

Teachers, Parents, and Educationalists' Perceptions towards Introducing English Early Age: An Explanatory Study

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Abstract

Teaching English at an early stage is a controversial topic. Many argue that we teach it at an early stage, whereas others strongly believe that we should not. The aim of this study was to explore the teachers, parents, and educationalists' understudy perceptions towards the introduction of the English language at an early stage in Libyan schools and their possible reasons for supporting/opposing this idea. For this purpose, the study employed a quantitative research design with a close-ended questionnaire in order to obtain the essential data for the study. Data was then analyzed manually, and the main findings indicated that the study's participants generally agree with the idea of introducing English at an early stage because they believe that teaching English at such a stage can a) make pupils very proficient in English, b) develop pupils' cognitive abilities, c) lead pupils to a better academic performance in their education; d) increase pupils' motivation for learning in the future. On the other hand, those who opposed introducing English did so because they thought it might a) negatively influence the pupils' acquisition of their mother language, Arabic; b) increase the burden on pupils; c) invade pupils' native culture. The study concluded with some pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research on the topic.

Keywords: *Perception, Early Age, Introducing English, Libyan Schools*



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INTRODUCTION

English has become a global language, and teaching it as a foreign or second language has also become increasingly important in most countries around the world. In many parts of the world, students start learning one or two languages in addition to their first language as a foreign language beginning early in their schooling. In Libya, the context of this study, English has recently become a compulsory subject in all primary schools beginning in grade one. The decision to introduce English has sparked a debate in Libyan society on the benefits and drawbacks of such a decision. Many people are concerned that the decision was a hasty one, and the stakeholders such as parents, teachers, pupils, and educationalists were not involved in such a vital decision. Therefore, the objective of this study is to explore teachers, parents, and educationalists' perceptions of introducing English at an early age in Libyan schools, as well as to find out the possible reasons behind their support/opposition to such a decision.

Problem Statement

The Ministry of Education has, as recently as two years ago, introduced the English language at an early age (i.e., in first, second, third, and four grades in primary schools) in Libya. This decision has sparked controversy in Libyan society. Some people do support this decision believing that it is a positive step for the education system in Libya, whereas some others believe that it may be harmful to teach a foreign language at an early age, as was widely reported in many previous studies (e.g., Al-Thaferi, 1999; Al-Shammari, 1989) in which they claim that language should not be taught to young learners until they are adults and fully proficient in their first language. Moreover, many educationalists and specialists in Libya argue that in taking such a significant step and

introducing such an important change, the Ministry of Education did not involve the stakeholders such as teachers and parents prior to taking such a decision. This study aims to explore the teachers, parents, and educationalists' views on the introduction of English at an early age, as well as to explore the reasons behind their support/opposition to the introduction of English at an early age.

Research Questions

The present study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. To What extent do teachers, parents, and educationalists agree/disagree with introducing English at an early age in Libyan schools?
2. What reasons, if any, could be behind the teachers, parents, and educationalists' decision to support and/or oppose introducing English at an early stage in Libyan schools?

Definitions of terms

An early stage: The term 'an early stage' is used in the current study to specifically refer to the stage from Grade 1 to Grade 4 in primary schools (i.e., from the age of six up to ten years old)

Educationalists: the terms educationalist is used in the current study to specifically refer to inspectors

Research Objectives

The current study attempts to achieve the following objectives:

- To find out whether or not teachers, parents, and educationalists agree with introducing English at an early age.
- To explore the possible reasons behind the teachers, parents, and educationalists' support/opposition to the introduction of English at an early age.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A brief Overview of Teaching English in the Libyan Context

In many countries around the globe, the English language has become an important language of all demands as well as it is making itself an important subject in education systems. In Libya's past and present-day, teaching English as a foreign language went through several stages under different conditions in its educational goals or policies. Sawani (2009, p.5-13) pointed out that during the 1970s and until the mid-1980s learning English was a compulsory component in Libyan schools and universities. Then, in 1986 teaching and learning English were completely banned due to some political reasons. In the middle-1990s, the policy of the Ministry of education concerning teaching English changed radically, and teaching English has resumed again in the Libyan education system. In 1993/1994, all Libyan students started learning the English language around the age of eleven in their primary school until the university stage, in which Libyan students learned English as one of the main subjects. In 2005/2006, English was taught in the 3rd class for only one year before it was canceled again for a

number of reasons. In 2006/2007, English was reintroduced and was taught from only 5th and 6th grades in primary school: (Al- Hussein S Mohsen, 2014:p59). Two years ago, the educational authority introduced English in grade one.

Definition Perception

Perception is an active process as one selectively perceives, organizes, and interprets based on past experiences. Berelson and Steiner (1964 cited in Vithessonthi:2005:p16) defined perceptions as "a complex process by which people select, organize and interpret sensory stimulation into a meaningful and coherent picture of the world ." Perception is also defined by Susuwele-Banda (2005) as "views or opinions held by an individual resulting from experience and external factors acting on the individual ." This study adopts Susuwele-Banda's (2005) definition of perception as a working definition as it is seen by the present researchers' to fit the purpose of the current study.

