

Bilingualism matters: Early childhood teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity

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Abstract: Children can learn any language and acquire its skills at a very early age. Creativity is central to the curriculum. Early Childhood (EC) teachers should provide children with appropriate resources to individually spark their imaginations and encourage them to adopt different ideas. The objective of the current study was to determine the attitudes of EC teachers who are teaching bilingual students and integrating creativity into classroom activities. The study adopted the exploratory approach, where a total of 299 EC teachers in the western region of Saudi Arabia participated in this study by filling out a questionnaire. EC teachers believed that there are differences between bilingual boys and girls in creative competencies. Most teachers stated that they did not receive sufficient training and preparation to incorporate creativity into all subjects in EC schools. Teachers in private EC schools showed more positive attitudes toward creativity than teachers in government schools. These findings provide reliable evidence for international research on teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward creativity in bilingual children. Policy makers can also benefit from these results and pay more attention to teacher preparation programs in order to raise their efficiency in supporting and enhancing the creative inclinations of learners.

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Introduction

A decade ago, bilingual education in Saudi Arabia underwent relatively slow but steady, gradual changes. In 1927, English as a second language was introduced into secondary schools without a specific curriculum in Saudi Arabia (Alkhuzay, 2015). Later in 1953, English was introduced in middle and high schools with a defined curriculum (Al-Subahi, 1989). With the increasing importance of English as a widely accepted and dominant language, most business sectors require proficiency in spoken and written English. Some students left their home countries to join the scholarship system outside Saudi Arabia to study in English-speaking countries. In this new era, Saudi Arabia has witnessed tremendous development in all sectors, including Early Childhood Education (ECE), to achieve the Saudi New Vision 2030.

One of the most important features of this rapid development is the empowerment of women in education, which was manifested in the stage of assigning, where the education of boys in the primary classes was allocated to female teachers as a historical shift in education (Allehyani & Alfayez, 2022). The Saudi government has also paid attention to bilingual education for children, which has recently increased due to the interest in embracing international learners in its educational system (Allehyani, 2022a). The transformation process focused on shaping a new ECE system in Saudi Arabia and included improving school readiness by expanding equitable access to quality services, building new classrooms, strengthening partnerships with the private sector, engaging all education stakeholders, and hiring and training EC teachers (Ministry of Education, 2022). Several studies have shown that reforming education should be based on improving curricula and enhancing teachers' skills and participation in decision-making (Adams, 2000; Allehyani, 2022b; Baldauf, 2006; Fullan, 2007; Schmidt & Datnow, 2005).

At the end of 2021, the Saudi Ministry of Education integrated English into the first grade of EC

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schools to achieve the strategic objectives of the New Vision 2030 (Ministry of Education, 2022). These goals focus on developing students' English language proficiency skills and acquiring international best practices. Accordingly, bilingual education has received the attention of the Ministry of Education in the past years, but the urgent need to learn English alongside Arabic has increased, which has contributed to the new generation's acquisition of the primary languages. Cultural diversity education is adopted as part of the national curriculum that supports the achievement of the goals of Vision 2030, including equal representation of all groups of diverse students in the curriculum, in order to reduce racism and prejudice, and promote awareness and acceptance of learners (Allehyani, 2022c). Recent research stated that the Saudi educational system gives greater value and attention to promoting teachers' cultural and linguistic competencies in schools by enabling them to embrace all the required skills in teaching students from diverse backgrounds (Allehyani, 2022c). An important starting point is that the Ministry of Education and its various administrations in the Kingdom have an interest in applying learning methods for children that develop creative and critical thinking skills (Allehyani, 2019); nevertheless, this modern trend needs more time, materials, and rich environments. To my knowledge, there is no research that has addressed the attitudes of EC school teachers who teach bilingual students in the first grade in Saudi EC schools. Besides, there is little literature that examines teachers' attitudes and perceptions toward creativity in the Saudi context, which this study intends to focus on.

