

# A Comparative Study between Monolingual and Bilingual Teaching Methodologies of English in a Health Sciences University in the United Arab Emirates

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## Abstract

This study examines the monolingual and the bilingual methods of teaching English to investigate which method is more effective and best achieves the learning outcomes of a language course. It also examines which method is preferred by the English language learners and gives better performance results. The study was conducted in RAK Medical and Health Sciences University located in The United Arab Emirates. The participants were Arab students who were divided into two groups. Each group was exposed to a different teaching method but the curriculum was the same. Then a questionnaire was distributed to determine the method that was preferred by the students as well as the method which resulted in a better performance. The results of the survey and the students' performance results showed that the bilingual method proves to be a more successful and convenient method in English classes than the monolingual method.

**Keywords:** monolingual, bilingual, teaching methodologies, English Language Learners (ELL), Arabic, translation

## 1. Introduction

In teaching English as a second language there is a question that has always been raised. That question is whether instruction should be in English only or it should include the intervention of the students' mother tongue, which is Arabic in this study.

Several studies were conducted in this matter, and it was argued that involvement of the bilingual method provides an advantage over the English-only method in second language (SL) learning and English learners in bilingual condition feel more satisfied with the teaching method (Slavin, R.E. & Cheung, A., 2005). Other studies also argue that the language of teaching English as a second language should be English only without the intrusion of the mother tongue of students. Most bilingual programs for ELL (English Language Learners) students implemented have not been additive but rather they have followed the transitional model (Menken, K. & Solorza, C., 2014). In other words, the purpose of bilingual programs for ELLs has been to educate them to transition into an English-dominant society. And even though bilingual education advocates have demonstrated bilingual education program to be highly effective for teaching English to ELLs, English-only policies still hold a dominant position (Han, Jung & Park, Kyongson, 2017). This study examines both methods to investigate which method is more effective and best achieves the learning outcomes of the course. It also examines which method is preferred by the English language learners.

The study was conducted in RAK MHSU which is a multicultural medical and health sciences university located in Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates. The university has students from various nationalities, but the study focuses on two first year groups from three colleges (Dental, Pharmacy and Nursing) whose mother tongue is Arabic. It examines the methods of teaching English and whether Arabic language should be used in teaching English language and ESP (English for specific purposes) or not.

The study also aims to compare the students' opinion and preference of monolingual and bilingual teaching

methodologies of English as well as comparing the performance of two different students' groups one was taught by the bilingual method and the other was taught by the monolingual method. It also examines whether the students' opinions coincide with their results or it is a matter of stereotyping and cultural comfort.

The learning outcomes of the course are to improve the English language of the students who failed in the Placement Test required for registration in the university and to make the students able to communicate in their chosen health science field. It should also improve their reading, writing, general vocabulary, medical vocabulary and make them able to construct a well-structured essay in English. The ENG101 course assumes that students have a band score of 5 or equivalent score in TOEFL.

The participants who were subjected to both teaching methods were tested in what they learned. The courses and the tests included general vocabulary, medical vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and writing essays. Then a questionnaire was distributed to determine the method that was preferred by the students as well as the method which resulted in a better performance.

### *1.1 Literature Review*

Although historically, in most teaching methodologies, English should be taught in English language only without any intervention of the students' mother tongue. The use of bilingualism has been employed as a instruction method in some English classes. Translation of complex words and ideas in Arabic facilitates learning English. Talking only in English to non-English background students did not help students have interest in their studies (Valdés, G., 1998) and bilingual teaching methods help students achieve a lot in their second language learning (Purkarthofer, J. & Mossakowski, J., 2011). Some linguists believe that the use of bilingualism should only be a supporting method. But as linguistic and societal demands upon minor language groups are shifting, new perspectives of second language acquisition are rejecting the monolingual norm, and new forms of second language education are being developed to provide a better policy and atmosphere (Han, Jung & Park, Kyongson., 2017).

Another opinion is that first language usage may be useful to learning English in some milieus, whereas in other milieus it may hinder language learning by depriving learners of a full and rich participation and communication (Al-Jadidi, H & Sanguinetti J., 2010).

However, both monolingual and bilingual lecturers may have same teaching methods. But these methods are not stable as they are affected by personal skills. Lecturers' communication skills and personal engagement with the students are important factors of success for both bilingual and monolingual lecturers (Aslam, M.S., 2013)

Some researchers concluded that speaking in English only encourages the clever and knowledgeable students and creates barriers to the less clever ones. Others believe that translating in Arabic is a waste of time (Cook, Vivian., 2012). Some believe that bilinguals are teacher centered whereas monolinguals are student-centered because they resort to other methods than translation including class activities that involves students. The use of the mother tongue of students by teachers of English as a communication method is to compensate for their inability to communicate in English (Forman, R., 2008). But both acquisition and learning are required according to some linguistic specialists. Krashen had different views on second language acquisition and emphasized the exposure to comprehensible input rather than output. Although he argues that learners can acquire language when they are in the environment through receptive skills, reading or listening, he also showed the limitation of comprehension activities as they could provide little chance to engage students in the classroom (Krashen, S., D., 2009).

There are also recommendations that by conveying meaning in two languages, bilingual teachers can create connotations through two cultures and students can understand new connotations as well as learning language and how it functions. Teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL) should be aware of the culture in which they are teaching and develop their skills of teaching accordingly (Xiao, Lixin., 2006). This is because classroom teaching reflects culture intensely, and opinions of teaching and learning are strongly affected by culture (Forman, R., 2008)

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The hypothesis of this study was that the monolingual teaching method is more effective than the bilingual method in second language acquisition, and more preferred to the learners as from our point of view as lecturers, learners grasp English better if only English is used in class to enhance English language acquisition. More class communication and action involved when no Arabic is used because the teacher tries to use all the facilities and all the skills he/she has to deliver the information. In this process, though it may take longer time, yet whatever is being taught lingers in the head of the learners and the vocabulary is retained for a long time without the help of

bilingualism. This is totally the opposite when Arabic is used in translation because when students acquire something easy, it goes as easy as it is acquired.