The Importance of Studying Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions towards Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Teachers and parents are essential elements in the educational system, and studying their perceptions should be taken into consideration when implementing foreign language programs for young children because their perceptions are one of the aspects of constructing validity (Fojkar & Pizorn, 2014). Moreover, investigating the perceptions of parents is vital because of the influence they have on the formation of children's attitudes. Thus, if parents believe that early learning of a foreign language is important and beneficial for the children, then the children too will have a positive attitude towards foreign language learning, and often, teachers' beliefs influence decisions regarding teaching methods, and further, they can affect students' viewpoints towards learning as viewpoints are often formulated early in life (Qbeita, 2011). In their study, Richards and Lockhart (cited in Habeeb 1996,p.8) pointed out that teachers' beliefs are founded on the goals, values, and beliefs teachers hold in relation to the content and process of teaching and their understanding of the systems in which they work and their roles within it.

Previous Studies on Parents', Teachers' Perceptions towards Introducing English at an Early Age.

Al-Mutawa (1996), conducted a study that aimed at exploring the attitude of Kuwaiti society toward introducing English as a foreign language in primary school. The study's findings suggested that teachers and parents that were investigated tended to have a negative attitude toward learning English early, and they disagreed with the idea of introducing a foreign language at an early stage/age. The study also indicated that parents and teachers under study believed that teaching English is only appropriate from the fifth grade onwards. Moreover, in another study in a different context, Bago (2008) undertook a study that explored the attitudes of Croatian parents towards early foreign language learning. The study aimed at determining whether Croatian parents had positive attitudes toward early foreign learning. The study revealed that parents had a positive attitude towards early foreign language learning. In addition, the findings

show that parents support teaching English at such an age because it develops both the child's cognitive ability and attitude towards other cultures, and it helps the child in acquiring his/her native language. Aytar A. G., Ogretir A. D.(2008) carried out a study on parents' and teachers' attitudes towards foreign language education at preschool education institutions in Turkey. The findings indicated that the majority of the participants strongly supported the need for foreign language education because they believed that it has positive effects on the child's cognitive-language development and skills. A similar study in the Croatian context conducted by Krajnovic and Letica (2009) found that the majority of parents have a positive attitude towards early foreign language learning. Moreover, the study suggested that the participants of the study supported early language learning because they think it can improve the children's motivation for learning in general. Another study by Damar et al. (2013) investigated the teachers' perceptions about teaching English to young learners in Turkey. The findings revealed that teachers were in favor of language education starting at the first age of primary school and even earlier during preschool. Habeeb (2013) conducted large-scale research on kindergarten teachers of English in Kuwait. The study revealed that the majority of teachers' supported teaching English at an early age (i.e., kindergarten stage). The reasons why teachers tend to support such an idea, as suggested by the study, was because they believed that teaching at such an age could increase/improve; a) students' confidence, b) their levels of understanding of other cultures, c) their social skills and relationships d) academic achievement and e) their motivation for continued learning of language. Fojkar & Pizorn (2015) undertook a study aimed to compare parents' and teachers' attitudes toward children learning a foreign language in the first years of formal education in Slovenia. The findings show that parents and teachers strongly support foreign language learning to start at an early age. Ying & Chun (2016) carried out a study on parental perceptions of early childhood English education in Taiwan. The study suggested that most Taiwanese parents were strongly in favor of early childhood English education because they believed that it provides opportunities for a better career for their children in the future. Finally, a recent study conducted in the Turkish context by Mert (2017), which explored the parents' and English language teachers' views about the optimal age for learning a foreign language, revealed that parents and teachers seemed to look positively at foreign language learning as they think that it positively affects the mental and language development of the early age language learners.

Previous Studies on the Impact of Introducing English at an Early Age

Previous studies on the positive impact of introducing English at an early age

A number of studies have been conducted on the positive impact of early language learning. Freudentein (1991), for example, claims that children who learn a foreign language early seem to be on a higher mental level than monolinguals of the same age in terms of verbal and non-verbal abilities. He also further argues that learning a foreign language early plays an important part in the developmental part of the children's character. In another study, AL-Mutawa (2005) looked at the possible effects of introducing L2 on L1 in primary schools in Kuwait. The study revealed that there were

