Sociocultural Integration of Bilingualism and Biliteracy of Emiratis: Exploratory Study in a Group of Fifth-Grade Students

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the sociocultural integration of bilingualism and biliteracy practices of a group of Emirati fifth-grade students, who were learning English and Arabic and using English as the medium of instruction for math and science. The explanatory, mixed methodology study examines how sociocultural aspects of language learning are integrated in the learners' bilingualism and biliteracy practices by using both quantitative and qualitative means. In the first phase, a group of fifth-grade students (n = 350), selected for the transitional nature of their grade cycle, and their Arabic and English teachers (n = 350) were surveyed on their bilingualism and biliteracy practices, with a particular focus on sociocultural factors. The second qualitative phase featured a more in-depth investigation of these practices through interviews with two English teachers, two Arabic teachers, and three students. The results revealed that the fifth-grade students did not possess adequate bilingualism and biliteracy abilities in English or, to a lesser degree, in Arabic, for their expected grade level. The reasons included lack of continuous bilingual/biliteracy interactions, lack of parental involvement and absence of a rich school context. Further, there have been no orchestrated efforts to engage the students with the sociocultural aspect of language learning. Thus, integrating the multifaceted aspects of bilingualism and biliteracy contexts and practices is strongly recommended in order to enrich these linguistic approaches to enable fifth graders excel in both languages, and to improve cross-linguistic transfer.

Keywords: ESL; Emirati Education; bilingualism; biliteracy; sociocultural aspects

INTRODUCTION

Researchers have suggested that children's sociocultural interactions go a long way in determining a child's literacy development within the dual contexts of school and home—whether in a first or a second language (Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Street, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Walqui, 2006, Tan & Faraishaiyan, 2012). Walqui (2006) argues that, in every English language program, the students' culture and native language need to be valued and consolidated through classroom activities, proposing that learning is more than mere cognitive development but it is also heavily influenced by common social practices. Thus, the main conduit through which learning takes place is the interaction with other learners and teachers through activities that focus on shared interests and that offer learning opportunities. These opportunities may also take place outside of the classroom, through extracurricular activities and within the domestic environment as well.

Therefore, from a sociocultural perspective, students acquire languages by participating in communities of practice and their exposure to the target language in social settings. As such, this study set out to explore the dynamics of learning English and Arabic among fifth-grade Emirati students for whom Arabic is the first language. The study was based on the integration of sociocultural aspects and practices in the two languages. In addition, it aimed to seek out the opinions of students and teachers to further probe the nature of these sociocultural integration aspects in a very specific bilingual learning environment. The study used a mixed-method

approach through a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The following research questions were then formulated to explore the current state of bilingualism and biliteracy practices from a sociocultural perspective:

1. What is the experience of Emirati fifth-grade students with bilingualism and biliteracy in their immediate sociocultural context?
2. What is the experience of their English and Arabic teachers with bilingualism and biliteracy in their immediate sociocultural context?
3. What are the variations, if any, between the students and their teachers with regard to the sociocultural context?

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

SOCIOCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE ON LANGUAGE LEARNING

This research draws heavily on the sociocultural perspective propounded by Vygotsky (1978), by which social interaction precedes the development of knowledge and ability. Human development cannot be viewed outside its social context interaction, which helps mediate learning between a novice child and a more capable peer or a guiding adult (Vygotsky, 1978). For Vygotsky, full cognitive development cannot occur without social interaction, and a child's development is a direct result of their culture (Vygotsky, 1981, as cited in Cook & Cook, 2005, p. 194).

From this perspective, language is seen as a cultural tool that enables our interactions while engaging in physical activities, developing oral language, and learning basic reading and writing skills. If, as suggested, all knowledge and ability arise from social interactions, then all knowledge is, by definition, co-constructed (Walqui, 2006). According to Vygotsky (1978), such interactions develop our higher-order thinking skills, and this development occurs within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which explains the difference between what a child can accomplish independently and with help of others. This means that the child can perform with scaffolding and assistance from adults, whether teachers or parents (Carrera-Carrillo, 2003; Faltis, 2006; Walqui, 2006). Thus, adults transfer culture to their children through social interactions and language communication, which serve as a learning and mediating tool for children's intellectual transformation. Noormohamadi (2008) refers to the process of the language transfer from adults to children as self-regulation of language functions. Moreover, Walqui (2006) identifies three distinct forms of scaffolding: (1) in a planned curriculum, through a project or classroom rituals, and assistance, (2) through the processes used in any particular activity, and (3) as an essential collaborative interactive process. Thus, students move from a heavily scaffolded environment to being able to do the task independently (Gibbons, 2003; Walqui, 2006). Literacy development, then, depends mainly on interacting with the contexts, which are in turn socially and culturally situated. At its best, it is a blend of the planned and the improvised, the predicted and the unpredictable, the routine and the innovative (Walqui, 2006). Additionally, Cummins (1981) believes that students must have the opportunity to use the language learned in the classroom in an authentic manner, while Walqui (2006) notes that language use helps affirm identity. Further, Roberts (1994) suggests that the teacher should assist students by scaffolding learning so they can complete tasks successfully.

