

## **Bilingualism and English Dictation Performance of Iranian Primary Level Students**

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### **Abstract**

The concept of linguistics transcends specific languages or communities in today's rapidly evolving world. Bilingualism has become increasingly prevalent in various countries, even in smaller cities. In many nations, the formal language of education differs from students' native tongues, and this distinction can exert both positive and negative influences on students' academic performance. Concurrently, the English language is experiencing a surge in popularity in Iran, with many individuals eager to acquire proficiency in this global language. This comparative survey aims to explore the impact of bilingualism on the dictation scores of second-grade elementary students studying English at the Iran Language Institute (ILI). The study involves 30 bilingual students in Tabriz and 30 monolingual students in Tehran, encompassing both genders. To ensure the comparability of students' educational levels, a preliminary step involved administering the Raven intelligence test. The resulting scores were subjected to ANOVA analysis. Subsequently, a dictation test, consisting of 40 words, was administered to the students, and their scores were subjected to an independent t-test. This dictation test underwent rigorous design and validation processes, which included input from four elementary school teachers. The final findings of the study indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between bilingualism and dictation scores, nor is there a significant correlation between gender and dictation scores.

**Key Terms:** Sociolinguistics, Bilingualism, Dictation

### **Introduction**

Bilingualism is a prominent feature of various societies worldwide, including Iran, which is considered an EFL (English as a Foreign Language) country where Persian serves as the official language. The increasing prominence of English in Iran, influenced by economic and global business factors, has led to a growing interest in bilingualism and its effects on language learning and teaching (Bourdieu, 1991; Crystal, 2012).

The phenomenon of bilingualism extends to diverse communities and contexts, particularly among native Turkish speakers living in multilingual environments within Iran (Bahrack et al., 2018). Bilingualism has garnered substantial research interest, with studies examining its impact on additional language acquisition (Grosjean, 2008; Kroll et al., 2010).

Bilingualism, at its core, refers to the ability to use two languages (Grosjean, 2010). However, it's essential to acknowledge the complexity in defining bilingualism, as it encompasses a spectrum of proficiencies and contexts (Klein, 1996). Depending on individual characteristics,

bilingualism can range from basic conversational abilities to advanced proficiency, allowing individuals to function as native-like speakers in both languages (Klein, 1996; Wei, 2018).

In Iran, where English learning is highly prioritized by parents, children often commence their English language education simultaneously with their formal schooling (Cummins, 2000). This early exposure to English is motivated by parents' aspirations for their children to gain competitive edge in future academic and professional endeavors (Cummins, 2000; Crystal, 2012). Notably, bilingualism can pose challenges, especially for children born into families where their mother tongue differs from the country's official language, such as Persian in Iran (Grosjean, 2008). These children often grapple with simultaneous learning of Persian and a foreign language, like English, leading to potential confusion and language development complexities (Hakuta et al., 2000; Bialystok, 2011).

The impact of bilingualism on cognitive and academic outcomes has been a subject of extensive research. Early studies employing IQ tests often suggested negative effects on intellectual development among bilingual children (Adler, 2001; Romanie, 1995). However, recent research challenges these notions; indicating that bilingualism does not necessarily hinder cognitive abilities and may, in fact, provide cognitive advantages (Bialystok, 2001; Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009).

Research has shown that bilingual individuals exhibit enhanced executive control, a cognitive trait associated with better academic performance (Bialystok, 2001; Bialystok et al., 2012). Additionally, bilingual children have demonstrated better metalinguistic awareness, contributing to their effective learning of target languages (Paradis, 2009; Clyne, 2009).

Furthermore, bilingualism has been linked to positive emotional and behavioral outcomes in children's school years (Han et al., 2010; Al Shaikhi, 2011). Non-English monolingual children, in particular, tend to exhibit more behavioral and emotional challenges compared to bilingual peers (Han et al., 2010).

Recent research conducted in Iran has investigated the effects of bilingualism on third-language vocabulary acquisition, revealing positive impacts (Keshavarz & Astaneh, 2004). Bilingual individuals have been found to be more effective and persistent learners of target languages, benefiting from their metalinguistic awareness (Clyne, 2009; Wei, 2018).

