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Bilingual Education in the United Arab Emirates

Abstract

This article describes the different methods used in bilingual education programs, focusing on how they have been adapted in Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirate (UAE). The article outlines pedagogical approaches and describes the relevant sociocultural context. It outlines the actions that might result in a loss of heritage and details how the government has protected the nation from these risks. It also discusses the legal background of the educational sector in the UAE and the Emirate.

Keywords: bilingual education, curriculum, cultural approach, UAE, schools

General introduction

Abu Dhabi, the largest city within the United Arab Emirates (UAE), is the nation's capital. Located in the Middle East, the country is relatively young, established in 1971 by the constitutional federation of the UAE. Rapid political and economic progress have resulted in significant development. Due to strong economic growth, the country has made substantial investments in its work force. UAE residents benefit from a high standard of living as well as a good school system, with the country steadily investing an enormous amount of money in the education sector. At the same time, economic growth has brought a vast number of non-Arabic speakers to the country, resulting in English being widely spoken in the Middle East. Shops, restaurants, and transport companies need to hire staff who do not speak Arabic in order to meet customer demand and market requirements. Many households use nannies, drivers and other types of domestic servants from South

and East Asia who are unable to communicate in Arabic. These circumstances mean that knowledge of the English language is often required to communicate and survive in the country. In essence, English has become the lingua franca of the UAE.

The Education System in the UAE

In the last few years, important changes and progress has been made in the UAE education sector. Every Emirati, regardless of gender, is entitled to free public education from pre-school to the university level. In addition, a private education system is highly developed and supported by the government, with generous scholarships available to Emirati students to support their learning in prestigious schools within the country or abroad.

The UAE education system is regulated by the Ministry of Education (MOE). The MOE is responsible for setting standards and providing guidance and curriculum requirements to different emirates. The Ministry of Education has been working on necessary reforms of the education system to make sure it meets international standards and is consistent with the UAE 2030 vision. Due to the often-significant differences among local education regulatory bodies, each emirate has its own rules. For example, in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, the controlling organization is the Abu Dhabi Department of Education and Knowledge (ADEK), previously called Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC). In Dubai, these responsibilities are handled by Dubai's Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA). As a result of past modifications of private school curriculums, these local organizations must comply with ADEK or KHDA rules but are not subject to MOE oversight. However, both bodies follow MOE guidance. Schools operate from Sunday to Thursday and observe all public holidays and religious celebrations such as Eid.

Main Education Sectors in Abu Dhabi

> The real asset of any advanced nation is its people,
> especially the educated ones, and the prosperity and success
> of the people are measured by the standard of their education.
>
> Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan

As the above quote indicates, the UAE is similar to other countries in its belief that education is key to its success, therefore numerous reforms and improvements have been established in the past decade. The schooling model in the UAE includes 14 years of compulsory education, and Abu Dhabi schools are divided into various sectors as follows.
– Nurseries – Must follow ADEK regulations and guidance. The primary aims of this early education is enforcing children's right to an education and guaranteeing their personal, physical and mental well-being.
– Private schools – Despite often having their own curriculums (British, American, Canadian, French, German, Indian etc.), these institutions must follow ADEK policy and

recommendations. ADEK monitors students' progress and evaluates school system efficiency.

– Charter Schools – Partnerships between government and private schools. These were established to offer more subjects and they generally follow American curriculums. These institutions are popular with Emiratis due to the extracurricular activities offered and they operate under the ADEK umbrella.

– Public schools – Patronized by the President of the UAE, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan and by the Ministry of Education, they follow a consistent education system nationwide.

– Higher Education Sector – Both private and public, operates under the ADEK umbrella.

Furthermore, as in most countries, primary and secondary education is compulsory in the UAE. Since the 1970s, the Abu Dhabi education system has been organized as follows:

– Kindergarten – Ages: 4 to 5 years old;

– Primary – Length of program: 6 years, ages: 6 to 12 years old;

– Preparatory (aka Middle School) – Length of program: 3 years, ages: 12 to 15 years old;

– Secondary – Length of program: 3 years, ages: 15 to 18 years old, certificate/diploma awarded: Secondary School Leaving Certificate; and,

– Technical Secondary School – Length of program: 6 years, ages: 12 to 18 years old, certificate/diploma awarded: Technical Secondary Diploma.

