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**Research Paper**

## **Perceptions of Bilingualism in the Iranian EFL Context: Minimalist or Maximalist Approach?**

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**Abstract**

Considering various uses of the word "bilingual" in different settings, there are two views regarding who can be called a bilingual. The minimalist view considers the minimal amount of proficiency in a second language (L2) as sufficient to consider an individual a bilingual, while the maximalist approach requires the bilingual to have complete mastery in L2. The aim of this study was to investigate whether the perceptions of EFL teachers and learners towards bilingualism align with either the minimalist or maximalist approach. Additionally, it aimed to determine whether significant differences exist in perceptions between EFL teachers and learners regarding bilingualism. To this end, 523 Iranian EFL teachers and learners filled out an adapted version of the Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale. The construct validity of the scale and its subconstructs were determined by exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). Further, a series of independent sample t-tests and one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) were run to check the mean differences between genders, levels of language proficiency, English-related majors and other majors, as well as EFL learners' and teachers' views towards bilingualism. The findings showed that teachers (compared to learners), high intermediate and advanced participants (compared to their intermediate and below counterparts), English-major learners (compared to non-English majors), older participants, and those with a higher level of education have a significantly more minimalist view of bilingualism. In the end, the findings were discussed in the context of the Iranian EFL context.

**Keywords:** *Bilingualism, Perception, Maximalist, Minimalist, Iranian EFL Context*

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**1. Introduction**

The world today is heavily influenced by bilingualism. People who were raised in societies where monolingualism and unculturalism were encouraged frequently view bilingualism as an uncommon occurrence (Grosjean & Ping, 2013). About two-thirds of children around the world are

raised in bilingual environments (Crystal, 1997). In fact, according to Weir (2000), one in three people utilize two or more languages on a regular basis for work, family life, and pleasure. Even more people use languages other than their mother tongue inadvertently. For instance, many people who acquired foreign languages in school speak them whenever the opportunity arises. These individuals would constitute a minor part of the global population if we count them as bilinguals (Maftoon & Shakibafar, 2011). From another perspective, everyone in the world is multilingual, according to Edwards (2004); that is, everyone knows at least a few words in languages other than their mother tongue.

The concept of bilingualism has been widely discussed among researchers due to its significance and prevalence in modern society. According to Baetens-Beardsmore (1974, p. 1), bilingualism is a term with “open-ended semantics”, which has been debated by scholars from both maximalist and minimalist perspectives. According to the maximalist view of bilingualism, scholars assert that it involves “native-like control of two languages” (Bloomfield, 1985, p. 56), emphasizing the necessity of a balanced, native-like competence in both languages. However, Dewaele et al. (2003) argue that the “ideal” bilingual does not exist, and even the “balanced” bilingual is rare. The authors discuss various forms of imperfect and unstable bilingualism, where one language may dominate over the others in certain situations and instances of language use (p. 1). According to Macnamara (1969, p. 82), bilingual speakers are individuals who "possess at least one of the language skills [i.e., speaking, listening, writing, and reading] even to a rudimentary degree in their L2, providing the door for more minimalist positions on the term". Hockett's (1958) concept of "semi-bilingualism," or "receptive bilingualism accompanying productive monolingualism" (p. 327), and Diebold's (1961) concept of "incipient

bilingualism," or "the initial stages of language contact" (p. 103), are at the extremes of the minimalist spectrum, respectively, where a bilingual speaker has one highly developed language and one in the early stages of development. However, these ideas suggest a broad category of bilinguals that blurs the distinction between a proficient speaker of two languages and a tourist using a phrase book, making it challenging to have a focused conversation about bilinguals.

## **2. Theoretical Framework**

### **2.1 Definitions of Bilingualism**

Researchers contended by the end of the 1980s that bilingualism does not necessitate equal competency in two distinct and isolable languages. As Grosjean (2010) pointed out, evaluating bilinguals' language skills in terms of monolingual standards is incorrect. The growth of views that bilingualism is the exception rather than the rule, that interaction between the two languages is accidental, and that the languages of the bilingual may be studied independently is one result of this monolingual bias in the definition. This has influenced bilinguals' self-perceptions; they frequently report that they know neither language well enough. According to Grosjean (2010), bilinguals are not necessarily equally fluent on all issues in both languages, and this is due to the complementarity principle, which states that bilinguals utilize their languages for a variety of goals, with a variety of interlocutors, and in a variety of contexts. Language competency levels may thus vary based on the demand for the language and the domain in which it is used. Rather than focusing on equal fluency as a sign of bilingualism, it is crucial to understand the reasons bilinguals require their languages, the way they

process, organize, and think about them, as well as their perception of themselves as bilinguals.

