

Ideal Multilingual Self versus Ideal L2 self of Arab students attending University in the UK.

Authors: Dr Rabia Gewieder¹ and Khulud Aleidi²

1 Assistant Professor Department of Social Work Faculty of Arts University of Tripoli, Libya PO Box 13932. Rabi38g@gmail.com

2 MENA Research Group, Leeds, UK, khuluda92@gmail.com.

Abstract

The aim of this research was to investigate how multilinguals students from the Arab countries currently residing, studying, or studied in the UK are motivated and inspired by being multilinguals compared to other UK linked bilingual Arab students speaking English as L2. The tools used were ideal multilingual-self = IDML, and Ideal L2-self= IDL2S, and were previously developed and validated by Henry and Thorsen (2018) in Sweden. The tools were completed in English by 41 students who received an online link. Other information on age, gender, L2 and L3 languages skills and country of origin were also collected. Four participants were interviewed to provide more in-depth insight on their views and consolidate the findings in a mixed methods approach.

There were more female respondents (23, 59%) than male respondents (16, 41%) out of those who declared their gender. Mean age of participants was 28.6 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.2 years, the minimum age was 20 years, and the maximum was 39 years. Seven participants were PhD students, 13 were doing Masters and the rest were doing a University degrees in different departments and Universities in the UK. There was a greater number of participants from Saudi Arabia (n=31, 76%) (Figure 2) among who responded.

The results suggested a higher total score in ideal multilingual-self of 12 multilinguals (from Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, Syria and Saudi Arabia) versus 26 participants predominately from Saudi Arabia who speak Arabic and English. The scores of Ideal L2 self of these two groups were comparable. In addition, multilinguals scored higher in the four dimensions of IDML. Overall, the quantitative data as well as the texts in the interviews suggested a strong positive view of multilingualism among multilinguals. Some of the bilinguals hold a favourable view of multilingualism but one respondent in the interview had a negative opinion on speaking more than two languages. Overall, this research shows that there is a strong and distinct ideal multilingual-self in the studied sample as was documented in different settings outside of the MENA region.

Introduction

Multilingualism, or interacting with others in more than two languages, is now more widespread than ever. It is typically defined as communicating in three languages at least compared to bilinguals who are communicating in two languages. Some authors, however, regard bilingualism as multilingualism as well. Grosjean (1982) argued that multilingualism has both the historical, existed in all time periods, and geographical, being in every part of the world, dimensions. There is also a rich research on this phenomenon specially in places where individuals usually communicate with two or more languages or indeed mixing the languages (Cenzo, 2013).

Research has provided enough evidence on the existence of a difference between a multilingual self (IDML) (a set of criteria, including motivation, and beliefs of a multilingual) from the L2 self (IDL2S) (Henry and Thorsen, 2018). The idea that a multilingual is very different or indeed is distinct from somebody who is only learning a second language have positively impacted on multilingualism research and informed studies on L2 and L3 acquisition. However, a distinction should be made between investigating the social aspect of being multilingual from the linguistic aspect of multilingualism. Research suggested that the social aspect of being multilingual is usually positive. For example, Sandro and David (2011) found empirical evidence that University students' attitude toward multilingualism is positive.

However, the research on how multilingual Arab students attending university in the UK think of being multilingual is rare. There is also a conceived difference between North African students and the Rest of Arab students in how they deal with foreign languages. Students from Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are native in Arabic, fluent in French, because of cultural and historical reasons, and also confident in English as it is the language of their education in the UK. On the other hand, Arab students from the rest of the Arab speaking countries are native in Arabic and fluent or confident in English with the exception of some Lebanese students who historically master French. Therefore, comparing these two groups of students will inform the notion of the significance of multilingualism and/or learning a second language in these under studied population. This research is aiming to answer the following research question:

How multilinguals students from the Arab countries currently residing, studying or studied in the UK are motivated and inspired by being multilinguals (measured on IDMS tool) compared to other UK linked bilingual Arab students speaking English as L2 (measured on IDL2S).

Literature Review

In the history of civilization speaking more than one language was always an advantage for individuals and communities alike. An interesting account of the history of speaking more than one language is to be found in Grosjean (1982) book on bilingualism in which he argued the case for, by highlighting several examples from different parts of the world, the thesis that bilingualism is probably the norm rather than the exception.

Research is lacking on multilingualism in the MENA region despite the co-existence of different languages and the historical exposure to European languages through colonialism and trade (Hourani, 2013). One significant historical example of multilingualism that involved Arabic and a European language was the multilingualism of inhabitants of Andalusia in Spain (Hourani, 2013). Arabic language interacted with old and new languages to a degree that the Modern Standard Arabic scientific and technical terminology is mostly based on European languages with the dominance of English (Awang and Salman, 2017). There are also studies into the impact of European languages such as English in Jordan, Egypt and Sudan and French in the Maghreb countries, in addition to Italian in Libya on the colloquial dialects of these countries (Al Btoush, 2014).

The focus of this research is on the motivation, beliefs and knowledge that being a multilingual offer more positive attributes, and impact on learning L2 as well, compared to being a bilingual only. However, before reviewing the linguistic literature, it is essential here to look at the literature that shaped the idea of investigating the SELF, which the beliefs that the person holds about themselves. The use of this self, or in several related but subtly different terms like self-concept and self-esteem- in social, psychological, and linguistic research is very common recently. There were few seminal books that consolidated the need to conceptualise a self in many different settings or circumstance during research (Wylie, 1974). Psychological research suggests that views of people about themselves and their attributes are very significant and impact on their day-to-day life including their career and education. Swann et al (2007) in a highly cited discussion piece titled “Do people's self-views matter? Self-concept and self-esteem in everyday life” and published in The American Psychologist Journal concluded that: *“people’s self-views do matter, and the task of future researchers is to determine how, when, and with what consequences. This conclusion has direct implications for programs designed to change self-views. That is, given that people with negative self-views think and behave in ways that diminish their quality of life”*. (Swann et al (2007, p92).

A review of literature suggested that firstly authors in linguistics were trying to conceptualise the multilingual self through qualitative research and mirror their research on previous conceptualisation of L2 self.

Some authors applied qualitative research to gather data on how being multilingual impact on the person. Pavlenko (2006) described how people who communicate with more than two language enjoy what they are doing, and their job and other opportunities are enhanced by being multilinguals. Other authors invested in developing a questionnaire or a tool to measure IDMS. One such studies is Jeoffrion, et al, (2014) who surveyed 684 university students in France to examine 26 items (questions) about multilingualism. The items included statements such as *“It is possible to speak a language fluently without having learnt it during childhood”* to measure views on the ability to learn language, and further items to examine different approaches to learn or communicate in foreign languages, and other language acquisition relevant attitudes. The answers were in Likert scales and subsequent path analysis and exploratory factor analysis identified 4 dimensions as follows:

- 1- Language transfer and integrative attitudes, 2- Open-plan view of language learning and flexible ability, 3- Reliance on L1 and 4- Normative approach and instrumental attitudes.

