



Assessing Teaching English to Children, under 7, in Iraqi Primary Schools and Kindergarten

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Keywords

target language, teaching, mother tongue, infants, adultery.

Abstract

People that want to learn English are becoming more numerous every day. There are approximately one billion students learning English worldwide (Crystal, 2003), which is a result of the language's dominance in all industries, the fact that every country in the world teaches English in its schools and universities, as well as the large number of private institutions that offer intensive English courses for non-native speakers every day in addition to the British Council's institutes. Since then, beginning in the first grade of primary school, all courses in history, geography, science, and mathematics have been taught in English, with one topic for the Arabic language (5 hours per week), and between one and two; however some scholars and linguists feel that teaching English in early ages of primary education in Iraq will impede the level of children's acquisition to other educational subjects so the researcher is going to make some experiment on the level of (ESL) comparing between the results of two primary school.

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1. Introduction

Around one billion students worldwide study English (A & Xu, 2003a), and that has given English to take an advanced step to be the most widely used language in the world. Every country in the world teaches English in its schools and universities, the number of people who want to learn it is steadily rising continuously. Intensive English classes for non-native speakers are increasingly being offered by commercial institutions in addition to those established by the British Council. If we look at the number of private institutions, particularly in the United Kingdom, where the Arabic sections begin studying the English language in depth in kindergarten, primary schools for the prime years of the child-pupils, we will be astonished that they were two times bigger than the late ten years.

The most common language in the world is English, which is studied as a foreign and second language in every country. According to statistics, 75% of the world's population is either learning or attempting to learn English. Without using English to comprehend and communicate, it is impossible for anyone who does not speak the native tongue to travel abroad. In international political gatherings, English predominates. It is used by 85% of international organizations. Numerous international conferences use it as their primary language. It is the primary

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language used for communication in the domains of technology, commerce, banking, and tourism. 90% of the content available on the Internet is related to television, movies, airlines, global corporations, foreign labor, and languages. (Patel & Jain, 2008).

With the emergence of numerous articles in Arab newspapers from authors who urge the need to teach English to children at a young age, we are now living in a time when the world has shrunk to the size of a small village and English has replaced the other languages as the dominant tongue. Many parents are adamant about wanting to start teaching their kids English at a young age. Some of them are eager to enroll their kids in private kindergartens and schools where they can study English as a second or foreign language. The Iraqi Ministry of Education is being questioned by numerous persons and parents. to allow the opening of primary schools and kindergartens to teach their children English language at an early age, because English language has become a necessity that must be learned. Some of them bring in a nanny or teacher who is proficient in the English language to teach the children English at home and in order to communicate with them. English language became taught to children from (four or five), and children began to address their parents and the member of family at home in English. The child in childhood is capable of learning English quite hasty.

2. Methodology and Collecting Data

There are many opinions about the early learning of foreign language for children. We will mention the most important of them:

- **The first widely held view on the connection between learning a foreign language and the right age is as follows:**

While many older children and adults find it challenging, many parents believe that children have an exceptional aptitude to pick up a new language rapidly and with little effort. Therefore, the parents feel that the primary determinant of success in learning a foreign language is age, and that the difficulties intermediate and secondary pupils in Iraq have had learning English are a result of their late start to learning the language. Early English instruction for students will address all issues. The findings of this study are consistent with misunderstandings about learning foreign languages identified by Marinova-Tod, including: misinterpretation of facts regarding the rate of language acquisition; misinterpretation of variations in linguistic abilities.

- **The Insisting of fathers on the Appropriate Age for learning:**

Parents maintain that the pre-school stage (i.e., between the ages of four and five) is the optimum age for teaching children English since children at this age will acquire the language effortlessly and without any effort. However, it is as if children are a blank page or an empty cup that we fill with whatever we want. For a long time, linguists and educators have disagreed over the best age for learning foreign languages, according to both (Al-Jarf, 2022) in this regard. Since it is thought that exposing young children to foreign languages in a natural environment will help them acquire them more quickly and fluently, the idea that foreign language training should start at this age has gained popularity.

- **Theories and Studies related to the topic under analysis:**

3. Theories

The critical period or critical age theory of (Lenneberg, 1964) and his claim that younger students are better able to learn a foreign language than older students, some of which depend on a decline in the ability to understand English associated with the noticed age, and that the ideal age for learning foreign languages is between two and puberty.