In line with these views of bilingualism, various definitions have been provided in the literature with their sometimes-differing perspectives towards bilingualism. While Bloomfield (1933, p. 55) described bilingualism as "native-like control of two languages," Mackey (1962, p. 52) defined it as "the ability to use more than one language." Similarly, Weinreich (1953) defined bilingualism as "the practice of alternately using two languages," whereas Haugen (1953, p. 7) advocated "the point at which a speaker can first produce complete meaningful utterances in the other language" as the beginning point for defining bilingualism. As can be seen, these definitions range from Bloomfield's strict demands of a completely balanced state of bilingualism to Mackey's, Weinreich's, and Haugen's moderate state of mastery over basic skills or the use of two languages. This flexibility even went further when, later on, Edwards (2004) claimed that everyone can be considered bilingual even if they know a few words or utterances in a language other than their native language. More recent studies, such as Wagner et al. (2022), have revealed that bilingualism is a relative concept under the influence of multidimensional factors. More specifically, their findings indicated that bilinguals are perceived to be those who have recently learned another language, are more proficient in it, and are able to extensively and actively use it.

This relative nature of bilingualism is further represented in the numerous terminologies used by scholars to propose different types of bilingualism based on distinct criteria. These categorizations have been made with regards to the language proficiency of bilinguals, such as *dominant* and *balanced* bilingualism (Hoffman, 1991), the effect of the two languages on one another like *additive* and *subtractive* bilingualism (Lambert et al., 1973),

the order in which the languages are acquired or learned, i.e. *primary* and *secondary* bilingualism (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2013), the reason why L2 has been learned which entails *circumstantial*, *elective* and *territorial* bilingualism (Hamers & Blanc, 2000; Valdez & Figueora, 1994), the context in which L2 is acquired or learned, i.e. *natural* and *artificial* bilingualism (Saunders, 1990) and various other factors (see Pishghadam et al., 2020).

## 2.2 Maximalist and Minimalist Approaches to Bilingualism

As mentioned, to address the subject of how proficient one needs to be in order to be labeled as bilingual, two opposing viewpoints have been advanced: the maximalist viewpoint and the minimalist viewpoint. These are all-or-nothing efforts at describing bilingual competence (Lehner, 1994). The maximalist viewpoint, in particular, includes phrases like "perfect bilingualism," "ambilingualism," and "true bilingualism." In fact, the maximalist approach requires comprehensive command of all four language skills in both languages (speaking, listening, writing, and reading). Bloomfield (1933), Christopherson (1948), and Oestricher (1974) are all proponents of this viewpoint. The only truly bilinguals in their eyes are those who can exhibit equal control of both languages in all skill areas. However, there appears to be no such thing as a 'perfect bilingual,' as no 'perfect bilingual' has yet to be reported throughout all language ability areas in both languages without any issue. Hoffmann (1991) argues, "Who could ever have identical linguistic ability in both languages...who would habitually use both languages for the same purposes, in the same contexts?" (p. 21). Thus, it is difficult to consider a natural situation in which a bilingual would be expected to have the same linguistic abilities in both languages for the same purpose in all four skills.

As opposed to this maximalist view, Haugen (1953) takes a minimalist approach, considering any significant utterance in another language as a sign of bilingualism, while others argue for a more maximalist approach. Despite this ongoing debate, neither approach is fully explanatory in characterizing bilingual ability. The maximalist viewpoint is too restrictive, as it requires proficiency in two languages to be considered at the highest level. Conversely, the minimalist viewpoint does not fully acknowledge the requirements of true bilingualism. Therefore, considering both perspectives leads to the logical conclusion that bilingualism lies somewhere in between.

### **2.3 Bilingualism in the Foreign Language (FL) Context**

From the perspective of FL learning, learners are considered to use their entire linguistic repertoire in the process of holistically growing the weaker 'target language' in collaboration with the other 'languages' in which they have multicompetence. Leung and Scarino (2016) believe that "goals for language learning should be articulated within an integrated view of the development of the holistic linguistic repertoire of learners" (p. 92). Turnbull (2020) agrees with this, arguing that summative monolingual-based forms of language assessment should be replaced with translingual models that holistically evaluate FL learners' complete linguistic repertoires and the unique ways in which they use this system to make meaning, express themselves, and learn in various contexts as emergent bilinguals. Such approaches aim to demolish the widely held belief that monolingual speakers are the standard for linguistic proficiency in the target language (TL) by disrupting the notion of language learners as double monolinguals.

Earlier on, studies found that, apart from proficiency, various factors play a role in the extent to which individuals categorize themselves as bilinguals. Sia and Dewaele (2006) performed a survey to investigate the

potential role of sociobiological (e.g., age, gender, and educational level) and linguistic characteristics (e.g., self-rated proficiency, years of exposure, and method of instruction) in the self-categorization of bilinguals. One noteworthy finding was that self-rated L2 competency ranged from 5 to 10 (10 being the maximum) on a 10-point scale among 20 individuals who self-identified as bilinguals. This suggested that some participants may not consider L2 proficiency to be the sole criterion for bilingualism. Studies have also found that teachers' beliefs about bilingualism can play a key role in its status in the FL context. Wischmeier (2012) found that teachers have broadly different beliefs about bilingualism, and the number of pupils with a migration background in a class appears to influence teachers' perceptions regarding bilingualism. Furthermore, compared to monolingual teachers, bilingual teachers were found to have more positive opinions about students' native languages (Byrnes et al., 1997; Coady et al., 2011; Flores & Smith, 2009; García-Nevarez et al., 2005; Shin & Krashen, 1996). More specifically, teachers who knew more than one language were considerably more likely to implement classroom activities that promoted children's home language and culture (Lee & Oxelson, 2006).

