



Arabic in English-medium Classes? Reasons and Implications

Julie Riddlebarger, Keith Kennetz,
Martina Dickson, Patricia Stringer & Lilly Tennant

15 March 2013

19TH INTERNATIONAL TESOL ARABIA CONFERENCE AND EXHIBITION

From KG to College to Career



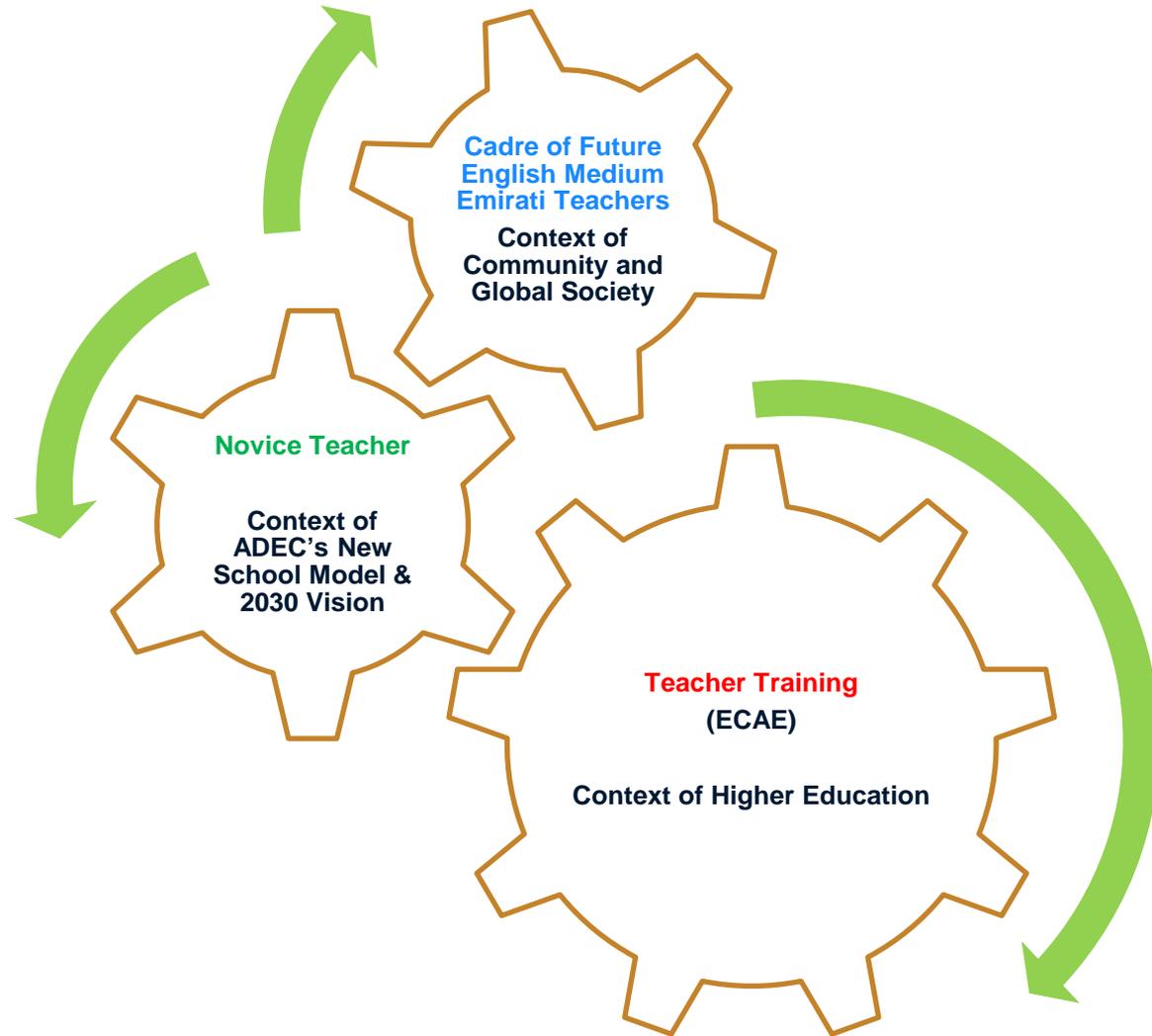
14TH -16TH MARCH 2013 | HYATT REGENCY, DUBAI



