Robert Kirkpatrick *Editor*

English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa

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Language Policy

Volume 13

The last half century has witnessed an explosive shift in language diversity not unlike the Biblical story of the Tower of Babel, but involving now a rapid spread of global languages and an associated threat to small languages. The diffusion of global languages, the stampede towards English, the counter-pressures in the form of ethnic efforts to reverse or slow the process, the continued determination of nation-states to assert national identity through language, and, in an opposite direction, the greater tolerance shown to multilingualism and the increasing concern for language rights, all these are working to make the study of the nature and possibilities of language policy and planning a field of swift growth.

The series will publish empirical studies of general language policy or of language education policy, or monographs dealing with the theory and general nature of the field. We welcome detailed accounts of language policy-making – who is involved, what is done, how it develops, why it is attempted. We will publish research dealing with the development of policy under different conditions and the effect of implementation. We will be interested in accounts of policy development by governments and governmental agencies, by large international companies, foundations, and organizations, as well as the efforts of groups attempting to resist or modify governmental policies. We will also consider empirical studies that are relevant to policy of a general nature, e.g. the local effects of the developing European policy of starting language teaching earlier, the numbers of hours of instruction needed to achieve competence, selection and training of language teachers, the language effects of the Internet. Other possible topics include the legal basis for language policy, the role of social identity in policy development, the influence of political ideology on language policy, the role of economic factors, policy as a reflection of social change.

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Robert Kirkpatrick

Editor

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Editor
Robert Kirkpatrick
Gulf University for Science & Technology
West Mishref, Kuwait

Contents

Contributors

Muhammad M.M. Abdel Latif Faculty of Graduate Studies of Education, Cairo University, Giza, Egypt

Amir Abou-El-Kheir Independent Researcher/Scholar, Nice, France

Ferdows Aghagolzadeh Department of Linguistics, Tarbiat Modares University (TMU), Tehran, Iran

Sajjadullah Al-Hawsawi King Saud Bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Khalid Salim Al-Jardani Khalid Al-Jardani for Educational Consulting and Quality Assurance, Muscat, Oman

Abed Aloreibi Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Ajdabiya, Agdabia, Libya

Hussain Al Sharoufi English Department, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Mubarak Al-Abdullah, Kuwait

Fiona S. Baker Emirates College for Advanced Education, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Osman Z. Barnawi Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

Robert Bianchi Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar, Doha, Qatar

Samira Boukadi CERT, Higher Colleges of Technology, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates

Michael D. Carey School of Education, Faculty of Science, Health, Education and Engineering, University of the Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs, QLD, Australia

Halil Ibrahim Cinarbas Independent Researcher, Gaziantep, Turkey

Hossein Davari Department of English Language, Damghan University (DU), Damghan, Iran

Mohammed Errihani Purdue University Northwest, Hammond, IN, USA

Rabia Hos Independent Researcher, Gaziantep, Turkey

Anwar Hussein - Abdel Razeq Birzeit University, Birzeit, Palestine

Yasemin Kırkgöz Faculty of Education, University of Çukurova, Adana, Turkey

Robert Kirkpatrick English Department, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Mishref, Kuwait

Paul MacLeod Assiniboine Community College, Brandon, MB, Canada

Iair G. Or School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel

Elana Shohamy School of Education, Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv-Yafo, Israel

Salah Troudi Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

Marta Maria Tryzna English Department, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Mubarak Al-Abdullah, Kuwait

Introduction: English Language Education Policy in MENA

Robert Kirkpatrick and Osman Z. Barnawi

Abstract This chapter discusses some of the research perspectives–alongside issues of national language policies—and considers the need of English language ability for educational and economic goals; the impact of the increasing use of English in the region on culture identity and other languages; current English education policies and national curriculums and teacher education, pedagogies, and evaluation. While English has become a major element in the spread of political, social and educational norms as well as nurturing economic globalization, giving impetus for the study of English throughout the MENA region, this has also led to lessening of the importance of other foreign languages, such as French due to the belief in the value of English as the international language. There is also some resistance from conservative parties who fear that English education may erode traditional culture and religion. Moreover, the allocation of resources for the study of English is uneven among the various countries- partly due to the unequal economic situations and the general state of education in each country.

Keywords English language policy • Education policy • Education in MENA

1 Language Policy Research

> .....policy is never simply implemented but is interpreted, mediated and recreated. This is so because the practitioners whose task is to implement the policy come with their own contexts, value system, histories and experiences. Once again interpretation is a matter of struggle, dispute and compromise as different interests get prioritized or marginalized (Bowe et al. 1992: 22).

The nature of policy in educational settings can be better realized when researchers, educators, and practitioners examine it through various levels, including historical, ideological, socio-cultural, political, economic, and institutional perspectives.

R. Kirkpatrick (✉)
English Department, Gulf University for Science and Technology, Mishref, Kuwait
e-mail: Ltaeditor@gmail.com

O.Z. Barnawi
Royal Commission Colleges and Institutes, Yanbu, Saudi Arabia

At the same time, putting policy into practice in a given social and educational context is a matter of struggle, fears, tensions, negotiations, and resistance, owing to the various competitive interests.

The introduction to the last volume, *English Language Education Policy in Asia* (ELEPA*)*, discussed both traditional and contemporary approaches to research in the field of language policy and planning (Kirkpatrick and Bui 2016). It was noted that while earlier approaches to language policy and planning had focused on identifying national language problems, finding a solution and assessing the success of the policy, recent researchers in the field (e.g., Ricento and Hornberger 1996; Paciotto and Delany-Barmann 2011; Canagarajah 2011; Shohamy 2006; Tollefson 2013) have taken a critical approach and are concerned with the ramifications of language policies on social justice, economic equality, identity and language endangerment (e.g., Coleman 2011). There is also now more micro-level involvement and interest in classroom practices and teacher roles (see McCarty 2002; Shohamy 2010) and the ways communities react to language education policies. There are also approaches to English education policy research that have paid close attention to "on the ground" analysis of how global, social, political and economic forces shape and reshape certain discourse communities (Davis 2014; Davis and Pyak 2015).