This suggests that developing one's literacy skill depends upon establishing a community of practice where authentic activities can take place. To help understand literacy practices as social and cultural practices, Barton (1994), Barton and Hamilton (1998), and Street (2003; 2000) differentiate between literacy events and literacy practices. Barton (1994)

defines a literacy event as the student's attempt to initiate, comprehend, or produce graphic signs. He further identifies general and cultural ways of using literacy that people can draw upon in a literacy event, a view shared by Street (2003). In the same vein, Collins and Blot (2002) argue that language is constructed via social interaction since children are not isolated individuals and through these interactions, they create literacy events. Furthermore, they suggest that language, whether spoken or written, is developed naturally in a sociocultural context, where every natural literacy event or speech act takes place within a social setting that serves in enriching the pragmatic use of the language.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Street and Lefstein (2007) consider literacy a social construct, positing that literacy is not static; rather, it reshapes itself as a socially constructed phenomenon. Likewise, Lankshear and Knobel (2006) define literacy as socially recognized ways for generating, communicating, and negotiating meaningful content through discourse. Barton and Hamilton (2000) further suggest that people convey their assumptions, values, feelings, and social processes when interacting with text. Similarly, Gee (1999) believes that literacy practices refer to not only constructing meaning from text, but also encompassing different ways of acting, interacting and feeling, valuing, thinking, and behaving. As such, exploring literacy and biliteracy events is crucial for understanding the real practices occurring in Emirati fifth graders' scholastic and domestic contexts.

Hornberger (2004) advances the idea of "Continua of Biliteracy," which offers a link between the cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, allowing us to view literacy on a continuum of sustainable biliteracy practices. In this regard, Hornberger (2004) defines biliteracy as instances in which communication occurs in two or more languages in, or about, written material. This model sees the use of language as part of a continuum rather than a dichotomy (May et al., 2004); therefore, to understand instances of biliteracy, we need to consider every dimension on the continuum: an individual, a situation, and a society can all be biliterate (Hornberger, 1989). Furthermore, Hornberger (1989) highlights the importance of the relationship between context, media, and content in developing biliteracy, which leads him to suggest the notion of intersecting and nested continua. This theory suggests that the richer language learning contexts and frequent use of language enable students to draw from across the literacy continuum and they have greater chances of expanding biliterate expression (Hornberger, 2004). In addition, he outlines three dimensions of his model: the reception-production continuum, the oral language-written language continuum, and the L1–L2 continuum (Hornberger, 1989). The author also refers to the interaction between people and societal/global power relations (2005).

Since the content that biliterate students read and write is part of the process of how, where, and when biliteracy develops, Hornberger's Continuum also suggests that educators need to include minority texts and perspectives, inside and outside their classroom, in order to encourage biliteracy practices (Hornberger, 2005). Hornberger summarizes his ideas by stating that "the more the contexts of their learning allow biliterate learners to draw on all points of all nine continua, the greater are the chances for their full biliterate development" (Hornberger, 1992, p. 199). In short, the development of biliteracy does not occur in isolation.

As such, certain contexts help develop literacy. Barton and Hamilton (1998) point out that "the home domain is often identified, (as) central to people's developing sense of society identity" (p. 9). According to Bronfenbrenner (1995), it is important to examine children's sociocultural interactions at home and at school. He added that schools must provide spaces where students can validate the cultural capital brought from home, and that certain factors can

improve bilingual and biliteracy practices at home—for example, talking to the children, reading, and involving them in literacy events, such as exposure to books and other material. Additionally, helping with homework, storytelling, going to the library, engaging in school activities, and parental conferences are all-effective (Kainz & Vernon-Feagans, 2007; Mercado, 2005; Zentella, 2005).