The participants of this study were divided into two groups. Each group was exposed to a different teaching method. They were all Arabic speaking from different Arab countries or locals from the United Arab Emirates. They all have Arabic as their first language and English was the target language to learn or improve.

Participants were taught general vocabulary, medical vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension and writing essays. The first group (60 students) is a monolingual method class and the other group (60 students) is a bilingual method class. Both groups were given the same materials. They both had hard and soft copies of the material being taught as well as the PowerPoint presentations used in teaching. In classes they were trained to write different types of essays and they had group discussions. The course was of 45 hours distributed as 3 hours weekly. During the course, students had writing assignments, a quiz, and a continuous assessment exam. These grades were compiled and added to a final comprehensive exam at the end of the course. All the exams, as well as the quiz, were multiple choice questions. The quiz and tests examined the participants' knowledge of vocabulary, grammar and comprehension, whereas the assignments tested their writing skills and ability to construct a well written paragraph or several paragraphs.

Then a survey which consisted of 16 questions that included satisfaction and preference of the learning group in different aspects was distributed among both groups. The first section of the questionnaire includes different fields tackled in the English course which deals with language skills in general like speaking, writing, grammar ...etc. The students were asked about their preferences whether these fields should be taught using English only or should be taught in English by the aid of some Arabic which is their native language. The second part of the survey questioned their cultural satisfaction and communication preferences. Finally, the survey questioned their general preference regarding each method adopted in each class and it questioned their performance as well.

### **3. Results and Discussion**

The statistical analyses of the results of the survey and the students' performance showed that students responded differently depending on the group they were placed in.

Regarding explaining the general vocabulary, those students who were exposed to the bilingual method agreed with a percentage of 93% to use the bilingual method. Whereas the students who were exposed to the monolingual method agreed with a lower percentage of 66%. For medical vocabulary, the percentage was very close to the previous section with a percentage of agreement of 95% in the bilingual group and the same 66% in the monolingual group. Therefore, more than half of both groups agree that Arabic should aid English in the explanation of both general and medical vocabulary with a higher percentage in the bilingual group.

As for activities related to pronunciation, listening, speaking, and essay writing, it is noticed that the percentage ranges from 72% to 79% who agree to use the bilingual method in the bilingual group, whereas, it ranges from 38% to 57% of agreement in the monolingual group. As for grammar the percentage of agreement to use the bilingual method was higher with a percentage of 71% in the bilingual group to a close 66% in the monolingual group. Therefore, the monolingual group does not strongly agree to use Arabic in listening, speaking, pronunciation or essay writing, whereas, their agreement was higher when it came to grammar. It is obvious that they do not agree to the interference of Arabic when it comes to conversation or expressing oneself in writing. This leans towards the interpretation that students are aware of the need to practice writing and speaking skills in the English language.