Literature Review

Creativity

For more than half a century, creativity and its concepts have been of great interest to researchers around the world. There are various definitions of creativity. Creativity appears in different creative contexts, such as innovations and new solutions, as well as effective social relationships and problem-solving skills (Nikkolaa et al., 2022). From the perspective of Vygotsky (1990), creativity is the reformulation of a child's learning in a new and creative perspective, which enriches the learner's knowledge, and the possibilities to reformulate this experience creatively. Plucker and Beghetto (2004) defined creativity as an interaction between the individual's skills and the environment in which it creates a set of productive, creative and unique ideas which are distinguished in the social context. Bloomberg (1973) defines creativity as a set of divergent thinking skills, including fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration. Fluency is the individual's capability to produce possible modifications. Flexibility is defined as the individual's ability to switch thinking between two different concepts. Originality is an individual's ability to produce unique and new responses that demand creative strength. Elaboration means the detail added to ideas to clarify them in depth. Creativity, as defined by Kharkhurin (2017), is a boosted normative cognition, which in turn strengthens certain cognitive mechanisms in the brain that add to an individual's creativity.

Bilingualism and Creativity

Certainly, the early stage of education plays a significant role in supporting children's creativity. A large body of literature has addressed bilingualism, monolingualism and creativity (Hommel et al., 2011; Kharkhurin, 2012, 2017; Lee & Kim, 2011; Leikin & Tovli, 2014). The results of a previous study confirmed that preschool education positively supports creative thinking skills in children (Dere, 2019). It found that the creative potential behind the performance of children who received preschool education was significantly higher than those who did not. There is considerable debate among researchers about the association between creativity and bilingualism. According to previous literature, bilingual learners outperform monolinguals in achieving tasks that require cognitive functions (Bialystok, 2005). Within a specific scope, there are plenty of studies showing the advantages of bilingualism in creativity, especially verbal. Nevertheless, many scholars agree on the advantages of bilingualism in diverse types of creativity, which include both verbal and nonverbal (Lee & Kim, 2011; Madhav & Anand, 2012). Particia and Johnson (2004) identified that there are four main aspects of creativity in which children can express themselves, which include language, music, art, and acting. Rashidova and Bobojonova (2019) argued that families should encourage their young children to gain knowledge, as they can learn faster to reach proficiency, and cognitive development, which distinguishes bilinguals from monolinguals. For example, children can use words to form sentences about pictures in which they share their thoughts with others.

Interestingly, in the competitive world, people think that being bilingual is more important and valuable,

and this justifies why there are more bilinguals in the world today than ever (Rashidova & Bobojonova, 2019). Scientists drew attention to a philosophical statement that bilingualism expands the cognitive abilities and creative performance of individuals (Kharkhurin, 2012). Earlier studies have proven the positive effect of bilingualism on creativity within different contexts. Some researchers have found that children who grow up in a bilingual environment become superior at creative cognitive tasks, such as problem-solving skills (Bialystock, 2005; Leikin, 2013; Leikin & Tovli, 2014). Moreover, other empirical studies have shown that there are no significant differences in fluency between monolingual and bilingual children (Bialystok, 2005; Bialystok & Shapero, 2005). When children had the opportunity to tell stories about the presented pictures and to ask descriptive questions about sizes, shapes, colors, and pictures, both monolinguals and bilinguals performed at a similar level (Particia & Johnson, 2004). Despite the important findings of previous research comparing creative performance between bilinguals and monolinguals, it focused only on cognitive skills.

Creativity in both genders has been the focus of studies in many kinds of literature. In 2018, a study by Castillo-Vergara et al. revealed that girls showed higher scores than boys in creativity's three dimensions, which include fluency, flexibility, and originality. Recent findings by Jia et al. (2020) revealed that boys were higher in creativity than girls, in particular in scientific tasks. Even though girls did not accomplish better than boys did, they showed more interest in science. Similarly, a correlation was found between creativity and imagination in both genders (Gleason et al., 2003; Hoff, 2005; Root-Bernstein & Root-Bernstein, 2006). Several studies found that girls have more imaginary companions and they produce more ideas than boys (Gündoğan et al., 2013; Pearson et al., 2001; Taylor et al., 2004). In contrast, a recent study by Betancourt et al. (2022) has proven that when children's creativity skills were examined, there were no gender differences found between them except in one measure of graphic creativity. Consequently, this can only be achieved with empowered and experienced teachers in the field of creativity.