More recently, following the prominence of translanguaging, more research was conducted on teachers' and learners' perceptions of using more than one language in classroom settings. Gallagher (2020) explored EFL teachers' views on the classroom as a bilingual space, revealing that EFL teachers recognized the value of incorporating students' first language in the classroom to support learning and promote a positive learning environment. Learners were also found to have positive attitudes towards multilingualism, which reveals its advantages for language learning and cultural understanding



(Irham, 2023). As for bilingual classroom environments, similarly, learners showed positive attitudes towards it and considered such environments beneficial for comprehension, vocabulary development, and writing composition (Archila et al., 2024; Hu et al., 2022; Larasati et al., 2022; Zarei & Alibabae, 2007). Overall, it was indicated that both teachers and students recognized the benefits of translanguaging for language learning, communication, and building a supportive classroom (Kung & Wei, 2019; Nguyen, 2022). A recent study conducted by Memari (2024) in the Iranian EFL context also revealed the advantages of translanguaging in the development of language skills.

While there is existing literature on different perceptions towards bilingual contexts, there has been no study conducted on the perceptions of Iranian EFL teachers and learners regarding the definition of bilingualism and whether it aligns with the maximalist or minimalist approach. Additionally, no research has been conducted to evaluate the Iranian EFL community's understanding of bilingualism based on their gender, language proficiency level, education level, major, and age. Therefore, the present study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. Does the adapted version of the Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale enjoy psychometric properties?
2. Do perceptions of EFL teachers and learners towards bilingualism fall within the minimalist or maximalist approach?
3. Is there a significant difference between the perceptions of EFL teachers and learners towards bilingualism?
4. Is there a significant relationship between EFL teachers' and learners' demographic characteristics (i.e., age, gender, years of

experience, and level of proficiency) and their perception towards bilingualism?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Participants**

Participants of this study were 523 Iranian EFL teachers and learners, including 351 (67.1%) females and 172 (32.9%) males. Two hundred eighteen (41.7%) were EFL teachers and 305 (58.3%) EFL learners. In terms of education, the participants had different degrees, such as diploma and associate degrees (26.2%), B.A. or B.S. (41.7%), and Master's and PhD (32.1%). They studied a wide range of majors such as accounting, civil engineering, English language teaching, genetics, and veterinary medicine, to name a few. The participants ranged from 18 to 71 years of age ( $M = 25.37$ ,  $SD = 8.07$ ). They all spoke Persian as their mother tongue.

#### **3.2 Instrumentation**

##### **3.2.1 Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale**

The study employed an adapted version of the Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale developed by Turnbull (2021). The original scale consisted of 39 items, with 9 items collecting demographic information and 30 items exploring the concept of bilingualism. However, in this study, a modified version of the scale was used, which included 24 items related to the concept of bilingualism. The scale was written in Persian for the purpose of this study. The students were asked to read statements such as 'You must read in both languages equally to be bilingual' and indicate their level of agreement on a scale from 'completely agree' to 'completely disagree'. The Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale was administered to participants, and the results of the exploratory factor analysis (EFA) showed that four factors

underlie the scale: *Using Language Skills*, *Proficiency in Language Skills*, *Role of Language Skills*, and *Age and Setting*. Nine items were removed from the scale based on the EFA results (see Appendices). The participants were also requested to mention their age, gender, level of education, and major as demographic information. The overall reliability of the scale was .79, as measured by Cronbach alpha.

### **3.2.2 Procedure**

Using convenience sampling, the participants were selected to fill out the online Google Docs version of the *Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale*. They participated voluntarily and were reassured that their responses would remain anonymous. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software was employed to run exploratory factor analysis, correlational analyses, and investigate mean differences through t-tests and one-way ANOVA. In addition, Analysis of Moment Structures (AMOS) software was used to run confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to validate the scale.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 EFA**

As recommended by Hair et al. (2019), responses of participants were randomly divided to two datasets. On the first dataset which included 263 responses, EFA was run to determine the underlying factors and on the other, which consisted of 260 responses, CFA was performed to validate the factorial structure of the scale.

Table 1 presents KMO and Bartlett's test results of the present study. The KMO statistic is .79 and since it is above a minimum of .50 (Kaiser, 1974), the selected sample is adequate to run factor analysis. According to Table 1, the value obtained by Bartlett's Test of Sphericity, i.e.,  $X^2 =$

2194.93, is significant ( $p < .001$ ) demonstrating that the correlation matrix is appropriate for factor analysis.

