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An Investigation into the Linguistic and Cultural Difficulties Faced By Bahraini Students Studying Arabic in International Schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain

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Abstract. The aim of this study are in three folded: first to shed light at language, identity and culture, explore the dilemma of bilingualism, particularly in the GCC the state including the Kingdom of Bahrain, and its dangers with reference to the domination of English as a global language; second to investigate the problem of globalization and its effect on Arabic language; and third to recommend prospects for future of Arabic learners and maintaining it as the language of the Quran for Arabic and Islamic nations. The researcher used mixed method design to collect and analyse the research data. The total number of student participants was 215, with 137 boys and 78 girls. Among these students, 81 (44 boys and 37 girls) were age 15 and were in Grade 10. The other (93 boys and 41 girls) were high school students age 16. Data collected from the questionnaire are analyzed quantitatively to see the frequencies and percentages of each response in the multiple-choice sections. Means were calculated for the responses and the results are presented in tables. Qualitative data, which were obtained from the open-ended questions of the students' questionnaires, teachers and students and the administrators' interviews are discussed and triangulated with the quantitative data to respond to the questions raised in this study. The findings revealed the potential danger that Arabic confronts in the Kingdom of Bahrain in the face of global English. Students feel the need to master English because they view it as the language of knowledge in addition to the prestige it brings the user. Furthermore, the finding indicated that the educational system has failed to create an effective bilingual program that enables students to achieve proficiency in Arabic and English languages. However, the goal must be bilingualism and the schools and universities must be equipped to teach and nurture bilingualism and not assume that students learning in English will be able to maintain their Arabic.

Keywords. Linguistic, Cultural Difficulties, Bilingualism, Bahrain Students

Introduction

Since the establishment of the first school in the Kingdom of Bahrain in 1919 which was called Al Hidayah Al Khalifiyya until now which is one century exactly. And following the establishment of the first non- Arab school related to the American Mission in 1902 and then built a school not far from the American Mission Hospital called Al Raja school and other schools followed the pattern quickly either by their embassies or by the oil industries, private schools were established for expatriate communities and allowed young Bahrainis to enrol. Needless to say, that English language was in real need as it became clear that this language is on the rise to be a global language. With private schools, young Bahrainis enjoyed learning English in a modern methodology though they felt that their Arabic classes were boring and

worthless as they were excelling in English and marking their progress well and were underachieving in Arabic due to their, books, teachers, curriculum and so on and so forth.

What made the situation worse is the Arabic dialects within Bahrain and the GCC or the rest the Arab world in comparison to Modern Standard Arabic widened the gap between what the children speak and what they write. This young generation of Arabs are stumbling and struggling with their own language. If we ask them to write one line, we are bound to discover many mistakes either in grammar or even spelling. In fact, from my experience, I noticed that many of them translate from English to Arabic and then they write what they speak without thinking that this is the language of our holy book the Quran. English is dominating our lives nowadays; it is a fact that we cannot deny or hide. This study helps our young generations and parents to avoid losing our identity.

Aspects of bilingual education, and its linguistic and cultural impacts affecting Arabic students in the states of the Arabian Gulf, particularly in private schools, occupied a substantial worry for parents and educational officials in these states including the Kingdom of Bahrain. This research aims to focus on bilingual educational schools where English is taught as first language to Arabs and Arabic as a native language.

Bearing in mind that English used as the language of wider communication. In fact English is used as a lingua franca among the multiple nationalities in the Gulf Arab states including Bahrain.

Do these students face difficulties? Are they able to cope with slang Arabic already used at home and adapt themselves to learn three languages! Does learning Arabic and English from early stage affect L1 (Arabic) or even L2 (English)? Furthermore, bilingualism has led to a widespread use of English in the Arabian Gulf as it seen as fundamental by parents for their children to seek prosperous careers. My study explores students in Elementary, Middle and High schools in the kingdom of Bahrain private schools.

This is a thorny issue that affect Arabic societies to maintain cultural and first language linguistic abilities. While studies prove that bilingual language learning is possible, but which comes first Arabic or English as L1? Many researchers know or ignore that Arabic has different slang forms affected by the different communities who live in the Gulf region. Languages like English, Urdu, Hindi, Punjabi and Tagalog are used on daily basis along with Arabic. A detailed analysis with regard to language acquisition will show that both L1 and L2 are affected and finally weaken the main four skills in both languages.

