



Language policies in education in Qatar between 2003 and 2012: from local to global then back to local

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Abstract

The State of Qatar, in cooperation with the RAND Corporation, launched in 2002 an ambitious educational reform and development plan, *Education for a New Era*, which included, among other things, the instating of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in mathematics, science, and technology in the K-12 system. From the start, the reform plan came under fire locally on grounds related either to ideological concerns or to implementational practicalities. Results of students in all grades on national examinations, which the Supreme Educational Council (SEC) oversaw, showed that a very small percentage of students (8–20%) had mastered the set learning outcomes in any of the main four subjects (Mathematics, Sciences, English, and Arabic). These results showed clearly that the reform initiative had failed to deliver on promises of improved student performance (Kirkpatrick and Barnawi, in: Kirkpatrick (ed) *English language education in the Middle East and North Africa*, Springer, Switzerland, 2017). In 2012, these perceived failures led the SEC to issue a decree reinstating Arabic as the language of instruction in grades K-12 in schools as well as at Qatar University in all areas of social sciences. The present study examined the problems that had caused the failure of the reform initiative through surveying, by means of structured interviews, the opinions of teachers at independent, public, and international schools in addition to the opinions of some SEC officials; the total number of interview hours was 34 conducted with 24 interviewees. The study identified the following issues as factors that had actively contributed to the demise of the experiment of using EMI in mathematics, science and technology: attitudes of stakeholders; teachers' qualifications and preparedness to take up such a daring task; the complexity of the context of teaching; and the manner of introducing the reform agenda.

Keywords Language policy in education · English as medium of instruction · Arabic sociolinguistics · Language as a human right, language and identity

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*I love the Arabic language and prefer having these subjects taught in Arabic, but I respect the government directives, as I am an employee of this government.
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Introduction

The State of Qatar, in its efforts to reconstruct the national identity in such a way that new generations of Qatari citizens could function effectively locally, regionally, and globally, has launched in 2001 a very ambitious educational reform plan, *Education for a New Era (EFNE)*. The plan involved generating standard-based curricula in four basic subjects (Arabic, English, Mathematics, and Sciences) and, most importantly for the purposes of this study, having English replace Arabic as the medium of instruction in mathematics, sciences, and technology in the K-12 system of education. However, the decision to adopt English as a medium of instruction (EMI) came at a time when people –laymen, scholars, policy-makers, and educators–were starting to express concerns about the future of the Arabic language in light of the various socio-cultural transformations in Qatari society. The first concern related to how the presence of large numbers of expatriates in the country, with their diverse languages and cultural traditions was exposing Qataris to new traditions and practices that may be alien to the conservative Muslim Qatari society. The second concern related to how the increase in domains of use of the colloquial variety of Arabic in areas such as teaching, media news and entertainment programs had weakened the value and prestige of MSA, especially in the eyes of young Qataris. The third concern related to how the expansion of foreign languages, especially English, into new domains of use had intensified feelings of insecurity about the Arabic language and represented a throwback to the colonial days where English ruled supreme. Of special concern for everyone was seeing English competing with the mother tongue, especially among young people and professionals, as a tool of communication in a wide variety of domains, ranging from simple everyday conversations, to social media messages, to professional discussions and conversations in the field of business, medicine, banking, and technology. Against the backdrop of these real or imagined threats to the Arabic language, the Qatari Supreme Educational Council (SEC) introduced *EFNE* and decided to put it into action immediately with the help of the RAND Corporation.

As soon as the plan became a classroom reality, stakeholders started noticing there were many gaps, hurdles, and serious issues associated with its implementation. Though it was obvious that the plan was not working well, those in charge kept assuming that these problems were normal occurrences as part of the growing and settling pains. However, as indications that the plan was on a downward slide increased, more voices of resentments and resistance got in newspapers to direct their sharp criticism of the plan, from conception to implementation. The criticisms centered on three major issues: the top-down manner in which *EFNE* was conceived, the lack of advancement and improvement of students' performance, and the perceived threat to the Qatari Arab cultural and linguistic identity. As close examination of the situation by the SEC left no doubt that the plan was a failure, the SEC

decided to retract its decision regarding EMI and to go back to Arabic as medium of instruction (MOI). What has gone wrong and caused such a well-publicized promising reform plan to fail? Where would the responsibility for this failure lie? Why has the SEC stopped the experiment in its entirety and so abruptly? What are the lessons learned from this experiment for language policy research and practice? These questions are the object of this study.

The main thesis of this study is that essential educational reform initiatives, such as the *EFNE*, in a complex multilingual society like that in Qatar, could succeed only if the decision is a shared one by all stakeholders and not a top-down decree. Furthermore, as the devil resides in the details of implementation, adequate preparations should be made, involving all stakeholders and taking into account the logistical, cultural, sociolinguistic, economic, and educational peculiarities of the community. A culturally sensitive vital issue like the EMI in the educational system of multilingual societies would certainly generate a great amount of insecurity and possible resistance and lack of cooperation, consciously or unconsciously. The objections would be mainly due either to ideological concerns or to practicalities of implementation. An EMI language policy decision is naturally more controversial in Qatar and other Arab countries because of the great esteem and loyalty bestowed on the “sacred” Arabic language in this part of the world, a situation rarely equaled elsewhere. The local population in Qatar, as in other Arab countries, view the mother tongue, Arabic, as a source of great pride and a symbol of individual, social, and cultural identity. The community will vehemently resist any perceived threat to Arabic, especially by a foreign colonial language, and this resistance will become more vociferous if the use of the foreign language proves to be ineffective.

The following sections include theoretical framework; review of the literature; background of the *EFNE* initiative; and shift in language policy.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical approach followed in looking at the issue of medium of instruction in Qatari schools draws on the critical social theory that promotes human freedom in all its forms and attempts to investigate hegemony and oppression in their many forms, including the linguistic form (Pennycook 2010; Phillipson 1992; Ricento 2009). It also draws on critical discourse analysis that views language as a form of social interaction where societal power relations are established and reinforced through language use (Fairclough 1995, 2003; Jaworski and Coupland 2002; Wodak 2001). This critical attitude to language planning and policy in general, and to EMI in particular, incorporates critical analysis advocated by language scholars (Bourdieu 1991; Hornberger 2009; Lippi-Green 1994; Ricento 2000; Tollefson 2009). Furthermore, it incorporates elements from postmodernism and notions of linguistic rights and language ecology (Cummins 2000; May 2005; Tollefson 2009). Cummins’ Theory on the role of language in academic achievement claims that, by using the learners’ first language as the language of instruction and assessment, learners can easily acquire academic skills because they would understand concepts better and perform better on examinations than they would if they learn through the

medium of a second language. Finally, the approach followed draws on the concepts of language ideology and authority to explain how policy decisions are formulated and reformulated (Milroy and Milroy 2012; Armstrong and Mackenzie 2013).

The application of this critical approach to the EMI language policy and its abandonment after less than 10 years of experimentation provides a detailed critique of the various perceived failures and shortcomings of the policy. The critique will include the failure of the policy to deliver the promised improvements in mathematics, science, and English language; its discrimination against low socioeconomic groups and its failure to provide equal access to quality education to all; and its failure to expect opposition by the immediate stakeholders and the general public on ideological grounds or due to practical issues of implementation. It tries to explore the reasons for the failure of a policy that decision makers in Qatar had formulated with the best of intentions and provided those in charge of implementation with all the asked-for and needed resources. It also underscores the role of preparedness and planning in proper implementation and the importance of the involvement of stakeholders in all the stages from planning to execution.

Background and review of related literature

The linguistic space in Qatar

As is the case with all Arab countries, the linguistic situation in Qatar is characterized by diglossia and multilingualism. Diglossia is a term first used in relation to Arabic by Ferguson (1959). It refers to the existence in the Arab countries of two distinct linguistic varieties of the Arabic language: a high variety (H) and a low variety (L). Speakers of Arabic use the H variety, known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), in formal communication and learn it formally at school, with possible earlier exposure to the variety through mass media. They use the L variety, known as the Colloquial or the Vernacular, in everyday communication and acquire it naturally at home as their mother tongue (Ferguson 1959). Qatari Colloquial Arabic belongs to the Gulf Arabic dialect that includes also the Saudi, Kuwaiti, Omani, UAE, and, Bahraini varieties.

