

A Study of The Effect of Bilingualism on EFL Kurdish Students' Third Language Vocabulary Learning



دراسة تأثير ثنائية اللغة على تعلم مفردات اللغة الثالثة لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة
أجنبية

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Journal of Babylon Center for Humanities Studies: 2026, Volume: 16, Issue: 8

الكلمات المفتاحية: الثنائية اللغوية، تعلم مفردات اللغة الثالثة، نموذج التعزيز التراكمي، اللغة
الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

كيفية اقتباس البحث

إبراهيم ، ادم خالد ، صنعان شيرو مالو ، دراسة تأثير ثنائية اللغة على تعلم مفردات اللغة الثالثة
لدى طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، مجلة مركز بابل للدراسات الإنسانية، آب
2026، المجلد: 16، العدد: 8.

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Keywords : Bilingualism; Cumulative Enhancement Model; EFL; L3 Vocabulary Learning.

How To Cite This Article

Ibrahim, Adam Khalid , Sanan Shero Malo , A Study of The Effect of Bilingualism on EFL Kurdish Students' Third Language Vocabulary Learning, Journal Of Babylon Center For Humanities Studies, Auguts 2026, Volume:16, Issue8.



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المستخلص:

على الرغم من تزايد الاهتمام بموضوع التعدد اللغوي، لا تزال الأبحاث التي تتناول تأثير الثنائية اللغوية على تعلم اللغة الثالثة محدودة مقارنة بالدراسات المتعلقة بتعلم اللغة الثانية. ويعتمد الإطار النظري الذي يستند إليه هذا البحث على نموذج التعزيز التراكمي (Flynn et al., 2004)، الذي يفترض أن جميع اللغات المكتسبة سابقاً تساهم بشكل تراكمي وإيجابي في تعلم اللغة الثالثة. ووفقاً لهذا النموذج، تُعامل الثنائية اللغوية كمُتغيّر مستقل يؤثر على نتائج تعلم اللغة الثالثة. يهدف هذا البحث إلى التحقق مما إذا كان هناك فرق معنوي ذو دلالة إحصائية في تعلم مفردات اللغة الإنجليزية بين الطلاب الكرد أحاديي اللغة، أي الذين يتحدثون اللغة الكردية فقط كلغتهم الأولى، وبين الطلاب الكرد الذين يتحدثون اللغة الكردية كلغة أولى والعربية

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كلغة ثانية. كما تسعى الدراسة إلى استكشاف تأثير هيمنة اللغة الأولى (الكردية) أو اللغة الثانية (العربية) على تعلم مفردات اللغة الثالثة. وقد اعتمدت الدراسة منهجاً كمياً، حيث تم توزيع استبيان لتحديد المشاركين المؤهلين ضمن كل مجموعة لغوية. بعد ذلك، تم جمع المواد الدراسية من الجامعات المشاركة بهدف إعداد اختبار موحد للمفردات يعكس المحتوى الأكاديمي الذي درسه الطلاب طوال العام الدراسي. تم تطبيق اختبار المفردات على 149 طالباً من طلاب السنة الأولى في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية بجامعة زاخو ودهوك في اليوم ذاته بنهاية العام الدراسي. كشفت النتائج عن وجود فرق معنوي في تعلم المفردات بين الطلبة ذو أحاديي اللغة وثنائيي اللغة. ومع ذلك، لم تُظهر الدراسة فروقاً ذات دلالة إحصائية في تحصيل تعلم المفردات بين ثنائيي اللغة المسيطرين على اللغة الأولى مقارنةً بمن يسيطرون على اللغة الثانية.

Abstract

Despite the growing interest in multilingualism, research on how bilingualism affects third language learning remains limited compared to second language studies. The theoretical framework guiding this study is the Cumulative Enhancement Model (Flynn et al., 2004), which posits that all previously acquired languages contribute cumulatively and positively to the acquisition of a third language. In this model, bilingualism is treated as an independent variable influencing L3 learning outcomes. The current study aims at determining whether there is a statistically significant difference in English vocabulary learning between Kurdish monolingual and Kurdish-Arabic bilinguals EFL students while also, studying the effect of L1 (Kurdish) and L2 (Arabic) dominance on third language vocabulary learning achievement. The study has adopted a quantitative approach by administering a questionnaire first which identified eligible participants within each language group. Subsequently, curriculum materials from the participating universities were collected to develop a standardized vocabulary test reflective of the academic content studied throughout the year. The Vocabulary test was administered to 149 first-year English department students from University of Zakho and Duhok at the same time by the end of their academic year. The findings identified that there is a significant difference between monolingual and bilinguals' vocabulary learning achievement. However, the study did not find noteworthy vocabulary learning achievement difference between L1 and L2 dominant bilinguals.



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Introduction

The rise of the Internet and technology, English became a global language of science, technology, business and education. Most of non-English speaking population of the world today either know English as a second or a third language. Bilingualism has become a global phenomenon that is no longer restricted by geographical or cultural barriers.

In many various countries such as Switzerland, Canada and Singapore, Bilingualism of home and school is a widespread phenomenon, and it has been dealt with rather positively, through introduction of systems of bilingual or multilingual education (Lambert et al., 1993).