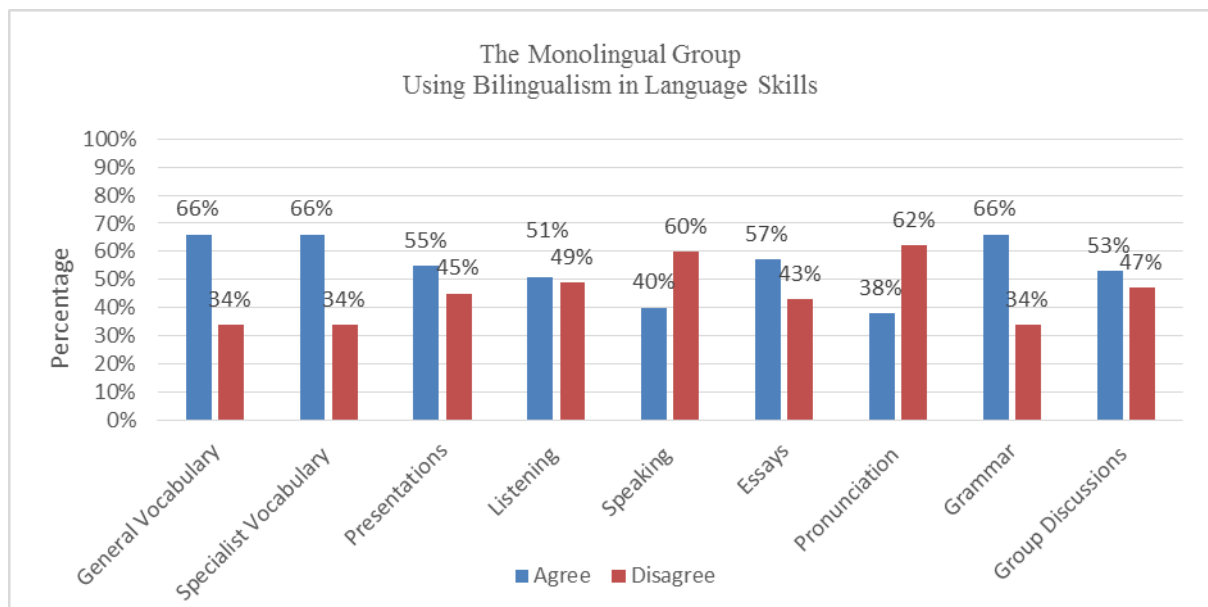
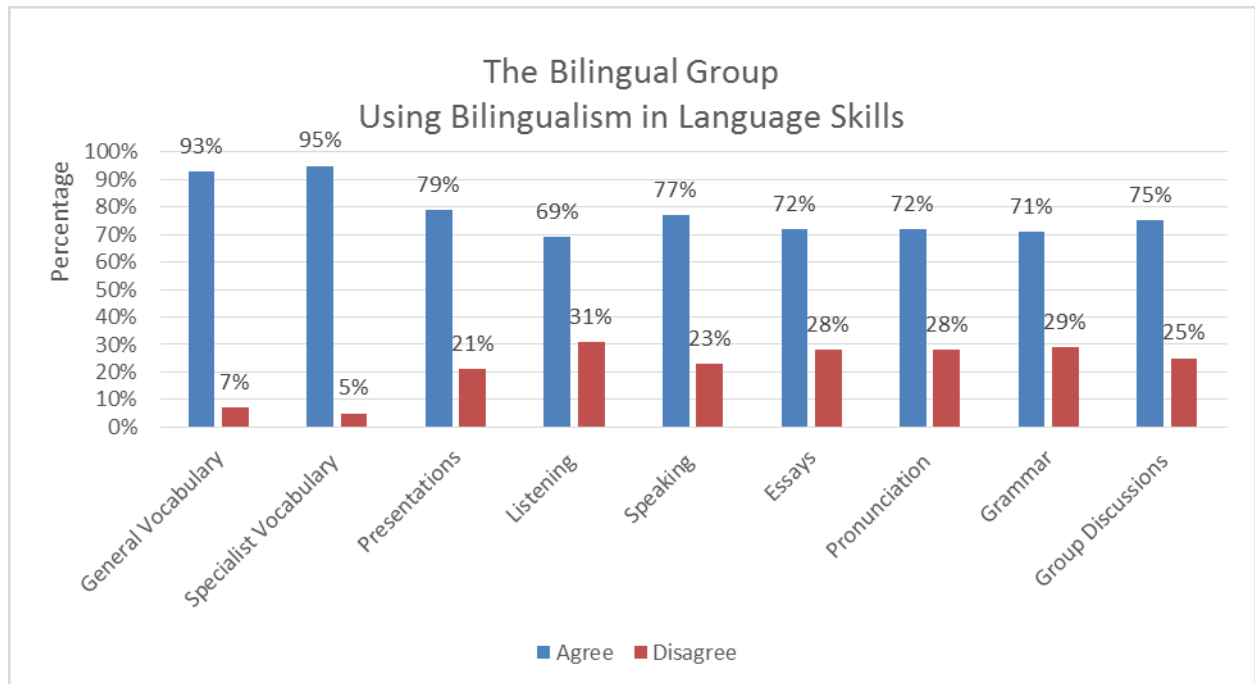
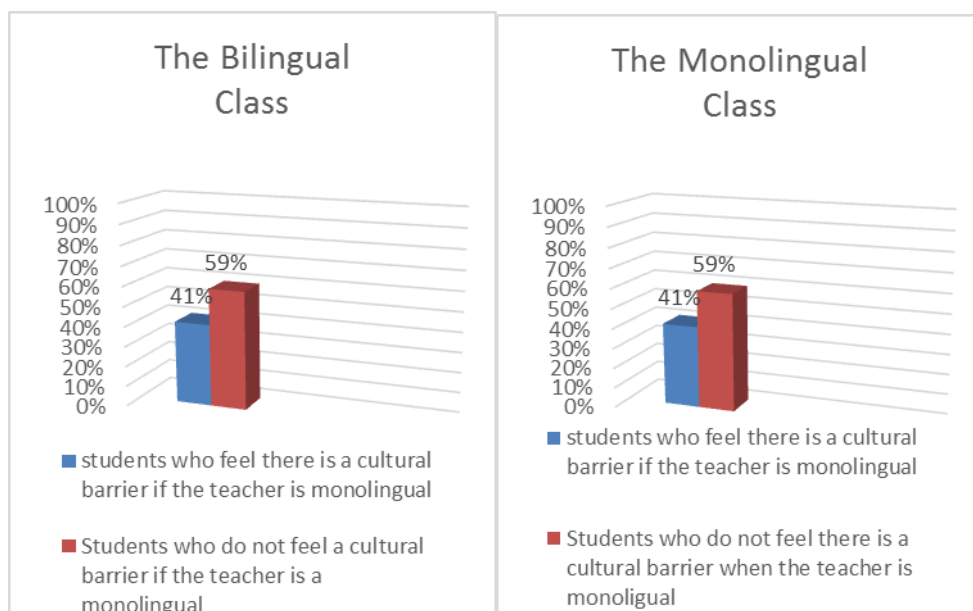


Figure 1. The Use of Bilingualism in Teaching Language Skills

In response to the question whether the students feel any cultural barrier when their lecturer is a monolingual, both groups, the bilingual as well as the monolingual, gave the same result. In both groups, 59% of the class agreed that there is no cultural barrier if their lecturer is a monolingual. Nevertheless, when they were asked whether they feel any cultural barrier with a bilingual lecturer, the percentage increased to 85% in the bilingual class and a surprising further increase of 89% in the monolingual class.

**Cultural Barrier If the Lecturer is a Monolingual**



**Cultural Barrier if the Lecturer is a Bilingual**

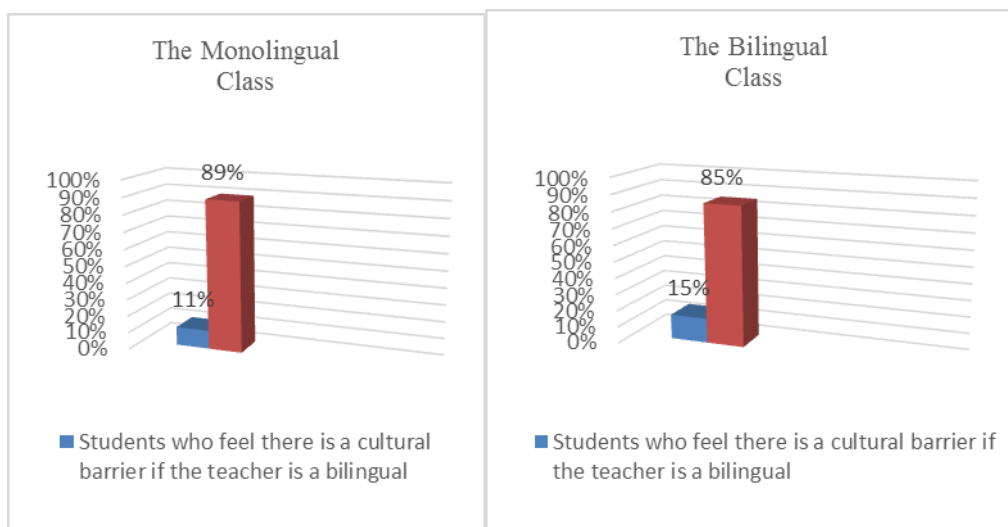


Figure 2. Cultural Barriers

In spite of the fact that both groups gave a high percentage for the bilingual regarding the absence of cultural barrier yet, a high percentage of students do not have a communication problem with the monolingual lecturer who does not speak Arabic. The bilingual group gave a percentage of 74%, whereas the monolingual group gave a percentage of 64% which means they do not have a communication problem.

