National Pride and the New School Model: English Language Education in Abu Dhabi, UAE

Fiona S. Baker

Abstract This chapter provides a brief history of the English Language in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and policies surrounding the status and position of English and Bilingual – Arabic and English – Education. While Dubai and the Northern Emirates are briefly mentioned, the focus is on the Emirate of Abu Dhabi and its New School Model (NSM) approach to education. The factors that have driven and had an impact on policy making in the UAE and NSM are discussed. The history and role of agencies and individuals in its initiatives, some of the challenges and potential that are part and parcel of its policy on bilingual education reform, are described. In the conclusion, there is a brief analysis of crucial issues surrounding bilingual education for realistic goal setting for children of Abu Dhabi Emirate in becoming bilingual.

Keywords New school model • Partial immersion model • Bilingual education reform • Realistic goals

1   Introduction

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a young country in the Arabian Gulf which was established in 1971 when the Trucial Sheikhdoms of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, Ras Al-Khaimah and Fujairah became a federation. The country rapidly developed from an assembly of tribes in the 1960s with a population that sometimes suffered from drought, poverty and hunger, to become an oil-rich nation and the sixth wealthiest country in the world. Today, it has a vibrant economy and plays a prominent role in the Middle East (IMF World Economic Outlook Report 2013). Such economic success has necessitated more highly qualified graduates to drive its development which was the impetus to place education at the top of the government agenda in the 1990s. However, in 1999, Al-Sulayti reported that Emirati school leavers were barely attaining functional literacy, were lacking in the reasoning

F.S. Baker (✉)
Emirates College for Advanced Education, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
e-mail: fbaker@ecae.ac.ae

and problem solving skills required in a modern economy, and had limited ability to take full advantage of technology. In 2002, to mark the 39th anniversary of the UAE's independence, the President, H.H.Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, reported that the largest portion of federal budget set aside for education had occurred in 2001, accompanied by education programs and plans for the development of education. Despite this investment, in a major policy speech to the nation, in April 2007, H.H.Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, reported that teaching methods and curricula were obsolete, the education system as a whole was weak, and ministers of education and higher education should work to find innovative and comprehensive solutions. On the one hand, the UAE government believed that a lack of English language was limiting employment opportunities for the country's youth (Library of Congress Federal Research Division, July 2007). On the other hand, with the UAE's global economic growth and use of the English language, preserving the nation's cultural heritage had become a concern. On UAE National Day 2008, H.H. Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the UAE and Ruler of Abu Dhabi, is reported as saying how crucial it is to preserve the nation's identity, stating that Emiratis have a "legitimate right" to live in a country in which they are "the mainstream, the pioneers and owners, of the common language and integrating identity." In 2013, for the first time in the Middle East, the Emirate of Dubai won its bid for Expo 2020 under the theme '*Connecting Minds, Creating the Future*.' Expo 2020 will be a place where the international community will share innovations and discuss issues of international importance, including the global economy, sustainable development and quality of life.

The aim of this chapter is to give a brief history of the English language in the UAE, and to describe the position of English language and Bilingual Education. While Dubai and the Northern Emirates are mentioned, the focus of the chapter is on Abu Dhabi Emirate and its New School Model (NSM) approach to education. The chapter will discuss the factors that have driven policy making in the UAE and the NSM in Abu Dhabi Emirate. It will also discuss the role of agencies and individuals in its initiatives and touch on the challenges and potential that are part and parcel of its policy on bilingual education reform. The chapter concludes with interplaying issues that should be taken into account in setting realistic goals for the children of Abu Dhabi Emirate as they become bilingual and take strides toward meeting the nation's future goals.

2   English Language in the Nation

Nowadays, the number of languages spoken in the UAE is approximately one hundred. These languages are spoken by two hundred nationalities and one hundred and fifty ethnic groups. The official and national language spoken in the UAE is Arabic with English as the nation's second language. In addition, Malayalam is spoken widely in the Malayali community – the largest Indian community in the UAE. Hind-Urdu and Tagalog are also widely spoken, reflecting the multiculturalism of the

UAE. The English language arrived in the UAE in the 1800s. In 1820, Britain concluded a general treaty of peace with the principal sheikhs of the Pirate Coast (along the southern coast of the Arabian Gulf) and Bahrain. Its purpose was to end piracy and plundering so as to establish a commitment to desist from the slave trade. From this period until independence in 1971, the individual coastal sheikhdoms were under British protection which meant that Britain assumed responsibility for their defense and external relations while the sheikhdoms followed a traditional form of Arab monarchy. This meant that the ruler had virtually absolute power over his subjects. In 1952, Britain recommended that the rulers of the seven sheikhdoms establish the Trucial Council to encourage the adoption of common policies in administrative matters. It led to a federation of states under the leadership of the late H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan (may God have mercy upon him).

In 1898, the American colonizers arrived and with the widespread introduction of public education, English was systematically taught in dedicated English language classes that used an Anglo-American canon of literature. Dr. Fred Atkinson, the first civilian General Superintendent of Education, justified the inclusion of English as a subject on the curriculum in Annual School Reports for 1901–1903 by declaring that a civilized citizenry was not prone to rebellion and that the English language was key to its development. Prior to this, only the social elite in Abu Dhabi had access to English-medium education through private fee-paying schools at home or abroad, usually through full immersion in English with Arabic taught only as a subject on the curriculum. It was not until October 2000, when The UAE Ministry of Education and Youth issued a policy document outlining a strategy to overhaul education that the position of English in schools appeared in UAE government policy.