The study explores middle and high schools' students' linguistic preference and language practices to assess their influences on identity construction. The collection of data includes students' surveys, interviews with students and teachers and administrators of private schools in Bahrain. Results show that preference are driven by perceived proficiency in both languages. Students are aware of their proficiency in Spoken Arabic which may lead them to think that they master their L1. In fact, results indicate that students have poor proficiency in both languages Arabic and English. To me, this creates an identity dilemma as they are unable to identify completely with either of the two languages.

However, data analysis reveals that English has dominated their lives and impacted their identity. Findings also show that although the student are aware of that danger that is inflicted on their mother tongue, yet, they are still keen to learn English and venture into its culture at the expense of Arabic culture. It is clear that educational policies in private schools in Bahrain falls short of providing these students with effective language programs. Though the Ministry of Education has made it compulsory to teach its Arabic curriculum but of most of our students find their Arabic studies boring and lack modernity.

In spite of language acquisition is looked at as a reincarnation of cultural and social values of the people who speak it, there has been discussions and arguments whether we can teach a second language without cultural context or even that language and cultural are terribly inseparable. When we teach Arabic in our countries, we teach it in its context of religion, culture as a means of communication for our communities. Whereas, when we teach English to our learners, we are speculating that English is lingua franca and is culture-free and neutral. On the other hand, some researchers claim that English has no culture. They deem it as a language of communication rather than stressing or affecting identity. Kayman defines English as a “utopia of communication” and of course he is referring here to English as crossing the world without any frontiers. Canagarajah 2006 proposes that learning any language could raise issues of identification. Acquiring English as L1 in our schools then could endanger our identity as Arabs. English by all means is the world’s lingua franca, and when we think of English we think of its imperialistic associations in the Middle East and particularly in the Arabian Gulf. We ought to remember the British Empire dominated a vast area from Egypt to India in the 19th century. In other words, the colonial era laid down the foundation of preside over other languages as lingua franca (Rajakumar 2011). Generally speaking, people do intuitively understand that there is a connection between languages and culture but sometimes the relationship between language learning and culture is not sufficiently explored. So, let’s have a look at a few issues that can help some language learners. The concept of identity has been studied carefully recently particularly with second language acquisition and more importantly bilingual education. Every language has embedded cultural overtones. These, of course, vary from country to country, not just language to language.

So the culture of a country will be expressed through the language. Sometimes the culture can be harder to pick up than the language itself. Of course, there is the culture of a country but also within that, there is a multitude of variations within each one. We all can recognize that even in our own countries when we go to a place or situation where there is unfamiliarity. Learning a language requires a learner to get a feel for the culture from which it comes. Even with the globalization that is affecting most corners of the planet, there are still cultures that are specific to each country and area. Without an appreciation of that, learning a language can be more difficult. Therefore, this study shed a light at language, identity and culture. Secondly, to explore the dilemma of bilingualism, particularly in the GCC the state including the Kingdom of Bahrain, and its dangers with reference to the domination of English as a global language, to investigate the problem of globalization and its effect on Arabic language and finally, prospects for future of Arabic and maintaining it as the language of the Quran for Arabic and Islamic nations.

Research Methodology

In this research, the researcher investigated how English use as a medium of instruction affects the use of Arabic by the young Arab generation in Bahrain. Let us also not forget the parents’ awareness of this phenomena and its impact on preserving our heritage and culture. The study also looked at how parents perceived the role of English in the future of their children. Most of these parents surveyed mentioned that the English is vital for the future of their children.

A preliminary review of the literature indicates those learners’ identity affects and is affected by second language learning. It specifically shows that English is a powerful language that may threaten the national language in the Kingdom if both languages are not given equal importance in the educational system. The data is coming from the Kingdom’s private

schools. It was hard job taking permission from private schools to conduct the investigation. Most private schools hate the intervention of outsiders, particularly from the ministry of Education, and other parties as they feel threatened at home. Anyway, the selection was made and schools agreed in the end which was a complete thrill to me. The researcher used in my investigation the mixed approach of qualitative and quantitative. This is of course in terms of questionnaires, interviews and direct seminars and discussions with members of administrative and teaching staff in Bahrain. The researcher justified the use of mixed approach as due to the nature of research that dealing with students, teachers, parents, administrative staff and the education ministry in the Kingdom.

The total number of student participants was 215, with 137 boys and 78 girls. Among these students, 81 (44 boys and 37 girls were age 15 and were in Grade 10. The other (93 boys and 41 girls) were high school students age 16. Students classified according to their ARABIC DIALECTS (AD) into groups shown in Table 1:

AD	Students	AD	Percentages
AD1	Levant group: Syrian, Jordanian, Iraqi, etc.	96	44.4%
Ad2	Gulf Arabic	75	34.0%
AD3	Egyptian, Sudanese, Libyan	39	18.2%
AD4	Moroccan, Algerian, Tunisian	5	2.3%
Total		215	100%

Let me reiterate the fact that 9% of these students were from Ibn Khaldoon School, 47% were from Choeifat School, 30% from Al Hikma School and 47 were from Bayan School. Most of these students were originally from Gulf region, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Egypt, Algeria, Sudan, Libya and Tunisia. There were some students who came from United Kingdom and the United States.