Overview of the Research Study

- This is a collaborative research study
- Research Aim:
 - To determine the challenges faced by ECAE new graduates during their first year of employment as English medium teachers
 - To identify the effectiveness of the teacher preparation and its relevance to novice teachers in their practice
 - To investigate the use of English as a medium of instruction by non-native speakers of English
- Mixed Design - Quantitative and Qualitative methods
- Participants - Emirati novice teachers
- Data Collection Tools
 - Survey questionnaire (complete)
 - Individual, semi-structured interviews (on-going)
 - Letter box strategy (focus group) (future)

Conceptual Framework of the Study



Focus of this session

- Research design
- Context of the study
- Background
- Construction of the survey questionnaire
- Participants
- Quantitative data
- Qualitative data
- Discussion

Context of the Study



- Total Population in the UAE: 8,248,000
Citizens: 948,000; Expats: 7.3 million
- Emirates College for Advanced Education (ECAE) – funded and Sponsored by ADEC, Abu Dhabi Emirate
- ECAE initiated in 2007, students enter from high school
- Currently ~ 300 students, mainly from the Abu Dhabi Emirate, supported by about 35 faculty members
- Abu Dhabi public schools in the midst of educational reform (New School Model)

Context of the Study

Abu Dhabi Education Council's New School Model



- Bi-lingual model with math, science and English being taught in English-medium classrooms by mostly ex-pat, native English speaking teachers (EMTs) in Cycle 1 (grades 1-5) (Ahmed, 2012).
- Bi-lingual model with all subjects being taught in both Arabic and English by two co-teachers (one EMT and one AMT) in KG (2 years).
- ECAE graduates have been hired to teach as EMTs in Cycle 1 (IELTS 6.5), EMTs in KG (IELTS 6.0), and AMTs in KG (IELTS 5.5). This study looks at ECAE graduates who are working in ADEC schools as EMTs, in either Cycle 1 or KG.

Background

Reasons for use of L1 in L2 classrooms

save time, build rapport, clarify difficult/complex concepts, explain vocabulary or grammar

Al-Alawi, 2008: L1 (Arabic) used to give instructions, joke, explain words

Al-Buraiki, 2008: Ts used L1 (Arabic) to explain concepts, vocabulary, grammar; control the class; give instructions

Salah & Farrah, 2012: Ts used limited L1 (Arabic) to translate abstract words, facilitate communication, reduce students' stress, check comprehension, and others

Study Participants

- 2012 ECAE Graduates – B.Ed degree, all Emiratis
- Currently employed as English Medium Teachers (EMTs)
- Working as novice teachers in Cycle 1 (grades 1-5) and KG
- Age group: 20-24 – 78%, 25-30 – 18%, above 30 – 4%
- Gender: 3 males and 27 females
- 93% attended Arabic-medium public schools
- 75% of their mothers did not finish high school
- 60% of their fathers did not finish high school
- About 64% had family working in the teaching profession

Survey Instrument

- **Construction of the survey questionnaire**
- **Invitation to Participate**
 - Introduction – email consent, online link to survey
 - eSurveysPro.com
- **Main parts of the survey**
 1. Demographics
 - 2. Language Use**
 3. Teaching Profession
 4. The Curriculum
 5. Teaching Strategies
 6. Personal

(Total 75 questions, 16 were demographic information)

Quantitative Data

Language Use: English or Arabic Pedagogy (n=28)

Question	Arabic %	English %
To explain new concepts to my students, I mostly use	36	64
To save time in teaching, I mostly use	39	61
To give directions (for example, how to complete a worksheet or other task), I mostly use	4	96
To explain English grammar , I mostly use (n=27)	15	85
To activate students' background knowledge , I mostly use	18	82

Quantitative Data

Language Use: English or Arabic Interpersonal/Emotional (n=28)

Question	Arabic %	English %
To tell jokes or make students laugh, I mostly use	46	54
To comfort students who are upset or ill , I mostly use	46	54

Quantitative Data

Language Use: English or Arabic Classroom Management (n=28)

Question	Arabic %	English %
To get students' attention , I mostly use	4	96
To control my class , I mostly use	14	86

Quantitative Data

Language Use: English or Arabic General Communication (n=28)

Question	Arabic %	English %
To communicate with students outside the classroom , I mostly use	43	57
To communicate with parents or family members , I mostly use	96	4
When a student asks a question in English , I mostly answer in	0	100
When a student asks a question in Arabic , I mostly answer in	7	93