The complexities of bilingualism and its impact on learning language have garnered increasing attention in the field of linguistic research, particularly as global interactions intensify. However, while substantial studies have demonstrated the cognitive and linguistic advantages of bilingualism in diverse contexts, there lingers a significant gap in comprehending its influence on third language (L3) learning, specifically within the multicultural and multilingual context of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

The current study attempts to tackle these gaps through evaluating the influence of bilingualism on third language vocabulary learning among EFL students. It aims to elucidate the relationships between previous language knowledge and its influence on vocabulary learning; more specifically, to determine whether there is a statistically substantial difference in English vocabulary learning between Kurdish monolinguals (KMs) and Kurdish-Arabic bilinguals (KABs) EFL students. Furthermore, it aims to investigate the different effects of first language (L1) (i.e. Kurdish) or second language (L2) (i.e. Arabic) on third language vocabulary learning achievement. Thereby contributing valuable insights to the discourse on bilingualism and third language education in a region where language diversity is both a challenge and an asset.

The current research presents the following questions:

1. Is there a statistically significant difference in English vocabulary learning achievement between KMs and KABs EFL students?
2. How does dominance in L1 (Kurdish) or L2 (Arabic) affect third language vocabulary learning achievement among EFL bilingual students?

Studying bilingualism's influence on third language learning in the Kurdistan Region is essential due to the unique multilingual landscape of



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the area, where Kurdish, Arabic, and other languages are spoken. This region is characterized by a rich cultural tapestry and varying degrees of language proficiency among its inhabitants. Understanding how bilingualism affects English vocabulary learning can provide critical insights into effective teaching strategies, informing educational policy and curriculum development.

The perimeter of study is limited to the investigation of the influence of Bilingualism on L3 vocabulary learning among first-year EFL students at the English departments at the University of Zakho and the University of Duhok. The research is conducted within the Duhok Governorate, Kurdistan Region-Iraq, during the academic year (2024-2025).

The research acknowledges several limitations. First, measuring first and second language proficiency can be challenging, as self-reported data may not accurately reflect true proficiency levels of the participants. Second, the sample size could limit the generalizability of the findings, particularly given the diverse linguistic backgrounds of participants. A larger sample could provide a more robust analysis of the effect and power of bilingualism on L3 vocabulary learning. Finally, the reliance on a specific educational context (first-year university students) may not fully capture the experiences of younger learners or those outside the university system, potentially affecting the study's applicability across different educational settings.

Literature Review

The existing literature suggests that bilingualism may enhance vocabulary learning and cognitive flexibility; however, previous research often overlooks key variables. For instance, the L1 and L2 proficiency level, use of language in the socio-cultural context. Additionally, studies examining the interaction between bilingualism and L3 learning are limited, particularly in formal educational settings where diverse language backgrounds converge.

Bilingualism

(Bloomfield, 1935) defines bilingualism as “the native-like control of two languages”.

Mohanty (1994) defines bilingualism within the limits of social-communicative dimension, which states that bilingual individuals or communities are those with adequate ability to communicate these languages with other speakers that know the same languages in a functioning manner.



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Dominance

In the context of bilingualism, language dominance denotes the relative strength or proficiency a bilingual person possesses in one of their languages compared to the other(s). It is crucial to differentiate this individual language dominance from societal language dominance, which pertains to the language most used and institutionally supported in a given society (Fishman, 1972). For example, Dutch is societally dominant in Flanders due to its use in government, education, and public life, but not all residents especially those from other regions or immigrant backgrounds are individually dominant in Dutch (De Houwer, 2003, 2007).

Language dominance in individuals is influenced by exposure, use, and context, and can go through a temporal change (Argyri & Sorace, 2007; Hohenstein et al., 2006). It is a nuanced and complex concept within linguistic, sociolinguistic, and psycholinguistic dimensions (Lanza, 2004). (Yip & Matthews, 2006) emphasize that it is primarily a cognitive property, shaped by factors like input quantity and evident in fluency. (Montrul, 2015) synthesizes these views by defining language dominance as encompassing three components: linguistic proficiency, external input, and functional use in context.

This means that when assessing bilinguals, dominance is not just about which language is "better known," but involves a dynamic interaction between how much each language is used, in what contexts, and how proficiently it is spoken and understood.

Cumulative enhancement model

The Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) primarily aims to explain how multilingual learners develop the structure of a new language, particularly how they build the grammar of the target language over time. It is predicated upon that language learning is a cumulative process, where each previously learned language contributes to the learning of additional ones. Importantly, the model assumes that learners do not simply repeat what they already know; instead, they build on their existing linguistic knowledge in meaningful ways. As a result, this accumulated knowledge is expected to positively support and enhance the learning of future languages (Berkes & Flynn, 2012).

In short, The Cumulative Enhancement Model by (Flynn et al., 2004) state that language learning is a cumulative process, where each previously learned language contributes to the learning of additional ones. This research uses this model as a foundation for research questions concerning the impact and the power of bilingualism on L3 learning. It



treats Bilingualism as the independent unchangeable variable while L3 learning as the dependent changeable variable that can be influenced. Many studies have used similar models or approach to answer similar questions in literature, which will be demonstrated in the following section.