Data analysis and Findings of the Study

The most important factor here is the usage of mother tongue not the English language as a mean to preserve identity. The responses of parents were examined closely and each one of them was referred to as corresponding category as follows:

- 1- Responses to Q1 and Q2 in both questionnaires to parents and students. Answers did help to get information from the students and their respective parents regarding of course English and Arabic usage.
- 2- Responses to Q3 regarding the students' survey under the category "language choice in Reading and Writing".
- 3- To analyze the responses and decide upon the students' preferences for language reading and writing and its influences on their Arabic.

All responses were analyzed according to participants' age, gender and dialect. Results were selected and organized to provide support to the study.

The summary of the results showed that English was used but not completely as Arabic was used as well at home. 5.6% declared that they used it all the time with their relatives. 13.6% of students referred that they used English all the time with their siblings. As for using it outside the family, 29.0 % of the students responded that they used English with their friends outside school, where as 45.7%stated that they used it outside the school. This means that inside the family English was not used all the time as much as the way it was used with siblings and friends. On the other hand, English was used between friends. Here is the outcome:

Percentage of all students' responses in Q1: I speak English to

	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Q1: I speak English			
Parents	2.8%	53.5%	43.7%
Siblings	13.6%	61.0%	25.4%
Relatives	5.6%	43.2%	51.2%
Friends outside school	29.0%	60.0%	10.5%
Friends inside school	45.7%	51.4%	2.9%

To analyze the finding closely, it was clear that higher percentages of students who used English sometimes to their parents and 43.2% with their relatives. However, the percentages were higher with siblings, as 61% of students stated that they used English sometimes with their siblings. Outside the family, 60.0% of students indicated that they used English sometimes with friends outside school and 51.4% used it inside school. To add more, I can reiterate that percentages of students who never used English were very small inside school as compared to inside the family. Only 2.9% who never used English with relatives. Here is the result in this table

Percentages of all students' responses to Q2: I speak Arabic to

	Regularly	Sometimes	Never
Q1: I speak Arabic			
Parents	77.1%	22%	0.9%
Siblings	56.8%	39.4%	3.3%
Relatives	72.9%	24.8%	2.8%
Friends outside school	30.4%	56.1%	13.6%
Friends inside school	16.8%	61.7%	21.5%

To analyze the findings, the researcher deduce that Arabic was widely used inside the family particularly with parents and relatives, while it was less used among siblings. Outside the family Arabic seemed to have very limited use between students, as 77.1% of students responded that they used Arabic all the time with parents and 72.9% with their relatives, whereas the percentage decreased with siblings. Only 58.8% of students used Arabic all the time with their siblings. Outside the family there was limited use of Arabic between friends, in and outside school. Only 16.8% indicated that they used Arabic all the time with their friends in school and 30.4% said they did outside school. I also discovered that smaller percentage of students who used Arabic inside the family while outside the family, the percentage were very much higher. Only 22.0% and 24.8% of the students indicated that they used Arabic sometimes with their parents and relatives respectively.

The question that must be asked here does age groups affect the findings particularly in middle and high school students as they are mostly threatened to use more English. It is clear that inside the family, all students used less English with parents and relatives than with siblings and friends. However, 15-16-year students used more English with parents. Relatives

and siblings compared to 14-year-old students. 8.2% of the 15-16 year old students indicated that they used more English all the time with their relatives compared to 1.3 % of the 14 year old students. Outside the family, 48.9 of students stated that they used English al the time with their friends inside the school as compared to 40.3 % of 14-year-old students.

