

## Instruction through the English Medium and its Impact on Arab Identity

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### Abstract

This study investigates the impact of English medium instruction on students' Arab identity and mastery of Arabic. The study, undertaken at two high schools in Abu Dhabi, UAE, examines students', teachers', and parents' perceptions about the effect of instruction in the English medium on students' identities and Arabic proficiency. A total of 140 students, 30 teachers, and 40 parents responded via survey questionnaires and structured interviews about the impact of English Medium Instruction (EMI). Results suggest that students are gradually becoming more competent in English and less fluent in Arabic. In addition, even though the students are aware of the fact that Arabic is part and parcel of the Arab identity, it no longer represents the core of their social identity. The study calls for the need to design a bilingual curriculum in which Arabic and English are used as media of instruction in an equitable manner, such that English neither displaces Arabic nor poses a threat to national identity and heritage.

**Keywords:** Arab identity, Arabian Gulf, English-in-Education; bilingualism, English as a medium of instruction, national identity, UAE

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## Introduction

Among many essential elements that constitute identity, language remains the major component, since it is present in the nation's history and is the symbolic system used by the members of a group to interpret the world (Masri, 2012). Language is embedded in a community's culture, and reflects people's behavior, thinking and understanding of oneself and the surrounding. The people's myths, values and traditions are expressed through their language. The language gains its value depending on who is using it, in which context and for what purpose (Ricento, 2010). Holes (2011) explains that language is an important tool which people use to create the sense of self and to present themselves. It is also the lens through which they are seen by others. In Holes' words: "Speech is the counterpart of how people dress" (p. 132).

It is thus no wonder that language plays a major role in shaping the identity of individuals and nations. Language is often seen as an element that needs to be preserved and protected from foreign influence. This issue has been raised by many scholars mainly due to the English language becoming the dominant medium of communication around the world. Having an official status in at least 75 countries worldwide, it is considered by many scholars as the *lingua franca* of the modern world and is the only hypercentral language among existing languages (de Swaan, 2001). This ascendancy has attracted the attention of language scholars as it is becoming more evident that it can have significant repercussions on learners' identity and sense of self.

In her analysis of language and identity, Norton (1997) strongly argues that educators should take the relationship between these two entities, language and identity, seriously. She postulates that speech, speakers and social relationships are inseparable entities. She believes that when language speakers interact verbally, they not only exchange information, but also engage in identity construction by organizing their perceptions of self, who they are and how they relate to the world. Norton adds that there is a social and historical relationship between the learners and the target language, which determines their willingness to learn and practice it. Such kind of relationship between the learners and the target language also determines the construction of their social identities, which are dynamic across time and space (Norton, (1997). Hornberger (2010) supports this concept by affirming that learning is the construction of the identity and not just the construction of the academic knowledge.

## Defining Identity

In recent years, interest in the concept "identity" has been on the rise. Many scholars have conducted studies which aimed at identifying the meaning of Individual Identity, Social Identity, and National Identity. One reason behind this sudden interest is the rapid spread of globalization and the English language as a *lingua franca*, which has gained a reputation as a threat to the identity of those whose mother tongue is not English. In Iran, for example, a study by Afghari et al. (2012) tackled the issue of changing identities due to the inculcation of foreign values through the English medium, curriculum and pedagogy. In Turkey, Atay and Ece (2009) investigate the impact of the Western culture on the Turkish identity, and concluded that it led to the identity crisis, since Turks are faced with the task of being recognized as a Western nation, or preserving their own Muslim identity.

But what is identity? To begin with, identity starts with the person's ability to answer the question: "Who am I?" In finding the answer to this question, people identify themselves as

independent individuals, thus, defining their individual identity. Erikson (1963) explores individual identity from a psychological perspective. He explains that the formation of personal identity starts at a very early stage in life, when the person is ready to recognize his or her individuality, away from the influence of the parents. Erikson identifies eight stages of identity formation. As a child, an individual starts forming his/her identity as soon as he/she gains confidence in his/her surroundings, and realizes that there is consistency and regularity in the experiences and the people who provide them. In this stage, the individual goes through the process of identification by developing the ability to form relationships with the others. As the person moves into adolescence, which Erikson considers a crucial stage for the development of the identity, he/she develops a sense of success and self-esteem, and is ready to gradually develop a sense of moral responsibility. In the stages that follow, the identity of the person dynamically changes due to the constant exposure to different experiences and responsibilities. Erikson believes that identity formation is a dynamic process throughout the person's life and is influenced by ideologies, vocations and relationships.