no negative effects of L2 on L1 and that learning English has, in fact, enhanced the acquisition the L1 (Arabic). In Saudi Arabia, Gawi (2012) carried out a similar study that aimed at highlighting any possible impact of early foreign language learning. The study suggested that learners who start learning English at an early age have a generally higher level of proficiency in all language skills compared with students who start learning it at a later age. Another study in Saudi Arabia by Aljohani (2015) in which he investigated the impact of teaching English at an early stage on 2000 students in Saudi primary school on their achievements in Arabic subjects (grammar, reading, and writing). The research findings showed that there was no negative effect on students' Arabic subjects because English was taught through the traditional language-teaching methods such as the grammar-translation method, so students did not have a chance to practice the language; in addition, Arabic was taught intensively and extensively through many subjects such as speaking, writing, grammar, and Arabic literature. Al-Fayyumi et al. (2017) carried out a study that aimed to identify the impact of learning a foreign language on learning the Arabic language in the First Grade from the teachers' perspective in Amman (Jordan). The study showed that there is a positive impact of teaching English at an early age on the learners' L1. A recent and large-scale study by Chen et al. (2020) investigated the effect of learning English as a foreign language in early childhood on children's later English and Chinese achievement. The study revealed that there is a difference between students with early childhood EFL education. The study's findings claimed that there was no evidence of any harm to the learners' native language (Chinese) as a result of their exposure to English at an early stage.

Previous studies on the negative impact of introducing English at an early age

Although most of the available literature, as was discussed in the previous section, tended to be in favor of teaching English at an early age, there are few studies that are not in line with those studies. A study conducted by Hwang (1993) on how a second language affects the first language learning of Korean children found that teaching English at an early age has a negative effect on children's acquisition of their mother language. This is because, according to the study, children at this age have not yet mastered their native language, and learning a new language could be confusing to them. A similar study but in a different context (i.e., Egypt) conducted by Jalal (1993) in Egypt (cited in A- Mutawa 2011, p.30), also argues that teaching a foreign language at an early age has adverse effects on acquiring one's mother tongue, Arabic. Farzaneh and Movahed (2015) conducted a study on Iranian learners that aimed at exploring learning a second language at an early age and how it affects first language learning. The study's findings suggested that teaching English at an early age did negatively impact the learners' L1, particularly in pronunciation, where it was found that the learner's pronunciation of some Persian words was noticeably affected.

The Research Gap

On the issue of whether or not English should be introduced at an early age in education, it was evident from the literature presented above that although most previous studies suggest that teachers and parents are in favor of introducing English,

the overall picture is still unclear and the findings are contradictory as some of the literature go against the idea of such a step. The situation is not very different from the literature on the impact of intruding on a foreign language at an early age on the learners' mother tongue and their overall educational performance. Some of the studies presented argue that learning a foreign language can be beneficial and helps learners in many aspects, whereas other studies claim that it could have a negative impact on the learners' native language and other aspects. These contradictory findings in the existing literature require further investigations to reach new conclusions about the topic. This present study aims to do just this and tries to contribute to the existing literature by investigating such an issue in a different context (i.e., the Libyan context). Moreover, the current study hopes to add to the available literature by exploring the educationalists' views on the issue under study, which were not taken into account by all previous studies despite the fact they constitute an important part of the education process. This study, however, is not going to look at any possible impact of introducing English on the learners' native language. This is due to space limits and the fact that English has just recently been introduced at an early age in Libya and, therefore, it is too early for it to have any impact on the learners' native language.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

The current study employed a questionnaire as an instrument to collect the data. According to Meye et al. (2004:42), the questionnaire is a "list of structured questions, chosen with the view of eliciting reliable responses from a chosen sample." The questionnaire used in the present study was adapted from a study by Habeeb (2013). However, in order to suit the purpose of the present study, some minor changes where some questions/statements were removed, adjusted, and added by the researchers so that the questionnaire serves the purpose of the present study. The construction of the questionnaire went through a week of editing and revising by the researchers. Ninety-four questionnaires were sent to different schools in different parts of Libya, namely Sirte, Misrata, Tripoli, and Al-jufra. All questionnaires were filled in and returned except five, which, for some reason, were not returned. The data collected was analyzed as shown in section 3.5 below.

Study Participants

The selected participants of this study were teachers, parents, and educationalists. The participants were randomly chosen from different primary schools in different cities in Libya, namely Sirte, Musrata, Tripoli, and Al-jufra. The sample size for this study was sixty-two in total: twenty teachers, thirty-five parents, and seven educationalists. (The table below presents some background information about the study participants)

Table.1: Participants' Background Information

Category	No	Gender		Age
		F	M	
Teachers	20	16	4	25-35
Parents	35	15	20	30-50
Educationalists	7	6	1	33-45

Data Analysis Method

The data were analyzed manually and statistically due to the fact that it was relatively small, and there was no need to use computing software such as SPSS for the analysis. The data was analyzed by using a very simple equation as described below. To calculate the percentage of parents, teachers and educationalists response, the number of the responses was multiplied by 100 and then divided by the total number of participants. The following example illustrates the equation.

