns of answers show that at a deeper level, people were scrutinized and come up with an idea that they like and emphasize to know more than one language. As a matter of fact, they commented a positive attitude toward their fist language. It means that bilingualism is important for them and utilized in any situation. They try to be in touch with their culture and language, as it is one important part of their identity.

#### **5. CONCLUSION**

This study discovered that the representative sample holds positive views towards knowing two languages. In fact, the result of the present study is in line with the positive relationship between bilingualism and further success. The findings show that bilingualism is highly correlated with the breadth of knowledge. This study can shield practical and theoretical implication of bilingualism on educational system of Iran. The research provides a basis for improving the quality of practices and give ideas to language planners and policy makers to go through the lines of the results and aliment knowledge, skills and proficiency.

It manifests that people try to communicate with others, although their mother tongue and the heritage of their culture plays an important role for bilingualisms.

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