

**THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE PROVISION OF HIGH QUALITY EDUCATION IN
THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES**

by

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I declare that **The Role of English in the Provision of High Quality Education in the United Arab Emirates** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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Summary

The knowledge gap between Arabic nations and the developed world is widening. A contributing factor to the slow acquisition and production of knowledge is the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as the language of instruction in schools. To bridge the gap, English is used in tertiary education in most Arab countries. The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a useful case study to explore the dynamics of Arabic and English in education. After an overview of the problems imposed by MSA, the dilemmas facing the teaching of English and in English in the UAE are explored. Many of the problems encountered in the teaching and learning of English are the product of specific aspects of an education in MSA. The study assesses whether MSA or English is the most viable instrument for the delivery of high quality education in the Arab world and finds that currently English is essential.

Key words: Education in Arabic, language policy, Arab diglossia, mother tongue education, United Arab Emirates, Abu Dhabi, literacy, reading culture, knowledge acquisition, transfer errors.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

ADEZ	Abu Dhabi Educational Zone
AHDR	Arab Human Development Report
ALESCO	Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation
AMIDEAST	America-Mideast Educational and Training Services, Inc.
APC	Advisory Planning Committee (Ministry of Higher Education, UAE)
ARLO	Arab Regional Literacy Organisation
CA	Classical Arabic
CEPA	Common English Proficiency Assessment
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Countries
MENA	Middle East North Africa (region)
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
PBL	Problem-based Learning
TESOL	Teaching of English to Students of Other Languages
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), the official language of instruction in schools throughout the Arab world, has been identified as an obstacle to the acquisition and production of knowledge particularly in the fields of modern sciences and technology. Modern Standard Arabic is in fact a misnomer. MSA is simply Classical Arabic which has been formalised through the creation of a standard grammar and the development of a dictionary. The main problem with MSA as a medium of instruction is twofold: resistance to the modernisation of MSA rendering it inadequate as a means of communication in all spheres of life in the modern world and the inability of teachers to communicate effectively in MSA. In the short to medium term English as a vehicle for education in the Arab world has the potential to support progress in the acquisition and production of scientific and technological knowledge. However, the dynamics surrounding the teaching of English in Arab schools prevent it from becoming the optimal instrument for an effective modern education. In this study, I discuss both the problems of MSA and of the teaching of English in Arab schools in order to explore the role that English may have in the provision of a high quality education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE provides a useful case study to explore the dilemma of the language of instruction in the provision of high quality education in the Arab world.

1.2 Background

The UAE has taken a quantum leap from being a loose assembly of tribes in the 1960s to one of the world's wealthiest countries, with a vibrant economy and a prominent role in the Middle East. Despite its economic success, the country's inability to provide highly qualified graduates to drive its development has brought the issue of education to the top of government agendas. An investigation into education in the UAE revealed that school leavers are barely attaining functional literacy, lack the reasoning and problem solving skills required in a modern economy and are incapable of taking full advantage of the information revolution so necessary for development (Al-Sulayti 1999).

As a response, the UAE Ministry of Education and Youth issued a policy document in October 2000 that outlines a strategy to overhaul education. This document, entitled “UAE Education Vision 2020”, examines the current challenges and provides plans and programmes for overcoming them. It defines a “high quality education” as one that “produces a generation equipped with basic skills in work, production, communication and citizenship [and which prepares] professionals with creative thinking and continuing self-learning skills [who are] able to adapt to changes and deal confidently and efficiently in the future” (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000: 9). It is this definition that gives meaning to the term “high quality education” in the topic of this study.

It is important to clarify the scope of this research and some terms that are particular to the UAE. The term ‘nationals’ is the official term for the indigenous Arab people of the UAE or ‘Emirati’. The term ‘locals’ is also sometimes used. It does not apply to foreigners – Arab or others – born in the country. Nationals or locals comprise less than one quarter of the total population of four million. The remainder is of European, American and South Asian origin, mostly from India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The ‘Western’ and Indian children who attend English-medium schools do not form part of this study. The focus of the study is on the largest body of children who attend schools intended for Arab and Muslim children. These schools provide tuition in Arabic and have English as a subject from Grade 1 to Grade 12.

The Arabic used as the medium of instruction in Arab schools is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a form which is very close to Classical Arabic (CA) and which is also known in Arabic as *Fusha* (literary or document Arabic). CA remains the absolute determiner of what is linguistically correct in Arabic. MSA is exclusively the language of education in Arab government schools throughout the Arab world, but it is never spoken in the streets or in informal situations. It is no-one’s mother tongue. It is the official language of government and of the government controlled media, such as newspapers, television and radio. MSA is the only form that can be used in writing despite the existence in every Arab country of a colloquial form of Arabic. The colloquial forms are purely oral (Maamouri 1998: 32), although in some countries like Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco, material has been published

in the colloquial. The colloquial forms are the mother tongue of the respective populations, are learned informally and are the means of communication for everyday life.

The existence of the formal Modern Standard Arabic and of a colloquial version of Arabic in every Arab country, each used for distinct purposes, means that the Arab world in general, and the UAE in particular, experiences the phenomenon of diglossia. Wardhaugh defines diglossia as a situation in a society in which its members use two distinct language codes which are kept quite apart in their functions (2002). Wardhaugh also refers to the 1959 study by Fergusson in which the latter states that the situation concerning Arabic shows the major characteristics of a diglossic phenomenon with Classical Arabic (through its formalised version MSA) as the High variety and the various regional colloquial forms of Arabic as the Low varieties.

1.3 Value of the Study

Throughout the Arab world, that is in all countries where Arabic is the official language, three phenomena pertaining to language and education prevail: first, the use of an outdated language (MSA) different from the mother tongue of the population as the medium of instruction; second, teachers' lack of knowledge of MSA and the dearth of modern education materials in MSA; third, the use of English as the language of tertiary education. All three phenomena occur in the United Arab Emirates. The UAE, with its small population, enormous wealth and ambitious drive to catch up with the developed world, provides an interesting case study of the constraints on the choice of language of instruction in Arab countries and the consequences for education of the use MSA in schools.

Although this study does not claim to have external validity, it is proposed that the findings may be informative for other countries wrestling with the same issues. While the findings of this study cannot be transposed, researchers may make certain inferences for their purposes and explore those further. The reliability of the study is ensured by means of a broad range of sources, both primary and secondary.

1.4 Research Methodology

An overview of literature on the specific subject of the role of English in education in the Arab world, but particularly the UAE, revealed that it is a scantily researched area. Although at the national library in Abu Dhabi, the capital of the UAE, books were found on the issues involved, these were few and old. In addition, the education authorities are not in possession of reliable data on the education system which is only 30 years old and has largely been operating in haphazard fashion, without a broad education strategy, particular criteria for eliciting data, a system of control and evaluation or a system of accreditation. Therefore, primary information provides the majority of the data for this study, with material coming from personal interaction with participants in the education system.

The acquisition of primary data was also constrained by cultural dynamics. It was very difficult for me, being female, to meet with male subjects in this conservative Arab society. In the UAE, it is frowned upon for men to meet alone with women, even in public places like libraries. Since the Emirati population keeps very much to itself, invitations to come to my home were always refused. Male subjects would at first meet with me in supermarkets to give me material. After a while, they would become concerned with being picked up by the security cameras (for normal supermarket security) passing a package of books or papers to me. In the end, we resorted to meeting in parking areas of supermarkets in the evening.

Due to the difficulties in acquiring information and the reluctance of subjects to go on record criticising or even simply expressing their opinions on the education system, it was decided to adopt a qualitative and interpretive approach to the research. A case study approach was deemed the most appropriate to accommodate the contextual, inclusive and emergent nature of the research and to provide a description of the education environment in the UAE (Leedy 1993). A case study approach also allowed for a reflective analysis to develop possible explanations for the dilemma of language of instruction in Arab education. In addition, since culture has an enormous bearing on the choice of language of instruction in the UAE, this study includes elements of ethnographic research, which describes the relationship between culture and behaviour (Ibid).

1.4.1 Sources of Data

The majority of the information on education in the UAE came from sources in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, one of the 7 emirates that form the federation of the United Arab Emirates. It is by very far the wealthiest of the emirates and Abu Dhabi City is the capital of the country. The Abu Dhabi Educational Zone (ADEZ) is the education authority responsible for schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

With the case study approach in mind, I made contact with Abu Dhabi Educational Zone officials who provided me with general data concerning the teaching of English in government schools. A note of caution is needed when one interprets official figures since, in general, UAE education officials do not want to go on record as critical of the system and are even less inclined to be self-critical. They will therefore either not answer a question or merely give the ‘official’ answer. Data from school principals and teachers is often also not reliable for the same reasons. One look at some of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) education documents for the Arab region will give an indication of the difficulty that regional governments have with statistics and with the interpretation of questions posed. Frequently, more can be gleaned from what is not said than from the actual information provided. Nevertheless, the databases of the UNDP Regional Bureau for Arab States and UNESCO have proved to be rich sources of statistical information not easy to acquire from UAE official sources. Internet searches have resulted in worthwhile journal articles, particularly on issues concerning MSA as a language of instruction.

Some interesting data concerning the relationship between Arabic teaching styles and the learning of Arabic also came to light when I attended a 3-month course in Modern Standard Arabic. There was a conflict between the teaching methodology and the outcomes desired by the course planners; the teacher based the course on reading and translation but constantly bemoaned the fact that the learners could not communicate spontaneously in Arabic. From conversations with Emirati and other Arab colleagues, I was given to understand that the approach of teaching through reading and translation – with an emphasis on rules and with the teacher in front of the class dispensing and controlling the information – is widely used in the Arab world. Language learning is based on translation, repetition and memorization of grammatical rules, which is not conducive to communicative competence or fluency. In

addition, I was able to experience first hand the complexity of the orthographic system and the difficulties posed to reading and decoding by the lack of diacritics representing vowel sounds.

Finally, I have become a member of the TESOL Arabia organization; their meetings, conferences and quarterly journal, *Perspectives*, provide valuable insights into the teaching of English in the Gulf region and particularly in the UAE.

1.4.2 Data Elicitation Techniques

Based on the information gained from reading material on education in the Arab world and the UAE specifically, I prepared questionnaires, which I submitted to two respondents of the Abu Dhabi Educational Zone, one a UAE national, the other a Canadian education planner involved in the implementation of programmes for teaching English in schools in Abu Dhabi. To get the views of the participants themselves, in keeping with the case study approach, informal discussions were also held with teachers and learners in Abu Dhabi, as well as with recent graduates from other Arab countries, such as Lebanon, Egypt and Jordan. Information thus obtained was corroborated in an interview with the Assistant Dean of the College for Education of the Zayed University for Women, in Abu Dhabi.

As part of fieldwork, conversations were held with colleagues who are experienced translators and who have worked with Arabic and English for many years. These informants provided me with information concerning the difficulties of translating modern works in science, information technology and biotechnology into Arabic. For example, it took 8 translators 3 days to come up with a word for the English ‘access’ in the title of a book by Jeremy Rifkin entitled *Age of Access*. On another occasion, it took three of the more experienced translators a whole day to come up with an appropriate word for ‘objective’, as in ‘the objective of the study’. At a workshop in English on child psychology and physiology, the interpreter translated both ‘psychology’ and ‘physiology’ with the Arabic for ‘psychology’. When one of the bilingual professors present brought the mistranslation to the notice of the speaker, a long debate ensued but no appropriate Arabic word for ‘physiology’ was proposed. In the end it was decided to stick to the word ‘psychology’ for both terms until an appropriate word for ‘physiology’ could be found. These instances illustrated the current limitations of the Modern

Standard Arabic vis-à-vis communication on topical issues and shed light on some of the implications for education in MSA.

1.5 *The Language Problem*

Quality of education has become a topical subject in UAE government and business circles. Despite awareness by the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour and local education authorities that education in the country is in crisis and that there is an urgent need to look at education policy as expressed in the Vision 2020 strategic document, the issue of language of instruction is persistently ignored by the various education authorities both on the national and the local levels. There is no reference at all in the Vision document to a policy on language medium. This seeming lack of awareness of the importance of language as a vehicle to convey knowledge is central to the crisis in Arab education. Maamouri quotes J.V. Neustupny on the definition of a ‘language problem’ as a situation that relates to conditions “...of which the speech community is not fully aware, which have not become a target of language policy, and which are still capable of contributing largely to the tension within the society” (1998: 29). The dynamics around language in education in the Arab world in general and in the UAE in particular seem to fit in with this definition of ‘language problem’. The only reference to language in the UAE Vision 2020 document is a vague statement that “the learning of languages” is an important factor in modern education (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000: 24).

The lack of debate at official level concerning language as a medium of instruction does not extend to all Arab linguists or to educated Arabs in business and academia. Maamouri maintains:

There is a growing awareness among some Arab education specialists that the low levels of educational achievement and high illiteracy (and low literacy) rates in most Arab countries are directly related to the complexities of the standard Arabic language used in formal schooling and non-formal education (1998: 6).

The view that the problem with Arab education lies in the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) as its medium is supported in the June 2003 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) compiled by the Regional Bureau for Arab States of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The report states that one of the principal reasons for the growing knowledge gap between the Arab world and developed countries is the deteriorating quality of education in the Arab world and of “standard Arabic as its medium of instruction” (AHDR 2003: 126). It maintains that the situation of “Arabic language teaching cannot be separated from that of classical Arabic in general, which has in effect ceased to be a spoken language” (Ibid: 7). Education authorities make no distinction between Classical Arabic (CA) and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), since they are in effect the same. MSA is the formalised version of CA. Wardhaugh explains the formalising of a language as the creation of a grammar, dictionaries and standardised texts (2002: 90). In the case of MSA a grammar has been constructed based on the Classical Arabic of the Quran, dictionaries have been compiled and standardised texts prepared. However, the formalising of MSA in no way implied modernising. For example, the standardised MSA texts are mainly religious texts based on the life of the Prophet Mohammed and the early history of the Muslim nation.

