

# THE IMPACT OF BILINGUALISM ON READING SKILL, CASE STUDY OF AZERI & PERSIAN STUDENTS AT TERTIARY LEVEL

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## ABSTRACT

This article intends to compare the impact of bilingualism on the reading skills of Azeri and Persian language students in Tabriz. This is a quantitative study. Data is gathered by pre-post tests that are about problems arising from bilingualism. The results show that students of this Azeri-spoken city did better in their reading skills which are caused by bilingualism during their education.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, Reading Skill, Azeri Language, Farsi Language.

## INTRODUCTION

In today's age, multilingualism has become more than just 'important', so knowing a foreign language other than your native language is very useful. Whether we consider it from a financial or social aspect, being able to communicate in a foreign language helps to have a 'real' connection with people and provides a better understanding of your language. Foreign language learning provides job opportunities. It is essential for business to develop and maintain a strong foothold in the global economy.

Bilingualism is the state in which a person is taught in a language other than his or her mother tongue. The mother tongue is the first language learned by the individual. The language that a person speaks, grows with it, and he perceives, touches, and identifies the cultural and social elements of his environment (Fanaei, 2005). Bilingualism is one of the most important issues that all countries of the world are involved in nowadays. Today, with the advancement of technology and communication and the influence of different languages between different ethnicities and nationalities, the acceptance of this phenomenon has become very common and it is rare to find a country where two or more languages or types of languages are not spoken. This issue is a common phenomenon in most provinces and cities of Iran. But in many countries, including Iran, when a child reaches the age of formal education, in a language other than his or her mother tongue, and in a language that is recognized as an official language throughout the country and in terms of the phonetic-lexical and grammatical system it is taught differently from his mother tongue, from this stage the person is faced with the phenomenon of being bilingual. Therefore, a bilingual person refers to a person who, from the beginning of formal education, becomes acquainted with and learns another language that is common in the country and is considered a second language (Fanaei, 2005). The use of two languages by one person is called bilingualism. From the point of view of Bloomfield, a bilingual person is a person who is fluent in two languages completely and equally. That is, he understands both languages and can speak them, and is also able to write and read in both languages (Bloom Field, 1933).

Fishman calls having the ability to communicate through more than one language bilingualism. Some other linguists limit bilingualism to mastering one of the four skills of listening, speaking, reading, and

writing in two languages, and many more are considered as learning foreign languages (Saghar Vanian, 1990). Scientists who have researched in the last two or three decades do not consider bilingualism as an absolute phenomenon but as a relative phenomenon. According to scientists who have studied bilingual people, learning a second language has effects on the relationship between the two hemispheres of the brain and their role in language behavior. Thus, although the theory of first language learning is more related to the left hemisphere of the brain, the right hemisphere of the brain probably plays a more significant role in learning and guiding the second language (Hamman, 2019).

The second way of looking at the phenomenon of bilingualism is an important issue in which, in addition to the inevitable phenomenon of bilingualism in many societies, recognizing the benefits of bilingualism is also very important so that people can better experience the benefits of bilingualism. There are several common and reciprocal benefits for bilinguals, including communication, cultural, economic, and cognitive benefits (Baker, 2001). One of the differences introduced by the sociological branch of language in linguistics is the introduction of the concept of bilingualism, which is of particular importance. The term bilingualism, first used by the eminent linguist (Ferguson, 1972), refers to a special kind of standardization in which two different types of languages coexist in a society so that each has a complete and definite role to play.

Just as several different languages may be used for speech in any area, each language usually has different accents and dialects, and generally different types, each used by a number of people in the community or on specific occasions. During speaking or writing, each person chooses one type of language, and usually, as a result of such rules, one of the linguistic types is created. Azerbaijani-Turkish is the spoken language of the people in the region of Azerbaijan and other northwestern regions of Iran and the official language of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijani-Turkish is a spoken language in the eastern regions of Turkey and southern Georgia and Dagestan . Azerbaijani-Turkish is a sub-branch of the Turkish language and the language of most of the Turkic regions of Iran, including Azerbaijan. Other different sub-branches of the Turkish language available in Iran are Qashqai Turkish, Turkmen Turkish, Khalaji Turkish, Khorasani Turkish, and Shahsevani Turkish. The Azerbaijani-Turkish language can be understood in two ways by Turkmen and Turks (including Istanbul Turkish and spoken dialects, Iraqi Turkmen and Qashqai) (Denis, 1963).

Reading skills are one of the pillars of language learning and students' learning and are a skill that we need to learn and improve our education. Reading skills are one of the most important learning needs of students in today's life. The ability to comprehend, interpret and deduce textbooks and non-textbooks introduces students to new ideas and information and helps them learn to think better and live better.

Reading is focused on understanding the written material and recognizing the values and meanings and concepts of words, phrases, and sentences, and receiving knowledge and meaning. In general, learning the skill of reading is the key to all learning because most learning of academic theory is done this way (Miller, 2010). The most important way of learning and acquiring knowledge and awareness in human beings is through reading, which is one of the most advanced and complex abilities and mental activities of human beings and is one of the basic and different subjects of learning during education. . The ability to read effectively increases a person's ability and cognitive function.