2.1   Education Vision 2020 Examines the Nation's Challenges

In The UAE's Ministry of Education and Youth's Vision 2020, 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, p. 9). The document discusses the controversy over language of instruction, although there is no reference to a language medium policy. The absence of a clear and thoroughly deliberated language policy appears to have been characteristic of other Arab states as well, especially those of the Gulf region (Gallagher 2011). The only statement made is that "the learning of languages" is a crucial factor in modern education (UAE Ministry of Education & Youth 2000, p. 24). Such a vague statement is made, even though Arab education specialists are aware that low levels of achievement and literacy rates in most Arab countries may be directly related to the complexities of the standard Arabic language – MSA used in formal schooling and non-formal education (Arab Human Development Report

2003). MSA is developed from Classical Arabic and is the written form of the language drawn up by educated people and intellectuals. The spoken dialect of colloquial Arabic is grammatically less complex and has a less voluminous vocabulary than MSA.

2.2 *The Arab Human Development Report (2003)*

Despite the presence of significant human capital in the region, the Arab Human Development Report (2003) concludes that constraints hamper the acquisition, diffusion, and production of knowledge in Arab societies, whereas human capital could offer a substantial base for an Arab knowledge renaissance. The report underlines the importance of knowledge to Arab countries as a powerful driver of economic growth through higher productivity. The closing section presents a strategic vision for creating knowledge societies in the Arab world based on five pillars: guaranteeing key freedoms; disseminating quality education; embedding science; shifting toward knowledge based production; and developing an enlightened Arab knowledge model. The Report states that in Arab civilization, the pursuit of knowledge is prompted by religion, culture, history, and the human will to achieve success. Obstructions to this quest are the defective structures created by human beings – social, economic, and above all, political.

The Report discusses the Arabic language as being connected to two basic matters that are closely associated with both the existence and future of Arabs. The first connection is with the "sacred" and the second is with "identity". The Arabic language is the distinctive feature that distinguishes Arab identity. It is the language of the Qur'an and was the rallying point for the intellectual, spiritual, literary and social activities encapsulated in an entire human civilization. Reportedly, nowadays the Arabic language faces severe challenges. The Arabization of the sciences and other disciplines has not proceeded according to expectations and there are also limitations to translation efforts in the sciences and humanities. Linguistic theory is also not proceeding at the anticipated rate; there is isolation from modern philosophical schools and methodologies, and a lack of awareness of the role language plays in modern society. The Arabic language is further complicated by the duality of standard and colloquial Arabic accompanied by a scarcity of advanced Arabic software that limit publications in Arabic (The Arab Human Development Report 2003).

2.3 *Arabic and English Languages in Education*

The UAE Vision for the year 2020 has highlighted the role of Arabic as central to the Islamic faith. However, schools, colleges and universities have continued to increase the profile of English as a medium of education. In 1996, Ayari documented the challenges Arab children experience in spelling, word recognition in isolated

context-free environments, and in becoming a bilingual reader in Arabic and English. This has been a matter of concern for several decades in the Arab world, especially in compromising the Arabic language. There has been a mushrooming of private Arabic speaking schools which are promising to provide an education that combines Arab heritage, norms and values in Islam, with a "world class education" in English. The position concerning English acquisition, is a progressive politico-pragmatic one that embraces a "discourse of opportunity" (Tollefson and Tsui 2004). Schools which were offering bilingual education, have become an attractive alternative to monolingual Arabic education and have continued to grow in number. Emirati parents have seen opportunities for their children in bilingual schools with English taking root in science, business, and new key professional domains in the Arab world.

2.4   Slow Response to the Language Debate

Arabic has a long and distinguished history of being the only official language of the Arab world and Classical Arabic is strongly identified with religion as the language of the Qur'an which is held to provide miraculous evidence of the truth of Islam (Crystal 1987). In Dubai, the National Strategic Plan for 2016, emphasizes the need to enhance Arabic language and local culture in society (in Randall and Samimi 2010). However, the Arab Human Development Report (2003) states that "fear of cultural and linguistic suicide must not result in stagnation or worse, in the continued deterioration of quality of education in the Arab world" (p.3). The Arabic language means that learners are exposed to Arabic cultural heritage and appropriate content for an Arab and Islamic education. Like other Gulf nations, the UAE has only recently acted on the Arabic – English language debate despite knowledge that English will meet the demands of its globalizing economy. Many Emiratis – males in particular – have studied English language abroad, or have graduated in the medium of English. Higher education in the nation is also taught in English by Western-educated faculty. Although English is generally regarded positively, the aftermath of 9/11 has provoked renewed interest in ideological issues associated with English language teaching and use in the Islamic context. The local press often discusses solutions to promote and protect culture and heritage.

In 2010, *the Khaleej Times* reported that over 90 % of students graduating from government high schools require English language skills development in higher education. Universities and colleges have required that candidates complete a Foundation English program and some (for example, Zayed University – a university with campuses in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai) have also necessitated prerequisite courses in Arabic and Information Technology before being admitted to a program at degree level. However, with the modernization of the education system, *the National* newspaper, February 4, 2014, reported that the Foundation year at federal universities and colleges, which aims to improve English-language skills

and increase International English Language Testing scores (IELTS) before under-graduate entry, will be discontinued by 2018.