Mullan & Penfield (1959) neurophysiological theory, which claims that " the first ten years of life are the optimal time to learn a foreign language. For effective learning of a foreign language. As dictated by the needs of brain physiology, it should occur before the age of ten. However, (Heijtz et al., 2011) reported on Montessori that " a child under the age of three is able to form language mechanisms and can speak any number of languages if they were used in his environment at birth". However, he quoted on (White), director of the Kindergarten Project at Harvard University, and other observers and students as saying that "the initial years of a child's life are the best period for learning".

4. The Experiments & Studies

4.1. The investigations that showed younger children are more adept at learning target languages than those who are older include

4.1.1. Magiste Study

The most significant investigation into German school kids in Stockholm by (Magiste, 1988) With growing amounts of a second language, whether it be German or Swedish, the first through fourth grade students learned their courses in their mother tongue. The study discovered that primary school children between the ages of 6 and 11 were better able to achieve a balance between the use of Swedish and German than secondary school students between the ages of 14 and 19. In a study carried out by (Magiste, 1988).

4.1.2. Vilke Study

60 individuals between the ages of 17 and 19 were studied by (Vilke, 1976) at the University of Zagreb along with a group of nine-year-old students. The nine hours they spent studying were spent on the same scientific topic under the same instructional conditions. The test findings revealed that younger children performed better than older students in terms of pronunciation accuracy and grasping the phonetic structure of the English language. When teaching a foreign language to children between the ages of six and seven, it is important that they first learn how to pronounce the language and its sound system before moving on to more advanced, abstract, and complicated language usage once they have reached the appropriate developmental stage.

4.1.3. Khaykovich Study

Khaykovich et al, (2002) studied two samples in Brazil, one of whom began learning English at the age of eight and the other at the age of thirty-one. For seven years, they each spent two hours a week studying English. The outcomes confirmed the hypothesis that learning a foreign language before puberty

enhances performance across the board, including fluency, speech rate, and accurate grammatical usage.

4.2. Older children are more adept at acquiring new languages than younger ones, according to the following studies

4.2.1. Cenoz Study

60 high school students who spoke either Basque or Spanish as their first language participated in (Cenoz, 2002)'s study. All subjects, excluding Spanish and English, which all pupils studied for six years, were taught in Basque. However, half of the children started learning English in the third grade and the other half in the sixth of primary school. The older children had a higher level of English language proficiency than the younger ones, according to the test results at the end of the session.

4.2.2. Stockmal Study

Waldron & Stockmal (1994) discovered that although preschool children and the primary school pupils were able to recognize the phrases, kindergarten students were less able to distinguish between patterns heard from several different foreign languages than primary school pupils and university students. This was especially true when the speaker or phrases varied. When the two languages diverge, an adult voice is heard. In a study carried out by.

4.2.3. Ohyama Study

In six early development institutions, a group of 3.5 to 6 year old Singaporean, Chinese, Malay, and Indian children were enrolled in (Ohyama et al., 1986) study. Children found it is challenging to simultaneously study English and a second foreign language, based on the outcomes of tests for Tamil, Malay, Chinese, and English as a foreign language. The amount of difficulty was influenced by the children's socioeconomic status and level of language exposure. Despite certain challenges, learning Malay and English was easier than learning Chinese and English at the same time. In addition to the aforementioned, (Singleton, 2003) demonstrated that "learning foreign languages is a continuous and linear process and that there are significant individual variances".

4.3. During the years between the ages of 7 and 17, one's capacity to acquire a second language grows with age

4.3.1. Ekstrand Study

2200 immigrant children in Sweden were the subject of a study by (Alvan et al., 1975) They were divided among 9 courses at comprehensive schools and represent 36 different ethnicities. Ekstrand administered exams to students and questionnaires to teachers to investigate the connections between age, length of stay, a number of functional Swedish language skills, nonverbal IQ, and socioemotional adjustment. All language factors, with the exception of free oral discourse, were found to have a substantial connection with age. All linguistic characteristics except for free oral communication did not correlate with the length of residency. Age and length of stay had no relationship to the social

emotional variables. Intelligence test results varied widely. The study's outcomes demonstrated a favorable