Reading is a purposeful activity that requires the organization of extensive cognitive activities to decode, understand and learn from texts (Mehdizadeh and Feizi, 2011). Reading is, in fact, the process of language development, in the sense that the activity of reading begins when the word or symbol is associated with seeing or touching an object or image. Reading ability is one of the effective factors in

every person's learning. Ease of reading and understanding difficult textbook texts has been defined as readability (Ziraki, 2009).

Researchers studied the impact of bilingualism on learners' listening comprehension, learners' self-efficacy, the learning of English vocabulary as a foreign language, and English grammar proficiency in Iran. Arabmofrad, Mohammad Motamedi and Majid Saeedi (2020) studied the effect of bilingualism Azeri vs. Persian on EFL learners' listening comprehension, the study employed a quasi-experimental design and the two groups' performance was compared by pre-test and post-test. The results indicated that there were no significant differences between bilingual and monolingual groups regarding their performance on listening comprehension, that is, bilingualism did not affect listening comprehension. Stefan Rathert and Nese Cabariglu, 2020, studied the impact of bilingual practice on EFL learners' self-efficacy. To investigate the potential effects of bilingual practice on the learners' self-efficacy, a self-efficacy scale English was administered. The analysis revealed that only five out of 25 students' self-efficacy perceptions changed significantly with a moderate effect size. Mohammad Hossein Keshavarz, 2004, studied the impact of bilingualism on the learning of English vocabulary as a foreign language. The results of the data analysis showed that native speakers of Turkish and Armenian who speak Persian as their second language performed better in the English vocabulary test than the Persian monolingual learners of English.

Merrickhi (2012) studied the effect of bilingualism on Iranian pre-university students' English grammar proficiency. The study attempted to ascertain whether bilinguals would do better than monolinguals on a standard English grammar test. All the participants were trained for 2 months and finally, they were given a post-test. The results showed that bilinguals definitely outperformed monolinguals on the English grammar test.

Almost all language learners have at least once been familiar with the term "four language skills". But neither in schools nor in language centers, this issue is not explained to language learners. Even in universities, only foreign language students are familiar with these expressions. The importance of this issue is so great that this issue should be taught together with the education of the alphabet so that the language learner gets to know how to learn the language. Due to the daily reading of books, websites, sentences, headlines, tables, catalogs, etc., reading skills in any language are of special importance. The aim of this study was to compare the English reading skills of monolingual students (Persian language) and bilingual students (Azeri-Persian).

### **Research Question**

1. Is there any significant difference between Azeri-Persian students' and Persian students' reading ability?
2. Does bilingualism affect Azeri-Persian students' reading skills?

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study was designed as a quasi-experimental study to focus on the impact of bilingualism on EFL learners' reading comprehension. There are two variables in this study, dependent and independent variables. Bilingual and monolingual have been considered two independent variables. Reading skill was the dependent variable. There was no control group in the study.

## Sampling

The participants in the present study were 45 university students studying English at Tabriz Azad University. All the students were given a biographical questionnaire and based on answers to the questionnaire, 20 bilingual (Azeri-Persian students) and 25 monolingual (Persian) students were selected. According to the results of the Nelson proficiency test scores, the students were homogenized and both classes were assigned as the experimental group. The participants in both groups received the same treatment for the same period of time.

## Data Collection

A pre and post-reading comprehension test was employed in the study to determine the reading comprehension achievement scores of the students. The test consists of 12 true or false questions. The researcher piloted this test before administrating that the reliability was 0.8 and it showed its validity. In order to determine the homogeneity of participants in reading comprehension, the researcher administrated a pre-test among the participants. The pre-test scores showed that students were homogenous in their reading ability. Both the groups (monolingual and bilingual) take part in treatment classes for four weeks, 8\*45 sessions. They were taught reading tests from a prepared packed passage and then they did different activities such as comprehension questions and quizzes.

At the end of the treatment classes, a reading test which was the same for both of the experimental groups was administered to participants in order to find out if there were any significant differences between the two groups regarding their language and treatment.

## Data Analysis

One of the instruments in the present study was a Nelson proficiency test to determine the students' level of language proficiency. The test was scored by the researcher and the results were submitted to statistical analysis, and SPSS statistical analysis was used to analyze the data.

## FINDINGS

In this chapter the findings and the results of the data collection which have been collected are presented. The data are shown in the tables and each table has its own explanation.

First, the researcher used to determine any pre-existing differences between the means of the two groups, and the results are shown in table one.

Table 1. The comparison of the mean of the two groups (pre-tests).

Group	N	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean
Pre-test of Monolinguals	30	19.2825	3.79231	.71630
Pre-test of Bilinguals	30	20.4976	3.89290	.73142

According to the mean scores of the monolingual group (M=19.28, SD=3.79) and bilingual (M20.49, SD=3.89), there aren't any significant differences in the reading skills of the two groups. The mean difference score was -1.28 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -3.49 to .95. Therefore, it shows that groups are homogenous in terms of reading comprehension and the result didn't reveal any significant differences between the two groups' pre-test.