In conclusion, bilingualism in Iran, particularly in the context of learning English, is a multifaceted phenomenon with implications for cognitive, academic, emotional, and linguistic aspects of individuals' lives. Recent research has shed new light on the advantages associated with bilingualism, challenging earlier assumptions of potential disadvantages. Understanding the complex nature of bilingualism and its effects in multilingual contexts like Iran contributes to a more comprehensive perspective on language learning and teaching.

## The Advantages of Bilingualism for Children

Being proficient in more than one language is widely acknowledged as a significant asset. Baker and Jones (1998, as cited in Sobhani, et al., 2015) have identified several major benefits associated with bilingualism, including advantages in communication, cultural awareness, economic opportunities, and cognitive development. In terms of communication, bilingual individuals often exhibit heightened sensitivity to the communicative needs of others, as they navigate a multilingual world (Grosjean, 2010). Furthermore, exposure to multiple cultures fosters an appreciation for cultural diversity and an understanding of cultural differences (Wei, 2018).

Economically, bilingualism opens doors across various professions and industries, enhancing career prospects and facilitating international business interactions (Grosjean, 2010). Moreover, cognitive advantages abound, with bilingualism linked to improved divergent thinking, creative problem-solving, and metalinguistic awareness (Bialystok, 2001; Kaushanskaya & Marian, 2009).

Bilingualism offers numerous advantages for children's social interactions, including within their families, communities, and cultural contexts. Bilingual children often excel at forming new friendships and building meaningful relationships in their second language (Wei, 2018). Recent research underscores the role of bilingualism in promoting self-control and confidence, key factors contributing to academic success (Bialystok, 2011). Additionally, some studies suggest that bilingual children outperform their monolingual peers in tasks requiring inhibition of misleading information (Bialystok et al., 2012).

King and Mackey (2009) highlight the multifaceted benefits of bilingualism. Importantly, bilingual children possess the valuable skill of speaking multiple languages, which has practical applications in employment, travel, maintaining family connections, preserving cultural heritage, and fostering friendships across diverse backgrounds (Bourdieu, 1991). Recent decades have seen a growing body of research emphasizing the advantages of bilingualism over monolingualism, with particular focus on metalinguistic benefits (Doughty & Long, 2003). Studies, such as those by Hamers and Blanc (as cited in Doughty & Long, 2003), have demonstrated that bilingual children excel in problem-solving tasks, attributed to their superior metalinguistic competence and well-developed creative thinking skills.

According to Baker (2006), bilingual children exhibit more fluent, flexible, and creative thinking abilities. They communicate naturally and expressively, enriching their relationships with family, community, and the broader societies they engage with (Wei, 2018). Bilingualism also allows children to access and bridge diverse literatures, traditions, and perspectives, fostering connections between people of varying backgrounds and reducing biases (Baker, 2006; Crystal, 2012).

Furthermore, with bilingualism comes a broader cultural experience, increased tolerance for diversity, and reduced prejudices (Grosjean, 2010). As globalization continues to remove barriers between countries, bilingual individuals enjoy enhanced earning potential and career opportunities (Crystal, 2012). Bilingualism contributes to heightened self-esteem, greater academic achievement, and proficiency in additional languages (Baker, 2006).

### **Bilingualism and its Impact on Learning another Language**

The influence of bilingualism on the acquisition of an additional language has garnered substantial attention from researchers. Notably, pioneering work in this area began with Ringbom and Thomas (1988, as cited in Ringbom, 2007), who conducted a seminal study comparing monolingual English college students with two groups of English-Spanish bilinguals embarking on English language learning journeys. The first bilingual group received no formal training, while the second group underwent a minimum of two years of formal Spanish instruction. The findings revealed that bilinguals with formal training surpassed their counterparts in the monolingual group in grammatical aspects. Moreover, both bilingual groups demonstrated superior vocabulary learning compared to monolingual students, although no significant differences emerged between the two bilingual groups.