**Table 1.**  
*KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.79
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2194.93
	df	276
	Sig.	.00

Principal Component Analysis along with Quartimax with Kaiser Normalization method were applied to the collected data. Table 2 demonstrates the number of factors extracted based on eigenvalues of one and higher. In this study, .32 was adopted as the minimum value for factor loading. According to Table 3, since items 7, 8, 18, and 19 cross loaded on two factors, they were removed from the scale. In addition, at least three indicators are required for identification of a single factor (Child, 2006; Fabrigar & Wegener, 2012; Izquierdo et al., 2014). Therefore, items 2 and 3 representing factor 7, item 6 representing factor 6, and items 23 and 24 representing factor 5 were also removed from the scale. As can be seen in Table 2, the remaining 4 factors explain 45.99% of variance in the *Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale*. Given the final categorization, Factors 1, 2, 3, and 4 were named *Using Language Skills* (represented by items 11, 12, 15, 16), *Proficiency in Language Skills* (represented by items 4, 9, 13, 17), *Role of Language Skills* (represented by items 1, 6, 10, 14) and *Age and Setting* (represented by items 20, 21, 22), respectively.

**Table 2.**  
*Total Cumulative Variance Explained by Factors*

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.86	20.25	20.25	4.86	20.25	20.25	3.66	15.24	15.24
2	3.30	13.74	33.99	3.30	13.74	33.99	2.80	11.64	26.88
3	1.91	7.97	41.96	1.91	7.97	41.96	2.33	9.69	36.58
4	1.56	6.50	48.46	1.56	6.50	48.46	2.26	9.40	45.99
5	1.27	5.30	53.76	1.27	5.30	53.76	1.47	6.11	52.10
6	1.13	4.71	58.47	1.13	4.71	58.47	1.37	5.70	57.80
7	1.07	4.47	62.94	1.07	4.47	62.94	1.23	5.14	62.94

**Table 3.**  
*Rotated Component Matrix*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I01	.09	.06	.60	.08	.17	-.01	.31
I02	.19	.12	.12	-.03	.12	.03	.80
I03	.25	-.12	.04	.28	-.28	.27	.46
I04	-.01	.55	.00	-.15	-.03	-.19	.20
I05	.02	-.10	.10	.30	-.11	.71	.07

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I06	.00	.00	.81	.01	.05	.01	-.00
I07	.46	.03	-.02	-.11	.13	.57	.04
I08	.68	-.06	.07	.01	.06	.39	-.10
I09	.09	.75	.05	-.12	.13	.23	-.14
I10	.26	.17	.74	-.05	-.10	.04	-.07
I11	.84	.11	.11	-.02	-.10	.03	.11
I12	.79	.04	.11	.08	-.10	.06	.06
I13	.08	.84	.05	.02	-.08	.01	-.06
I14	.17	.08	.76	.15	.12	.04	.02
I15	.76	.07	.14	.28	.11	-.11	.08
I16	.79	.10	.06	.29	.06	-.06	.09
I17	.07	.81	.11	.05	.11	-.04	-.04
I18	.14	-.18	.08	.66	-.08	.32	.04

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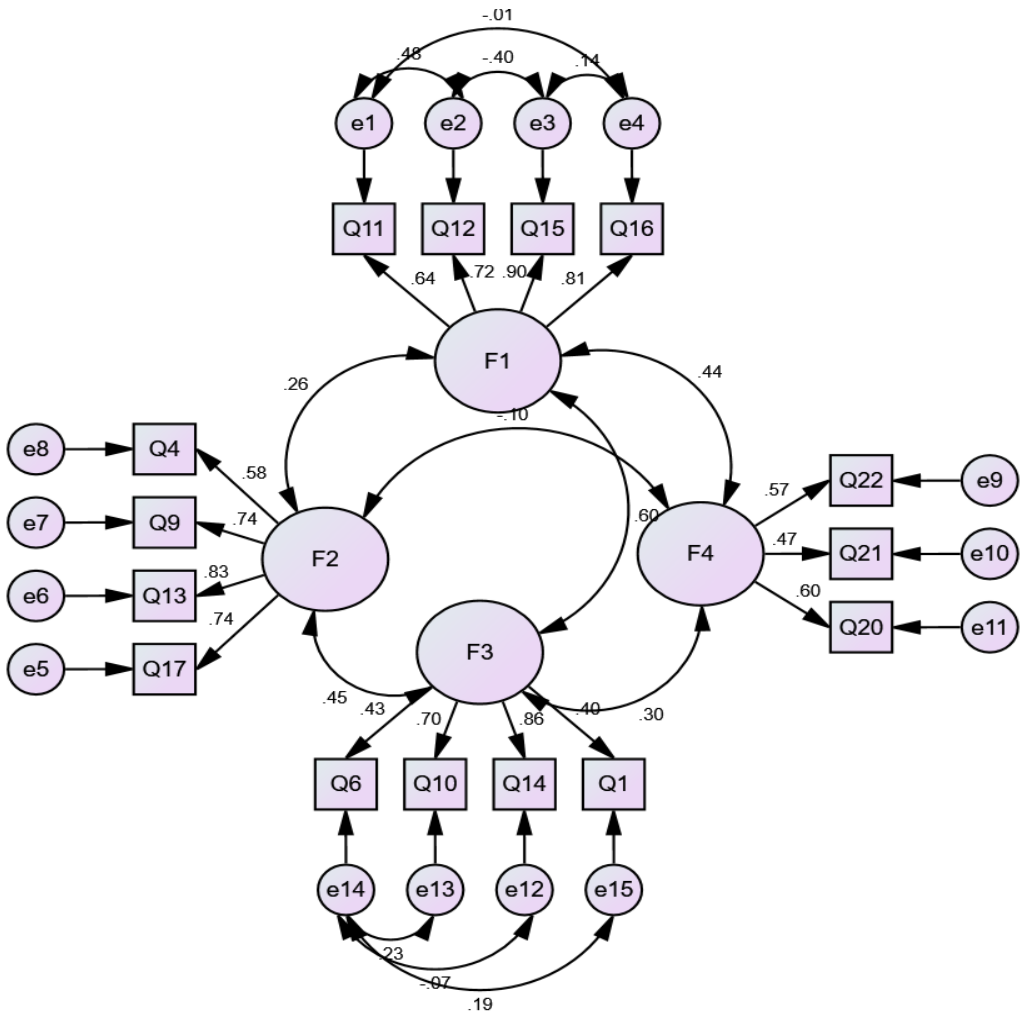
I19	.08	.59	.07	-.16	.05	-.12	.37
I20	.07	-.11	.05	.75	.05	.05	.01
I21	.29	-.01	-.03	.52	.24	-.11	.02
I22	.13	.01	.08	.70	-.31	-.01	-.06
I23	.29	.13	.08	-.08	.68	-.17	.03
I24	-.16	.03	.18	-.02	.75	.12	.03