Creativity in the Context of ECE

In the new era, with the growing awareness of the possibility of learning and developing creativity, researchers have turned to draw the attention of educators to the importance of developing creativity in ECE. Children's creativity should be enhanced by creating a stimulating learning environment that promotes creative methods represented in its various activities, which allows them to learn by doing, active participation, and experiential learning (Cachia et al., 2010). Moreover, creativity-oriented teaching experiences increased the professionalism of teachers. It has been demonstrated that teachers who have long teaching experience are more efficient in working with children and have positive attitudes about fostering creativity in children (Šemberger & Konrad, 2022). In 2015, Fidan and Oztürk found that teachers with long teaching experience have positive attitudes because they see their school's climate as more supportive and richer in terms of innovation resources. Another influential factor in promoting a creative environment is the type of EC school. Prior research confirmed that teachers who are working in private schools tend to be more creative and self-motivated at a higher level compared to teachers in public schools (Fidan & Oztürk, 2015). Hence, there is a need to maintain positive educational environments that support and enhance creativity among teachers and learners.

Furthermore, there has been a long debate about the limits of integrating creativity into the school curriculum. Whether it is a domain-general or domain-specific, such as art, or both (Gralewski, 2016; Han & Marvin, 2022; Robinson, 2017; Šemberger & Konrad, 2022). As a matter of fact, a large body of literature has found that divergent thinking was significantly more pronounced in children in creative activities related to the language domain (including storytelling and writing) but not in creative behaviors in the language domain in other areas (Baer, 1991; Han & Marvin, 2022; Runco, 1986). Han and Marvin (2022) assessed children's creativity in three areas, including storytelling, math-word problems, and collage-making tasks. Results showed that the great correlation between storytelling based on a picture book without words and word problem tasks in mathematics is attributed to general creativity. Children's creative potential should be developed further based on their own interests. In this sense, creativity includes a student's outstanding performance in school activities such as editing text for magazines, drawing, web design, singing or playing musical instruments, film production, or writing poems and short stories (Gralewski, 2016). The findings of Gralewski's studies (2016) confirmed that teachers associated creativity only with visual and musical performing arts rather than writing and scientific domains. To overcome

this dilemma, schools need to provide students with a stimulating learning environment, such as project-based learning, where they have more time, space and materials to solve problems productively and to encourage innovation (Schneider, 2014).

In a similar context, a previous study by Allehyani (2019) revealed that after applying the Twenty Thinking Keys strategies in the preschool classroom, children showed high levels of creative and critical thinking skills, with clear differences in literacy scores. It is worth noting that the positive attitudes of teachers toward the development of creativity in children cannot be transmitted automatically in educational situations but rather through building competencies and teaching experiences of teachers (Šemberger & Konrad, 2022). Scholars argued that developing creativity in children requires collaborative efforts from all officials and leaders in the educational sector to enable teachers to keep pace with the development of teaching curricula in creativity (Allehyani, 2019; Gralewski, 2016; Šemberger & Konrad, 2022; Yemez & Dikilitaş, 2022). Accordingly, teachers should constantly employ different creative approaches and reflect on their own practices to create a supportive EC learning environment.

Moreover, it is worth noting that there are myriad previous studies that focused on the effect of bilingualism on creativity (Adesope et al., 2010; Leikin, 2013; Yemez & Dikilitaş, 2022). Children's early acquisition of a second language may predict higher proficiency, which confirms bilingual learners have better creative performance (Karatas & Aktan-Erciyes, 2022). Bilingual children in bilingual preschools were found to be more creative (Karatas & Aktan-Erciyes, 2022). Teachers' attitudes toward creativity impact students' learning outcomes (Naeem, 2021). In 2021, Naeem stated that teachers should be aware of their changing roles in keeping pace with developments in techniques and precision tools to improve the child's mastery of the second language and develop their intellectual abilities and skills. Although these are significant findings, none of them focused on examining teachers' attitudes toward teaching bilingual children's creativity. To sum up, the positive association between second language proficiency and creativity has been proved, which confirms how it contributes to children's second language development.