Previous Studies

It is essential to note that Mägiste (1984) did not identify any major distinction between monolinguals and bilinguals regarding learning a third language in his study. As part of a large-scale investigation by the National Swedish Board of Education, a study involving 2,736 8th grade immigrant students was conducted to compare their English proficiency with that of 67,162 Swedish monolingual peers using standardized tests. The results showed that foreign students who regularly spoke Swedish at home and kept up with their first language did better in English than Swedish students who only spoke Swedish. Conversely, immigrant students who actively used their home language daily showed slightly lower English proficiency than their monolingual counterparts. These results demonstrate the subtle influence of home language use on third language learning.

In a large-scale study involving 2,835 sixth-grade students in Germany, researchers explored how immigrant bilingualism affects learning English as a foreign language (EFL), while controlling for several background factors such as cognitive ability, age, gender, socioeconomic status, parental education, and cultural capital. The study included different bilingual groups, including Arabic-German, Chinese-German, Polish-German, and Turkish-German speakers, as well as a monolingual German group for comparison. The results showed an overall positive link between bilingualism and English language achievement. However, the strength of this relationship varied depending on the home language spoken. Most importantly, students’ proficiency in the school language, German, emerged as the strongest predictor of success in learning English (Maluch et al., 2015).

A longitudinal study by the same researcher utilized data from the ELEMENT project to assess the impact of bilingualism on third language (English) acquisition from elementary to secondary education among students in a prominent German city. The research followed a representative sample of 1,032 students from 6th-8th grade, of whom approximately 15% came from language minority backgrounds. These students were categorized based on early bilingual exposure, home language use, and frequency of language use, creating profiles such as German monolingual, mixed dominant German, mixed dominant non-





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German, and non-German only. The bilingual students represented diverse home languages including Turkish, Arabic, Chinese, Polish, and others. The sixth-grade results showed that students from language minority backgrounds did better than their monolingual peers when learning English as a third language (L3). This suggests that being bilingual can give learners an early advantage, likely because of better cognitive and language awareness skills. However, by the eighth grade, this advantage had largely faded. Only bilingual students who mainly used German at home continued to show stronger English skills, which highlights how important solid proficiency in the majority language is for long-term success in learning an additional language. The study also noted a general pattern: although all student groups improved in English between sixth and eighth grade (effect size $d = 0.54$), the rate of improvement was significantly lower for bilingual students, particularly those with minimal German exposure at home. This pattern may reflect the increasing importance of instructional language proficiency and academically supported literacy skills in later stages of L3 development. Furthermore, while 34% of bilingual students were raised bilingually from birth, the remaining majority acquired German successively before age five, introducing additional variation in bilingual proficiency. Overall, these findings suggest that while bilingualism initially facilitates L3 learning, particularly in environments that support metalinguistic awareness, long-term success is closely tied to the learner's proficiency in the language of instruction. Pedagogically, the study underscores the importance of leveraging students' bilingual resources and adopting differentiated teaching practices in multilingual classrooms (Maluch et al., 2016).

Edele et al. (2018) carried out a large-scale study to explore how immigrant bilingualism relates to third language (L3) learning. The study drew on data from 8,752 tenth-grade students in Germany, including 7,964 monolingual students, 436 Turkish-German bilinguals, and 352 Russian-German bilinguals. Students' language skills were measured using standardized tests in their first language (Turkish or Russian), second language (German), and third language (English). The results showed that bilingual students who had high and well-balanced proficiency in both their first and second languages performed better in English than average monolingual students. However, this advantage appeared only among L2-dominant bilinguals in the Russian-German group and was not found in the Turkish-German group. Further analyses revealed that bilingual students with low overall proficiency or strong dominance in their first language actually performed worse in English

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than monolingual students. Interestingly, when high-proficiency bilinguals were compared with monolingual students who had similarly strong German skills, the advantage in English disappeared. This finding suggests that proficiency in German, rather than bilingualism itself or knowledge of the first language, played the central role in L3 success. Supporting this interpretation, additional analyses showed that German reading comprehension was a very strong predictor of English proficiency in both bilingual groups, while listening skills in the first language had no meaningful effect. Overall, the study suggests that any benefits of bilingualism for learning a third language depend largely on the strength of the instructional language, rather than on proficiency in the minority language.

Cenoz and Valencia (1994) carried out a study in the Basque Autonomous Community that examined Spanish-Basque bilingual students learning English. The study involved 320 students in their final year of secondary school, all between 17 and 19 years old. Of these participants, 48 percent were Spanish monolinguals, while 52 percent were bilingual in Spanish and Basque. The bilingual group included 77 male and 89 female students, who attended either state schools (62.27 percent) or private schools (37.72 percent). The monolingual group consisted of 84 male and 70 female students, with similar attendance in state (52.59 percent) and private (47.40 percent) schools. Bilingual students were defined as those who had received all of their schooling in Basque for at least 12 years. Within this group, 68 percent had Basque as their first language and 32 percent had Spanish as their first language, but all showed high proficiency in both languages. The monolingual students were native Spanish speakers who had been educated only in Spanish. The results of the regression analyses showed that bilingualism was a strong predictor of success in learning English, even after controlling for cognitive, social, psychological, and educational factors. Importantly, the positive effect of bilingualism remained stable across different variables. Students who were taught in Basque, regardless of whether Basque or Spanish was their first language, performed better in English than their Spanish monolingual peers. These findings suggest that bilingual education played a clear and positive role in supporting third language learning.