Example: $13 \times 100 / 20 = 65\%$

RESULTS

Research Question One: To what extent do teachers, parents, and educationalists agree with introducing English at an early stage in Libyan schools?

i. Teachers' Results

The results, as shown in the chart (1) below, reveal that the majority of teachers' participants (80%) agree with introducing English at an early stage, whereas only 10% of them disagree and 10% tend to partially agree with the decision.

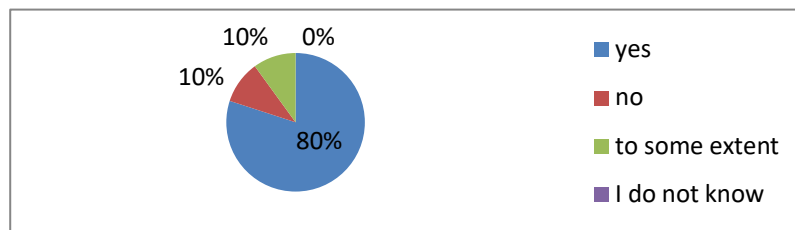


Chart (1): Teachers' Results

ii. Parents' Results

As shown in the chart (2) below, the results suggest that 82.85% of parent's participants tend to support the idea of introducing English at an early age, and only 8.57% tend to oppose this decision, while 8.57% of parents tend to partially agree with this decision.

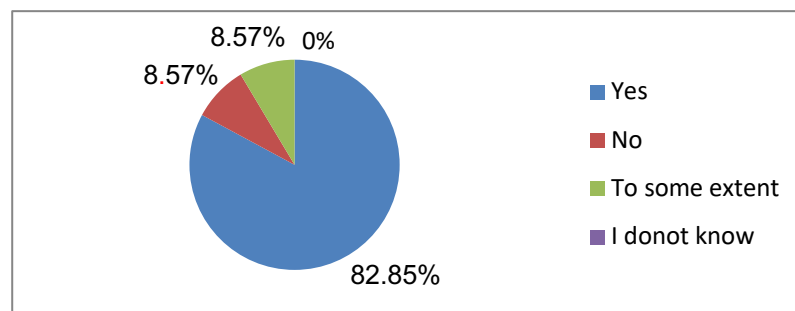


Chart (2): Parents' Results

iii. Educationalists' Results

As can be seen in chart (3) below, 14.28% of educationalists participants agree with teaching English at an early stage, whereas most of them (85.71%) are only in partial agreement with such an idea. Interestingly none of the educationalist participants in the present study totally disagreed with the decision to teach English at this stage.

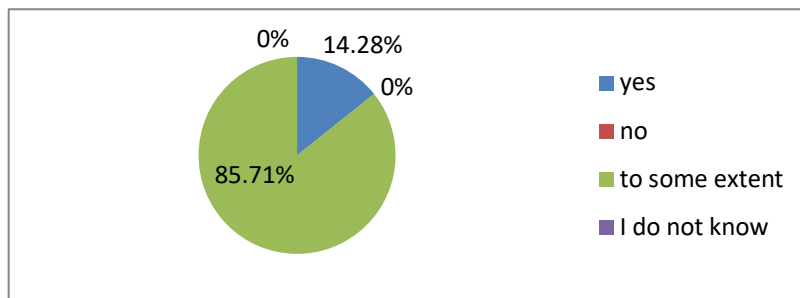


Chart (3): Educationalists' Results

Research Question Two: What reasons, if any, could be behind the teachers, parents, and educationalists' decision to support and/or oppose introducing English at an early stage in Libyan schools?

Teachers, Parents, and Educationalists' Reasons for Supporting the Introduction of English at an Early Age

i. Teachers' Results

As shown in section 4.1.1, subsection i above, 80% of teachers' participants agree with the idea of introducing English at an early stage. As for the reasons, all teachers (100%), as illustrated in chart (5) below, claim that one of the important reasons for supporting teaching English at an early stage is because it "develops pupils' cognitive abilities and increases their understanding of other cultures ."Moreover, the results have also shown that 81.25% of teachers believe that another important reason for supporting this idea is because it "increases pupils' motivation for learning in the future" as well as it "makes pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get better career in the future ."Finally, just over half of the teachers (56.25%) think that learning English at this stage could lead pupils to "a better academic performance in their education ".