Home is the first place of interaction, of activities, involvement, and communication. If mothers read to their children, take them to libraries, and involve themselves in joint reading, these practices can help stimulate learning within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to Pérez (1998), discourse is essential within sociocultural contexts that focus on printed, written, and other literacy texts. Gee (2000) also suggests that these practices are more than just reading and writing; they are part of a larger communicative social system.

Research proposes that home experiences are essential to developing a child's language and literacy skills (Heath, 1983; Lightsey & Frye, 2004), encouraging metalinguistic insights into the phonological, functional, and syntactic aspects of language that will, ultimately, facilitate literacy development (Lightsey & Frye, 2004). In addition, knowledge of book titles, reflecting exposure to literature at home and at school, is seen as a good predictor of reading achievement. Moreover, Liow's (2005) study in Malaysia concludes that home literacy has a strong influence on literacy development in general.

Language is not only about accurate use, but also about appropriate use. In terms of pragmatics and cultural development, parents have an important role to play in teaching their children how to use language appropriately and in context (Tseng, 2002). According to Scribner (2013), culture is actively created by students and teachers through interactions that focus on meaning. Therefore, linking home and school literacy supports vital practices in literacy development. In Roberts' research (2008) among Spanish- and Hmong-speaking children, it was evident that those who took books home in their first language learning learned more English vocabulary.

In a recent study, that investigates the link between proficiency levels and sociocultural integration of 149 highly educated young-adult sequential Polish-English bilinguals reside in UK (Hammer, 2017), the study found that sociocultural integration is strongly linked to the ultimate proficiency level in second language following immigration. In another study, that seeks to investigate the integration of sociocultural approach and its contribution to students' academic achievement (Yuen, Arreguín-Anderson, Ed, & Sánchez, 2020). The authors of this study posited that adopting sociocultural approaches to mobile learning could not be just consider as strategy but it should be a belief about empowering students. Moreover, some researchers indicated a lack of systematic review on bilingualism studies that examine the trends, methodological approaches, challenges and limitations with regard to language processing, sociocognitive transformation and process of integrating culture (Barrot, 2016; Nambiar, Hashim, & Yasin, 2018; Or-kan, Azman, & Su-Mei, 2020). For example, Barrot (2016) studied teachers beliefs on their practices and the study found that there a*re consistencies between their beliefs and practices, albeit the existence of some divergence.* Nambiar, Hashim, & Yasin (2018) highlighted the importance the role of *content knowledge and linguistic knowledge which is culturally base; while ,* Or-kan, Azman, & Su-Mei, 2020 embarked on extensive review of some studies on bilingualism, they concluded that a more comprehensive look for bilingualism is needed.

CONTEXT OF THE STUDY

This research was conducted in the United Arab Emirates, where the bilingual context is unique in many respects. First, second language curricula and programs differ, depending on whether

they are offered by the Ministry of Education (MoE), where English is treated as a subject, or by the Abu Dhabi Education and Knowledge Department (ADEK), where English is the language of instruction for teaching mathematics and science.

ADEK's (previously Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) approach dates back to 2009, when the Emirate of Abu Dhabi embarked on an ambitious reform program, known as the "New School Model" (NSM). Policy makers in Abu Dhabi initiated a plan for public schools to promote learning in a bilingual context. According to ADEC's strategic plan for 2005–2018, the NSM was a bilingual framework, where students started learning in English from as early as kindergarten and primary school; recently, the model has been extended to cover every grade from kindergarten to secondary schools. According to this model, students should be able to express themselves in English and understand major concepts in mathematics and science, where English is the medium of instruction. ADEC (2010) promoted their new approach as an attempt to create biliterate and bilingual students in both Arabic and English.

O'Sullivan (2015) points out that bilingual education in the UAE is a contentious field, and that one must consider the wider social and cultural consequences of using different languages in local society. Gallagher (2011) adds that many stakeholders in the UAE see giving equal importance to English as a threat to the Arabic language's position and role. Another issue is that major institutions' placement test results suggest that students often struggle to cope with English language curriculum requirements at university (Ahmed, 2010; Rababah, 2003; Weiss, 2003) .

The diglossic situation, thus created, makes learning Arabic to a sufficient standard difficult for many Arab students (Elbeheri, Everatt, Mahfoudhi, Abu Al-Diyar, & Taibah, 2011). Accordingly, students attend school armed only with the colloquial Arabic that they have learned at home and are then exposed to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Therefore, they begin their educations speaking a dialect and must begin to learn MSA formally, while learning English as a second language simultaneously. This can create a cognitive overload.