Multilingualism is also a major feature of the language situation in Qatar that manifests itself clearly in the diversity of languages spoken by Qatari nationals and expatriate communities living in Qatar as well as by the indigenous south Arabian language varieties that serve as home language for some Qatari tribes. As Qatari citizens constitute only around 10% of the population of the country, which is currently around 2.6 million, the remaining population are expatriates who come from all over the world, bringing with them their native languages and cultural traditions that they use and practice within their communities. Of these expatriates, 18% are speakers of other varieties of Arabic who share with Qataris the diglossic situation, and around 60% come from Asia. Bakir (2010) reports that a Gulf Pidgin Arabic has been developing as a means of communication between Asians and Arabic-speaking communities in Qatar. The remaining 12% of the expatriates come from other countries all over the world. However, English has been serving, for quite some

time now, as the lingua franca par excellence for communicating among the various speech communities.

As for the education scene in Qatar, it is important to note that the vast majority of students who enroll in Qatari public schools come from families whose first language is Arabic; usually, they are Qatari citizens and Arab expatriates. Other expatriates would normally enroll in community schools that are run by their respective embassies or in international schools. An increasing number of economically capable Qatari families have started recently sending their children to international schools that could provide them with what has been perceived as better education and higher English language proficiency.

Medium of instruction

In most countries around the world, schools offer education in all subject matter through the medium of the national language, which is in most cases the native language of the majority of the indigenous population in the country. Having the native tongue as the language of instruction is necessary not only for learners' cognitive development but also for their sense of belongingness and national identity, for "language is not a neutral tool of communication but is everywhere implicated in the ways in which we read and write the world, the ways in which knowledge is produced and legitimated" (Hanks 1997: 241). In education, it is believed that "when ... communication takes place in a language known to the student, the chances of achieving understanding are high compared to when it takes place in a language with which the student is not familiar" (Ejeh 2004: 73). On the other hand, learners studying major subjects in a language other than their mother tongue are more likely to face both academic and linguistic difficulties (Cummins 2000; Thomas 2009; Van Rinsveld et al. 2016).

The choice of medium of instruction in schools and universities is a controversial issue in most post-colonization societies. Decision makers and educational planners in these societies often feel that their native language, for a variety of political, economic, and developmental reasons, cannot cope with the demands of its citizenry in the modern, globalized, information-driven world. In this case, a prestigious international language, English or the ex-colonizer's language, is usually adopted as a teaching language for scientific and professional subjects (sciences, mathematics, business, and technology) in schools and universities. Governments and policymakers usually cite the need for modernization and the use of technology and its fruits that cannot wait for academies to coin new terms as the reason for the maintenance of a major role for the foreign global language in education and other essential domains of language use such as banking, business, and research. However, adoption of a foreign language as medium of instruction brings to the surface issues of "cultural preservation and identity, access to education, employment and social mobility, the heightened risk of individuals without access to the English language becoming marginalized within their own societies, and the potential for loss of native languages and cultures" (Al-Mahrooqi and Denman 2015: 2).

After independence, all Arab countries were eager to build their nation-states, placing major emphasis on the role of the Arabic language and cultural traditions in the construction of their national identities free of foreign influences. However, many voices in these young societies called for maintaining a major role for the ex-colonizer's language in administration and education as links to modernization. Such proclamations often tried to mask the reality that "there were also other, tacit grounds, including the fact that classes and social groups that had successfully acquired the language of the former colonial masters were thereby ensuring themselves the privileges which such acquisitions brought with it" (Christ 1997:4).

The issue of medium of instruction involves having to choose between using the national language or an international language, mainly English or French, as teaching language in certain subject matter areas in schools (mainly in mathematics, sciences, and technology). The issue is not limited to a specific country or a specific region. Many Arab and non-Arab countries have opted for partial or full use of a foreign language as a medium of instruction in K-12 (e.g. many ex-French and ex-English colonies in Asia and Africa, such as; UAE, Tunisia, Mauritania, Lebanon and Jordan) although such policies have faced much resentment and resistance. Discussions of the medium of instruction issue in the Arab world have raised tensions among certain sections of the population. In a review of the literature on teaching science in Arabic, BouJaoude and Sayah (2000) suggested that the arguments could be depicted as an ideological debate between the *realism* of admitting the need to access scientific information through an international language and the *dream* of an Arabized science education that supports Arab academia to conduct research in Arabic. Likewise, Surgo (2014) frames the issue as a struggle between the *symbolic*, represented by Arabic, the language of tradition, culture, religion and national identity, on the one hand, and the *utilitarian*, represented by the foreign language, English or French, associated with scientific and technological advances, modernity, and progress.

Research studies on perception of impact of EMI in the Arab world

Some researchers believe that using a foreign language as a medium of instruction could be harmful to the development of both the learners' native language and their second language as well as their performance in subject matter areas. Van Rinsveld et al. (2016) claim that learners learning through the medium of a non-native language are more likely to face academic problems in general and more particularly with mathematical word problems. This is in part due to their low proficiency in the instruction language because, in addition to the mental load required for absorbing the content of such subjects, learners would have to contend with the requirement to decipher the language of delivery which they do not completely master.

The Arab educational reform scene shows lack of clearly stated policies that specify the role of the national language and that of the foreign language in education. It also shows the lack of adequate planning for implementing the transition from Arabic to English. These two issues have raised concerns among educators, linguists, and concerned citizens about the developing gap between what Arab children learn

in English and the Arab and Islamic cultural traditions (Al-Assem 2007; Fassi Fehri 2013; Hopkyns 2015; MacLeod and Abou-El-Kheir 2017; Zakharia 2009). Thus, the 2007 decision by the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia to allow 500 community schools with 600,000 students to introduce international programs different from the official curricula in content, methods of teaching, and language of instruction has stirred controversy in the Kingdom. "While many educators saw the decision as positive and useful and that it represented a qualitative move for education, others saw exactly the opposite considering it as a call for westernization that would negatively impact education in the future" (Al-Assem 2007). For example, Abdallah Obeid, Saudi Minister of Education in 2007, said that the purpose of using EMI is to offer science in its original language, an act of enrichment of student's abilities, adding that EMI does not harm Arabic, which is the national language. However, Mohammed bin Ahmad Al-Rasheed, Saudi ex-Minister of Education warned that using EMI amounts to a vote of non-confidence in the Arabic language that could lead to loss of identity. He encouraged early introduction of English as a foreign language but expressed strong opposition to EMI. He further harped on the issue of socioeconomic disparity stating that only the well-to-do would be able to send their children to community schools, leaving Arabic for the poor and destitute who cannot afford community schools.

Research studies investigating perceptions of the impact of using EMI on student achievement and student attitudes toward the medium of instruction in Arab schools and universities are rather few in number. The studies conducted show division of opinion on the issue. Studies in which participants favor using Arabic over the foreign language (Al-Muhaideb 2005; Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb 2015) found that university students in several Arab countries prefer pursuing their studies in Arabic because they believe learning in one's own language is more effective and poses no linguistic and cultural difficulties for learners. On the other hand, studies in favor of using English as a medium of instruction (Al-Jaraf 2004; Malallah 2000; Troudi and Jendli 2011) found that these students believe that English would help them learn science, business, and technology from their sources and secure better jobs for them in the globalized job market.

Some researchers highlighted the vital perception of learners and other stakeholders of the inter-relatedness of language, identity, and culture (Al Dabbagh 2005; Jenkins 2007; Karmani 2005a, b; Kramersch 1998; Shaaban and Ghaith 2002, 2003; Suleiman 2003). These researchers viewed language as "the principle means whereby we conduct our social lives. When it is used in contexts of communication, it is bound up with culture in multiple and complex ways" Kramersch (1998:3). Some scholars and practitioners believe that EMI would harm the image of Arabic as a symbol of national identity and culture. Ahmed (2011) claims that "the imported education and rampant spread of, and emphasis on, English, accompanied by a relatively American pop culture, is beginning to sideline Arabic resulting in the linguistic and cultural loss of those who identify with it" (p. 120).

Research studies carried in the field on language of instruction in the Arab region show conflicting results. A recent study by Al-Qahtani and Al-Zumor (2016) has shown that Saudi Arabian parents displayed positive attitudes towards using EMI in international private schools, but some expressed their concern for the possible

adverse effects of EMI on Arabic. In the United Arab Emirates, many parents, school principals, and scholars view decisions to use EMI and to develop new curricula as signs of western interference and westernization in the Arab world pushing in the direction of “More English, Less Islam” (Charise 2007).