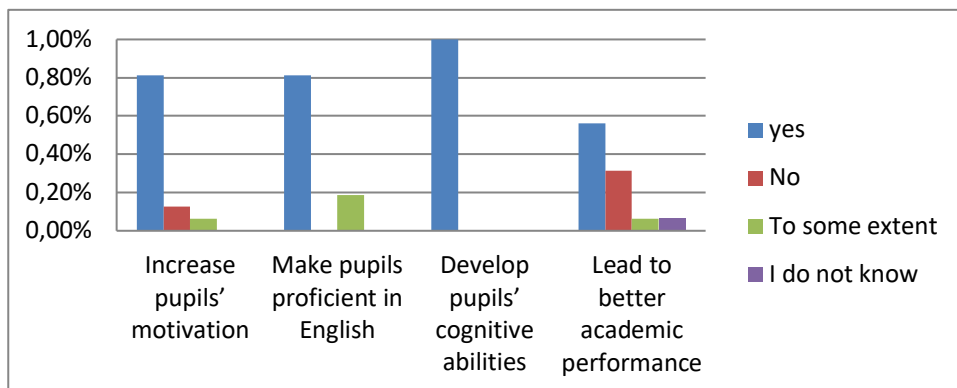


Chart (5): Teachers' Results for supporting Teaching English

ii. Parents' Results

As shown in 4.1.1, subsection ii above, 82.85% of parents' participants agree with introducing English at an early stage. As for reasons for supporting teaching English at this stage, all parents (100%), as demonstrated in chart (6) below, think that because it would "make pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get better career". Furthermore, most parents' participants (96.55) claim that teaching English early "develops pupils' cognitive abilities and increases their understanding of other cultures". In addition, the results illustrated that 93.10% of them claim that another reason for supporting this idea is because it "increases pupils' motivation for learning in the future". Finally, the results have also shown that many parents participants (82.75%) claim that teaching English at this stage could leave pupils "to a better academic performance in their education".

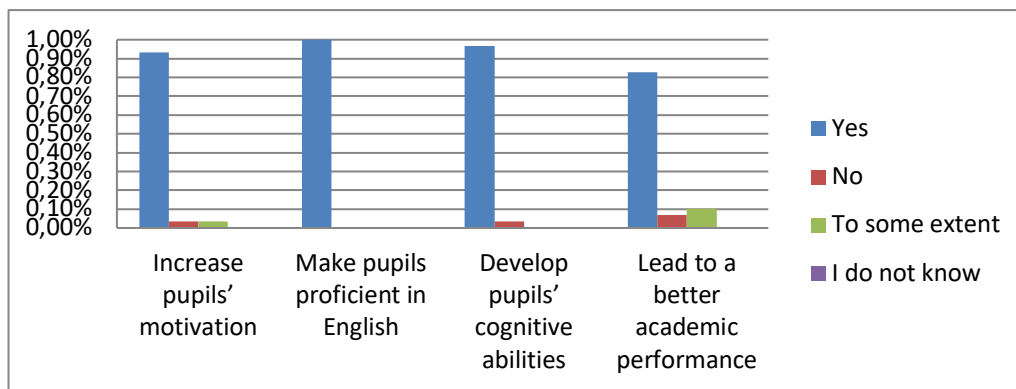


Chart (6): Parents' Results for Supporting Teaching English

iii. Educationalists' Results

As indicated in 4.1.1, subsection iii above, 14.28% of educationalists' participants agree with the idea of introducing English at an early stage. As for the reasons for supporting the teaching of English, about 14.28% of educationalists' participants, as illustrated below in chart (7), claim that the reasons for supporting it are because teaching English at this stage could "lead pupils to a better academic performance in their education" as well as it would "make pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get a better career ."And it also "increases pupils' motivation for learning in the future," and it develops pupils' cognitive abilities and increases their understanding of other cultures."

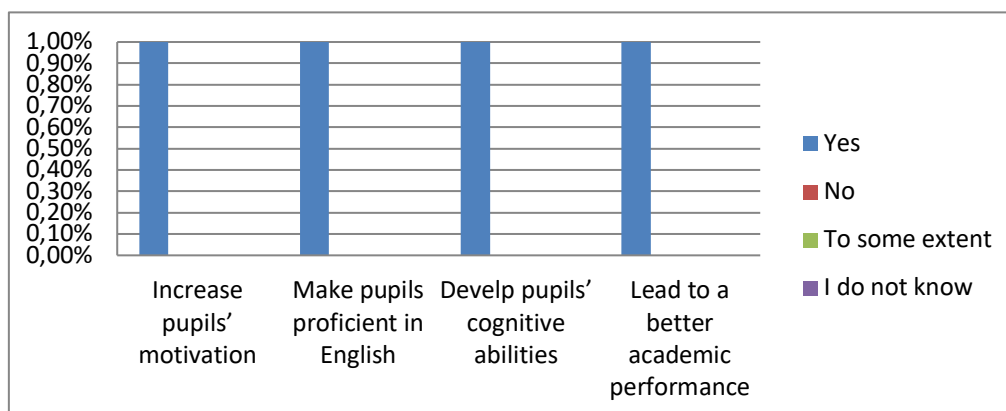


Chart (7): Educationalists' Results for Supporting Teaching English at an Early Stage

Teachers, Parents, and Educationalists' Reasons for Opposing Introducing English at an early age

i. Teachers' Results.

As mentioned in section 3.1, subsection i above, 10% of teachers' participants disagree with the idea of teaching English at an early age. As for the reasons for opposing this decision, all teachers (100%), as presented in chart (8) below, believe that "teaching English at this stage could negatively influence the pupils' native language (Arabic)". The other reason for half of the teachers' participants (50%) was because it "increases the burden on pupils." Interestingly, none of the teachers opposed teaching English on the ground that it was "a kind of cultural invasion".