In addition to Erikson's theory about the individual identity, other studies and references provide a number of definitions, which clarify the concept. The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy defines the identity as follows: "those attributes that make you unique as an individual and different from others" or "the way you see of define yourself" (as cited in Spieberger & Ungersbock, 2005, p. 352). Atay and Ece (2009) describe individual identity as the construction of the ways people interpret the world and interact with their surroundings. In this view, people's identities determine their perspectives and evaluation of the world. Based on these definitions, it can be deduced that individual identity describes the traits, characteristics, and values that a person gains through life, and which distinguish him from other individuals.

While individual identity provides answers to the question: who am I?, social identity is seen as the answer to: Who am I as a member of my group, and in relation to the other groups? According to Erikson (1963), in seeking the acceptance and recognition from the others, a young person merges his individual identity with that of others, through committing to new relationships, which results in forging a social identity. Norton (1997) explains that social identity describes the relationship between the person and the society, and the concomitant values transmitted through social institutions such as workplaces, law courts, families, social services and teaching institutions. It is important to recognize that social identities are shaped in particular by political and economic contexts, and are affected by factors, such as race, religion, ethnicity, language, and culture. In such social contexts, individuals strive to maintain group distinction, dignity and historical discourses (Fearon, 1999).

In addition to emphasizing the importance of the individual and social identities, other studies have focused on identifying and exploring the concept of national identity. Suleiman (2003) contends that national identity does not grow naturally among the people who present it, but is rather an intellectual and historical construct. Based on this assumption, we can elicit the meaning of the national identity and its elements from the definition stated in the Oxford English Dictionary: "An extensive aggregate of persons, so closely associated with each other by common descent, language, or history, as to form a distinct race or people, usually organized as a separate political state and occupying a definite territory." Bloom (1990) defines national identity as the condition in which a group of people have made the same identification with

national symbols and have internalized the symbols of their nation. Smith (1991) explains that a nation is a named group of people who share five major characteristics. They are stated verbatim as follows: 1. a historical territory or home land, 2. common myths and historical memories, 3. a common, mass public culture, 4. common legal rights and duties for all members, and 5. a common economy with territorial mobility for members.

Suleiman (2003) argues that it is difficult to provide a scientific definition for the term national identity due to the complexity of the issue. However, He proposes that description of the nation and national identity should include the following key elements: a common language shared traditions, and religion. Suleiman provides further description of the nations and the national identity and distinguishes between two types: the political (or “old nation”) and the cultural nation (or “newer nation”). He cites Seton-Watson & Auty’s (1981, p.4) explanation of both types: in the political nation “the state came first, then national consciousness, and then the nation”, for the cultural nation, national consciousness came first, “then the nation and the nationalist consciousness, and last the state”. Regardless of the sequence in which the nations are formed, and despite of the variety of definitions, it can be concluded that identity encompasses a number of traits shared among the individuals of a community in ways that render them distinct from other societies and nations.

### **Arabs, Arabic and Arab Identity**

Patai (1983) and Barakat (1993) agree that Arabs are a group of people who share the same language, culture, sociopolitical experiences, economic interests, and a memory of their history. They live in Arabic countries and share common traditions and customs. Despite the fact that the Arab world is fragmented into political units, Arabs share a strong belief in the Arab brotherhood, unity and belonging to the Arab Umma (Patai, 1983). Patai (1983) adds that Arabs can be recognized by their supreme ethics and values, which are derived from Islamic teachings and pre-Islamic, nomadic ideals. He describes them as people with courage, generosity, hospitality, self-respect and honor, and considers these as some of the virtues that are constitutive of Arab identity. Islam is yet another trait which characterizes Arabs. Even though it is a religion of other non-Arab nations, Arabs consider themselves the originators of it, and were the ones who introduced it to the world (Patai, 1983).