The few research studies on the Qatari experience in teaching Science and Mathematics in English conducted before and after the SEC had revoked the 2003 decree show a division of opinion regarding the advantages and disadvantages of the EMI practice. The first such study was that of Al-Obaidli (2009) who surveyed, through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the perceptions of women English teachers regarding their assigned roles in the implementation of the then-new English standard-based curriculum. The findings indicated that teachers enjoyed increased flexibility and having a say in choice of instructional materials but complained of the top-down manner of introducing reform, lack of institutional support, and heavy workload. Ellili-Cherif and Romanowski (2013) studied the attitudes of stakeholders to the *EFNE* educational reform initiative, especially its EMI component. Their findings showed that respondents felt that EMI constituted a threat to the Arab identity of the nation in that English helped spread western cultural values that are at odds with the local culture and tended to devalue Arabic in the eyes of its speakers. Romanowski et al. (2013), surveyed the opinions of principals, teachers, and parents regarding EMI in Qatar through open-ended questions, interviews, and focus groups. The study concluded that “*EFNE* has provided several educational improvements ... [yet it] is difficult, placing pressure on the teachers, school leaders and parents and requiring them to do tasks that they are not ready to fulfill, or do not have the skill to prove successful” (p. 131).

Background of the *education for a new era* reform plan and EMI

The State of Qatar, in its efforts to build a knowledge-based society and to reconstruct the national identity in such a way that the new Qatari citizens could function effectively locally, regionally, and globally, has launched in 2001 a very ambitious educational reform plan. The need for the reform plan arose out of a general dissatisfaction with the existing public education system in the country at the time and the desire to embrace recent global trends in education that encourage the development of critical thinking, communication skills, digital knowledge, and team work. The unified curriculum that was in place at the time in all public schools in the country promoted rote memorization rather than critical thinking and hence was not up to the aspirations of the country’s leaders and most of its citizens. In order to come up with innovative, effective solutions, the leaders of the State of Qatar collaborated with RAND Corporation to examine the existing K-12 education system in the country and come up with an educational reform plan in line with international standards and best practices. After extensive research and study of the system, it was decided to adopt a Standards-based system similar to the one used in schools in the USA and many other countries around the world. The new system was accompanied by a change in the structure of public schools through the introduction of a form of chartered schools, which came to be known as Independent Schools. These schools

enjoyed a considerable amount of freedom in terms of academic and administrative processes, following a decentralized model.

SEC was established in 2002 to serve as the custodian of the emerging *EFNE* educational reform plan. The main four tenets of this reform plan were independence, accountability, variety, and choice. Curriculum standards for four compulsory subjects were developed and evaluated by teams of local and international subject-matter experts, guided by international standards (Dr. Hamda Al-Sulaiti from the Institute of Evaluation: Personal Interview). The four subjects were English, Mathematics, Science, and Arabic. A more far-reaching decision was made instating English as the medium of instruction in Mathematics and Sciences. Furthermore, the SEC gave schools the choice to select other subjects to be added to their curricula and to decide on the language of instruction for these additional subjects.

The decision to adopt EMI for Mathematics and Sciences came through a decree issued by the SEC in 2003 making English the language of instruction for Mathematics and Science subjects, for all grades in Independent Schools. This was followed by enforcing English as the language of the classroom for grades 1–3 and increasing the English language instructional hours in all grades. The decree was grounded in the belief prevalent all over the world that English is the current global language of science and scientific discoveries. Many saw in the new policy a way of improving the general English proficiency of Qatari students and, consequently, enhancing their chances for succeeding in higher education locally or abroad, and for providing them with an important tool for competing in an increasingly globalized job market. However, it needs to be stressed that having Math and Science subjects taught in English meant that students' achievement in three out of the four compulsory subjects was dependent on students' proficiency in the English language. That is, the English language became by virtue of this decree the dominant language in Independent Schools in the country although the constitution of the State of Qatar states that Arabic is the official language of the country (Alkhatib 2015: 152) and to be used in all domains of life. There has not been a declared language policy in the country until 2003, when the SEC made English the classroom language for grades K-3 and, additionally, for Math and Science for grades 4–12. Prior to that date and since the establishment of a formal education system in Qatar in the early fifties of the twentieth century, the English language was taught as a foreign language in the public K-12 educational system (Brewer et al. 2007). It was introduced starting in grade five with less than 5 h of instruction per week. In 1999, however, English started to be taught as of grade 1 (Education Comprehensive Development 2004, p. 31).

The first cohort of Independent Schools (consisting of 12 schools) began operating in 2004, while the Ministry of Education continued to operate public schools normally (Alkhatib 2015: 146). This was followed by gradual conversion of public schools into Independent Schools year after year, until all public schools became Independent Schools by the school year 2010–2011 (the last cohort consisted of 70 schools at once (Mr. Adel Al-Hashemi, Director of Evaluation Institute 2003–2010: Personal Interview). Initially, parents were excited about having their children join Independent Schools, and there were waiting lists of students (Brewer et al. 2007), but soon after, this excitement turned into uncertainty and disillusionment, explicitly

expressed in the form of criticism of the system in the media, especially on social media and newspapers.

The introduction of EMI came at a time when English was at the height of its prestige, not only in the K-12 educational system, but also in the country as a whole. Thus, Qatar University, the only national university at the time, started in 2004 to demand that incoming students possess a fair level of proficiency in English. In fact, Qatar at the time had been pursuing a process of modernization and globalization that involved carrying out many projects aimed at developing the country infrastructure and equipping young Qataris with twenty-first century skills that would help them join the ranks of a sophisticated workforce. The role of English as a language of knowledge acquisition and effective communication in these major plans seemed essential.

Another major cause for the demand for English has been the fact that around the same time the population of the country has dramatically increased. It has jumped from 614,000 in the year 2000 to 1,700,000 in 2010 (Qatar Population Data 2017). The increase has come about due to the increasing need for expats to push forward the development plans of the country. For these expats coming to Qatar from all corners of the world, the English language was the easy choice for the lingua franca of communication. Many public functions started to be conducted in English and many services to be provided in English alone or together with Arabic. In addition, proficiency in English became a general requirement for employment in the country (Alkhatib 2015: 100) while prior to this time, proficiency in the English language has been a requirement for employment in restricted sectors, namely, the financial and oil and gas sectors, and to some extent in certain private businesses.

With the conversion of all Qatari schools into Independent Schools and the introduction of the newly designed curricula came an evaluation component that was administered at the national level for students in grades 4 through 11 in the four basic subjects (Arabic, English, Math, and Science) under the supervision of the Institute of Evaluation. The results of these national examinations showed significant weakness in students' performance in all tested areas. Not surprisingly, the adoption of English as a medium of instruction in Mathematics and Sciences was blamed by a major sector of the society for this disappointing performance.

It is important to note that Qatari educational authorities saw in *EFNE* a national project aimed at increasing equality among the different socioeconomic sectors of the Qatari society by providing better education and English for all in a new type of school close to the structure of private schools that most Qataris thought highly of. Decision makers saw English as an asset that all should have access to in a knowledge-based economy that Qatar was striving to reach. In fact, the vast majority of the society initially welcomed *EFNE* and its EMI component. At that point, the majority did not seem to have seen English as a threat to Arabic because Arabic was one of the four main subjects that were emphasized in the project and for which ambitious standards were formulated, leading people to believe that the outcome of the project would be balanced bilingual citizens. It is only when parents and educators started to see the early signs of the project not fulfilling its promises, as attested to by the learners' weak performance on all four subjects, the project became the object of wide societal criticism.

The debate around *EFNE* centered mainly on the elevated status of the English language in the country as a whole and in the education system in particular. Many saw in the new status of English in Qatar a marginalization of the Arabic language, which is the national and native language of the country, and the language of its daily interaction, religion, culture, and heritage. They saw in the increased emphasis on learning the English language a threat to learners' competency in the Arabic language, as well as to the Arab identity of the new generations. Simply put, the debate was between those who considered proficiency in English as a social capital and a tool for social and professional mobility and advancement and those who saw it as an attempt at westernizing the country (see for example Fassi Fehri 2013: 52). In other words, the language of instruction controversy in Qatar, and in most Arab countries as well, has pitched the defenders of traditions, cultural heritage, and religious and national identity against proponents of modernity, globalization, and progress (Gravel 1979; Redouane 2016). Gravel (1979) considered the struggle as one between symbolism, represented by the mother tongue, and utilitarianism, represented by the foreign language.