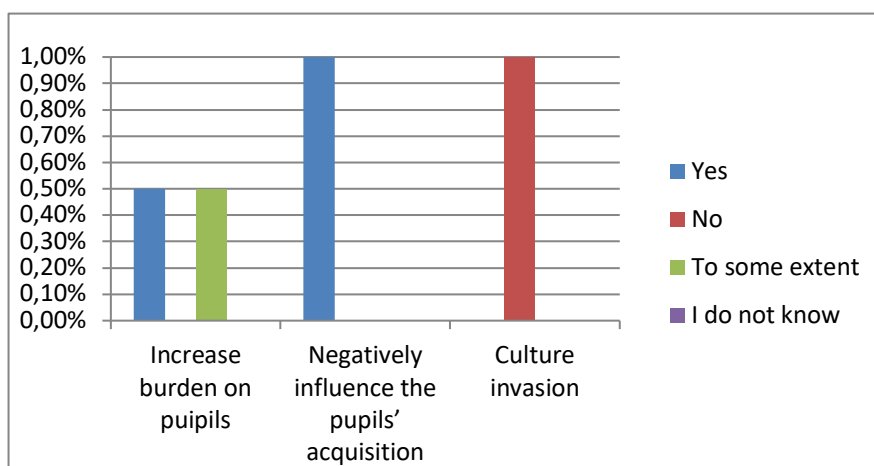


Chart (8): Teachers' Results for Opposing Teaching English

ii. Parents' Results

As illustrated in section 3.1, subsection ii above, 8.57% of parents' participants disagree with the decision of introducing English at an early stage. As for the reasons, most parents' participants (66.66%), as illustrated in chart (9) below, claim that teaching English at an early stage could "negatively influence the pupils' acquisition of their

native language (Arabic)". Moreover, about 33.33% of parents' participants claim that teaching English at this stage may "increase the burden on pupils". Finally, none of them seem to think that teaching English at this stage is a kind of cultural invasion.

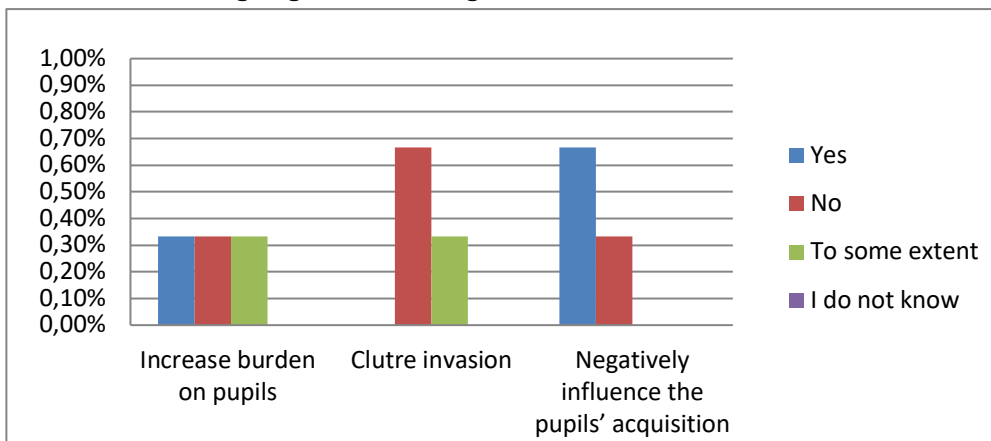


Chart (9): Parents' Results for Opposing Teaching English

Educationalists' Results

As shown earlier in section 3.1, subsection iii above, 85.71% of educationalists' participants disagree partially with the decision of introducing English at an early stage. As for the reasons, 66.66% of educationalists participants, as shown in chart (10) below, believe that teaching English at this stage could "negatively influence the pupils' acquisition of their native language (Arabic)". Furthermore, 33.33% of educationalists participants think that teaching English may "increase the burden on pupils" as well as is "a kind of cultural invasion."