On the other hand, Suleiman (2003) argues that being Arab does not necessarily mean being a Muslim or Semitic, or living in an Arab country, and argues that language is the most defining component of Arab identity. Salameh (2001) also agrees with the Arab nationalists in their definition of the Arabs, and quotes Al-Hussari who argues that: “Every person who speaks Arabic is an Arab. If he does not recognize his Arabness, we must look for reasons that have made him take this stand.” Furthermore, Suleiman acknowledges the role of the Arabic language as a symbol of the Arab identity since the pre-modern era. For him, Arabic is the language which embeds the Arab’s intellectual enterprises and is the language of their religious sources and Islamic theology (Suleiman, 2003).

Even though Arabic is considered a key component of the Arab identity, today it faces several challenges that threaten its existence. First, a number of speech forms or so-called dialects are being largely accepted and spoken in the Arab countries. Salameh (2011) argues that these dialects might not be Arabic at all, and are standing in the way of using the Modern

Standard Arabic. He believes that the use of different dialects and the influence of the foreign languages weaken Standard Arabic, and therefore lead to identity confusion in the Arab minds. He suggests that Arabic vernaculars be normalized and standardized in order to unify the national language.

Second, the Arabic language and identity have nowadays, more than ever, come under threat due to the wave of globalization and its attendant Western values and culture. Countries of the Middle East and North African (MENA) region consider English a necessary means of communication and an inevitable tool for development in different domains. While Arabic is seen as the language of cultural authenticity, localism, tradition, emotions and religion, English is associated with modernity internationalism, business, material status and secularism (Findlow, 2006). Therefore, English is widely used by Arabs in many aspects of their daily lives. According to Zughoul (2003), teaching English in the Arab world serves the purposes of the development sought by the Arabs. This is evidenced by the fact that more and more schools and institutions are using English as a medium of instruction. In the UAE, Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) has been implementing strategies to further enhance the use of English in both private and public schools. Belhiah and Elhami (2013) describe the current situation of the English language by saying that the UAE is showing increasing interest in educating young Emiratis in English, as it is the language of business, technology and science. However, they caution that this is happening at the expense of Arabic proficiency and suggest that decision-makers develop a bilingual curriculum “that is clearly designed to foster a sense of additive bilingualism in which English does not eclipse the Arabic language and marginalize its culture.” (p. 22)

It is such debates and controversies that this study seeks to address. The study is motivated by questions like: Have Arab students been disadvantaged by the English Medium Instruction (EMI) mandate? Is the impact on students' Arab identity always negative?; and finally, can bilingual education in Arabic and English be conducted in an equitable and “additive” manner (Lambert, 1980)? While this study cannot provide exhaustive or comprehensive answers to such complex issues, this research begins to address the impact of English as a medium of instruction on identity based on students', teachers' and parents' reported observations.

### **Data and Methodology**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of English as the medium of instruction on the identity of the Arab students in the UAE. To collect data, three surveys were designed to elicit students', teachers', and parents' views. The surveys were conducted in two private English medium schools in Abu Dhabi. The first group of participants was composed of 140 Arab male and female students in grades 8, 9, 10, and 11. Their ages ranged from 12 to 17. The second group of participants consisted of 30 Arab teachers. Their degrees include BA, BS and MA. The third group of participants included 40 mothers and fathers, all of whom were Arab and resided in Abu Dhabi.

The data collection took place in the third semester of the school year 2012-2013. Two schools were visited on two separate days, and with the permission of the administration, paper survey questionnaires were distributed to students and teachers by one of the co-researchers. As

for the parents' surveys, 11 surveys were collected from parents whose children are in grades 8 and 9 in one of the schools visited. Other parents were contacted via email and phone and given the paper survey questionnaires. All the participants were informed about the purpose of the study through the cover letter attached to the survey. They were also assured that their answers and identity would remain anonymous.

