

Language Literacy Attrition: An Empirical Investigation

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Abstract : Our world is now operating under the auspices of globalization with its attendant language of 'global English.' In many parts of the world, the need for English is often accepted without much thought given to native languages. Indeed, this is the current situation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), with English encroaching into all areas of society, and especially forcefully into the education sector, where English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is on the rise. At the same time, Arabic literacy (i.e., the ability to read and write in Arabic) is declining among the UAE youth. Using a mixed-methods design, a study was conducted to gain insights into the use of Arabic by Emirati University students. The study examines how often Emiratis, males and females, use their native language (Arabic) in their daily lives, how they view their reading and writing skills in Arabic vis-à-vis their English literacy skills, and the extent to which they can demonstrate their literacy skills in Arabic. Clear evidence emerged showing that while Arabic as a dialect continues to be spoken on a daily basis, Arabic literacy is unquestionably losing ground. This was found to be motivated by educational, political, societal, and personal forces. These findings and their implications to language policy and existing bilingualism programs will be discussed. Suggestions for further research will also be made.

Keywords : Arabic, globalization, global English, literacy attrition, United Arab Emirates

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