The English language has been the focus of government education policy espe-cially in the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, with some model schools in the Northern Emirates joining Dubai's system of reform. There has also been a growing need for qualified teachers in Arabic medium schools and the development of appropriate Arabic medium resources. This need may also apply to the private sec-tor because on June 22 2016, *the Gulf News* reported that Arabic language remains a 'poorly taught and neglected subject in schools' http://gulfnews.com/news/uae/education/arabic-lessons-leave-pupils-tongue-tied-1.545557. It has not always been required for teachers to have fully qualified teacher status. Established in 1988, the Higher Colleges of Technology, and almost a decade later – Zayed University – graduated a large number of national females who, irrespective of their first degree and lack of specialized teacher preparation, started to take up employment in schools. In Abu Dhabi, professional development efforts provided by Public Private Partnership (PPP) independent contractors on 3-year contracts with ADEC, were aimed at increasing performance in all areas of educational development, including curriculum design, training, monitoring and evaluation, with the participation of 30 kindergartens and primary schools from the public sector in 2006.The program was designed for government schools to benefit from the experience of the private sector so as to improve the quality of education and student achievement. Today, ADEC teachers are holders of an academic qualification – a Bachelor of Education degree – with preference given to those with a relevant Master's degree and preferably, expe-rience of classroom teaching. To this aim, in 2007. Emirates College for Advanced Education (ECAE) was established in Abu Dhabi. It is an Abu Dhabi government higher education institute affiliated with ADEC, dedicated to teacher preparation, continuing professional development, and education research. The College prepares students to teach English, Science and Mathematics in ADEC Cycle one schools, in the medium of English.

3 The Emirate of Dubai and the Northern Emirates

The developing economy of the UAE has always relied heavily on expatriate labor to support the development which has taken place over the last half century. This is to the extent that in most of the Emirates, expatriates outnumber Emirati citizens. It is especially true of the Emirate of Dubai. English has emerged as a *lingua franca* at all levels of society with accompanying social ramifications (Randall and Samimi 2010 p.43). In the Emirate of Dubai, The Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA), the government authority that oversees both private and public education, took over the role from the Dubai Education Council in 2006 under the directive of H.H. Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister of the UAE, and Ruler of Dubai. KHDA's remit was to develop the education sector in Dubai Emirate. In 2010, there were 44 schools designated as

Future Schools. These schools became part of the Madares Al Ghad (MAG) program with a curriculum that places emphasis on the development of bilingual nationals taught by teachers who are prepared to apply contemporary pedagogy in well-resourced schools. 16 secondary schools – grades 10, 11 and 12 (working in cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MoE); 13 intermediate schools – grades 6, 7, 8 and 9, and 18 elementary schools – grades 1, 2 and 3 for Arabic, English, Science and Mathematics were designated *Future Schools*. In the elementary schools, English, American, European and other native English speaking teachers were integrated into the project as part of the Ministry's efforts to improve English language proficiency. In 2010, Ms. Shaikha Al Shamsi, Chief Executive for Educational Affairs, announced that the same schools would extend the MAG curriculum into grade 4, explaining that there had been no decrease in the number of lessons taught in Arabic. In 2009, 31 of the schools operating the MAG curriculum were located in the five Northern Emirates: Ajman, Fujairah, Ras Al-Khaimah, Sharjah and Umm Al-Quwain. Nowadays, almost all schools in Dubai fall under the KHDA umbrella, which has five entities, namely; the Dubai School Inspection Bureau (DSIB); Dubai School Agency; EDAAD, which is a scholarship program for high achieving students to study at top universities in the world; Emirates National Development Program; National Institute for Vocational Education and Tamkeen which empowers people with visual impairments. As public accountability has increased, from the baseline inspections undertaken in 2008–2009 by the DSIB, there has been evidence of significant school improvements in Dubai Emirate.

4   Abu Dhabi Emirate and the Abu Dhabi Education Council

Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision (2030) aims to "achieve effective economic transformation of the Emirate's economic base and bring about global integration and enduring benefits to all. Abu Dhabi has a core commitment to build a sustainable and diversified, high value-added economy by 2030" (The Government of Abu Dhabi, p.14). The Economic Vision (2030) was formed to begin a 10-year strategic education reform process in 2005. ADEC took over some of the functions of the UAE Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research. It issues licenses for educational institutes, supervises education zones and schools, and establishes and monitors educational standards. In 2006, nine private public school partnerships (PPPs) were formed as a foundation to ADEC's NSM curriculum in Abu Dhabi Emirate. Technical and Further Education Global (TAFE Global), part of the New South Wales Department of Education and Training, provided a curriculum for the PPP operators and schools in thirty KG – grade 5 schools in Abu Dhabi Emirate – 12 in Al Ain, 12 in Abu Dhabi city, and 6 in the Western Region – Al Gharbiya. From September 2007, two additional operators signed up to provide PPP education for 3 years to 30 new schools for grade 6–9 students. This meant that Arabic had to share its dominance with English in these selected Abu Dhabi PPP schools because the PPP providers: Beaconhouse, CfBT

Education LLC, Cognition, Mosaica, Nord Anglia, Sabis School Improvement Partners (SIP), Specialist Schools and Academy Trust (SSAT), and Taaleem Edison Learning (TEL) were all education service providers with bases in English speaking countries.

ADEC policy states that "the NSM has the aim of providing an effective response to a number of challenges facing the school system; has a focus on improving student learning experiences, and raises the academic outcomes of Abu Dhabi students to become internationally competitive to achieve the Economic Vision 2030 (http://www.adec.ac.ae). Since the establishment of ADEC in 2005, the curriculum has evolved to meet standards in consultation with the New South Wales Government, Australia. The curriculum was first tested in the model and PPP schools on a 3-year contractual basis. Private operators from the UK, US, Australia, New Zealand and Canada have worked toward helping the PPP schools achieve standardized goals so as to improve student performance and align teaching practices to contemporary international methods (http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/schools-ppp-future-to-be-revealed-soon).