Although the rules followed by the public education system in the UAE are consistent nationwide, private or international school systems might be slightly different than those in Western countries. The Abu Dhabi Department of Knowledge has also created a set of rules and guidance that must be followed by the Islamic society in the field of education.

Requirements for private sector education in Abu Dhabi

In order for schools to legally operate in the UAE, they must first obtain a private license. This involves a multistage process and must be approved by ADEK. During this time, the frequency of ADEK inspections decreases if previous assessments have resulted in positive reports. In order to renew their licenses, school must obtain set minimum rating levels within a five-year time period (Band A with a rating of 'good' or higher). Similarly, all teaching staff must obtain council accreditation to work in the education sector. The curriculum must be clearly established from the beginning, including stated goals, and any major changes must be approved by the council. There are three categories of licenses:

1. Temporary License for new schools (max 2 years);
2. General License; and,
3. Council-Accredited License. This is an optional high-status license and can be only obtained if a school has been granted an outstanding rating. In order to obtain a license to open any kind of private education centre, in addition to financial, credulity and safety checks, certain conditions based on local laws apply:

- The company must be registered in the Emirate in accordance with current laws and regulations;
- The company must include one or more United Arab Emirate nationals as a shareholder/partner, holding a minimum of 51% of the share capital; and,
- People applying for an official Private School License must be UAE nationals, at least 25 years old, and have a clean criminal record.

Once a license is obtained, any changes of board members must be approved by the Council. Schools may teach only one curriculum; an international diploma might be added to American and/or British curriculums after high school if previously authorised by the relevant international organization and the local council.

Regardless, the curriculums of all schools, whether in the government or the private sectors, must follow certain norms. Every school must perform well in regular ADEK inspections. The frequency of scheduled reviews depends on the school's performance rating from the previous visit. Better ratings mean less frequent official inspections. In its guidance and regulation policy for private sector schools, ADEK cites the most important core values that each school must demonstrate. These include:

– teamwork
– transparency
– respect
– accountability
– care and compassion

In addition, special attention is paid to moral obligations, defined as a set of ethical values and principles which are in accordance with the religion of Islam as well as the values, ethics, identity and culture prevalent in UAE society, and which respects other religions (see Policy (30)). (ADEK, Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual, 2014).

Visible signs of culture required in the buildings

Every building must display official photos of their Highnesses in the main entrance of the school building. Regulations state that:

The order of pictures shall be from left to right as follows: 1. The UAE's Founder. 2. The UAE's President. 3. The UAE's Vice President. 4. The Crown Prince of the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. Schools shall comply with all relevant matters regarding the positions of their Highness' pictures and placements as stated in the "Positions of Their Highness Pictures and Placements and Uses of Flags Manual" at Schools in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi. (ADEK, Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual, p. 43).

In addition, the UAE national flag must be flown both inside and outside of the building. The flag is always raised with appropriate conditions and lowered following official mourning announcements. Every morning, the National Anthem must be played during school assembly, with pupils expected to respectfully sing the anthem. In addition, all private schools must promote Arabic ethos and values. Therefore, in addition to mandating Arabic as a core subject, Islamic Education and UAE Social Studies must be included in every curriculum.

The Private School Guidance includes the following requirements (ADEK, Private Schools Policy and Guidance Manual, p. 122):

Minimum number of instruction periods per week for Arab students in foreign and Asian curriculum schools				
Grade	G 1–3	G 4–6	G 7–9	G 10–12
Islamic Education	3	2	2	2
Arabic Language	6	5	4	4
UAE Social Studies	1	1	2	–
Time	Minimum 40 minutes per instruction period			

Minimum number of instruction periods per week for non-Arab students in foreign and Asian curriculum schools				
Grade	G 1–3	G 4–6	G 7–9	G 10–11
Islamic Education	2	2	2	2
Arabic Language	4	4	4	4
UAE Social Studies	–	1	1	–
Time	Minimum 40 mins per instruction period			