One questionnaire was designed for each group of participants in order to obtain their views. Each questionnaire consisted of three sections. Section 1 investigated students' linguistic preference. The participants were asked to choose one of the three options: Arabic, English or other (languages). Students, parents and teachers were asked to determine in which language the students preferred to read, to write, and to express their emotions. The three groups of participants were also questioned about the students' linguistic preference when using the Internet and conversing with their Arab friends. Students and parents had to determine the students' preference when listening to music, watching TV programs and speaking with their family members. In sections 2 and 3, the participants were asked to rate their agreement on a 1-5 Likert scale regarding the relationship between the English curriculum and Arab identity on the one hand and western identity on the other.

## Data Analysis and Discussion

### Linguistic Preference

In the first section, the participants were asked to state their views regarding which language they preferred when performing different linguistic functions, such as reading, surfing the internet, and expressing emotions. The findings exhibited in table 1 show that the majority of the students (85%) prefer to read in English, while 90% of the students preferred to write in it *in lieu* of Arabic. Interestingly, 92.2% of the parents and 100% of the teachers agreed with this view. Some teachers said that the students were only interested in reading English novels. They believed that their students lacked the knowledge of Arab writers and Arab literature. On the other hand, the students linked their preference to read and write in English to their daily exposure to English through the English curriculum, and to the fact that they were encouraged to use English at all times.

On the other hand, when asked to choose the preferred language to express their feelings and emotions, half of the students (50%) chose English, whereas the other half (50%) preferred Arabic. In addition to that, only 45.7% of the students said they spoke English with their Arab friends. In their comments, the students supported their choice of communication in Arabic by saying that this reinforces their Arab identity. Many chose the word "proud" to describe their feeling towards their Arabness. Some students linked their use of spoken Arabic to their Islamic practices and to the desire to preserve their culture and traditions.

The parents' and the teachers' responses regarding this part were slightly different (see tables 2, 3). 65% of the parents and 73.3% of the teachers believed that the students expressed their feelings and emotions in English rather than Arabic, while 52.5% of the parents and 70% of the teachers believed that the students spoke with their friends more often in English. The teachers further supported these findings by saying that the students used English in their daily interaction with their peers through games and playtime. One parent said that the students were being peer-pressured into using English as a way to express their Western identity, which is becoming very popular among the youngsters.

When asked which language the students used when speaking with their family members, the majority of the students (90.0%) and parents (72.5%) agreed it was Arabic (see tables 1, 2). The main reason behind this, as reported by both groups, was the role that parents play in encouraging their children to speak Arabic at home. Parents affirmed that their constant guidance and teachings at home geared their children towards using Arabic rather than English. One parent pointed out that, in order to teach their children Arab and Islamic values, it is necessary to speak Arabic. In addition, many parents and students said that their religious practices reinforced the use of Arabic at home (e.g., performing prayers, reading the Quran, and fasting in Ramadan)

To summarize, it seems that students are growing up in a linguistic situation characterized by diglossia. Depending on the situation, the students are capable of alternating between English and Arabic. However, in spite of the parents' encouragement to use Arabic, the majority of students showed a preference for English. Whether at school, with friends, or even during their leisure time, English is the language they find easier when communicating and expressing their thoughts. Schools' regulations, the English curriculum and peer-pressure are seen by many participants as some of the reasons that reinforce the use of English and therefore might eventually lead to poor mastery of Arabic.

**Table 1. Linguistic Preference - Students' Views**

	Arabic	English	Other
1. In which language do you prefer to read?	15.0%	85.0%	0.0%
2. In which language do you prefer to write?	10.0%	90.0%	0.0%
3. In which language do you find it easier to express your feelings and emotions?	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%
4. Which language do you prefer when using the Internet?	1.4%	98.6%	0.0%
5. Which language do you prefer when listening to music?	18.6%	81.4%	0.0%
6. In which language do you watch TV programs?	29.3%	70.7%	0.0%
7. Which language do you use when speaking with your Arab friends?	54.3%	45.7%	0.0%
8. Which language do you use when speaking with your family members?	90.7%	9.3%	0.0%