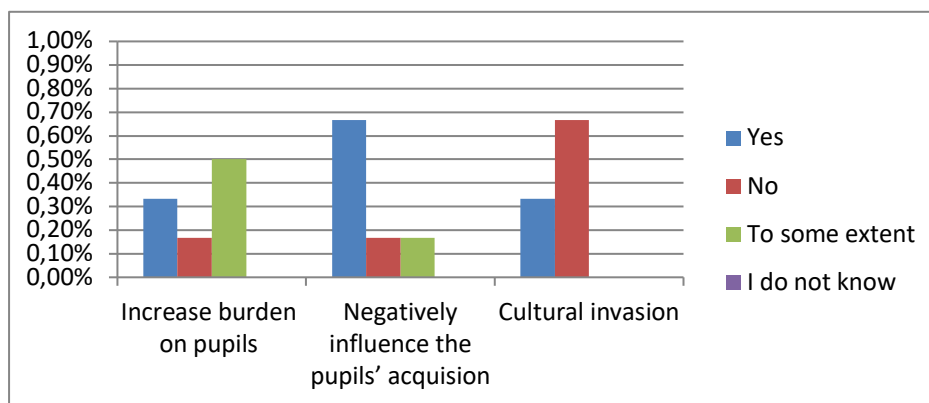


Chart (10): Educationalists' Results for opposing Teaching English

DISCUSSION

After having presented the results in the previous section, this section intends to discuss these results in relation to the current study research questions, the literature reviewed in section two, and the wider context of the study. The results have clearly demonstrated that the majority of parents and teachers were satisfied with the introduction of English at an early stage. Parents' support was slightly higher than

teachers. Educationalists, on the other hand, were too much lesser degree in support of this decision as the results show that most of them were only in partial agreement with introducing English at this stage. These results are, to a large extent, in line with previous studies (e.g., Bago, 2008; Ogretir, 2008; Letica, 2009; Damar, Gursoy & Korkmaz, 2013; Habeeb, 2013; Fojkar & Pizorn, 2015; see section 1.5.5 for more studies) reviewed in section two which show that parents teachers support the idea of teaching at an early stage. However, despite the fact that our findings are in line with existing relevant literature, the current findings are contradictory to Hwang's (1993) study, which showed that parents and teachers in Korea disagreed with teaching English at an early age as they thought it could have a negative effect on the pupils L1 among other things.

To return to our results and as were shown in section 3.1, all parents attributed their support for teaching English early to the fact that teaching English at such a stage would make pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get better careers. These findings are interesting as they suggest that parents' support for teaching English is instrumental as they see learning English at this stage could have economic benefits and would guarantee a better job for their children. In other words, parents agree that teaching English at an early stage is not driven mainly by academic reasons but rather by economic reasons. This, of course, is understandable, and it is, in fact, in line with most previous studies' findings (e.g., Ying & Chun, 2016), which suggest that parents want their children to learn English in order to get a good job in the future because the English language has become one of the essential requirements for most jobs in the Libyan market and throughout the world. This is not to suggest, however, that parents do not care about the academic benefits for their children in learning English. In fact, the results indicated that the second most important reason for parents in supporting the introduction of English was that they thought it would develop their children's cognitive ability and raise their understanding of other cultures. The results, if anything, probably suggest that it is a matter of priority for parents, and they probably see English as a way of ensuring a better future for their children by mastering English.

As for teachers, the results indicated that most of them support the introduction of English because it can raise the pupils' cognitive abilities and their understating of other cultures. This probably suggests that teachers are concerned more with the academic aspects rather than the future career of the pupils. Again, as with the parents, the results could show the degree of priority rather than the importance of learning English at this stage. Educationalists' support was noticeably lower than parents and teachers, as was shown earlier in the results section. However, those who support introducing English tend to give equal weight to the reasons for supporting such a step, as was clearly indicated in the results section 3.1. However, as stated in the results section, most educationalists seem to partially agree with the decision of introducing English at an early stage. In other words, educationalists seem to be cautious about introducing English at an early stage, and therefore they were not in full agreement with such idea. This takes us to the discussion of the results regarding the opposition to introducing

English by some of the teachers, parents, and educationists under study. Most parents, teachers, and educationists opposing the teaching of English at an early stage claim that they do so because they fear that introducing English at such a stage could have a negative impact on the pupils' L1 (Arabic). They also believe, to a lesser extent, that introducing English as a subject at this early stage increases the burden on the pupils in terms of the daily and weekly classes they have to take and the efforts they have to exert in their studies. The findings regarding the fear of the negative influence of teaching English at an early stage on the pupil's mother tongue are contradictory to most previous studies (e.g., AL-Mutawa, 2005; Al- Fayyoumi et al., 2017, for more studies on this issue, see section 1.5.5) which claim that learning English at an early stage has no negative impact on the pupils L1. The studies which seem to be in line with the current study's findings regarding the possible influence of teaching English early on the mother tongue were by Farzaneh and Movahed (2015), and Jalal (1993), which showed that teaching English at an early age did have a negative impact on the learners' L1 (see section 1.5.5 for more details about the study).