The chapters in this new volume, as with ELEPA, include both recent and historical research perspectives–alongside issues of national language policies—and consider the perceived need of English language ability for educational and economic goals; the impact of the increasing use of English in the region on culture identity and other languages; current English education policies and national curriculums and teacher education, pedagogies, and evaluation.

2 Globalization, Economy and English Language Spread

As discussed by Tsui and Tollefson, globalization relies on technology and English; and to keep up with these changes "all countries have been trying to ensure that they are adequately equipped with these two skills" (2007, p. 1). With this in mind, English has become an essential element in the spread of political, social and educational norms as well as nurturing economic globalization. At the same time, these elements have given a massive impetus for the study of English throughout the world, including the MENA region. English facilitates access to markets and services, aids in "managing the flow of resources" (Heller 2010, p. 103) and is considered by some governments as an accessory in the solving of social problems and poverty and even as a unifying force nation wise (Tsui and Tollefson 2007; Coleman 2011). These perceived benefits have led to many governments in the region introducing English into the curriculum at increasingly lower ages, together with a degrading of the importance of other foreign languages, due to the belief in the overarching value of English as the international language as well as the language of 'global academic excellence' (Sapiro 2010) and 'corporatization of higher education institutions' (Piller and Cho 2013).

Within higher education in many Middle Eastern countries English ability has become synonymous with success in academic disciplines and an ambitious student is often advised to gain either a degree at an overseas institution – or at least study in a university where English is the medium. Faculty members who publish in recognised English academic journals are seen as competing on the world stage: something highly valued in recruitment and promotion within tertiary instituting in the region. Governments in the Arabian Gulf countries

> have, at varied levels, adopted an English medium instruction policy, imported English medium educational and training products and services, franchised international programmes, offered generous financial support and incentives to overseas institutions to establish branch campuses locally, and undertaken major initiatives worth billions of dollars to reform and internationalize their HE systems (Le Ha and Barnawi 2015, p. 4).

The usefulness of English is so accepted that parents pressure institutions to provide English education and even at preschool level successful private kindergartens offer 2–4 year olds immersion or at least bilingual English programs throughout the region. Of course it is not only national governments and locals behind the push towards English. As noted in the ELEPA volume English has been advantaged through its use in international schools, multinational companies, Hollywood movies and the internet (Appleby 2010; Heller 2010; Gray 2012; Luke 2011). Seargeant and Erling (2011) and Phillipson (2012) have noted this furtherance of English is also assisted by the USA and Britain (the British Council has centers in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Palestinian Territories, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen, Algeria, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and UAE) (see also Kirkpatrick and Bui (2016) for more accounts of these issues).

Overall the success of English is closely allied with its value as a means to employability, professional mobility, social usefulness and fulfilment. With the increase of social media and the web, the growth of English as a second lingua franca in the Middle East is bound to continue into the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, it should be acknowledged that the spread of English education within the MENA region has several implications. English education can acerbate social disparity due to, for instance, the ability of wealthier citizens to enrol their children in English programs from an early age. This may leave those who do not have the advantages of an English education limited in their social life and being employable in lower paying jobs than their English fluent peers. As Tollefson and Tsui (2004, p.2) note, the

> Medium-of-instruction policy determines which social and linguistic groups have access to political and economic opportunities, and which groups are disenfranchised. It is therefore a key means of power (re) distribution and social (re) construction, as well as a key arena in which political conflicts among countries and ethnolinguistic, social and political groups are realized.

Latif in this volume explains that:

> the MOE needs to find more innovative policies to close the gap between English education in public and private schools on the one hand and within public schools on the other. The existence of such parallel educational systems characterized mainly by the type of English instruction they provide can create future gaps in social interaction and communication, and jobs accessibility.

In reality, however, it is quite challenging to find a balance due to diverse interests and equally diverse results, and the perceived need for English across the MENA countries has created a shadow market of English education in which hundreds of private language institutes "have opened branches ….to offer around the clock English classes" (Le Ha and Barnawi 2015, p. 12), financially challenging parents, families and the society at large.

3   Weakening of Culture and Local Languages?

The Asia volume discussed the "possibility of taken-for-granted English language policies not only to weaken the vitality of local languages and cultures but to arouse linguistic conflict and confusion among parents, local communities, and children" (Kirkpatrick and Bui 2016, p. 6). However, while almost every country in Asia has a unique native language, the contexts of the countries in this volume are rather different, with Arabic as the native language of most of the population in all countries except Israel and Iran. One might expect that this dominance of Arabic language in the region would have a mitigating effect on the "hegemony" of English.

Nonetheless patterns among the MENA region emerge which are quite similar: there is still concern about the sway of English, a fear of dilution of culture, and indeed confusion among communities and educators about the usefulness of English and how and when it should be introduced and taught. Of course, as with the countries in ELEPA volume, there is also recognition of the economic advantages of developing English skills and the need for each county to compete in a global economy. There are also major differences in attitude to English within different groups (and between individuals) in each country and between each country within the region.

3.1   The Status of English in the Arabian Gulf Region

Today, "the desire to learn English as a national mission and to internationalize their HE has been clearly articulated in the Gulf countries' strategies, educational policy reforms and initiatives" as Le Ha and Barnawi (2015, p. 4) argue. Guttenplan (2012) writes about the issues in universities in Qatar where faculty are finding media students need special classes in Arabic to bring them up to a professional level, and notes that many younger Gulf Arabs use "Arabizi", switching between Arabic and English languages (2012). Kinninmont (interviewed in Guttenplan) finds, due to the need to use English to communicate with the massive numbers of expatriate workers, that Arabic is becoming almost a second language in the region, and that "wealthy and educated youth increasingly speak to each other in English" (2012, p. 10). In the UAE, Baker (this volume) notes that parents sometimes have problems talking with the teachers of their children (who are now taught in English medium schools).