The phenomenon of Arab diglossia has also been identified by a number of Arabic language specialists as the core of the problem in literacy and knowledge acquisition. The language problem in education in the Arab world is therefore the result of two factors: first, the use of a variety which is different from everyone’s mother tongue as the official language and as the medium of instruction, that is, the diglossic situation; second, the official variety is outdated and cannot cope with the demands of a modern education in a rapidly changing world.

The issue of language medium, therefore, becomes critical in any strategic plan that aims at changing the direction and outcomes of an education policy. In the UAE, as in other Arab countries, change to the education policy is imperative since the current approach has proved

unable to provide the quality of school leavers necessary to drive national development. Yet, there appears to be reluctance on the part of Arab education officials in general and the UAE education authorities in particular to deal head-on with the crucial issue of language.

1.6 Scope of the Study

This study investigates the factors that contribute to the language gap in education policy and analyses whether a “quality education” can be achieved in Arabic under current circumstances or whether English needs to be an integral part of this objective. In Chapter 2, a brief overview of pertinent books and articles provides a general picture of the dynamics surrounding education in Modern Standard Arabic and in English in the Arab world and specifically in the UAE. It is clear from some of the literary sources (Massialas and Jarar 1983; Al-Misnad 1985; Al-Sulayti 1999; Ayari 1996;) that the problems confronting Arab children in the acquisition and production of knowledge in Arabic and in English have been around for several decades.

Chapter 3 takes a closer look at the central problems in the Arabic language which affect the acquisition of literacy and therefore of knowledge by Arab children. Chapter 4 looks at specific language issues that teachers of English need to deal with when teaching English to Arab learners, while Chapter 5 looks at the challenges that face instruction in English in government schools and in tertiary education in the United Arab Emirates. Chapter 6 brings together the key points of the previous three chapters and makes some proposals for the way forward.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Arab countries have become conscious of the increasing knowledge gap between the Arab World and the rest of the developed world. The 2003 United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) mentioned several constraining factors including, significantly, the deteriorating quality of education in the Arab world and the inability of Arabic to provide an effective medium to convey the knowledge required in a modern effective education.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry for Education and Youth has proposed an ambitious programme entitled Vision 2020 to revolutionise education in the UAE. The programme details a complete overhaul of the system, including the revision of curricula, the design of new materials, improving the training of teachers and upgrading the facilities at schools. Yet the education policy as delineated in Vision 2020 fails to look at the crucial issue of language in education, particularly how Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) may serve the objectives of the programme, or even if it can do so. The fact that the many private educational institutions providing education for Arabs in English are becoming increasingly popular should be an indicator to UAE education authorities that education in Arabic is not meeting the aspirations of the people.

The subsections of the following literature review reflect the principal issues in the debate on what the language of instruction should be to provide a high quality education in the Arab world in general and specifically in the UAE.

2.1 UAE Education Vision 2020

According to the Vision 2020 document, the outcome of a high quality education is an individual who has the skills to do a professional job, can communicate effectively, has a sense of patriotism and is sufficiently literate to continue with the life-long learning necessary in a constantly changing world (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000: 9). The document

specifies that a high quality education requires knowledge of the modern sciences, including languages, mathematics, the natural sciences and computers. It concludes that in order to achieve this standard of education, the UAE education system has to undergo drastic changes in objectives, policies, curricula, teaching materials, methodologies, evaluation tools and operational and administrative systems (Ibid: 31).

A glaring omission in the document is the issue of language policy. This is particularly remarkable since language is the instrument through which knowledge is conveyed and the Vision 2020 document does mention that knowledge of languages is an important factor in quality education (Ibid). Moreover, the acquisition of a modern education, particularly at a tertiary level, requires the ability to share in the global knowledge bank for which access to the Internet and other international sources of data and reference is essential. The 2003 Arab Human Development Report maintains that the majority of knowledge is currently being produced in English and a vast proportion of Internet material is in English.

Currently UAE learners are taught in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) – the formal and official version of Arabic – which is distant from the colloquial Arabic spoken at home and in the streets. Teachers are often poorly qualified and unskilled in MSA. English is taught as a foreign language from Grade 1 to Grade 12 by Arab teachers. The result of the inability of teachers to work confidently in MSA and/or English is that the competence in all skills attained by a learner in both English and MSA even by the tertiary level of education is very low.

The lack of a clear language policy and of a strategic assessment of the impact of the choice of language medium in schools undermines many of the proposed strategies of Vision 2020, for example, access to Internet in the classrooms, the stocking of school libraries, the choice of teaching staff and of academic books, curricula and materials.

2.2 Lack of Language Policy in the Arab World

The absence of a clear and thoroughly deliberated language policy is not just characteristic of the United Arab Emirates. It appears to permeate most other Arab states, particularly those of the Arabian Gulf region. The 2000 UNESCO “Regional Report on Education for All in Arab States” also lacks any reference to medium of education or to how Arabic can best serve the purpose of a quality education.

Paradoxically, the UNESCO report is often more useful for what information it is not able to provide than for what is actually stated. For example, a number of countries are unable to provide the training level of teachers (such as the United Arab Emirates) yet maintain that the levels of teacher accreditation are 100% or close. The low level of training of teachers, not least of language teachers, is a matter of great concern in education. The fact that the UAE can provide data on numbers of teachers accredited but is not able to provide information on their level of training is indicative of the lack of knowledge the government has regarding the quality of teaching taking place in government schools.

Another aspect of particular importance is the figures given on the percentage of the educational budget spent on research and development in education as against salaries. For example, while Singapore allots 7.8% of its education budget to research and development, the UAE uses only 1% for the same purpose. The vast proportion of the UAE education budget goes to salaries, exceeding that of most other Arab countries. The substantial allocation of the UAE education budget to salaries is indicative of both the cost of paying high salaries to indigenous teachers to keep them in education (in accordance with a government affirmative action programme called ‘emiratisation’) and the high cost of importing teachers to compensate for the shortfall. In addition, with the enormous wealth that the UAE enjoys from its oil industry, the allocation of only 1% of the education budget to research and development is a clear indication of the lack of importance accorded to innovation and progress in education.

2.3 Problems with the Arabic Language

The 2003 UNDP Arab Human Development Report (AHDR) explores the problems of the lack of thorough education planning and of a clear language policy in most Arab countries, and emphasises the importance of research and development in education. The report focuses principally on knowledge, human development and the knowledge society in Arab countries. It maintains that one of the “cardinal challenges facing the Arab world is the growing knowledge gap” (AHDR 2003: 1) and that “the most important challenge facing Arab education is its declining quality” (Ibid).

One of the critical points made by the report concerning language and education is that “the Arabic language is facing severe challenges and a real crisis in theorization, grammar, vocabulary, usage, documentation, creativity and criticism” (Ibid: 7). To this it adds the challenge of information technologies, which relates to the computerized automation of the language. For example, there is no computer software for Arabic indexing, an essential aid in the effective use of academic and scientific research publications. The report goes on to say that the teaching of Arabic is also undergoing a crisis in methodology and curricula. In particular, there is a growing gap between the Modern Standard Arabic taught at schools and the functions that MSA is expected to perform in modern learning and living. The problems of particularly academic/scientific communication between Arabs and the international scientific and academic community are compounded by the fact that “facility with the English language is waning across the Arab world” (Ibid: 124).

Interestingly, the AHDR report makes the statement that Arabic is taught as the object of thinking, analysis, classification, evaluation and inference and not as the instrument to effect these skills (Ibid: 126). It recommends that an initiative be implemented to formulate the grammatical rules of Arabic and to enhance its communication capabilities by expanding its functional use in everyday life. The report also recommends the consolidation and enhancement of glossaries of terminology, thesauruses and specialized lexicons in social and scientific fields.

Finally, a critical topic that the report addresses is the lack of translation of scientific and general books into Arabic. This has a big impact on the stocking of libraries in Arabic medium schools in the UAE, and limits learners' access to knowledge produced in other languages. According to the AHDR (Ibid: 66) “[d]eveloped and developing countries alike are moving fast to acquire the ever-increasing quantity of knowledge in its original language” which is then translated (Ibid). Yet, the Arab world lags far behind in the number of works translated into Arabic. While there are more than 100,000 translated titles published in the world every year, only 330 are translated into Arabic, the language of more than one fifth of the world's population. This compares very negatively with a language like Japanese with a total of 1,700 titles translated annually.

The facts given in the Arab Human Development Report, together with the background on education in the UAE provided by the Vision 2020 strategic report, highlight some of the problems that the education authorities in the UAE face in their choice of language medium to attain the high quality of education stated in their objectives.

Despite the importance of Arabic as symbol of the unity of the Arab world and of its central role in the maintenance of the Muslim faith, English as a medium of education is increasingly being regarded as crucial by private Arab education institutions in the UAE. The importance accorded to education in English is manifest in the mushrooming of private Arab schools that promise to provide an education that combines Arab heritage and Muslim values with a ‘world class education’ in English. Unless there is a policy to modernize standard Arabic and to improve the teaching of Arabic in schools, combined with a concerted effort to increase the translation and production of suitable learning and teaching materials for schools, English medium schools are going to continue to offer an attractive alternative for parents and learners who aspire to an education that will give the learner access to global information and job opportunities. The number of English schools had grown from 188 in 1988 to 388 by 1997, and, although no current statistics are available, seems to have continued to grow at a rapid rate, providing a clear indication of their popularity.

2.4 The Need for Quality Teaching

Another important issue in education in the UAE is the need to improve the quality of indigenous teachers drastically. For as long as Arabic as a medium of teaching is proving to be a limiting factor in education, and as long as the professional quality of Arabic teachers remains low, foreign language and particularly English medium schools with better educational resources and better qualified teachers may prove an increasingly strong attraction.

The issue of the quality of teachers is one that has been around for decades. Sheikha Al-Misnad published a book in 1983 entitled *The Development of Modern Education in the Arab World*, in which she decries the quality of education, educators, books, materials and curricula in the Arab world. She describes the teachers as poorly trained and able only to teach in a traditional teacher-up-front approach with reliance on the blackboard and textbooks and with a focus on examinations designed to allow the learner to proceed to the next level. She expresses the need for teachers to receive better training and to become acquainted with “modern methods of teaching” (1983: 323). According to her, “since the beginning of modern education, the shortage of qualified national teachers has been considered to be (*sic*) a major cause of the poor quality of teaching” (Ibid).

In the UAE, the majority of teachers who are nationals are women. Education is an acceptable field of employment for national female graduates in a country where women’s choice of careers is still largely influenced by societal constraints. As Sheikha Al-Misnad states:

A large proportion of female graduates in the [Arabian] Gulf States either join teacher-training courses from the beginning, or end-up working as teachers, regardless of the fact that their first degrees were in general arts or science subjects (1983: 328).

The quotation refers to a significant problem, namely that women who are not qualified to teach at all become teachers. In the UAE, the problem of the appointment of unqualified women as teachers is exacerbated by a strong government emiratization program, which aims

at sharply increasing the numbers of nationals working in both the public and the private sectors.

2.5 The Poor Language Skills of Teaching Candidates

In addition to their lack of teaching qualifications, the Arabic and English language skills of candidates for the teaching profession are often weak. As mentioned in the discussion of the 2003 Arab Human Development Report (AHDR), there is a marked difference between academic/official Arabic, as represented by Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), and the spoken Arabic of the societies of the various Arab countries. Therefore teachers who are indigenous Arabs may not necessarily be qualified to teach in MSA and frequently even less qualified to teach in English.

The issue of language training for local Emirati university entrants is dealt with in the book *Education in the Arab World: Challenges of the Next Millennium*, published by the Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research (ECSSR). This book is a collection of papers presented at a conference of the same name in 1999. The section “Education in the United Arab Emirates” is candid on the weaknesses of the education system. In his paper concerning language training in particular, Halloran maintains that because the standard of Arabic and English of entrants is very low, the Zayed University for Women has instituted a policy which requires candidates to complete two years of studying only English, Arabic and Information Technology before they are allowed to pursue their chosen field of study (1999: 323). The approach of Zayed University to language training is at the same time an admission of the poor standards of language teaching in schools and of the important contribution that English makes to an effective tertiary education.

Another speaker at the same education conference made the statement that “[a] fair knowledge of the computer, the Internet, modern means of communication and the English language is now a must” (Mograby 1999: 302). Halloran’s and Mograby’s papers represent

two of the few instances of material published on education in the UAE where the importance of language, and in particular of English, in education is clearly stated.

2.6 *English and Linguistic Schizophrenia*

There is reluctance on the part of most Arab education authorities to deal with the crucial issue of language head-on. In his 1986 article “The Power and Politics of English,” B.B. Kachru speaks of a linguistic schizophrenia with respect to the use of English in countries where English is regarded as a second language (which he refers to as Outer Circle countries) and where it is regarded as a foreign language (which he calls Expanding Circle countries). The schizophrenia manifests in the love-hate attitude towards English of users of English in Outer and Expanding Circle countries. Users in these countries love the knowledge, social and economic mobility and influence that they gain from knowing English but hate to admit that they need English to attain these objectives. The same sentiments concerning English are evident in the UAE. English is used in education, commerce, business and international relations but seldom is its importance admitted in official circles. Learners are sent abroad to acquire tertiary education in English and local tertiary education is also provided in English but there is no adequate policy to guide the teaching of English in government schools and there is a resistance to acknowledging its importance in official education documents.