This table clarifies the result

According to age:

	Age 14	15- 16
I speak English regularly		
Parents	1.3%	3.7%
Siblings	16.3%	12%
Relatives	1.3%	8.2%
Friends outside school	29.5%	28.8%
Friends inside the school	40.3%	48.9%
I speak Arabic regularly		
Parents	68.8%	82.1%
Siblings	43.2%	62.4%
Relatives	70.3%	74.1%
Friends outside school	21.6%	32.1%
Friends inside the school	11.3%	20.1%

When I studied the regional differences, especially that Arabic has many dialects, I classified the results according to four dialectical regions. The data indicated that groups used English with their parents and siblings to different degrees. The findings of the research revealed that all regional groups used less English inside the family atmosphere. Young students used less English with parents and relatives compared to older ones. I classified them as follows:

- AD 1 (Arabic Dialect 1) Levant
- AD 2 Gulf Arabs and Bahrainis
- AD 3 Egypt, Sudan, Libyan
- AD 4 North Africans Arabs

The findings are as follows: 100% of AD4 used only Arabic with their parents and no Arabic with their friends in and outside schools all the time. For AD 2, students used more Arabic all the time with parents, relatives, siblings, and friends inside and outside school than all other groups. For AD 3 they used no Arabic all the time with friends inside the school. AD 1 they used English more sometimes. I can sum up the findings in this table in a clear manner:

Percentages of students' all the time or regular responses:

Q1: I speak English often to	AD1 14	AD1 15-16	AD2 14	AD2 15-16	AD3 14	AD3 15- 16	AD4 15-16
Parents	0.0%	0.0%	3.6%	6.3%	0.0%	4.5%	33.3%
Brother/sister	20.0%	10.0%	7.1%	14.9%	18.7%	8.7%	33.3%
Relatives	0.0%	3.3%	3.7%	10.6%	0.0%	8.7%	66.7%
Friends outside school	35.3%	31.7%	7.4%	21.7%	50.0%	30.4%	66.7%
Friends inside school	34.4%	55.7%	35.7%	32.6%	56.2%	65.2%	33.3%

Q2: I speak Arabic often to

Parents		57.1%	71.0%	85.7%	93.6%	62.5%	86.4%	100%
Brother/sister		32/4%	53.2%	75.0%	75.0%	37.5%	60.0%	66.7%
Relatives		65.7%	67.7%	83.1%	81.3%	62.5%	81.8%	33.3%
Friends	outside	17.1%	21.0%	50.0%	51.1%	12.5%	27.3%	0.0%
Friends	inside	8.6%	12.9%	21.4%	36.2%	0.0%	9.1%	0.0%

This is important as it indicates the more children grow older, the more they feel there is a need to talk to parents in Arabic. This applies to siblings, relative and so on and so forth. Even if it is a small percentage that does matter as there are seeds that we can count on to preserve our language regardless of gender. On the other hand the children tend to speak more English when they are young, perhaps this would improve their English as parents feel. Furthermore, some of the children do mix between Arabic and English on the spoken level. This is a clear indication of the schools' influence to use English at the expense of Arabic language. In fact, this phenomena is quite apparent in the entire Gulf region that if you want to show you are well-educated, you should ornament your spoken Arabic language with English. Finally, the officials in the ministries of education are completely unable to interfere as this needs an urgent solution to control the rise of English in private schools in the Arabian Gulf. In a nutshell, the majority of the students acknowledge the influence of speaking English on their cultural identity and that mixing two languages, Arabic and English, affected their mother tongue Arabic. But, however, the majority as well did not feel the risk of losing their mother tongue. Parents in the research were very much involved in their children's education. They viewed the English medium as a prerequisite for access to the best educational system which would bring greater career opportunities for their children. Their responses were characterized by a positive attitude towards the English language. The majority of parents and students revealed that they believe speaking English is a natural behavior and is the outcome of the multilingual environment in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

This supports the findings in the literature which suggests that English is now the main channel of interaction among its non-native users. On the other hand, the results of the study showed some parents were aware of the negative consequences of global English on the Arabic language.

Conclusion

The study has clearly shown that students in English schools prefer to speak English than their mother tongue inside and outside schools. They also like to read and write in English more than their Arabic. There is a negative attitude towards speaking and learning Arabic. In order to preserve our students' mother tongue, policy makers have to take the initiative and responsibility to promote Arabic in English schools. Parents should also share that responsibility to encourage their children to use their mother tongue inside and outside family. Parents should be encouraged to enroll their children in schools where their first language is properly taught and promoted and here I am referring to the Arabic language. They are recommended to involve themselves in their children learning of Arabic. They should visit the school and closely work with teachers to enhance the learning of their children. Parents

should inform regularly their children to be proud of who they are and always express themselves in their mother tongue and in every context. Moreover, the school curricula failed to give Arabic language the prestigious status it deserves a mother tongue. It is absolutely clear that Arabic is reserved for traditional studies such as Arabic literature and Islamic Studies which has resulted in downgrading Arabic in the eyes of our children who become comprehensive of using it and focus instead on the language that will help them instigate in the workplace or society. And finally, achieving bilingualism and biliteracy are not clearly objectives by the Ministry of Education in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

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