The unsatisfactory performance of students on English language national exams, despite the measures taken by the government in terms of dedication of resources in order to enhance this performance, contributed much to fueling further anger with the policy of teaching Mathematics and Science in English. People felt that EMI proved its ineffectiveness in improving learners' English proficiency although it involved increasing hours of instruction in English. Students' performance on Mathematics and Science did not seem to improve either.

Learner's unsatisfactory performance on standardized national tests, and the mounting criticism by Qatari citizens led the SEC, in early 2012, to issue a decree that mandated changing the language of instruction of Math and Sciences subjects back to Arabic in all Independent schools and at Qatar University. The 2012 language policy was put into effect immediately, starting with school year 2012–2013.

The SEC was integrated within the revived Ministry of Education and Higher Education with a new mission, to focus on the professional development of schoolteachers. Kirkpatrick and Barnawi (2017:171) stated that "at present, it seems that Qatar intends to ... concentrate on a reform of teacher education in order to boost the number of Qatari teachers and to further improve the school system.

Objectives of the current study

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the Qatar EMI policy, the issues related to its implementation, and its eventual failure and abandonment by policy-makers. More specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

1. What are the positions of SEC officials and schoolteachers regarding the implementation of the 2003 language policy?
2. What do they consider the reasons for the failure of the EMI initiative were?

3. In their opinions, what are the changes in the role and status of the English language in the education system in Qatar before 2003 and the present?

It should be pointed out that there is a serious gap in the literature on language policies in the Arabian Gulf in general, and in Qatar in particular. Although the education reform project in Qatar, *Education for a New Era*, started as a very promising project with a clear, detailed, innovative plan in line with international standards, many issues and problems arose during the implementation stage. Only after the experiment has been folded, some researchers started looking at the circumstances that led to the demise of the project (Romanowski et al. 2013; Alkhatib 2015).

The significance of the current study resides in the fact that the researchers started the research at a time when the journey was midway, in 2007–2008, 4 years after the launching of the project and 4 years before its coming to an end. At that time, the authors felt the growing resistance to the principle and practice of using EMI in Sciences, Technology, and Mathematics as part of the reform plan, and they decided to conduct a qualitative study to investigate the issue. However, in order not to look like they were trying to undermine such a vital project, the findings of the study were under safe keep until this time. The researchers believe that the findings could shed light on what happened later and could enlighten language policymakers in their efforts to come up with plans that will serve the aspirations for effective communication of Qataris locally, regionally, and globally, spelled out in the *Qatar National Vision 2030*. Additionally, the findings of the study may help similar projects elsewhere avoid the difficulties the EMI reform project faced in Qatar. More specifically, it could serve as a warning to other countries that have initiated, or are thinking of initiating, similar reform projects, especially in the Arabian Gulf and in the Arab world in general, not to underestimate the protestations and apprehensions of their populations regarding the use of EMI.

Methodology

The current study draws qualitative data from a number of interviews conducted in 2008 with school principals and teachers in a sample of schools in the country. Further interviews were conducted at the Institute of Education and the Institute of Evaluation, both under the Supreme Education Council (See Table 1 in Appendix for an idea of interviewees). Additional interviews were conducted in 2017, seeking further information as deemed necessary.

Interviews

The researchers selected, for the purposes of this study, two Primary Independent Schools and two Secondary Independent Schools, in addition to two Government Secondary Schools and two Private International Schools. One of the International Schools followed a modified American curriculum and the other was a franchised

school that followed an international curriculum, developed by the school itself. Both schools offered Arabic as part of their curricula.

The purpose of these interviews was to get the perceptions and positions of principals and teachers at these schools regarding the implementation of the EMI language policy of 2003. The questions focused on the challenges faced in implementation, concerns about the impact on the Arabic language and learners' acquisition of Arabic, and impact on learners' sense of affinity to the Arab and Islamic identity and culture.

In February 2008, the researchers obtained a list of all independent schools in the country from the website of the SEC. For each school, the list included the name of the school, its level, geographic location, gender of its students, and the cohort the school belongs to, in addition to other details. The term cohort is used here to refer to the year in which the school turned into an independent school, since public schools turned into independent schools in cohorts, with the first cohort being introduced in 2004 and the last in 2010.

In order to get representative data, the researchers selected schools from neighborhoods representing different socioeconomic classes, stratified across gender and school levels. Therefore, four Independent Schools were selected, two of which were located in neighborhoods that are known to be occupied by higher income residents; one of which was a high school for girls (cohort 2), the other, an elementary school for boys (cohort 1). The other two Independent Schools were located in somewhat lower socioeconomic neighborhoods. One of the two was a primary school for girls (cohort 3) and the other one a secondary school for boys (cohort 2). For comparative purposes, two public secondary schools were selected, one located in a middle class neighborhood, and the other in a slightly less privileged neighborhood. As for the international schools, the location was not much relevant since the students of these schools come from all over the country.

Additional interviews were held with top officials at the Institute of Evaluation and the Institute of Education. Furthermore, since part of the teachers' professional development was tasked to the College of Education at Qatar University, the Dean of the College was also interviewed. Interviews were conducted with 24 interviewees representing public, private, and international schools and the SEC. The interview time totaled 34 h. All of the interviews at schools and institutes were conducted between mid-April and mid-July of 2008.

The interviews were conducted at each school with the Principal or Vice Principal, the English language Coordinator, and the Math and Science Coordinator. These staff had the double role of teaching and coordinating the subject matter. Some schools arranged interviews with both coordinators; others included the coordinator for English only or just the school Principle. This depended on their availability. Each person was interviewed separately. The interviews were semi structured, consisting of pre-prepared open-ended questions and follow up questions where applicable. Only responses relevant to the current study are referred to below. Most of these interviews were conducted in Arabic, and the quotes have been translated into English by the first author.

Findings of the study

Interview questions, responses, and findings

All interviews included the questions listed below, in the same order presented here. We have compiled the responses into four main categories: those given by staff (Principals/Vice Principals and subject matter Coordinators) working at Independent Schools (IS), Public Schools (PS), International or Globally-oriented Schools (GS), Policy Custodians (PC), that is officials working at the Institute of Evaluation and the Institute of Education that are under the SEC. Responses of the Dean of Qatar University's College of Education were added to the last category (see Table 1 in the Appendix for information on the interviewees and duration of interviews).

The interview questions are presented below, together with a summary of the responses; the full quotes will be presented in Tables 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7 in the Appendix.

1. Question I: What do you think of changing the language of instruction of Math and Science to English and of the general enhancement of the role of English in education?

The vast majority of responses to this question were favorable towards the enhanced role of the English language in school education (See Table 2 in the Appendix for detailed responses). Generally, interviewees from the four categories have agreed that proficiency in English, when attained, would be an asset to Qatari learners as interviewees view English as a global language, a language for modern times, and an effective tool of global communication in all domains. Furthermore, they all felt that English is the gate to higher education within Qatar or abroad and to gaining access to modern science and technology. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the interviewees had different worries and concerns regarding the use of the English language. Thus, while representatives of IS and PS focused on the need for early introduction of English and for additional hours of teaching to help achieve proficiency, those of GS and PC focused on English as the global lingua franca that facilitates business, trade, and banking transactions locally and internationally and allows contact with the rest of the world through education, and travel. Needless to say, the PC (SEC Officials) were talking of a wish list and representatives of GS were starting from the fact that their students tend to be highly proficient in English.

When asked if they had any reservations and concerns regarding the growing role of English in Qatar, interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with the manner in which the EMI decision was implemented, being enforced in a top-down fashion in all grades at the same time and immediately (See Table 3 in the Appendix for detailed responses). Other reservations concerned the contribution of the 2003 policy to the marginalization of the Arabic language in general, and in the education of scientific subjects in particular. Ironically, some PC representatives, who were supposed to be the guardians of the EMI decision, expressed their belief that science and mathematics should be taught in Arabic,

citing evidence from “studies” that show that understanding content is easier in the learners’ mother tongue.

2. Do you think that the Arabic language is being affected by the enhanced role of the English language? Why do you think so?