As such, it is difficult to make students use higher-order thinking skills, especially in the second language, as demanded by the UAE National Agenda and UAE Vision 2021. The UAE seeks higher scores in such measures as the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS); in order to achieve this, a strong focus has been placed on primary education—particularly at the fifth grade, which is considered a transitional stage.

Emirati students start their education in kindergarten (KG1), where they are taught English, mathematics, and science in English, while other subjects are taught in Arabic. The use of English as a language of instruction is aimed at raising bilingual students. English Medium Teachers (EMTs) teach English and co-teach mathematics and science with Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs). When students start Cycle 1 schools (K-5 schools), they study mathematics and science exclusively in English. EMTs began teaching twelfth graders in 2009, and then the policy was extended to grades 10 and 11. ADEC then implemented a similar model in Cycle 2 (grades 6–9) in 2010. Therefore, Cycle 2 is seen as a transition point between Cycle 1, where basic skills in both languages are taught, and Cycle 3, which is the gateway to higher education. Outside the classroom, students use both languages to communicate in activities and cross-curricular events. This study, then, focuses on Grade 5 because of its importance as a transitional stage from Cycle 1 to Cycle 2.

This research was conducted while schools in Abu Dhabi were still under the control of ADEC. However, in September 2017, all public schools transferred to the "Emirati School Model" (ESM) under the official supervision of the MoE (The National, 2017). It is important to emphasize that the merger of ADEC and MoE schools was only partially complete at the start of Academic Year 2017–2018, when ADEC became the Abu Dhabi Education and Knowledge Department (ADEK).

Therefore, this study uses a group of Emirati fifth-grade students to explore the integration dynamics of the sociocultural aspects of bilingualism and biliteracy practices of Arabic and English.

METHODOLOGY

This study used an explanatory sequential, mixed-method design that helps provide "a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone" (Creswell and Clark, 2011, p. 5). The study strived to collect as much information as possible about Emirati fifth graders' bilingualism and biliteracy learning practices from a sociocultural perspective. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010) posit that, when used in combination, quantitative and qualitative data provide a more complete, fine-tuned picture and that, by triangulating data collection methods, the researcher can draw on each respective method's strengths (Creswell, 2012).

The research design used here was rolled out at the beginning of the research process and involved two phases. Initially, a background survey was used to collect demographic data, questionnaires were collected from a larger sample size; in the latter stage, qualitative data from a smaller sample was considered. This second phase involved interviews with teachers and children, classroom observations, and an analysis of authentic bilingualism and biliteracy classroom practices.

In the first stage, a number of Emirati Grade 5 students (both males and females) ($n = 350$) completed surveys about bilingual and biliteracy practices; an equal number of Arabic and English teachers ($n = 350$) did the same (English teachers [$n = 150$]; Arabic teachers [$n = 200$]). All English and Arabic teachers working in Cycle 1 schools are female.

The second stage made use of convenience sampling, which is a purposeful sampling technique, where the criteria were availability and willingness to participate (Creswell & Clark, 2011; Bryman, 2012). The chosen schools were in a major UAE city. For the semi-interview, the schools were asked to provide willing participants, and teachers were asked to recommend students who would talk openly. Individual interviews were then conducted with students and teachers. Classroom observations were carried out in one male school and two female schools, and four teachers were observed (two Arabic teachers and two English teachers). The researcher also observed both English and Arabic lessons in two classes at two different schools.

The content validity of 5-point Likert scale questionnaires and background surveys, classroom observation checklists, and interview questions was ascertained by sending them to a panel from the College of Education at the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) to revise and check for appropriateness. The feedback provided was used to revise the questionnaires and rubric; the suggested modifications focused on modifying the language for the students, minimizing the number of questionnaire and interview questions, and deleting repetitive statements. The researchers also found it useful to discuss interpretations with participants, especially where clarification was required, thus ensuring interpretive validity.