**Table 2. Linguistic Preference - Parents' Views**

	Arabic	English	Other
1. In which language does your child prefer to read?	7.5%	92.5%	0.0%
2. In which language does your child prefer to write?	5.0%	95.0%	0.0%
3. In which language does your child find it easier to express his or her feelings and emotions?	35.0%	65.0%	0.0%
4. Which language does your child prefer when using the Internet?	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

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5. Which language does your child prefer when listening to music?	20.0%	80.0%	0.0%
6. In which language does your child watch TV programs?	30.0%	70.0%	0.0%
7. Which language does your child use when speaking with his/her Arab friends?	47.5%	52.5%	0.0%
8. Which language does your child use when speaking with his/her family members?	72.5%	27.5%	0.0%

**Table 3 Linguistic Preference - Teachers' Views**

	Arabic	English	Other
1. In which language do students prefer to read?	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%
2. In which language do students prefer to write?	3.3%	96.7%	0.0%
3. In which language do students find it easier to express their feelings and emotions?	26.7%	73.3%	0.0%
4. Which language do students use when speaking with their Arab friends?	30.0%	70.0%	0.0%
5. Which language do students prefer when using the Internet?	0.0%	100.0%	0.0%

### The English Curriculum and Arab Identity

In this section, the participants were asked to express their opinions regarding the potential impact of the English curriculum on different elements of the students' Arab identity, including history, heritage, literature, culture and values.

The findings show that only 14.3% agreed with the statement that the English curriculum exposed them to Arab history and heritage. This view is further supported by the parents, since about two thirds disagree or strongly disagreed with the statement. Similarly, only 16.7 % of the teachers indicated agreement with the statement. In their comments, many students pointed out that the English curriculum lacked lessons which taught them the history of the Arabs. Some parents supported this by stating that their children had no knowledge of the Arab history and heritage. A parent pointed out that her daughter knew the names of Arab countries in English only.

Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of the students, parents and teachers conveyed their disagreement with the statement that that the English curriculum provide students with sufficient exposure them to Arab literature. A teacher wrote in her comments: "My students don't know most Arab writers". In one of the classes we attended, the teacher asked the students to name five Arab and five Western authors. The students failed to mention any Arab authors, while a long list containing the names of the Western authors was supplied in no time. Many parents attributed their children's lack of knowledge and interest in Arab literature to their poor

knowledge of Arabic. One parent explained that since they preferred to read in English, it was only natural that they chose to read English instead of Arabic literature.

In their responses to the statement whether the English curriculum exposed students to the Arab culture and values, 40% of the students and parents disagreed with the statement, while 17.9% of the students and 27.5% of the parents strongly disagreed. The teachers shared the same opinion. 36.7% disagreed and 16.7% strongly disagreed. Only 16.9% of the teachers actually believed that the English curriculum exposed the students to Arab culture and values (see table 6). In their comments, both the parents and the teachers expressed their worries that the students were embracing Western culture in their daily lives.

In another statement, the participants were asked whether the students were encouraged to use Arabic in school. 39.2% of the students revealed that they were not. This disagreement was also made manifest in the parents' and the teachers' responses. More than half of the participants in these two groups also believed that the students were not provided with sufficient encouragement to use Arabic in school (see tables 5, 6). On the other hand, the majority of the student's responses showed that they were encouraged to celebrate National, Arab and Islamic festivities. The students' results were confirmed by the agreement of the parents (52.5%), and the teachers (93.4%), who believed that the school did encourage these celebrations (see tables 5, 6).

The findings regarding the impact of the English curriculum on the students' Arab identity were also consistent with the parents' and teachers' responses to the previous statements in that they reflected the failure of the English curriculum to accommodate aspects of the Arab identity alongside its culture and values. 36.4% of the students disagreed and 20.0% of them strongly disagreed that the English curriculum reinforced their Arab identity (see table 4). Two thirds of the parents (70.0%) and almost half of the teachers (46.7%) agreed with the students. Less than 10% of them believed that the English curriculum reinforced the students' Arab identity (see tables 5, 6). It is also worth mentioning that even though in their written responses some students stated that the English curriculum did not affect their Arab identity in any way, none of them supported the idea that this curriculum might have positively reinforced it.