In another notable investigation, Sanz (2000) meticulously compared 124 Catalan-Spanish bilinguals with 77 Spanish monolinguals who embarked on learning English. This study sought to control various variables, including socioeconomic background, motivation, attitudes, general intelligence, and exposure to English. English proficiency, assessed through grammar and vocabulary tests, indicated that bilingual participants outperformed their monolingual peers, underscoring the advantageous role of bilingualism in language learning.

Furthermore, Munoz (2000) delved into third-language (English) acquisition among bilinguals proficient in Catalan and Castilian, comparing them to their monolingual counterparts across different English proficiency tests. The results consistently favored highly proficient bilinguals, those with strong competence in Catalan and Castilian, who achieved higher scores than monolinguals across various tests. This suggests that bilingualism indeed facilitates the acquisition of additional languages.

While many researchers advocate the positive influence of bilingualism on language acquisition, some studies suggest alternative perspectives. For instance, Van Gelderen et al. (2003, as cited in Saadat et al., 2013) explored English reading comprehension among 397 Dutch monolinguals and Turkish or Moroccan-Dutch bilinguals residing in the Netherlands. A componential analysis was employed to ascertain the factors contributing to differences in English reading comprehension. Surprisingly, the study found that bilinguals exhibited lower reading comprehension abilities than their monolingual counterparts. The researchers attributed this phenomenon to several factors, including the weaker reading comprehension skills of Turkish and Moroccan-Dutch bilinguals in Dutch, the absence of control over socioeconomic status, and the linguistic proximity of English to Dutch in comparison to Turkish or Moroccan.

### **Bilingualism and Its Intersection with Gender: An Evolving Field**

In recent times, there has been growing recognition of the expanding gap between bilingualism research and the study of language and gender. While empirical studies exploring the convergence of these domains are gradually emerging, there remains a significant lack of theoretical frameworks addressing the interplay between bilingualism and gender, and how each field can mutually benefit from such interdisciplinary exploration.

Though investigations into language and gender date back at least a century (West, Lazar, & Kramarae, 1997), the formal establishment of language and gender as a distinct area of inquiry transpired in the 1970s. This transformation was precipitated by the groundbreaking work of Lakoff (1975) in "Language and Woman's Place" and the seminal anthology "Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance" edited by Thorne and Henley (1975). These works ignited fervent interest among sociolinguists and linguistic anthropologists, directing their focus toward examining the intricate relationship between gender and linguistic practices. Initial research spanning from 1975 to the early 1990s predominantly centered on disparities in language usage between women and men, seeking to explain these disparities within the framework of gender identities or relations, categorized as deficit, difference, or dominance. These conceptual lenses were also employed in studies probing the connection between gender and multilingual practices (Pavlenko, 2001).

Pavlenko (2001) further elucidated the experiences of bilingual women, with contributions from scholars like Borker (1980), Gal (1991), and Spedding (1994). Their insights underscored the notion that ethnographic practices sometimes rendered women linguistically reticent and inclined toward monolingualism. Moreover, it was posited that earlier research may have inadequately represented reality, as some women strategically concealed the extent of their bilingualism, especially in "unequal encounters" with white middle-class male researchers.

In the context of language choice and gender, numerous linguistic settings link the dominant language, often perceived as the language of power, with masculinity, while minority languages are associated with femininity and domestic values (Pavlenko, 2001). This intricate interplay of gender and language imparts distinct meanings to bilingualism among different groups. In certain communities, women might encounter barriers limiting their access to a prestigious second language, constraining their bilingualism. Conversely, opposite dynamics may prevail (Baker, 2006).

Concurrently, research on gender disparities in bilingualism has reported instances of female learners outperforming their male counterparts. Notable studies include Bowey's (1995) investigation of 500 Chinese university students in Hong Kong, revealing female superiority in general language proficiency. Similarly, Jorgensen (2003) conducted extensive research on Swedish children learning English and immigrant children learning Swedish, observing higher proficiency levels among girls. These disparities were attributed to cognitive variables, neural function, and cultural influences. Nevertheless, Ellis (2008) cautioned against definitive claims of female superiority in bilingualism, highlighting that motivation and incentives for bilingualism may vary between genders, contingent upon the opportunities offered by a second language.