Quantitative Data

Language Use: General Beliefs (n=28)

Question	Agree %	Disagree %
Using English all the time is difficult for my students	57	43
I believe it is important to use English as much as possible in the classroom	79	21
In general, Arabic is used more than English in the school	68	32

Quantitative Data

Language Use:

English as a Medium of Instruction (n=28)

Question	Agree %	Disagree %
I believe that students will not learn Arabic well because they are studying for half the day in English	39	61
I believe it is better for students to be taught English by native English speakers	46	54
I would prefer to teach in Arabic rather than English	25	75

Quantitative Data – Summary

- Pedagogy – English mostly used except in the case of new concepts or technical terms
- Classroom management – mostly in English
- Interpersonal – more of a split between Arabic and English
- Communication outside of the English classroom – in Arabic
- Most respondents feel comfortable teaching in English (both teachers and students can handle it)
- 25% would rather teach in Arabic!

Qualitative Data

Semi-structured Interviews

- 14 questions
 - Challenges
 - Surprises
 - Preparation at the college
 - Communications with the school community
 - Role as an Emirati EMT
 - Use of language in the classroom
 - Home and work balance
- Individual interviews conducted (face to face or phone, (30-45 minutes))

Trends

Students expect Emirati teachers to speak Arabic

R1: “What was more challenging was making the students talk to me in English as when I started teaching the students **the students expected me to talk to them in Arabic** so they were using Arabic most of the time.”

R2: “I found it difficult to speak to the kids only in English while **I knew the kids did not know English.**”

R2: “Yes I found it too difficult to speak in English...**I was told not to speak in Arabic but I still did.** The principal said you should speak in English and told the students I don’t know Arabic but the kids know I speak Arabic.”

Trends

Actual usage of Arabic in the English-medium classroom

R1: “To be honest sometimes I use few words in Arabic while teaching **science or math just to help them understand the meaning or the idea** of the lesson.”

R2: “I still use Arabic when I want them to stop running or **get them to listen to me...**”

R2: “In teaching I try to speak English only. I try my best to speak in English and use some Arabic words to explain. For warnings, about their life and family, **especially those who are shy, I talk to them in Arabic.** There are two students who are quiet and who do not speak and do not respond both in English or Arabic.”

R2: “Yes, but in my lesson today, my principal others who observed said that this is the first time they saw **the whole lesson in English.**”

Trends

Actual usage of Arabic in the English classroom

R2: “In the **beginning of the year, it was more Arabic** but now I use more English.”

R3: “**I use Arabic to teach about respect.** They have to respect the teacher, when I say ‘respect the teacher’ they just look at me, but if, and I can read their eyes, but if I say this in Arabic they really look at me like ‘oh...okay we get it.’ ...I’m using Arabic in the main words and concepts, for example energy – what’s the meaning of energy? What’s the meaning of consuming? I say it and I put cards with the meaning. Also if they are trying to answer but they don’t find the word .. I let them say it in Arabic ... for example the *coursi* is beautiful...she asks me, what’s the meaning of *coursi*, I tell her chair. **I also use Arabic to teach them Islamic values**, like God forgive you, God look after you, etc...if **they are struggling with ideas** and they don’t know it I skip the language and explain in Arabic.

Trends

Actual usage of Arabic in the English classroom

R3: I'm using Arabic, indeed. **Maybe 30% is in Arabic**, explaining the main words, and if they, for example, my weaker students are really struggling then I feel they are struggling for two reasons, the concepts and the language... **I am trying to reduce the stress on them** by using some Arabic. Some of them get it but some of them are very slow learners which needs...Arabic, support classes – that is another challenge – in Arabic and in English.

R5: Uh, I don't...I don't think I need to use Arabic in any other case except to clarify. **When the concept is more important than the language, than the medium.** So, I need to focus on the concept or the content more than the medium.”

Trends

Arabic and English in the classroom

R2: “We have words for Arabic and English. I put English words on the wall but many AMTs don’t want English, and **they think Arabic is more important**, and those (*sic*) they have a problem with that.”

R2: “....at first I did not like that the Arabic teacher (AMT) translates every word I taught them (the students). **I told her not to translate and that I can also speak in Arabic.**”

R4: “I am a bi-lingual teacher so **I think I can do the Arabic and the English together**. I can do it. I can start with Arabic and turn into English.”