In Saudi Arabia, Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi (this volume) explain that English is a medium of instruction in most colleges and universities, especially in the sciences. However, there is resistance from conservative parties, with regard to including English in the primary school curricula, who are fearful that this may "accelerate the Westernization of Saudi society" (Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi, ibid).

3.2   The Status of English Language Outside the Arabian Gulf Region

Even outside of the Arabian Gulf region–where there are not the same massive numbers of expatriate workers (who often rely on English as lingua franca)—there are still major issues related to the increasing use and educational promotion of English. Given the fraught nature of Iran's relationship with western powers over the last few decades, English education in Iran is complicated. Aghagolzadeh and Davari note the "ambivalence" of the state toward English and that it is perceived to some extent "as a medium of cultural invasion of the West". Yet, at the same time English "is officially recognized as one of the two essential elements of literacy in the third millennium" (Aghagolzadeh and Davari, this volume). In Libya Ibrahim and Carey cite Youssef (2012) who suggests that Libyans display a negative attitude towards learning English, due to some anti-American feelings (this volume). When "Libyan students practice English communicatively, their peers do not take them seriously. It is most often perceived as showing off, so it is therefore socially taboo to use English in public" (Ibrahim and Carey, this volume). In Tunisia, Troudi and Boukadi discuss the debate between calls for globalization, openness, and modernity, which enhances the western languages, French and English, as languages of science and technology, on the one hand, and Arabisation, which emphasizes Arabic in order to preserve the traditional culture and identity on the other (this volume). In Israel English is widely used and almost a necessity for success in business and career. However, sections of the society have concerns about its threat to culture. Ultra-Orthodox Jewish men (but not women), are often less proficent in English than their countrymen due to an emphasis on religious subjects during their schooling. Or and Shohamy write that "Many Haredi men discover years after finishing school that they need to know English, and then take courses in order to catch up with their secular peers" (this volume).

4   English Education Policies

The Gulf region has long been suffering from high unemployment or underemployment and most have a high reliance on foreign workers (Hvidt 2013). In response Gulf region countries are, to varying degrees, attempting to change their petroleum

based economies into knowledge based economies, often with English as a key component: plans that have become even more pressing with the drop in oil prices since 2015. Massive oil money surpluses have allowed them to import highly qualified education providers and also to fund their national's tertiary study abroad: factors that are supporting growth in skill levels in English. Of course money alone cannot guarantee educational progress and the variety of outcomes between the Gulf countries are documented in the individual chapters.

The diversity among non-Gulf countries in the region is more pronounced due in part to economic pressures. Following the worldwide trend (Canagarajah 2005; Menken and Garcia 2010) many MENA counties have replaced or are replacing grammar based curricula with communicative language teaching – although this has not been fully implemented due in part to the importance of national exams which tend to be focused on grammar in most MENA countries.

4.1   Teacher Quality

In Egypt, Latif writes that "expanding and enriching in-service teacher training programmes is another requirement for successful English education in Egypt (this volume)". And the same applies to most countries in the region–although the Gulf counties have been able to mitigate this effect due to the attractive salaries and working conditions for expatriate educators– leading to a large influx of skilled teaching faculty at all levels of education. Needless to say, the benefits of this policy are unevenly spread from country to country, and within each country.

4.2   Testing

Language testing the MENA region has long been controversial. The close relation between the successful implementation of a curriculum and washback from testing is well established. Bianchi, for instance, writes about Palestine that "revision of the *tawjihi* exam to reflect more global and authentic use of English in order to stimulate positive testing washback" (this volume). In Libya "the objective of students and educators in Libya is for students to complete their exams with the highest possible scores (Ibrahim and Carey, this volume). And Latif suggests that "classroom practices are expected to remain unchanged as long as the assessment procedures are not changed to test communicative skills" (this volume). Most national English exams throughout the region evaluate communicative ability only indirectly (a major reason that large scale proficiency exams such as IELTS include separate writing, speaking and listening components, ensuring direct evaluation of each skill). However, despite the clear advantages of more direct testing it is somewhat difficult for exam boards to add these skills to their exams due to the need for large

numbers of trained raters, special technology (in the case of listening tests), and additional time if testing speaking ability. These practical testing issues do not mean that large scale direct testing of communicative ability can never be implemented but it does mean that exam boards need to be open to innovative solutions.

5 Final Remarks

The chapters in this volume show the diversity of English education policy and outcomes and provide a current view of the tensions inherent in the implementation of language policies across the region. The mix of politics, cultures and education are absorbing for academics, and even the interested layman will find much worthy of study.

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English Education Policy in Bahrain – A Review of K-12 and Higher Education Language Policy in Bahrain

Amir Abou-El-Kheir and Paul MacLeod

Abstract The Kingdom of Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy that has a long history dating back over 5000 years. It is the only island-state in the Gulf. It is also the smallest, and has the lowest population, of all the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) States. Due to Bahrain's long political and trade relationship with Britain (which continue in the new globalized economy), English has been an important part of Bahrain's economic survival. As a result, English is an integral component of the Bahraini education system and is now taught from the first year of schooling. It has also become the medium of instruction in many higher education institutions in the Kingdom. This chapter examines the history of English education in Bahrain, it's current developments, and what the future landscape of English language policy in Bahrain may resemble. The chapter also offer suggestions on how to address some of the language and policy challenges that Bahrain is facing. Overall, many of the English language policy decisions in Bahrain are showing signs of success in both the K-12 and higher education sectors.