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
Rotation Method: Quartimax with Kaiser Normalization.

## 4.2 CFA

To substantiate the factorial structure of the scale, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used (Figure 1). According to Table 4, item factor loadings were all above .4. In addition, goodness-of-fit indices are reported in Table 5. Researchers define different criteria for acceptance; in this study  $\chi^2/df$  should be less than 3 (Ullman, 2001), TLI and CFI should be over .90, and RMSEA should be less than .08 (Browne & Cudeck, 1993). The obtained results demonstrate that the model fits the data adequately, hence confirming the structure of the scale.

**Figure 1.**  
*Measurement model for the Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale*





**Table 4.**  
*Standardized Regression Weights*

				Estimate
Q11	<---	F1		.639
Q12	<---	F1		.719
Q15	<---	F1		.898
Q16	<---	F1		.810
Q17	<---	F2		.737
Q13	<---	F2		.829
Q9	<---	F2		.742
Q4	<---	F2		.580
Q22	<---	F4		.574
Q21	<---	F4		.473
Q20	<---	F4		.601
Q14	<---	F3		.860
Q10	<---	F3		.705
Q6	<---	F3		.429
Q1	<---	F3		.400

**Table 5.**  
*Goodness of Fit Indices*

	X <sup>2</sup> / df	TLI	CFI	RMSEA
Acceptable fit	<3	>.90	>.90	<.08
Model	1.79	.93	.95	.05

### 4.3 Descriptive Statistics, Mean Differences and Correlations

Table 6 indicates the descriptive statistics of all groups. As can be seen, since the mean scores of both teachers and students on the Bilingualism Scale (Teacher;  $M=43.27$ , Student;  $M=44.66$  equal to 2.86 and 2.94 based on the Likert scale respectively) are less than 3 (midpoint) on the Likert scale, it can be said that participants of this study share a minimal bilingualism view.

**Table 6.**  
*Descriptive Statistics*

Constructs	Groups	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Overall Bilingualism	Teacher	218	43.27	7.44	.50
	Student	305	44.66	7.27	.42
	Males	172	43.97	8.15	.62
	Females	351	44.14	6.96	.37
	Intermediate and below	248	45.03	7.36	.47
	High intermediate and advanced	275	43.23	7.28	.44
	English Related Majors	162	42.73	7.29	.57
	Non-English Majors	361	44.69	7.33	.38
	Diploma and Associate Degrees	137	45.71	6.91	.59
	Undergraduate Degree	218	44.95	7.06	.48
	Graduate Degrees	168	41.64	7.53	.58

In order to check the mean differences between gender, level of language proficiency, English-related majors (including English Language Teaching, Literature, Translation, and Linguistics) and other majors, and English language students' and teachers' views towards bilingualism, a series of independent sample t-tests were run. Table 7 demonstrates the results of the independent samples t-test. As indicated in Table 7, teachers and learners viewed the concept of bilingualism significantly differently ( $t=-2.13$ ,  $p<.05$ ). The mean overall score of teachers was lower than those of students (Teacher;  $M=43.27$ , Student;  $M=44.66$ ). With respect to gender, no significant difference was observed between teachers and students ( $t=.25$ ,  $p>.05$ ). With regards to level of language proficiency, participants at intermediate level and below obtained a significantly higher score on the scale than participants at high intermediate and advanced levels (Intermediate and below;  $M=45.03$ ,  $SD=7.36$ , High intermediate and advanced;  $M=43.23$ ,  $SD=7.28$ ,  $t=2.80$ ,  $p<.05$ ). Moreover, participants studying one of the English-related majors scored significantly lower than participants of other majors (English-related majors;  $M=42.73$ ,  $SD=7.29$ , Non-English majors;  $M=44.69$ ,  $SD=7.33$ ,  $t=-2.84$ ,  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 7.**