The introduction of English speaking educators employed in Abu Dhabi schools was the beginning of ADEC's NSM. The model introduced English as an additional medium of instruction alongside the existing medium of Arabic with the goal of "developing students who are literate in English"(http://www.adec.ac.ae/en/Education/KeyInitiatives/CurriculumImprovement/Pages/English-Medium.aspx). ADEC kindergartens follow a bi-literate, bilingual approach, with an English and Arabic medium teacher as co-teachers in the classroom. The aim of the commitment to bilingualism is to provide equality of access for all children to develop linguistic, cultural and social capital so as to provide for the future educational and socio-economic privileges of Emiratis (Bourdieu 1991). The ADEC school system, a weaker yet important form of additive bilingualism, follows a partial immersion model with English as the medium of instruction for the teaching of English, Science and Mathematics.

Government schools in Abu Dhabi have rapidly witnessed a dramatic rise in the status of English. This has meant that families seeking Arabic-only instruction for their children have had to seek out private fee-paying Arabic-medium schools. ADEC started the development of an education policy agenda that defined the guiding principles, vision, and objectives for the UAE's education system. The agenda was developed with the participation of key stakeholders. A taskforce of representatives was formed from the three education sectors: P-12 (pre-primary to grade 12), higher education, and technical and professional education, as well as from government and industry. The members of the taskforce were both local and international education policy leaders. The taskforce was divided into three teams (one for each education sector) which began the process of developing the education policy agenda by defining the collective principles, goals, and objectives of the education system, including the pathways between primary, secondary, and tertiary level education. External review has been put into place to further enhance the education policy agenda. Abu Dhabi also prepares Emirati teachers to deliver instruction in English for the content areas of Science, Mathematics and English at a number of

federal universities and colleges, including Emirates College for Advanced Education, a dedicated teacher preparation college and a partner to ADEC.

4.1 Initiatives to Support the Teaching and Learning of English

To achieve its goal, ADEC has embarked on numerous initiatives to support English education while maintaining a focus on Emirati culture and heritage and development of twenty-first century skills; namely, critical thinking, communicating, interacting effectively and problem solving. Abu Dhabi schools have four levels: Kindergarten, Cycle 1 (grades 1–5), Cycle 2 (grades 6–9), and Cycle 3 (grades 10–12). Benchmarked against countries with highly respected early childhood education systems including, Australia, US, UK and Finland, the initial plan was to fully integrate the NSM into the public education system by 2015–2016 (http://www.khaleejtimes.com/nation/inside.asp?xfile=/data/educationnation/2013/April/educationnation_April41.xml&section=nationgeneral). From the years 2010–2011, ADEC began to implement the NSM in state kindergartens and Cycle 1 schools. In March 2013, announcements were made to extend the NSM into Cycle 2 and 3 schools with effect from the 2013/2014 academic year (March 24, 2013, http://www1.adec.ac.ae/English/Pages/PressItems.aspx?PRId=728). The NSM curriculum places more emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving skills in place of memorization strategies and didactic approaches to teaching.

4.2 ADEC Levels of Education and the Role of English

Children in KG1 must be 4 years old by October 1 of the year of entry. While school attendance at kindergarten level is voluntary, the number of children attending is increasing in the Abu Dhabi Emirate. In kindergarten, children are taught in a bilingual, bi-literate model of education with English and Arabic co-teachers. In Cycle one schools – grades 1–3 – children are taught in a partial immersion model in both Arabic and English. Content areas of English, Science and Math are taught in English by native English speaking teachers employed from English-speaking nations, or by Emirati teachers who have an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) band 6.5. Social Studies, Music, and Arabic and Islamic Studies are taught in Arabic by Arabic medium teachers.

ADEC has introduced two major benchmarking assessment programs to measure student achievement. Both benchmarking assessments include English language and literacy performance. The first program is called Performance Indicators in Primary Schools (PIPS) and has been conducted since 2010. PIPS assessment provides teachers with detailed profiles of children's literacy and mathematics skills

in kindergarten and grade 2; Cycle 2 – for children in grades 6–9, and Cycle 3, for grades 10–12, has the overall aim or nurturing learners for the future, and to help them start to become fully rounded members of society. ADEC is committed to developing students who are literate in English to meet the needs of Abu Dhabi's Economic Vision 2030, and prepares students for tertiary education, the workplace and life experience that requires English. To achieve this goal, ADEC has embarked on numerous initiatives to support the teaching and learning of English while maintaining a focus on Emirati culture and heritage and the development of twenty-first century skills. There has been a transition from a textbook-driven to a learning outcomes-based curriculum that meets international standards. It is delivered by teachers adept in student-centered approaches that build on student knowledge, understandings and skills, rather than on a one-size-fits-all approach.

This shift in paradigm has involved an introduction to an ongoing assessment framework, ECART (English Continuous Assessment Rich Tasks), that aligns with Tama'an in Arabic and inquiry-based learning approaches that encourage students to develop lifelong learning skills and foster curiosity. Education advisors have been employed to develop and use international best-practice when teaching English in ADEC schools. Employment of licensed native English-speaking teachers from overseas to teach Cycle 3 English on collaborative projects, designed to support teachers and schools in understanding how to support student Arabic and English language development, has been implemented. Teachers follow the English Continuous Assessment Rich Task (ECART) framework when teaching English in Cycle 2. The framework, which was introduced in the academic year 2013–2014, has eight sections which must be covered during one trimester – organisation, context, research, strategies, reflection and review, e-Learning, integrated strand tasks, final product and presentation. The framework covers trimester themes. Themes are outlined by ADEC for trimesters 1 and 3 in each grade, and in trimester 2, teachers and students, choose their own theme. The framework teaches students how to learn through an inquiry-based process which is an approach to teaching, learning and assessment that reflects authentic, real-life contexts, and allows teachers to meet the learning needs and interests of students. The framework also requires teachers to provide students with ongoing feedback about their learning. ADEC is proceeding with the planning process leading to a re-designed Cycle 3 program for students in grades 10, 11 and 12. The redesigned program aims to support transitions from KG-12 schooling, to tertiary education or employment. ADEC is making use of expertise in a range of fields from federal universities and the public and private sector to design and develop a system of educational opportunities for the young people of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Currently, there is a short-term plan to introduce periods of Arabic, English, Mathematics and Problem-solving, along with the inclusion of native English speaking teachers to provide English instruction to Cycle 3 students.