In terms of reliability, a checklist was designed to ensure the questionnaire and interview items aligned with the research questions; a classroom observation list was also checked for validity and reliability by three professors of the UAEU College of Education. Additionally, Kvale's (2007) suggestions for a successful and valid interview were adopted and followed. These suggestions included getting clear and relevant answers from the participants, clarifying the questions, seeking a clear and accurate interpretation by the researcher, and phrasing the questions to motivate the participants to provide more information. Thus, the principal investigator employed certain strategies during the interviews, such as elaborating on any unexpected points of view and asking the interviewees to provide more

feedback for further clarification. Furthermore, during the interviews, the principal integrator tried to ensure that her interpretations were compatible with the interview questions and the participants' understanding. Additionally, during the analytical stage, emails and phone calls were used as follow-up to ensure the interpretations were correct. The self-reporting nature of the questions encouraged students and teachers to express their views regarding the sociocultural, bilingualism and biliteracy practices taking place in the classroom.

FINDINGS

The findings were first examined from a quantitative perspective by analyzing the mean (M) and standard deviation (SD) of the questionnaire items. In terms of parental/ home support category, the students reported that their parents interacted with by reporting the least mean score as shown in table 1, through online programs and literacy activities or by providing sufficient English language materials to encourage them to read and write in English. They also felt that they did not receive adequate support at home, although their parents had highly positive reactions upon knowing that they were making progress with English (see Table 1 below).

TABLE 1. Students' report on parental and home support

Category	M	SD
My parents interact with me through the school's online programs.	2.55	.818
My parents support literacy activities.	3.14	.935
My parents provide me with English language material at home.	3.24	.927
My parents encourage me to read and write in English at home.	3.26	.941
My parents get very excited when they know I am making progress in English.	4.37	.853

In terms of students' report on teachers and school support for English, the students reported that their school had sufficient resources to support English language learning, and they reported that their teacher use different strategies to teach them and they tried to motivate them. Nonetheless, they reported that their schools did not involve parents enough in interactive online programs. That said, the English teachers tried to relate their teaching to the home culture to motivate students to read, write, and speak in English.

TABLE 2. Students' report on English teachers and school support

Category	M	SD
My school involves my parents through interactive online programs.	3.04	1.012
Our English teacher tries to relate English learning materials to our culture.	3.60	.914
Our English teacher tries to motivate us to read, write and speak in English.	3.98	.958
I can learn from my English teachers because they use different strategies to teach us.	4.08	.709
My school has appropriate resources and a library that supports English language learning.	4.50	.500

In terms of parental/home support for Arabic, the students reported that they wanted their parents to interact more with online programs and to provide more Arabic language material at home. However, the parents appeared to be excited about their children learning Arabic and encouraged them to read and write at home, while supporting the school's literacy activities. This suggests that parents wanted to see their children involved in literacy activities in both languages with little variations in their reporting; nonetheless, they need to supply appropriate material at home (see Table 3 below).

TABLE 3. Students' report on parental and home support

Category	M	SD
My parents interact with me through online programs.	1.71	1.07
My parents provide me with Arabic language material at home.	3.42	1.131
My parents get very excited when they know I am making progress in Arabic.	3.91	3.905
My parents encourage me to read and write in Arabic at home.	4.34	.909
My parents support school literacy activities.	4.49	.865

When it came to students' report on their Arabic teachers and the school support; the students reported that the schools have appropriate resources and library for Arabic language and that their Arabic teachers motivate them and use different strategies. However, the students reported less on parental involvement.

TABLE 4. Students' report on Arabic Teachers and School Support

Category	M	SD
Our Arabic teacher allows us to use English in our Arabic lessons	2.99	.884
The school involves my parents and me in reading and writing through interactive online programs	3.03	.976
I can learn from my Arabic teachers because they use different strategies	3.76	.922
Our Arabic teacher motivates us to read, write, and speak in Arabic	3.77	.913
My school has appropriate resources and library support for the Arabic language	4.34	.582

English teachers reported on sociocultural issues. The results indicated that English teachers reported a lack of support from home, with few parents attending school meetings, reading to their children, using online programs, or doing homework with their children. They also reported that parents showed high enthusiasm for their children learning English (see Table 5 below).

TABLE 5. English teachers' report on parental and home support

Category	M	SD
Parents participate in school meetings and literacy workshops.	2.58	.658
Parents read to their children at home.	2.60	.665
Parents interact with their children through online programs.	2.61	.721
Parents do homework with their children.	2.76	.631
Parents are enthusiastic about their children learning English.	2.84	.656

The Arabic teachers reported similar, if slightly more positive, feelings regarding parental involvement and home support. They felt that the students wanted their parents to help more with homework, to encourage reading and writing, to take part in school meetings and workshops, and to interact with online programs. However, Arabic teachers generally thought that parents provided adequate support for their children's literacy practices (see Table 6 below).