In conclusion Jeoffrion, et al, (2014) found that their tool is valid to measure attitude to multilingualism which they termed plurilingualism:

“The path analysis shows that advanced students who learn several languages have a more plurilingual posture than beginners or those who learn fewer languages” (Jeoffrion, et al, 2014, p8).

However, what stands out in this field is the study of Henry and Thorsen (2018) on the influence of ideal multilingual self on motivation and investigated its impact on education. They modified IDL2S tool to fit the conceptualisation of IDMS and conduct the study on 323 students enrolled at two schools in Sweden where different languages are taught. Their hypothesis is that the impact of multilingualism is positive and it affects favourably the subsequent learning of another language. Further exploratory factors analysis showed that the tool is valid, and the authors concluded that:

“While the current findings are not intended to be generalisable beyond the very particular context in which the research was conducted, they provide initial support for the construct

validity of the ideal multilingual self. Specifically, they show that the ideal L2 self and the ideal multilingual self are distinct constructs” (Henry and Thorsen, 2018, p=361). There were, however, clear to point out that while further validity studies may be needed and testing the tool in different settings may be desirable to check its usefulness in informing education and encourage holistic approach in teaching that include several languages.

In summary, multilingualism impact can be examined in both qualitative and quantitative methods and there are tools that could be applied in different environments to examine the relevant hypotheses. This is the focus of the research presented here.

Methods

This is a comparative study between multilinguals and bilinguals' international students from Arabic background with the aim to gather their views on how multilingualism impacts their self-confidence and facilitate their studies and future career. The comparison is between students who speak, write, and read in at least 3 languages including English with bilinguals of Arabic and English. When students are selected the main criteria are how many languages do they use and their proficiency in their languages. Arabic should be their native language although as expected some of the students from the Maghreb could speak Amazigh as a native language. However, Arabic still the main language in all North African countries. The reflection of these students on multilingualism will help understand the different contexts that this group of students learn and use L2 and L3. The theoretical background is based on theories and ideas that multilingualism has a positive impact on their users more than speaking only a second language. Arab students share the same language but have different history and contact with foreign languages with students from the Maghreb region (Morocco, Algeria, Mauritania and Tunisia) have a strong command of French compared to students from Eastern Arabic countries.

Study design

This is a mixed method research with both quantitative and qualitative data collection approaches. The schematic presentation below (Figure 1) illustrates these two parts of the study:

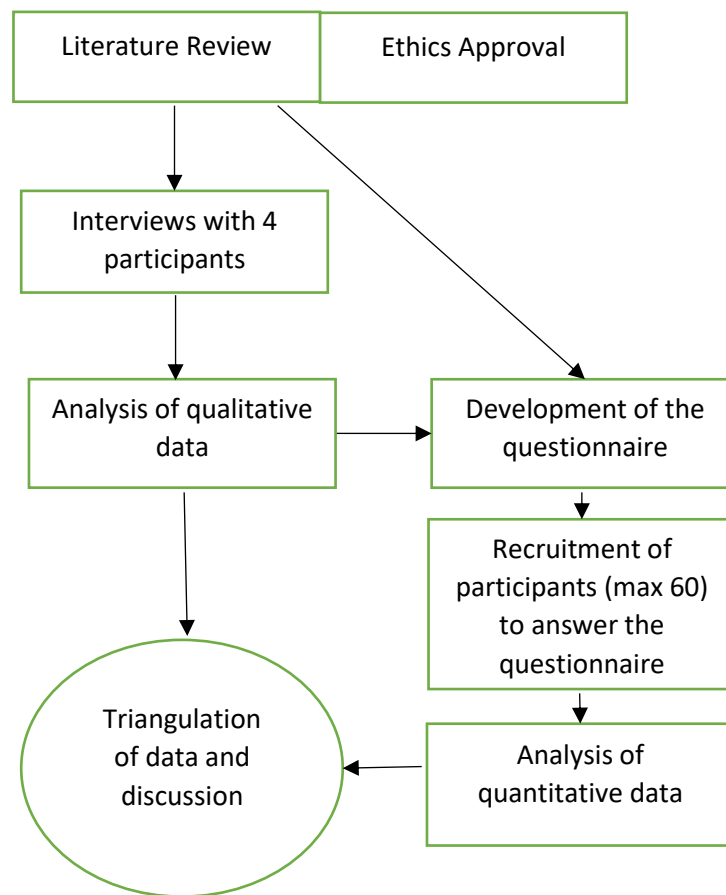


Figure 1. Schematic presentation of the method.

Recruitment of Participants

The participants were all studying, or studied recently, in the UK and are originally from the Arabic speaking countries in the MENA region. As access to students' emails was not granted the sampling frame was not available. For logistical reasons the recruitment of these students was from the universities of Leeds, Leeds Beckett and Bradford. The students' associations (including the Islamic society in each university) were approached to advertise for the study. Interviews were carried out by the researcher using social media platforms. Each participant signed a consent form after reading a participant's information sheet before participating in the study.

Development of the questionnaire

The main tool is based on Henry and Thorsen (2018) ideal multilingual-self questionnaire which is reliable and was validated previously by the same authors. The questions on the second language were, however, changed to English as in the Henry and Thorsen (2018) study

L2 was French rather than English. The first few questions) were designed to categorize the participant into two groups (multilinguals versus bilinguals). No questions were asked about the scores in any language, but the participants were asked to self-declare their proficiency in the spoken languages apart from their native language of course. The tool questions are illustrated in Table 1 below. The scores are on Likert scores of 5 ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Therefor the total score would be 20 for each measurement. In the analysis the groups of multilinguals will be compared to the group of bilinguals in each component and in total to answer the research question.

Table 1. Multilingual-self and Ideal L2 self questionnaire.

Code	Ideal Multilingual-self	Code	Ideal L2 self
1.1	Communicating with people in other language(s) besides English and the language I speak with my parents is not going to be a problem for me in the future	2.1	I see myself as a person who in the future is good at speaking English.
1.2	When I think about the future, I can see myself speaking several different languages other than English and the language I speak with my parents in many different situations.	2.2	I see myself as a person who in the future will use English in contact with people outside my own country.
1.3	Being able to speak other language(s) besides English and the language I speak with my parents' language will be a part of who I am in the future.	2.3	When I think about the future, I can see myself speaking English in many different situations
1.4	When I think about who I will be in the future, I see myself as someone who speaks several different languages other than English and the language I speak with my parents.	2.4	Being able to speak English will be a part of who I am in the future

The prompt questions of the interviews were as follows:

- In your view is there a difference between speaking only two languages (including your native language) or speaking more than two languages? What is the impact of speaking more than two languages on yourself, your studies, and your future career? If you speak only Arabic and English, please reflect on the impact of being able to speak English and whether you need to learn a third language?
- Please feel free to speak about any aspects of languages in contact and reflect on your personal views regarding multilingualism either positive or negative.

The researchers had to engage more during the interviews as the bilinguals interviewed were not very engaging with the topic.