The vast majority of interviewees indicated that they did not think that the Arabic language was under threat because of the enhanced role of the English language because Arabic is associated with a rich cultural and literary heritage and is the language of the Holy Qur’an. A number of responses were general in nature, or conditional, not addressing the specific issue at hand. On the other hand, there was a difference of opinion regarding the Arabic language proficiency of Qatari students, with IS and PS representatives claiming that students are strong in Arabic and that there is no perceived deterioration because of EMI. The GS representatives added that there is no danger to Arabic and that the standards-based curriculum for Arabic should help improve students’ proficiency. (See Table 4 in the Appendix for detailed responses).

Surprisingly an IS respondent suggested that it is the responsibility of families, not schools, to enhance children’s skills in the Arabic language. Another IS respondent claimed that the current low proficiency in Modern Standard Arabic is independent of the enhanced role of English.

Still, some other respondents thought that the Arabic language was threatened by the English language (See Table 5 in the Appendix for detailed responses). Many expressed their concern that the Arabic language had been neglected. Some of the IS representatives expressed their concern that learning scientific terms and expressions in English will take away from Arabic the ability to assimilate concepts and equivalent terms. In other words, there was an expressed fear that Arabic would lose the potential of being a language of science. One PC representative expressed the belief that Arabic is being negatively affected by the enhanced role of English in the new schools system (Independent Schools) since students’ Arabic spelling has become worse, but she immediately adds that the problem started earlier. The majority of respondents called for exerting more effort to improve the teaching of the Arabic language in terms of teachers’ qualifications, textbooks, and methods of teaching.

3. What are the challenges that you are facing in implementing EMI in the Qatari educational system?

The responses of the IS and the PC representatives to this question were most relevant and indicative of practitioners’ concerns as these two groups were heavily involved in the implementation process and living it day-by-day. The responses of the PS and GS representatives were mainly tangential and not based on actual involvement. Thus the PS interviewees felt that the curricula was too demanding of the teachers, without going into any details while the GS interviewees highlighted

the problems they face with their own students, especially their low proficiency in Arabic (See Table 6 in the Appendix for detailed responses).

IS and PC respondents identified finding qualified teachers of Math and Science who could teach these subjects in English as the major challenge they face. According to a number of interviewees, teachers of these two subjects often code-switch to Arabic, teach English at the expense of content, or teach the content superficially while using much simplified English (See Table 6 in Appendix). To overcome this challenge, schools had their Math and Science teachers get additional training in the English language, and dedicated more hours to the teaching of English, a strategy that failed to make any significant change in students' performance in the subject matter. This situation was complicated by the perception of many stakeholders that this excessive focus on English led to the marginalization of the Arabic language.

4. Do you think that the increased exposure to English and to western teachers would negatively influence students' sense of Arab identity and culture? Why do you think so?

Most of the interviewees expressed the belief that increased exposure to English and to western teachers does not necessarily have a negative impact on students' sense of Arab identity (See Table 7 in the Appendix for detailed responses). However, the majority of these interviewees could not provide convincing arguments for their declared position except for an argument provided by the category of SEC officials, which pointed to the fact that a person's identity is the collective outcome of a number of factors in addition to language, such as culture, traditions, and heritage. Interviewees said that part of their lack of concern about the impact of EMI on local identity is the fact that faculty coming from the West are too few to make a difference, even if they wanted to. Others expressed the opinion that there is much more exposure to western values in media and on the Internet than at school.

It is quite interesting that concerns about students' sense of Arab identity and local culture are expressed by teaching staff in all school types, including International Schools, and that no such concern is raised by officials from the SEC (See Table 8 in the Appendix for detailed responses). Interviewees felt there is excessive use of English in education and in the public sphere in general. Others suggested that western teachers should be monitored to check on what they teach to ensure they do not teach values not compatible with Islam or local traditions and values. Representatives of GS felt that, as role models, teachers could influence students' cultural identity.

Summary of Results

The present study surveyed the opinions of school principals, teachers, and SEC officials, in addition to those of the Dean of the College of Education at Qatar University. It collected data through semi-structured interviews from representatives of independent, public, and international schools. It sought answers for the following

four main issues related to the reform *EFNE* initiative: (1) attitudes towards the expanding role of English in the curriculum, especially using EMI; (2) the effect of the enhanced role of English on learners' acquisition of the Arabic language; (3) challenges that faced the implementation of EMI; and (4) potential threats from EMI to Arab identity of the Qatari students.

Regarding the first issue, attitudes towards EMI in the reform plan, interviewees (principals, teachers, and SEC members) were generally positive towards the reform initiative citing the need for English by students intending to pursue higher education studies and to join the increasingly globalized job market. However, there were criticisms of the procedures of implementation and the lack of adequate preparation and planning, such as the enforcement of the new curricula and the use of EMI for teaching sciences, mathematics, and technology all at once in all grades. Some stressed the harm done to Arabic, expressing the fear that Arabic would be devalued in the eyes of the learners. Others felt that the move towards adoption of EMI should have gone hand in hand with steps to strengthen Arabic and modernize its teaching methods and instructional materials to make them more relevant to learners' needs and experiences.

As for the second issue, reactions of the interviewees to the issue of the impact of *EFNE* and EMI on the acquisition and vitality of the Arabic language in Qatari society were mixed. The study showed that one of the major concerns of the SEC was the negative impact that using EMI could have on the welfare of the Arabic language in Qatar, both as a vehicle of communication and as a symbol of individual, social, cultural, and national identity. Some principals complained that the initiative had not taken any measurements to strengthen Arabic against the perceived assault from English.

Some respondents, however, felt that Arabic would not be adversely affected by the adoption of EMI because of its rich literary and cultural heritage and on being the language of the Holy Qur'an. Some went farther, expressing their belief that Qatari students are proficient in Arabic, a claim that students' scores on SEC tests refute. An interesting attitude emerged from the interviews where interviewees shifted the blame for learners' weakness in Arabic from the school and teachers to the family.

Many respondents admitted that students' proficiency in Arabic was rather low and added that EMI did not help the cause of a weak Arabic. Others expressed their concerns about Arabic as language of identity as English as a subject of study in school and EMI were exposing students to western values and western traditions. Furthermore, EMI represented to them an act of banishing Arabic from academic and general communication in sciences, mathematics, technology, business, banking, and commerce.

When it comes to the third and fourth issues that focus on challenges and threats, many revealing and interesting conclusions from the study seem to shed light on the 2012 decision to abandon the EMI experiment and revert to Arabic as medium of instruction. The first observation is that the third question was the most indicative of what was going on in the process of implementation and the challenges that those involved in the process had to face. The list of challenges identified in this study is very close to the findings of the post-change literature

on the subject (Alkhatib 2015; Nasser 2017; Ellili-Cherif et al. 2012, 2013, 2015). It is clear from the responses that the GS group and the PS group were not fully aware of what was going on compared to the PC and IS groups who were leading the experiment from the top and on the ground respectively. The GS had their own curriculum and felt that what was presented in the EFNE did not concern them. To them the issue was not one of EMI, since English was the teaching language in all school subjects at their schools, and their students were normally highly competent in English; their main concern was the weak foundation of their students in Arabic. The PS group seemed to have continued with their programs and were trying to get an idea of the new curriculum since, eventually, they were going to be turned into Independent Schools, hence their awareness of some of the issues but not all.

The last two groups, IS and PC, were highly involved and showed many legitimate concerns. The main issues they raised are listed below:

- finding qualified teachers who are competent in the subject matter they teach (mathematics, sciences, or technology) and are, at the same time, fluent in English and pedagogically qualified;
- overburdening of teachers with extra duties such as finding and developing instructional materials;
- implementing all changes at once to all school grades without taking in consideration students' preparedness;
- lack of textbooks in a culture that has never played the education game without it;
- concerns by parents, learners, and officials of the harmful effects of EMI on cultural identity;
- using first language and code-switching in classes supposed to be conducted in English because students' low proficiency in English has made understanding concepts and reading texts in English impossible tasks;
- difficulty of set standards and learning outcomes for learners; and
- wide variations in abilities, language proficiency, and subject matter background knowledge in the same class;

These serious issues have led in part to students' demotivation, need for tutoring, and complaints about difficulty of learning tasks and homework and long school days.