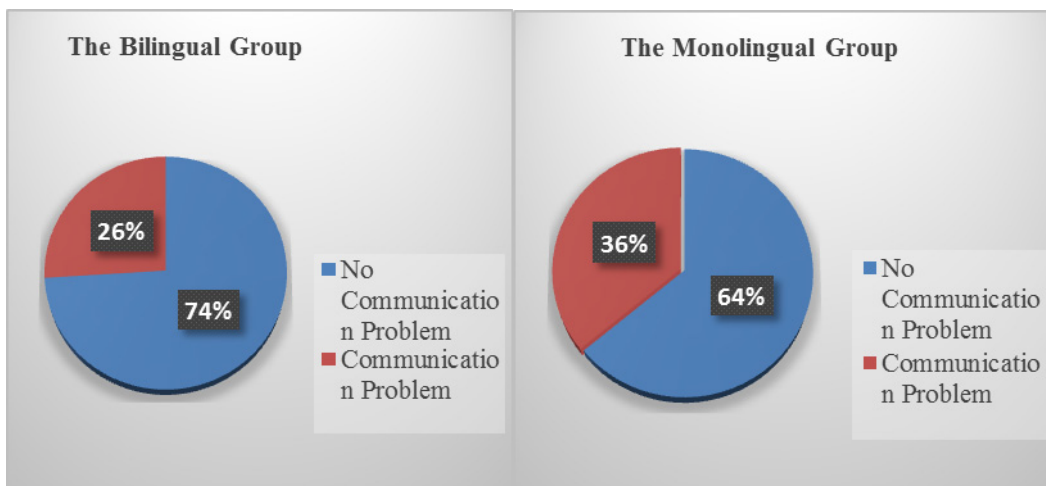


Figure 3. Communication Problem if the lecturer is a monolingual

As for translating some points in Arabic to aid in the comprehension for Arab students, the percentage was very close in both groups who think that translating is not a waste of time or effort (79% in the bilingual group to 75% in the monolingual group). Moreover, the percentage was very close also when asked if translation in Arabic is beneficial and sometimes better be used in correcting their errors with a percentage of 90% in the bilingual group to 83% in the monolingual group. Therefore, both groups strongly agree that translating in their mother tongue is useful and not time consuming.

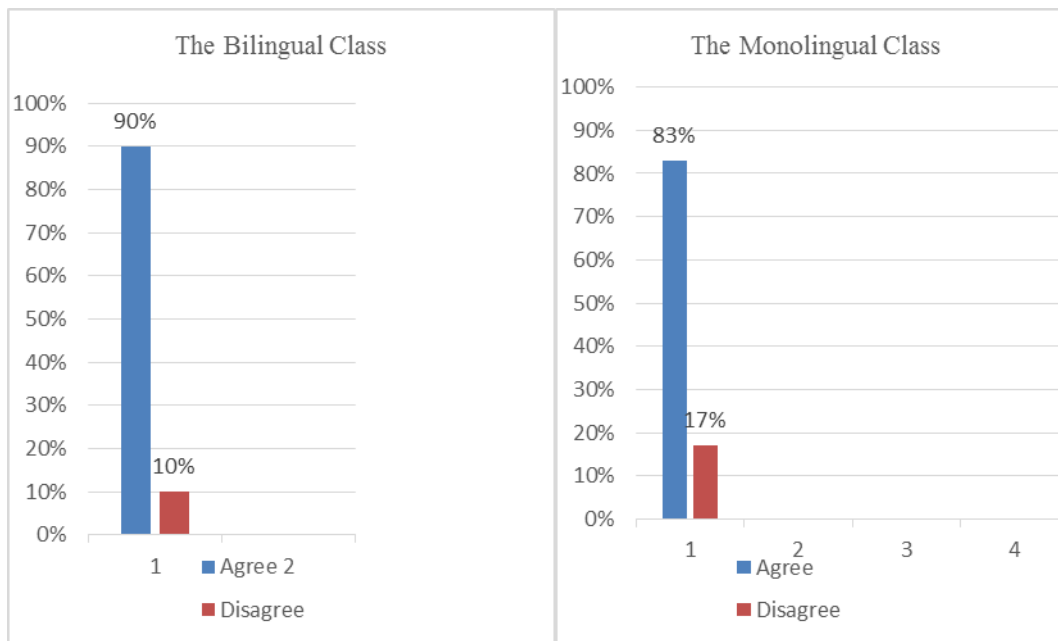


Figure 4. Using Translation to Aid in Comprehension in English classes

Moreover, both groups agree - with a very close percentage of 80% to 90% - that using translation to help in analyzing and identifying their errors is better than explaining their errors in English only.

