

Bilingual Education at Sudanese Universities: Exploring Effectiveness and Implications by Ishraga Bashir Mohammed

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to identify the fundamental principles underpinning the effectiveness of bilingual education at universities. The study highlights the implemented language planning activities in three private universities and three Government universities. Also the study reports on the advantages and disadvantages of monolingual education, Arabic-medium and English-medium universities. The study reveals that the attitude of most of the students and their faculty members were in favor of using a mixer of Arabic/English instructions. The researcher recommends that policy makers and educationists in Sudan should nurture Bilingualism or even multilingualism and to develop programmes that enhance bilingual education.

Keywords:

bilingual, monolingual education, higher education

1. Bilingual Education

Bilingual education is a complex concept that refers to the use of two languages in instructional settings. (Cazden & Snow, p. 9 cited in Clark (1898-1987)) asserts that bilingual education depends upon many variables, including students' first language, the language of instructions, and the linguistic goal of the program, to determine which type of bilingual education is used. There are two types of bilingualism at tertiary level, i.e., Institutional bilingualism and individual bilingualism (Beillard, 2000, p. 471; Garigue, 1985, p. 941; Langner & Imbach, 2000, p. 462 cited in Plessis 205). Institutional bilingualism refers to the language adopted by a given institution and not necessarily is the sociolinguistic output of the programmes. An institution that offers courses in two languages, i.e., parallel-medium education or "double monolingual education" (Beillard, 2000, p. 471; Langner & Imbach, 2000, p. 462), could be classified as a bilingual institution. The other type of bilingualism is the individual or "technical" bilingual education which refers to the notion of bilingual studies, it is the natural outcomes of the sociolinguistic of the institution programmes. Bilingual education programs can be considered either

additive or *subtractive* in terms of their linguistic goals, depending on whether students are encouraged to add to their linguistic repertoire or to replace their native language with the majority language

2. General Outcomes of Bilingual Education Programs

The most Significant Research studies on bilingual education started in 1920s as cited in (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; García & Baker, 2007; Cummins, 2001; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006; May, 2008). These studies, have considerable general conclusions about the adequacy of bilingual education; they have clearly stated that, well-implemented bilingual programs are an effective way of promoting proficiency in the L1 and L2 (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006). Based on the findings of the above mentioned studies, Cummins (1979, 1981) proposed what he called the “interdependence hypothesis”. This hypothesis was formally expressed in the following way: *“To the extent that instruction in Lx is effective in promoting proficiency in Lx, transfer of this proficiency to Ly will occur provided there is adequate exposure to Ly (either in school or environment) and adequate motivation to learn Ly”*. There are many empirical research studies that support the interdependence hypothesis, examples, (Dressler & Kamil, 2006; Baker, 2001; Cummins, 2001; Genesee, Lindholm-Leary, Saunders, & Christian, 2006). The most comprehensive study was done by Dressler and Kamil as part of the Report of the National Literacy Panel on Language Minority Children and Youth (August & Shanahan, 2006). They conclude that: all these studies provide evidence for the cross-language transfer of reading comprehension ability in bilinguals. They also have shown evidence of the relationship that holds (a) across typologically different languages. The research studies provide evidence of transfer of metacognitive and metalinguistic strategies Transfer of pragmatic aspects of language use, transfer of specific linguistic elements, and transfer of phonological awareness. I can safely assert that the research on bilingual education assured that, a well-designed and carefully implemented bilingual education programs can have a significant positive effect on student achievement both in English literacy and in other academic core courses.