The above details demonstrate some of the ways that the UAE has invested in education. The ADEK Department of Knowledge states, "The education sector in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi is one of the dynamic sectors that contribute to the continuous advancement of the UAE, as it offers a wide range of education institutions that work on graduating highly educated professionals who can help in achieving Abu Dhabi 2030 vision" (ADEK website statement). In the UAE's future vision, education is the key element of the country's 2030 long-term economic plan, intended to build strong, knowledge-based industries to reduce the nation's reliance on the oil sector and to implement high teaching standards in order to meet the needs of the labour market.

The UAE is home to millions of expats. In fact, since the number of migrant workers in the country outnumbers the native-born population, the education system is forced to provide a range of options for students. Bilingual and International schools are two of the most common models of education in the region.

Definition of bilingual education

According to Ofelia Garcia, "Bilingual education is the use of two languages in the instruction and assessment of learners" (2009). There are numerous bilingual education programs that vary in their aims, use of language and students' targets. All these programs should consider the sociocultural, political and historical characteristics of the countries they are offered in. A bilingual education program should teach learners to become bilingual and biliterate. In addition to local students, bilingual programs also serve immigrants

and refugees. Bilingual systems should not focus only on language learning but should educate learners holistically, with additional instruction on literacy and language practice.

Goals of Bilingual Education

The aim of bilingual education programs may vary depending on the country. For example, in countries such as the USA, Great Britain or China, they might be considered a way to weaken students' use of their native languages. These countries have a large number of immigrants and often focus on developing general and academic literacy in their official or standard languages. In the UAE, there are two different approaches. In public schools, bilingual education has a curriculum that is presented to students in two different languages. However, in the private sector English is the dominant language and schools mandate that students use English as a target language instead of their mother tongue.

According to Lynn Malarz (Bilingual Education), bilingual education is organised into four academic areas: cognitive development, affective development, linguistic growth, and cultural enrichment. Nevertheless, scholars have different opinions on what the primary goals of bilingual education should be. Some experts consider cognitive and affective development the most important aspects of these programs. Other researchers argue that linguistics should be the core of the learning process. Most bilingual learning programs promote both linguistic and cultural diversity. Enabling a transition to mainstream native culture is important, however it should not be prioritized in bilingual education programmes (L. Malarz, Bilingual Education).

Basic Models of Bilingual Education

De Mejia, Baker, Lin & Man and other recognised scholars divide bilingual literature into three basic models first identified by Fishman (1976): maintenance, transitional and enrichment programmes.

According to Fishman (1976), maintenance programmes are designed to maintain linguistic minorities. They support first languages, using the learners' native language to teach the target language. The students' mother tongue is used as the medium of instruction during the early years of schooling (Fishman, 1976).

Unlike maintenance programmes, the objective of transitional programmes is making students fluent in the target language as quickly as possible. The goal is to prepare students for a monolingual mainstream society.

According to Lin & Man (2009), enrichment programmes are designed for language students. The main goal is that learners become fluent in a target language but do not replace their native language in daily use. The second language is used as the medium of instruction in some or all academic subjects. Scholars have analysed and observed different models of enrichment programmes in a variety of contexts, including Canadian/French immersion, European schools, and dual language schools (Lin and Man, Bilingual Education, 2009). These models of bilingual and bicultural education have one aim – to enrich

children's education with a special linguistic approach. Learning second languages is the most common approach in the USA while European schools use Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) (Baker, 2011). We can recognise various model of education in bilingual literature context. They have different goals, relationships of majority and minority language speakers, or medium of instructions. Following are some descriptions of the popular language enrichment programs:

– French-Canadian schools have had proven success using programmes that allow pupils to achieve a high level of proficiency in a second language without any native language loss. Their goal is to make Canadian English speakers fluent in French while developing an appreciation of the customs and cultures of both French- and English-speaking Canada. An immersion approach may be used depending on the levels and ages of the learners. Lin, A. and Man, E. (Bilingual Education Southeast Asian Perspectives 2009)