To conclude this section, the results suggest the English curriculum did not seem to reinforce the students' Arab identity since it failed to expose them to Arab culture, history, heritage, and values. Moreover, the schools' regulations, which discouraged the use of Arabic in the classroom, seem to be detrimental to the schools' significant efforts to reinforce the students' Arab identity by holding festivities that promote Arab, national and Islamic values.

**Table 4** *The English Curriculum and Arab Identity - Students' Views*

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English curriculum exposes me to the Arab history and heritage.	0.0%	14.3%	41.4%	25.0%	19.3%
2. The English curriculum exposes me to the Arab literature.	0.0%	9.3%	22.9%	42.9%	25.0%
3. The lessons taught in the English curriculum expose me to the Arabic	1.4%	10.0%	30.7%	40.0%	17.9%

	culture and values.					
4.	The English curriculum reinforces my Arab identity.	2.1%	10.0%	31.4%	36.4%	20.0%
5.	In school, I am encouraged to use Arabic.	7.9%	13.6%	39.3%	22.1%	17.1%
6.	In school, I am encouraged to celebrate National, Arab and Islamic festivities.	42.1%	40.0%	15.0%	1.4%	1.4%

**Table 5. The English Curriculum and Arab Identity - Parents' Views**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English curriculum exposes my child to the Arab history and heritage.	0.0%	12.5%	22.5%	40.0%	25.0%
2. The English curriculum exposes my child to the Arab literature.	0.0%	5.0%	22.5%	40.0%	32.5%
3. The English curriculum exposes my child to the Arabic culture and values.	0.0%	7.5%	22.5%	42.5%	27.5%
4. The English curriculum reinforces my child's Arab identity.	0.0%	7.5%	22.5%	40.0%	30.0%
5. In school, my child is encouraged to use Arabic.	7.5%	10.0%	30.0%	32.5%	20.0%
6. In school, my child is encouraged to celebrate National, Arab and Islamic festivities.	20.0%	32.5%	37.5%	5.0%	5.0%

**Table 6. The English Curriculum and Arab Identity - Teachers' Views**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English curriculum exposes my students to the Arab history and heritage.	0.0%	16.7%	36.7%	23.3%	23.3%
2. The English curriculum exposes my students to the Arab literature.	3.3%	10.0%	23.3%	36.7%	26.7%
3. The English curriculum exposes my students to the Arabic culture and values.	3.3%	13.3%	30.0%	36.7%	16.7%

4. The English curriculum reinforces my students' Arab identity.	3.3%	6.7%	43.3%	30.0%	16.7%
5. In school, my students are encouraged to use Arabic.	6.7%	13.3%	23.3%	33.3%	23.3%
6. In school, my students are encouraged to celebrate National, Arab and Islamic festivities.	56.7%	36.7%	6.7%	0.0%	0.0%

### The English Curriculum and Western Identity

In this section the participants were asked to express their views regarding the potential role of the English curriculum in inculcating Western history, heritage, literature, culture and values into students' thinking. The results show that 79.3% of the students, 80% of the parents and 83.4% of the teachers believed the English curriculum exposed the students to Western history and heritage (see tables 7, 8, 9). In their written responses, some students claimed that the contents of the social studies and history courses were predominantly about the West. Some parents pinpointed the fact that the students were instructed to seek information from Western references in order to complete projects and classroom requirements, thus increasing their exposure to Western history and culture. Others believed that the students were only interested in reading English books and novels. In their opinion, their choice of English literature was based on their ability to understand the language easily. In addition, the students indicated that they found the English literature more interesting and entertaining.

The participants also agreed that the English curriculum exposed the students to the Western culture and values. While almost half of the students supported this idea, more than 80% of the parents and teachers strongly agreed with it (see tables 7, 8, 9). Many participants expressed their concern about this state of affairs in their written responses. One teacher wrote: "the English curriculum is creating the sense of belonging to the Western culture". Furthermore, a student stated the following: "The English curriculum constantly imposes the Western culture on me, and infuses it into my thoughts to the point where I no longer feel I am in an Arab environment".