However, despite the fact that most of the studies reviewed in section 1.5.5 claim that teaching English at an early stage tends to have little or no impact whatsoever on the pupils' L1, and despite the fact it is a well-established fact by many linguists that children are quite capable of learning more than two languages quite easily and proficiently, we do think that current study's participants (i.e., the parents, teachers, and educationists) fear that introducing English at such stage may have a negative impact on the pupils L1 (Arabic) is quite justifiable in the context of the present study. Although we were unable to find any study which confirms this, from our experience as students, teachers, and parents, Arabic standards among students tend to be very poor at all educational stages and beyond. Many parents, teachers, and employers complain that students encounter many problems in almost all aspects of their L1, such as reading, writing, speaking. It is beyond the scope of this study to elaborate on the possible reasons for such low standards of Arabic but what is relevant here is that it is probably safe to say that parents, teachers, and educationists worry that introducing a foreign language at such stage for pupils who are already weak in their L1 could have consequences on the Arabic language in future is justified and sensible.

To sum up, the present study's findings show that most teachers, parents' participants, and, to a lesser degree, educationalists are happy with introducing English early in school. These findings suggest that the Ministry of Education's decision to introduce English early in schools was probably a good step for most parents and teachers under study. However, as will be shown later in section 5, the current study's findings must be taken cautiously as they only represent a small sample of the target population. Moreover, as the results demonstrated, not all participants agreed with the decision. In other words, although the present study suggests that most participants agree with such decision and, therefore, do support the Ministry's decision to introduce English early in schools, findings also suggest that a good number of participants were unhappy with such a decision. The views of those who agree or disagree are vital, and they should be

taken into account in any future plans to either replace, expand, adjust, change or abandon the existing policy regarding teaching English early in Libyan schools. This is because teachers' and parents' perceptions/views are, as was discussed in section 1.5, very important as they are considered to be key players in the educational process, and they should be involved in shaping the educational policies. Moreover, those who disagree with teaching English early in school have voiced important concerns regarding the possible negative impact of the foreign language on the pupils' L1. This study did not look at the actual positive or negative impact of introducing English early on the pupils' L1 because the decision was quite recent, and it is too early to assess such impact. As will be suggested in section 5.2, further research is urgently needed to look at whether or not introducing English at such an early stage would have had any positive or negative impact on Arabic English. We believe that such a study would provide us with concrete evidence on whether or not the Ministry of Education should carry on, adjust or abandon its current policy on teaching English in Libya at an early stage.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study aimed at exploring teachers, parents, and educationalists' perceptions towards introducing English at an early stage, as well as finding out the reasons, if any, behind their support/opposition for such a decision. To do so, the study has sought to answer the following research questions:

- 1- *To what extent do teachers, parents, and educationalists agree/disagree with introducing English at an early stage in Libyan schools?*
- 2- *What reasons, if any, could be behind the teachers, parents, and educationalists' decision to support and/or oppose introducing English at an early stage in Libyan schools?*

To achieve its stated aims presented in section 1.3 and to answer the research questions which have just been reiterated, the current study employed a quantitative design using a close-ended questionnaire to collect the data needed for the study. The data was then analyzed manually and statistically, and the following findings were revealed:

- 1- Most teachers (80%) and parents (82.85%) supported introducing English at an early stage, whereas most educationalists (85.71%) only partially supported such decision.
- 2- Most teachers attributed their support to introducing English at an early stage for the following reasons:
 - i. It would develop pupils' cognitive abilities and increases their understanding of other cultures (100%).
 - ii. It would increase pupils' motivation for learning in the future (82.25%).
 - iii. It would make pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get a better career in the future (81.25%).
3. Most parents attributed their support to introducing English at an early stage for the following reasons:
 - i. It would make pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get better career" (100%)

ii. It would develop pupils' cognitive abilities and increase their understanding of other cultures (96.55%).

4. Most educationalists, unlike teachers and parents, thought all reasons were equally important, and they attributed their support for introducing English at an early stage for following reasons:

i. Teaching English at this stage increase pupils' motivation in the future.

ii. It would make pupils very proficient in English which would help them to get a better career.

iii. It develops pupils' abilities and increases their understanding of other cultures.

iv. It could lead pupils to a better academic performance in their education.

5. Most parents, teachers, and educationalists attribute their opposition to introducing English at an early stage for the following reasons:

i. It could negatively influence the pupils' acquisition of their mother tongue (Arabic).

ii. It would increase the burden on pupil

Study Limitations

No research is perfect, and this current study is not an exception. Despite the fact that the present students' researchers have put effort into making this research objective valuable, there ought to be some limitations that need to be acknowledged. One of these limitations is that the current study used a single research method and design, namely questionnaire and quantitative design, to collect the data needed for the study. The study sample was rather small, which might not be large enough to draw a firm conclusion on the topic of the study. Moreover, this study fell short of seeking pupils' perceptions on the issue under study.

Recommendations for Further Research

Based on the limitations of the present study mentioned above, further research is needed in order to get a clearer picture of the issue under study. The following are some suggestions for further research:

1. Further research should be conducted on the actual impact of teaching language at an early stage on the pupils' L1.

2. This study could/should be replicated using a larger and more representative sample and multi-research methods to capture more opinions and views and get deeper insights about the issue under study.

3. Pupils' perception of introducing English at an early stage should be sought.

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