

Psychological factors of bilingualism



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Introduction

Bilingualism is primarily concerned with use of twin languages in a country. This paper discusses the use of English and Arabic languages in UAE and how it related to the individual identity and psychology of people in UAE. This paper analyses the impact of bilingual habits and identity of an individual and the psychological adjustments that a person must make to a-fit himself or herself in a bicultural environment. In an environment where individuals have to adjust to more than one cultures and deal in more than one language, it has a very positive implication on the psychology of an individual leading to benefits such as multiple group loyalties, bilingual competence learning to impressive personalities and beneficial outcomes at work or career places through better mingling (Appel, 1987).

Psychological factors of bilingualism – Cognitive, Executive and Perception Based

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In a study conducted by Worall, children of age groups between four-six and six-nine were studied have monolingual and bilingual backgrounds of learning for their choices of phonetic and semantic words. It was observed during the study that the children, who had a bilingual approach, had a better understanding of semantic words in comparison to children who had a single language approach. The children with bilingual background reached at a semantic language learning advantage at least 2-3 years early than their singular language counterparts. This clearly states that bilingualism enhances language developmental aspects in an individual's personality.

It has also been established by Ellen and Hatuka in their study that the individuals who have a bilingual approach have a better thinking pattern and can think and work on more than one direction than the people who speak and understand only one language. So, the people in UAE who can understand and think in both languages, English and Arabic have a stronger chance of excelling as individuals in their own fields rather than people who can speak only Arabic. These people are able to control their mind better and work according to the grammatical as well as syntax requirements of the languages – English and Arabic. This better understanding of languages leads to better awareness and increased power to control structures in an individual. Such people can better understand and control uncertainty and arbitrary aspects of objects (Hakuta, 1985).

The people of UAE who observe the immersion and study of both languages – English and Arabic – from an early stage, are better able to think and act according to instructions in both languages and have a higher degree of cognitive development than their counterparts who have studied only in

native language i. e. Arabic. Such individuals have a better understanding of concepts as a part of their personality and are able to better map the words and labels towards the concepts of life (Bialystok, 1987).

These individuals also have a better functioning and understanding of executive functions and skills such as problem solving capabilities, mental flexibility and control the individual attention, enhances inhibitory control and effectively switching between the tasks. The individuals who can also control their language power while dealing in English, besides the native language, Arabic have better cognitive and executive functions understanding. Not only they have an understanding of executive functions, but also prevent the decline of cognitive functions when the old age arrives.

Bilingual factors also influence the perception based psychological factors. This includes the creative power and psychological flexibility to assume situations. The individuals who have an ability to perceive and understand both English and Arabic languages, have a better conceptualization and imaginary power leading to a psychology pertaining to better understanding of life situations. They are able to better manipulate the life and work situations to work in accordance with expectations and favorable situations. This advantage is of extreme importance in comparison to their colleagues who have a monolingual approach towards work and life situations (Emmorey, 2008).

Also it has been noticed that bilingual individuals have a better understanding of mathematical concepts that even immerse into real life challenges and calculations – thus, leading to beneficial and profitable situations and decision making power. They have a better understanding of

mathematical concepts, say, for example, logically placing the objectives and issues in accordance with profit making or loss based studies. Such perception based advantage also percolate into non mathematical situations, for example, understanding a problem based upon depiction through pictures. Thus, it can be established that individuals have a better understanding of life and work concepts as well as cognitive, executive and perception based problem solving psychological factors if they are bilinguals, over their monolingual counterparts (MacSwan, 2008).

Challenges towards adopting bilingual learning in UAE and Recommendations

The poor quality of education pertaining to Arabic language learning is the major challenge in UAE. Both in private and public schools, the language which is the native of UAE, does not observe adequate teaching skills or learning resources, as there must be. This is in no match to the global English language learning resources. The teachers fail to match the global standards of learning.

It is highly recommended that the educational authorities realize the benefits of bilingual teaching and develop resources for Emiratis for adopting both English and Arabic language that matches the global aspects of learning. Specific focus must be laid on bringing Arabic language at par of English standard. Also, Arabic and English languages must be immersed with each other in learning at a very early level for appropriate development of cognitive and executive functions of individuals.

It is thus recommended that the English and Arabic languages must be immersed at a very early level.

Conclusion

It is very important to introduce and continue bilingual approach for the corporate, government and educational institutions of UAE. English language must be introduced and Arabic language must be preserved. It is important to consider that bilingual approach can be challenging for the psychology of individuals due to the differences in language basics and the ambiguity that is associated with adopting these languages at all levels such as schooling, corporate etc. Needless to mention, that before the emphasis can be laid on learning of English language and finding places for this foreign language in the lives and identity of UAE people, prominence has to be given to Arabic language learning from a very early stage. A bilingual language approach for Emiratis means higher degree of cognitive, perception and executive skills development in students as well corporate people.

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