Keywords Bahrain • Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) • Language policy • Education policy • English as a medium of instruction • K-12 • Higher education

A. Abou-El-Kheir (✉)
Independent Researcher/Scholar, Nice, France
e-mail: a.abouelkheir@outlook.com

P. MacLeod
Assiniboine Community College, Brandon, MB, Canada
e-mail: drpaulmacleod@gmail.com

1 Introduction

1.1 Brief Overview of Bahrain's Development as a Nation

Bahrain has been a strategic location for trade since the Dilmun period more than 5000 years ago (United States. Department of State 1996). From the third to the sixth Century, the island–then known as Tylos–was part of the Persian Empire. From the sixth Century until the ascendency of the Al Khalifa clan in 1783, it was variously under Persian, Omani and Portuguese control. A crucial point in Bahrain's development was the conversion of a majority of the population to Islam in the seventh Century (Al-Baharna 1968; Global Edge 2014). However, despite Bahrain's ancient history, the emergence of Bahrain as a nation is relatively recent. The Al Khalifa's signed the first of a number of treaties establishing the peaceful relationship between Bahrain and Britain in 1820 (Al-Baharna 1968). Bahrain became a British protectorate in 1861 and remained that way until independence in 1971 (Commins 2012, p.103).

1.2 Current Demographics and Political Situation

Bahrain's current political situation is profoundly influenced by the historical factors surrounding the consolidation of the Al Khalifa's dynastic rule in the nineteenth century. The Al Khalifa's maintained a feudal system whereby the Sunni sheikhs, and related tribes who were encouraged to immigrate to Bahrain, were given dominion over (and collected taxes and tribute from) the indigenous Sh'ias who worked in the date palm plantations and other agrarian roles. This power and status imbalance – which is in stark contrast to the far more homogeneous nature of society in the other Gulf States– is one of the root causes of the political strife that periodically erupts in modern Bahrain (Commins 2012, p.103).

Bahrain is a constitutional monarchy; it converted from Emirate to Kingdom in 2002. The population of approximately 1,281,332 is predominately Muslim. 46 % of the population is Bahraini with 54 % non-Bahraini. (CIA Factbook, Bahrain 2013).

1.3 Bahrain's English Education Policy

English is used extensively in Bahrain. All students are required to learn English, which is taught throughout primary, intermediate, and secondary schools, and is offered at many institutions of higher learning. The government of Bahrain clearly recognizes that having students learn English is extremely beneficial to its economy and its future success.

1.3.1   K-12

Bahrainis are introduced to English in their first year of schooling, which they start when they are 6 or 7 years old (Rixon 2013, p. 15). This is a fairly recent policy since English was first taught at the primary level (3rd grade) in 2000 (Al-Sulaitai and Ghani 2001, p. 20). Before English was introduced, at the primary level, a pilot was performed in 1996/1997 to see if English could successfully be included in primary and intermediate schools (Al-Sulaitai and Ghani 2001, p. 86). After its success, English was formally introduced. Children at the primary level are taught a range of skills including, but not limited to, writing, reading, listening, identifying detail, skimming, understanding dialogues, and using grammar. At the end of the primary cycle (6th grade), students are tested on these skills (Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training [QAAET] 2012, p. 47). Many Bahraini parents, those who are able to afford it, send their children to private language institutes so they can improve their English skills; this is a lucrative business in Bahrain (Rixon 2013, p. 66).

English education continues for students at the intermediate and secondary levels. Along with Arabic, mathematics and science, English has been described as one of "the four core subject areas" for students in secondary schools (QAAET 2012, p. 32). At the secondary level, English concepts are reinforced and students are introduced to more difficult texts. In theory, this system should prepare high school leaving Bahrainis for post- secondary studies, but in practice, high school students are often not well prepared and lack the proper training for university studies (QAAET 2012). Whatever the causes, the, general lack of preparation of Baharaini students for higher education and the workplace coupled with low scores on both national exams and international tests (e.g., TIMSS), is a key driver of ongoing educational reform in the Kingdom (QAAET 2012).

1.3.2   Higher Education

At many universities and other institutions of higher learning in Bahrain, Arabic is the official language. Nevertheless, many technical and medical colleges have English as their official language (QAAET 2010). As a result, students without the required English skills to enter these programs tend to gravitate toward the humanities. The majority of Bahrainis choose to study education, humanities and social sciences (60 %) as opposed to medicine, science, engineering, and other technical subjects (25.1 %) (World Bank 2008). The University of Bahrain requires incoming students who have scored lower than 90 % in high school English classes to take a semester long English orientation course; however, university staff members have assessed this course as inadequate (QAAET 2010) For the sake of the economic development of the country, Bahrainis– in general– need to acquire better English skills.

2   The Development of Bahrain's K-12 System

2.1   *Early Development*

2.1.1   Beginnings to 1933

As with most countries in the Middle East, the Kuttab or Koranic school were the only educational option for centuries. Shirawi (1987) notes that the records of the early development of education in Bahrain are both incomplete and contradictory.[1] What is agreed upon is that Bahrain's K-12 system started much earlier than in the other Gulf States. From there, differences arise. The government of Bahrain maintains that a group of merchants and prominent citizens known as the "Education Committee" opened the first school, Al-Hidaya Al-Khalifia School for Boys in 1919 (Bahrain, MOE n.d.). This is technically the start of the public school system in Bahrain. However, other sources (Shirawi 1987; Al-Tajir 1982) indicate that the first school established in Bahrain was under the auspices of the Arabian Mission of the American Dutch Reform Church which offered instruction for girls and boys.[2]

