

Advantages and reasons of being bilingual



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Saunders (1988) states that Fishman, a well-known writer in bilingualism, declares that “ more than half of the world’s population today uses more than one language while engaging in activities basic to human needs” (Saunders 1988 p. 1). Numerous causes contribute to the emergence and dominance of bilingualism. There are various optional or compulsory factors. Immigration is a major factor of being bilingual, whereas Immigrants move from one country to another, because of various reasons. For example, some of them escape from wars or poverty in their countries to search for better life in foreign linguistic communities. As a result, they will be forced to learn the language of the host countries and become bilingual in order to have wider contact opportunities and getting jobs. According to Saunders (1988), most immigrants speak the language of the new culture and environment. In Australia, for instance, 86. 3% of immigrants speak their second language more than their home languages. Geographical proximity of two countries is a possible factor of being bilingual, where people of the two communities need the communication among each other for different purposes like trade and other social relations like marriage resulting in bilingual families. Saunders also states that commerce and trade are critical factors motivating people to acquire a second language. Most economic business and commercial markets involve bilingual individuals to deal with customers from multicultural areas.

2. 3. 1 Education as a great reason of being bilingual:

Education is one of the most fundamental factors pushing or motivating individuals to learn a second language. Being bilingual through education can be optional or obligatory. I notice that, in all Arab Gulf countries, most

school students become bilingual due to their learning of English as a compulsory subject. However, there are some students, including colleges and universities students, who learn their second language English as an optional subject. The learning of English in these countries seems to be the result of the international relations between them and the United Kingdom. It is worth mentioning that the main focus of my research paper is being bilingual due to education.

According to Baker (1988), bilingual education refers to any program aiming to teach students a second language besides their mother tongue at school. It takes various classifications based on the following factors. First of all, bilingual education is classified to “ elitist bilingualism” and “ folk bilingualism” according to the incentive of being bilingual. Elitist bilingualism is regarded as a reward offered to certain special individuals by government. Some students, for instance, are rewarded by being allowed to study abroad or study in prestigious universities in their countries. On the other hand, folk bilingual education is deemed a crucial need people have to meet in order to remain alive. When immigrants move to a new place, they acquire the language of that place so that they can interact with people there. Bilingual education is also categorized into “ immersion and submersion bilingual education” based on the use of both languages in learning. In the immersion education, students are allowed to speak their mother tongue while experiencing their subjects and communicating with teachers. They learn the second language gradually as time goes by. In contrast, students are not allowed to speak their home language in the submersion bilingual education. They are taught all their subjects in their second language. According to the

major used language, bilingual education can be also categorized into “transitional and maintenance or enrichment bilingual educations”.

Transitional bilingual education essentially aims to develop and make students fluent in one language only, which is the majority language.

Therefore, this bilingual education focuses on the bilingual’s first language in the learning procedures with few extra classes to learn the second language.

For example, in the USA and Europe, the minority of languages are taken into account and cured in order to make the minority groups to be able to

continue the education in English or other majority languages. Huddy and Sears (1984), state that bilingual education is improved in the United States

by the Bilingual Educational Act in order to meet the needs of children who speak minor languages (Huddy and Sears 1984). On the other hand,

maintenance or enrichment bilingual education aims to teach children their subjects with both languages to guarantee that children get good levels of

proficiency in both languages. Baker indicates that some students are taught some subjects such as grammar in their native language, while mathematics

is learned in the second language. Consequently, students master both

languages, and the two languages are developed simultaneously. This type

of education is used for example in Canada and Wales as Baker shows that “English speakers are taught French or Welsh to enable them to be fully

bilingual” (P, 47). I assume that maintenance or enrichment bilingual

education refers to the same kind of education used in Oman but, here, the government uses the term dual education to refer to it.