Since 2008, the External Measurement of Student Achievement (EMSA) standardized testing program has been a key feature of assessment in Grades 3–12. EMSA assessments measure student achievement in Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science, at the end of the third semester. Performance in EMSA contributes

10 % of the end of year grade. While Mathematics and Science are taught in English, Arabic language, History, and Islamic Studies are taught by native Arabic speakers (ADEC 2010). ADEC's initiatives involve a transition from a textbook-driven to a learning outcomes-based curriculum that meets international standards, and the introduction of student-centered approaches that build on student knowledge, understandings and skills, rather than follows a one-size-fits-all approach. There is also an introduction to an ongoing assessment framework, ECART (English Continuous Assessment Rich Tasks).

On July 3 2008, the *National* newspaper announced that a mandatory Arabic exam would be introduced into government schools for all grade 10 students other than expatriates in private schools. Arabic language is compulsory in all schools, but examinations in the language have not been required. Students take a Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) entry test that measures student English proficiency to attend higher education. CEPA requires that students have a good grasp of English grammar, as well as the reading and writing skills necessary for university study through the medium of English. By supporting teachers to more effectively embed the development of these skills into their daily teaching from Grade 10, students should have a solid foundation to meet CEPA requirements by the time they reach Grade 12.

In 2011, ADEC introduced a new Arabic language curriculum for all Cycle 1 schools (Kindergarten to Grade 4). The *Khaleej Times* (6 October, 2011) reported Dr. Karima Mazroui, Director of ADEC's Arabic Curriculum Division as saying, "We have introduced a completely new approach and standards in learning Arabic through engaging activities that encourage active participation and meaningful communication among school students." To achieve ADEC's Arabic language curriculum goals, from 2011 onwards, Arabic medium teachers have been engaged in professional development. ADEC has also employed education advisors to support English teachers in their use of international best practices in language teaching. In 2013, ADEC also started to employ licensed native English-speaking teachers from overseas to teach English in Cycle 3 (grade 6–9) classrooms.

4.3   Underachievement in English at Tertiary Level

The Abu Dhabi government school reform has largely been driven by leaders in the tertiary sector where the medium of education is predominantly English. Previous curricular and pedagogic interventions had not shown any appreciable improvements in the English language competence of school leavers and providing Foundation English programs at tertiary level had become unsustainably expensive. Traditionally, tertiary education has employed faculty from overseas to provide Foundation or Preparatory level English programs and instruction in English. High failure levels in English are problematic. In 2006, test takers from the UAE earned the lowest overall scores of twenty countries, according to statistics from the International English Language Testing System consortium. However, with the

investment in the NSM at school level, the UAE has announced its goal to phase out tertiary sector foundation programs by 2018.

The UAE also participates in international large-scale student assessments such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Program for International Student Assessment (PISA), an international assessment of student attainment in Mathematics, Reading and Science established in 2000. Since 2000, the OECD has attempted to evaluate the knowledge and skills of 15-year olds across the world through its PISA test. More than 510,000 students in 65 economies took part in the 2014 assessment process, which covered Mathematics, Reading and Science, with the main focus on Mathematics. The reading assessment seeks to measure a student's ability to understand, use, and reflect on written texts. Assessments involve the application of cognitive and metacognitive skills to reading texts accompanied by a self-assessment of reading enjoyment. In 2010, the PISA test results ranked the emirate of Dubai, 42nd among 65 education zones around the world in reading literacy. In 2011, Abu Dhabi and Dubai were benchmarking participants with scores of 476 and 424 respectively. The UAE and other Gulf countries performed poorly, especially in comparison to richer nations such as, Japan and Finland. By identifying the characteristics of higher performing education systems, PISA has given policy makers in the UAE data to identify effective policies that can be adapted to the local context to inform future progress of language and literacy.

4.4   Transition into the New School Model Curriculum

In a matter of months, for educators, parents and children in Abu Dhabi, English as the medium of instruction became compulsory as ADEC transitioned into the NSM. As Gallagher (2011) states, "such an explicit articulation of policy is unusually forthright…..particularly so, in this globally sensitive region (p.62). In comparison, the introduction to English in Malaysia, also as the medium of instruction for English, Science and Mathematics, which occurred on 6 May 2002, was gradually phased in. The then Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad announced that the government was willing to re-introduce English-medium education 'if the people [wanted] it'. On 11 May 2002, the Education Minister Musa Mohamad confirmed that a bilingual system would be set up with English used for teaching Science and Mathematics. Then, on 21 July 2002, Musa Mohamad announced details of the implementation of the new system in national schools. Similarly, in the case of the Emirate of Dubai, the school reform was also phased in gradually with a percentage of schools becoming *Future Schools* with others gradually joining the reform. In comparison, all government schools within ADEC's NSM Cycles were destined to rapidly take on the partial immersion model. Formerly, distinct roles of English (internationalism, modernity, business, secularism) and Arabic (tradition, emotion, religion, culture, localism) started to blur their boundaries. Dualism remains, in some sense reaffirmed by the curricular allocation of the "hard" school subjects of

Science and Mathematics to the medium of English, and the allocation of such "soft" subjects as Social Studies, Music and Islamic Studies to the medium of Arabic. Unlike the prototypal Canadian school immersion model, where bilingual education is an elective choice made by middle-class parents, and unlike the selective approach in Hong Kong where only the academically strong are pre-selected according to examination results for bilingual education (Lin and Man 2009), all families whose children attend ADEC schools in Abu Dhabi today did not have a choice in partial immersion. For families who are not proficient in English, there are challenges to supporting their children in the medium of English at home (Blaik Hourani et al. 2012). This is true not only for English language development, but also in the content areas of Mathematics and Science which are taught in English.