There is a distinct fear of the loss of culture in this young Muslim nation, established in 1971, and there is also a fear that education in English may bring secularisation. Arabic ensures that the learner is exposed to material from the rich Arabic cultural heritage and, more importantly, to content which is appropriate to Muslim education. In the UAE, it is not English that is the language of power, but Arabic. Traditional systems of authority are upheld by the religious and cultural values transmitted through Arabic. From this perspective, it is important for the authorities to ensure an Arab and Muslim education, which is clearly stated as an objective in the strategic Vision 2020 policy document (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000: 9).

There is no denying that English has had an unprecedented impact on the languages and cultures of the world over the last decades especially, although this influence can also be clearly traced to the colonial period. Britain held sway over the UAE and Oman, then known as the Trucial States, right up to December 1970 and memories of it as a ruling power are still fresh. Nevertheless, the cultural power of English is not necessarily or irremediably tied to its pedagogical use. Singapore is an example of the ability of a non-English speaking country to use English as the language of teaching and learning in a very successful education strategy. Yet, the particular Asian culture of Singapore is evident to any visitor to the country. Singapore has not lost its cultural identity to English. Singapore champions four national languages other than English, but education is in English. While the UAE seeks to emulate Singapore with regard to education, it fails to imitate it with regard to language policy. Loss of cultural and particularly religious identity is a strong fear in the Arab world. However, Arab nations should have little reason to fear the demise of Arab culture, religion, language and traditions due to the use of English in education. The Arab world is vast, it has a long and distinguished history of which its people are proud and Arabic has the added protection of being the only official language of the Arab world. Moreover, as the language of the holy Quran, Arabic has a sacred status among Muslims.

Kachru does mention the pedagogical sphere as one of the spheres through which the English language can exercise power and influence over other languages and cultures. Specific aspects of pedagogy in English which he describes as instruments of power and influence are:

[t]he model for the teaching of English and its sociological and pragmatic validity; the “bandwagons” that should be taught; teacher training programmes that have been developed in Inner Circle (English mother-tongue) countries; culturally biased standards of testing and evaluation of competence and proficiency; and approaches and research paradigms for English for Special Purposes (1986: 133).

It can be argued that these instruments are not inextricably linked to an education provided through English. Each and every one of the instruments of power named by Kachru can be modified if the education policy is to produce an education through the medium of English that is appropriate to Arab and Muslim values and traditions. Together, the Arab world has

sufficient financial resources to produce syllabi, books, materials and programmes to complement such a policy.

In my remarks about the current weaknesses of education in Arabic and of the desirability to improve and formalise the role of English in education for Arab learners, I do not wish to imply that there is no room for Arabic in education in the Arab world or in the UAE. Nevertheless, with the majority of knowledge currently being produced or disseminated in English, the most expedient way of tapping into the world's vast knowledge resources is to use English as an instrument in education, certainly for the short to medium term. The use of English can and should be done concurrently with a programme to increase the depth and range of Arabic according to the recommendations of the 2003 Arab Human Development Report. However, raising the level of Modern Standard Arabic to make it an effective medium for a modern education is a process that will take several years, despite the existence of academies in a number of Arab countries charged with conducting "a linguistic and lexicographic study of Arabic so as to simplify then modernize it (*sic*) and to coin Arabic equivalents for technical and scientific terms" (Massialas 1983: 93).

In addition, English is already being used in substantial sectors of education in the Arab world as shown by the number of private English medium schools in the UAE and the growing number of satellite tertiary education campuses from Inner Circle countries. However, the expanding use of English is happening in an uncontrolled manner, resulting in government policies that will have little or no impact because they are not founded on an objective evaluation of the education situation at grassroots level. Through a comprehensive and correct evaluation and assessment, the danger of the unplanned influence of English culture through teaching in English can be mitigated. English can then be perceived as a resource and not a threat.

2.7 The Influence of English and the Potential of Arabic

The power of English currently lies in its “unprecedented functional range” (Kachru 1994: 135). When the functional range of English is juxtaposed with the current limited functional range of Modern Standard Arabic (as mentioned in the 2003 Arab Human Development Report) there is a real possibility of English taking over certain functional areas which were once the domain of Arabic. This phenomenon can already be seen in certain areas of scientific and technical education. The solution lies, as the AHDR suggests, in the urgent implementation of a policy to increase the functional range of Arabic. The report also states that Arabic has an intrinsic strength which comes from its “unique capacity to derive words and terms flexibly from its lexicon and its prodigious vocabulary of synonyms and meanings” (AHDR 2003: 126). The modernization of Arabic and the expansion of its functional range will go a long way towards strengthening the use of the language in education in the Arab world, which may otherwise succumb to what Kachru (1994: 139) refers to as the “deficit hypothesis”. This hypothesis states that a language will borrow from other languages, in this case English, to fill the gaps in its own lexical and functional range.

According to the information in the 2003 AHDR, Arabic is in a period of ‘dormancy’, lacking the momentum to modernise and to remain relevant in a rapidly changing world. The term ‘language dormancy’ is used by Kachru to refer to a state in which languages stagnate. However, the dormancy of Arabic is a product not of the power of English, but rather of the political, social and economic circumstances prevailing in large parts of the Arab world. For example, in the wealthy Gulf states ruling families may fear that any modernization of Arabic could create a society distant from the precepts of the Quran on which the political authority in traditional systems is based. The poorer Arab states depend heavily on the generosity of the rulers of wealthier states and are economically and politically unwilling to bring about any changes. Arabic is therefore a victim of its own political and linguistic authorities and can thus be strengthened by language policies implemented by the same. Unless a concerted effort is made to make Arabic relevant in the present and for the future, the unplanned and invisible spread of English will continue (Kachru 1994), which may well have a detrimental impact on the Arabic language and Arab culture.

2.8 The Role of Academic Discourse

Emotional discourse about the impact of English on the Arab language and culture abounds in education in the Arab world. English and the powers behind it are frequently vilified and what is perceived as the intrinsic power of English is condemned by the proponents of the continued use of Arabic in education without their arguing for the intrinsic strengths of Arabic. An example of such argumentation is the 2002 monograph by Raji Zughoul, of Jordan. The paper, despite the promising title “The Power of Language and the Language of Power in Higher Education in the Arab World”, is largely a criticism of Britain as a colonial power and of its destruction of the cultures of its colonies. Although many of the arguments are valid in a discussion of the ills of colonialism, they shed little light on current policy in Jordan or the rest of the Arab world vis-à-vis the use of English and Arabic in education. The paper also describes the different approaches of tertiary education institutions in Jordan to the use of English and criticises the choice of English as opposed to Arabic as the language of instruction. Such discourse shows the dearth of constructive thinking around the issues of language, and particularly concerning the way to bring Arabic back as an instrument of good quality education in the Arab world.

Fortunately this type of discourse is counter-balanced by the work of individuals like those who wrote the 2003 Arab Human Development Report and of others, such as Byron Massialas who wrote a book entitled *Education in the Arab World* in 1983. Although Massialas also maintains a very caustic approach to those who laud English or French as a better instrument for education in the Arab world, he is able to give an account of the strengths of Arabic and the ability of Arabs to produce knowledge in Arabic and to have scientific innovation patented. He also praises the ability of Arab governments in certain countries, for example, Morocco and Algeria, that were previously under colonial rule, to reform their systems of education. They have been able to change the content of their education systems to reflect Arab culture and to change the medium to Arabic as opposed to the language of the colonial power. Moreover, they have been able to provide a sufficient number of trained indigenous teachers over a relatively short period of time to ensure cultural and religious faithfulness. Some heroic efforts have indeed been made as described by

Massialas (1983: 90–95). However, he also lists much the same educational constraints as are listed by the authors of the 1999 ECSSR book by the same title, published fifteen years later, and in Education Vision 2020 published in October 2000. Included are:

- A centrally determined curriculum and syllabi which leave little room for materials innovation and adaptation to local needs
 - Inadequate provision for continuous assessment, research and experimentation
 - Inadequate production capacities for non-print supplementary aids
- and
- Skills and motivation of teachers that are often inadequate (Ibid: 96).

With the current lack of attention paid to a crucial aspect in education like language of instruction, it may just be that researchers in the Arab world and in the UAE in particular will still be grappling with the same constraints ten years from now.

2.9 English as a Resource rather than a Threat

The Arab Human Development Report makes the statement that fear of cultural and linguistic suicide must not result in stagnation or worse in the continued deterioration in the quality of education in the Arab world (AHDR 2003: 3). What is necessary is some courageous and innovative thinking concerning language issues to maximize the enormous potential of Arabic in modern education and to look at English as an interim instrument to raise the level of education in the Arab world. In this respect, the 1989 article by Bronwyn Norton Peirce, entitled “Toward a Pedagogy of Possibility in the Teaching of English Internationally: People’s English in South Africa”, raises some interesting issues. The principal argument, and one that the authorities in the UAE may heed, is that English can be used as an instrument to strengthen cultures and promote citizenship. Citizenship is very important in the UAE, where the concept of being a citizen of the Arab and Muslim nations as well as a responsible UAE citizen forms one of the pillars on which the education strategy mentioned in Vision 2020 rests (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000: 17).

Peirce maintains that pedagogy can empower both teachers and learners: “[To empower] is to enable the self-affirming expression of experiences mediated by one’s history, language and traditions” (Peirce 1998: 408). The empowered learner is able to take greater responsibility for success in life. Peirce places some emphasis on the empowerment of the individual in terms of his/her ability to deconstruct the dominant discourses in society and to create new possibilities for themselves. It could be argued that questioning the prevailing social and cultural practices in the Arab world is precisely what Arab political, religious and educational authorities fear and what has caused the stagnation of education programmes. However, a worthwhile modern education can be achieved through a conscious effort to instil national pride in culture and traditions while ensuring that the approach to education and the content of curricula promote intellectual independence and creativity. This corresponds to the objectives of Vision 2020 to produce creative, independent and responsible individuals. “The fundamental issue is how a pedagogy of possibility can incorporate aspects of the students’ lived culture into pedagogical work....” (Ibid: 416)

Both Peirce (1998) and Kachru (1986) argue that English need not be a threat to other cultures and languages. The English language can be used to depict, teach and enhance local cultures through well designed syllabi and programmes, supported by culturally appropriate materials and taught by highly competent and sensitive teachers who may, or may not be indigenous to that culture. This seems, under the prevailing circumstances, to be a good point of departure for improving the quality of education in the UAE and in the Arab world in general.

3 PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY ARABIC IN EDUCATION

To understand the problems that Arab students have when learning to read, write, speak and listen in English, it is important to be aware of the situation surrounding the Arabic language as the official language of instruction in Arab schools as well as the problems of learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). The difficulties that surround learning and teaching in MSA also lead us to understand why there is a role for English in quality education in the United Arab Emirates and the Arab world for at least the short to medium term.

The 2003 Arab Human Development Report is the first international report of the millennium to look critically at the phenomenon of Modern Standard Arabic as a language of instruction and its impact on education and development in the Arab world. However, the report is not the first expression of concern with respect to MSA. Many Arab linguists have been expressing concern over the status of Arabic as an official language and as a medium of instruction since the middle of the twentieth century, when many Arab countries gained independence from the colonial powers that had held sway over them for several decades.

In 1964 an Arab Task Force was created to look at issues of literacy and in 1972 the Arab Regional Literacy Organisation (ARLO) was established within the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organisation (ALESCO) to coordinate the Arab literacy effort (Maamouri 1998: 19). Authors like Mohamed Maamouri (1998) and Salah Ayari (1996) have focused particularly on the issue of diglossia in the Arab world and its impact on literacy. Shukri Abed (2004) has done an in-depth analysis of how the Arabic language reflects the views of the Arab individual on issues such as modernisation, cultural imperialism and globalisation and to what extent Arabic is changing to incorporate new terms and ideas.

The section of this dissertation that follows looks more closely at the nature of MSA itself and how its particular characteristics impact on learning. The paper presented by Mohamed Maamouri at the “Human Development: Moving Forward Workshop” in Morocco in 1998 is useful in providing an overview of the impact of MSA on education and therefore I have based the discussion of specific aspects of Arab education on it.

3.1 Diglossia and Arab Education

One of the central factors impacting on the quality of education in the whole of the Arabic-speaking world is the use of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in education. All schooling, from the first year of primary school to the last year of high school is carried out in MSA. However, the mother tongue of the Arabs from different countries is a colloquial form of Arabic specific to each Arab country. These colloquial forms are so diverse that it can be said that each Arab country has its own dialect. The differences between the various Arabic dialects are at times substantial enough to compel Arabs from different countries to revert to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) to communicate. However, when Arabs are asked what their mother tongue is, they will state quite unequivocally that it is Arabic.

The de facto language situation is that there is a clear state of diglossia in all Arab countries, with MSA being used in formal education and almost exclusively in writing and reading, while the colloquial Arabic is used for all oral communication outside the formal education setting (and frequently inside the classrooms). The colloquial is the mother tongue of every speaker and thus is learned informally. Nevertheless, despite the substantial distance between the two forms of Arabic – the colloquial and MSA – the existence of the two distinct forms is not given official recognition in any Arab country, nor is it readily admitted to by Arabs. Two reasons are put forward to explain this deliberate disregard for diglossia in Arab countries. The first is that any admission that the Arabic spoken in a country is not the recognized High form (H) of the MSA is to admit to the existence of an inferior form of Arabic, a Low form (L). The second, which is an extension of the first, is an admission that Arab governments and Arabs have allowed what is perceived as the sacred form of Arabic – the Quranic Arabic, which is still the absolute authority and measure of correct Arabic – to become corrupted.