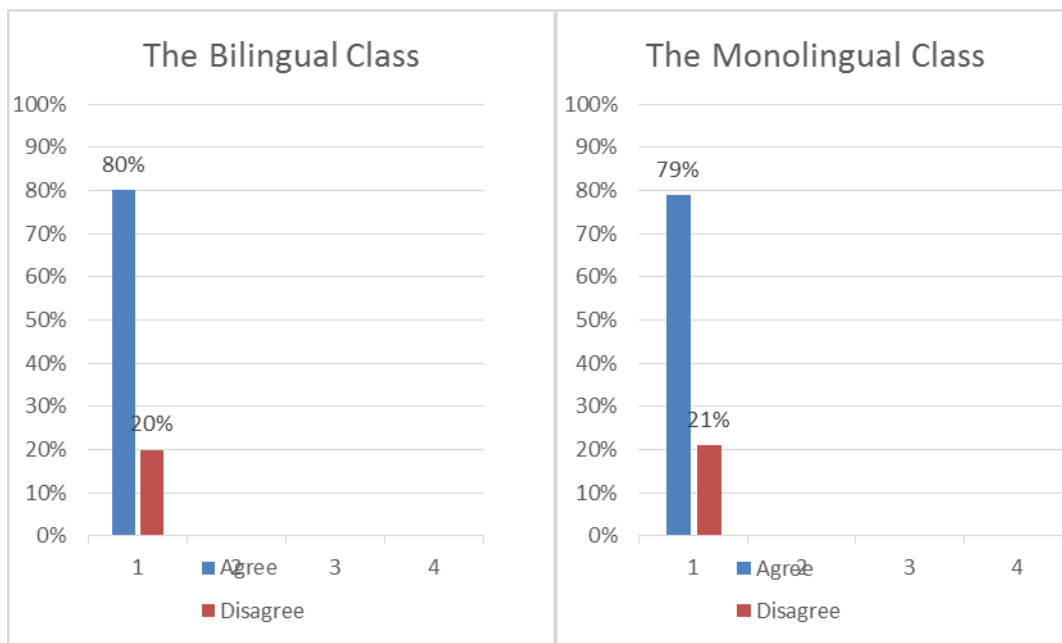


Figure 5. Using translation in Analyzing Students' Errors

In response to the need to use learning aids like dictionaries, mobiles, electronic or online dictionaries in English classes, 33% of the bilingual group used them to enhance understanding and learning English. Whereas a higher percentage of 80% in the monolingual group are using dictionaries. This points towards the conclusion that the need of using translating gadgets is reduced as the lecturer facilitates the requirements of the students by using their native language.

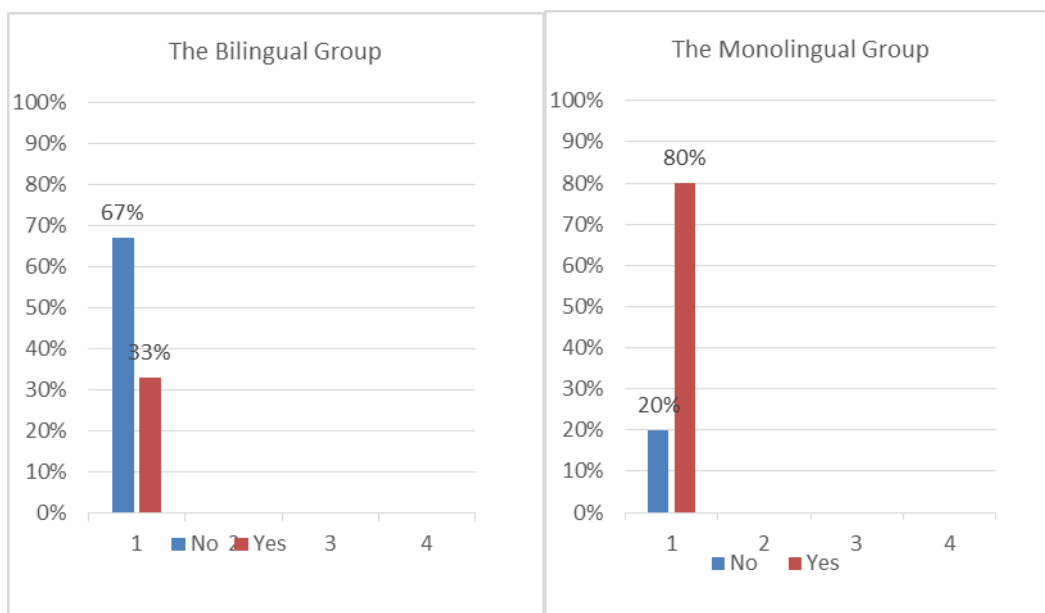


Figure 6. Need to use dictionaries

A judicious use of the Arabic language in English language teaching was preferred by both groups. The bilingual group did not prefer to use it a lot but they totally refused the concept of never using Arabic in class. As a matter of fact, none of the participants from the bilingual class (zero%) agreed never to use Arabic in class. In the monolingual group only 9% refused totally to use Arabic in class. But, students of the bilingual group agreed that Arabic should be used sometimes with a 71% to 40% agreement from the monolingual group that Arabic should be used sometimes in English classes. Yet both groups also did not totally agree to use Arabic a lot as the percentage was very weak, only 11% in the bilingual group to 19% in the monolingual group. Therefore, students do not want Arabic to be used too frequently as it might compromise on their learning the English language. However, they strongly agree with the fact that it should not be done away with entirely.