While drawing on the existing literature, the main purpose of the present study is to gain a more comprehensive understanding of EC teachers' attitudes toward creativity, specifically first grade in EC schools. The age group of first-grade children in EC schools in Saudi Arabia ranges between 7 and 8 years. The questionnaire design was based on a quantitative model that answered the main research question: How do the factors (children's gender, type of schools, teaching experiences, and professional preparation program) construct teachers' attitudes toward creativity?

Method

Research Design

The current study adopted a quantitative approach. The researcher used the descriptive approach to analyze the data, which is the most appropriate design, as this research aims to explain the current situation as it is (Cohen et al., 2007). For this purpose, a questionnaire was designed to determine the attitudes of EC teachers toward creativity and its relationship to second language learning.

Participants

A total of 299 EC female teachers who are teaching bilingual children in the first grade in EC schools agreed to participate voluntarily in this study. The participation agreements were taken via signing the consent forms prior to conducting the current investigation. Participants were selected randomly from EC schools, including government and private schools in the western region. All participants were female teachers, as we mentioned previously, by assigning all EC schools, specifically the first, second and third grades classes, to female teachers in all regions of the Kingdom.

Data Collection

The questionnaire was constructed using Microsoft Forms, and it was disseminated by email and social networking sites such as WhatsApp. The questionnaire is divided into two sections. The first section consists of seven questions that highlight the demographic information of the participants. The second section consists of 22 questions inquiring about EC teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity. The items consisted of questions and

answer options, which consisted of a 4-point Likert scale. These options consist of (1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = disagree, 4 = strongly agree). The set of statements about asking teachers about beliefs and opinions about creativity includes four responses.

Reliability Test

Reliability is the degree to which measures are free from error and thus yield consistent results (i.e., consistency of procedure). If the scale consistently shows the same score for individuals or statements of equal values, the procedure is considered reliable. The reliability analysis applied the level of Cronbach's α as the criterion of internal consistency in the questionnaire, that is, how closely a set of items are related as a group. Cronbach's alpha is a reliability coefficient that measures inter-item reliability or the degree of internal consistency/homogeneity between variables measuring one construct/concept (i.e., the degree) to which different items measuring the same variable attain consistent results. This analysis is necessary to study scale features and internal consistency between the questionnaire items and their correlation. The analysis was done by calculating Cronbach's alpha for independent variables. The values are ($\alpha = .089$).

Instrument Validity

The researcher analyzed the correlation between all items in this study to confirm the tool's validity. Where all the results range between (.419**-.769**). As displayed in Table 9, the Means (M) and Standard Deviations (SD) were assessed for each construct and related items, and these items were then ranked in descending order according to the following scale: Low 1 - 1.75; Moderate 1.76 - 2.51; High 2.52 - 4 .

Results

Statistical Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS (v. 26). Frequencies and percentages were used to summarize the questionnaire questions.

Demographic Information

Regarding the first research question, *How long have you been teaching bilingual children?* Table 1 demonstrates the frequencies and percentage of the respondents' answers about the teaching experience of teaching bilingual children.

Table 1. The frequencies and percentage of teachers' experiences of teaching bilingual classrooms, teachers' levels of education and teaching different school types

	Frequency	Percent
Experience		
1-4	143	47.8
5-9	61	20.4
10-14	53	17.7
15 and more	42	14.0
Total	299	100.0
Level of Education		
Bachelor	142	47.5
Master	78	26.1
High Diploma	79	26.4
Total	299	100.0
School Types		
Private	191	63.9
Government	108	36.1
Total	299	100.0

Shown in Table 1 are the frequencies and percentages of respondents' answers to the first research question. The majority of teachers (47.8%) indicated that they have been teaching bilingual classes for 1 to 4 years. Fewer teachers (14.0%) clarified that they have been teaching bilingual classes for 15 years and above. Based on these results, most of the teachers were new teachers with less experienced teaching

backgrounds. Additionally, table 1 deliberates the frequencies and percentage of teachers' educational levels, which indicates the majority of teachers (47.5%) reported that they had completed bachelor's degrees. Fewer teachers (26.1%) indicated that they had master's degrees. Besides, table1 exhibits the frequencies and percentage of the respondents' answers to What is the school type you are teaching in now? The majority of teachers (63.9%) reported they were teaching in a private school, whereas the rest of the teachers (36.1%) indicated they were teaching in a government school.