Muslims over the ages have regarded Quranic Arabic (and its formalised form, MSA) as the perfect form of expression for the Muslim faith and culture. The most conservative Arab linguists argue that because of its God-given status, Arabic is perfect and Quranic Arabic is the measure of linguistic purity and correctness. To illustrate one extreme view of how Quranic Arabic linguists regarded Arabic as perfect, Shukri Abed gives the example of early Arabic linguists refusing to accept Greek logic as having any universal value on the grounds that, in order to discuss the tenets of Greek logic, Greek words had to be used. By this, they

inferred that Greek logic was particular to Greeks since it found a reflection in the Greek language, but that it would not apply to the Muslim world since there was no specific Arabic terminology to express this logic in Arabic (2004: 4). This linguistic argument, according to Abed, still rages on today and has major implications for the adaptation of the Arabic language to new knowledge and therefore to modern education.

Hence, the official admission of diglossia – that is, of the existence of colloquial forms of Arabic with words that have been borrowed from other indigenous languages or from the former colonial language in addition to the Modern Standard Arabic – has implications that go beyond the linguistic into the religious. Moreover, due to the inextricable link between the religious and the political, such an admission would have major implications for pan-Arab unity – strongly manifest in linguistic unity – and for the Islamic concept of the supremely desirable single Arab (understand ‘Muslim’) nation speaking one sacred and therefore perfect Arabic. It is this reluctance to admit that there are Low forms of Arabic, or colloquial Arabic, that results in the insistence on education being provided in High Arabic or MSA.

3.2 *Some Differences between High Arabic (MSA) and Colloquial Arabic*

Ayari maintains that even well-educated Arabs who have mastered Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and are able to read and write in it well enough to satisfy academic requirements will admit to a lack of confidence and skill in using the language (1996: 245). Clearly, the refusal to recognize the difference between the MSA and colloquial Arabic and the insistence that education must be delivered through the medium of the former has serious implications for the quality of education and academic expression in the Arab world.

To illustrate the linguistic discontinuity experienced by Arab learners attending school in Arabic, it is useful to look at some of the differences between colloquial Arabic and MSA. Of note, as mentioned by Maamouri, is that along the diglossic continuum the different varieties are closer to each other than each is to Modern Standard Arabic.

Maamouri gives a concise description of the differences between MSA and the colloquial varieties (1998: 34). These differences, he maintains, are phonological, syntactical and

lexical. To provide but a few of Maamouri's examples, MSA is a highly inflectional language while the colloquials have lost all inflections and case endings. MSA follows a Verb-Subject-Object word order while the colloquials follow a Subject-Verb-Object word order; MSA is composed of 28 consonants and three short and three long vowels, while most colloquials have a more complex vocalic structure which has two new vowels (/e o /) in addition to the MSA vowels. Another interesting difference between MSA and colloquial Arab dialects is that although both have a rich lexicon, the MSA lexicon is mostly based on derivation from accepted Arabic root words, while the colloquials have and continue to benefit from a free attitude to borrowing from foreign sources, which MSA rejects.

As an example of the difficulties experienced by a Tunisian learner who only knows the colloquial Arabic when he enters school, Maamouri uses the story of Muhammad learning to read.

As soon as he learned his letters, Muhammad started to read the world surrounding him. This changed his whole appreciation of life and of the concrete things around him. He discovered to his great confusion that the electricity bill his family received at the end of each month used a new word in Arabic, *kahraba*, which meant 'car' in his own speech. How could that be? When asked, his teacher explained that the new word for 'car' is going to be *sayyaara*, which reminded him of *tayyaara*, his own word for 'airplane.' However, if the latter comes understandably from *taar* 'to fly,' what is the meaning of *saar*? Certainly not 'to go' in his mother tongue... He had to unlearn a lot of what he already knew in order to do well in his Arabic class. If the language of the school was his mother tongue, Muhammad thought, why was it then that the language of reading was so unfamiliar to him? (44)

The distance between the colloquial and Modern Standard Arabic (the latter also referred to as *Fusha* by some authors) is further illustrated in a vignette that Maamouri gives of the experience of two cousins, one in Tunisia, Khaled, and one in Saudi Arabia, Sourour. In Tunisia nobody speaks in *Fusha*, "it sounds too weird and forced". Khaled speaks the colloquial Arabic called Arbi and French. He uses both to communicate with his friends. Khaled never reads Arabic for pleasure, although he does read in French. When he visits his cousin Sourour in Saudi he realizes that even there, in the land of the holiest Muslim shrines, *Fusha* is not really the most important language –everyone has to speak English to get by. Only presenters on the news use *Fusha*. Sourour goes to a school that uses the British system. She learns *Fusha* but mostly does translations from Arabic into English. She doesn't feel comfortable

speaking it. Khaled feels that “*Fusha* should not matter to Tunisians since it doesn’t even matter to Middle Easterners. Tunisians have their own Arabic which is more natural to them, and French and English which are more practical in the world today” (1998: 28 and 29).

3.3 Arabic Orthography and Reading

One of the big problems facing readers of Arabic is the use of vowels in writing. Although the vowels are crucial to denote tense, person and gender, the diacritics, or movement symbols, which indicate the vowel sound that follows the consonants, are not written. Khammash and Roos explain:

[A large part of Arabic vocabulary] is made up of a word scheme that consists of a triconsonantal root that provides the meaning and a pattern provided by the vowels that indicate the word form or grammatical meaning. These roots provide a lexical group of related vocabulary. For example, the triconsonantal group S-L-M refers to words that are related to submission, religion and peace, such as aSLaMa, iSLaM, muSLiM, SaLaM. A shift in vowels changes the meaning through the grammar (2004: 20).

By excluding the diacritics, the writer puts the onus of deciphering the grammar on the reader, meaning that the reader has to first scan a sentence and sometimes a paragraph before being able to determine who is doing what and when. The importance of diacritics to meaning is illustrated in the fact that, although MSA and the original Classical Arabic do not use diacritics, no copy of the Quran can be printed today without diacritics since these are so crucial for a correct understanding of what is written in the holy book. The Quran is the only official exception in MSA where diacritics are used to ensure correct understanding of the holy texts.

Maamouri also maintains that there is sufficient evidence from other countries using alphabetic systems to support the importance of sight-to-sound correspondence in acquiring fluent word recognition skills (1998: 43). With several of the sounds not represented in the writing of a word in MSA, word recognition is impeded. To complicate reading further, each letter has three or four forms depending on whether it occurs at the beginning, middle or end of the word and whether it allows other letters to link to it or whether it stands alone.

3.4 Impact of MSA on Education

The use of MSA in education throughout the Arabic-speaking world has negative implications for learners, teachers and curricula. Maamouri refers to a 1970 paper entitled “Language Education in Arab Countries and the Role of the Academies” by Salih Altoma in which the Academies (which are the official bodies responsible for developments in the Arabic language) were already then criticised for ignoring trends in education in general and in language learning in particular. Altoma was also critical of the tendency of the Academies to attribute the failure of Arab education systems to deliver a good education to poor teaching of MSA as well as to the curriculum, textbooks, students and the lack of qualified teachers (Maamouri 1998: 24). This is simply a refusal by the Academies to deal with the real heart of the problem in Arab education, that is, MSA in its current form as a medium of instruction.

Since learners entering school in the Arab world have to do their schooling in a language which is substantially different from what they recognise as their mother tongue, and since the complexity of Arabic orthography, which goes far beyond the few examples given, impedes easy acquisition of reading skills, the Arab student encounters obstacles to literacy that learners becoming literate in their mother tongue would not necessarily encounter. Moreover, since learning is facilitated by comprehensible input, in the context of literacy acquisition the fact that the learner of Arabic is learning new words with little or no semantic correspondence to the words in the learner’s colloquial Arabic makes learning to read more difficult. An English-speaking child learning to read in English knows the meaning of ‘car’, can form a mental picture of the object when learning to read the word ‘c-a-r’, and will easily learn to associate the form of the word with the sound and the object. This is not the case with an Arab child learning to read in MSA. Furthermore, as Maamouri states:

There is a strong assumption that the retention of reading skills leads to educational attainment and life-long learning. Therefore, reading skills seem to constitute a key goal of educational planning since their acquisition translates into substantial gains in educational attainment (1998: 9).

Children who cannot read can also not do science, mathematics or any other studies. The inability to read, therefore, has a negative impact on the amount of knowledge learners can acquire and subsume and hence on the general quality of their education.

The difficulty that learners have in learning to read, and by extension in acquiring knowledge, results in learners feeling insecure and feeling a lack of accomplishment that is evidenced in high dropout rates. In the UAE, school completion figures show that only 16% of enrolled children complete primary education and little more than 10% of high school children follow on to post-secondary education (Ibid: 14).

Dropout rates are also exacerbated by school-year repetition rates, even though the UAE has adopted the automatic promotion system for the first three years of primary schooling. The UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Arab States maintains that while the UAE has high enrolment ratios, it is “facing quality challenges” (UNESCO Education for All, 2000: 26). According to Maamouri, the UNICEF International Bureau of Education makes the following point concerning the phenomenon of repetition:

There is an obvious connection between repetition in the first grades of primary education and the learning of reading and writing; there is a need for significant changes in the teaching of reading and writing...; there is also a need for a greater awareness of the impact of linguistic factors on school performance in general and on literacy in particular (Maamouri 1998: 15).

3.4.1 Educational Materials in MSA

One very important aspect that the 2003 Arab Human Development Report raised is the lack of modern books in MSA for schools and universities as well as the lack of books in MSA to be read for leisure. In his article entitled “The Arab World’s Scientific Desert”, Del Castillo mentions that a study by the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development found that “no more than 10,000 books were translated into Arabic over the past millennium, equivalent to the number translated into Spanish each year” (Del Castillo 2004: 2). Maamouri also maintains that there are insufficient materials available in MSA to support curricula or to encourage children to start reading in MSA at an early age and continue to read in it throughout the years of education and beyond.

3.4.2 Teachers and MSA

Another aspect of the impact of MSA on the quality of education in the Arab world is that the teachers themselves have not sufficiently mastered MSA to teach confidently in it. Maamouri maintains that, for both pedagogical and psychological reasons, it is important for education authorities to give greater attention to the training of teachers in MSA, “because when the Arab teachers show an acceptably high fluency in language instruction (*sic*), their example will encourage the children to learn from them” (1998: 40).

The inability of teachers to speak and teach in MSA with any degree of confidence and fluency has the added consequence that teachers are unable to create teaching and learning materials in MSA to enrich their teaching and to facilitate learning. It also results in significant diglossia in the classrooms, where both teachers and children read and write in MSA but speak, ask and answer questions in the colloquial. The link between the knowledge acquired formally in the classroom and reality in the world outside the school is tenuous, failing to provide the meaningful context that facilitates the acquisition of knowledge. There is therefore a pervasive feeling of insecurity on the part of both teachers and learners, which is exacerbated when school leavers are poorly prepared for the challenges of tertiary education or find themselves unable to find employment because they lack the basic linguistic and cognitive skills to do the job.

3.4.3 Education in MSA and Work Skills

The complaint that employers have to spend considerable resources on in-house training to provide the Emirati nationals with the basic skills to do the job, is one that has been gaining prominence since the government instituted a process of emiratisation according to which any company has to employ a prescribed number of Emirati nationals or face severe fines. The complaints from the business sector are the same throughout the Arab world. In his article, entitled “Arab Education: Tradition, Growth and Reform”, William Rugh states:

[In the Arab world] employers are increasingly complaining that job applicants have not learned skills useful in the private sector so they must hire foreign labour or also undertake remedial training programs (2002: 414).

A leading Arab businessman stated at an international conference on Arab higher education in March 2002 that the education system in the Arab world needed to be completely overhauled and that Arabs would need to change their mindset or “the Middle East would not achieve its full economic potential” (Ibid: 407). In an effort to improve the quality of their graduates, tertiary institutions in some Arab countries already spend as much as 35 – 40% of instructional resources on upgrading the academic skills of college entrants (Ibid: 412).

At a 2002 conference in Marrakech on Arab education sponsored by America-Mideast Educational and Training Services (AMIDEAST), a Saudi participant described Arab university graduates in the following way:

[T]ypically they have high technical knowledge...[but] they are weak in communication skills, they cannot write not only in English but in Arabic too. They cannot communicate verbally as well as they should. They cannot make a presentation, their computer skills are also very weak, and there is a major issue... which is weak analytical skills (Ibid).

3.4.4 Vignette: Lena at Work

The story of Lena (the name has been changed to protect the individual) illustrates the poor MSA and English language skills of Arab graduates and how this impacts on efficiency at work. Lena came to the UAE to work as a marketing specialist for a publishing company and is in charge of international marketing. Having acquired her education in Lebanon, Lena speaks Arabic (Lebanese colloquial and MSA), French and English with varying degrees of fluency. Her mother tongue is Lebanese Arabic. She completed her degree in Political Science and International Relations at a Lebanese university. The medium of instruction was English. However, Lena is quite unable to write a simple business letter in MSA or English, to use the correct tenses and conjunctions or to spell even simple words correctly. When she is required to write a letter in Modern Standard Arabic she needs the help of the translators, although she can generally understand what she reads in MSA. When asked by the researcher which language she regarded as her strongest, she replied that she was most familiar with English. It would appear that Lena acquired knowledge of four languages but has been unable to reach an acceptable degree of competence in any one of them, except for her

mother tongue – Lebanese Arabic – which she cannot use for work purposes (personal communication).