3. Bilingualism in Higher Education

Bilingual education in higher institutions have two different models the most significant model to be considered by higher education is the Two-way Mainstream Bilingual Education or Dual-Language Bilingual Education, with particular reference to what Baker and Jones (1998, p. 525) call the “Dual Majority Language Bilingual Education”. Two medium of instruction are used concurrently discussing and explaining the same topics (Alexander, 2004, pp. 204-206). “Technically” bilingual higher education could be established through the principle of bilingual parallelism (Beillard, 2000, p. 471), leading to parallel-medium education, “practically two universities in one”, as Garigue (1985, p. 943) described it. Two types of education should be considered here, i.e., strong and weak parallel-medium education. In the first instance provision is made for near-perfect parallel bilingualism, thus offering tuition, course materials and textbooks in both mediums of instruction. In the case of weak parallel

medium education only the instruction and perhaps some of the study materials are provided in both languages. Another variation hereof is encountered in cases where not all courses or qualifications are provided for in both languages. For example, parallel bilingualism may only apply to undergraduate courses, while monolingual instruction may be used at postgraduate level. More often than not, the strong version of parallel-medium education is not realized in practice (Van der Walt, 2004, p. 144). Nevertheless, a university may still be classified as a parallel-medium or bilingual institution because of its overall policy on parallel-medium education example for that, the University of Fribourg/Freiburg is considered to be a “model bilingual university” (Langner & Imbach, 2000, p. 462 cited in Plessis). The bilingual university can simultaneously accord access to a major international academic language. In fact, Purser (2000, p. 453) predicts that bilingual (or even multilingual) universities will increase, primarily as a result of the growth of languages such as English in academia (Schaller-Schwaner, 2004; Treanor, 2005), and partly as a result of the internationalization of universities.

Bilingual universities are obviously more expensive to operate than monolingual ones (Brink, 2004, p. 13). However, it is important to consider what the cost will be of not having a bilingual university catering for the needs of a specific linguistic grouping. Finally, the issue of ownership remains a serious challenge for bilingual universities. Purser (2000, p. 459) stresses the usefulness of seeing the bilingual institution as an instrument of a “language continuum” (in relation to sociolinguistic reality), rather than as an instrument of “language separateness” (in relation to language ideology). Clearly, the management of bilingual policies in higher education is a complex challenge. It most certainly requires “legal will” and institutional commitment (Beillard, 2000, p. 474), and, obviously, appropriate funding (Brink, 2004, p. 14).

4. The Need for Bilingual Universities

Use of more than one language in higher education is universal according to Purser (2000, p. 451), these types of universities nevertheless have been around for a considerable long time. The University of Ottawa, for instance, was established in 1848 (Garigue, 1985, p. 941), the University of Fribourg/Freiburg in 1889 (Langner & Imbach, 2000, p. 462), other bilingual universities are established recently (UNESCO-CEPES, 2000). Research studies on bilingual universities found that these universities share certain features regarding their origin, mission and function. Purser (2000, pp. 452-453) asserts that bilingual universities are, political creations (UNESCO-CEPES, 2000) and thus the products of unique contexts, traditions and social conditions, for instance, the University of Ottawa was created as an instrument of cohesion between the English- and French-speaking populations in order to promote bilingual cohabitation (Beillard, 2000, pp. 469-470; Garigue, 1985, p. 941; Purser, 2000, p. 453). In a similar vein, the University of Fribourg/Freiburg was created as an essential component in the political structures within a bilingual Swiss Canton and as a meeting place between two civilizations (Langner & Imbach, 2000, pp. 461-462; Purser, 2000, p. 453). Bilingualism at the University of Yaounde´ I (Cameroon) was also derived from a political unity brought about by the amalgamation of the