A study by the author and her colleagues on constraints and limitations to parental involvement conducted in 2012, found that the language barrier sometimes created a problem in communication and understanding of curriculum and pedagogy. As one parent said, "[We] can't communicate because the teachers don't speak Arabic, and the parents don't speak English. Sometimes we can't follow up at home because the worksheets are in English. It is too rapid [a] change" (Blaik Hourani et al. 2012, p.144). Yet, ADEC's Policy, 2012–2013, P-12; Standard 2, states that "educators will respect and cooperate with parents and the community in their daily work to advance student learning." In reality though, due to communication gaps in the bilingual environment, the implementation of ADEC's policy can be challenging for parents and teachers, adding to communication gaps.

4.5   Preparation, Development, and Retention of Teachers of English

Among ADEC's priorities have been challenges pertaining to teacher development, recruitment, language facility and retention. A number of initiatives have been started to ameliorate the challenges. PPP providers have delivered professional development workshops to teachers in schools and in 2015, Emirates College for Advanced Education, inaugurated its Continuing Education Centre (CEC) as a subsidiary of the College to support the nation in the professional development of school administrators and teachers. On June 24 2012, the *Gulf News* reported a salary increase for government teachers "in recognition of the critical role played by teachers in a nation's development." The press celebrated teachers, acknowledging them to be "the building blocks for the development and progress of any modern state" (http://gulfnews.com/news/gulf/uae/government/salary-increase-for-government-teachers-1.1040083).

The fourth annual education conference held at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in September 2013, had the theme '*Future of Education in the UAE: Innovation and Knowledge Production*'. The conference recognized the challenges facing youth in the UAE and Arab World and focused on the necessity to adopt exemplary contemporary methods of education. The focus was on developing

a knowledge economy through the medium of English. It highlighted that language facility had not only been a challenge for learners but also for teachers because many teachers had not been educated nor prepared. At the secondary and tertiary levels teachers did not possess the academic degree(s) required to teach the course(s) assigned. Nowadays, however, criteria for employment are more rigorous with ADEC requiring an Emirati entering the teaching profession today to have an IELTS band of 6.5 to teach in a Cycle 1 school; 6.0 for a position in kindergarten as an English medium teacher, and 5.5 for an Arabic medium teaching position. In the ADEC system, native English speaking kindergarten and Cycle 1 school teachers are qualified to teach integrated English, Mathematics and Science. They are employed to model pedagogical and content learning goals in the NSM as well as to provide models of the teaching of English. Research is conclusive on how crucial quality of teaching is for language learning and for learner achievement. Lambelet and Berthele (2015) state that more research is needed to improve age-appropriate teaching techniques so as to boost motivation levels and metalinguistic awareness of foreign language learners of all ages.

Abu Dhabi shares the challenge of teacher capacity building with the rest of the world. Globally, there is an exodus of competent teachers to take up higher paying positions in other fields. Issues of social standing have also played a role in teacher attrition, accompanied by teachers being overwhelmed by the actualities of the job, especially concerning classroom management and behavior (Ingersoll and Smith 2003). A survey conducted in 2011 however, on teacher job satisfaction in Abu Dhabi schools, reports 77.7 % on a satisfaction index in government schools. It also found greater satisfaction among males than females with highly qualified teachers being less satisfied than those with lower qualifications (UAE Interact, 16/08/2011). The role of women in Emirati society has grown in line with the country's development with some Emirati women putting personal development, a thriving career, and independence before marriage (Olarte-Ulherr October 31, 2013). The UAE has working women in all sectors. The government supports women with many women in government ministries and at executive levels in the public sector. Emirati women enjoy privileges including free education, housing and preferential access to public sector jobs. Career possibilities are generally very bright. There are five female cabinet ministers in the UAE government and women are at the fore-front of several key government agencies, including the team that helped the city of Dubai secure the 2020 Expo and the Dubai Media Office, which is responsible for communications in the Emirate of Dubai. In February 2016, the UAE Vice President and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, announced the formation of the UAE Gender Balance Council, which according to local press reports, will promote new strategies for female empowerment. More women value independence and self-reliance and choose to delay marriage to continue their education and establish their careers. Men have developed greater acceptance of the idea, although many prefer that Emirati women work in female oriented professions such as teaching. Despite a nationwide Emiratization drive in education, most posi-

tions in schools are taken up by women. On January 1 2015, The *National* newspaper reported that ADEC employed 1485 Emirati school staff in 2014, but only 6.8 per cent of them were male. Of 28,078 teachers working for the Ministry of Education in 2013–2014, only 5.8 per cent, or 1654, of them were Emirati men. The Federal National Council statistics show a very small number of Emirati men working in the nation's primary schools, a factor that risks jeopardizing pupils' national identity and culture at an early age.

As more colleges and universities partner with ADEC, entry level and exit criteria for Education undergraduate degree programs are being reshaped by ADEC. Employment at ADEC requires an in-depth interview with accompanying IELTS band to enter the workforce. Teachers in the system may have lost interest in trying out new teaching approaches and strategies because workloads have been heavy, prohibiting time to adequately read and prepare. However, with ADEC teacher performance standards and mandated professional development that occurs after schools hours, level of teacher commitment is improving. As the *National* newspaper (May 2, 2016) reported, the UAE-wide teacher licensing scheme will begin in 2017. It will be fully implemented by the year 2021 in line with the requirements of the UAE National Agenda and will be a unified system to ensure minimum entry requirements are met for all nationalities.

