

The Influence of Kindergarten in Overcoming Diglossia among Primary School Pupils in Saudi Arabia

Munira Al-Azraqi

University of Dammam. Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Does diglossia, a natural linguistic phenomenon, present extraordinary challenges to children that are just starting school? The form of Arabic a child has to use in school is not usually the form that he/she uses at home. In school, books are written in standard Arabic, but at home the form used is typically a local dialect. Does this switch impede knowledge acquisition? In kindergarten, children encounter standard Arabic for the first time, and it is during this stage of a child's education that he/she is prepared for primary school. This study examines the benefits derived from language learning in kindergarten to overcome diglossia among first-grade Arab primary school pupils. I examine whether the year a child spends in kindergarten helps him/her to overcome diglossia during the first year in primary school. A sample of 101 female pupils (ages 6-7) was randomly selected from the first grades of five primary schools in Al-Ahsa, Saudi Arabia. They were divided into two groups: the first subsample included pupils who had attended kindergarten for at least one year before primary school, while the second subsample included pupils that had not attended kindergarten before starting primary school. The results show that there was no significant difference found between the mean scores of children who attended and those who did not attend kindergarten in all four dimensions of the presented diglossia test and in the total score. In summary, children show a similar level of diglossia regardless of whether they attend kindergarten before starting primary school.

Keywords: Diglossia, Arabic, kindergarten, Saudi Arabia, education.