Analysis

The quantitative analysis was based on firstly describing the data (mainly the scores of Likert scale) and secondly comparing the scores of Multilinguals versus bilinguals students using an inferential statistical method such as t-test if the data was normally distributed, a prior test of normality was used on the continuous data such as age and time in the UK to examine the distribution of data (Nicenboim and Vasishth, 2016). For ordinal data such as the Likert scales non-parametric statistic (Mann Whitney) is used to compare groups. All analysis was performed using SPSS software after exporting the data file from the online survey tool of Leeds University. In some cases, exported data has to be re-arranged to be suitable for SPSS. The graphs were produced by SPSS or copied from online survey if they are representative to the discussed results and in other cases data was copied to Microsoft excel to produce better-quality graphs.

In all statistics the level of significance denoted by P was taken as equal or below 0.05. This P value is defined by Dahiru, (2008) as:

“The P value is defined as the probability under the assumption of no effect or no difference (null hypothesis), of obtaining a result equal to or more extreme than what was actually observed. The P stands for probability and measures how likely it is that any observed difference between groups is due to chance” (Dahiru, 2008, p21)

Despite that there are some doubts on the usefulness of P value in scientific reasoning especially in Medical literature. It is widely used in social science to measure if the difference is an actual occurrence rather than happening by chance only. However, it is largely affected

by the sample size and in this research because there is a small sample size then it can be argued that when there is a significant difference it is more likely to be true.

The interviews with four students (2 bilinguals and 2 multilinguals) were conducted in English, typed and the transcript and analysed thematically using Braun and Clarke (2006) approach to code the data and then find the relevant themes. Data from the two groups (multilinguals and bilinguals) of the study and from the survey and the interviews then triangulated to inform the discussion and the conclusion of the study.

Ethics

An ethical application was approved by the University of Leeds for the surveys and the interviews. All data were entered with no sensitive information on the participants (e.g. their names, address. Etc). This is to ensure the anonymity. Data are stored anonymously in the survey online with password protected access for the researcher. When data was exported that data file was stored on a password protected computer for further consultation or if needed for further analysis to publish the data in a conference or as peer reviewed manuscript in an academic Journal.

Results

Only 41 participants responded to the link to online surveys tool. There were more female respondents (23, 59%) than male respondents (16, 41%) out of those who declared their gender. Two respondents did not answer this question. Mean age of participants was 28.6 years with a standard deviation (SD) of 4.2 years, the minimum age was 20 years, and the maximum was 39 years. One respondent did not declare their age. Seven participants were PhD students, 13 were doing Masters and the rest were doing a University degrees in different departments and Universities in the UK. There was a greater number of participants from Saudi Arabia (n=31, 76%) (Figure 2) among who responded to the survey as expected as the researchers posted mostly through Social Media platforms that have more students from that country.

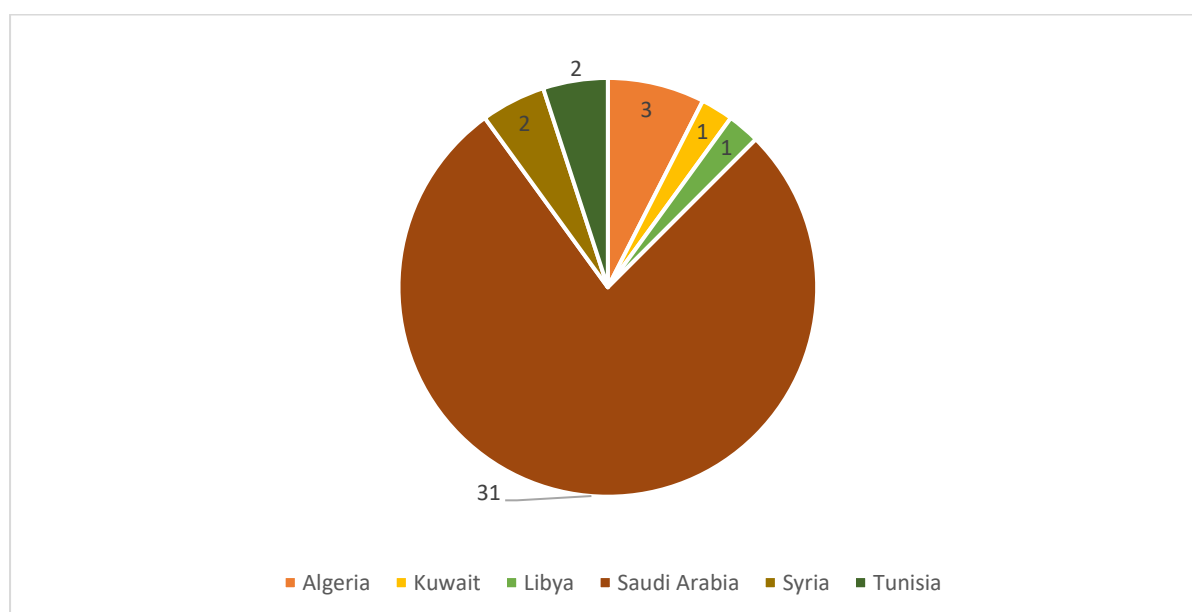


Figure 2. The country of origin of the participants. More than 3 quarters of respondents were from Saudi Arabia.

Posting in North African students' platforms failed to get large number of respondents. However, there 12 multilingual (speakers of more than 2 languages) and 27 bilinguals (speakers of Arabic and English) so comparisons are possible. All bilinguals speak English in addition to Arabic. Eight of the multilinguals speak French as a third language (even though some of them should have learned French before they learned English in case of respondents from Algeria and Tunisia), two speak Turkish. Interestingly, one speaks Korean, and one speaks Japanese. There were no differences between the groups (multilinguals versus

bilinguals in their age or how long have they lived in the UK (Table 2). However, there were as twice females (8) than males (4) in the Multilingual group.

Table 2. Mean and SD and SE of the comparison between multilinguals and bilingual in their age and the length of their stay in the UK.

	9-Do you speak a third language (other than Arabic and English)?	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
1-Age	Yes	12	28.67	3.055	.882
	No	28	28.61	4.605	.870
4-How long have you lived in the UK?	Yes	12	3.71	2.116	.611
	No	28	2.66	2.815	.532

The Multilingual group was overall much better than bilinguals in English, they rate their speaking better as suggested by the boxplot in Figure (3) and consider their writing more on the very good or excellent categories as shown in Figure (4) and also their rate their reading skills higher than the bilingual (Figure 5). However, when these differences tested for statistical significance using the non-parametric statistics of Mann-Whitney only the differences in writing were significant at ($z=2.5$, $p=0.014$). Reading and Speaking skills p values were above 0.05.