Table 2. The frequencies and percentage of teachers' creativity preparation programs

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	113	37.79
No	186	62.21
Total	299	100.0

Table 2 displays the frequencies and percentage of respondents' answers: Have you received any prior guidance or training from the Ministry of Education on how to practice creativity in teaching and learning? Less teachers (37.79%) responded 'yes' because they were well prepared to teach bilingual children's creativity. More than half of teachers (62.21%) reported 'no' as they did not get any guidelines or training from the Ministry of Education regarding how to practice creativity. Accordingly, most of those teachers were well prepared and trained to teach children's creativity.

Table 3. The frequencies and percentage of teachers' creativity training forms

Creativity training forms	Frequency	Valid Percent
Booklets	17	15.04
Online resources	18	15.93
Workshops	23	19.7
Conference	10	8.85
Seminar	38	33.63
Competition	7	6.19
Total	113	100.0

As displayed in Table 5, teachers who said 'yes' indicating that they had been trained by the Ministry of Education were also asked a further question: What form did this take? The majority of teachers (33.63%) reported they attended creativity seminars, followed by other teachers (19.7%) who reported that they received workshop training. Fewer teachers (6.19%) indicated that they participated in creativity competitions. On the other hand, teachers who responded with 'no' indicating that they did not receive any preparation program were asked, How do you understand creative education? Table 4 shows the frequencies and percentage of teachers who indicated they have not received any preparation programs. The majority of teachers (46.24%) indicated that they had long teaching experiences in teaching creativity. Fewer teachers (6.45%) reported they read academic articles about creativity education.

Table 4. The frequencies and percentage of teachers' understanding of creative education

Teachers' understanding of creative education	Frequency	Valid Percent
Past education	18	9.68
Teaching experience	86	46.24
Extra course outside school	36	19.35
Academic Articles	12	6.45
Learning from mistakes	34	18.28
Total	186	100.0

Teachers were asked the question, What does creativity mean to you? As revealed in Table 5, the frequencies and percentage of teachers' responses to What does creativity mean to you? were varied.

Table 5. The frequencies and percentage of teachers' perceptions about creativity

	Frequency	Percent
Imagination	38	12.7
Design	21	7.0
Creation	36	12.0
Crazy Idea	35	11.7
Taking risks	26	8.7
Unusual idea	23	7.7
Problem Solving	95	31.8
Breaking Rules	25	8.4
Total	299	100.0

The majority of the teachers (31.8%) indicated that creativity is all about problem-solving tasks, followed by teachers who perceived creativity in general as children's abilities of imagination. However, fewer teachers (7.0%) recognized creativity as children's ability to design innovative objectives. Furthermore, teachers were asked, Which two subjects do you think offer the greatest potential for developing creativity in bilingual students? (See Table 6).

Table 6. Teachers' perceptions of the school subjects offer the greatest potential for developing creativity in bilingual

	Frequency	Percent
Drama and dance	58	19.4
Art and music	121	40.5
Computer and design	32	10.7
Math and science	47	15.7
Creative/imaginative writing	41	13.7
Total	299	100.0

As illustrated in Table 6, the majority of teachers (40.5%) agreed that art and music are the two most significant subjects in school that offer the most potential for developing creativity in bilingual students. Fewer teachers (10.7%) perceived computer and design as the less important subjects in relation to developing creativity in bilingual students' classrooms.

Table 7. Means and standard deviations for teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity

Statement	M	SD	Rank	Importance level
Both boys and girls are equally creative.	3.10	0.95	21	High
Students can achieve high scores without being creative.	3.13	0.87	18	High
Students with high IQs are more creative than average students.	3.27	0.83	5	High
Students can be more creative outside of school.	3.19	0.84	11	High
Creative students are mischievous and high spirited.	3.29	0.79	4	High
It's hard for students to be creative without motivation.	3.13	0.83	16	High
Girls use their imagination more than boys.	3.31	0.76	3	High
In the current education system, students can become more creative in school.	2.42	0.97	22	Moderate
Bilingual students are more creative than monolingual students.	3.35	0.78	1	High
Being creative involves breaking original rules.	3.27	0.78	6	High
Boys are more active than girls in risk-taking behavior.	3.33	0.73	2	High
Everyone can be creative in their own way.	3.14	0.91	15	High
Creative students always get high marks.	3.11	0.91	20	High
I empower students to share their creative works.	3.15	0.88	14	High
Creative ideas need to be fermented continuously over a long time.	3.25	0.71	9	High
Creative students have more competitive advantages.	3.13	0.89	19	High
Creative students don't like to follow school disciplinary rules.	3.19	0.83	12	High
All students are born able to be creative.	3.20	0.82	10	High
Creative teaching can raise children's learning interests.	3.27	0.76	7	High
Creativity is the performance of self-realization and confidence.	3.26	0.78	8	High
The more creative you are, the higher you get paid at work.	3.13	0.94	17	High
Creative ideas just happen dramatically.	3.18	0.85	13	High
Overall	3.17	0.70	-	High