These findings support earlier research from immersion contexts, where the utilization of a minority language as a vehicle of instruction (e.g., Basque) enhanced not only L2 but also L3 learning. In sum, the study demonstrates that bilingualism when supported by long-term, high-proficiency development in both languages can provide cognitive and



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linguistic advantages that facilitate third language acquisition (Cenoz & Valencia, 1994).

Another study by Zare and Mobarakeh (2013) compared Arabic-Persian bilinguals (APBs) and Persian monolinguals (PMs) in learning English. A total of one hundred male students from high schools were randomly assigned to two groups of equal size. (50 APBs and 50 PMs). All participants completed a background questionnaire assessing language proficiency and bilingual status. To ensure homogeneity, the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered, followed by a vocabulary pretest consisting of 50 English words previously unknown to all participants. The instructional treatment involved teaching the 50 target words, after which students completed a vocabulary posttest measuring general vocabulary knowledge, recognition, and production in English. The three independent t-tests indicated that APBs did better than PMs in overall L3 vocabulary learning, with a clear advantage in vocabulary production. In contrast, no meaningful difference was found between the groups in vocabulary recognition. These findings suggest that bilingualism may provide an advantage in productive vocabulary learning in a third language, possibly due to enhanced metalinguistic awareness or transfer of lexical learning strategies.

To examine cross-linguistic influence in third language (L3) acquisition, a study by Sadouki (2023) tested the predictions of the Cumulative Enhancement Model (Flynn et al., 2004) and the Typological Similarity Model (Rothman, 2011). The study included 35 middle school students, all of whom spoke Arabic as their first language (L1), French as their second language (L2), and were learning English as a third language (L3). Participants completed a multiple-choice translation task and were asked to translate an English (L3) text into both L1 (Arabic) and L2 (French). The results revealed greater transfer from French, the typologically closer language to English, thereby supporting the Typological Similarity Model, which suggests that learners tend to draw from the structurally more similar language at early stages of L3 acquisition. Additionally, the participants' successful use of both L1 and L2 in translation tasks aligned with The Cumulative Enhancement Model suggests that all previously learned languages can have a positive impact on the development of a third language (L3). These findings support the idea that both L1 and L2 can facilitate L3 learning, with typological proximity playing a key role in the direction of transfer. While the study provides useful pedagogical insights, it also acknowledged limitations such as its small sample size, the restricted range of tasks, and the lack of

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consideration for individual learner differences, such as motivation and language aptitude.

Method

For the purpose of determining whether there is a statistically significant difference in English vocabulary learning between Kurdish monolinguals (KMs) and Kurdish-Arabic bilinguals (KABs) EFL students and, the effect of L1 (i.e. Kurdish) or L2 (i.e. Arabic) dominance on third language vocabulary learning achievement. The current study used a quantitative method. Furthermore, the following sub-sections deal with: participants, research design, sampling procedures, and tools.

Research Design

In order to find any statistically significant difference between KMs and KABs in their vocabulary learning achievement. The first step was to identify eligible monolinguals and bilinguals. Second was to collect curriculum materials from “Reading & Writing” and “Listening & Speaking” subjects from both the first and second semesters that students studied during their academic year to design a vocabulary test between both universities. Through the vocabulary test we will be able to indicate the difference between KMs and KABs vocabulary achievement.

Participants and sampling procedure

This study involves 149 first-year university students from English language departments from two universities in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq: University of Zakho and University of Duhok. The primary reason for selecting first-year university students from the English Language department is that it offers a well-controlled environment for an EFL study. Both bilingual and monolingual participants are immersed in the same academic setting, receiving equal exposure to English language learning on a daily basis, which ensures consistent opportunities for skill development across groups. University education also provides a more extensive and immersive learning experience compared to the limited exposure of studying English for one hour per day in public high schools. Additionally, the structured guidance and comprehensive knowledge provided at the university level creates an ideal context for measuring and comparison of the language development trajectories of monolingual and bilingual EFL students.

Data collection tools and procedures

The current research employs two main data collection tools: a questionnaire and a Vocabulary Test. A comprehensive questionnaire that is adapted from Anderson et al. (2018) with the Kaiser-Meyer-Olin measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis ($KMO = 0.84$) and Zare and Mobarakeh (2013) which has been modified to fit the



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specific needs, context, and population of the current study. The questionnaire is administered to all students to gather background information and act as the first filtering tool to distinguish monolinguals and bilinguals among them. Through this Questionnaire the process of elimination will prove to be more systematic and effective. For example, participants who know more than 3 languages and studying English as fourth language will be excluded from the study based on their responses in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire included the following criteria: personal and demographic information, family and parental background, student's language background, and language use and dominance. All sections were answered by the students (see Appendix A).