Trends

Arabic and English in the classroom

R4: “I am very happy to be a bi-lingual teacher because I am understanding the kids. KG1 when they come there was no Arabic. When we sit together and talk there is no understanding of the shared or guided reading. **I don't speak Arabic with them, but I understand what they say so I build the English language according to their comments.** I feel good about being a bi-lingual teacher and I want my own class because I can speak both English and Arabic.”

R5: “...**when I feel like there are question marks drawn on their faces, I do go back and use Arabic.** Especially when I explain science because some science words are difficult for them to access. And I use some Arabic words.

Trends

Student language use

R2: “**They try to talk in English during the English lesson but in math, they try to use Arabic.** They know that when I have a book in English, they have to speak in English, even the emerging learners, the high level ones speak in sentences (‘I like this,’ ‘My mother has this bag’), when I show pictures, and they say it in English.”

R2: “You mean in the periods, we do the routine in English, days of the week in English, so **when the Arabic teacher asks them, they say it in English** (laughs), why do you think? Maybe because I have them for 3 days in the morning and she has them for only 2 days.”

Trends

On being bilingual teachers

R3: “But, apart from this, in general the **parents are happy** because we are like...showing them what they have to wear, or making Islamic values while we are teaching by modeling...They are not against this idea of having EMTs. They are just afraid of the teachers who are not wearing clothes very well, saying bad words, cannot transfer the information for the students, just English English English.”

R5: “And, uh, but the time when I need them (NB: Emirati AMTs), they are curious to know about how did I get my degree, how could I teach, like **how did I learn to teach English, math and science within four years?** And was this...they keep asking me about the college.”

R5: “I think I would say, um, it’s understanding their (NB: students’) oral Arabic conversations, and then switching them in English. Or, you know, answering that in English, or **making that Arabic question into English.**”

R4: “I am a bi-lingual teacher so I think I can do the Arabic and the English together. I can do it. **I can start with Arabic and turn into English.**”

Conclusion

There is pressure to NOT use Arabic, but it is being used selectively for some pedagogical and interpersonal purposes, and sometimes for classroom management and giving important directions – and our respondents are able to do this.

They are confident and comfortable using only English in English class; it is primarily in science and math that Arabic may be used.

Caveat: Self-reported data! Qualitative and quantitative don't always match.

Final thought

**“Lessons in English in UAE Schools
'Violation of Constitution' FNC told”** ([headline in *The National*, 6 March](#)) (Issa, 2013)

Thank you for your attention. Questions or comments?

Keith Kennetz: kkennetz@ecae.ac.ae

Julie Riddlebarger: jriddlebarger@ecae.ac.ae

References

- Ahmed, A. (2012). Abu Dhabi schools face hurdles hiring Emirati teachers. *The National*, February 20.
- Al-Alawi, T.M. (2008). Teachers' beliefs and practices about the use of the L1. Retrieved 7 November 2012 from <http://www.moe.gov.om/Portal/sitebuilder/sites/EPS/English/MOE/baproject/version2/1.pdf>
- Al-Buraiki, M.A. (2008). The L1 in young learner classrooms: Teachers' views and practices. Retrieved 27 September 2012 from <http://www.moe.gov.om/Portal/sitebuilder/sites/EPS/English/MOE/baproject/version2/Ch2.pdf>
- Issa, W. (2013, March 6). Lessons in English in UAE schools 'violation of constitution' FNC told. *The National*. Retrieved 13 March 2013 from <http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/education/lessons-in-english-in-uae-schools-violation-of-constitution-fnc-told>
- Machaal, B. (2012). The use of Arabic in English classes: A teaching support or a learning hindrance? *Arab World English Journal* (3)2, 194-232.
- Morrow, C. (2011). The case for bilingual support: Crutch or scaffold? *TESOL Arabic Perspectives*, 18(1), 7-13.
- Mouhanna, M. (2009). Re-examining the role of L1 in the EFL classroom. *UGRU Journal* (8)Spring 2009. Retrieved 27 September 2012 from <http://www.ugr.uae.ac.ae/acads/ugrujournal/docs/REL1.pdf>
- Salah, N.M.H., and Farrah, M.A.H. (2012). Examining the use of Arabic in English classes at the primary stage in Hebron government schools, Palestine: Teachers' perspective. *Arab World English Journal*, 3(2), 400-436.