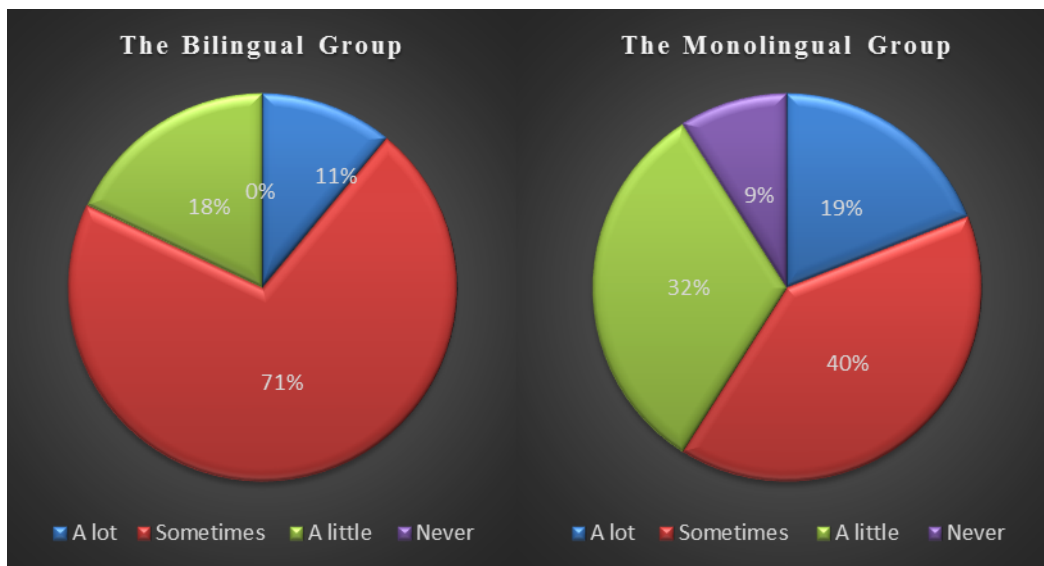


Figure 7. Students' preferences about the frequency of using Arabic in English classes

The last section of the survey questioned directly the students' preferences psychologically and academically. The question on the comfort level of the students on the preference of bilingual/monolingual generated 67% of the bilingual group feel comfortable psychologically if the lecturer is bilingual whereas 51% of the monolingual group would feel comfortable psychologically with a bilingual lecturer. Whereas, 8% only from the bilingual group and 7% from the monolingual group prefer a monolingual lecturer. On the other hand, 25% of the bilingual class and 42% in the monolingual class feel there is no difference whether the lecturer is monolingual or bilingual. Therefore, the preference of a bilingual lecturer clearly prevails in both groups.

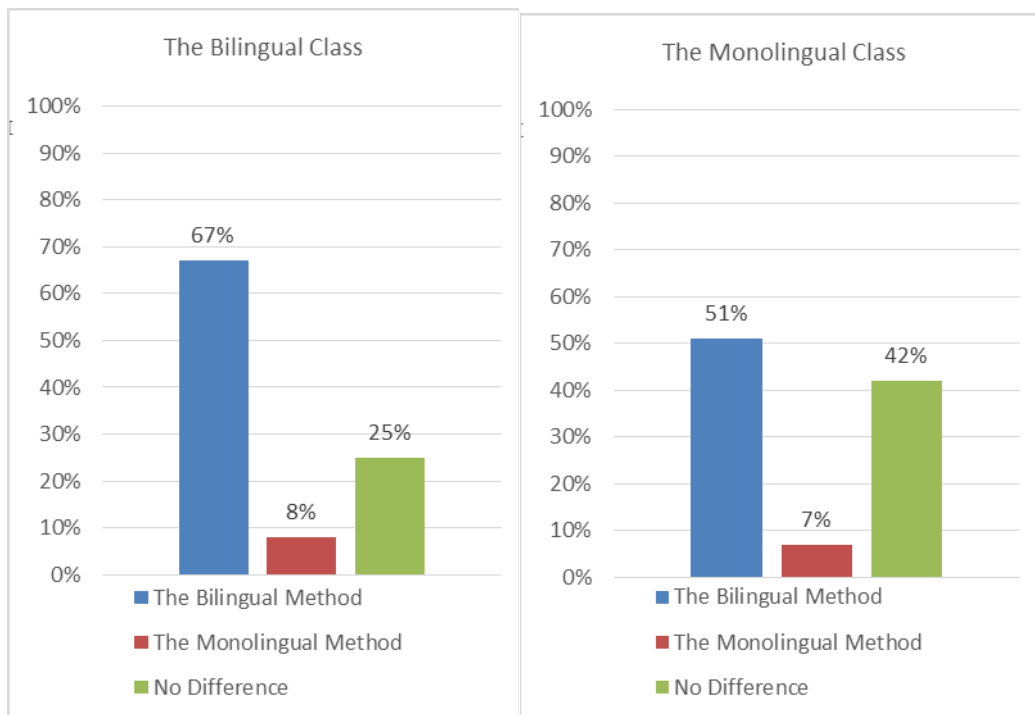


Figure 8. Bilingual /Monolingual psychological comfort

Regarding the academic improvement of the students' language after the course with every method, 59% of the bilingual group feel their language improved because the lecturer is bilingual, whereas, a very close 51% of the monolingual group feel that their language would have improved if the lecturer is a bilingual. On the other hand, 25% of the bilingual group feel that there is no difference if the lecturer is monolingual or bilingual with an opposite higher of 43% in the monolingual group. Yet, very few students in both groups (16%-6%) asserted that their language has improved due to the monolingual method.