In this respect, (Olson & Samuels, 1972) pointed out that the previous hypotheses of Linberg, Penfield, and Roberts' theories are not supported by the results of scientific research and they are not based on deduction or on the basis of direct observation. Other research that claims to back up the advantages of starting to learn a foreign language young is either anecdotal in character or has a limited scope and lacks control measures. Studies that attempted to demonstrate the importance of starting foreign language training early fell short of their goals for a high level of accuracy and precision. Many hypotheses and studies were unable to provide empirical evidence to support their assertions, with the exception of the early acquisition of pronunciation and phonetics by children. When we look

4.4. Early exposure to English will not hinder a child's acquisition of the Arabic language by causing them to mix the two languages when speaking.

According to this study, conversational mingling between Arabic mother tongue and the target (English) won't have a negative impact on a young child's acquisition of the Arabic language. In this case, the research findings on the association between age and forgetting one's mother tongue and the impact of learning a foreign language on that mother tongue were inconclusive.

4.4.1. Issa and Al-Mutawa's Study

Al-Mutawa & Al-Dabbous (1997) examined student performance in science, math, and Arabic in the year before English language instruction and in the subsequent year across 30 primary schools in Kuwait. It was discovered that the pupils' study of the English language had no impact on their level of achievement in the Arabic language in second grade. That is, three hours a week of English instruction for first-graders had no impact on their proficiency with Arabic, either positively or negatively. the findings of a three-year investigation carried out by:

4.4.2. Jia and Aronson's Study

Children who came in the United States at the age of nine or under had shifted their language of choice from the mother tongue to the language of the country they had immigrated to (Jia & Aaronson, 2003) on ten Chinese children who immigrated there between the ages of 5 and 16 years. The second arose when they were involved in a situation where the second language predominated over the first within the first year of their arrival. Regarding the older children, they maintained their preference for the first language over the course of the three years and lived in a setting where the first language was more prevalent than the second, which aided in the retention and fluency of the first language.

4.5. Studies their findings indicated that young infants who acquire a new language forget their native tongue

One of the studies that demonstrated how teaching a child another language at a young age that causes the child to forget their mother tongue is the research of

4.5.1. Hansen Strain Study

Four American children who studied Japanese for two and a half years while they were in Japan were the subject of a study conducted by Hansen-Strain. The kids were 3, 4, 7, and 9 years old. The two eldest children attended a school in Japan. Younger children lose their mother tongues more quickly than they do the English language, according to Hansen-Strain's research. Without a formal educational setting (Hansen-Strain, 1990).

4.5.2. Merino Study

Field et al. (1983) examined the problem of language forgetting in 41 bilingual (Spanish and English-speaking) kindergarten through fourth-graders. The use of the Spanish language differed between kindergarten and upper grade students, according to the study. By that point, the kids' performance had considerably declined. By the time they were in the fourth grade, there were no discernible disparities in their comprehension of the Spanish language among the various grades. After two years, the researcher evaluated the students again and found that while everyone's English proficiency had increased, their Spanish proficiency had declined. She also observed that children who used both Spanish and English with the same speaker experienced significant cases of forgetting.

4.5.3. Orellana Study

A study by (Orellana et al., 1994) looked at children between the ages of 5 and 6 who spoke mostly Spanish at the start of the study (Spanish is the strong language). Since their fathers were all fluent in the language, they all learned English rapidly. The English-speaking characters in the children's plays, their relationships with one another, and their role-playing activities were early examples of the research's effectiveness. Three years later, the issue with the foul language was resolved. According to observations and parent interviews, the children no longer spontaneously spoke Spanish with their parents or peers, and they avoided doing so even when asked or under pressure to do so. Or to put it another way, the youngsters walked away.

4.5.4. Bettoni Study

Orellana et al. (1994) discovered that the rate of language amnesia among Italian immigrants in Australia happens very quickly. The first generation of immigrants speak one Italian dialect as their first language at home, followed by Standard Italian and English. The standard Italian that children learn at home is their weakest language, and after a short while they begin learning English outside the home. The distinction between colloquial and classical speech, which parents maintain at home, is lost on children, and there is misunderstanding between the two dialects. The children's Italian is translated into English. They perceive the insufficiency of the switch from the local tongue to English, and they start to progressively eliminate Italian from daily conversation.