Towards the end of the academic year, participants will take a standardized vocabulary test based on the vocabulary words identified from the curriculum materials. These include "Reading & Writing" and "Listening & Speaking" modules from both first and second semesters. The vocabulary words included all content words, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs and excluded function words such as articles, pronouns and prepositions. Only the common vocabulary words that were used in both classrooms via the given curriculum materials across both universities will be selected for the pool of words that will be used in the vocabulary test. This will ensure the fairness and reliability of the standardized vocabulary test. Furthermore, all identified vocabulary words will be categorized based on context and frequency.

It is worth mentioning that the common vocabulary between two universities will be compared to items from Nation's (2012) BNC/COCA word lists (Nation, 2016; Smith, 2023). Only words that exist in that list will be selected to design the vocabulary Test. Ultimately, the vocabulary test is adapted from Webb, Sasao, and Ballance (2017) which they developed the Updated Vocabulary Levels Test (UVLT) to measure breadth of vocabulary knowledge. The UVLT covers the 1st 5000 most frequent word families of English in a continuous series of five levels.

Based on these facts, the standardized test will ensure that all participants are assessed using the same set of vocabulary, allowing for a direct comparison of their vocabulary learning. (see Appendix B). To further emphasize the reliability of the vocabulary test, the Cronbach Alpha reliability test for the vocabulary test was conducted in SPSS (version 27.0.1.0). The choice of Cronbach's Alpha as a measure of internal consistency is particularly appropriate for the current study, as the test items were dichotomously scored (correct/incorrect). As stated by Tavakol and Dennick (2011) Cronbach's Alpha is suitable for assessing

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reliability in instruments with dichotomous responses, where it is equivalent to the Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20), widely recognized for its application to tests of this nature. Furthermore, DeVellis (2016) emphasizes that Cronbach's Alpha remains an established and reliable method for evaluating internal consistency across both continuous and dichotomous scales and is readily computed in statistical software such as SPSS. The reliability analysis conducted for the vocabulary test in this study yielded a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.968 across 75 items, indicating an excellent level of internal consistency for the test instrument.

Concerning students' questionnaire, it is administered in person to the students in their classrooms at departments of English Language at the University of Zakho and University of Duhok. Then the students' responses were gathered after being completed. They were asked to respond to every questionnaire items. The participants were informed that their responses will only be used for research purposes. Also, any personal information will be kept confidential. Using multiple choice and five-point Likert Scale, the participants were asked to check mark the items which were applicable to them. It took the participants 10-15 minutes to fill out the questionnaire. The questionnaire was administered to 162 participants. After analyzing the results of the questionnaire, the total number of eligible participants for the current study was 149. The 13 ineligible participants either did not have Kurdish as first language and Arabic as second language or they knew more than two languages, which disqualified them from being bilinguals that are fit for the current study. As for the Curriculum Materials, they were easily obtained by the lecturer of the subject. The lecturer also informed the researcher about which part of the textbook materials were used for the classroom or required for the students to study.

The Vocabulary Test was administered to all the participants who were deemed eligible by the filtering mechanism of the questionnaire. The test was conducted near the end of the academic year of (2024-2025) at both University of Zakho and University of Duhok. The students were given 30 minutes to complete the test.

Data Analysis and discussion of results

For the purpose of clarity and grasping the scope of the results in terms of comparisons it is essential to perform a basic descriptive analysis for the study participants.



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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Monolinguals and Bilinguals Participants of both Universities

	Monolinguals		Bilinguals		Total	
	N	Percentage	N	%	N	%
University of Zakho	39	45.9%	26	40.6%	65	43.6%
University of Duhok	46	54.1%	38	59.4%	84	56.4%
Total	85	100.0%	64	100.0%	149	100.0%

A crosstabulation analysis was conducted to examine the distribution of monolingual and bilingual participants across two universities: the University of Zakho and the University of Duhok. Out of the total 149 participants, 65 (43.6%) were from the University of Zakho and 84 (56.4%) from the University of Duhok. Among the University of Zakho participants, 39 (45.9%) were identified as monolinguals and 26 (40.6%) as bilinguals. In comparison, the University of Duhok had a slightly higher proportion of both monolinguals and bilinguals, with 46 (54.1%) monolinguals and 38 (59.4%) bilinguals. Overall, monolingual participants constituted 85 (57.0%) of the total sample, while bilinguals made up 64 (43.0%).

Table 2. Language Dominance in Kurdish-Arabic Bilinguals: Frequency and Percentage by Dominant Language

Language	N	Percentage
First Language Dominant (Kurdish)	118	79.2%
Second Language Dominant (Arabic)	31	20.8%

As can be seen in Table 2, the number of bilingual participants shows that 118 (79.2%) are dominant in their first language (Kurdish), while for the second language (Arabic) is 31 (20.8%).