Discussion

Clearly, the above statements show that opinions of the interviewees in this study regarding the EMI language policy of 2003 and its implementation fall into two heavily polarized positions. The first position represents a strong endorsement of the language policy of 2003, which mandated the use of English as the main language of instruction in Independent Schools. The main justification for this stand was that proficiency in English would improve learners' chances of fitting well in a

globalized world, enhance their access to modern knowledge and to tertiary education, and boost their competitiveness in the job market. In other words, advocates of this position saw that the expanding role of English in Qatar would boost the “social capital” of individuals and, consequently, would enable them to contribute substantially to the economic growth of the country.

The second position viewed the policy as a “Trojan horse” in that it looked and sounded positive, but in reality the outcome would open the gates for westernizing the society. They saw that the expanding role of English in Qatar would open the door for western values and culture to invade the space that has been occupied, and should remain occupied, by the Arabic language and Arab and Islamic values and culture. The involvement of RAND, the famous American think tank, in the *Education for a New Era* initiative has not helped reduce any concerns, but instead it created more doubt about the policy and its desired outcomes. RAND was portrayed as a colonial arm whose intention was to serve the interests of the English-speaking western powers rather than the interests of the local community, a perception shared by participants in other studies (Alkhatib 2015). These opposing positions are in line with the claims of BouJaoude and Sayah (2000) and Surgo (2014) that the arguments are ideological between those who prefer using Arabic as a MOI for its familiarity and symbolism and those who prefer English for its utilitarian value for relatively young countries who want to become knowledge-based societies.

A number of the interviewees in this study expressed enthusiastic support for the EMI policy at the beginning of the interview but became more conservative when issues of culture, identity, and national language were raised. This supportive stand could have different interpretations. One possible interpretation is that the person could truly have been supportive of the policy but was reluctant to show his/her indifference to the possible negative ramifications of the policy for local culture, identity and the Arabic language due to the sensitivity of the issue. Another interpretation is that the interviewee, being in an official position and part of the implementation team, initially gave the responses that he/she thought were expected to be given, but then when he/she got more engaged in the conversation and maybe less cautious, became more honest and shared his/her true views. Some of the responses to question 1 (Tables 2, 3) that were obtained from the PC interviewees exemplify the latter case. The initial statements revealed their position as officials representing the government of Qatar that had issued the policy. However, the true positions of these individuals became clear with further questions, several minutes into the conversation. A third interpretation is that the interviewees initially looked at English from a utilitarian perspective related to economy and job market, but when the researchers raised the issue of identity, the position was modified in support of the native language. This may indicate that these individuals truly believed that it was possible to implement the EMI policy while having students maintain their Arabic language and their Arab and Islamic culture.

Further, the responses to the third question clearly show that the implementation of the policy in Independent Schools has not been smooth due to critical challenges facing the project. Interviewees felt that many of the listed challenges could have been overcome if a slower pace had been adopted in implementation. According to

Mr. Adel Al-Hashemi (ex-Director of Evaluation Institute) during the first couple of years of the project, the selection of schools staff has been rigorous but after that and because of the pressure for expansion, less qualified administrators and teachers joined the schools, and more investment was directed towards their professional training. It is also reasonable to assume that students' lack of proficiency in English would have been less of an issue, if the change of language of instruction would have been implemented gradually, that is, starting implementing in one or two grades at a time, rather than to all school grades at once. The feedback obtained from international schools regarding weak competence in mother tongue leading to poor acquisition of additional languages can be invoked for explaining students' weak competence in English in Independent Schools as well. The challenges listed above or at least some of them have contributed to the weak performance of Independent School students on the Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment and Standardized international exams (Qatar's Third National Human Development Report 2012).

A glance at the above summary shows that the respondents had strong opinions that are not always based on facts and evidence but rather on myths, perceptions, and unchecked opinions. For example, shifting the responsibility of teaching the Arabic language as well as maintaining and enhancing its symbolic culture and identity value in the direction of families is an escapist, unjustified stand. Furthermore, claiming that Qatari students have a strong base in Arabic is baseless as the results of students on SEC tests and on college placement tests in Arabic have shown.

The decision to adopt EMI with the provision of making it a classroom language in Grades 1–3 and increasing hours of English language teaching has been more critical than other changes introduced by them administrative as in following a decentralized system for K-12, or structural as in following a standard-based model.

Stakeholders' responses indicate that the EMI decision has lacked adequate planning in the areas of teacher qualifications and teacher preparation and adaptation to the philosophy, objectives, and dynamics of the new curriculum; the selection of instructional materials; the new teaching methodology, and the system of assessment. Furthermore, the whole idea of teaching students in a language other than their own flies in the face of essential academic research that indicates that learners taught such subjects in a language other than their mother tongue are more likely to face academic and linguistic difficulties (Thomas 2009; Van Rinsveld et al. 2016; Benson and Kosonen 2013). It is important to note that there are scholars and practitioners who believe in the effectiveness of programs such as Content-Based Instruction (CBI) or Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) that support the use of a foreign language, mainly English, in teaching academic subjects such as mathematics, sciences, technology, and social sciences. Both CLIL and CBI share with EMI the objective of improving learners' L2 proficiency by teaching subject matter through L2 (Dearden 2017). Research studies on the effectiveness of EMI report different results based on the context in which EMI is used. It looks like EMI poses no serious problems in high-income countries and private academic institutions; however, the practice creates tension in low-and middle-income communities, especially in developing countries. Indeed, according to the British Council:

Important research findings show that if young students in low-or middle-income countries are taught in their own or a familiar language, rather than English, they are more likely to understand what they are learning and be more successful academically (including in L2 as a subject) with benefits to education, the economy and society (Simpson 2017).

The EMI practice is widespread at secondary schools and higher education institutes in Europe and the US (for minority groups) with satisfactory results and a few problems (Badinska and Kokavcova 2010; Banegas 2012; Cenoz et al. 2013; Mozak and Carroll 2017). However, the EMI practice, which is gaining grounds rapidly in countries in Africa and Asia, and especially in the Middle East, is coming under attack for two major reasons: its effect on students' achievement and its negative impact on native language and cultural identity (Amin 2009; Belhia and Elhami 2015; Charise 2007, Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb 2015; Murtaza 2017; Troudi 2009).

Concerning the issue of the threats English poses to Arab identity, responses to the question of impact of EMI on Arab identity were mixed. Some interviewees felt that although foreign experts had put the curricula together, many local educators had a say in identifying the learning outcomes. They added that the number of western teachers is too small to sway learners' opinions in the direction of western values. Some felt that Qatari families are the ones who teach Qatari values to their children and are responsible for the welfare of the Arabic language.

Another point to note is that SEC officials claimed that EMI would have no effect on Arab identity because individuals and communities do not build their identity around language alone but also around other elements such as history, culture, traditions, and ethnic heritage. This is in contradiction with Ginsburgh and Weber (2011) who emphasize that it is language, not nationality or ethnicity, that is most attached to the individual and with Suleiman (2003) who stressed the role of the Arabic language in the Arab nationalist movement.

Some suggested that exposure to the culture of English-speaking people is healthy and would affect students positively but would not change strongly entrenched Qatari values. Other points of view were expressed where respondents stated that Arabic, the symbol of national identity, would be devalued when, for example, public lectures at Qatar University that could easily be delivered in Arabic are given in English. Some stated that English is already dominant in the public space, and moving it to a strong role in education would complicate the issue further. It is interesting that the idea that parents are responsible for instilling religious values in their children and leading them to embrace Arab culture and traditions kept coming up in the discussions.

Comparison of the results of the current study to the findings of research conducted after the 2012 SEC decision to revert to Arabic as MOI shows that the issues identified by the interviewees as major challenges to the implementation process turned out to be the challenges and problems that have led to the failure of the EMI language policy (Alkhatib 2015; Ellili-Cherif and Romanowski 2013; Romanowski et al. 2013; Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb 2015; Nasser 2017). Trouble signals were there for people to see, but, for some reason, addressing these problems was not a priority. Furthermore, these studies suggest there has been a prevailing implicit

assumption that things will work themselves out if more linguistic and pedagogical training for teachers is intensified (Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb 2015; Ellili-Cherif and Romanowski 2013; Ellili-Cherif et al. 2012; MacLeod and Abou-El-Kheir 2017; Nasser 2017; Nasser and Romanowski 2011; Romanowski et al. 2013; Zellman et al. 2009). However, these assumptions have proved wrong.