4.6. Different Opinion

According to the findings of several research, there are actually a variety of elements that influence whether or not children retain their mother tongue. We shall provide the following viewpoints:

- Boers (2000) examined a number of prior studies and came to the conclusion that learning a foreign language will not have detrimental consequences provided the mother tongue is seen as prestigious and has a standing in society. However, if it lacks status, it is forgotten.
- Barnett et al. (1996) noted that language-speaking group evolves within themselves rather than external forces imposing language forgetfulness. The social changes that societies experience have an impact on the language that people use. These changes involve social status indicators, economic forces, media, and demographic issues. The switch to a different tongue is also a reflection of shifting social and cultural ideals, such as the rise of individualism, pragmatism, and materialism. Returning to the mother tongue (the language of the minorities) necessitates a shift in values; nevertheless, this change in values must occur from within the language-using community and must be influenced by its actions. It calls for understanding the current stage of language forgetting, which necessitates developing leadership for
- Wooden & Hurley (1992) contend that educating children in their mother tongue should include activities that are beneficial to them in a setting that provides moral support, makes use of educational materials that take the child's development into account, places an emphasis on the national culture, and uses works of literature by authors who share the same cultural background. Mother language forgetfulness can be attributed to a variety of cultural and demographic factors, including interactions with other children and completing one's education in English.

5. Results and Discussion

The results that we obtained are the differences in opinions among scholars and researchers on the topic. This topic was taken from different aspects and contradictory opinions until it became a controversy in which the discussion extends for a long time. We will define the results here in a calm way and start discussing them from an Arabic point of view:

5.1. Parents' opinions on the appropriate age for teaching English and its justifications from their point of view:

The best time to start teaching English as a second language is between the first and second grade of primary school (ages 7 to 9). Although 75% of parents believe that learning starts in kindergarten (before the age of six), this isn't always the case. The majority of children at this age should be in the first intermediate grade (13–15), while 5% should be in the fourth primary grade (10–12). Many parents feel that youngsters between the ages of four and five are more receptive to language because of their "clean brain" and easy absorption of learning. They argue that youngsters at this age may pick up the language easily and that learning

it now is easier than learning it later. Their goal is for their kids to learn the English accent well.

5.2. The advantages of studying English as a foreign or second language

We live, now, in a time when the world has shrunk to a small hamlet and English has emerged as the language of choice and as one of the needs of life, parents now see the importance of teaching their children the language. It is utilized for transportation, shopping, healthcare, dining out, with the driver and maid, and even for groceries. It is the language of communication devices like computers and televisions. English is used to write everything we wish to see. The Internet and practical books are both written in English. Consequently, the parents want their kids to be able to speak and understand English. Some of them think that English is a more valuable language than the:

- 70% of parents believe that enrolling their young children in kindergarten is necessary, primarily so that they can learn Arabic and take one course in English. This will help the children learn English later on and will also allow them to benefit from both languages at the same time.
- 7% of parents prefer to educate their kids simply English or just one Arabic language course because Arabic is the language of society and children can pick it up from their surroundings.
- Additionally, 23% of respondents think that teaching children only Arabic is essential because it is the language of the Holy Qur'an and the primary tongue of Muslims. Children should learn Arabic as early as possible to ensure that their language is undistorted from a young age by exposure to other languages..
- Only 13% of parents choose to speak to their children at home in Arabic; yet, youngsters pick up the language from their surroundings and society. Additionally, 8% of parents would prefer that one parent interact with their child in Arabic while the other does it in English.
- Only 13% of parents choose to speak to their children at home in Arabic; yet, youngsters pick up the language from their surroundings and society. Additionally, 8% of parents would prefer that one parent interact with their child in Arabic while the other does it in English.
- While 42% of parents prefer to speak to their young children in both Arabic and English (i.e., using English words in addition to Arabic words), for example, words for restaurants, stores, and hospitals so that the children can use them when they visit these locations. According to them, this doesn't lead children to become confused and won't have an impact on how they pronounce words and build sentences while using the Arabic language.
- According to 37% of parents, Arabic should be the primary language used to communicate with kids at home in order to teach them the language properly and build their vocabulary before they start school so they may become fluent in it. because it is simple to learn Arabic before the age of six. It would be challenging for him to learn Arabic and speak it afterwards if, on

the other hand, the child began learning English before speaking Arabic. They believe that studying Arabic at a young age will help them to quickly read and memorize the Qur'an as well as to correct their speech.