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Table 3. Mean Vocabulary Test Scores and Standard Deviations for Monolingual and Bilingual Participants

	Language Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Vocabulary Test Scores	Monolingual	85	45.05	18.427	1.999
	Bilingual	64	58.30	13.192	1.649

An independent samples t-test was conducted as stated in Table 3 and Table 4 to compare the vocabulary test scores of monolingual and bilingual EFL students. The vocabulary test was scored out of 75 points. Descriptive statistics indicated that the monolingual group (N = 85) had a mean score of M = 45.05 (SD = 18.43), whereas the bilingual group (N = 64) had a significantly higher mean score of M = 58.30 (SD = 13.19). The t-test revealed a statistically significant difference in vocabulary achievement between the two groups: $t(146.67) = -5.11$, $p < .001$. The mean difference between the groups was -13.25 (95% CI: -18.37 to -8.13), with bilingual participants outperforming their monolingual peers. These findings suggest that bilingualism is positively associated with enhanced third language vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners.

Table 4. Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Vocabulary Scores of Monolingual and Bilingual EFL Students

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means					
Vocabulary Test Scores		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference Lower Upper
	Equal variances assumed	14.253	<.001	-4.885	147	<.001	-13.250	2.712	-18.610 -7.889
	Equal variances not assumed			-5.114	146.667	<.001	-13.250	2.591	-18.371 -8.129



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Table 5. Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Vocabulary Scores of L1(Kurdish) -Dominant and L2 (Arabic)-Dominant Bilinguals

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		F	Sig.	t	df				Lower	Upper
Vocabulary Test Scores	Equal variances assumed	3.644	.061	.173	62	.863	.576	3.325	-6.071	7.223
	Equal variances not assumed			.175	58.148	.862	.576	3.292	-6.013	7.165

Table 6. Mean Vocabulary Test Scores and Standard Deviations for L1 (Kurdish) and L2 (Arabic)

dominant bilinguals

		Language dominance		Std.		
		Group	N	Mean	Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Vocabulary Test Scores	L1 (Kurdish) dominant		33	58.58	15.184	2.643
	L2 (Arabic) dominant		31	58.00	10.924	1.962

An independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether language dominance (L1 vs. L2) among bilingual participants influenced their third language (L3) vocabulary learning. Participants were divided into two groups: those dominant in their first language (Kurdish) and those dominant in their second language (Arabic).

The results indicated (as shown in Table 5 and Table 6) no statistically significant difference in the mean scores obtained from vocabulary test scores between the two language dominance groups. The L1-dominant group (N = 33) had a mean score of M = 58.58 (SD = 15.18), while the L2-dominant group (N = 31) had a nearly identical mean of M = 58.00 (SD = 10.92), $t(58.15) = 0.175$, $p = .862$. The mean difference of 0.576 was not statistically significant, and the 95% confidence interval [-6.013, 7.165] includes zero, confirming the lack of a reliable difference.



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In response to the first research question, the present study investigated the influence of bilingualism on third language (L3) vocabulary learning among EFL students, specifically comparing monolingual and bilingual learners. The results demonstrated a statistically significant advantage for bilingual participants, who scored means notably higher than their monolingual peers on an English vocabulary test. This outcome supports the predictions of the Cumulative Enhancement Model (Flynn et al., 2004), which asserts that prior language learning whether from the first (L1) or second language (L2) can help in aiding the acquisition of a third language by providing cumulative and non-redundant linguistic knowledge.

This finding does not align with early work by Mägiste (1984), who reported no significant difference in L3 learning between monolingual and bilingual learners. However, more recent large-scale studies reinforce the positive impact of bilingualism. For example, Maluch et al. (2015, 2016) found that bilingual students in Germany tended perform better than their monolingual classmates in English (L3), particularly in the early stages of learning. However, their later longitudinal findings indicated that these bilingual advantages diminished over time unless the learners were also proficient in the language of instruction (German). Similarly, Edele et al. (2018) concluded that high and balanced bilingual proficiency particularly in the instructional L2 was associated with better L3 outcomes, underscoring the role of academic language proficiency in supporting vocabulary development.

The present study's findings further align with the work of Cenoz and Valencia (1994), which established that Spanish-Basque bilinguals performed better than Spanish only speakers in learning English as an L3. Their results suggest that bilingualism, when fostered through long-term, high-proficiency education in both languages, provides cognitive and metalinguistic advantages that translate into better L3 learning outcomes. These patterns were similarly observed by Zare and Mobarakeh (2013), who found that Arabic-Persian bilinguals significantly outperformed Persian monolinguals in productive vocabulary learning in English.

In response to the second research question, the current study adds a nuanced dimension to literature by analyzing language dominance among bilinguals. The comparison between Kurdish-dominant and Arabic-dominant bilinguals revealed no statistically significant differences in vocabulary scores. This result suggests that language dominance alone does not account for L3 vocabulary learning success, thereby reinforcing the CEM's central tenet: both L1 and L2 can contribute beneficially to L3 acquisition. This finding contrasts with Edele et al. (2018), who noted



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better outcomes among L2-dominant bilinguals (specifically in the Russian-German sample), and with Sadouki (2023), whose work highlighted the role of typological similarity in directing transfer effects.