The early development of K-12 schooling in Bahrain (roughly from 1892 to 1930), was marked by the same sectarian divisions, and other conflicts, that persist today. Shias refused to participate in, or allow their children to attend, school taught by Sunnis. The Education Committee opened a second boy's school in 1926. A girl's school was opened in 1928 despite the strong protest of religious leaders. Eventually, in the 1929–1930 school year, a boy's school (the fourth school in Bahrain) was opened for Shia students. A separate Education committee comprised of Shias was formed to run the school. The government subsidized all of these schools to various degrees. Finally, as the two education committees weakened under the stress of internal conflict and government pressure, the government assumed full control of the Education Committee schools in 1930 (Shirawi 1987). However, the Shia schools were still separate. Shia leaders strongly opposed the amalgamation of schools and withdrew their children in protest when this was initially attempted in 1930. After several years of government insistence, all public schools were finally amalgamated under government control in 1933. The start of a modern public school system in Bahrain then dates from the initial takeover of the Sunni Education Committee Schools (Bahrain, MOE n.d.) or the amalgamation of all schools under government control (Al Shirawi 1987).

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[1] This historical summary depends heavily on Shirawi's work as the original sources she used were unavailable to the current researchers.

[2] It should be noted however, that the Al Hidaya school was the first school opened by Bahrainis for Bahrainis.

2.1.2   1933–1955 A Period of Growth

During this time, the number of schools and pupils expanded. Village schools were opened starting in 1935 and two technical classes were begun in 1936, which eventually grew in to a technical college. By 1939, the number of students in Bahraini schools reached 1589, nearly triple the number of students in 1930 (Al Shirawi 1987). In 1940, the first secondary school in Bahrain was established in Manama. Its curriculum emphasised the teaching of English language skills even though Arabic remained as the primary language of instruction (Al Shirawi 1987, p. 71–72). Growth of schools continued despite the problems of supplies caused by World War 2 and by a chronic lack of qualified Bahraini teachers. In 1945, the first Bahraini Director of Schools, Ahmed Omran was appointed head of Schools for Boys. By 1947, the education system had expanded to 13 boys' schools with 1750 boys, staffed by 82 teachers while 5 girls' schools, housed 1288 girls, taught by 65 teachers. Just 3 years later, in 1950, the number of male student had jumped to 3282 boys while the number of female students showed a more modest increase to 1763. There was a phenomenal increase in student numbers between 1950 and 1955. By 1955, the number of boys attending school had almost doubled again to 7500 boys in 24 schools with 314 teachers. Similarly, the number of girls attending school nearly doubled to 3386 girls in 11 schools with 125 teachers. (Al Shirawi 1987, p. 79–82).

2.1.3   1956–1986: Further Growth and reform

From the late 1930's through the 1960's, the issues plaguing the Bahraini K-12 system remained constant: (1) Difficulty dealing with the huge expansion of the school system over a relatively short period of time.; (2) The rapid expansion led to a shortage of qualified Bahraini teachers and difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified foreign teachers; (3) Lack of finances and (4) Inadequate school buildings. To remedy this situation, evening training classes featuring English and fundamentals of pedagogy, among other subjects, began in 1951. The British Council also started offering evening English classes and periodic teaching workshops during this time. In addition, the government began sending selected teachers for training both within the MENA region and beyond.

By 1956, the Bahraini education system had grown dramatically, but it had also become fragmented with different directors for the boys', girls' and technical schools. They also followed different imported systems with Infant (primary) schools following the Syrian or Lebanese curriculum; the boy's schools' the Egyptian curriculum; the girls' schools the Lebanese curriculum and the technical schools a combination of British and Egyptian curricula modified for the local context. In order to run this somewhat fragmented system more efficiently, an Education Council was established and the systems were officially integrated in 1958 (Shirawi 1987). In the 1960s, the focus shifted to developing secondary education. In 1962, total students enrolled in schools rose to over 23,000. To help alleviate the ever-growing shortage of teachers, two teacher training colleges were opened: one for

men in 1966; one for women in 1967. English language studies were part of the core curriculum for both these colleges.

By independence in 1971, the total number of students reached over 50,000 (Nahkleh 1976 as cited in Pandya 2006, p.56). In 1974 and 1975 new laws were passed making schooling to the end of middle school both free and compulsory for all Bahrainis, which again increased enrollment. During this time, oil prices rose sharply and a program of expansion and new school construction and curriculum reform was instituted. In the early 1980s reforms were made to the secondary system to better align graduates' skills with industry needs. In 1986, the total number of enrolled students reached 85,867 or 43, 987 males; 41,880 females (Shirawi 1987).

2.1.4   1987–Present

In the mid-1980s another round of education reform was undertaken, this time with the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO) and Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization (ALESCO) consultation. A two semester system was adopted and the secondary schooling stream was divided into several streams with a focus on technological, vocational and scientific subjects (Shirawi 1987). Growth of student population slowed during this period: from 1991 to 1999, the number of students rose from just over 100,000 to nearly 130,000 (Al-Sulaiti and Abdul Ghani 2001). From 2000 to 2013 student numbers stayed constant at around 130,000 (Bahrain, MOE 2009).

At the end of the twentieth Century, the structure of Bahrain's education system was divided into four parts: Cycle 1, ages 6–8 and Cycle 2, ages 9–11 are primary; Cycle 3, ages 12–14 is Basic (Intermediate) and Secondary school (not named as a Cycle), is ages 15–17. The system has remained in a similar format from then until the present day (Al-Sulaiti and Abdul Ghani 2001; The Report 2010). While English education is a priority for Bahrain, as it strives to develop a knowledge economy and to expand its role as a regional and international hub for banking and other services, the rhetoric of the strategic plans (Economic Vision, 2030; various reports to UNESCO, 2001, 2011; the King's Project on E-learning) emphasize student preparation for work; the importance of Arabic and Islamic values, the necessity of good citizenship and loyalty to the King and the need to improve information technology skills. English is, by default, under the category of necessary skills for success. The reasons for this are discussed in the next section.