Due to the constant exposure to all that was Western in the curriculum, approximately half of the students believed they had been embracing Western identity. Though 37.9% of them remained neutral, only 15% disagreed. According to many students, the English curriculum geared them towards adopting the Western way of thinking, behavior and how they viewed the world. A teacher described the students as being "Westernized" due to the contents of the English curriculum. It is worth mentioning that 57.5% of the parents 73.3% of the teachers agreed with the students' point of view that the English curriculum encouraged the students to adopt some form of Western identity.

In the statement that followed, the participants rated their extent of agreement regarding the students' use of English in school. In their responses, more than 80% of the participants agreed that the students were constantly encouraged to use English in school. In their written responses, some students reported that this use was a major catalyst in their tendency to use English rather than Arabic. Some parents stressed the fact that the students were constantly asked to use English in school. In their opinion, this had a negative impact on their children's mastery of Arabic. As a matter of fact, several teachers admitted they encouraged the students to use

English frequently even during recess and extra-curricular activities. A teacher made another point by referring to the issue of recruiting native speakers of English as teachers, a matter which left the students with no other choice but to converse exclusively in English.

In the final statement, the participants were asked whether the students were encouraged to celebrate Western festivities, such as Halloween and Christmas. The findings indicated that 34.2% of the students believed this was the case. 36.6% of the students disagreed, while 27.5% remained neutral. Around 30% of the parents and teachers agreed with the statement. Even

though many parents suggested that the celebration of the Arab and Islamic occasions should be more frequent, the schools considered all the occasions similarly important, and encouraged the students to participate in these celebrations.

**Table 7. The English Curriculum and Western Identity – Student' Views**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English curriculum exposes me to the Western history and heritage.	26.4%	52.9%	13.6%	5.0%	2.1%
2. The English curriculum exposes me to the Western literature.	40.0%	42.9%	12.1%	3.6%	1.4%
3. The English curriculum exposes me to the Western culture and values.	22.1%	55.0%	17.1%	3.6%	2.1%
4. The English curriculum reinforces my Western identity.	13.6%	33.6%	37.9%	10.7%	4.3%
5. In school, I am encouraged to use English.	42.1%	36.4%	16.4%	2.9%	2.1%
6. In school, I am encouraged to celebrate Western festivities (e.g., Halloween, Christmas, etc.).	7.1%	27.1%	32.1%	25.0%	8.6%

**Table 8. The English Curriculum and Western Identity - Parent's Views**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English curriculum exposes my child to the Western history and heritage.	32.5%	47.5%	12.5%	7.5%	0.0%
2. The English curriculum exposes my child to the Western literature.	37.5%	50.0%	12.5%	0.0%	0.0%
3. The English curriculum exposes my child to the Western culture and values.	30.0%	45.0%	12.5%	12.5%	0.0%
4. The English curriculum reinforces my child's Western identity.	17.5%	40.0%	27.5%	12.5%	2.5%

5. In school, my child is encouraged to use English.	60.0%	30.0%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
6. In school, my child is encouraged to celebrate Western festivities (e.g., Halloween, Christmas, etc.).	12.5%	32.5%	27.5%	25.0%	2.5%

By and large, the above findings suggest that the English curriculum plays a major role in promoting some form of Western identity amongst students via heavy exposure to Western culture, values, and literature. In addition, the fact that in schools, the students celebrated different Western occasions seems to be in contradiction with the schools' efforts to reinforce their Arab identity by promoting the Arab, national and Islamic traditions. Furthermore, the schools' role in encouraging the students to use English rather than Arabic while in schools could result in low levels of Arabic proficiency.

**Table 9. The English Curriculum and Western Identity - Teachers' Views**

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. The English curriculum exposes my students to the Western history and heritage.	36.7%	46.7%	16.7%	0.0%	0.0%
2. The English curriculum exposes my students to the Western literature.	46.7%	43.3%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
3. The English curriculum exposes my students to the Western culture and values.	26.7%	63.3%	10.0%	0.0%	0.0%
4. The English curriculum reinforces my students' Western identity.	23.3%	50.0%	23.3%	3.3%	0.0%
5. In school, my students are encouraged to use English.	60.0%	36.7%	3.3%	0.0%	0.0%
6. In school, my students are encouraged to celebrate Western festivities (e.g. Halloween, Christmas, etc.).	3.3%	23.3%	33.3%	30.0%	10.0%

## Conclusion

In their endeavor to achieve global standards of modernization and development, UAE policy makers have decided to switch gradually from Arabic- to English-medium instruction. However, many educators and policy makers have recently concern that Arabic and Arab identity are under threat due to the excessive use of English and the influence of Western culture and values. Therefore, they argue that there is an urgent need to preserve both entities. This study has sought to find out whether there is a decline in the use and mastery of Arabic and due the English-medium instruction and whether this has an impact on students' Arab identity.