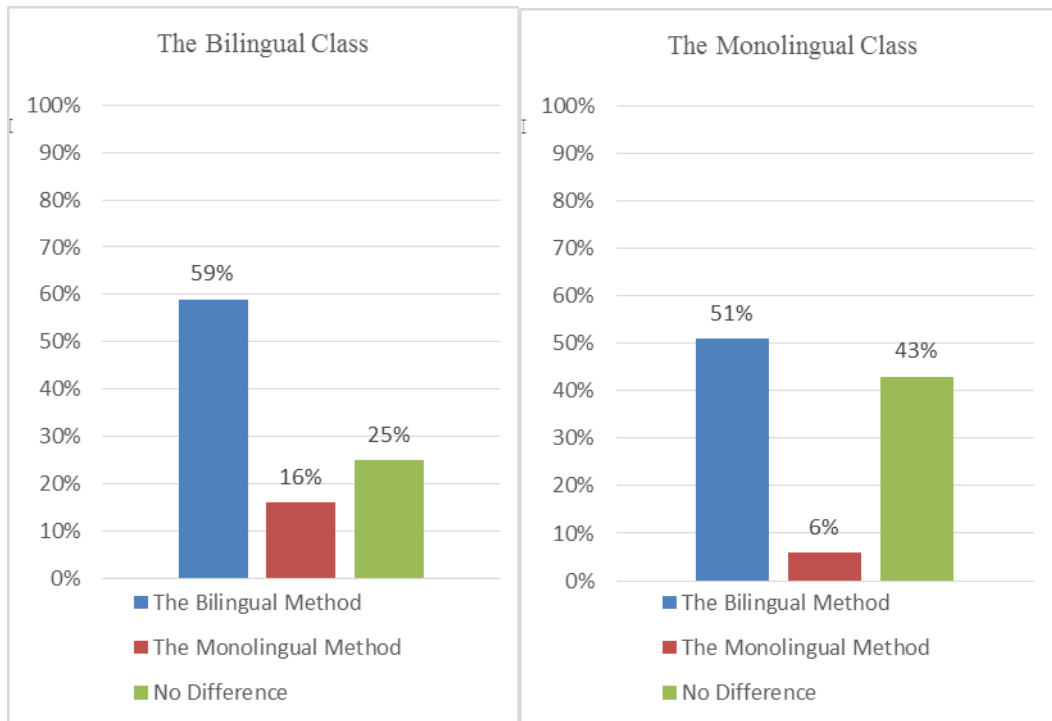


Figure 9. The Improvement of Language after the course

When it came to the freedom of choice of a lecturer, 64% of the students in the bilingual group chose a bilingual lecturer and 15% feel that it will make no difference if the lecturer is bilingual or monolingual. On the other hand, 45% of the monolingual group chose a bilingual lecturer and 32% feel that it makes no difference. Thus, it is clear that very few students from both groups (21% -23%) chose a monolingual as their lecturer of English.

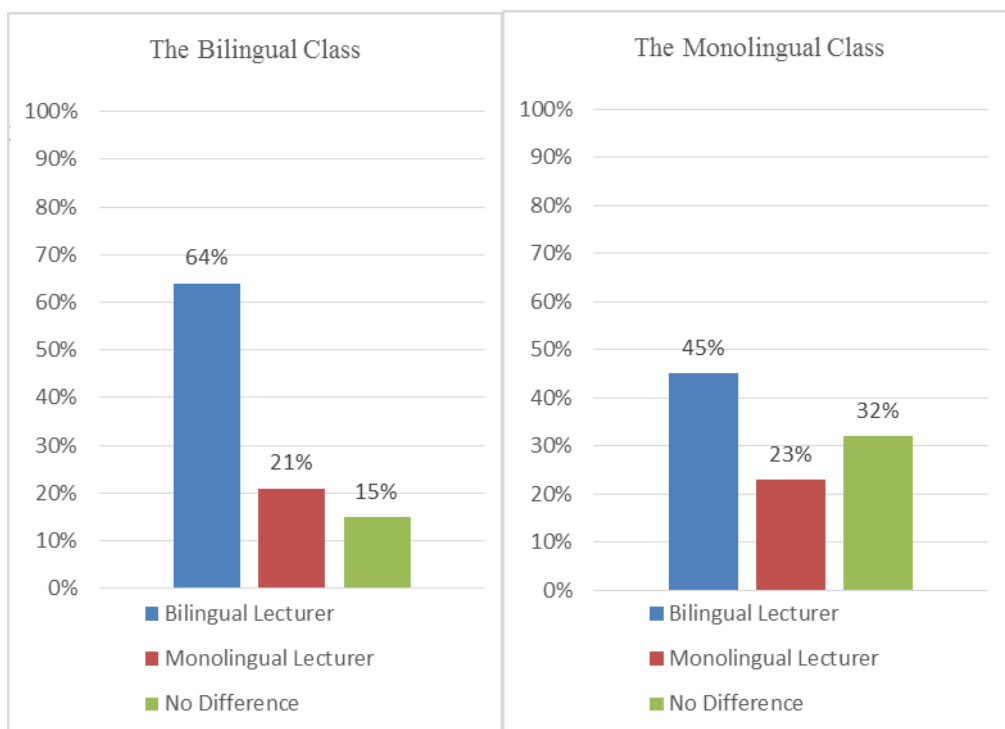


Figure 10. Choice between Monolingual and Bilingual lecturer

By measuring the performance of the participants from both classes, it is noticed that the failure rate in the group examined which was exposed to the monolingual method is higher with a percentage of 19% to only 1% in the

bilingual class. Moreover, the percentage of A+ students in the bilingual class is higher than the monolingual class (20% to 12%) .

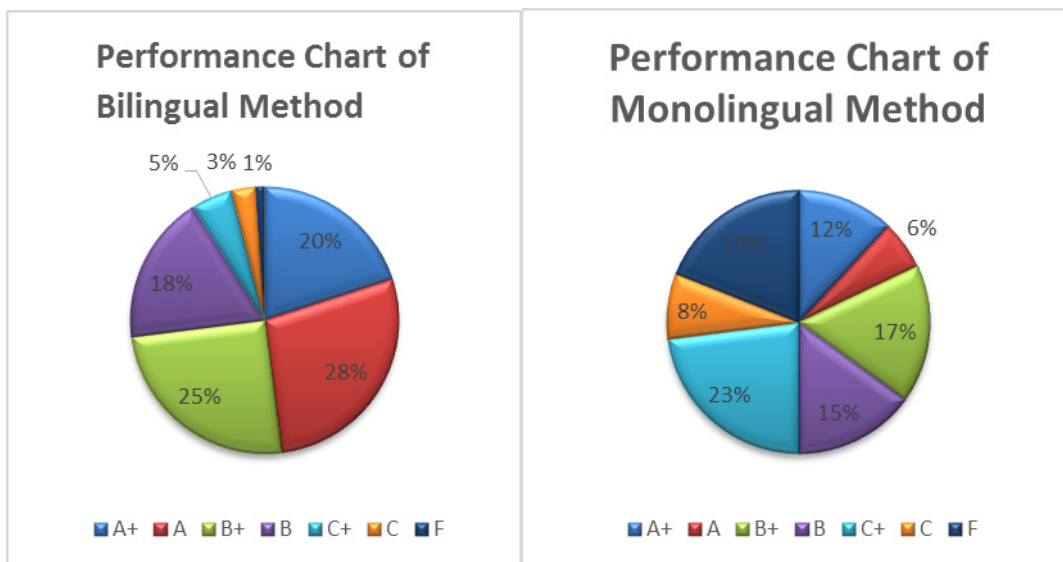


Figure 11. Performance of the Students in the Monolingual and Bilingual Groups Selected