2.2   Limitations and Disadvantages of Bahrain's K-12 Policy Choices

Unfortunately, as noted at the end of the previous section, while the importance of a high-functioning education system is a key aspect of the Bahrain 2030 Economic Vision, English education policy is not separately or explicitly discussed in the

policy documents surrounding the Bahrain 2030 Economic Vision or in the myriad of documents explored during extensive research for the preparation of this chapter. Due to the rhetoric around other aspects of the curriculum it might seem as though English is not currently an area of concern for the MOE in Bahrain.

There are a variety of explanations for this seeming omission. It may not be emphasized in policy documents as Bahrain (with close ties to Britain since the 1820s) has long used English—along with a variety of other languages—to facilitate trade and thus it is deemed unnecessary to elaborate a strategy. It may also be the case that it is politically expedient to emphasize the teaching of Arabic and Islamic studies rather than English.

Nevertheless, English education policy is a concern as evidenced by the emphasis Bahrain's MOE has placed on English in teacher training programs (Haslam 2011) and the move to start teaching English from Grade 1. The Bahrain Teacher's College (BTC) is taught by bilingual Arabic/English professors, and requires completion of a Foundation year (of which English is the core component) for students who are unable to meet the GPA entry requirements for English (Haslam 2011; BTC 2013). The disadvantage of this lack of written policy on English language for K-12 students is that it contributes to the crisis of education that Bahrain – along with most of the other Gulf States—is facing: years of development and reform has yielded a system wherein its young people are not prepared for the challenges of higher education and meaningful private sector employment. A significant part of this under-preparedness is the lack of high level English skills needed for interacting effectively with a largely expatriate workforce and for study in technology and science-related fields and medicine which are taught in English at the tertiary level.

The education system in Bahrain, and the country as a whole, is facing challenges that are historical and long-standing. Bahrain is facing simmering conflicts between the minority ruling Sunnis and the majority Shia population as it has for generations (Commins 2012). Similarly, the same problems identified in the K-12 system in the 1950s (lack of resources, shortage of qualified teachers, high drop-out rates) still plague the system today (Commins 2012). Expansion pressures may have eased, resulting in a reduced need for expatriate teachers. Regrettably, as Kapiszewski (2000) notes, graduates of the teacher's college at the University of Bahrain were employed mainly in the public education system and were not well trained enough to be employed at private schools contributed to an unemployment problem, which is particularly acute among the young and highly educated. Foreign teachers still dominate the teaching profession in Bahrain in areas such as information technology, science and English. This chronic problem was one of the driving forces behind the reform of teaching training in the Kingdom (Bahrain, MOE 2012).

In terms of English language education, Bahrain needed a reform plan that would address the shortcomings in the K-12 system. As will be discussed, in the strengths section below, Bahrain has implemented—and stayed with—a long-term education reform initiative.

2.3   The Strengths of Bahrain's K-12 System

As the historical overview shows, Bahrain's K-12 system was established much earlier than anywhere else in the Gulf. Although the expansion was relatively rapid, in Gulf terms, its development was quite slow as it grew over several decades, compared to the rapid expansion of the K-12 systems in neigboring countries such as Qatar and the UAE. As such, Bahrain has been able to maintain a more stable system and avoid ongoing cycles of radical reform. Further, it was one of the first Gulf States to integrate girls' schooling into the system and educates girls and boys equally. In addition, the decision was made to maintain Arabic as the medium of instruction in the K-12 system which avoided much of the difficulties and controversies that have troubled the UAE and Qatar in their attempts to introduce English as the medium of instruction in the K-12 system.

The emphasis on vocational and technical education at the secondary level has helped a portion of the local populace choose an option in secondary school that better fits their needs that allows them to avoid exhausting time attempting a university education, which they currently lack make them successful at the tertiary level. These are weak positives to be noted as strengths.

Despite its much earlier start, Bahrain is still burdened with an education system that is not adequately preparing its young people for success in higher education and the workforce in the twenty-first century (Deloitte, 2013; Kapiszewski 2000; Bahrain, MOE 2008; World Bank 2008). A result of this situation is that the major strength of the Bahrain K-12 system is, ironically, the ongoing reform process. Beginning with the Education Law of 2005 and continuing with the Bahrain Economic Vision 2030 in 2008, education reform in Bahrain has been holistic, which has allowed them to avoid the never-ending cycle of new reforms, previously mentioned, that have resulted in many of its Gulf neighbors and other school systems around the world (Abou-El-Kheir and MacLeod 2014; Bishop and Mulford 1999).

The National Education Reform Initiative (NERI) was launched in 2008 as part of the Bahrain 2030 Economic Plan. The first four projects launched in 2008 were: 1. The opening of the Bahrain Teachers College (BTC); 2. A school improvement programme –first implemented at Umm Kalthoom Intermediate Girls School; 3. the official opening of the new Bahrain Polytechnic (BPT) and establishment of the Quality Assurance Authority for Education and Training (Baby 2008; QAAET 2012). As noted, the BTC is part of an effort to improve K-12 teaching in the Kingdom and has a strong commitment to ongoing teacher professional development as well as initial teacher training. Teachers in Bahrain's K-12 system have to undergo 90 h of MOE approved professional development per year as the government strives to raise standards (Haslam 2011).

The QAAET's mandate is to review and report on education providers at all levels and to monitor National examinations. Work is ongoing on a National Qualifications Framework, and the development of a National Curriculum is ongoing. The QAAET has now reviewed all schools in the Kingdom and has begun the

second round of evaluations. While some schools have regressed, a higher percentage of schools are being rated outstanding based on a scale of Outstanding, Good, Satisfactory, and Inadequate. Schools that score at the Inadequate level develop an improvement plan in concert with the QAAET and are subject to frequent review visits until they are re-examined (QAAET 2012). Currently students sit National exams at grades 3, 6, and 9. In 2012, there was also a pilot exam for grade 12. Areas of concern are that scores were overall lower than in 2011 and that girls—as they have every year at every skill and level—outperformed boys. The QAAET plans to research the gender imbalance in scores to seek solutions. (QAAET 2012).