First, students have indicated a strong preference for the use of English in their day-to-day activities. By being exposed to English rather than Arabic at school, through media and internet, the students are becoming more competent in the former and less fluent in the latter. The study also reveals that in comparison with the number of the English periods offered, the number of Arabic periods is not sufficient for the students to master Arabic. Although the findings indicate that the students are involved in a diglossic situation, in which Arabic is used with family members and English at school, English is gradually becoming their first choice. It is used not only to communicate with their teachers and friends, but also to surf the internet, carry out leisure activities, and to express feelings and emotions. As a result, students are becoming more and more fascinated with the Western culture. This fascination is exhibited in their choice of Western means of entertainment and appreciation of Western values. According to many adolescents, to be Western is tantamount to being “cool”.

Second, the study reveals that students do not receive sufficient exposure to materials that promote Arab values and reinforce Arab identity. Even though the students are occasionally introduced to the aspects of Arab identity during Arabic classes and school celebrations, this exposure is eclipsed by the abundance of Western cultural and historical references in the English curriculum. The latter does not include any materials about Arab history, literature, culture and heritage. Furthermore, the English curriculum excels in meeting the students' expectations by promoting pedagogical practices based on critical thinking and problem solving, a matter which fulfills their cognitive needs and broadens their horizons. Besides, the English curriculum provides a wide range of programs, which facilitate students' access to higher education. For instance, obtaining international certificates such as The International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) or The International Baccalaureate (IB) secures better academic opportunities in North American universities.

Finally, the study has highlighted the issue of identity crisis, which the adolescents face due to the contrasting values conveyed through English and Arabic. Granted, the dual use of Arabic and English and the exposure to two different cultures, many students have pointed out, provides them with a wide spectrum of values and perspectives. According to them, a mixed identity provides effective ways to deal with a variety of situations in a flexible and open-minded manner. However, many of the values are contradictory, which creates a sense of confusion and loss vis-à-vis which values to privilege or adopt. Several students expressed a sense of loss and detachment from Arab identity. Even though the students are aware of the fact that the Arabic language is part and parcel of Arab identity, it no longer represents the core of their social identity.

The study has a number of theoretical and pedagogical implications, which can contribute to persevering Arabic and reinforcing Arab identity. First, there is no denial that the Gulf countries' endeavor to achieve global standards of development in different sectors and to adapt to modernization and globalization forces make it necessary to adopt English, though not exclusively, as a medium of instruction. At the same time, it is crucial that the students remain attached to their indigenous language and Arab identity. To meet these objectives, a complete bilingual system should be implemented. The education system should continue to adopt EMI, but should also ensure that the students master Arabic. Therefore, administrators in the English medium schools should emphasize the importance of Arabic and Arab identity in their mission and vision, and set regulations which allow more frequent use of Arabic in school.

In addition, the contents of the Arabic courses should provide sufficient knowledge about Arab culture, heritage, history and literature. These courses should also be revised and modified in ways that promote critical thinking and problem-solving to meet the students' needs and expectations. Teachers of Arabic should be provided with continuous professional development opportunities to enable them to apply novel approaches to language teaching, and therefore increase students' interest in the Arabic language and its heritage.

In conclusion, a new curriculum should be introduced to meet international education standards, yet maintain the Arab culture and its values. This curriculum should be designed to cater to the needs of the Arab students, and restore their attachment to Arabic and its heritage. In so doing, schools should strive to recruit bilingual teachers who can teach effectively in the English medium, without compromising students' indigenous culture and societal values.

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