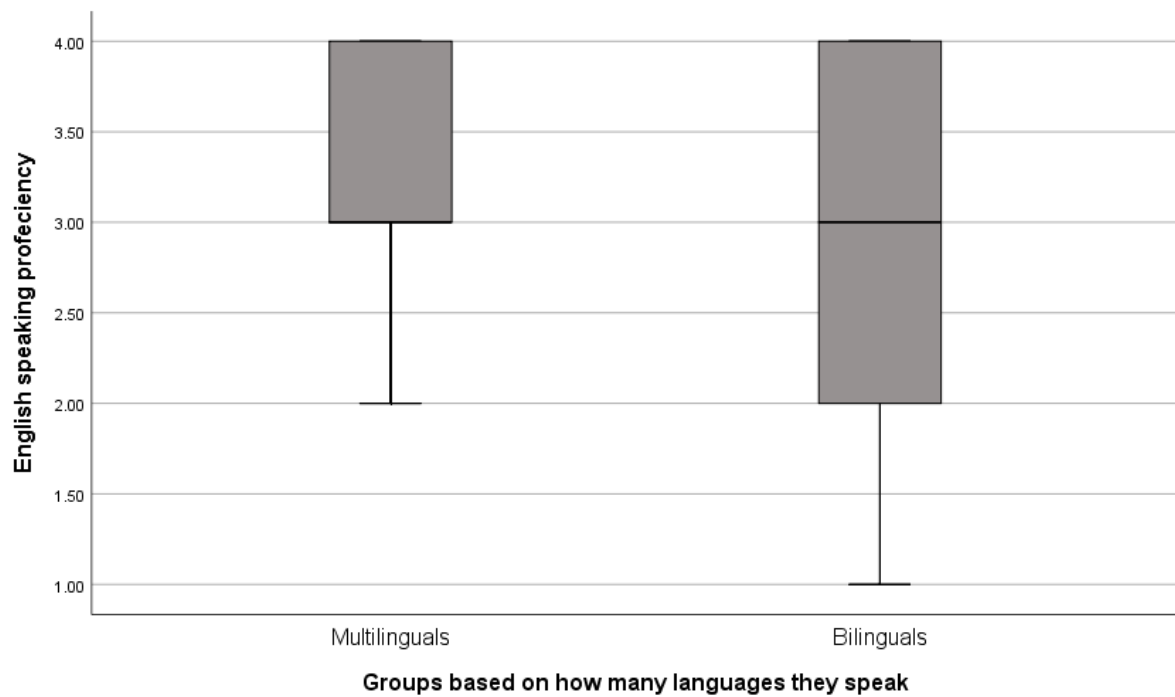


Figure 3. Boxplot of five data points including the median and minimum and maximum of scales rating of proficiency of speaking English ranging from 1=poor to 4=Excellent of bilinguals and multilinguals.

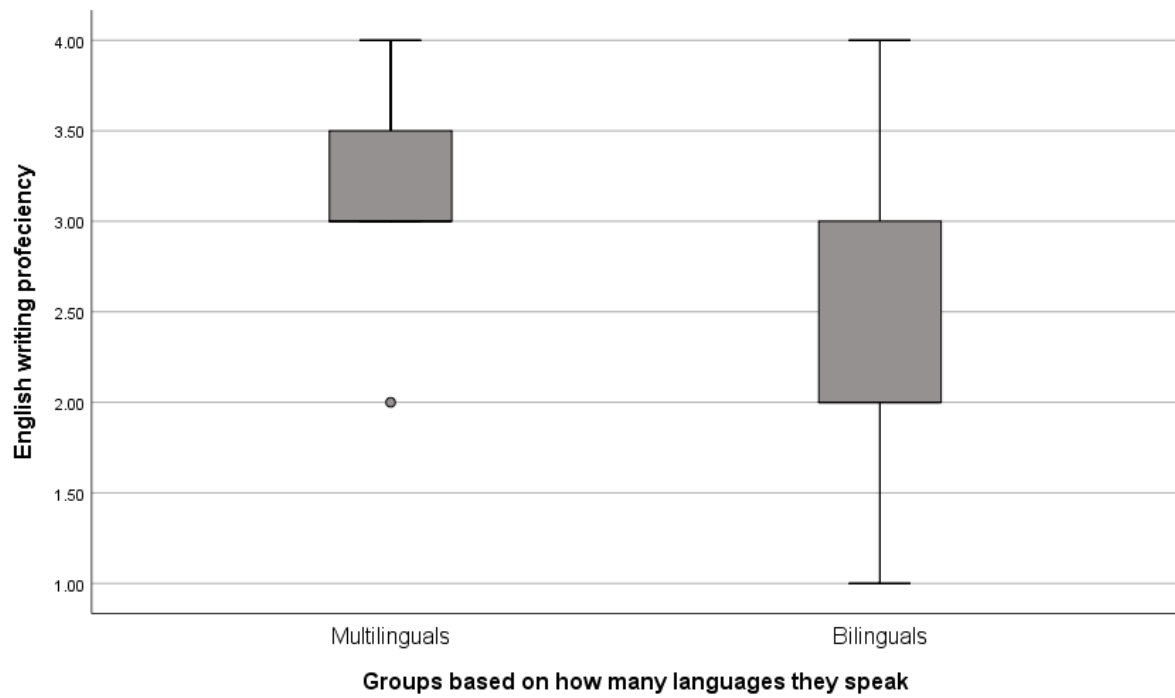


Figure 4. Boxplot scales rating of proficiency of writing English ranging from 1=poor to 4=Excellent of bilinguals and multilinguals.

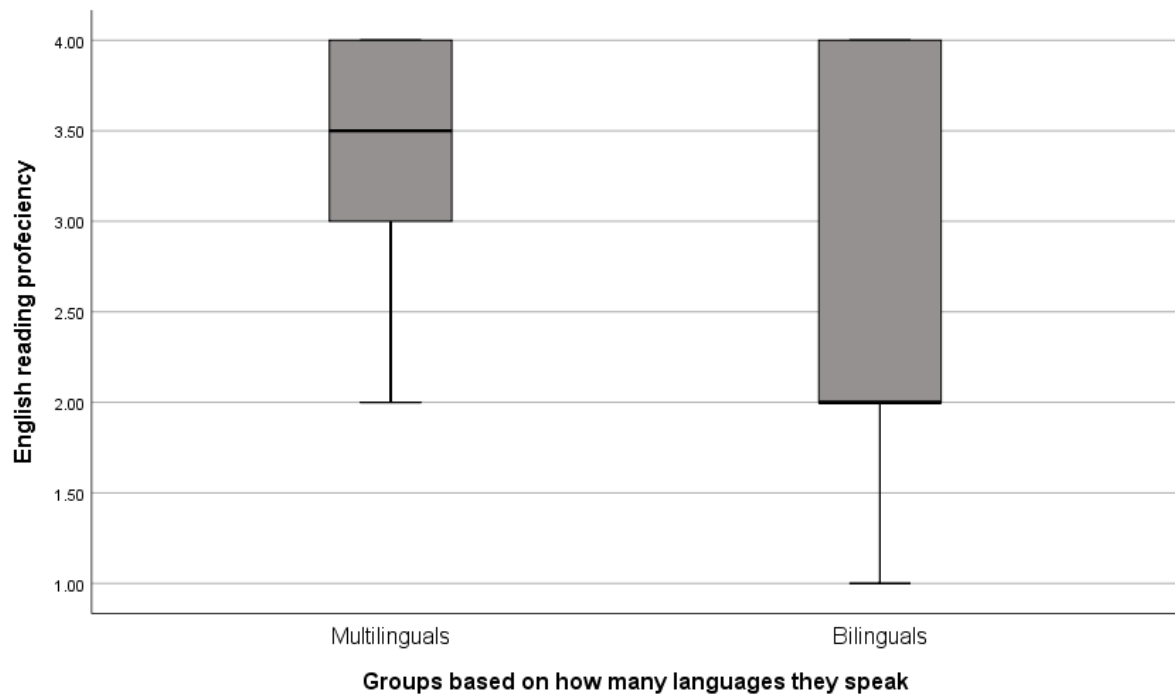
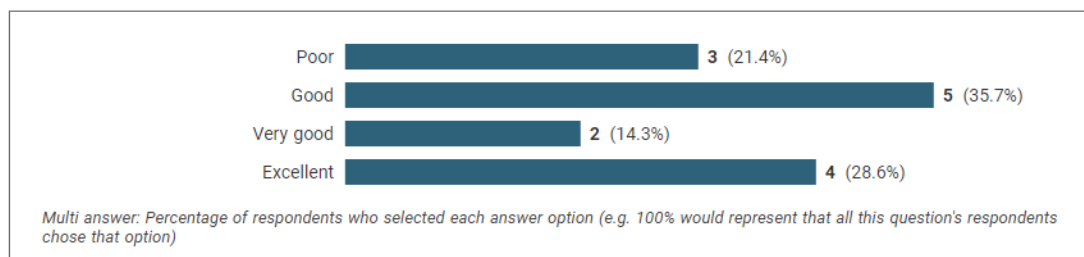