3   The Development of Bahrain's Higher Education System and Policies

3.1   A Brief History of Higher Education in Bahrain

The history of higher education in Bahrain can be broadly conceived as two currents (Karolak 2012, p. 20–21). The first began in the late 1960s when the Teachers College (1966) and Gulf Technical College (Bahrain Polytechnic) (1968) – the first institutions of higher education in the country – were established. Other institutions that were founded in this phase include the College of Health Sciences (1976), the College of Arts, Science and Education (1979) and the Arabian Gulf University (1979) (Madany et al. 1988, p. 411, as cited in Karolak 2012, p. 20). The University of Bahrain (UoB) was the result of the merging of Bahrain Polytechnic and the College of Arts, Science and Education in 1984. Karolak describes the founding of UoB as the culmination of the first wave of higher education in the country.

The second wave of higher education in Bahrain began in the 2000s. Karolak notes, "12 private institutions were established in the last decade" (2012, p. 20). This wave can be best understood by analyzing the broader worldwide trends of the higher education industry that were taking place at this time, especially insofar as these trends resulted from the World Trade Organization's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). GATS opened the doors of higher education to international markets and Bahrain was the first Arab country to lift the restrictions of 'importing or exporting educational services' (Bashshur 2007 p.17). This agreement led to great benefits, but also produced several challenges. The advantages and difficulties of this document vis-à-vis Bahrain will be analyzed in Sect. 3.3 and 3.4.

3.2   Foreign Education Systems and Higher Education Policies

In Bahrain, since private and international institutions of higher learning must focus on academic programs that address the economic needs of the country before they can acquire accreditation, humanities are largely undervalued whereas applied

sciences are strongly emphasized. Another emphasis of these universities is to help their graduates develop the needed English language skills to meet market demands (Karolak 2012). These policies are based on two main determinations.

Firstly, the Ministry of Education considers that training students in science and technology will be more beneficial to Bahrain's economy than allowing institutions to devote more resources to the humanities (Karolak 2012). Secondly, the Ministry of Education also reports that students in Bahrain prefer to study humanities rather than applied/technical subjects (Karolak 2012). In a recent doctoral study conducted in Qatar (Abou-El-Kheir 2014), university students voiced a similar preference for Liberal Arts studies. However, as the majority of jobs on the market are in technically related fields, graduates generally do not have the requisite skills to compete for positions (Karolak 2012).

Additionally, private sector employees have been hesitant to hire Bahraini nationals due to a lack of English language competency. So far, the international universities have been able to meet the nationalization objectives in some private sector fields and have made positive strides in others (The Report: Bahrain 2010; Wilkins 2011). Consequently, these policies (of favouring the hard sciences to the soft sciences, and the adoption of foreign and private universities) shape the landscape of higher education in the country by attempting to ensure that programs in the humanities do not skew the balance of the education sector. This trend, however, is not unique to Bahrain and other Arab countries. For example, Reilly (2010) discusses a similar decline in degrees granted in liberal arts fields, and a greater focus on professional degrees, in the United States.

With its emphasis on developing analytical skills, which help students to become independent thinkers, the Western education style stands in contrast to the recent education trend in the Middle East, which esteems memorization and the importance of recognizing hierarchy rather than critical thinking (G-Mrabet 2010; AHDR 2003). Specifically, numerous institutions in Bahrain have adopted Western styles of education because they believe that there is a direct correlation between Western education and students' success and their ability to solve problems (G-Mrabet 2010).

In addition to the twelve private and international universities that have opened in Bahrain since 2000, the proportion of international students at universities in Bahrain has risen to 21 % (Hamzah 2013). This percentage is significantly higher than the proportion of international students in universities in the UK (14 %), Germany (13 %), and the US (4 %) (Hamzah 2013). The influx of international students in recent years, which will be explored below, has had both positive and negative effects on Bahrain.

3.3 The Accreditation Policy

Bahrain's accreditation policy, along with its focus on the applied sciences and of bringing in foreign and private institutions, is another significant aspect of their higher education policy. The primary purpose of the accreditation policy is to

prevent the educational landscape from being saturated with programs in the humanities as these programs are not aligned with the Kingdom's economic goals (The Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain n.d.). This in turn encourages students to pursue scientific, technological, and industrial careers, all of which, as earlier mentioned, are advantageous to the nation's economic growth in the modern world. Through a Royal Decree in 2005, the Higher Education Council was created to oversee the accreditation policy. The Council's responsibilitites include granting educational licences and setting and monitoring performance and outcomes (Al-Khalili 2008; Higher Education Council n.d.)

As mentioned above, one of the principal motivations for importing Western style education is that it is perceived to be more conducive to yielding scientific discoveries and advancing technologies whereas the existing education trends in the Arab world are 'highly didactic, teacher-directed, and not conducive to fostering analytical free thinking' (Faour 2011). The hope is that this switch will inspire students to become lifelong learners, and encourage them to develop the necessary skills needed to become contributing members of their countries' (G-Mrabet 2010). Scientific facts are discovered by testing known theories, coming up with creative ideas, and meticulously analyzing data. New ways of thinking emboldens students to be critical of information, to test it, to engage in dialogue with their teachers, and to be innovative. All of these skills and characteristics are essential for citizens in a nation that emphasizes the applied sciences and a knowledge-based economy (Griffiths and Maraghi 2011; Faour 2011).