English-speaking southern Cameroon with the then *La Re' publique du Cameroun* leading to the adoption of two official languages for the new state (Amin, 2000, pp. 436-437). The six bilingual universities of Finland (out of a total of 20) arose from the need to accommodate the Swedish-speaking minority within the bilingual Finnish state created in 1917 (Anckar, 2000, pp. 500-502). The Belarussian State Pedagogical University, one of the few bilingual universities in Belarus, reflects the Belarussian/Russian bilingual character of the Belarus state. More than 27% of students enrolled at higher education institutions (mostly private) study in both languages (Konchitis, 2000, pp. 508-509). From these examples, the close relationship between the language policies of bilingual universities and those of bilingual states can be observed. Universities may experience a need to promote individual bilingualism (or even trilingualism) for a variety of reasons, including a bilingual context, market-driven forces and changes in student demographics. Such factors may require a bilingual approach in higher education that delivers graduates who function well in more than one language within a specific environment. We note this in the case of the University of Puerto Rico, which has been promoting Spanish/English bilingualism for more than one hundred years. The Istanbul Technical University, a Turkish-speaking institution, requires its students to complete approximately one-third of their courses in English. Turkish, however, remains a significant and necessary language within the scholarly and academic context (T. Reagan and S. Schreffler, in press). The National University of Rwanda was obligated to introduce bilingual studies in French and English after reopening in 1995, owing to its drastically changed student demography (Ntokamunda, 2004, pp. 70-71). The changing landscape in higher education in Europe may be contributing to the growth in bilingual universities there (Berthoud, Kalliokoski, Mackiewicz, Truchot, & Van de Craen, 2001, pp. 9-10; Treanor, 2005). The preservation or development of a minority language and culture may also be a strong motivation for establishing a bilingual university. The bilingual university can, on the one hand, create an academic haven for a "less important" language or a minority language, as in the case of the Free University of Bolzano/Bolzen where the minority language of Ladin is used (Kozma & Rada'csi, 2000, p. 44). This university requires its administrative personnel to be bilingual (German/Italian), offers bilingual studies in its Faculty of Education, and trilingual studies in its School of Economics. The motto of the university is "Dare to be multilingual" (Campisi, 2000, pp. 478-483; Kozma Rada'csi, 2000, pp. 44-45). Inter-university collaboration along the common German-Polish border (i.e., in the case of the European University of Viadrina) and in other areas, is also leading to prominence of different minority languages in higher education (Purser, 2000). Finally, the bilingual university can simultaneously accord access to a major international academic language. In fact, Purser (2000, p. 453) predicts that bilingual (or even multilingual) universities will increase, primarily as a result of the growth of languages such as English in academia (Schaller-Schwaner, 2004; Treanor, 2005), and partly as a result of the internationalization of universities (Nelde, 2003; Vonlanthen, 2003; Webb, 2005). Kozma and Rada'csi. (2000, p. 45) also predict that "offerings will increasingly be multilingual" and Thomas (1997, p. 79) emphasizes the need

for future citizens of Europe “to be plurilingual and culturally mobile” and for higher education to be able to respond adequately (Brink, 2004).

5. Language Policy in Higher Education in Sudan

5.1 Language Environment

The total ecology of the linguistic environment of the Sudan shows two major languages, Arabic and English, besides hundreds of local languages and dialects. The use of English as a second language in Sudan was first introduced by British rulers in the 19th century. Throughout the British rule, English language continued to gain official, political and social status. When Sudan gained independence, the English language had been so deep-rooted in the socio-political fabric of the country that it was constitutionally kept as one of the official languages. From 1958 onward, the Arabic language has become the means of instruction of the Primary level right up to the secondary level of education in the north of Sudan. In 1992 the Arabic language became the medium of instruction in higher education. This period known as the period of nativism, Sudanese were looking for an identity. In Nifasha agreement in 2005 between south and north Sudan English and Arabic are granted equal constitutional status as official working languages, the parliament passed a bill declaring Arabic and English as the official languages of Sudan till an indefinite period of time. English plays an important role in Sudan today. Judging from certain trends it appears that the influence of English is on the increase rather than on the decrease. The inclusion of the Arabic language in the curriculum was viewed as a positive direction towards more effective teaching and learning since, compared with English, Arabic would be an easier language to use as tool of learning.

Studies conducted on the evaluation of the Arabicization (use of Arabic language as a medium of instruction) policy revealed that the policy is not seriously implemented especially by private institutions. At tertiary level, it appeared that the policy is not a priority for many private institutions e.g. Ahfad university. Many institutions seemed to have put more premium on the use of English in teaching, the main language aspiration of many Sudanese. I think Globalization, is the main reason that English becomes the medium of instruction in Sudan in recent years. The need to be proficient in the use of English among non-native speakers has become a global phenomenon. The number of higher education institutions which use English as the medium of instruction are increasing constantly. Today, more and more universities in Sudan are starting to design language policies, usually English-medium education. According to the ministry of higher education, there are 28 government universities most of them are Arabic-medium, and 105 private universities all of them use English as a medium of instruction. As for the primary and the secondary schools, the number of International school increased, to become 103. After 2005 the international School gained popularity among Sudanese. English has been used at Sudanese universities, thus far, for academic and research purposes, mainly in those university centres where international research collaborations have been established. In addition, those departments that contribute to the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes of English Studies, Translation and