After the discussion that we witnessed and the theories and studies, not all of the researchers agreed on a single formula including the researcher of this research, he sees the following percentages are the most near to the solution.

- According to 77% of parents, since Arabic is the dominant language in the area and society, learning English before the age of six has no detrimental consequences on a child's ability to acquire the Arabic language. Additionally, the youngster won't mix up the two languages. According to the respondents, learning Arabic is simple, and as it is their native tongue and the language of the Holy Qur'an, children are naturally inclined to study it at home from their families and their surroundings.
- While 23% of respondents think that since children who learn the English language first find it challenging to learn Arabic later, studying the English language early will have a detrimental impact on the child's ability to acquire the Arabic language. Speaking classical Arabic is necessary if one wants to straighten their tongue. Before the age of six is the ideal time for the tongue to straighten out. since learning Arabic is difficult and requires a lot of time. Some respondents noted that their siblings' children's early exposure to English had an impact on their ability to learn Arabic, resulting in their lack of proficiency in the language.

In a procedural study carried out by the researcher for a sample of two classes in his school where he works for the first stage, each class contains 30 students, of whom are studying English as a second language with Arabic, and the other class is studying it as a language of instruction for curricula in English language, such as physics, chemistry, and mathematics, with a follow-up of a year. The following issues were the attention of the researcher:

- The extent of the impact of English language on Arabic or the other way round.
- The extent of the effect of studying in English for the subjects on the level of the student in the rest of the lessons
- The desired benefit from introducing English as a challenge with Arabic and the student's comprehensive academic level

At the end of the academic year 2021/2022, the researcher found the following results

- English is everyone's strongest language, while Arabic is weaker to varied degrees, particularly in reading and writing. In terms of the chosen tongue for speaking with other people,
- 35% only use English,
- Additionally, 25% of speakers combine Arabic and English.

- And 40% of people use English words while speaking informally with others.
- 50% of university students prefer American or British-accented English. It was challenging for me to read and write Arabic, nevertheless.
- The 35% in question are completely incapable of writing regular Arabic.
- And while 65% of them can read and write in Arabic, they struggle to express themselves because they are either slow or make spelling errors; they are better able to do it in English, where they also lack the knowledge of the meanings of the terms they come across when reading books. More often than Arabic, they like reading books and stories in English. It should be understood.
- 10% of individuals who enrolled in the university found it extremely challenging to study the Arabic-taught courses and the university's prerequisites, such as the courses on Islamic culture. for use in discussion
- At home, the mother spoke Arabic to 10% of the respondents while the father conversed with them in English. This 10% preferred to respond in English and used no Arabic at all, despite comprehending the question's meaning in Arabic.

6. Conclusion

The researcher did his best to portray how Iraqi parents feel about teaching English to kids younger than six years old. The study's findings demonstrated people's intense fascination with the English language's widespread use and dominance in all spheres of life, as well as their conviction that it should be taught to children from a young age. The findings also exposed certain misconceptions among parents on the approaches to learning English at early and elderly ages, their effects on achievement and mother tongue, and the idea that success and failure in learning English depend on age. Both the learned and the uneducated, as well as students, share this opinion.

Culture is carried by language. Since spoken and written Arabic are two different languages, when a child learns a language, he also learns a culture, concepts, a way of thinking, and the ability to express himself. If the English language is emphasized from an early age, it will eventually become the language of culture, daily life, and belonging, and it will be more revered and proud of the English language than the Arabic language. A youngster who does not begin learning Arabic at a young age would never be able to read the Holy Qur'an in it. Given how many parents are preoccupied, the observed reality shows that parents do not teach their children Arabic at home and if they liked to ,the children feel that Arabic is a burden on them.

Children who study in English often utilize it at home to communicate with their parents. They pay attention to what the father and mother are saying in Arabic, but they converse with them and respond to them in English, much like some parents do with their kids. as well as emanates. Additionally, the political environment in which we currently live in the Arab world forces us to maintain and advance our

language. We worry that there will come a day when parents and intellectuals will demand that science and math be taught in English (as happened two years ago in Malaysia), until we get to the point where Arabic-speaking youngsters will demand that instruction in Arabic be abolished and that will be sufficient.

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