

Teaching English for Children in Public Schools Can Work in Egypt

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Abstract : This study explores the recent application of bilingual education in Egyptian public schools. It aims to provide an overall picture of bilingual education programs globally and examine its adequacy to the Egyptian social and cultural context. The study also assesses the current application process of teaching English as a Second Language in public schools from the early childhood education stage and onwards, instead of starting it from middle school; as a strategy that promotes English language proficiency and equity among students. The theoretical framework is based on Jim Cummins' bilingual education theories and on recent trends adopting different developmental theories and perspectives, like Stephen Crashe's theory of Second Language Acquisition that calls for communicative and meaningful interaction rather than memorization of grammatical rules. The question posed here is whether bilingual education, with its peculiar nature, could be a good chance to reach out to all Egyptian students and prepare them to become global citizens. In addition to this, a more specific question is related to the extent to which social and cultural variables can affect the young learners' second language acquisition. This exploratory analytical study uses mixed-methods research design to examine the application of bilingual education in Egyptian public schools. The study uses a cluster sample of schools in Egypt from different social and cultural backgrounds to assess the determining variables. The qualitative emphasis is on interviewing teachers and reviewing students' achievement documents. The quantitative aspect is based on observations of in-class activities through tally sheets and checklists. Having access to schools and documents is authorized by governmental and institutional research bodies. Data sources will comprise achievement records, students' portfolios, parents' feedback and teachers' viewpoints. Triangulation and SPSS will be used for analysis. Based on the gathered data, new curricula have been assigned for elementary grades and teachers have been required to teach the newly developed materials all of a sudden without any prior training. Due to shortage in the teaching force, many assigned teachers have not been proficient in the English language. Hence, teachers' incompetency and unpreparedness to teach this grade specific curriculum constitute a great challenge in the implementation phase. Nevertheless, the young learners themselves as well as their parents seem to be enthusiastic about the idea itself. According to the findings of this research study, teaching English as a Second Language to children in public schools can be applicable and is culturally relevant to the Egyptian context. However, there might be some social and cultural differences and constraints when it comes to application in addition to various aspects regarding teacher preparation. Therefore, a new mechanism should be incorporated to overcome these challenges for better results. Moreover, a new paradigm shift in these teacher development programs is direly needed. Furthermore, ongoing support and follow up are crucial to help both teachers and students realize the desired outcomes.

Keywords : bilingual education, communicative approach, early childhood education, language and culture, second language acquisition

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