Health sciences. However, the new language policy designed after Nivasha (2005), have significantly contributed to the increase of the use of English in other degrees. In that sense, Sudanese institutions, (primary, secondary, and tertiary level) have clearly promoted the implementation of EMI.

5.2 The Present Paper Focuses on the Following

This paper seeks to explore the impact of monolingual education at Sudanese English-medium and Arabic-medium universities it sets out to reappraise the notion of bilingual higher education and its requirements in terms of language policy, as well as examine the need for bilingual universities by drawing on examples from the international arena.

5.2.1 Method

This study is based on qualitative analysis of previous studies conducted across the region at different times. Most of the information about bilingualism is based on a study conducted by Dr. Plessis in his Article 2005. It also contains accounts of the author's, students, and instructor's experiences in a classroom setting which emphasize the study to use the exploratory research design to conduct the research.

5.2.2 The Participants

The informants in this study were from the students and faculty members of the three Public universities. Khartoum, Omdurman Islamic and Al-Neelain and three private universities, Sudan International University, Ahfad University for women and the National University. The Participant have been asked about the language of instruction, their attitudes towards the use of English and Arabic language

6. Significance and Purpose of Study

This study is significant in several ways. It examines the practice of monolingual education in Sudan. It investigates further the view that input in a second language is adequate as a means of acquisition. In the context of Sudan most of the universities are monolingual using either English-medium instruction or Arabic-medium instruction at considerable expense, and yet there has been very little research specifically focused on the impact of monolingual education on the student's achievement and, the socio-economic effect on Sudan. It is hoped that this research will increase the knowledge of the effects of monolingual and bilingual education intertiary level, it is anticipated that the research findings will lead to awareness and improved practices among university and will be beneficial to the policy makers stakeholders and the students.

7. Discussion

7.1 Private Universities Language Policy

Three English-medium private universities are chosen for purpose of this study. Those are, Ahfad University for women, Sudan International University and the national University. The use of English at these universities is linked to the recruitment of international students and temporary exchange programs.

The (limited) public discussion on the use of English in higher education is mainly confined to the social aspect of the mission of these universities towards the community. The race for A-publications and its impact on the competitiveness and ranking of the universities makes that scientist pay less and less effort to the academically undervalued publications in the local language. Students who wish to attend a private university must take an exam to measure their English-language proficiency. Significant number of students have received language instruction and has been exposed to a foreign language and its culture during a long term of study, still more than 60% of the students require remedial English before going on to their degree program, and up to one third of the private universities budget is spent on foundation level English courses (“Intensive English Classes”) because English is the primary language of instruction in these universities. Continual efforts are made in order to prepare students for EMI. It is the goal of these universities to develop and compete globally which fuels the demand for English language learning as it reflects the contemporary power balance and offers the hope that mastery of the language will lead to employment and prosperity. The attitude of both teachers and students seems to be that English is to be learned before entering the baccalaureate program and that once students enter into their major program of study, it is too late to expect much improvement in English language ability. If a student wants or needs to work on their language, they must do it on their own. Students, in general, feel that just studying content in English is enough support and that additional measures are not necessary to increase their ability to develop their English language skills. Many departments have no system in place for assessing the language ability of their students, and until recently were not asked by the institution how they assess their students language ability. This I think has sent a message to both faculty and students that language development after entry is not important, and that the language ability that the students have is enough. When looking at the results of this study, it is important to acknowledge that many of the problems that the students encounter are not unique to this context. As one faculty member commented on the survey, “Honestly, the standard of written English is-on the whole-fairly poor. In terms of academic writing however, it seems to be appalling everywhere in the world! Students worldwide do not seem to be taught how to reference properly or how to justify arguments—or even create an argument in an essay or critical review!”