Conclusion

The results of the study show empirical support for the hypothesis that bilingualism positively contributes and impact L3 vocabulary learning. Bilingual participants significantly outperformed their monolingual peers on a standardized English vocabulary test, underscoring the cognitive and linguistic benefits associated with bilingual experience. This outcome aligns with the Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) (Flynn et al., 2004), which posits that previously acquired language knowledge regardless of whether it is L1 or L2 facilitates subsequent language learning by enriching metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and cross-linguistic transfer mechanisms.

However, the second line of inquiry concerning language dominance yielded no statistically significant differences between Kurdish-dominant and Arabic-dominant bilinguals. This finding suggests that the cognitive and linguistic advantages conferred by bilingualism are not contingent on dominance in one language over the other. Both language systems appear to contribute positively and equally to the development of third language vocabulary. These results provide a more nuanced understanding of the CEM by reinforcing its assumption that facilitative transfer can stem from either previously acquired language, independent of dominance. Taken together, the findings contribute to the growing body of evidence suggesting that bilingualism can enhance additional language learning, particularly in the domain of vocabulary learning. The findings extend the current literature by offering evidence from the Kurdish and Arabic bilingual context in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq.

Suggestions for future studies

Future research should further explore how factors such as language proficiency, instructional language exposure, linguistic distance of the L1 and second language impact third language learning among bilinguals.

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Appendix A



A Study of The Effect of Bilingualism on EFL Kurdish Students' Third Language Vocabulary Learning



The students' Questionnaire

Dear Student,

I gratefully ask you to participate in this study by responding to the questionnaire below. It will collect data about your language history, proficiency, usage, and preferences to explore how bilingualism impacts third-language learning. Your participation is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without consequences. Your responses will be kept confidential, and the collected data will be securely stored and used only for research purposes, ensuring your identity remains anonymous.

Directions: Please note that with some questions you must write your answer in the appropriate space provided. However, most of the other questions only require you to tick the box that applies to you the best.

Thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this study. Your participation is highly appreciated and acknowledged.

Section 1: Personal and Demographic Information

Participant Code	(It will be provided by the researcher)		
Name			
Age			
Gender	☐ Male	☐ Female	
University	☐ University of Zakho	☐ University of Duhok	
Ethnicity	☐ Kurd	☐ Arab	☐ Assyrian
	☐ Other (please specify): _____		
City/Town where you grew up			
Dominant language in that city/town	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____

Section 2: Family and Parental Background

Please Tick (✓) in the box that best applies to you.

Parents' Language Background				
1.	Mother's first language	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____
2.	Mother's Second language	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____
3.	Father's first language	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____
4.	Father's Second language	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____



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5.	Languages used by parents at home:		
	☐ Only first language	☐ Mostly first language with some use of a second language	
	☐ Equally both languages	☐ Mostly second language	☐ Only second language

Section 3: Language Background

Please Tick (✓) in the box that best applies to you.

6.	Your First Language:	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____
7.	Where did you learn it?	☐ Home	☐ School	☐ Community ☐ Other: _____
8.	At what age did you learn it? (If learned from birth, write age "0")	_____		

Your First Language Proficiency Level:

		Beginner (1)	Elementary (2)	Intermediate (3)	Advanced (4)	Native/Fluent Proficiency (5)
9.	Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10.	Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11.	Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12.	Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

13.	Your Second Language:	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____
14.	Where did you learn it?	☐ Home	☐ School	☐ Community ☐ Other: _____
15.	At what age did you learn it? (If learned from birth, write age "0")	_____		

Your Second Language Proficiency Level:

		Beginner (1)	Elementary (2)	Intermediate (3)	Advanced (4)	Native/Fluent Proficiency (5)
16.	Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
17.	Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
18.	Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
19.	Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

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20.	Your Third Language:	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ Other (please specify): _____		
21.	Where did you learn it?	☐ Home	☐ School	☐ Community	☐ Other: _____	
22.	At what age did you learn it? (If learned from birth, write age "0")	_____				
Your Third Language Proficiency Level:						
		Beginner (1)	Elementary (2)	Intermediate (3)	Advanced (4)	Native/Fluent Proficiency (5)
23.	Speaking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
24.	Listening	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
25.	Reading	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
26.	Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Section 4: Language Use and Dominance

Please Tick (✓) in the box that best applies to you.

Primary language used in the following settings						
27.	Home	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
28.	University/Academic Settings	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
29.	Social Situations with Friends	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
Frequency of Language Use: Indicate frequency of use for each language in the following contexts (1 = never, 5 = always)						
How often do you use your first language at:						
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
30.	Home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
31.	University/Academic Settings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
32.	Social Situations with Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How often do you use your Second Language at:						
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
33.	Home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



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34.	University/Academic Settings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
35.	Social Situations with Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
How often do you use your third language at:						
		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
36.	Home	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
37.	University/Academic Settings	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
38.	Social Situations with Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
What language do you prefer for the following activities: Please, choose only one option.						
39.	Reading	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
40.	Writing notes	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
41.	Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
42.	Texting Friends	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
43.	Texting Family Members	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
44.	Listening to Music	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
45.	Watching Movies	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
46.	Watching TV or News	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
47.	Browsing on the Internet	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
Contextual Factors						
48.	My home environment is primarily:	☐ Monolingual		☐ Bilingual		
49.	In my community, the language environment is:	☐ Monolingual		☐ Bilingual		
50.	How often do you engage in activities requiring the use of both languages? (Only for Bilinguals)	Never (1) ☐	Rarely (2) ☐	Sometimes (3) ☐	Often (4) ☐	Always (5) ☐
This term "language-switching" refers to some people that switch between the languages they know within a single conversation (i.e. while speaking in one language they may use sentences or words from the other language). Please specify how often you engage in language-switching. If you do not know any language(s) other than your first language, ignore these questions.						