Figure 5. Boxplot scales rating of proficiency of reading English ranging from 1=poor to 4=Excellent of bilinguals and multilinguals.

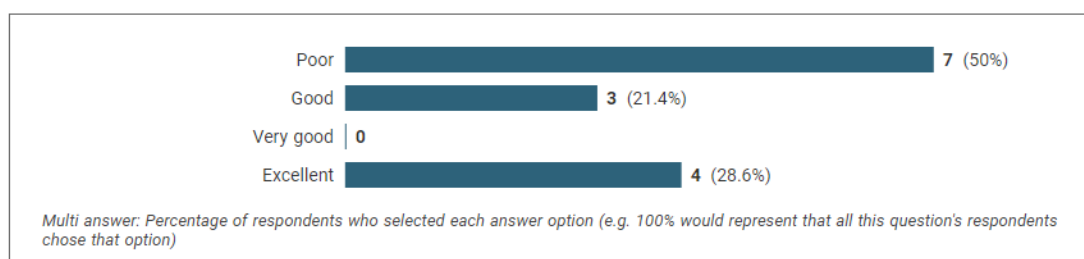
Mastering of a third language

Figure (6) shown below indicated that the rating of multilinguals to their proficiency in their third language is varied and overall, their skills in English are much better by comparison.

10-Speaking



11-Writing



12-Reading

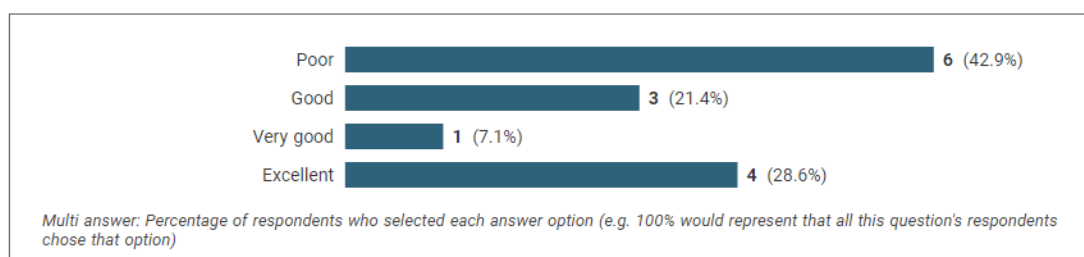


Figure 6. Bar charts produced by online surveys platform show that only around 28% of multilinguals think that their proficiency in the third language is excellent. There is also more than 50% who think that their writing skills is poor in the third language.

Answers to open questions

Many respondents just ignored the spaces available for them to elaborate more on different issues. Two notable answers were the following: one was negative about multilingualism and he was a bilingual and the other was a multilingual who was very positive in his views.

The bilingual said when asked to elaborate more:

“It is good to invest in learning English and other languages. For me however I am now invested more in bettering my classical Arabic since it is part of my identity and I plan on being a better writer.”

While the multilingual reply to the same open question was:

“Being multilingual will effect absolutely in the way you think, because your brain will be train to think differently in some situations, therefore, I think it is advantage and great skills for everyone should learn it”

The scores on ideal multilingual and bilingual-self tools

The scores of the Likert scores were much higher when the total of the four dimensions (four questions) were compared between the two groups in the two sets of questions, as shown in Figure 7 and Figure 8 as a mean and 95% confidence interval. The multilinguals scored much higher in ideal Multilingual self and this was statistically significant and was also higher in ideal bilingual self but was not statistically significant as shown in table 3.

Table 3. Comparison between the groups in deal Multilingual-self (IDMS) and Ideal Bilingual-self (IDL2S) total scores. N of Multilinguals (12), N of Bilinguals (28). One participant data were missing.

Groups based on how many languages they speak		Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean difference	SE of difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
IDMS	Multilinguals	16.75*	2.30	5.57	1.28	2.99	8.16
	Bilinguals	11.18	4.14	5.57	1.03	3.49	7.65
IDL2S	Multilinguals	17.50**	2.75	1.53	1.50	-1.49	4.56
	Bilinguals	15.97	4.84	1.53	1.20	-0.90	3.97

*significant at $p=0.001$, **Not significant at $p=0.31$ (independent samples t-test).