*Results of the Independent Samples T-test on Teachers and Students, Gender, Language Proficiency, and (Non) English Majors*

t-test for Equality of Means								
Factor	Groups	T	df	Sig. (2- tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
							Lower	Upper
Overall Bilingualism	Teachers	-	521		-1.39	.65		
	& Students	2.13		.03			.11	.27
	Gender	.25	521	.80	.17	.69	-1.18	1.52
	Language Proficiency	2.80	521	.005	1.79	.64	.54	3.05
	(Non) English Majors	-	521		-1.96	.69		
		2.84		.005			-3.32	-.61

To check the mean differences across levels of education, one-way ANOVA was implemented. According to Table 8, there was a statistically significant difference with respect to the Overall Bilingualism score ( $F=14.79$ ,  $p<.05$ ), as determined by one-way ANOVA. A Scheffe post hoc test revealed (Table 9) that participants with graduate degrees obtained a significantly lower degree on the Bilingualism scale than those with diploma and associate degrees and undergraduates (Mean Differences= -4.06, -3.30 respectively,  $p<.05$ ).

**Table 8.**  
*Results of the one-way ANOVA across Levels of Education*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
<b>Overall Bilingualism</b>	Between Groups	1524.07	2	762.03	14.79	.00
	Within Groups	26790.23	520	51.52		
	Total	28314.30	522			

**Table 9.**  
*Results of the Post Hoc Scheffe Test across Levels of Education*

Dependent Variable	(I) educational level	(J) educational level	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Overall Bilingualism	Diploma & Associate degrees	Undergraduate degree	.76	.78	.62	-1.16	2.68	
		Graduate degrees	4.07*	.83	.00	2.04	6.09	
	Undergraduate degree	Diploma & Associate degrees	-.76	.79	.62	-2.68	1.15	
		Graduate degrees	3.30*	.74	.00	1.49	5.11	
	Graduate degrees	Diploma & Associate degrees	-4.06*	.83	.00	-6.09	-2.03	
		Undergraduate degree	-3.30*	.74	.00	-5.11	-1.49	

Finally, as can be seen in Table 10, results of Pearson correlation demonstrated that age is negatively correlated to the overall score on the Bilingualism scale ( $r = -.12, p < .05$ ).

**Table 10.**  
*Correlation Analyses*

	Language Skills	Proficiency	Role of Language Skills	Age & Setting	Overall Bilingualism
Pearson Correlation	-.11**	-.06	-.05	-.03	-.12**
Age Sig. (2-tailed)	.009	.18	.25	.51	.007
N	523	523	523	523	523

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

## 5. Discussion

The present study sought to explore whether the adapted version of the Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale enjoyed psychometric properties (adapted from Turnbull, 2021) and ascertain their construct validation. The second aim of this study was to investigate whether the perceptions of EFL teachers and learners towards bilingualism fall within the minimalist or maximalist approach. In addition, the present study attempted to analyze if teachers' and learners' perceptions of bilingualism differ from one another. Finally, attempts were made to find out if teachers' and learners' perceptions of bilingualism hold any relationship with their demographic characteristics.

For the first objective of the study, EFA was run on the adapted version of the Bilingualism Scale by Turnbull (2021), the findings of which indicated the scale had four sub-constructs, including Using Language Skills, Proficiency in Language Skills, Role of Language Skills, as well as Age and Setting. Subsequently, the construct validity of the adapted scale, as well as its indicated sub-constructs, was confirmed through CFA.

As for the second objective of the study, it was found that teachers' overall perception of bilingualism was more minimalistic than that of learners whose views fell mostly within the maximalist perspective. This finding implies that as teachers are more aware of the L2 learning process and the fact that learners' ability to use L2 skills is not necessarily the same as their ability to use L1 skills, they do not expect learners to have L2 mastery similar to native speakers. In other words, mechanisms involved in learning L1 differ from those of L2, and several other variables, such as the age and setting of learning, play a crucial role in L2 learning. Based on teachers' perspective, achieving the native-speaker level of mastery is not a prerequisite for being bilingual; therefore, even minimal use of L2 is an instance of bilingualism by teachers as long as communication takes place and needs are fulfilled. A previous study investigating nativespeakersim in the Iranian EFL context demonstrated that teachers are against assuming native speakers as the benchmark for L2 performance (Naji Meidani et al., 2015), which can lead to teachers' adoption of the minimalist approach to bilingualism as well. On the other hand, learners showed a maximalist perception of bilingualism by considering themselves bilingual only if they can use L2 language skills as proficiently as L1 skills. Learners tend to frequently compare themselves with native speakers, so they set their goals to be nativelike users of L2, which is why most of them are hard on themselves and do not perceive themselves as bilingual unless they perform like native speakers. In line with the findings of the present study, Turnbull (2021) also showed that despite the widespread use of English in Japan, the majority of learners do not consider themselves bilingual and view bilingualism as a far-fetched goal as they constantly compare themselves to native speakers. This means that do not view themselves as a bilingual unless they use English at the same level as a native speaker, meaning that to them, bilingualism equals employing the