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		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)
51.	With parents and family	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
52.	With Friends	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
53.	Social media (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, etc.)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Attitudinal Aspects						
54.	I identify most strongly with the following language:	☐ Kurdish	☐ Arabic	☐ English	☐ Other: _____	
55.	It is important for me to maintain fluency in:	☐ Only my first language		☐ My first and second languages	☐ All the languages I know	
For each language, rate your integration in its community on a scale from 1 (not integrated) to 5 (highly integrated).						
	Language	Integration Level				
		Not integrated (1)	Slightly Integrated (2)	Moderately integrated (3)	Well Integrated (4)	Highly Integrated (5)
56.	First Language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
57.	Second Language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
58.	Third Language	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐



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Appendix B



The Vocabulary Levels Test

Student Name:

University name:

Instructions:

1. Place a checkmark (✓) under the word that matches the meaning provided.
2. Each meaning corresponds to only one word in the row.

Example on how to answer:

	sleep	smile	sun	table	tired	walk
To move forward on foot						✓
What people do when they rest at night	✓					
A large object you eat meals on				✓		



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1,000 Word Level (15 Marks)

	add	carry	cook	dance	dog	dress
To prepare food by heating it						
A piece of clothing often worn by women						
To take something from one place to another						

	brother	car	flower	house	love	tree
A male sibling						
A building where someone lives						
A plant with colorful petals						

	answer	cold	green	morning	question	rain
A response to something asked						
Not warm						
Water that falls from the sky						

	bath	beach	blue	father	food	photo
A place to wash your body						
A place with sand near the sea						
The male parent						

	happy	help	open	read	school	shoes
A place where children learn						
To give assistance						
To look at written words and understand them						

2,000 Word Level (15 Marks)

	alarm	assume	bitter	chest	exercise	knife
A loud sound used as a warning						
To accept something is true without proof						
A strong, unpleasant taste						



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	article	benefits	calm	coach	relax	seek
Something good that you get from something						
To try to find something						
A person who trains or leads a team						

	compare	confused	contact	detailed	emotion	fur
A feeling like joy or anger						
To see what is similar or different						
A soft covering from an animal						

	internet	message	patterns	peaceful	remove	salty
Not involving conflict or violence						
A way things repeat in a regular order						
A system used for online communication						

	skillfully	stress	tone	university	vote	hobby
Something you do for fun in your free time						
Pressure or worry caused by problems						
A place where students study after high school						

3,000 Word Level (15 Marks)

	athlete	decline	whisper	mixture	gradually	paragraph
A person who plays sports well						
A group of sentences in writing						
To speak very quietly						

	confidence	criticize	focus	install	evaluated	visual
To fix something in place or set it up						
To think clearly about one thing only						
A belief in yourself						

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	anxiety	content	precise	cooperate	request	task
To work together						
A job or duty you are given						
A feeling of worry or fear						

	approval	compete	diversity	impact	minimum	structure
The smallest possible amount						
Being made of different kinds or types						
Saying something is good or agreeing with it						

	crucial	essential	mixture	pursue	strategy	theme
A plan for achieving a goal						
Very important						
To try to get or do something over time						

4,000 Word Level (15 Marks)

	bicycle	cafe	soap	hammer	dictionary	texture
A tool used for hitting nails						
A book with word meanings						
A two-wheeled vehicle you ride						

	arrogant	butterfly	mist	recycle	skip	tutors
Not humble; thinking too highly of oneself						
Teachers who give extra help						
To reuse materials again						

	campus	cinema	hug	lemon	odors	patience
The area of a college or university						
A bad or strong smell						
A fruit that tastes sour						





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	bold	consistency	enrich	postpone	thunder	upgrade
To delay something until later						
Loud sound during a storm						
To make something better or more valuable						
	boarded	deprived	flawed	hammer	inclusion	humble
Lacking pride; modest						
Not perfect						
To get on a bus, train, or plane						
5,000 Word Level (15 Marks)						
	ample	bribe	clap	dentist	erase	visa
A person who cares for teeth						
To remove writing						
To hit your hands together to show praise						
	fragrances	apprehension	verb	dusk	lightning	symphony
A musical performance by a full orchestra						
A word that shows action						
Flash of light during storms						
	compliment	disapprove	snack	tailor	immigrate	landmark
A small amount of food eaten between meals						
To move to a new country to live						
To say something nice to someone						
	conversely	dusk	perfume	sour	vacation	vocabulary
A trip for rest or fun						
A strong pleasant smell						
The words used in a language						
	erase	grammar	mall	visa	symphony	thunder
Rules of a language						
A large building with many stores						
Permission to enter another country						