3.5 Reform in MSA

Proponents of colloquial Arabic call for the promotion of a variety (seldom specified) of spoken Arabic as the common language to replace Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). However, some linguists prefer a variety that is based on what educated Arabs from various parts of the Arab world, such as academics and business people, use when communicating with each other. This variety is already in existence and users are able to communicate effectively on any range of topics. Known as '*Educated Arabic*', this form of Arabic is a mixture of MSA and colloquial Arabic and is "mostly based on the language forms spoken by educated Arabs in situations of linguistic accommodation" (Maamouri 1998: 25).

Proponents of MSA fall into three schools of thought. There is the traditional school that does not want to see any change, the Cairo school that believes that simplification of Arabic is necessary but without deviating too much from the current rules and the third group that proposes radical changes to MSA (Ibid: 52). However, due to the lack of consensus on what needs to be done, to the various distances of the different colloquials from MSA and to the lack of political commitment to address the problems of language in a meaningful and practical way, much needed reforms and standardisation of MSA have yet to take place.

The political sensitivity around educational and language reforms is illustrated in a December 2003 article by Dr. Saad Al-Ajmi in a UAE newspaper, entitled "I think, therefore I am a traitor", in which he says:

For decades, Gulf thinkers have called for a thorough review and revision of the educational curricula in the region, as they are out of touch with reality and seem to breed unemployable graduates with worthless paper credentials. They have served to marginalize the youth of the Arab world. For their audacity in this regard, Gulf thinkers were labelled 'Westernised secularists' seeking to change the Arab-Muslim identity using 'imported,' destructive and Western ideas (*Gulf News* 2003).

The ideological weight attached to Arabic as a sacred language and as the language of unification of the Arab nation has proved an effective obstacle to reform, leaving the educational systems in the Arab world encumbered with a language that does not meet the everyday needs of the Arabic speakers. For example, there are no words in MSA to describe the contents of a modern wardrobe or many of the items in a normal kitchen, and MSA vocabulary has not been developed to meet the rapidly changing language needs of science and technology.

Where a particular language academy has developed a word through what is deemed acceptable grammatical derivatives, this word has frequently not gained currency and the colloquial form continues to be used. Maamouri gives the example of the word for ‘mattress’ in Tunisia. In Tunisian Arabic ‘*mdharba*’ was coined in a 1997 advertisement for mattresses. The word that was coined from MSA at the same time for the same object by the relevant academy was ‘*hawaashi lawlabiyya*’. When confronted with the MSA term, “even university-level Arabic professors could not guess what this last term meant or to what concrete reality it referred” (Maamouri 1998: 55). Moreover, Arab academies are purely advisory and have no powers of implementation to promote the use of the new vocabulary that they develop. Therefore, the colloquial often overrules MSA.

Another factor that obstructs the effectiveness of the language academies is the fact that the speed with which knowledge is being produced and disseminated – and the speed with which other languages like English coin a word for it – far exceeds the speed with which the academies can formulate an Arabic word for the specific item or phenomenon. The academies must first decide whether there should be an Arabic word for the new item or phenomenon – the innovation may not be desirable from the perspective of a conservative Muslim society – and then they have to formulate a word which fits in with the strict grammar rules of root words and declensions. By then, a colloquial word has normally gained currency. It frequently becomes entrenched at the expense of the term coined by the academy. However, it should be noted that although many new words have found their way into colloquial Arabic through a process of borrowing or Arabising, these words do not find their way into official documents or into the system of education. They create in essence “a language within a language” (Abed

2004: 11). Nevertheless, these words do provide Arabs with the necessary vocabulary to deal with modern scientific and technological developments.

Since a broader consensus on language and educational reform has not been reached over the last four decades in the Arab world despite the urgent need for such reform, individual Arab countries may have to initiate their own educational reforms. Yet, even such reforms require that the government of a specific country recognize the problems imposed by MSA on education in general and on the acquisition of literacy in particular. They also require such a government to have the courage to make the needed changes, even when this means “challenging the dominant paradigms of the Arabic language and Arab education” (Maamouri 1998: 57). Any policy concerning reform in education that does not take into account the importance and impact of the language of instruction is unlikely to reach its objectives.

4 TEACHING ENGLISH TO ARAB LEARNERS

A quote from the UAE Minister of Education and Youth, Dr. Ali Abdull Aziz Al Sharhan, provides the official view on the importance of language instruction:

As language teachers, we need to remind ourselves that the ultimate goal of language instruction is to be able to have our students communicating fluently in a foreign language. And the process of language learning to communicate fluently requires that students use the language in their studies, that they expand beyond the knowledge of language to use it in the classrooms. In this way, they will develop language skills that make them fluent (Syed 2002: 6).

What is now required is for this statement from the Minister to be transformed into policy and that the issue of which language should be the medium for instruction be resolved. Arguably both MSA and English could qualify as the “foreign language” referred to in the quote. The assumption, however, is that he was referring to English.

Competence and fluency in English are two objectives that are clearly not achieved through the learning of English in government schools in the UAE. One of the problems that have already been identified is the lack of capacity of Arab teachers, in general, to teach English effectively. Moreover, in schools there is a conflict between the objectives of a curriculum, like the ‘New Parade’ curriculum used in Abu Dhabi, and the method used to teach it. There is also a gap between what school principals and administrators say they will do – teach communicatively – and what they are comfortable to see happening in their classrooms. Moreover, there are also language-specific issues which impact on the ability of Arab learners to learn English. The list of such aspects is almost interminable. Therefore, only the most common phenomena and frequent resultant difficulties are mentioned below.

4.1 *Writing and Grammar*

The most obvious problem is that Arabic is written from right to left, whereas English is written from left to right. The actual forming of the letters also presents difficulties for Arab learners. In Arabic, letters are formed by a series of strokes, unlike the continuous flow of the Roman alphabet used for the English script. There is also little difference between the printing

and script of Arabic (Thompson-Panus and Thomas-Ruzic 1983: 609). Moreover, Arabic writing conventions and spelling systems are vastly different from those of English. For example, there are no capitals in Arabic and prepositions are joined to the word that follows them. Arabic is also a very phonetic language and the variations in vowel sounds found in English (for example, the sound of the vowel ‘a’ in car, make and bat) and in diphthongs cause difficulties for the Arab learner.

The formation of sentences and paragraphs poses its own dilemmas. Richard Harrison, from the University of Bahrain, writes in his 2004 article, “What is happening to written English?” that in current usage the English sentence is shrinking. Referring to a 1994 study by Brock Haussamen, Harrison states that the average English sentence length in the 1600s was 40 – 70 words, in the 1800s 30 – 40 words and in the 1990s 20 words. Harrison then looks at a 2004 editorial from *The Times* newspaper and finds that many sentences have ten or fewer words (Ibid: 8). He maintains that the subject-verb-object sequence is becoming more prominent (recall that MSA follows a verb-subject-object sequence), there are fewer subordinate clauses, relative pronouns and conjunctions, and more reliance on phrases.

The result is shorter, sharper and more direct sentences, which are quicker and easier for the reader to process. In return, however, a greater obligation is placed on the reader to infer the connections between the sentences (Ibid: 7).

While the reduced use of, for example, relative clauses may be good news for Arabic learners – since Arabic uses a relative particle and has no relative pronouns – inference is usually a problem for Arab learners of English. The Arabic sentence is normally explicit with the subject repeated even when the relative particle is used.

Despite the fact that Harrison maintains that there are fewer subordinate clauses in English today, Thompson-Panus and Thomas-Ruzic state that maturity of style in English is measured by the degree of subordination rather than coordination within a paragraph. In Arabic, however, a paragraph is built with parallel constructions, with parts of sentences connected by coordinating conjunctions. Therefore, paragraphs written in English by Arab learners “can appear awkward and lacking in organization” (1983: 619).

Regardless of the different approaches to paragraph construction in English and Arabic, Salah Ayari states that there is a definite correlation between the ability of the Arab learner to write in Arabic on the one hand and to “comply with English rhetorical conventions” on the other (1996: 246). Since so much of the research on literacy acquisition in the Arab world reveals that Arab learners experience difficulties in writing in MSA, it is to be expected that they will equally have difficulties composing paragraphs in English.

An additional concern is that an Arab learner may have difficulty using an English dictionary. In a dictionary of Arabic a word entry is made according to the word root and is not necessarily alphabetical since Arabic vocabulary is derived from the word root. For this reason, Arab learners will learn words like ‘criticize’, ‘critic’, ‘criticism’ and ‘critical’ more easily if they are presented together as a group (Ibid: 614).

Khammash and Roos look at a number of grammatical features in Arabic that cause errors of transfer into English, some of which are quoted below (2004: 18–24 et passim):

- There is no indefinite article in Arabic. Therefore, when it is required in English, the Arabic learner will usually omit it.
- The definite article ‘*al*’ is attached to the noun that follows it, for example, *jebra* is a branch of mathematics. The definite article *al* is attached to it to give the word adopted into English *algebra* (algebra). If the adjective comes after the noun, the definite article is repeated and attached to both: “the house the beautiful”.
- The use of prepositions in Arabic is governed by strict rules. In the absence of a rule for the English, Arabic learners will transfer a rule from the Arabic: “She looked to her mother.”
- Arabic has a different concept of helping verbs and does not use the verbs ‘do’, ‘be’, or ‘have’ as auxiliary verbs. Arab students frequently mix these up or omit the auxiliary verb especially when they are trying to form negative statements and questions: “Why you eat early?” In Arabic, the tense, number and gender govern the verbs so there is no need for helping verbs.
- Arabic has past, present and future tenses. However, it does not have the perfect or the continuous as aspects with a specific verb form. The idea of the perfect is conveyed by such words as ‘until’ and ‘just’. To convey the idea of the continuous aspect, the simple form is used along with the word ‘now’: “Also this custom still until now.”

4.2 Reading

Much has been said about the problem of diglossia and how it makes the acquisition of reading difficult for the Arab child. Moreover, the complexity of orthography and the lack of diacritics exacerbate difficulties in learning to read. The fact that reading is perceived as difficult and that the material available for reading is not in the colloquial Arabic but in MSA, is limited and bears no notable relation to every day life, conspire to create a non-reading culture. The lack of a reading culture impacts on the reading competence of Arab learners.

The lack of a culture of reading in Arab education also has a bearing on the ability of Arab learners to learn English and to learn in English. For example, teachers claim that until they started studying to become teachers of English they were never asked to do any extensive reading, which may have trained them to read speedily (Khandil 2001: 218). Ayari makes the statement that the “[l]ack of reading and writing skills in these [Arab] students’ native language...has a negative impact on the learning of reading and writing skills in a foreign language, such as English” (Ayari 1996: 245).

A project has begun that may assist children with extensive reading and promote a reading culture. It is the translation into English of some particularly popular Arab children’s stories, such as “Hamad, the Young Falconer” by Randa Hamwi Duwaji. The translation of popular stories will not only promote extensive reading in English for Arab children, but ensure that the material is culturally appropriate, particularly at the primary school level.

Other aspects of reading in Arabic further impact on the learners’ ability to read in English. In a paper presented at the 2nd Annual Teacher-to-Teacher Conference in Abu Dhabi in 2001, Ahmed Kandil explains why Arab students are unable to speed read in Arabic or in English. He maintains that when reading in Arabic, learners are expected to read intensively, paying attention to all the details and all the words in the passage even when instructed to read quickly to get the general idea (Kandil 2001: 217). The difficulty that Arab learners experience in reading fast and skimming texts is likely to be exacerbated by their need to decipher the meaning of a text in Arabic due to the lack of diacritics.

Interestingly, Kandil notes that from the Arab learner's perspective "text represents the truth" and learners are not taught to "challenge or evaluate a text", therefore, learners spend most of the time "trying to memorise the facts that are presented in the text" (Ibid: 218). Finally, Kandil mentions that reading is very rarely taught and very frequently assessed. Therefore, reading is not a pleasant activity for the learners (Ibid: 219).

4.3 *Speaking and Listening*

Relatively little appears to have been written about techniques to motivate Arab learners to listen and speak in English, though it is possible to infer from the document by the UAE Minister of Education and Youth quoted earlier that competence must be accompanied by fluency (Syed 2002: 6). The communicative approach focuses strongly on verbal interaction in the classroom to increase fluency. However, Arab students are conditioned to the traditional 'sit and listen' approach to learning. The Arab teachers, lacking fluency themselves, are uncomfortable with spontaneous verbal interaction in the classroom and do not encourage it, whether they are teaching Arabic or English. English mother-tongue teachers face the task of breaking old learning habits and promoting a system where learners learn the language by speaking it.

A factor that has come to the fore is the provision of culturally appropriate material for speaking exercises. The issue of cultural sensitivity has become more prominent as globalisation has fuelled the debate around cultural and linguistic imperialism. However, there are numerous possibilities for the practice of English to fulfil language functions in the Arab culture. One proposal has been to get learners to speak about a text that is well known in their culture in English (Yagi 1999). Another proposal has been to use verbal translation (interpreting) of Arabic texts and the ensuing discussion as a means to getting learners to speak within a cultural space in which they feel comfortable. Yagi argues that the solution to getting learners to speak "is to find some natural context where there are genuine ideas to be communicated and there is a genuine need to communicate them in the foreign language" (Ibid: 28). Particularly when there is a vast cultural distance between the learner and the target language, learners are inhibited for fear of embarrassing themselves by revealing or crossing cultural taboos. This prevents spontaneous communication in class. By providing a concrete task which is culturally appropriate, anxiety is reduced and the learners may feel that they are

teaching the teacher something. This is often a successful strategy, particularly when the learners are trying to convince the teacher of their point of view. In informal conversations with teachers in Abu Dhabi, the cultural gap was often identified as an inhibitor in communication.