– Dual Language schools, where both languages are given equal attention in the curriculum, are very popular in the USA. Attendees of these schools become bilingual and biliterate (Baker, 2000). However, in practice the amount of time spent on a particular language might differ depending on the students' needs. In practice, only one language is used in each period of instruction, with language boundaries being established for time, curriculum content and teaching (ibidem). It is vital to create a timetable giving the languages equal importance. However, even with good boundaries there is always the risk that one language becomes associated with more prestigious/modern subjects while the other language is used to teach less respected topics (ibidem).

– Some European schools provide great examples of successful immersion education. However, these types of schools are often only available to a limited clientele due to their high fees. In their research, Lin and Man (Bilingual Education) quote Breadsmore asserting that:

> The least productive model included in this collection is that of the European Schools, given that it is not destined for expansion, is expensive to operate and could be taxed with elitism. Nevertheless, the immense practical experience gained from this complex form of multilingual education and the many insights it offers on how to handle mixed populations on an equal footing should provide elements of inspiration. As a model, it is unlikely to be adopted elsewhere. It differs significantly from many so-called international schools, however, in that, unlike the latter, it is genuinely multilingual both in programme and in outcome, whereas most so-called international schools are only international in population make-up, to some extent in curriculum, but rarely so in languages on offer. MLA 8th Edition (Modern Language Assoc.)

European schools are generally multilingual. They promote European identities but also focus on the development of students' first languages and cultural backgrounds. Learning a third language is a very common option. Lin and Man (Bilingual Education) describe European Curriculums as those in which all children follow the same model. Second languages may be used as mediums of instruction in cognitively undemanding and contextualized subjects such as physical education or art. Another important point to consider is that exams are prioritized until Grade 8, so younger students can focus on

language development and creative thinking. Learning environments are kept relaxed and stress free because students sometimes need to use their weaker languages. First languages are maintained as a subject and medium of instruction whilst the use of second languages is gradually expanded from undemanding subjects such as physical education, music or art into more complex content courses (Lin, Man, 2009).

– International schools have been established all over the world; however, in Europe these schools are mostly monolingual. They are often considered elite schools as they normally charge quite high fees. There are various models of international schools described by de Mejia, including national schools with a curriculum designed for children who live away from home, schools following a global education curriculum and principals. The second model often serves children of diplomats or parents who are working abroad, and generally follow a British or American curriculum. Teaching staff is mostly British or American-trained, and they prefer to hire native speakers. In fact, over the past decade, these schools have become popular among wealthy families who want their children to receive an internationally recognised education and can afford the high fees. Most of the international schools around the world offer monolingual classes, with English being the most common medium of instruction. Many schools offer second languages too, sometimes as an alternative medium of instruction with smaller groups and fewer class hours available.

Bilingual Education approach in the UAE

Kay Gallagher researched bilingual education in Abu Dhabi and her findings highlighted some of the important changes occurring in the educational community during the last decade. Supported by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC), educators worked together and established an ambitious reform plan and commitment to teach English in public schools. The country has been a pioneer/leader in the private education sector mainly driven by British or American curriculum education systems and has also successfully implemented a bilingual education approach in UAE public schools. The UAE government in Abu Dhabi introduced a new model of education starting from the 2010/2011 academic year. At first, this model included early learners and some primary education levels, but included plans to gradually broaden the population served.

The Abu Dhabi Education Council states, "Amongst a range of ongoing pedagogic, curricular and school leadership reforms, a major new departure is the introduction of English as an additional medium of instruction alongside the existing medium of Arabic." This shift towards bilingual education was heralded as "a monumental step" by its architects (2010) It was a big step forward towards a new and more highly developed education system.

The intended focus was on "creating bi-literate students, which means students will be able to understand, speak, read and write in both English and Arabic. While mathematics and science will be taught in English, Arabic language, history, and Islamic studies will be taught by native Arabic speakers" (ADEC, 2010).

