

Why Arab parents speak English to their children at home



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Abstract

This study sought to find out why Arab parents speak English (L2) to their children at home, the effects of this practice on Arabic (L1), and misconceptions about L1 and L2 acquisition. The survey results coming from 150 parents showed academic, pragmatic, sociolinguist, and psychological reasons such as making it easy for children to master English, to help them practice it, learn new vocabulary, and pronounce words correctly. Their children go to an international school and are more fluent in English. Some were born in an English-speaking country. Many consider English more important than Arabic for future college study and future jobs. English is the global language, and it is useful and needed everywhere. Children need it to communicate with the foreign housemaid and other foreigners in the community. All parents believe that speaking English is prestigious, a sign of high class and like to brag about it. Some suffered because they did not speak English well and do not want their children to suffer.

This status quo created a gap between children's knowledge of English and Arabic. Some children do not speak L1 at all, respond to questions in English and conversation in Arabic, have difficulty reading and writing Arabic and communicating with grandparents and relatives.

The results revealed misconceptions about L1 and L2 acquisition, and that learning English in childhood has no negative effects on Arabic and has positive effects on academic achievement.

The results will be discussed in light of L1 and L2 acquisition research, the optimal age for learning L2, the effect of learning English on children's L1 language skills and academic achievement and factors that lead to successful L1 and L2 language learning.

Key words

Arab children; Arab parents; first language acquisition; L2 at home; second language acquisition

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