At a “Tactile Tasks and Teaching Techniques” workshop held by TESOL Arabia in Abu Dhabi in March 2004, one English teacher described how he used football to get the Arab learners, all men, to practise all skills: reading, writing, speaking and listening. The task was called “Fantasy Football in the UAE Classroom”. The project involved groups of four male learners being given a fictitious budget of so many million pounds and then being told to select a football team from information on the Internet, including buying “real players” to set up a team, such as strikers, defenders, goal keeper and so forth. The prices for these players are also available on the Internet on the football sites. It would seem that the newspapers actually give a points score on a weekly basis to each well-known player in terms of the week’s performance and goals scored. The learners had to monitor the success of the team they created in the British newspapers subscribed for on the Internet, as well as through football reports on television which were recorded by the teacher and played back to the learners in class. The learners were expected to listen to the reports and to discuss them. The students whose team got the most points at the end of a month won a prize. This activity was always successful, as football is an integral part of UAE male culture and guaranteed always to elicit a lively discussion.

Perhaps one can infer that one of the main inhibitors thus far in getting learners in the UAE to speak and listen to English has been the lack of capacity of the Arabic mother-tongue teachers of English, certainly in the government schools, for utilising these skills themselves with any degree of confidence. Skilled Arab teachers of English and English mother-tongue teachers who are able to use culturally appropriate pedagogy may empower Arab learners to communicate effectively in English and to present their own culture and values with greater confidence.

5 ENGLISH AND EDUCATION IN THE UAE

5.1 *Pertinent Aspects of UAE Education*

A review of available literature indicates that, until recently, education was regarded as a matter of prestige and that content, standard and quality were of little interest to learners, parents and educators. This lack of interest, particularly on the part of ‘education authorities’ appears to have been the major cause of the poor quality of education for some time (Al-Misnad 1985). While 2003 statistics show a substantial growth in the number of schools and teachers and in enrolment figures, as well as a very substantial increase in the number of universities and private colleges providing tertiary education, there have been increasing pressures on Arab countries, particularly those of the Arabian Gulf region called Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – of which the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is one – to improve the quality of education (Mograby 1999). “Education in the GCC countries is criticized for its emphasis on routine, learning and memorization, for its high attrition and for repeaters’ rates which have reached 31 percent in some secondary schools” (Al-Sulayti 1999: 273). In addition, “[s]chools are accused of graduating more and more low achievers who are functionally illiterate and lack the minimum threshold of competence” (Ibid). The absence of effective oversight and enforcement of standards by education authorities exacerbates the problem.

Backed by substantial economic resources, a small population and a strong desire to overcome the economic and social marginalisation of the Arab world, the United Arab Emirates has embarked on the process of modernisation of its educational system. However, the dearth of debate on the subject of the language of instruction in Arab schools in the country can only militate against attempts at reform which aim at improving the quality of school leavers and graduates.

In statements by various UAE educationalists the aspect of poor communication skills is frequently mentioned. In an article by Barbara Bibbo published on 1 May 2004 in the *Gulf News* newspaper, entitled “Quality of education must be improved,” Dr. Hanif Hassan, Vice-President of Zayed University in Abu Dhabi, is quoted as saying that 95% of high school graduates enrolled in Zayed University from public schools are not ready to enter universities since they come from an education system which is still backward and in need of urgent reform. He said:

We talk about dismantling teaching traditions which are poor and backward, where there is no attempt to develop the students’ critical thinking and communication skills and so forth. There are schools where the teacher will deliver his lesson and the students will learn it by heart, without daring discussing (*sic*) what they are learning...[w]e should be proud of our heritage, but should not restrict ourselves from going for the best practices in education (Bibbo in *Gulf News* 2004: 5).

This seeming attachment to traditional ways of learning is also identified by Maamouri as a problem (1998). He comments that this method of teaching and learning “delivered little more than a rudimentary knowledge of the decoding skills to generations of semi-literate Arabs...” (1998: 21). Moreover, schools are faced with a crisis in the Arabic language (AHDR 2003: 7) which extends to the dilemma of whether to teach modern sciences and technologies in English or in Arabic. Although there is no intrinsic weakness in Arabic that precludes the teaching of these subjects in Arabic (Massialas 1983), the 2003 AHDR states that the Arabic language needs to be made more flexible and modern before it can be used as an effective teaching medium. For the UAE, the current limitations of Arabic imply the necessity to use English, at least in the short term, which places its own demands on non-English speaking learners and teachers, as well as on syllabi, books and materials. The problem also has cultural implications which are an important concern for the UAE education authorities (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000, *passim*).

In addition, in the UAE, the lack of appropriate Arabic language skills of teachers is a serious issue. Most teachers come from other Arabic speaking countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan and Syria, which means that their Arabic vernacular is different from that spoken by the UAE students. This difference of mother tongue and the approximate knowledge of MSA of both teachers and learners can only have a negative impact on the communication skills of the UAE learners.

The mix of language patterns in the classroom leads to serious pedagogical problems and even to feelings of linguistic insecurity in formal communication among high numbers of Arab learners... Young Arab users do not feel free to use and innovate in *Fusha*. Pupils entering school have to ‘unlearn’ or even suppress most of their linguistic habits while they try to acquire a new set of ‘rigid’ rules...On the one hand, teachers deliberately try to neglect and undermine the actual speech habits of the pupils. On the other, the same teachers find themselves often obliged to use the colloquial to communicate with their learners for one reason or another (Maamouri 1998: 40).

In the UAE, the emiratisation of education presents its own challenges. To reach the emiratisation target, poorly qualified teachers continue to be absorbed into the teaching profession. While the current number of teaching positions filled by indigenous teachers in government schools is 25%, UAE education authorities are aiming at raising that level to 90% by the year 2020. This ambitious target has an impact on the quality of teachers, especially in government schools. Qualified and experienced foreign teachers are being replaced with Emirati nationals who currently still come out of teacher training colleges with inadequate abilities to teach in either Modern Standard Arabic or English and with poor knowledge of methodology. Moreover, since many female graduates opt for teaching as a culturally acceptable career for women, despite being qualified for a different career, the national teaching corps sees a number of teachers who are graduates but not in Education. These teachers are faced with an environment fraught with educational challenges such as unclear education and language policies. Lack of oversight and guidance further impacts on their effectiveness and on the ability of schools to meet their educational objectives.

5.2 Learning and Teaching English in Abu Dhabi

A look at the schooling system in Abu Dhabi, the leading emirate in political and economic terms, provides a good illustration of developments in the other emirates. There are 130 government schools in Abu Dhabi City. Of the 130, ten are model schools that are experimenting with new methods of teaching English, in particular the use of the communicative approach from Grade 1 onwards using a programme called ‘New Parade’. The strategy for the model schools includes using English mother-tongue teachers, but these are still far in the minority (less than 2%). The English programme is being implemented and managed by the Abu Dhabi Educational Zone (ADEZ) authorities. The remaining 120 schools continue with the traditional approach of teaching large classes, with a focus on translation,

rules and grammar and Arab teachers for English. In all schools, children do six forty-minute periods of English per week (6 x 40 min) from Grade 1 to 12.

5.2.1 Teachers and Teaching of English in ADEZ Schools

In order to determine how English was being taught and learned in Abu Dhabi schools, a questionnaire was submitted to two officials of the Abu Dhabi Educational Zone (ADEZ). A summary of the answers on the completed questionnaires is included in this study as Addendum A.

The responses to the questionnaires indicate that education officials themselves interpret the situation concerning teachers of English in schools differently. One of the reasons for the confusing picture is the lack of reliable data from schools themselves as well as from recruitment authorities concerning numbers and level of qualification and training of teachers. Another reason is the level of qualification and experience of education officials themselves on issues pertaining to education management and teaching.

Concerning the level of qualification of teachers of English already in the education system, there was an interesting discrepancy with the question on the proportion of teachers who are qualified to teach English as a second or as a foreign language. The local official who was one of the respondents stated that 70% of the teachers are qualified, while the Canadian consultant stated that only a “very small” proportion is qualified. It would seem that in some cases, teachers who are accredited to the central education ministry are understood to be qualified to teach, whereas they may simply have a general degree or diploma or merely have experience in teaching. Hence the answer of the Emirati official who stated that 70% of teachers are qualified to teach. However the vast majority of teachers of English are from the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region and have a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature, but no teaching qualification. The difference in the response between the Emirati and the Canadian official is reminiscent of the UNESCO report which explains the difficulty of determining the exact situation of the ground because of the different interpretations placed on each question by different respondents. A further contributing factor adding to the confusion in the

UNESCO report is that every country in the Arab region has different certification requirements for teachers (UNESCO 2000: 31).

With respect to the number of English mother-tongue teachers in Abu Dhabi schools, it would seem that in the normal (not model) schools none of the approximately 700 teachers of English are English mother-tongue speakers. There is one male Emirati teaching English and 50 female Emirati teachers. The remainder are Arab from the Middle East North Africa (MENA) region. In the model schools there are 12 Canadian teachers, recently recruited as part of the new approach in these schools. Curiously, these Canadian teachers are teaching the first two years of school and not Grades 11 and 12 as might be expected in a situation where the transition from school in MSA to tertiary education in English is so difficult. Arab teachers still teach English from grades 3 to 12 in the model schools.

As a result of the general awareness that high school graduates are unable to speak English with any degree of fluency, officials in ADEZ have prescribed the communicative approach for schools. However few teachers or principals are comfortable with the communicative classroom or its requirements (Enright and McCloskey 1985). Teachers are more inclined to use the Grammar-Translation approach with which they themselves were taught or an 'eclectic' mix of methodology. In further discussion with one of the respondents and with a former Abu Dhabi education official it was revealed that very few teachers feel confident enough in English to use the communicative approach.

Another factor that militates against the use of modern teaching methodology and materials in classrooms is the attitude of school principals and parents to changes in the traditional method of teacher-up-front instruction. When more confident or experienced teachers try to foster spontaneous communication in the classroom and attempt to change the layout to reflect a communicative classroom, they are criticised for playing games and asked to return to the traditional class. Moreover, when teachers change the test format from the straightforward 'fill in the right word' multiple choice to a more demanding format, such as 're-arrange the following words to form a correct sentence', students' test scores drop. Parents become upset and complain to the principal that the new teachers are no good because the learners are getting lower marks. Even where the principal may be sympathetic towards the new approach and may have committed himself to the education authorities to implement a communicative

approach, direct pressure from parents is usually enough to make the principal return to the status quo of a traditional approach (personal communication).

There are thirteen school supervisors charged with ensuring standards and adherence to curricula and approach. Although regular inspections take place and principals do submit reports, when asked how teachers are monitored for meeting curriculum objectives, the answer from both ADEZ respondents was that they were “not monitored”. As an answer to the question of how the curriculum outcome standards are measured, both respondents stated that it is simply through subjective testing and evaluation by the teachers themselves. It would seem that the only way to determine the performance of teachers is from student end-of-year exam results. Although these are overseen by the supervisors, each school sets its own end-of-year English exams. The Grade 12 exam is set by the Ministry for Education and Youth based on (unspecified) international standards.

In personal communication with an Abu Dhabi Educational Zone official I was informed that teachers who perform well, based presumably on student grades, are shifted to the model schools, which is unfortunate because it means that the vast majority of schools are left to lag behind.

The respondents were asked to express their opinion as to what they thought were the strong and weak points in the teaching of English in Abu Dhabi schools. Interestingly, no strong points were mentioned. On the weak points, three issues came to the fore from the answers. First, the lack of motivation of the students; second, the low level of teachers’ professional development (from the same respondent who said that 70% of the teachers were qualified to teach English as a second or foreign language) with the added view that there should be more development programmes based on teachers’ needs; and third, that teaching aids are not available, particularly the ‘New Parade’ series which has been chosen as the curriculum to be followed in the government schools.

The respondents were also asked to add any information they felt would be valuable in forming a picture of English teaching and learning in UAE schools. They commented that training courses on new trends in teaching English as a foreign language should be made

available and that teachers should have the freedom to “devise” their own teaching material in line with school textbooks.

Concerning the aspect of further training of teachers, there is a serious problem in upgrading the skills of existing teachers or training them to use new programmes. Emirati teachers generally teach simply because it is a job that their fathers or husbands approve of. They are not motivated to work harder or learn more. Many teach only until the birth of their first child, upon which the husbands insist that the wives stay at home. The qualification that such wives have attained, as stated by Sheikha Al-Misnad already in 1983, is merely for status. It is the minority that want more training and flexibility in approach but the current system is unable to accommodate their requirements. Moreover, there is never a question of increase in remuneration, even for better qualified teachers, therefore there is no incentive to improve.

Information gained from informal discussions with South African teachers working in public and private schools for Arabs in Abu Dhabi revealed their dissatisfaction with the lack of professional freedom in teaching in the classroom. Most cited undue interference from parents and principals as the main reason for not completing or renewing their contracts. As expatriate workers, they receive no support from the national education authorities who maintain that problems in schools must be addressed by principals (personal communication).