Table 1. Table of Performance of the Students in the Monolingual and Bilingual groups

<i>Performance</i>	<i>Bilingual</i>	<i>Monolingual</i>
A+ (95-100)	20%	12%
A (90-95)	28%	6%
B+ (85-90)	25%	17%
B (80-85)	18%	15%
C+ (75-80)	5%	23%
C (70-75)	3%	8%
F (Fail)	1%	19%

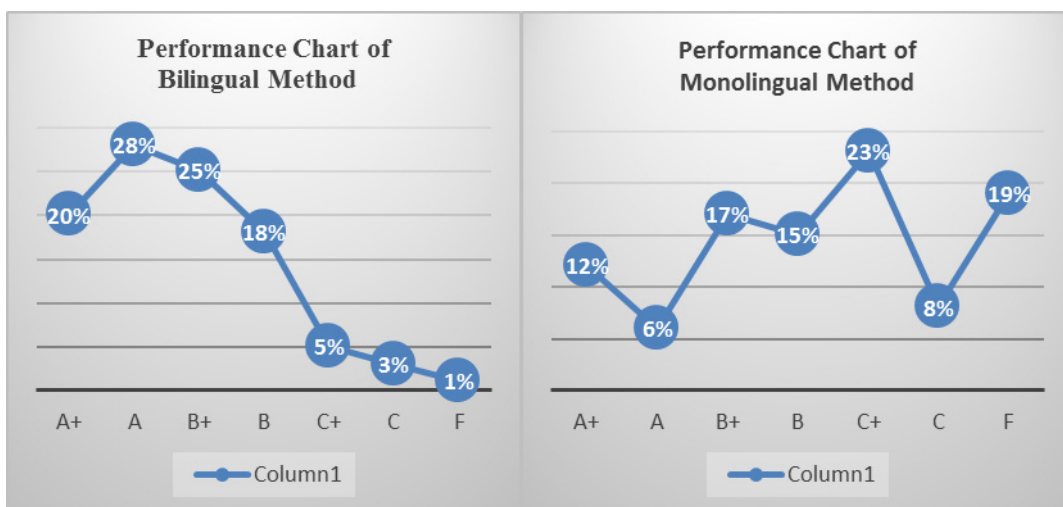


Figure 12. Line Chart of Performance of the Students in the Monolingual and Bilingual groups

It is noticed from the line chart that the performance of the bilingual group runs stables with high grades for most of the group tested. Then it goes down with a few number of students whose grades range from C+ to F. Whereas in the monolingual class the performance takes a zigzag form, it is fluctuating with average scores and few number of A or A+ and high average of F. The difference in academic performance reflected in the grades are

decisively demonstrated. Therefore, both students' preferences as well as academic efficacy shows that the bilingual method is more efficient when teaching ELLs.

#### 4. Conclusion

The study started with the hypothesis that bilingualism as an intervention for English language learning is not an efficient method of teaching English. However, the results were surprisingly different in many aspects.

Regarding teaching language skills, it is noticed that students in both groups prefer the interference of their mother tongue in skills like general vocabulary, specialist vocabulary and grammar. Whereas, when it comes to skills of speaking, pronunciation, writing or any skill that requires expressing oneself the percentage for bilingualism gets lower although some students may prefer it also. This shows that students are aware that there are some skills in English that should be practiced without the interference of Arabic which will enable them to communicate in English better.

There were two aspects that were really contradicting in this study related to the cultural barrier and communication as nearly half of both groups feel there is a cultural barrier when the lecturer is a monolingual. But when it came to communication both groups gave a high percentage that there is no communication problem if the lecturer is a monolingual. This may be either due to stereotyping or just a psychological comfort. But the truth is that being a monolingual does not necessarily mean that there is a problem in communication, especially that The United Arab Emirates is a multicultural community where everyone has to communicate in English together with the native language.

Both groups feel that translation is useful to them and not a waste of time in classes. Moreover, a high percentage of students, in both groups, require translation in Arabic to understand their errors. Therefore, both groups value translation one way or the other as an aid to English language comprehension and learning.

Moreover, regarding the use of electronic translating gadgets or dictionaries, it is obvious that in the group using the monolingual method, students use these gadgets more than students exposed to the bilingual method. This can be due to the fact that the bilingual lecturer takes the role of an instant translator for any difficult term.

Furthermore, when asked about the frequency of using Arabic, both groups did not prefer to use it a lot but they agree that it should be used sometimes. Therefore, it is obvious that both groups are aware of the importance of practicing their English language and using it more frequent in their English classes more than their native language. It is also observed that few students in the monolingual group agree that Arabic should not be used at all. But in the bilingual class a surprising Zero % is given to never using Arabic in class. Therefore, most students feel that Arabic should be used in the class albeit judiciously for a better facilitation of language learning.

At the end of the study, what was more important than all the opinions was the real performance of the students. The performance charts prove that the group exposed to the bilingual method has higher A pluses and As and less average grades than the group exposed to the monolingual method. In other words, it has a lot of excellent marks and only 1% failure. Whereas, the group exposed to the monolingual method has higher failure rates and bordered towards average marks. Furthermore, most of the grades were average grades and then the curve gets low with C&F grades.

Therefore, from the above it is concluded that the Bilingual method proves to be a more successful and convenient method in English classes of Arabs than the monolingual method. This does not only apply to the students of RAKMHSU Arab and local students, but it can also be applied to any non-English speaking countries or other Arab countries as well.

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