There are several factors that may inhibit teacher implementation of educational reforms, including content, standards, assessment, instruction, and grading. Teachers may consider themselves inadequately supported to address issues such as class size, classroom management (especially in boys' schools) and resourcing. ADEC states that it will make every effort to ensure teachers can provide high-quality instruction; it recommends that class sizes for each Cycle not exceed: 20 students in kindergarten; 25 students in Cycle 1 and 30 in Cycle 3. In reality, enrollment requires class sizes larger than the guidelines recommended in policy so schools can seek approval for larger enrollment from their Regional Office (p.25). Not all schools are equally well resourced with some teachers in ADEC kindergartens purchasing their own hands-on materials. According to ADEC guidelines, Heads of Faculty will participate in ongoing professional development as provided by, and/or required by ADEC which provides site-based professional development aligned with the School Improvement Plan and other identified school-based needs. Teachers participate in ongoing professional development as required by ADEC (p.27).

Research suggests that the development of literacy in two languages ensures not only socio-affective and linguistic advantages, but also cognitive gains. Research on early bilinguals (Bialystok 2001; Bialystok et al. 2005) has shown that bilingualism is associated with more effective controlled processing in children and adults as bilinguals because of the constant management of two competing languages that enhance executive functioning, a higher level of metalinguistic awareness, communicative sensitivity and field independence (Bialystok et al. 2004). Learning the writing system of another language is in many ways distinct from learning the new language itself, especially when the scripts differ, as in Arabic and English (Cook

and Bassetti 2005). As Freeman (2007) states, "the cumulative evidence from research conducted over the last three decades at sites around the world demonstrates that cognitive, social, personal, and economic benefits accrue to the individual who has an opportunity to develop their bilingual repertoire" (p.9). It is this consensus that underpins UNESCO's (2003) declaration that it "supports bilingual and/or multilingual education at all levels of education" (p.32).

Bilingualism in the Arab world has received little attention (Al-Khatib 2006). Mastery however, of three registers of the first language places a tremendous first language learning burden (Abu-Libdeh 1996) on Emirati school children. Arabic is an example of a true diglossic situation where three varieties of the language are used within the same speech community. Gallagher (2011) discusses the linguistic complexity of MSA for Arabic-speaking learners and likens the learning MSA to learning a second language. In addition to the complexities of Arabic, English uses an entirely different script and it does not possess full one-to-one symbol-sound correspondence. To use Cook and Bassetti's term (2005, p.7), it is "phonologically opaque." Both consonant and vowel sounds are written in English, not just the consonant sounds as is the case in Arabic; and it is oriented left to right on the page – the opposite of Arabic. These and other linguistically distant features pose an additional load in an already challenging linguistic context for children, and may limit bi-literacy success. At the same time however, there are arguments in favor of higher cognitive challenges for school learners for as long as the challenges are scaffolded by effective teaching and curricula (Gibbons 2009).

4.6   The Partial Immersion Model

Of the many models of bilingual immersion education, the model of second language immersion ADEC has adopted, is an additive, side-by-side partial immersion model. ADEC adopted the partial immersion model because Social Studies and Islamic Studies are taught in Arabic. Malaysia adopted a similar approach to partial English immersion in primary school in 2003, teaching Mathematics and Science through English (Swee Heng and Tan 2006), while in Brunei two further subjects, History and Geography, are also taught through the medium of English (Lin and Man 2009) but significantly in both cases, English-medium teaching is not introduced until later in elementary school. Johnson and Swain (1997) identify bilingual teachers as one of eight core features of prototypal immersion programs, where the teacher has "the language proficiency necessary to maintain the L2 as a medium of instruction and to support and motivate the use of the L2 by the students" ("L2" refers to the additional language and "L1" to the learner's first language) (p.8). However, this is not the case in the UAE as the English speaking teacher, unless a newly qualified Emirati, may be a native speaker of Arabic.

4.7   Foreign Expertise and Local Capacity Building

ADEC's curriculum development initiatives were spearheaded by English speaking foreign consultants and specialists. Yet, the importation of short term consultants is neither sustainable nor desirable in the long term so ADEC has employed Emirati nationals as decision-makers – many of whom hold a doctoral degree. By decreasing its reliance on external expertise and providing better education and training for nationals and home grown experts, concerns about loss of national identity have started to subside. Currently, key positions at ADEC are filled by prominent Emirati Nationals. At the time of writing, Dr. Mughair Al Kjhaili is Director General of ADEC. Mr. Mohammed Salem Al Dhaheri, is ADEC's Executive Director of School Operations; Engineer Hamad Al Dhaheri is Executive Director at ADEC's Private Schools and Quality Assurance Sector and Mr. Salem Al Katheeri is Director of the Al Ain Region. Dr. Karima Matar Al Mazrouei, Director of Curriculum at ADEC, who spoke at the 6th Languages Forum (ADEC, April 2013) explained that the campaign aims to improve classroom practices and the performance of reading while focusing on reading independently. Dr. Al Mazrouei is a proponent of teaching that draws from a variety of resources to incorporate reflective dimensions to enable teachers to independently develop instructional materials. Teachers are evaluated by school principals and heads of faculty on four performance standards: The profession, the curriculum, the classroom and the community and are rated at five different levels: Pre-Foundation; Foundation; Emerging; Established and Accomplished.

