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Entitled

*EXPLORING THE BILINGUAL AND BILITERACY PRACTICES OF EMIRATI FIFTH GRADE
STUDENTS: A MIXED METHOD STUDY*

by

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Abstract

This study explores bilingualism and biliteracy practices among Emirati fifth grade students who are learning both English and Arabic languages, and using English as a medium of instruction for other subjects. The study examined different aspects of bilingualism, including the linguistics aspects, language transfer, cognitive and metacognitive factors, sociocultural influences and ultimately bilingualism and biliteracy practices. It was a mixed methodology study. In the first phase 350 Arabic and English Teachers ($n=350$) – English teachers =150: Arabic teachers =200 – were surveyed about bilingualism and biliteracy practices. The second phase featured an in-depth investigation of student bilingualism and biliteracy via qualitative interviews with two English and two Arabic teachers, and three students. There was also a document analysis and classroom observations. The results revealed that the fifth grade students used their first language as tool to mediate their English language learning through codeswitching, translation and translanguaging: the students did not possess adequate linguistic abilities in English or, to a lesser degree, in Arabic according to their expected grade level. The teachers use scaffolding strategies and students deployed cognitive and metacognitive strategies to learn both language. The Arabic teachers viewed their students' knowledge of Arabic as superior to their English but agreed that students still needed a lot of support in Arabic. The English teachers, Arabic teachers and students all agreed that parental involvement and support was lacking. Finally, there was no orchestrated effort evident to help students to grow bilingually or to enrich their biliteracy practices. The study recommended a general reconceptualization of the bilingualism and biliteracy program to focus on developing an intervention program to develop linguistic skills in both languages and improve cross-linguistic transfer. This requires appropriate teacher training and greater parental involvement.

Keywords: UAE Bilinguals, Biliteracy, Primary Grade, English and Arabic, Aspects of Bilingualism.