Kay Gallagher believes that there could be several reasons that ADEC used the term 'monumental' to describe the changes in the public education sector. Firstly, it is important to remember that before 2010, the majority of schools in the Emirate were private and most of them followed the British or American systems. Nevertheless, in UAE curriculum schools all subjects were taught using Arabic language as the only medium of instruction. English was merely a second language. Starting in 2010, English and Arabic were given equal prominence, a somewhat controversial decision. Due to the high percentage of people coming from the western region, English was already widely spoken in the country. For many years Emiratis were concerned about the vulnerable position of their native language and were afraid of losing their mother tongue and culture. Therefore, making a decision to elevate the status of English must have been very difficult and extra precautions were certainly taken. Before this change, parents had some influence on the type of education chosen for their children. If they wished their children to have greater exposure to English, they could simply enrol their children into a private sector school. If they wanted to cultivate their children's interest in and knowledge of Arabic culture and language, they had an option of sending them to a public school. However, bilingual education has been mandatory since 2010; all pupils learn both languages and parents no longer have a say in this decision. From a pedagogical point of view, this was a complex decision. It raised many questions that had to be resolved during the implementation period, such as whether schools should teach American or British English and whether this decision was truly important (Gallagher, 2011).

Lin & Man (2009) point out in their research, the English language no longer belongs to just one nation.

> The World English (WE) paradigm (or theoretical framework) has changed our concept of "English" from a monolithic notion to a pluralistic notion of "Englishes". That is, there is not one single legitimate English in the world; there are many legitimate Englishes. It has also highlighted the notion of ownership of English by people in ex-colonies of Anglo-speaking countries. That means English no longer belongs only to the former colonial masters. Different Englishes are now being developed and appropriated (i.e., taken as their own) in their own right by people who use them as their first or second languages and very often as a marker of their own identities (e.g. in Singapore and India). (Bilingual Education: Southeast Asian Perspectives, 2009: 3).

Similar to other Asian countries, the UAE's main focus is on making sure that students are bilingual and biliterate learners. State schools tend to follow a more American version of the language and education standards. However, educators are also widely hired from the UK as well as from other English-speaking countries. There still has not been enough research conducted on bilingual education in this region. The program is in the initial evaluation and testing stages, with the ADEK, school leaders and educational communities carefully monitoring the results and continually making improvements.

Sociocultural context

Bilingual education encourages students to learn how to function in different cultures, and sometimes how to assimilate with different cultural practices. By promoting bilingual education in the Gulf, the UAE is proving that it is a powerful and tolerant country that does not suffer from the "chronic case of xenoglossophobia – the fear of foreign languages" Cutshall (2005: 20) evident in many other powerful monarchies. It has also accepted the difficult challenge of how to adapt bilingual learning so Muslim and Islamic values are not lost.

The current situation in Abu Dhabi proves the statement that "bilingual education is a simple label for a complex phenomenon" (Cazden, Snow, 1990). It is related to "debates about the fundamental purposes and aims of education in general: for individuals, communities, regions and nations" and must be recognized as being situated in complex sociohistorical, economic, cultural and political contexts (Baker, 2001: 183–184). To understand the great range of bilingual education agendas in Abu Dhabi, one should consider the diverse sociohistorical contexts that have resulted in the assorted goals and diverse programs. The main goal of UAE bilingual education is to provide language skills which are marketable, making learners more employable and raising their status. Another sociocultural aim is to maintain a sense of history and pride in their native language and culture among the younger generation of Arabs, while at the same time developing an international mindset and English proficiency sufficient for them to successfully compete in the global economy.

The above-mentioned aims can also be considered evidence that Abu Dhabi is using bilingual education for more than limited linguistic and educational purposes. As Baker (2001: 193) says:

> ... bilingual education does not necessarily concern the balanced use and development of two languages in the classroom. Behind bilingual education are varying and conflicting philosophies of what education is for. Sociocultural, political, and economic issues are ever present in the debate over the provision of bilingual education.