5.3 Entry into Tertiary Education

The unsystematic approach in schools towards the teaching of English, the dearth of suitably qualified teachers and the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials have a cumulative effect when UAE school leavers congregate at the national institutions for tertiary education. The *Gulf News* interview with the Vice-President of Zayed University (Bibbo 2004), which notes the poor quality of education of UAE entrants into tertiary institutions, mentions the same problems as stated by Halloran six years earlier in his 1998 paper “Zayed University: A New Model for Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates”. Halloran mentions that in 1996 the Minister of Higher Education instituted an Advisory Planning Committee (ACP) for the Future of Higher Education in the UAE. The Committee was charged with examining all aspects of higher education in the country, assessing its current status, identifying problems,

proposing solutions, and recommending policies to assure that high quality post secondary education supported by the federal government would be available for citizens of the UAE well into the next century (ECSSR 1998: 323). Halloran identified lack of facilities, funds and personnel as problems (Ibid: 325). Moreover, looking at advances in education in the developed world, he made the following statement concerning countries of the Arabian Gulf region and the UAE:

They can, if they choose, equip their young people with attitude (*sic*), knowledge and technical skills that will enable them to flourish as members of the family of nations in the twenty-first century. The challenges are great... (Ibid: 326).

The implication is that these countries were not achieving this objective in 1996 and, from the comments of the Minister, not much has improved by 2004.

It should be noted that tertiary education in the UAE is offered to any UAE national who has completed high school. Tertiary education in the UAE is only in English therefore all learners entering tertiary institutions have to complete the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) exam. The exam is divided into three sections: (1) listening comprehension; (2) grammatical structure; and (3) reading comprehension (Traynor 1985: 43). TOEFL scores range between 290 and 699. Universities in the United States require non-native speakers of English applying for enrolment to score at least 500 (Ibid: 44). The general understanding is that any individual wanting to teach English in the UAE should have a score of over 550 (personal communication).

The latest statistics provided on TOEFL results for students, teachers and supervisors of English in Abu Dhabi are not encouraging. From a sample of 369 students taken from 4 model schools, only 6 scored over 500, and 20 scored between 460 and 500. The average score is 380. Of 198 teachers, only 25 scored over 550. The vast majority scored between 460 and 550. With supervisors, scores were equally discouraging: out of 10 supervisors only 1 scored over 550 while 5 scored between 510 and 550. The average score of the supervisors of English is 518.

In a 1998 article entitled “Facility with the English language and problem-based learning group interaction: findings from an Arabic setting”, Mpofo, Lanphear, Stewart *et al* describe

the results of a study they carried out, which was aimed at finding a correlation between the TOEFL scores of 49 students at the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences at the United Arab Emirates University and their interaction in problem-based learning (PBL). They state that the mean TOEFL score of the female group was 468.20 and for the males it was 439.96 (1998: 479). The United States Testing Service identified 470 as the mean TOEFL score for 1849 UAE candidates (mostly male) in 1993 (Ibid: 482). Although these are different sample groups, it is of concern that the TOEFL scores of the male medical students reflect a drop of 30 points in 5 years, especially since one could assume generally that it would be the better learners from the UAE schooling system who would enter medical school. The Arab Human Development Report has stated that the ability of Arabs to use English effectively is deteriorating (AHDR 2003). As the English language changes and the vocabulary expands to meet the growing scientific and technological advances, it is likely that the English proficiency gap will widen unless teaching of English in the UAE undergoes a major change of approach, methodology and curricula.

Since TOEFL tests reading and listening comprehension, among other skills, it is a reflection of how much students understand of what they read and hear. The low TOEFL scores for students and teachers are a reflection of their capacity to learn independently and to use all the resources available in print, in the media and on the Internet to acquire, use and transmit knowledge. Teachers' TOEFL scores are also an indirect reflection of the ability of teachers to move away from the textbook with confidence, to create teaching materials to support the curriculum as well as to promote verbal communication in class and to function as a facilitator as required in a truly communicative programme (Larsen-Freeman 2000: 121–136). Yet the UAE Curriculum Document states that “the approach to the teaching of English as a foreign language will be ‘eclectic with a strong emphasis on the communicative approach’” (Dammak 2003: 4). It would seem that teachers function within eclecticism of methodology but few venture towards spontaneous communication in the English classroom. Although a mixture of approaches can be very effective, depending on the teaching environment, it is necessary that it be based on knowledge of the advantages of each method under specific circumstances, what Prabhu refers to as the teacher's sense of plausibility (1990). From information received from people working in the education field in the UAE, it would seem that the choice of approach is haphazard and random.

One interesting finding of Mpofu, Lanphear, Stewart *et al* is that there was a high correlation between the TOEFL scores of male students and the level of education of their mothers although no such correlation existed with the female students. No figures are given to illustrate the correlation. However, of the 49 male and female medical students, 34 had mothers whose educational level was primary school or less, and only 4 students had mothers who had a university degree; 21 students had fathers who had primary school education or less, and 13 students had fathers who had a university degree or more (1998: 482, 483). Maamouri states that the level of literacy of the parents has a significant impact on the involvement of parents in the educational attainment of their children and that the high illiteracy rate among Arab parents is “an obviously significant obstacle to creating an early literate environment for a young child” (1998: 61). The UAE is making significant strides in the education of women in particular. Halloran (1998) states that 68% of total enrolments in federally supported higher education institutions are women and that while the number stood at 13,000 in 1996, it is projected to grow to 26,000 in 2006.

In one of the few policies that reflect the importance of language in education, and particularly of English in tertiary education in the UAE, the Zayed University for Women in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, has implemented a new policy that requires two years of only English, Modern Standard Arabic and Information Technology training for its new entrants before they can proceed with any courses in their chosen speciality (ECSSR 1999: 323). This is at the same time a reflection of the lack of confidence in schools to provide adequate levels of English language tuition and of the importance of English in a good quality education. In this respect Mograby states that, “[a] fair knowledge of the computer, the Internet, modern means of communication and the English language is now a must” (ECSSR 1999: 302). The lack of computers in schools and the general low level of computer use in Arab countries is a constraining factor in access to international sources of knowledge. For example, Del Castillo (2004: A36) makes the point that, “[t]here are only 18 computers per 1,000 people in the Arab world. The global average is 78 per 1,000.”

5.3.1 Learning English in Schools and Tertiary Institutions

The interview I had with the Assistant Dean of the College for Education at Zayed University for Women, Dr. Robin Zoubi, was valuable in that it confirmed a lot of the information

gleaned from informal discussions with individuals involved in the education system in Abu Dhabi (for the complete interview see Addendum B) and corroborated the information provided by the ADEZ respondents. The overall impression was that there is great confusion and haphazardness in terms of curricula and methodology at school level, which cannot be explained away by the phrase “eclecticism in teaching methodology”.

Dr. Zoubi said that the central problem around the teaching of English in the UAE is that it is not taught as a language, that is, as an instrument of communication. The inability of the Arab teachers of English to communicate with confidence means that they cannot promote conversation in the classroom. A common complaint of the children is that they cannot pronounce a word because they haven't heard it spoken. The teachers also teach English from Arabic – they speak Arabic to explain the English concepts in the classroom – and children are simply required to memorise lists of words and grammar rules. The inability of high school leavers to use the words and grammar rules in discourse was evidenced when a teacher was teaching English to a group of high school graduates for their entry as cadets into a government department. In the class text there was a reference to a student writing an essay. None of the cadets knew what an essay was.

One of the reasons why the teachers teach lists and rules is because, more often than not, they come from other Arab countries with a degree in English literature, but with no qualifications in teaching. They have no knowledge of appropriate teaching methodology. Dr. Zoubi stated that in the few instances teachers have tried to use the communicative approach they have been told that the teachers should be teaching and the children should be silent. She added that the idea that the children should be doing the work in the classroom seems not to be accepted. The result is that when the learners have to make the leap from vocabulary lists and grammar rules to understanding spoken English as required by the TOEFL oriented programmes in Years 11 and 12, the leap is too great and most learners do not manage.

In the few cases where the teachers are competent and want to teach creatively, albeit within the curriculum, school principals and inspectors suppress the initiative by determining what pages get taught when, and which activities are included in the programme. When an observer from Zayed University was attending a school English lesson on adjectives, the teacher was explaining words such as smooth, rough, wet, dry, cold and hot. During the explanation there

was a fish on a table near the teacher. When she was asked why she hadn't used the fish to illustrate the adjectives, the teacher answered that the fish was part of an activity for another lesson. The refusal of the teacher to use the obvious example of the fish to illustrate the adjectives is indicative of the strong control exerted on teaching by school authorities at ground level. Their inflexibility stems from a defensive attitude based on a lack of knowledge and understanding of modern education methodologies and a fear of venturing beyond what is prescribed.

In some model schools where Arab teachers have been employed to teach English, an attempt is being made to introduce the teaching of English across the curriculum in Maths and Science. However, there is enormous resistance on the part of parents and teachers. Parents are afraid that English will be taught in the Maths and Science classes instead of the subjects themselves, and teachers maintain that they are teachers of English and not of Maths and Science. The resistance of teachers occurs even in the first years of primary school. Dr. Zoubi maintains that teachers in the UAE are also not willing to put in the amount of teaching periods that teachers in developed countries cope with. In general, UAE teachers consider a three-period day as heavy and four classes as a "killer load". The size of the average classroom could contribute to the perception of overload, since there are 30 to 40 children in each class.

The impact of poorly trained teachers and the lack of productivity of teachers are exacerbated by the inability of Arab educationalists to produce appropriate curricula. This results in the need to purchase commercial curricula not structured for conditions in the Arab world. For example, one crucial problem with the adoption of foreign commercial curricula in Arab schools, not only for English but for other subjects as well, is that the school year in the UAE is far shorter than in other developed countries. The international school year works on 180 school days, whereas in the UAE a school year is on average 120 – 125 days. This is mainly due to the large number of religious holidays and the short school days in Ramadan. The result is that any commercially obtained curriculum cannot be completed in any given academic year and, as Dr. Zoubi stated, the national education authorities have to determine which parts of the curriculum are to be taught. Dr. Zoubi also identified the lack of computers and of Information Technology know-how in schools as a problem. The lack of equipment and the little knowledge of computers and English made the Internet all but inaccessible to

schools and learners and had a negative impact on the quality of entrants into tertiary education.

Dr. Zoubi said that the short-term solution for the problems accumulated by learners during the twelve years of school is the bridging programmes presented by most tertiary institutions. These are expensive and time consuming and frustrate both learners and staff, who really would like to start new entrants on the tertiary programme, without having to spend time and resources to endow them with the skills that they should have acquired at school.

6 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study of English in education in the UAE has relevance to most Arab states since many face the same challenges (Maamouri 1998: 8). An overview of literature concerning the principal dynamics of education in English in non-English speaking countries reflects many of the same issues such as the lack of local skills, the need to import teachers and resources and the impact on the local culture and languages. Therefore, the study of the implications of education in English for Arab learners in the UAE should provide some insights into the dilemmas facing many developing and underdeveloped countries, not only in the Arab world, in their choice of language of instruction.

What has become apparent from the literature review and from the research done in this study is that the UAE and the Arab world in general need to look more carefully at language policy and the impact of language on teaching and learning. Any planned policy to improve an education system, such as the UAE Vision 2020, must look at what needs to be taught and how, but also through what medium. Currently, the functional range of English is giving it an edge over Arabic in terms of range and depth as stated in the Arab Human Development Report (2003) and that advantage is underscored by the fact that global knowledge banks, which are accessible to all, are available largely in English. This is a reality that needs to be factored into any policy that looks at modernising education in the short term and propelling the country into the developed world, much as Vision 2020 aims to do.

Since English is already being used in the education system, being taught as a subject in government schools and as the medium of instruction in private schools for Arab learners as well as in all tertiary institutions, it is incumbent upon the UAE education authorities to ensure that resources allocated to the teaching of English in schools are optimally utilised so that tertiary education can use all the time and resources available to equip its graduates with the world class education and the skills which the UAE needs.

It is not sufficient for tertiary education institutions to have crash courses or readiness programmes at tertiary level to upgrade the English competence of the cadres. Many years of schooling are under-utilised with regard to knowledge acquisition, not only in English but

also in other subjects, due to inferior teaching materials and approaches and also due to the lack of access to international knowledge banks such as international libraries and the Internet. It has become increasingly apparent that the level of English of most Arab teachers is not sufficiently high to teach English effectively, and that the programme of bringing English mother-tongue speakers into the schools to teach children is the most practical short to medium term solution to raise the learners competence in English.

Critical areas that need to be improved are the training of teachers of English in modern teaching methodology, the enforcement of standards required for the recruitment of teachers (for example, high TOEFL scores), frequent and strict assessment of individual teachers, compulsory in-service training for teachers already in the system and the development of culturally sensitive but modern educational material for learners.

From the informal conversations, the questionnaires submitted to the Abu Dhabi Educational Zone and the interview with Dr. Zoubi, Assistant Dean of the College for Education at Zayed University, it is evident that education authorities need a stronger vision, better management processes and more knowledge of the modern trends in education in order to take informed decisions and implement them in a practicable manner.

The weakness of educational authorities throughout the Arab world has also been well documented in a number of studies and reports by international organizations, both Arab and otherwise. In order to bridge the knowledge gap between Arab countries and the developed world, the findings in these documents need to be carefully collected and collated to obtain a comprehensive view of the state of education in the Arab world. Moreover, the skills of qualified and experienced Arab educationalists should be harnessed to improve education in the Arab world and there has to be a sharp increase in the budget for educational research and development.

While finding means to use English as the language of instruction in a culturally compatible way, Arab countries, such as the UAE, need to urgently apply themselves to improving the functional range and the flexibility of the Arabic language, while updating its lexicon and designing modern Arabic educational and reference resources as well as teaching methods.

The most plausible option available for Arab countries wanting to modernise their education system rapidly, appears therefore to be a strategy to use English as an instrument that gives access to internationally available knowledge, in the short term, and Arabic as a culturally appropriate vehicle, in the medium to long term. Such a strategy is particularly viable for the small and wealthy Arabian Gulf countries like the UAE that have the financial resources, small populations and the ambition to catch up to the developed world.