second language as proficiently as L1 (Turnbull, 2021). Although the scope and scale of using English in Iran are far more limited than in Japan, both countries draw on the belief that they are monolingual and monocultural (Maher, 1997), which inevitable pushes learners to view themselves as monolinguals despite being able to use English. As shown by previous research (Naji Meidani et al., 2015), Iranian EFL learners, like Japanese learners, strongly approve of the idea of nativespeakerism, which has also represented itself in their attempts to sound like native speakers (Naji Meidani, 2022; Pishghadam & Saboori, 2011; Zarrinabadi & Khodarahmi, 2017), their strong preference for native teachers in this FL context (Shobeiry et al., 2023), and, as indicated by the current study, their maximalist view of bilingualism.

With regards to demographic characteristics, no significant difference was observed between male and female participants, regardless of being a teacher or a student, in their view of bilingualism, which in both cases leaned towards a more minimalistic approach. However, in previous studies, gender did exert an influence on attitudes towards bilingualism, in that females held more positive attitudes than males (Kostoulas-Makrakis et al., 2006). As for language proficiency, the findings showed that high intermediate and advanced participants held a more minimalist view towards bilingualism, while the view of intermediate and below-intermediate participants was more of a maximalist one. Previous studies have also revealed that emergent bilinguals (Garcia, 2009), who are at the beginning stages of using two languages, are very self-critical and tend to consider their competencies in L2 insufficient for a bilingual status (Grosjean, 2010). This finding was also confirmed later on by Turnbull (2021) in that Japanese



emerging bilinguals also viewed bilingualism from a maximalist perspective, thereby considering it a hard-to-achieve aim. However, high intermediate and advanced speakers of an L2 have been exposed to the language for a longer period, and as mentioned by Labrie and Clément (2010), more contact with the L2 leads to a higher level of self-confidence in that language. Therefore, they better understand that success in an L2 does not necessitate perfection, and even having a limited command of English can make an individual bilingual.

Teachers' and learners' perceptions of bilingualism were also observed to be different across educational levels. The justification for this finding lies in the educational context and the potential impact of academic training on individuals' perceptions of bilingualism. It is plausible that individuals with graduate degrees, who have undergone extensive academic training, may adopt a more pragmatic or utilitarian perspective towards bilingualism. Their focus may be on acquiring functional language skills necessary for professional or academic purposes rather than striving for mastery in multiple linguistic domains. Conversely, participants with lower levels of formal education, such as diploma, associate, or undergraduate degrees, may view bilingualism through a maximalist lens, considering it a pathway to improving their socio-economic status and securing better prospects for themselves, as being bilingual opens up a wide range of job opportunities in sectors such as tourism, international trade, etc. (Cummins, 2008)

English-major students, in addition to previous differences, were also found to have a more minimalist approach towards bilingualism. This inclination could stem from their comprehensive knowledge of language learning processes within their field of study. Similar to language teachers, English-major students are often familiar with theories and methodologies

regarding both first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition. This awareness may lead them to moderate their perception of bilingualism, recognizing that perfect mastery of a second language is not a prerequisite for being considered bilingual (Cook, 2016). Instead, they may adopt a pragmatic understanding, valuing functional proficiency in English and their native language(s) over attaining high levels of proficiency in all language skills. This perspective acknowledges the complexities of language learning and the gradual development of language skills over time, allowing English-major students to hold a more minimalist view of bilingualism despite potential gaps in language abilities.

As for the last objective, the findings revealed that older learners and teachers possess a more minimalist attitude towards bilingualism. It can be implied that in this case, as individuals get older, perfection loses its importance; that is why being bilingual does not mean being a perfect native speaker of two languages for them. Older learners and teachers may prioritize developing communication skills and pragmatic language use over achieving native-like fluency or linguistic perfection (Grosjean, 2010). They understand that effective communication does not necessarily require mastery of all language skills but rather the ability to convey meaning and interact successfully in diverse linguistic contexts (Bialystok, 2009). Therefore, they may adopt a minimalist attitude towards bilingualism, valuing functional language proficiency that facilitates meaningful communication and interaction in real-life situations.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study aimed to investigate the perception of bilingualism among teachers and learners, considering factors such as gender, proficiency level,

education level, major, and age. The objective was to determine whether they have a minimal or maximal perception of bilingualism. The study found that teachers, high intermediate and advanced participants, English-major students, older participants, and those with a higher level of education tended to view bilingualism more minimally. Gender did not appear to play a role in this regard. This suggests that individuals with greater language proficiency and educational attainment may perceive bilingualism as attainable through functional language skills, rather than requiring native-like fluency in both languages.