5   Recommendations and Conclusions

Improved English language proficiency for future generations of Emirati school leavers will occur through the NSM partial immersion model. Despite concerns regarding the loss of Arabic and a discussion of the disadvantages associated with studying in the medium of English (Al Maatooq 2008; Al Anati and Barhoumeh 2007), comparative research studies have shown that Arabic proficiency is unlikely to be negatively impacted as "students in bilingual programs who speak a dominant societal language usually develop the same levels of proficiency in all aspects of the first language (L1) as comparable students in programs where the L1 is the exclusive medium of instruction" (Genesee 2004, p. 552). Further, according to Cummins (2000), children educated through a partial immersion model, do not experience adverse consequences in the development of academic skills in the majority language. What is crucial however, is that expectations for bilingualism should be realistically benchmarked over years of the NSM's development. For children experiencing difficulty, appropriate support should be provided. Research shows

that 5–7 years are needed to achieve grade level norms in academic subjects taught in English (Cummins 1984). A recent longitudinal study showed that young children had strong accents after 4 years of enrollment in English-medium schools (Tsukada et al. 2005), implying that native accent is not always attained.

Interplaying in the success of the NSM are overall societal and cultural attitudes to schooling and the quality of the school system itself. The introduction of non-Arabic speaking teachers into the school system has not been without its challenges. As Guest (2002) and Littlewood (2000) have pointed out, sociocultural contexts such as membership and identity should be considered during the reform process. It is argued that as methodologies are exported across contexts, careful monitoring is needed to prevent failure due to the mismatch between teacher methodology and expectations, and those of parents (Hu 2002; Nunan 2003). Challenges occur when school reforms do not conform to the process of learning, when knowledge is co-constructed between two or more people, with language as the most critical tool for cultural transmission (Vygotsky 1986). Furthermore, for cognitive change to occur, Vygotsky (1986) theorized the need for dialectical (cognitive) constructivism, which emphasizes interactions between persons and the environment. In instances where English is the predominant means of instruction and communication for curricular and pedagogical change, social interactions and cognitive change processes create tensions in home-school communications as cultural and language tools are compromised or even abstracted from interactions. Wertsch's (1991) approach to mediated interaction stresses the importance inherent in the cultural, historical and institutional context that affects mental functioning. A critical aspect of the approach is the cultural means that shape both social and individual processes. For parental involvement to happen comfortably and effectively, dialoguing is essential to parents working with teachers to develop common expectations and support student learning. The language gap between the community in Abu Dhabi and the English medium of the school, has meant that translators have been employed to bridge the language gap, although language barriers have caused a limit to communication during the reform. Since conditions are not yet fully developed in Abu Dhabi schools for seamless communication from home to school, children's achievement may be uneven (Gallagher 2011). Initially, literacy development will be impacted by a bilingual model of education Cummins (2000) found that significant positive relationships exist between the development of academic skills in the first and second languages. His common underlying proficiency hypothesis (Cummins 1979, 2000) posits that development in one language automatically enhances development in another. According to Gallagher (2011), what is not clear is the extent of such transfer in the case of languages that are linguistically dissimilar, as is the case of Arabic and English. Bialystok et al. (2005) found that similarity in scripts eases the acquisition of bi-literacy, yet there has been insufficient research conducted to gauge the ideal time to commence the teaching of literacy in languages with divergent scripts (Garcia and Baetens Beardsmore 2009).

In ADEC's bilingual model, teachers and parents need to be aware that children's progress in Arabic may be relatively slower (demonstrating a lag) initially, by around 3 to 4 years (Baker 2006). ADEC should consider qualifying bilingual classroom assistants to work with groups and individual children at risk of not achieving grade level expectations owing to bilingual linguistic demands (Baker 2014). Introduced in 2011, ADEC's Arabic curriculum is crucial as significant improvements in first language literacy will not happen unless there is a mechanism in place to improve Arabic language curricula, pedagogy and teaching materials. In addition, there is likely to be a "silent period" while young learners develop comprehension in English, so for kindergarten children, language production may well take some time to emerge, necessitating highly qualified, patient and supportive teachers (Krashen and Terrell 1983).

What is certain is that as ADEC continues to implement its NSM curriculum, it will be important to carefully monitor and evaluate all aspects of the approach. In 2006, the Grade 8 curriculum outcomes were unrealistic as in: "identify the point of view in texts and justify their interpretations; write well-structured texts in English for different purposes and audiences, and dealing with more complex topics; evaluate the organizational patterns and techniques used in challenging spoken texts" (ADEC 2006, p. 21). ADEC's on-going curriculum review however, has the aim of raising the bar as students learn and develop by incorporating research and state-of-the-art technologies. Immersion schooling has been successful internationally (Johnstone 2001). However, while ADEC has lengthened the school day, bilingual education takes a lot more time than monolingual education to reap rewards (Perez 2004). A partial immersion model will lead to bilingual competence, but even in a full immersion bilingual model of education, school use of an additional language is insufficient in itself for full bilingual development to occur (Garcia and Baetens Beardsmore 2009). It is crucial for both languages to be supported in the community, if the UAE's goals for a bilingual and bi-literate population are to be met (Gallagher 2011). Currently, Emirati children, in the main, speak Arabic outside school, and parental knowledge of English, societal limitations, and language sentiment in the community may mean there is inadequate support for children's bilingualism to fully develop. Children who have educated English speaking parents may experience an advantage because their parents can offer support in English (Blaik-Hourani et al. 2012). It is crucial that the NSM should be aware of the tensions and dissonances created, paying close attention to the issues embedded in its application for the first generation of bilingual learners and for the nation as a whole. On-going research should be carried out to identify and alleviate areas of tension and challenge, with a realistic time frame set for its NSM to deliver its full potential in meeting the nation's bilingual goals.

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