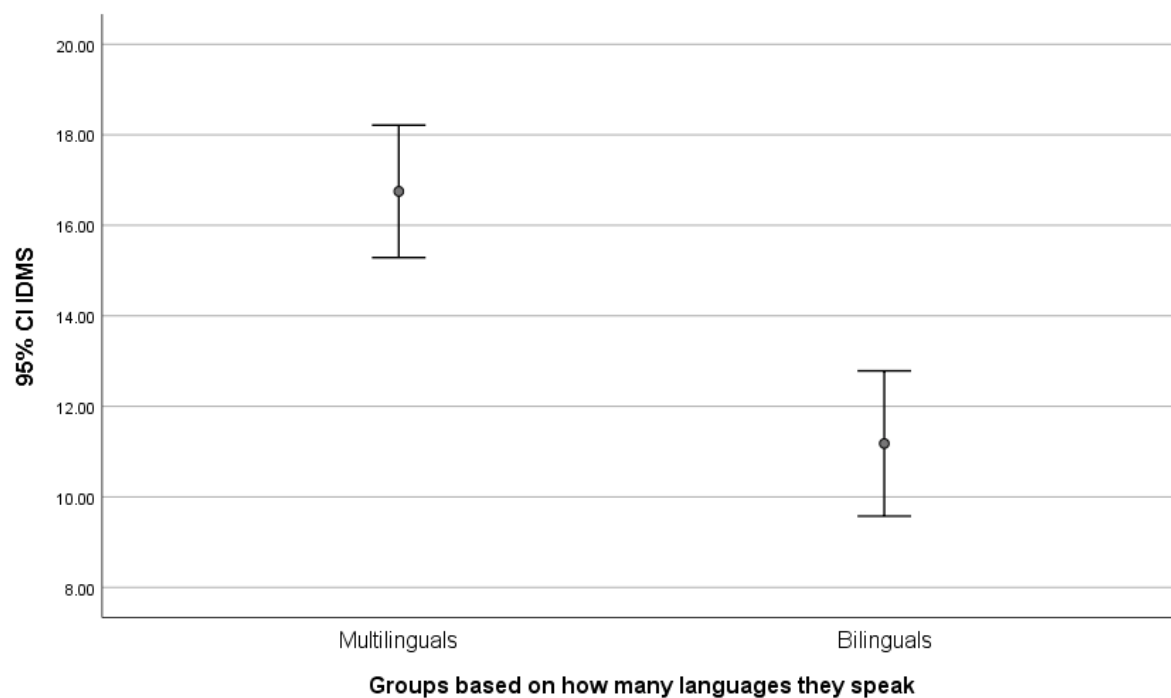


Figure 7. The total score of IDMS (Ideal Multilingual self) of the two groups.

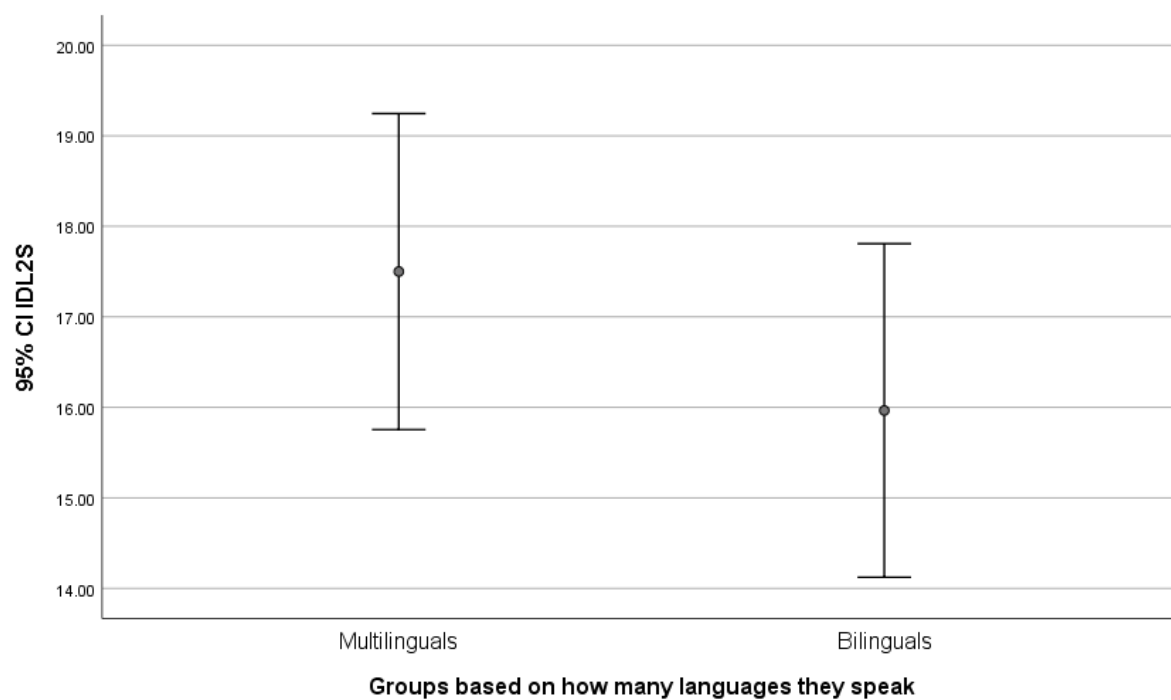


Figure 8. The total score of IDL2S (Ideal L2 self) of the two groups.

The multilingual scores in every dimension were higher in Ideal multilingual-self compared to bilingual but not statistically different from bilinguals in ideal bilingual self as shown in table 4.

Table 4. scores of every dimension of the tools measuring Ideal multilingual-self (IDMS) and Ideal L2-self (IDL2S) out of 5 Likert scores expressed as mean and measures of deviations.

Code*	Groups based on how many languages they speak	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	P-value**
IMS 1.1	Multilinguals	4.17	0.83	0.24	0.001
	Bilinguals	2.66	1.32	0.24	
IMS 1.2	Multilinguals	4.17	0.83	0.24	0.001
	Bilinguals	2.69	1.26	0.23	
IMS 1.3	Multilinguals	4.42	0.51	0.15	0.001
	Bilinguals	3.11	1.20	0.23	
IMS 1.4	Multilinguals	4.00	0.74	0.21	0.014
	Bilinguals	2.97	1.30	0.24	
IL2S 2.1	Multilinguals	4.58	0.51	0.15	0.65
	Bilinguals	3.90	1.32	0.24	
IL2S 2.2	Multilinguals	4.33	0.89	0.26	0.59
	Bilinguals	4.14	1.38	0.26	
IL2S 2.3	Multilinguals	4.25	0.75	0.22	0.45
	Bilinguals	3.93	1.36	0.25	
IL2S 2.4	Multilinguals	4.33	0.89	0.26	0.42
	Bilinguals	4.00	1.28	0.24	

*See table 1 for key to the code. ** p values calculated using 2 independent sample t-test on SPSS. Bold values are significant at $P < 0.05$.

As table 4 showed the scores of multilinguals in IDFMS was almost the double of bilinguals in this questionnaire.

The interviews

As mentioned earlier the interviews were conducted with 4 students, two speak more than two languages and the other two speak Arabic and English. All students were living, or lived, in the UK for at least 4 years. Three interviews were conducted in English and the fourth interview was conducted in Arabic. This participant was an Algerian female speaking Amazigh, Arabic,

English and French (all to a satisfactory level, with an Amazigh (a language spoken in parts of North Africa being her mother tongue) Part of her insistence in Arabic is that she treats Arabic as an acquired language even though it is the official language in Algeria. This transcript was then translated into English for analysis.

Two main themes were identified from these interviews. A positive opinion on multilingualism and impact on first or second language.

Positive view of multilingualism

The four interviewees shared a positive view on being a multilingual with the feeling that being multilingual will give them more confidence and increase their knowledge and benefit them culturally, scientifically and at the personal level. The word count map which was generated using an online software (<https://worditout.com/word-cloud/create>) is used here to show the more frequent words in the interviews (Figure 9).