The findings suggest that one reason why some learners lose motivation to learn a second language or experience high levels of anxiety is due to their maximalist attitude towards bilingualism. They believe that being bilingual requires them to be perfect speakers of both their first language and the second language, and to perform in the second language as well as a native speaker. The implications of these findings extend beyond the academic realm to language learning and teaching practices. Understanding learners' perceptions of bilingualism is crucial for educators to design effective language learning curricula and materials. By acknowledging and addressing learners' maximalist attitudes towards bilingualism, educators can promote a more positive learning environment and enhance learner motivation. It is important for teachers and material designers to inform learners about the meaning of being bilingual and what they can expect from themselves. Encouraging learners to adopt a minimalist approach can increase their self-confidence and help them view themselves as 'multicompetent speakers' (Cook, 2016). Future research in this area could explore the potential impact of learners' perceptions of bilingualism on language learning outcomes, such as motivation, anxiety, and language proficiency development. Additionally, qualitative studies could provide

deeper insights into the underlying factors shaping individuals' attitudes towards bilingualism, offering valuable implications for language education policy and practice.

In the present study, it is essential to acknowledge a limitation regarding the distribution of sample sizes across various demographic and categorical variables. While efforts were made to recruit participants representing diverse backgrounds and characteristics, discrepancies in sample sizes emerged across certain groups, including gender, role (teachers/learners), and major (English/non-English related). This variation in sample sizes may have implications for the generalizability of our findings and could potentially introduce biases in the analyses conducted. Despite these limitations, it is important to recognize that statistical tests employed in this study, such as ANOVA and t-tests, are robust to moderate deviations from equal sample sizes, particularly when the overall sample size is substantial. Nonetheless, future research endeavors should strive to achieve more balanced sample sizes across all relevant variables to enhance the robustness and validity of findings.

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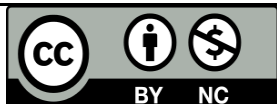
**Appendices****Appendix A****Factors of the Validated *Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale***

Factors	Items	Label
Factor 1 <i>Using Language Skills</i>	11	اگر مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب در دو زبان به یک میزان باشد، شما فردی دوزبانه هستید.
	12	اگر میزان استفاده از مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب شما در دو زبان به یک اندازه باشد، شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
	15	اگر مهارت نوشتاری در دو زبان به یک میزان باشد، شما دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
	16	اگر میزان استفاده از مهارت نوشتاری شما در دو زبان به یک اندازه باشد، شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
Factor 2 <i>Proficiency in Language Skills</i>	4	شما می‌توانید یک زبان را بهتر از زبان دیگر صحبت کنید و همچنان دوزبانه محسوب شوید.
	9	اگر مهارت شنیداری در یک زبان بهتر از زبان دیگر باشد، همچنان شما دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
	13	چنانچه مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب شما در یک زبان بهتر از زبان دیگر باشد همچنان شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
	17	اگر مهارت نوشتاری در یک زبان بهتر از زبان دیگر باشد، همچنان شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
Factor 3 <i>Role of Language Skills</i>	1	تسلط در مهارت صحبت کردن به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.
	5	تسلط در مهارت شنیداری به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.
	10	تسلط در مهارت خواندن به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.
	14	تسلط در مهارت نوشتن به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.
Factor 4 <i>Age and Setting</i>	20	برای اینکه شما فردی دوزبانه باشید، باید هر روز از هر دو زبان استفاده کنید.
	21	اگر شما یادگیری زبان را در کودکی آموخته باشید، دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
	22	برای دوزبانه بودن باید زبان دوم را در کشوری که با آن زبان صحبت می‌کنند، آموخته باشید.

**Appendix B****The Validated *Perceptions of Bilingualism Scale* in Persian**

گویه	کاملاً موافقم	موافقم	نظری ندارم	مخالفم	کاملاً مخالفم
۱. تسلط در مهارت صحبت کردن به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.					
۲. شما می‌توانید یک زبان را بهتر از زبان دیگر صحبت کنید و همچنان دوزبانه محسوب شوید.					
۳. تسلط در مهارت شنیداری به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.					
۴. اگر مهارت شنیداری در یک زبان بهتر از زبان دیگر باشد، همچنان شما دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.					
۵. تسلط در مهارت خواندن به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.					
۶. اگر مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب در دو زبان به یک میزان باشد، شما فردی دوزبانه هستید.					
۷. اگر میزان استفاده از مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب شما در دو زبان به یک اندازه باشد، شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.					
۸. چنانچه مهارت خواندن و درک مطلب شما در یک زبان بهتر از زبان دیگر باشد همچنان شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.					
۹. تسلط در مهارت نوشتن به دوزبانه بودن مرتبط است.					

					۱۰. اگر مهارت نوشتاری در دو زبان به یک میزان باشد، شما دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
					۱۱. اگر میزان استفاده از مهارت نوشتاری شما در دو زبان به یک اندازه باشد، شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
					۱۲. اگر مهارت نوشتاری در یک زبان بهتر از زبان دیگر باشد، همچنان شما فردی دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
					۱۳. برای اینکه شما فردی دوزبانه باشید، باید هر روز از هر دو زبان استفاده کنید.
					۱۴. اگر شما یادگیری زبان را در کودکی آموخته باشید، دوزبانه محسوب می‌شوید.
					۱۵. برای دوزبانه بودن باید زبان دوم را در کشوری که با آن زبان صحبت می‌کنند، آموخته باشید.



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