The question of whether differences in second/additional language acquisition are primarily linked to language status (monolingual vs. bilingual), socioeconomic factors, or gender continues to challenge researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA).

### **The role of teachers in bilingual education**

Teachers will vary in their understandings of bilingualism and the processes of second/foreign language acquisition. Some teachers will be bilingual or plurilingual themselves

and have a wealth of personal experience to draw on. Others may be very familiar with multilingual school environments. Some may have had no contact with bilingual learners.

Franson (2011) mentioned some aspects of bilingualism and the development of first and additional languages which can inform teachers' approaches to bilingual and multilingual learners. Teachers should be aware that:

- The learner's first or home language plays a significant role in the learning of the additional language in terms of cognitive, linguistic and socio-cultural influences.
- Learning a foreign language will not necessarily proceed in an orderly and systematic fashion. Learners will use prior linguistic, learned and world knowledge. They will learn when there is a need to communicate and to learn.
- Learning a language and becoming bilingual is also about learning and living in different societies and cultures. It is not just about acquiring a new language, but also about understanding another culture and developing another identity.

Based on previously discussed ideas; the present study deals with the following research questions to investigate the effect of bilingualism on English dictation performance of elementary students.

The present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of second elementary students?
2. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of male second elementary students?
3. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of female second elementary students?
4. What is the effect of bilingualism on the English dictation performance of female second elementary students comparing with male students?

## Method

### Design

This study adopts a quantitative survey design to explore the differences of bilingual and monolingual learners in their dictation skills.

### Participants

The participants of this study include 60 male and female second elementary students in Tehran and Tabriz cities who are learning English in Iran Language Institute (ILI) which were in elementary level and selected randomly as the sample group of this study. Raven's Progressive Matrices was used for the purpose of homogeneity among students and accordingly 15 monolingual male students, 15 monolingual female students from Tehran city and 15 bilingual male students and 15 bilingual female students from Tabriz city were selected. All of these students are learning English in ILI. It is worth noting that people of Tehran are initially monolingual speaking only Persian language which is the official and academic language in Iran, however, people living in Tabriz are originally Turkish and they are considered to be bilingual speaking both Persian and Azeri languages. This fact was assured based on a demographic questionnaire.

### Instruments and Procedure

The instruments of this study include Raven's Progressive Matrices and a dictation text. The Raven test was administered to estimate the IQ level of students for ensuring the homogeneity of the participants. The test, which was built in 1938 by Penn day and Raven has 60 questions multiple choice and consist of five series (E, D, C, B, A) each including 12 questions, listed in order of difficulty. It is a nonverbal group test typically used in educational settings. It is the most common and popular test administered to groups ranging from 5-year-olds to the elderly. The results were scored after 40 minutes.

The main instrument of this research is an English dictation text consisting of 40 words based on the students' academic level. These words were selected and gathered by consulting four teachers in Tehran and Tabriz teaching English in ILI. The validity of this text is content validity which was ensured by the ideas and comments of experienced teachers.

### Results

To assess the impact of bilingualism on students' dictation performance, a comparative analysis was conducted by examining the dictation scores of two distinct groups: bilingual and monolingual students. Furthermore, gender distinctions among students were taken into account in this analysis. To achieve this, an independent t-test was employed to statistically evaluate the data. Additionally, as previously mentioned, the homogeneity of the participant groups was evaluated using the Raven test. The scores from this test were categorized into four groups: male bilingual, female bilingual, male monolingual, and female monolingual students. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) test was employed to assess and compare the intelligence scores among these student groups. As depicted in Table 2, the statistical results indicate that  $p > 0.05$  and  $F = 0.41$ . Consequently, these findings suggest no significant disparities among the groups, affirming their homogeneity.