The first step of establishing language education policies in Abu Dhabi was to identify and rank the most significant and vital goals of the Emirate, such as was done in the 2030 UAE vision. Another very important part of creating a new bilingual approach for ADEK was to publicize the main goals and priorities of the bilingual system. The organization also needed to work with families and other stakeholders and educate them about the factors and conditions necessary for success. All this planning required additional resources for schools, families, and members of the community.

According to ADEC, one of the paths to successes in bilingual education is encouraging teachers to become familiar with their students' culture. Every school organised an introduction week for recently arrived staff. Making sure that their teams were able to work well together was key to the success of every school organization. One of the things that ADEK has been checking during their school inspections and lesson observations is whether teachers' resources are sufficiently related to UAE culture. In order to protect

and promote UAE heritage, ADEK introduced the 'My Identity' program as a compulsory part of the curriculum in all UAE schools.

> Our ancestors left us a legacy of traditions that make us proud. Our mission is to pre-serve, develop and maintain it as an asset of this nation for generations to come. (The Late Sheikh Zayed)

My Identity Project – the purpose

As previously mentioned, the UAE is open and welcoming to many other cultures but still does its best to hold onto its own values and customs. Nevertheless, the enormous economic growth of the country has required extra effort to effectively foster national identity. Whereas public schools generally do this quite well, private sector education has had more difficulty with it due to multiple international demands influencing national identity. The vast international demographic of students and teachers used English as a lingua franca, and the Abu Dhabi Department of Knowledge was fully aware of the complexities involved in implementing the special curriculum approach. Therefore, they introduced the 'My Identity Framework', a source of guidance and recommendations about the project. The purpose of it was to give schools time to modify their curriculums to reflect a deeper knowledge and understanding of Emirati values and culture along with instilling an appreciation of the UAE. The project was made a high priority and provided national objectives that were customized to fit the context of international schools.

The main objectives for the private sector are:
– "Deepen the national identity of Emirati students, and foster appreciation, value, and respect of UAE identity among expatriate students;
– Strengthen and consolidate loyalty and a feeling of belonging to the UAE;
– Link national identity with local, Arabic, and Islamic roots;
– Reinforce the national identity among all students through an active, inquiry-based, and experiential supplementary curriculum that deepens student understanding of Emirati history, culture, and values over time;
– Provide students with information at varying levels of depth about the national iden-tity at each grade level to facilitate students' engagement;
– Promote the national identity consistently and effectively at a schoolwide level and within the mandatory curriculum; and,
– Encourage students to achieve the Abu Dhabi 2030 Vision of being confident local and global citizens." (My Identity Curriculum Framework ADEC, 2009)

The program has been divided into six themes based on grade level to identify the key areas needed for best practice:
– My Values are my Identity – The importance of this theme is to teach learners about Islam and its values, including how the religion has influenced life in the UAE. It shows learners how to interact with other cultures and religions and how to live with moderate principles and practices of an Islamic country.
– My Language is My Identity – Includes information about Arabic and its dialects as

part of a major language in the Middle East. Here students learn to appreciate why Arabic is so important internationally. Includes activities to develop students' practical language skills.

– My Community Is My Identity – Links learners to UAE history and heritage by stressing the importance of social relations and maintaining unity and cohesion. Focuses on more than the important historical facts and promotes loyalty.

– My Culture Is My Identity- Makes students aware of past and present traditions. Students learn about food, clothing, and the beauty of art. This theme connects "values to cultural forms [and] deepens our understanding of how cultural practices evolve, what makes something culturally aligned or not aligned, and how cultures adapt through cross-cultural interactions" (My Identity Framework, ADEC, 2009).

– My Citizenship Is My Identity – Awakens the students' feelings of belonging and loyalty towards the UEA and GCC regions. Opens learners' minds so they can look at the world with a local view and appreciate it.

– My History Is My Identity – Shows students how they can learn from history and contribute to the future of the UAE and the Gulf region.

There are significant differences between international and Emirati cultures. Nevertheless, by introducing the My Identity project and exporting it into the curriculum of local international schools, the UAE education system cultivates and maintained its culture in the Gulf.