TABLE 6. Arabic teachers' report on parental home support

Category	M	SD
Parents do homework with their children.	3.05	1.073
Parents encourage their children to read and write in Arabic.	3.13	1.113
Parents participate in school meetings and literacy workshops.	3.22	1.181
Parents interact with their children through online programs.	3.30	1.336

English teachers reported on school and teacher support. The findings in ascending order indicated that, English teachers adjust the English curriculum to students' needs; they differentiate instruction and assessment techniques based on the students' prior knowledge; they use authentic materials and social language to promote communication skills. They also indicated that the schools encourages them to participate in professional development; they use various English language-teaching materials relevant to students; they encourage students to use English language only. Moreover, English teachers reported higher in terms of the schools possession of appropriate resources and a library that supports English language literacy; they also reported that they attend professional development sessions and more they motivate students to read, write, and speak in English. Such results indicated that English teachers attempted to motivate students to use English as much as possible and modified the curriculum to suit individual needs. They believed that their schools provided good programs and resources to support English language learning and provided relevant professional development opportunities (see Table 7 below).

TABLE 7. English teachers' report on school and teacher support

Category	M	SD
I adjust English curriculum to students' cultural context and needs.	3.94	.85
I differentiate instructions and assessment techniques based on students' prior knowledge.	4.02	.66
I use authentic materials and social language in my instruction to promote communication skills.	4.03	.82
My school encourages me to participate in professional development.	4.07	.72
I use different English language teaching materials that are relevant to students.	4.373	.49
I use English language only.	4.41	.49
My school has appropriate resources and a library that supports English language literacy.	4.65	.48
I attend professional development sessions to better my teaching practices.	4.67	.47
I motivate students to read, write and speak in English.	4.78	.42

Arabic teachers reported on school and teachers' support. The findings in an ascending order indicated that: They use teaching materials that are authentic; they asked students to speak Arabic only; they motivate students to work on language skills; they attend professional sessions to better their teaching practices; they have appropriate resources for teaching; they have good programs; they differentiate instructions; the schools support their professions development. However, they reported to less degree on their schools' roles for involving parents; and adjusting the curriculum to be geared to students' cultural context; and the school providence of language programs. These results suggested that schools needed to provide more activities to support learning in a social context (see Table 8 below).

TABLE 8. Arabic teachers' report on school and teacher support

Category	M	SD
My school provides language activities that support learning in a social context.	3.83	.962
I adjust Arabic curriculum to students' cultural context and needs.	3.93	.827
My school involves students, parents, and local community in literacy activities.	3.98	1.151
My school encourages me to participate in professional development.	4.00	.750
I differentiate instructions and assessment techniques based on students' prior knowledge.	4.05	.765
My school provides a robust Arabic program.	4.07	1.017
My school has appropriate resources and a library that supports Arabic language literacy.	4.08	.776
I attend professional development sessions to better my teaching practices.	4.13	.718
I try to motivate my students to read, write, and speak in Arabic	4.14	.716
I ask my students to use Arabic language only.	4.16	.665

I use authentic material and link the curriculum to background knowledge	4.19	.660
I use different Arabic teaching material that is relevant to the students.	4.33	.736

By way of comparison, the self-report of English and Arabic teachers on these sociocultural issues were cross-tabulated. Table 9 shows that Arabic teachers had more positive views of the home environment and parental support than the English language teachers did. However, the results still indicated that both Arabic and English teachers held predominantly negative views of the level (or lack) of parental support and would like to see it improved (see Table 9).

TABLE 9. English and Arabic teachers on parental and home support

Category	English	Arabic
Parents are enthusiastic to see their children learning the language.	24%	56%
Participation in School Meetings and Literacy Workshops.	19.%	40.5%
Reading with their Children at Home	10%	15%
Interacting with their Children Through the School's Online Programs.	14%	39%
Doing Homework with their Children.	10.7%	34%
Being Enthusiastic to See their Children Learning English	24%	56%
Encouraging Children to Read and Write at Home	12%	37%