Table 1  
*Mean of IQ scores*

	Number	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
Bilingual female	15	101.733	2.15362	0.55606
Monolingual female	15	102.2667	8.09291	2.08958
Monolingual male	15	102.3333	1.88718	0.48469
Bilingual male	15	100.667	3.49830	0.90326
Total	60	101.7500	4.56451	0.58928

The scores derived from the Raven test for each participant group are presented in Table 1, while the outcomes of the ANOVA test are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2  
*Results of ANOVA test*

	Sum of squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig
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Between Groups	26.717	3	80906	0.415	0.743
Within Groups	1202.533	56	21.474		
Total	1229.250	59			

The frequency distribution of students' dictation scores yielded the following results:

*For monolingual male students:*

- The average dictation score is 32.4, with a standard deviation of 3.81.
- The distribution is slightly negatively skewed, with a skewness value of -0.35.
- Scores range from a minimum of 25 to a maximum of 38.

*For bilingual male students:*

- The mean dictation score is 31.93, and the standard deviation is 4.83.
- The distribution also exhibits a slight negative skew, with a skewness value of -0.47.
- Scores range from a minimum of 23 to a maximum of 38.

*For monolingual female students:*

- The average dictation score is 30.46, and the standard deviation is 4.92.
- The distribution is moderately negatively skewed, with a skewness value of -1.7.
- Scores range from a minimum of 17 to a maximum of 36.

*For bilingual female students:*

- The mean dictation score is 31.46, with a standard deviation of 7.66.
- The distribution shows a significant negative skew, with a skewness value of -2.56.
- Scores range from a minimum of 7 to a maximum of 38.

Table 3

*Mean score of students' dictation scores*

Students	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	Skewedness	Minimum	Maximum	Variation range
Male	Monolingual	15	32.4	3.81	-0.35	25	38	13
	Bilingual	15	31.93	4.83	-0.47	23	38	15
Female	Monolingual	15	30.46	4.92	-1.7	17	36	19
	Bilingual	15	31.46	7.66	-2.56	7	38	31

Furthermore, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed to assess the normal distribution of the variables. This test served to determine and confirm whether the variables followed a normal distribution. The results indicated that the significance level of students' scores on dictation exceeded 0.05, signifying that the data is consistent with a normal distribution. Consequently, it is justifiable to assert that a parametric test is suitable for this research.

Table 4

*Results of Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test*

Variables	Number	Mean	Standard deviation	No difference	Positive difference	Negative difference	Test	Significance level
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Dictation scores of students	60	31.56	5.4	0.15	0.11	-0.15	1.22	0.09
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The results obtained from data analysis revealed that there is no significant difference between the dictation scores of bilingual and monolingual students and bilingualism does not have negative effect, Table 6 illustrates independent t-test; accordingly, the significance level is 0.85 which is more than 0.05 and  $T=0.19$ . In addition, Table 5 shows differences related to mean scores for effect of bilingualism on dictation status of students.

Table 5

*Results of Mean Difference for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Students*

Variable	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Students' dictation status	Monolingual	30	31.43	4.43
	Bilingual	30	31.7	6.29

Table 6

*Results of Variances for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Students*

Variable	Language	F	P	T	df	P
Students' dictation status	Monolingual Bilingual	1.07	0.3	0.19	58	0.85

There is no significant difference in dictation scores between male bilingual and monolingual students, and bilingualism does not appear to have a negative effect. Table 8 presents the results of an independent t-test, with a significance level of 0.77, which exceeds the threshold of 0.05, and a T-value of 0.29. Additionally, Table 7 displays variations in mean scores related to the impact of bilingualism on the dictation performance of male students.

Table 7

*Results of Mean Difference for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Male Students*

Variable	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Male students' dictation status	Monolingual	15	32.4	3.81
	Bilingual	15	31.93	4.83

Table 8

*Results of Variances for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Male Students*

Variable	Language	F	P	T	df	P
Male students' dictation status	Monolingual					
	Bilingual	0.53	0.47	0.29	28	0.77

There is no significant difference in dictation scores between female bilingual and monolingual students, and bilingualism does not appear to have a negative effect. Table 10 presents the results of an independent t-test, with a significance level of 0.67, which exceeds the threshold of 0.05, and a T-value of 0.42. Additionally, Table 9 displays variations in mean scores related to the impact of bilingualism on the dictation performance of female students.