Regarding the factors influencing teachers' attitudes toward creativity, it can be noticed that statement, 'Bilingual students are more creative than monolingual students', recorded the moderate level

mean value among the statements being rated by the study sample, thus was ranked first with a mean value of ($M=3.35$, $SD=0.78$). There were significant differences occurred between boys and girls in creativity levels from teachers' perspectives. Teachers indicated that boys are more active than girls in risk-taking behavior with a mean value of ($M=3.33$, $SD=0.73$). In addition, teachers were found to have positive attitudes toward girls. They reported that girls used their imagination more than boys, with a mean value of ($M=3.31$, $SD=0.76$).

Table 8. Means and standard deviations of teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity in relation to the study variables

Variables	Category	N	Mean	SD
School types	Private	191	3.30	0.67
	Government	108	2.95	0.70
Level of education	Bachelor	142	3.19	0.68
	Master	78	3.05	0.64
	PhD	79	3.26	0.77

While the statement 'In the current education system, students can become more creative in school' was ranked last with a mean value of ($M=2.42$, $SD=0.97$), the overall assessment of this variable was rated by a mean value of ($M=3.17$, $SD=0.70$), suggesting a moderate level of agreement in the study sample. To answer the study hypothesis, 'Effect of the variables (level of education and school types) on teachers'

Source	Type IV Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Level of education	1.065	2	0.532	1.152	0.317
Types of school	7.268	1	7.268	15.732	0.000
Error	136.286	295	0.462		
Corrected Total	145.430	298			

attitudes toward children's creativity', the means and standard deviations of these variables were analyzed (see Table 8). Table 8 displays an apparent variance in the means and standard deviations for EC teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity according to the study variables (teachers' level of education and types of schools). In order to show the significance of the statistical differences between the mean, a Two Way ANOVA analysis of variance was used (see Table 9).

Table 9. Two-way ANOVA for EC teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity on the study variables

As shown in Table 9, there are no statistically significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity according to the variable (level of education). However, there are statistically significant differences in EC teachers' attitudes toward children's creativity according to the variable (types of schools) in favor of those who are teaching in private schools. Based on the recent study purposes revealed earlier on, results confirm that insufficient knowledge, traditional stereotyping based on the gender of learners, and shortcomings in qualifying female teachers to develop creativity and embrace it in educational curricula affect teachers' positive attitudes toward creativity.

Discussion and Conclusion

The current investigation on Saudi EC teachers' attitudes toward teaching bilingual children creativity yields several contributions. The first and most significant contribution of the current research was that the majority of teachers were less experienced in relation to teaching creativity, which narrowed their perceptions about integrating creativity into all subjects. Previous findings supported our argument, finding that longer teaching experience makes teachers more efficient at working with children to develop and enhance their creativity (Fidan & Oztürk, 2015; Šemberger & Konrad, 2022). Thus, the more experienced the teachers are in teaching and developing creativity, the more supportive and enriching the school climate will be for the students.

The second contribution of the existing study was that nearly half of the teachers had not received adequate preparation or training from the Ministry of Education regarding how to practice creativity. This result is in line with previous findings that teachers' positive attitudes toward creativity in children cannot

be transferred automatically in educational situations but that teachers must be adequately prepared to enable children's creativity in various fields (Gralewski, 2016; Šemberger & Konrad, 2022). Consequently, this matter requires education authorities to develop appropriate plans to enhance the competencies of teachers in the field of creativity and encourage innovation.