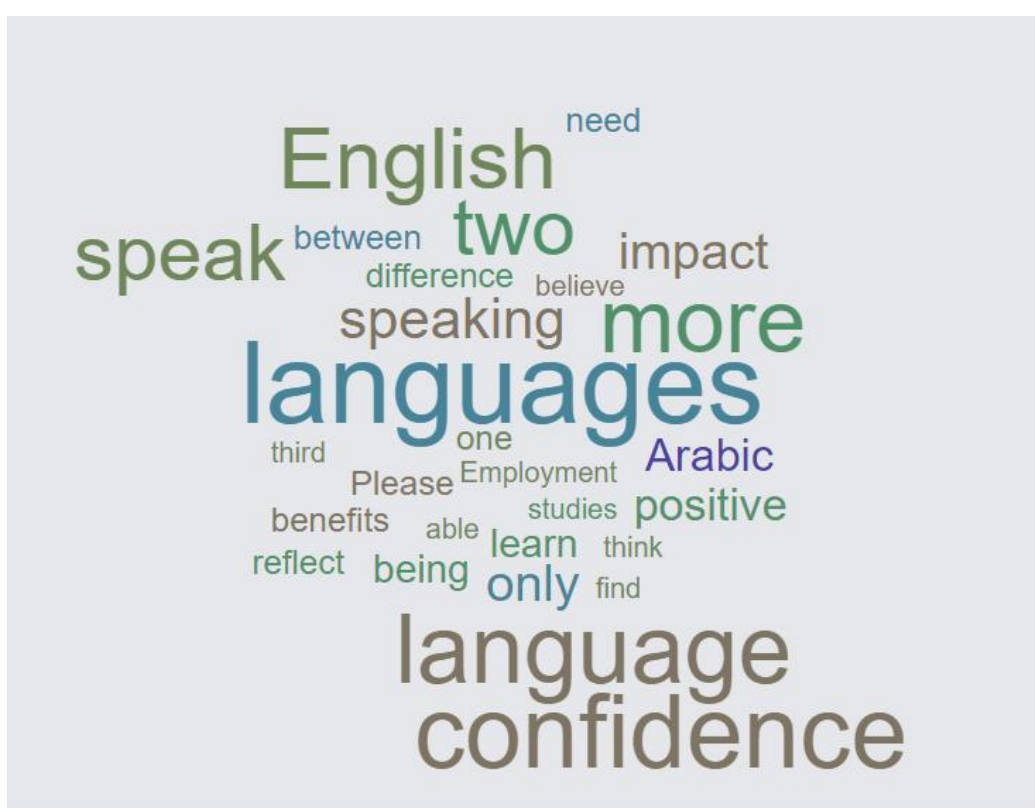


Figure 9. Word count map (cloud) was generated reflecting the most common occurring words in the interviews (the larger the font, the most frequent the term). Most words illustrate a positive construct regarding multilingualism with confidence is a prominent term.

A bilingual (male age=30 years from Saudi Arabia has a positive view of multilingualism, he said:

“Of course, there is a difference between speaking two languages and three languages, when you speak more than two languages it helps you to interact more with people from different backgrounds and I believe that with every language we learn, our personality develops more for the better”

He added:

“I think that being multilingual is a good thing, as it makes the person more open to the world, since it helps to gain a lot of experience and knowledge, along with many scientific, educational and practical benefits”

An interesting view on being Multilingual was the reflection of the Amazigh speaker from Algeria who reflected on her being a multilingual since childhood. She said:

“I was brought up in a village near Batna in Algeria where my parents and all people in the village speak Amazigh [the local language of the Amazigh people] and I had to learn Arabic and French at school. Later my Arabic improved tremendously when I moved to Batna and my French as well. When I got the equivalent of A level, I was awarded a scholarship at Oxford University to do Biomedical Science. I started learning English and I found that not very challenging because I was already exposed to European language. To me Multilingualism is the normal situation”

The second Multilingual was a Libyan female who decided to learn Korean out of her love to the Korean culture and the music that is called now K-pop. Her reflection was positive in its entirety toward multilingualism. She said:

“I was confident in my English since I was young. When I came to the UK I was in love with English to a degree that I am speaking with my Arab friends in English. Then in year 2 of my studies I had an option to choose a language and as I was fascinated by the Korean songs, I had no doubt that if this language was available to study I would do it. I became very good after few months and then I decided to go to Seoul for a month. Now I can enjoy a conversation in Korean without any problems”

A respondent from Saudi Arabia who is a bilingual reflected on the reaction of his countrymen when he visits Saudi Arabia. He Said:

“Sometimes people who don’t speak the second language will get frustrated if you speak with them a word or two of the second language even if it isn’t on purpose”

This reflection suggests that some bilinguals or even multilinguals refrain from speaking the languages they know to avoid negative reaction from those who do not speak them.

Impact of learning a third language on other languages

The reflection of the Algerian Amazigh on the impact of learning a third language on the second language or the other way around is positive. However, the Libyan participant was a bit dubious on the impact of her third language on her English as she said:

“As a learner of English and Korean the main constraints in the time you devote to each language. There are of course more resources in English, and I cannot travel to South Korea every year to practice Korean more”

An interesting, and at all unexpected finding is what one of the bilinguals reflected on regarding the negative impact of learning foreign languages on the native language. This young Saudi female said:

“I admit that the more I become fluent in English the more my Arabic is badly affected, which I used to count as a disadvantage. However, I noticed that it is not an influence on the language itself, but rather, it is the difference between the two languages manifested in this way”

A positive reflection on mastering L3 was from a bilingual who said:

“Although, the languages I speak fluently are Arabic and English, I am definitely keen to learn more languages. This will pay off in my life as a human being and as an academic no doubt. It will allow me to seek the knowledge that has not been translated into English and I will be proud of myself”

Triangulation of results

The quantitative data as well as the texts in the interviews suggested a strong positive view of Multilingualism among multilinguals. Some of the bilinguals hold a favourable view of multilingualism but one respondent in the interview had a negative opinion on speaking more than two languages. The confidence with languages and increased motivations was reflected in the high scores of the multilinguals in the dimensions of the tools and also when the frequency of words were visually presented and in the enthusiasm that the interviewees showed and in their answers. Overall, this research shows that there is a strong IDMS as was documented in different settings outside of the MENA region.

Discussion

The main finding of this study is that the motivation, beliefs and confidence of multilinguals students who study, or studied, in the UK is significant as measured by ideal multilingual-self tool which is a validated and reliable tool.

The main novelty of this study is that it is an investigation of beliefs about multilingualism in an understudied population in a multilingual setting. It contrasts with the study of Jeoffrion, et al (2014) as they examined students' beliefs toward multilingualism in a monolingual environment. The study used the tool developed by Henry and Thorsen, 2018 in Sweden. The findings of the study presented here consolidate the existence of strong multilingual self that was explored previously in the Europe. The beliefs of students from Arabic background were examined in a multilingual environment as the UK universities usually have a large proportion of Foreign students. The findings also in agreement, albeit indirectly, with the findings of Ushioda, (2017) that learning English will motivate learners to acquire the desire to learn and communicate with other languages.