Addendum A: Questionnaire on English Education in Abu Dhabi, with the Replies of the Respondents Indicated

Note: *There were two respondents from the Abu Dhabi Education Zone (ABEZ) – one national (N) and one expatriate (E) who asked not to be identified. The national respondent completed the questionnaire first. Where the more senior expatriate official agreed with the answer of the national respondent, the answer was merely ticked as correct. Elsewhere, the expatriate official provided a different answer, which I was told was representative of the facts. The questionnaire was administered in written form in the format below and the respondents filled in their answers. Figures provided were for Abu Dhabi City.*

The Role of English in the Provision of a Quality Education in the UAE

Thank you for assisting with some background data that will inform the evaluation of the role that English plays in education in the UAE. Could you please assist with the following information regarding the teaching of English in schools in Abu Dhabi. (If you have information for the emirate, please be so kind as to give emirate figures throughout. If it is easier to provide figures for Abu Dhabi City, please provide those throughout.)

How many government schools in Abu Dhabi?	<i>Normal</i> (N) 125; (E) 130	<i>Model</i> (N) 8; (E) 10			
How many of them teach English as a subject?	<i>Normal</i> (N) 0; (E) 130	<i>Model</i> (N) 0; (E) 10			
How many schools have English as a teaching medium?	<i>Normal</i> (N) 1; (E) 0	<i>Model</i> (N) 1; (E) 0			
Number of school years at each level.	<i>(N) No answer</i> <i>(E) Primary 1-5</i> <i>Intermediate 6-9</i> <i>High 10-12</i>	<i>Primary School</i>		<i>High School</i>	
		<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior</i>	<i>Junior</i>	<i>Senior</i>
In which school year does English teaching start?	<i>Normal Schools</i> (N) Grade 1; (E) Grade 1	<i>Model Schools</i> (N) Grade 1; (E) Grade 1			
How many hours of English a week?	<i>Pre-school</i> (N) 160 minit (sic) (E) 40 min x 4/wk	<i>Primary School</i>		<i>High School</i>	
		<i>Junior</i> (N) 160 min	<i>Senior</i> (N) 200 min	<i>Junior</i> (N) 240 min	<i>Senior</i> (N) 240 min
<i>Note: The Expatriate official changed the configuration of the question to reflect Prep school and high school.</i>		<i>Prep School</i> (E) 40 min x 6/wk		<i>High School</i> 40 min x 6/wk	
What proportion of teachers are English mother-tongue speakers?	<i>Normal Schools</i> (N) 0 (E) 0 out of 700 odd	<i>Model Schools</i> (N) 12 (E) 12 Canadian			

How many teachers of English are national?	<i>(N) none</i> <i>(E) 1 male, 50 female</i>			
How many teachers have formal qualifications in Education?	<i>(N) no answer</i> <i>(E) placed a question mark (?)</i>			
Proportion of teachers with formal qualifications in Teaching of English as a Second/Foreign Language.	<i>(N) 70%</i> <i>(E) v. small</i>			
What is the preferred method/ approach for teaching English. 	<i>Audio-Lingual</i>			
	<i>Communicative (N) ✓ (E) majority</i>			
	<i>Grammar-Translation (traditional) ✓</i>			
	<i>Other (n) no answer; (E) Eclectic</i>			
Proportion of teachers with training in the preferred method.	<i>(N) no answer; (E) no answer</i>			
How are teachers monitored for adherence to the method? 	<i>Not monitored</i>	<i>Regular inspections (N) ✓ (E) by ADEZ supervisors</i>	<i>Grades attained by students</i>	<i>Principal reports (N) ✓ (E) ✓</i>
How is the English curriculum chosen? 	<i>Custom designed for UAE needs (N) ✓ (E) ✓</i>	<i>Custom designed for Abu Dhabi</i>	<i>Commercially available curriculum</i>	<i>Chosen by individual schools</i>
How are teachers monitored for meeting curriculum objectives? 	<i>Not monitored (N) ✓ (E) ✓</i>	<i>Regular inspections</i>	<i>Grades attained by students (N) ✓ (E) ✓ mainly</i>	<i>Principal reports</i>
Number of school inspectors for English.	<i>(N) 13; (E) 13</i>			
How are English curriculum outcome standards measured? 	<i>Internationally recognized exam/testing standards</i>	<i>Subjective testing and evaluation by teachers (N) ✓ (E) ✓</i>	<i>Discretion of and reporting by school principal</i>	<i>No control</i>
At the end of schooling, do students sit a final exam in English?	<i>(N) Yes; (E) Gd12 Standard UAE exam, but each grade sits a school based exam.</i>			

If yes – Who sets the exam? 	<i>School</i> (N) no answer; (E) at the end of each grade but overseen by supervisors	
	<i>Abu Dhabi Education Authority</i>	
	<i>National Ministry (N) no answer; (E) ✓ Gd12</i>	
On what basis is the exam set? 	<i>National Curriculum (nationally determined)</i> (N) no answer; (E) ✓	
	<i>International high school test (international standard)</i> (N) no answer; (E) ✓	
	<i>TOEFL</i>	
Can learners be prevented from passing out of school if they have not attained the minimum required level of English?	<i>Yes</i> (N) no answer (E) ✓	<i>No</i>

Could you please contribute your own thoughts on what you think are the strong points and the weak points in the teaching of English in schools in Abu Dhabi? (For example, high level of training of teachers could be a strong point; lack of library material or class aids in English could be a weak point.)

(N):

- Students lack at (*sic*) motivation
- Teacherse (*sic*) professional development programmes – should be based on teachers’ needs
- Teaching aids are not available.

(E): Only added a comment to the last point: “especially New Parade Series”.

If you have any additional data you think would be valuable to sketch the picture of the teaching of English in Abu Dhabi government schools, please feel free to add below.

(N):

- Training courses on new trends in teaching English as a foreign language
- Freedom should be given to teachecrs (*sic*) to devise their own materials in line with school textbook.

(E): Ticked both these comments but did not add any views.

Addendum B: Interview with the Assistant Dean of the College for Education, Zayed University

Note: The interview was not recorded. Notes were taken with permission, and an attempt has been made here to reflect the exact wording of answers as closely as possible.

Q: What is the main problem concerning the teaching of English in government schools in Abu Dhabi?

A: English is not taught as a language. By that, I mean, it is not taught as an instrument of communication. The children are given vocabulary lists to learn and also learn grammar rules as discrete items but are not able to apply them. English is also taught through Arabic, and most of the oral communication in class takes place in Arabic. One of the complaints that learners have is that they do not know how to pronounce words because they haven't heard them spoken. One day, I was observing an English primary school class and the teacher was explaining how animals use 'pushes' to keep their babies warm. She then proceeded to explain what a 'push' was. After a while, I understood that what she was talking about was marsupials and the use of the 'pouch'.

Q: So the ability of teachers to communicate verbally in English is poor?

A: Yes. There are times when I ask these teachers how long they have been in Abu Dhabi, or how long they have been teaching, and they are not able to give me a linguistically correct answer. They can't converse in English. There are obviously exceptions, but these are few. We also have instances of when I take the student teachers from our education college to the schools, children tug at their *abayas* [black cloaks worn by national women] when we are leaving and ask them to come again because that is the only time they get taught in English.

Q: What kind of qualifications do these teachers have? The idea that teaching is a special skill does not seem to have much currency.

A: Until recently there was the idea that if you are a graduate you can teach. But most of the English teachers who come from other Arab countries do have a degree in English, often a Bachelor's in English Literature.

Q: Is there an official approach by education authorities to the teaching of English?

A: They say that the approach should be communicative and that schools should ensure that the children participate in their learning. But on the ground there is this misunderstanding of the communicative approach. When education supervisors visit schools where a teacher is using this approach, their reaction is that the class is out of control. Even if two children are talking to each other in the learning process, this makes the supervisors uncomfortable. They ought to be quiet and the teachers should be teaching. In a few instances when I have gone back to praise a teacher for a particularly good lesson, I have been told by the teacher that she had been penalised for having presented that lesson. The idea that the children should be doing the work in the classroom doesn't seem to be accepted. They want to see the teacher in front doing all the talking and the students sitting with their hands folded listening.

Q: I have heard that the schools use the 'New Parade' curriculum?

A: Yes. The problem is that the teachers have no freedom to teach even that curriculum. They are told what pages to teach every day, and what exercises to do, and are not allowed to deviate from that. There was an instance when a teacher had brought a fish to school. She was teaching the adjectives 'rough', 'smooth', 'wet', and 'dry'. The fish was an obvious object to illustrate this to the children. When I praised her for her idea to use the fish to illustrate the adjectives, I was told that the fish "is not for today. It is not in today's pages. The example of the fish is for tomorrow's lesson."

There is also the problem that books are bought not only for English, but also for science and maths. However, these books are designed for 180 school days, which is the internationally accepted length of the academic year, but the UAE seldom manages more than 120 or 125 school days in the academic year, although the official figure is

145. This means that we have to choose which lessons we will teach from the book because we don't have time to cover the whole syllabus.

Q: What are the school hours?

A: You won't believe this, but even to a simple question like that we get different answers. One would think that each principal decides when to open and close the schools. Last year we did a demographic study of the schools for one of the projects we want to start. The range of answers on each question was astounding. But officially the schools are supposed to run from 7:30 to 13:00.

Q: Students have to pass a TOEFL exam to be accepted by the tertiary institutions. At what stage of schooling do they start preparing for TOEFL?

A: They usually start in Grade 11 through 12. They do TOEFL and SAT [School Admission Test]. It is an enormous leap from the vocabulary lists and grammar rules.

Q: What is Zayed University doing to bridge the gap between school leaving standard and university entry standard?

A: We have a Readiness Programme conducted through our English Language Centre. It is a two-year programme. New learners have to do an entrance test, the CEPA [Common English Proficiency Assessment]. Based on their scores, they enter different levels of the Readiness Programme. The Readiness Programme is a maximum of two years. If after two years the learner does not reach a TOEFL score of 500, they are out of the college. They can follow the option of going elsewhere for one year to get their TOEFL score up and then return to the college. But they only have that one extra year to succeed. The English entry standards of the Higher Colleges of Technology are lower and of the UAE University lower still.

Q: I was under the impression that students could not be turned away?

A: If the parents, husband or education authority insists that we accept the student, we usually have to. We slot the student at the lowest level of the Readiness Programme.

Q: The Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT) have a programme of doing English across the curriculum, so to speak. Its new entrants do their technical courses in English, while learning English at the same time.

A: We have a programme that I started last year with one model school and four teachers – one a national and the other three Arab expatriates. The idea is to teach science and maths in Grades 1 and 2 in English and, therefore, to teach English literacy while teaching science and maths. There were all sorts of complications. The authorities were afraid that the time for science and maths would be spent on English and that the children would not learn their science and maths. We also had a problem to identify teachers. Teachers who were able to teach English were afraid to have to deal with maths and science even at such early stages of schooling. There is also the culture that any extra work needs extra remuneration. But we finally overcame the obstacles and the programme started four months late. It was very successful. With the new academic year, we will start the programme in four model schools with 24 teachers who the education authorities are identifying. I hope we will be able to start on time.

We have also started English summer camps for high school children. These are very popular. We divide the English groups in 8 levels, with level 8 being full TOEFL readiness. The children are normally in levels 3 – 5. They are all fixated on TOEFL and even at the very early levels want to start “doing TOEFL”. It is like they cannot separate learning English from TOEFL. We have to tell them that TOEFL is dealt with at levels 7 and 8. It is interesting that the girls fall into higher competence levels than the boys of the same age group. Girls generally come in at levels 3 – 5, while the boys come in at levels 2–4.

Q: Why do you think there is such a difference?

A: I think that cultural factors play a role. Boys go home and they can go out to play or roam around town, but the girls go home and stay home. They have more time to read

and study than the boys. The girls are especially sad when the camp ends because then they have nothing else to do.

Q: Let's get back to the Abu Dhabi schools. What is the size of the average classroom?

A: Too big. You will have 30 children in a class, sometimes 40.

Q: And in the model schools?

A: The model schools try to keep their classes smaller. There are in the region of 20 children per class.

Q: What other differences are there between model and normal government schools?

A: The model schools have a longer day. They go on until 15:00. This is to include some homework time at school and sometimes some extra projects. The teachers are also better qualified and better paid, but not much. The capacity of teachers to work is really quite low. When I think that we used to teach 7-period days in the States. Here they consider taking 3 classes in a day a heavy load and 4 classes a "killer load." But things are changing.

Q: What is the layout in the classrooms?

A: In the normal schools the layout is traditional – rows of desks and the teacher in the front. With 30 students in a class, it is difficult to rearrange the furniture and create the areas required for a truly communicative classroom. The model schools have made some attempts at grouping the children.

Q: What about computers for the learners?

A: The Minister of Education and Youth is very serious about bringing IT [Information Technology] into schools. There is a pilot project to create computer labs in 32 schools. These will be linked to the Abu Dhabi Educational Zone network.

Q: Am I right to assume that the learners have problems using the Internet for research for their school work because their ability to work in English is so poor?

A: This is a really big problem. We had the case of a high school girl who downloaded a whole page of German for an answer to a task. When she was asked how this had happened, she said that she thought it was English, because the writing “looked the same”. But the children do manage to use chat groups to chat to other Arab children. They use computer language (‘r’ for ‘are’ and ‘u’ for ‘you’) and use Romanised script for Arabic words. There is also now the criteria that all new teachers appointed have to have the Microsoft ICDL (International Computer Driving License) course.

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