Karolak (2012) notes several advantages of the GATS' policies in Bahrain, including a wider variety of education options and innovative collaboration. One of these results is that Bahrain is setting itself up to become an international education hub. This is being done through a partnership between Bahrain Economic Development Board (EBD) and Kuwait Finance & Investment Company (KFIC). The plans include establishing scientific laboratories, foreign branch campuses and a world-class research center (Dou and Knight 2014). This in turn has lead to some positive results. For instance, out of the 32,327 students that were enrolled in higher education in 2012, 7000 were international students (Higher Education Council website n.d.). Having a higher percentage of expatriate students exposes nationals to new ideas and cultural perspectives, which often enriches students' experiences and has the potential to foster international cooperation.

Overall, there remain some challenges. Many of the initiatives by prospective institutions have been delayed indefinitely (Dou and Knight 2014). The reasons for this are unclear; however, it may be due to the current political situation and unrest in the Kingdom, the many instances of lack of academic freedom in higher education recently expressed (discussed below in Sect. 5.2) or a combination of these and or other concerns the invited universities may have.

3.4 Limitations of Bahrain's Higher Education Policies

In general, the accreditation policy in Bahrain is a positive policy that is meant to foster the country's economic development; however, it has its limitations. This policy may lead to the impression that the majority of the nation's educational budget should be used to cultivate the sciences rather than the humanities. This presupposition is misleading for the simple reason that development in the scientific and technological spheres implies an ability to effectively communicate with colleagues, researchers, scientists, engineers, etc. Therefore, language and communication studies as well as other liberal arts are equally fundamental to the economic sustainability of nations. Many institutions (and scholars) support teaching liberal arts subjects and contend that they provide the needed tools to survive and thrive in a modern society (Reilly 2010) Accordingly, although focusing on skills needed for a successful labour force is a step in the right direction, policy makers, legislators, and educators need to open for further debate and study, the advantages given to institutes that stress the applied sciences over the humanities. To echo Faour (2011), 'while necessary and important, this emphasis on the "technical" aspects misses a basic human component'.

Additionally, the emphasis on Western models of education should be tempered by the realization that attention to one's cultural roots is imperative for the flourishing of a nation. For this reason, it must be remembered that traditional educational methods are not entirely without merit, and it can be argued that some elements of these methods are necessary. After all, Western countries also emphasize memory and hierarchy (i.e. in connection to their elected representatives, historical figures and heads of state) in their cultural, social, and historical studies. It is imperative that national educators at certain times and in certain contexts use traditional methods of education so as to protect the country's identity.

According to Juliana G-Mrabet, there have been numerous instances in which foreign educators have imposed their Western perspectives, norms, and biases onto their Middle Eastern students (G-Mrabet 2010). Expatriate educators need to be sensitive to the cultural values and norms of their Bahraini students.

Further, although, as discussed above, having a large international student body has many benefits, it does raise concerns over the quality of educational standards and consumer rights (Martin 2007). In addition, if it has not done so already, the presence of international students may engender a desire for Bahrainis to study abroad. While this is not problematic in and of itself, due to the expenses involved, it could potentially lead to a situation in which "access to transnational education" would be "limited to privileged social classes," thereby deepening social stratification (Martin 2007). One possible solution to mitigate this problem would be for the government to expand its merit-based scholarship program to Bahrainis who wish to study abroad, which currently only funds ten students (Crown Prince's International Scholarship Program n.d.).

3.5   Bahrain's Higher Education Policies Compared to Its Closest Neighbours

While Bahrain's policies are similar to its GCC neighbours (Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait), there are discernable differences in Bahrain's educational performance and those of other GCC states, as well as how much the respective governments contribute to public education. The issue of emulation of Western educational practices is the same in the other Gulf countries (and thoughout most of the Arab world). However, because of the higher percentage of international students at Bahraini universities, the advantages and disadvantages of having an international presence on Bahrain's campuses are accordingly more pronounced than on the campuses of its neighbours.

One of the differences between Bahrain and some of the other GCC countries is the amount of money the government invests in its public education sector. Bahrain's expenditure on education was reported as 2.6 % of its GDP in 2012 (The World Factbook). This percentage is similar to that of Qatar that spent 2.5 % (2008). In contrast, Saudi Arabia spent 5.1 % (2008) of its GDP on education, Oman 4.3 % (2009), and Kuwait 3.8 % (2006). Generally speaking, around 5 % or more of developed countries' GDP is devoted to education. While the percentage of Bahrain's GDP devoted to education could be increased, it is important to realize that simply increasing a nation's GDP expenditure on education will not solve its problems. If Bahrain's funding of education is gradually increased, it is imperative that the government/Ministry of Education use these funds strategically to achieve the educational goals of becoming 'A first rate education system [that] enables all Bahrainis to fulfil their ambitions' and to 'provide Bahrainis with the skill, knowledge and values they will need to become employees of choice for high-valued added positions', as laid out in the Economic Vision 2030 (The Economic Vision 2030 for Bahrain n.d.).

Despite the relatively low percentage of GDP that Bahrain devotes to education, its academic performance is generally better than the performance of the rest of the GCC. According to a 2006/2007 report of the World Economic Forum, Bahrain scored higher in every single higher education related index than Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (World Economic Forum 2006, cited in McGlennon 2006, p. 3). Among its surrounding geographical counterparts, Bahrain contains a healthy educational system, but when one compares Bahrain to other countries on a global scale, a different story emerges. According to Sulaf Zakharia, "Bahrain needs to upgrade its capacity in university-industry research collaboration (where it now ranks 124th [out of 148 participating countries])…and the quality of its research institutions (120th)" (Zakharia 2007, p. 156). Though from a global perspective, the challenges Bahrain's higher educational system faces seem daunting, when compared to other countries in the Gulf, it contains many positive features which can be built upon.