As a reality and based on the result I found that, the students in the three private institutions support English as a medium of instruction while other did not see any difference in either of the two medium of instruction. Some recommended having more text books translated into Arabic for effective learning in Arabic.

7.2 Government Universities Language Policy

The educational councils in Government Universities have decided that English should be the medium of instruction for all applied science programmes and Arabic should be the language of education for all humanities. Therefore the researcher has chosen three government universities (Khartoum, Alneelain and Omdurman Islamic university) to assess lectures experience teaching in English and dealing with students with low English language proficiency. Lecturers at these Universities unanimously assert that

teaching in English is a very challenging experience, In spite of the fact that the students have studied English for eight years before university. When students advance to the tertiary level, it is expected of them to have some significant amount of English language knowledge. From the interviews with the lecturers, it was found out that they were aware of the language policy of the university. They explained that classes are supposed to use English, but given the fact that their students do not understand and comprehend English vocabulary; they are compelled to use Arabic for clarity to the learners. One of the lecturers in faculty of medicine said: Well, the policy tells me to teach in English and examinations are set in English, but students understand better when I teach in Arabic. "Students understand fully if he/she is taught in his/her own language. English is hard, so we translate into Arabic for them to understand better". Another explained: "We know that we should teach in English. But I find a problem when students do not understand English, so I am forced to translate into Arabic". This was further supported by the students. In their responses, four out of the six students interviewed indicated that they were accustomed to Arabic being their language of instruction. While the other two said that their teachers use both Arabic and English.

From my observation, lecturers were not following the official medium of instruction policy, even though some lecturers expressed their support for the policy. This was also seen by their own explanation concerning the reasons as to why they used Arabic to communicate with students. Some teachers said that they used English as a medium of instruction during classroom lessons and Arabic out of classroom instruction. However, their statements were found to be in contradiction to my observation where the classes were mostly taught in both languages. This is a strategy lecturers use due to the fact that students do not understand the concepts in English, so they use code switching or translation, also the lecturers themselves do not feel free to use English. According to my observation, when English was used students did not understand what was being taught, and lecturers' instructions were not clearly stated. Upon discussion with most of the academic staff on the subject, they said that language of the resources is of high Standard. Consequently, during the course of classroom lecture, significant amount of the students (specially first and second year students) appeared completely away, unwilling to respond, de-motivated, confused, disinterested, and missed lectures. To sum up, all the academic staff are aware of the fact that English is an important language for the education and socio-economic advancement of the students and Sudan. To conclude, the three universities, Khartoum, Omdurman and Al-Neelain all of them use English/Arabic as languages of instruction, moreover, Instructors assigned students English textbooks and references to read, in both languages, English/Arabic. I may conclude that in private as well as in government institutions there is a kind of bilingual education. They both have a weak version of parallel-medium education.

8. Conclusion

The context of the higher education in Sudan favours bilingualism or even multilingualism. Therefore, it would be quite unwise not to take advantage of that context and continue to expand the students'

bilingual opportunities in their degree studies. As it is obvious that the Sudanese universities are in the path of internationalization, bilingual/multilingual programmes offer a wider range of employment possibilities in the labour market at international scale, guaranteeing our students the same opportunities as other international students. There is much to be done yet, but we are on solid ground.

Sudan language policy should normalize bilingualism for social cohesion, and social development through language policies that build on the natural mastery of two or even more languages. Such policies should be embedded in the social vision for a country, operationalized in legislation, and reflected in planning, budgeting and research covering all societal sectors. Set up a system of dynamic partnerships for education between all stakeholders (government, education providers, language and education experts, the labour market, local communities and parents) in order to establish participatory dialogue and to mobilize large-scale support for integrated, holistic and diversified multilingual education that will boost accountability and transparency.

I recommend that policy and practice in Sudan nurture Bilingualism or even multilingualism; primarily a mother-tongue-based one with an appropriate and required space for international languages of wider communication.

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