One last comment relates to the critical theoretical perspective used for dealing with the data in this study. In line with the theoretical framework, the study shows that decisions to use a language other than the mother tongue as a language of instruction could generate resentment and could affect learners' achievement adversely. Nevertheless, the factors that lead to that are not necessarily only sociolinguistic, sociopolitical, or ideological in nature. The lack of adequate planning and preparation and the lack of proper monitoring could be major factors in resisting and aborting the language policy change and complicating matters beyond redemption. Another corollary to this conclusion is the finding that the status of the native tongue that is being overlooked could be a highly complicating element in the success or failure of EMI. Arabic is a language with a rich history and significant symbolism to its speakers, as a religious language and a carrier of a major world culture. Policies that devalue the language would not meet with great success.

Concluding remarks

The problem of medium of instructions in Qatari and Gulf schools, as well as in other Arab and third world countries, will continue to haunt and irk policymakers and educational reformists as they see the complexity of the sociolinguistic situation and the absence of a single policy that fits all. For one thing, the peculiarities of the teaching/learning context, the availability of needed human and physical resources, and the social and cultural features need to be taken into consideration when making educational and linguistic decisions. Importing educational models may work well in certain environments but fail miserably in others. Reform should be looked at as a comprehensive process that involves laying the grounds physically, socially, and psychologically for the coming change, using all mass media venues and involving social media as well. It also involves gradual introduction of reforms to allow people to adjust to the change and to espouse it out of conviction. In other words, stakeholders should have a say in decisions on language policy.

Furthermore, the system should develop an evaluation component that provides constant assessment of students' learning and, consequently, the effectiveness of the implementation of changes; this includes allowing people to provide their own feedback and having their remarks taken into consideration. In the case of Qatar, although The Evaluation Institute has been administering annual national exams and collecting a great amount of data, it would have been much helpful if more attention had been paid to the growing concern re the status of the Arabic language. For example since EMI involves having English take over some of the functions of Arabic, a move that has upset conservative elements, some drastic measures could have been taken to strengthen the Arabic language and to prevent its devaluation in the eyes of its speakers.

Many of the challenges that faced the project of *Education for a New Era* could have been avoided if the medium of instruction policy has been planned more carefully. Such planning could have included measures to shore up Arabic; gradual introduction of reforms; adequate preparation of teachers and administrators in terms of curriculum philosophy; creative methodology of teaching, language proficiency of teachers and students; selection and production of instructional materials, time management; and continuous assessment of the implementation process.

One of the lessons learned from this study is that although using EMI has its advantages when it comes to the building of a knowledge-based society and to accessing the globalized job market, the disadvantages and drawbacks outweigh these advantages in Arab societies whose native language is looked at with a great degree of respect and sanctity. Adoption of EMI in Arab societies would be considered sacrilegious as it devalues the revered native language in the eyes of its speakers, a situation that might create identity issues. If we add to this the logistical issues related to properly laying the ground for the change and convincing stakeholders of the benefits and set limitations of the new policy, we would come close to understanding why the *EFNE* initiative had failed.

It is important to add that the decision to make English the classroom language in grades K–3 in Qatari schools has complicated matters further because it was seen as a threat to Modern Standard Arabic, which is introduced formally in Grade 1. In fact, after 9 years into the EMI experiment, students' performance on SEC tests demonstrated that they had not learned either Arabic or English well. Under such circumstances, the decision to put an end to the experiment and go back to Arabic as a medium of instruction seemed a reasonable option. Learning through the medium of the native language is in line with UNESCO's proclamations on language rights and its recommendation that countries should use the mother tongue as the language of instruction (Fassi Fehri 2013:50 and 76). Teaching through the medium of the native tongue, especially in early stages is encouraged for all minority groups inside English-speaking countries such as the USA (Goldenberg 2013) and for all communities around the world that feel that their languages are endangered (Spolsky 2004; Spolsky and Shohamy 1999). Although the motivation of such a move could be to facilitate the learning process, the outcome of it will definitely include the benefit of language maintenance, hence, culture and identity maintenance as well (Ginsburgh and Weber 2011).

Having said that, one cannot underestimate the importance of enabling learners to acquire competency in additional languages, particularly English, which is the current global lingua franca. However, this does not necessarily call for enforcing English as the language of instruction in schools. All interviewees in this study had the understanding that Qatar expects its citizens to have a reasonable level of English for social interactions, travel, and accessing the internet and for effective professional communications in certain sectors, such as business, science and technology, international relations, IT, and banking. They also recognize the need for English in certain fields of study at the university, such as Engineering, Medicine, and Pharmacy.

One last remark concerns the use of EMI in the other Gulf countries, especially in the UAE that shares many of the issues that Qatar has struggled with. Although the UAE is following a gradual approach to the introduction of English in schools, the

challenges of qualified teachers, appropriate instructional materials culturally and developmentally, concerns about effectiveness of Arabic language learning practices, and fear for the loss of Arab identity are as serious in the UAE as they have been in Qatar. What happened in Qatar may serve as a warning to Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, and Oman that the nurturing of Arabic is important for the Gulf people, and any plans for expanding the role of English should go hand in hand with major concrete steps to promote the status of Arabic and its effective acquisition. Short of that, there will be resentment and the repercussions could mess up educational development plans. As for Qatar, we believe that there should be a critical, thoughtful review of the experience in order to be able to build constructive alternatives. Qatar should not abandon the experiment completely; it should build on the positive points in *EFNE* and *EMI* and incorporate them in the new educational plans that emphasize teacher professional preparation and development and allow students to join international schools through a voucher system if they wish (MacLeod and Abou-El-Kheir 2017). Careful planning and active consultation with active social forces could help build a healthy bilingual system that accords Arabic the high status it deserves as a mother tongue and give English a major role in domains that will help Qataris fully participate in the modern world and join a knowledge-rich globalized work force.

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Appendix

See Tables 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8.

Table 1 Number of interviewees and interview duration in each school type/entity

Name of school/entity	No. of interviewees	No. of hours
Independent schools	10	14
Public schools	4	5
International schools	4	6
SEC	5	7
Qatar University	1	2
Total	24	34

Table 2 Reasons for looking positively at the enhanced role of English in education by different interviewee types

Interviewees	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It enhances learners' language skills 2. Learning an additional language, whether English or any other language, is something positive 3. Learning English is a privilege for these students 4. Teaching English at an early age is more productive and facilitates acquisition 5. Proficiency in English is important for students for studying abroad or even for using the internet 6. Students learn the English language for coping with modern times and modern science 7. The more a person is exposed to a language the better he masters the language 8. English has become necessary and therefore, we should teach it to our children
Category (2): public schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is a sign of advanced education 2. English is the language of modern times 3. It is the language of science advancements 4. Starting to teach English from grade one is good and will enhance the skills of students and would better prepare them for university education 5. It enables students to interact with people from other cultures 6. It will enable them to understand scientific texts
Category (3): international schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It brings everybody together in one language 2. English is currently the international language 3. This would enable graduates of the system to be able to travel and communicate globally 4. Such emphasis on English is good and is necessary for trade and commerce, which is being enhanced in the country 5. English is needed for commerce and industry 6. All need it now and there is no getting away from the fact that you need English to be able to communicate with the global community 7. English is important for those working in the business sector
Category (4): officials from SEC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. English is important because it is the tool for accessing the rest of the world 2. It is the language of globalization 3. Teaching science and math in English is a futuristic plan for preparing students for universities 4. Resources whether books or internet are in English 5. The universities that the students will join teach in English 6. Basically, English can be used in all domains

Table 3 Reasons for having reservations regarding the enhanced role of English.