As far as the teachers' views of school and teacher support were concerned, the following answers emerged. Arabic teachers reported 86% when asked if they used authentic materials and social language to promote communication skills, while English teachers rated this item at 78.4%. In this regards, English teachers need to make the curriculum relevant to the students. In terms of using the target language only, Arabic teachers rated this item at 84.5%, while English teachers reported that they did it 100% of the time. Here English teachers may feel that students need more input in the target language. Arabic teachers reported 84%, compared to 79.4% for English teachers, when asked about using varied language teaching materials that was relevant to the students' backgrounds. In terms of finding ways to motivate students to read, write, and speak in the target language, Arabic teachers reported 80.5%, while English teachers once again scored it at 100%. This view of English teacher reflect their efforts to motivate student to learn the target and a challenging language. A large number of Arabic teachers (83%) reported that they differentiate instructions and assessment techniques based on their students' prior knowledge, while 100% of English teachers reported to use this approach. When asked whether the school had appropriate resources to support literacy, 73.5% of Arabic teachers thought that their school did, while all English teachers (100%) thought so. Finally, adjusting curriculum to students' cultural context and needs scored 56% from Arabic teachers and 61.4% from English teachers. These results show that English teachers reported more positive views of school and teacher support than their Arabic-teaching counterparts did.

The second phase of data analysis involved interviews with three fifth-grade students, two English teachers, and two Arabic teachers. The students reported that their parents usually encouraged them to read and write and to do well in school but did not read with them.

> Student 1 (S1): When I return from school, I sit in the living room with my family to discuss and talk about our day.

The students felt a certain degree of self-pride when their parents attended school or parents' meetings; however, they also felt that, as they had large numbers of siblings, their parents did not have enough time to support their learning. Student 1's parents were quite well educated and enriched the home environment with books and other stimuli.

S1:   We have a library at home. We have a room where we organize our books—both Arabic and English books. There is a round desk in the middle of the room for reading.

Unfortunately, the same student's parents were not involved with any online programs, despite encouragement from the school.

S1: I do online reading for English only. We have Raz-kids and Mathletics. For Arabic… mmm, I do not think we have an online account for that. My English teachers encourage us to tell parents to participate with online reading, but I do it alone.

The other two students seemed to avoid reading at home altogether.

Student 3 (S3):   I do not pay attention to online programs—I use my iPad to download games. When my mother reads in the newsletter that I must do reading online, she gets angry and forces me to read.

Student 2 (S2):   I do not tell her about English online reading because I do not want her to tell me to read at home. I read only when the teacher tells us that we must read.

The students also felt that their schools had good resources and offered extracurricular activities. However, S1 felt that the students were not engaged enough to make use of those resources.

S1:   We have library, computers, books everywhere, but many students are not motivated, maybe they need more motivation or a different way to encourage them read and write not only inside the classroom.

Additionally, the school in question provided online resources to encourage students to read and do mathematics at home with their parents, although these seemed to be underused or ignored altogether.

S3:   I gave my mother the usernames and passwords, I use them sometimes.

To get as deep an understanding of sociocultural factors as possible, both Arabic and English teachers were also interviewed. They were asked whether they related the instructional material to the students' background experiences, about sociocultural aspects such as the home environment, and how those affected language learning and literacy.

Several major themes emerged. First, they perceived a general lack of parental involvement; English teachers thought that parental support at home was not enough, with only a few parents involved in their child's literacy development. They linked parental involvement to the children's negative attitudes toward homework. They also highlighted poor responses to parents' meetings and lack of involvement with their children in online reading—such as using Raz-kids or doing Maths with Mathletics.

English T1: It is sad to see that not all of them get enough support from parents and in their homes. They are not accountable—if they do not come to school, it is ok, and if they do not do their homework, that is ok. I think [that] once they show no interest in their child's school life, then the students do not care about their grades because there is no pressure from home… I do not see [the] majority of the parents attend the parents conference that we have [a] few times during the year. A parent that comes, asks me about their child, and is interested–their kids perform better.

Not many parents were involved in their children's learning. Some bought books for their children but did not read with them. One English teacher thought that some parents bought books to "try to impress," but that they did not really get involved. The English teachers also struggled to get parents involved in online programs. Even though it only required a regular half an hour, they found that parents were not supportive.

English T2: Even parents came back and said, "We do not like to read with them."

Arabic teachers also felt that parental involvement was lacking and highlighted the link between the parents' educational level and their involvement with their children.

Arabic T1: Parents' involvement in their children's language development depends on their education level, not the economic status in this country. I can tell, when I meet with parents, [that] those who are educated read for their children at home, participate in school activities, and do homework with their children.

Arabic teachers also struggled to get parents involved in either curriculum-related or cultural activities.