All Arab students are communicating in written format and in formal setting with the so called Standard Modern Arabic and communicating in daily life with their own distinctive dialect which are different from one region to the other in the Arab World. Technically, some authors argued that this is a multilingualism dimension, but the issue is debatable. The impact of European languages is very clear on the Arab dialects but less so on the Modern Standard Arabic. Exploring this, though, was not the aim of the study.

Interestingly, awareness of the diglossia which was discussed in the literature review was evident in some of the responses as a bilingual male whose score in Multilingual Self was low reflect on the need of learning the classical Arabic instead of a third language:

This study was challenging in recruiting adequate number of participants from the Maghreb countries because of limited time frame and the fact that social media platform used was not populated by the students from these countries. A much better approach would have been using students' university emails, but this is not easily accessible for students. Yet, 6 North Africans were recruited and two of them were interviewed. Two Syrians were also recruited who speak French as a third language and therefore the Multilingual group had French as third language creating a homogenous group to enhance comparison. The initial hypothesis that the Maghreb are different from the rest of Arabs because of historical and socio-political reasons are not

tested fully in this research. However, there are many criteria all multilinguals share, and this research provided an insight into this issue. The detailed analysis provided adequate evidence into how multilinguals from the MENA region regardless of their background see themselves versus bilinguals. The study also demonstrated that multilinguals are much better in the acquisition of English a point that received much attention previously from Japanese linguistics like Takahashi, (2021) who is keen to investigate multilingualism out of the global dominance of English and argue that “*not much has been investigated regarding motivation to learn languages other than English.*” (Takahashi, 2021, p358).

The exploratory factor analysis was not possible on the data collected because the sample size was low. For further research a proper calculation of sample size should be conducted before starting the study to make sure that the sample is appropriate for all analysis required.

The other aspect worth mentioning here is that while this study is examining the social dimension and motivation of being a bilingual or multilingual, the linguistic dimension of this language in contact (e.g. code switching) were not investigated or discussed. This could be an idea for a future research as only few studies on such topics are published in peer reviewed journals (Hamed, 2018). In fact, further research on this topic could benefit from the findings presented here in two ways:

1- use Arabic language in IDMS and IDL2S to reach different multilingual communities in which English is not even a third language (some communities use Arabic, French and Spanish in day-to-day life). Ref if further research decided to do this then this translation must be done according to a proper approach that include a back-translation process (Brislin, 1970) to check that the Arabic version did affect the original version. If a large sample is recruited (more than 200) then a further validity check could be possible using a factor analysis approach that could examine if the four dimensions of the tool is preserved (Henry and Thorsen, 2018).

2- other aspects of multilingualism could also be examined. This could be applied on both participants and corpora in which analysis of texts is possible. The availability of software that could manage large texts could make this research possible. However, funding is still required to compensate for researchers' time and effort.

Conclusion

The linguistic research is embracing multilingualism to understand how language interact with each other and how people of the world, who speak many different languages, interact with each other. This research is significant on understanding other aspects in linguistic research including L2 acquisition. The body of literature on multilingualism is massive. However, as the literature review section suggested there is still room for investigating the different aspects of multilingualism in understudied populations or neglected languages. This research is one step further to fill this gap on the linguistics studies in MENA region.

The findings of this study indicated strongly, despite the low sample size, that being a multilingual has a positive impact on the individual. The multilinguals scored higher than the bilinguals in the total score and in each dimension of IDMS validated tool. This positive impact includes increased motivation, eagerness to expand knowledge and active engagement in the cultural and academic life from a global perspective. The interviews provided further evidence that being a multilingual provide more overall positive criteria than being a bilingual. In addition, multilinguals proved that they are better than bilinguals in L2 acquisition. However, further research on multilingualism in the MENA region is required in the local communities and where L2 is not English to enhance the findings presented here. Overall, this research shows that there is a strong and distinct ideal multilingual-self among Arab students studying in the UK.

Acknowledgement

The two authors wish to thank Dr Osama Tashani, the Director of MENA Research Group at Leeds Beckett University for his guidance and advice during the conceptualization, analysis and writing of this manuscript.

References

- Al Btoush, M.A., 2014. English loanwords in colloquial Jordanian Arabic. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 6(2), p.98.
- Awang, R. and Salman, S. 2017. Translation and Arabicization Methods of English Scientific and Technical Terms into Arabic. *AWEJ for Translation & Literary Studies Volume*, 1 Number 2, May 2017 Pp. 92 -106.
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V., 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), pp.77-101.
- Brislin, R.W., 1970. Back-translation for cross-cultural research. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 1(3), pp.185-216.
- Cenoz, J. (2013) "Defining Multilingualism," *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge University Press, 33, pp. 3–18. doi: 10.1017/S026719051300007X.
- Dahiru, T., 2008. P-value, a true test of statistical significance? A cautionary note. *Annals of Ibadan postgraduate medicine*, 6(1), pp.21-26.
- Grosjean, F., 1982. *Life with two languages: An introduction to bilingualism*. Harvard University Press.
- Hamed, I., Elmahdy, M. and Abdennadher, S., 2018, May. Collection and analysis of code-switch Egyptian Arabic-English speech corpus. In *Proceedings of the Eleventh International Conference on Language Resources and Evaluation (LREC 2018)*.
- Henry, A. and Thorsen, C., 2018. The ideal multilingual self: Validity, influences on motivation, and role in a multilingual education. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 15(4), pp.349-364.
- Hourani, A., 2013. *A history of the Arab peoples: Updated edition*. Faber & Faber.

- Jeoffrion, C., Marcouyeux, A., Starkey-Perret, R., Narcy-Combes, M.F. and Birkan, I., 2014. From multilingualism to plurilingualism: University students' beliefs about language learning in a monolingual context. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 27(1), pp.8-26.
- Nicenboim, B. and Vasishth, S., 2016. Statistical methods for linguistic research: Foundational Ideas—Part II. *Language and Linguistics Compass*, 10(11), pp.591-613.
- Pavlenko, A. ed., 2006. Bilingual minds: Emotional experience, expression, and representation. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Sandro, C. and David, L., 2011. Using a holistic approach to explore language attitudes in two multilingual contexts: The Basque Country and Malta. In: *Becoming Multilingual*. Cecilia Varcasia (ed.). PETER LANG. New York.
- Swann Jr, W.B., Chang-Schneider, C. and Larsen McClarty, K., 2007. Do people's self-views matter? Self-concept and self-esteem in everyday life. *American psychologist*, 62(2), p.84.
- Takahashi, C., 2021. Developing the ideal multilingual self in the era of global English: a case in the Japanese context. *The Language Learning Journal*, 49(3), pp.358-369.
- Ushioda, E., 2017. The impact of global English on motivation to learn other languages: Toward an ideal multilingual self. *The Modern Language Journal*, 101(3), pp.469-482.
- Wylie, R.C., 1974. *The self-concept: Theory and research on selected topics* (Vol. 2). U of Nebraska Press.