Table 2. Paired Samples Correlations.

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test of Monolingual & Bilingual Groups	30	-.189	.340

Table 3. The results of the t-tests for the two groups (pre-tests).

	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean	95 % Confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig
				Lower	Upper			
Pre-test Monolinguals Pre-test Bilinguals	-1.280	5.9874	1.1087	-3.49980	.95021	-1.210	29	.238

Checking obtained T-score in T-table reveals that the differences between the means of the two groups are not statistically significant ( $p < 0.5$ ). Therefore the present researcher was confident that the two groups are homogenous to start with. The results of the comparison of the post-test of the two groups after 8 sessions of treatment are presented in tables 4 and 6.

Table 4. The comparison of the mean of the two groups (post-tests)

Group	N	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean
Post-test of Monolinguals	30	20.5989	3.69245	.70104
Post-test of Bilinguals	30	24.1879	3.49751	.63880

Table 5. Paired Samples Correlations

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Post-test of Monolingual & Bilingual Groups	30	-.229	.204

Table 6. The results of the t-tests for the two groups (post-tests)

	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean	95 % Confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig
				Lower	Upper			
Post-test Monolinguals Post-test Bilinguals	-3.487	5.67125	1.0680	-5.59198	-1.3750	-3.295	29	.004

Table 4 and 6 reveals that there is a statistically significant difference between the mean of the monolingual group ( $M=20.59$ ,  $STD=3.69$ ) and the bilingual group ( $M=24.18$ ,  $STD=3.49$ ),  $T -3.29$  in the post-test performance at  $P < 0.5$  level. The mean difference score was  $-3.48$  with a 90% confidence interval ranging from  $-5.59$  to  $-1.37$ . So the results showed that bilingualism was more effective in promoting students' reading ability.

Table 7 was conducted to show a paired T-test between the mean of pre and post-test of each of the groups to determine the differences between the means are significant or not. The results revealed

significant differences between the mean of pre and post-test of each of the groups. Tables 7 to 9 indicate that both of the groups have actually improved significantly.

Table 7. Comparison of the means of pre- and post-tests of Monolingual group

Group	N	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean
Pre-test of Monolinguals	30	19.2825	3.79231	.71630
Post-test of Monolingual	30	20.5989	3.69245	.70104

The results illustrated in table 7 and 9 indicates that the mean differences between pre and post tests are significant. They also show a statistically significant increase in scores from pre-test (M=19.28, SD=3.79 ) to post test (M=20.59, SD=3.69), T= -10.13 . The mean increase of the scores was -1.43 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -1.74 to -1.15 .

Table 8. Paired Samples Correlations.

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test of Monolingual	30	.978	.000

Table 9. Paired sample t-test for Monolingual group.

	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean	95 % Confidence interval of the difference		t	df	Sig
				Lower	Upper			
Post-test & Post-test of Monolinguals	-1.3986	.76171	.13972	-1.74103	-1.15121	-10.132	29	.000

According to the T-test, in Tables 10 and 12 there was a statistically significant increase in scores from pre-test (M 20.49, STD=3.89) to post-test (M=24.18, STD=3.49), T = -14.36. The mean decrease in the score was -3.64 with a 95% confidence interval ranging from -4.19 to -3.15. Hence the difference is significant and these changes in the mean provide the evidence to show that bilingual's scores were more significant than monolinguals in reading comprehension.

Table 10. Comparison of the means of pre- and post-tests of Bilingual group.

Group	N	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean
Pre-test of Bilinguals	30	20.4976	3.89290	.73142
Post-test of Bilinguals	30	24.1879	3.49751	.63880

Table 11. Paired Samples Correlations.

		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1	Pre-test & Post-test of Bilinguals	30	.929	.000

Table 12. Paired sample t-test for Bilingual group.

	Mean	STD. Deviation	STD. Error Mean	95 % Confidence intervl of the difference		t	df	Sig
				Lower	Upper			
Post-test & Post- test of Bilinguals	-3.64589	1.39786	.25521	-4.19924	-3.15265	-14.367	29	.000

In a summary, it is clear that both groups' reading comprehension skill increased after the treatment, according to table 10 and 12, in the post-test it is clear that bilinguals' reading skill is more significant than monolinguals' reading skill and bilingual students can benefit from their L1 in reading comprehension.

### CONCLUSION

Reading skills are one of the most important learning needs of students in life. The ability to comprehend, interpret, and infer texts introduces students to new ideas and makes them think better. According to the obtained data, it can be understood that the skill of monolingual students (Persian language) 20.59 and the reading ability of bilingual students (Azeri-Persian) 24.18 are at the educational level. A comparison of these means shows that there is a difference between the readability of monolingual students and bilingual students so that reading skills are higher in the bilingual group than in the monolingual group. According to the results, it can be understood that there is a significant difference in the reading skills of monolingual and bilingual students, and bilingual students performed better in reading skills. Therefore, the first language reading skills of bilingual students have had a significant impact on strengthening the reading skills of bilingual students.

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