Interviewees	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. [The change of language] would have been better to start gradually from grade one or preschool, not as currently done for all grades at the same time 2. Students at grade 5 and six are challenged by learning science and math in English because they studied the two subjects in previous years in Arabic 3. Arabic is not only a language, rather, it is a set of cultural values that need to be learned 4. Students learn the [English] language for coping with modern times and modern science, but this does not mean replacing the language of Qura'an
Category (2): public schools	<p>English is the language of the current era and it should be taught starting from the nursery or preschool but more emphasis should always be on the Arabic language</p>
Category (3): international schools	<p>No reservations were expressed</p>
Category (4): officials from SEC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is better for students to study math and science in their first language because they better understand their first language. This is based on studies 2. The [English] language could be acquired later 3. Understanding the content is easier in the mother tongue 4. I love the Arabic language and prefer having these subjects taught in Arabic but I respect the direction of the government, as I am an employee of this (government)

Table 4 Arabic is not being affected by the enhanced role of English

Interviewee	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. If the Arabic language teaching is enhanced there would be no concern about a negative impact of the English language on the acquisition of Arabic 2. Giving focus to both languages would produce balanced bilinguals 3. Arabic has a rich cultural heritage and is not being threatened by the English language 4. We teach English and Arabic side by side at an advanced level and therefore I do not see Arabic being threatened by the English language 5. The Arabic foundation of students is strong and is unlikely to be harmed by learning English as a second language 6. English would not negatively affect Arabic if the usage of English is restricted to “studying” and Arabic is used in other contexts 7. The issue with Arabic is not related as much to the influence of English; rather, it is related to the lack of support provided to the teaching of Arabic and to using outdated textbooks 8. Research has shown, especially for early grades, that those who do well in English are already strong in their mother tongue and vice versa 9. Children are capable of learning many languages without one affecting the other 10. It is mainly the duty of the family to enhance the Arabic language proficiency of its children. If this is done, we will have no issue with the change of language of instruction on the students’ competency in Arabic
Category (2): public schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teaching English will not negatively affect Arabic since all other subjects are being taught in Arabic in public schools 2. I never noticed any decline in students’ Arabic proficiency after the increased emphasis on teaching English 3. There is no threat to the Arabic language as Arabic rules and grammar are taught to students very early and the use of English is restricted to school [in Public Schools]
Category (3): international schools	Loss of language is not that obvious in Qatar
Category (4): officials from SEC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As long as the mother tongue is well established there won’t be problems in maintaining the second language or affecting the mother tongue 2. It’s not like we are teaching English and forgetting the Arabic language! We are the first country who introduces the Arabic standards. I can’t see problems in teaching English

Table 5 Arabic is negatively impacted by enhanced role of English

Interviewees	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is normal for students' [proficiency in Arabic] to be influenced by the English language since they learn scientific terminology in English only 2. The increased emphasis on English will harm the Arabic language since after learning English students would prefer to use it, even if their competence in Arabic is solid 3. Standard Arabic should be used in teaching in primary schools, and focus should only be on the mother tongue. English should be introduced as a second language 4. Increased emphasis on English has negatively affected Arabic since we see that some students are very weak in Arabic although they are competent in math and science 5. The English language already dominates with use of satellites and internet Language
Category (2): public schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It is certain that the English language would have a big impact on the Arabic language unless the content and teaching of Arabic is enhanced 2. Students will get used to using English for different technical terms and eventually forget the Arabic equivalents 3. Most students are already weak in Arabic and the more they use English, the worse their Arabic will be 4. We are not at all against learning English. But at best we want it to be given the same emphasis given to Arabic or less
Category (3): international schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Currently English is used everywhere since we are in an open society 2. We need to enhance our Arabic culture and make reference books available in Arabic 3. As things stand now, the Arabic language is being definitely neglected 4. It would be great if Independent Schools could strike the balance between teaching the two languages in schools. This is the responsibility of the schools 5. Responsibility lies with the family to provide their children with opportunities to use Arabic in speaking and reading. This could be said about all children attending international schools 6. The school is concerned that the mother tongue of students is weak because students need to have a strong foundation in their mother tongue in order to learn a different language, in this case, English 7. English is affecting the mother tongue, whatever the mother tongue is
Category (4): officials from SEC institutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The increased emphasis on English in banking and commerce comes at the expense of Arabic because now parents tend to prepare their children and encourage them to master English 2. Students now are weaker in [Arabic] spelling, which means traditional schooling might be better. But the problem didn't start with the independent schools system. It has been there and there should be more concern for Arabic and its teaching

Table 6 Challenges facing different school types

Interviewees	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Finding good textbooks/instructional material 2. Weak foundation of students in the English language 3. Lack of motivation on the part of students 4. Students' feeling that education has no value for them 5. Finding teachers who are at the same time pedagogically qualified, proficient in English, and have mastery of subject matter 6. Wide gaps among students in English language proficiency Some students are "like native speakers" while others can hardly "utter a full sentence in English" 7. Gaps in skills and knowledge resulting from turning a school into an independent school at all levels of the education cycle at once 8. Overloading teachers with curriculum design, teaching, grading, and evaluation There is need to divide the load when using ready-made curricula 9. Having no textbooks a big challenge for learners and teachers 10. Long school day for teachers 11. Students' levels below set standards Teachers have to simplify concepts and create material and find textbooks to address the standards
Category (2): public schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Curricula suitable in terms of level but too long which affects students' comprehension of the material 2. Increased responsibilities of teachers
Category (3): international schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Difficulty learning a second language when there is no solid first language 2. No Arabic language learning before age of making learning two languages at the same time an arduous task for children 3. Not enough time for exposure and learning of English It normally takes a student 6–8 years to learn English as a second language in an English environment with strong exposure and usage of mother tongue at home. But in this school it might take us longer because the students don't have a strong mother tongue
Category (4): officials from SEC	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Lots of teachers not qualified to teach math and science in English 2. Low proficiency in English of classroom teachers (teaching English, Math and Science in English) for grades 1–3 as this was not a requirement when they got hired 3. No textbooks in the new system 4. Some teachers addressing the standards in a superficial way so the same things were taught for example for grades 1 and 4! 5. Teachers' quality, different cohorts, and degree of commitment [of the school administration] 6. English linguistic competence of teachers If teachers are not linguistically competent, students will get neither the content, nor the language 7. Teacher's professional judgment of what is appropriate culturally without harming educational vision 8. Many parents opposing the idea of having their children being taught in English and being exposed to the western ideology [she means values] 9. Problems with the parents who wanted textbooks

Table 7 Increased exposure to English has no negative impact on students' Arab identity

Interviewees	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Although the Standards were put together by British experts, Qatari educators were consulted and have taken part [in the project] 2. Western teachers are a minority, and they are the ones to be affected by the environment and culture of the school, not vice versa 3. I am not concerned about the influence of foreign teachers on students' identity and culture because they are a minority, and close monitoring would prevent it 4. I don't see a big influence of English culture and foreign teachers because the family is supposed to enhance the mother tongue
Category (2): public schools	Foreign teachers would not change students' values or culture because students are already raised in a certain way and they would not simply forget what they were raised according to it
Category (3): international schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. As long as teachers don't get engaged in political or religious discussions [with students], things would be fine 2. All of foreign teachers respect the local values of the countries they work in; otherwise they wouldn't work there 3. English can never dominate and affect the Arabic culture. This is the responsibility of the Qatari people, it is not my responsibility 4. Students would definitely be influenced by the English culture, not only through their teachers, but also through TV, internet, and their classmates. The influence is positive since we need to know about other cultures as long as we don't forget our own
Category (4): officials from SEC	Our identity includes religion, culture, and heritage, not only the Arabic language

Table 8 English has a negative cultural impact on students' sense of affiliation to Arab culture and identity

Interviewees	Responses
Category (1): independent schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The excessive use of English in schools (which is the current situation) definitely has a cultural impact on the Arab culture and identity of students. Some functions that would normally be conducted in Arabic are currently being conducted in English, like public lectures at Qatar University 2. Teachers who are native speakers could be good for younger children but there has to be close monitoring so that they don't try to instill values in the children that contradict ours 3. Such influence comes from outside school as well 4. It is good to be aware of other cultures, but this should be within what is acceptable in our religion and moral values 5. Foreign teachers would affect the Arab identity of students since teachers are considered role models for students 6. [Foreign teachers] would not be able to pretend to live the values of our society all the time.
Category (2): public schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learning English from native speakers is good but teachers should respect the religion, culture, and traditions of the society 2. We want the foreigners to learn and use our language as well 3. We want our language to be dominant in our country
Category (3): international schools	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. We are concerned about the influence of English culture on the local culture 2. It is the job for both the parents and the school to help students maintain their cultural identity 3. I hope the way of life, the Arab values, and the traditions are not going to be lost. It is the job of both the parents and the school [to preserve them] 4. If parents don't spend enough time with their children or speak to them in Arabic, these children would lose their heritage and Arab identity and culture 5. They need to be taught their religion and values by their parents 6. It is very important for them to be proud and [to] respect and maintain their culture. The burden is on the parents because a teacher can't act all the time and pretend that she or he belongs to the Arabic culture
Category (4): officials from SEC	–

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