Arabic T2: When parents are invited to attend class activities, [or] cultural and literacy competitions, they do not attend. Maybe one or two out of ten attend. We need more parents to be involved.

SUMMARY OF THE MAJOR FINDINGS

The following themes are emerged based on the study results. 1. Parents are enthusiastic about their children learning, but they lack the real mechanism to translate their enthusiasm into real, practical support for their children's education. 2. Although the schools have sufficient materials to support language learning, there is no evidence that parents use the school's learning materials to support learning, especially online learning. 3. There is, to some extent, support from parents in terms of Arabic language learning, but to a lesser degree for the English language. 4. There is more learning materials to support English language learning compared to Arabic. 5. Arabic and English teachers use many strategies and exert great efforts to teach the students but there is lack of follow-up from the parents' side. 6. English teachers believe that parents are negligent in terms of supporting their children's English language learning. 7. Arabic teachers have more positive views about parents than English teachers do. 8. The students viewed their parents as passively supporting their English learning, compared to Arabic. 9. Some teachers believe that parents' support depends on their educational level, and this could affect the parents' support of English.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that interaction—the main conduit through which learning takes place (Walqui, 2006)—was lacking. Parents were enthusiastic about their children learning, but they failed to translate their enthusiasm into real, practical support for their children's education. In this regard, they could play active roles in successfully scaffolding and facilitating the learning process (Barton, 1994; Barton & Hamilton, 1998; Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Collins & Blot, 2002; Street, 2000). More involvement from parents is needed, this could be done by various ways that schools can outreach for parents and try to involve them. In addition, the findings revealed a lack of a mechanism for "Continua of Biliteracy," as postulated by Hornberger (1989; 2004), which deals with integrating cognitive and sociocultural perspectives, allowing students to view literacy on a continuum of sustainable biliteracy practices.

The results also revealed that the schools had sufficient material to support English and Arabic learning; however, there is no evidence that parents used such material to support learning (especially online learning), which indicated that many Emirati parents did not have enough English knowledge to help their children with literacy development. Thus, parents supported Arabic language acquisition to an extent, but not English. Although students reported excellent literacy resources at their schools, they also mentioned a lack of parental support. In

this regard, an approach that deals with literacy practices as an all-encompassing composure of acting, interacting and feeling, valuing, thinking, and behaving (Gee, 1999) is missing.

English and Arabic teachers agreed that parental involvement was inadequate. This result was supported by the students, who viewed parental support as weak due to a lack of time and other family issues. Parents provided some material to support literacy, such as books, and were sometimes involved in doing homework and tasks, but they did not attend parents' meetings regularly or ask about curriculum and assessment details. This lack of parental support makes it difficult for teachers to tap into prior knowledge and create a community of practice that combines home learning with classroom and school activities. The teachers in this study, felt that, parents were not keen and less interested in developing their children's literacy. As indicated by both the Arabic and English teachers, who deployed many strategies and made efforts to teach the students, but they lacked a follow-up from the parents, the absence of a domestic link hampered the children's ability to integrate sociocultural aspects, missing a great opportunity to validate their cultural capital (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Previous research has emphasized that effectively ameliorating bilingualism is through the interaction of bilingual and biliteracy practices and by engaging in school activities and parental conferences (Kainz & Vernon-Feagans, 2007; Mercado, 2005; Zentella, 2005). It is notable to see that Arabic teachers have more positive views about parents than English teachers do, and that students viewed their parents as passive in supporting their English learning compared to Arabic. Moreover, some teachers believed that parents' support depended on their educational level; this could validate the argument by which parents refrain from supporting learning the English language because it needs more persistence in acquisition and learning. These findings corroborate the positions of O'Sullivan (2015) who indicated that bilingual education in the UAE is a contentious matter, and that one must consider the wider social and cultural consequences of using different languages in a local society. It also supported Gallagher (2011) who asserted that many UAE stakeholders have seen attributing equal importance to English as a threat to the Arabic language's position and role.

CONCLUSION

This study's results present the following general implications for curriculum, instruction, and research. 1. Curriculum should not be designed as individual language programs, but as bilingual program, that considers the literacy continuum orientation. 2. There should be orchestrated efforts between Arabic and English teachers to accommodate the aim of a holistic bilingual education. 3. Future research should compare parents' support in the two languages and investigate whether a relationship exists between the parents' level of education and their involvement in supporting learning in both languages.

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