Table 9

*Results of Mean Difference for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Female Students*

Variable	Language	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
Female students' dictation status	Monolingual	15	30.46	4.92
	Bilingual	15	31.46	7.66

Table 10

*Results of Variances for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Female Students*

Variable	Language	F	P	T	df	P
Female students' dictation status	Monolingual					
	Bilingual	0.63	0.43	0.42 0	28	0.67

There is no significant difference in dictation scores between female and male bilingual students, as depicted in Table 12, where the independent t-test results are presented. Specifically, the significance level is 0.84, which exceeds the threshold of 0.05, with a T-value of 0. Furthermore, Table 11 displays variations in mean scores concerning the impact of bilingualism on the dictation performance of female students.

Table 11

*Results of Mean Difference for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Female and Male Students*

Variable	Gender	Number	Mean	Standard deviation
students' dictation status	Male	15	31.93	4.83
	Female	15	31.46	7.66

Table 12

*Results of Variances for Effect of Bilingualism on Dictation Status of Female and Male Students*

Variable	Gender	F	P	T	df	P
students' dictation status	Male Female	0.32	0.57	0.2	28	0.84

### Discussion and Conclusion

Contrary to common belief that acquiring two languages might be more challenging and time-consuming for children, research, including that of Genesee (2012), suggests that both bilingual and monolingual children follow similar language acquisition processes and timelines. This study aimed to shed light on the impact of bilingualism on primary level students' performance in learning an additional language, specifically English. While concerns about raising bilingual children often surface among parents and educators, the findings of this study indicate that bilingual learners did not surpass their monolingual counterparts in English dictation performance.

However, it's worth noting that Kan (2008) has highlighted the substantial influence of bilingual children's experience with learning a foreign language on their overall language development, emphasizing the complexity of language acquisition processes.

The results of this study challenge the common expectation that bilingualism significantly influences students' academic achievement, specifically in dictation performance. Bilingualism, as observed in this study, did not exhibit any substantial effect on the dictation performance of both monolingual and bilingual students. Furthermore, gender differences were not found to have any significant impact on dictation scores. These findings differ from those of studies conducted by Bailystok (2001), Keshavarz and Astaneh (2004), and Clyne (1997), which suggested a positive effect of bilingualism on academic performance.

Ellis (2008) noted that gender-related disparities in language learning outcomes may be attributed to various motivations and opportunities that individuals have when learning an additional language. Consequently, variables such as language status, gender, or socioeconomic status alone may not account for variations in language learning success.

Therefore, it can be inferred that factors other than bilingualism may contribute to students' challenges in dictation. One possible factor may be the teachers' proficiency and pronunciation influenced by their native language, as discussed by Modares (2003). Writing dictation errors, stemming from learners' difficulties in comprehension and concentration, can also hinder their ability to control their writing skills. In summary, the findings of this study suggest that being bilingual and having a native language different from the formal language of the country do not play a significant role in the foreign language learning process, particularly among children. Consequently, foreign language education can be implemented without emphasizing students' mother tongues or bilingualism status. Success in language learning and academic performance appears to be influenced by a range of factors beyond the number of languages one can speak.

Based on these results, educators may prioritize other affective, cognitive, and situational factors when evaluating and improving students' academic performance.

However, it's essential to acknowledge the limitations of this study, which was conducted exclusively among elementary students in two cities in Iran. The research faced constraints related to time and obtaining permissions from various ILI branches in Tabriz and Tehran. Future studies can expand on these findings by examining the impact of bilingualism on academic achievement across different age groups, academic majors, and performance levels. Additionally, exploring how bilingual students' intelligence levels affect their foreign language learning achievement and comparing them with monolingual students could provide valuable insights into language education.

Recent research in this area has produced mixed findings. Some studies continue to support the idea that bilingualism can have positive effects on cognitive development (e.g., Bialystok, 2015), while others emphasize the complex interplay of various factors in language learning outcomes (e.g., Peal & Lambert, 2017). These recent studies underscore the need for a nuanced understanding of the relationship between bilingualism and academic performance, considering factors like motivation, language exposure, and the specific language skills being assessed. Furthermore, the role of teachers in facilitating language learning for bilingual students has gained increasing attention (e.g., García, 2019), highlighting the importance of pedagogical approaches that consider individual learner characteristics.

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