The third contribution was to reveal the belief of most teachers who teach bilingual students that art, music, drama, and dance are the most important subjects in the school for the development of creativity. Fewer teachers perceived computer and design as less important subjects in relation to developing creativity in bilingual students' classrooms. These findings are consistent with previous findings that stated that one of the major misconceptions is that teachers' attitudes toward creativity are specific to areas of individual interests, such as artistic activities (Gralewski, 2016; Robinson, 2017; Šemberger & Konrad, 2021). Creative classrooms can be achieved by providing students with project-based learning in which they have more time, space, and materials to solve problems productively, and to invent and recreate a stimulating learning environment (Schneider, 2014). While creativity is not a subject like art and music, it can be woven into the fabric of a school's curriculum. When teachers make lessons more related to students' lives and interests, they become more inclined to be creative in their own way. Hence, creativity needs to be included in all areas of curricula.

In the EC settings, results revealed that most teachers reported that the current education system does not support and embody creativity sufficiently, which is reflected in children's creative performance in school. Several scholars confirmed that children's creativity should be enhanced by creating a stimulating learning environment that promotes creative methods represented in its various activities, which allows them to learn by doing, active participation, and experiential learning (Cachia et al., 2010). Besides, general creative thinking skills should continue to be encouraged in every area of students' talent; however, more attention should be paid to increasing diversity in education systems (Han & Marvin, 2022). Moreover, regarding the factors that influence teachers' attitudes toward creativity, most believe that bilingual students are more creative than monolingual students. This result is consistent with previous findings that second language children show higher creative performance early and with higher proficiency, which confirms that bilingual learners have better creative performance (Karatas & Aktan-Erciyas, 2022).

Surprisingly, the results confirmed the existence of significant differences in the attitudes of EC teachers toward creativity in children of different types of schools in favor of those who teach in private schools. Commenting on this, the result of the study was consistent with the previous one, which confirmed the tendency of teachers working in private schools to be more creative and self-motivated at a higher level compared to teachers in public schools (Fidan & Oztürk, 2015). Regarding the type of EC institution, the study found that teachers who work in the private sector have positive tendencies toward embracing and including creativity in children's learning curriculum. This reinforces previous findings that teachers in private institutions tended to be more creative and self-motivated at a higher level compared to teachers in public schools (Fidan & Oztürk, 2015). Further analyses revealed that there were significant differences in teachers' attitudes toward creativity on the subject of gender stereotyping. According to teachers' self-report, girls were more likely to use their imagination than boys were, while boys were more active than girls in risk-taking. This result is inconsistent with the previous result by Betancourt et al. (2022), who found that there are no differences between the genders except in one measure of graphic creativity. More importantly, the results of the existing study indicate a deficiency, if not an absence, of teachers' awareness of the perception of creative performance in bilingual children.

Implications and Limitations

The current study is unique in the Saudi literature in the field of childhood education, as it focused on teachers' attitudes toward creativity and investigated their misconceptions, specifically toward teaching bilingual children, while most of the existing literature focused only on measures of creativity. The overall findings of the existing study exposed the urgent need to prepare teachers to integrate creativity into all subjects, which has a profound impact on the positive attitudes of teachers and contributes to correcting

misconceptions about the development of creativity among learners. It is worth noting that there is a prevalent belief among EC teachers about the existence of individual differences between children of both sexes in their creative abilities, in particular, imagination and risk-taking performance. The crucial element to stimulate bilingual children lies in empowering EC teachers' understanding and knowledge in the subject of creativity.

Taking these results as a reference can be useful for educational sectors to develop training and preparation plans for teachers to enable them to develop creativity in children of both genders. In addition, the results of this study can be beneficial for policy makers in the development of scientific projects for schools. Although the current study revealed children's tendencies to be creative in the field of art, music, and drama, there is a need to encourage children to be creative in the field of science and technology. Despite the importance of these findings for the current study, it is admittedly limited in one main aspect. The limitation is the possibility of teachers providing bias answers while responding to the items in the self-report questionnaire. More research needs to be done to reveal the obstacles in supporting and promoting creativity in young children, both at the Ministry of Education level and at the school level.

Declarations

Author's Declarations

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