Pedagogical approach

Pedagogically, bilingual education should integrate language and content. These efforts challenged educators to develop content for these classes.

Teachers have to be knowledgeable about bilingual development and they must have highly sophisticated linguistic and pedagogic skills in order to use the instructional languages strategically and effectively to support students' meaning-making (Christian, 1996; Valdes, 1997; Lindholm-Leary, 2001). Teachers should engage students in dialogue and facilitate rather than control student learning. This will help to encourage the development of higher-level cognitive skills and is associated with higher student achievement. (Doherty, Hilberg, Pinal, Tharp, 2003; Levin, Lezotte, 1995).

Finding a large number of classroom practitioners who are trained in bilingual education is difficult. This is complicated by the Emirate being a 'temporary destination' and therefore having a high turnover of academic workers. Most teachers had been trained in English-speaking countries where bilingualism was relatively new. For EAL students, teachers tried to implement lessons encouraging fluency in English as quickly as possible, but did not focus at all on their native tongue. In addition, those educators often were not bilingual, and this complicated and limited their understanding of learners' everyday struggles. Often trained educators decide to move to a different school, emirate, country or simply go back to their home. Therefore, if teachers were not specifically trained, they often confused approaches to bilingual programs with those of learning English as an additional language.

It is clear that ADEK tried to find the most suitable teaching approaches to accomplish what was best for the learners. For example, there were bilingual strategies similar to Lindholm-Leary's (2001) method:

> In order to be successful schools must invest in the effective leadership approach where all the resources are allocated within the program, staff trainings, curriculum development in both languages: English and Arabic. The leader of the program can be vice principal, indicated coordinator or resource teacher. The coordinator of the program must possess an extensive knowledge of bilingual education, he is responsible for instructional methodologies, effective classroom practice. He or she is responsible for the development, planning, coordination, and teachers training. (ADEK)

Another important consideration when choosing a pedagogical approach is teacher effectiveness. Each educator wishing to work in the UAE must be verified and approved by ADEK. Requirements include documentation of qualifications as well as a recommendation letter, all subject to a detailed review. Although both native and non-native speakers are permitted to work in the region, only highly qualified teachers with appropriate teaching accreditations can be approved. However, as Johnson and Swain assert (as quoted in Gallagher, 1997, p. 8), bilingual educators are one of the core features of immersion programmes, and as such teachers should have "the language proficiency necessary to maintain the L2 [second language] as a medium of instruction and to support and motivate the use of the L2 by the students".

Unfortunately, in Abu Dhabi native teachers are often speakers of Arabic with limited spoken English, while foreign teachers are most likely monolingual English speakers. This situation poses many challenges for the creation of an effective bilingual immersion program. Teachers often cannot provide cognitively stimulating instruction to students who struggle with understanding. Furthermore, as Garcia (2009) says, few teachers are trained to be professional bilingual educators. This is a very common problem in both public and private schools in Abu Dhabi. Private schools are mostly monolingual with some incorporation of Arabic lessons for local children based on ADEK restrictions. In the ideal classroom, teaching assistance is provided to help achieve comprehensible input and maintain linguistic equality in the classrooms. However, this approach it is not common in private bilingual British or American curriculum schools.

Nevertheless, private schools are trying to compensate for these deficiencies by investing in development strategies, multicultural and educational training and cooperative learning across the other departments. Children learn their first languages naturally starting as infants, but might need some direct instruction in EAL if they enter school when they are older. Research has shown that there needs to be some focus on grammar in SLA. Grammar is a part of language learning but without any explicit instructions. Grammar patterns are learnt in a natural accusation way rather than as a method of traditional translation and memorization. The established curriculum specifies which linguistics structures are essential and how to embed these into the academic content. Teachers are aware that focused grammar instruction is essential for cultivating academic language proficiency and is needed for higher levels of literacy. Since teachers are a vital part of the education process, it is necessary for them to pursue appropriate ongoing professional development

and this was a key part of Abu Dhabi educational standards. Not all the students can receive academic or literacy support at home so teachers may be their only point of instruction. Effective implementation of policy requires coordination across grades and attention must be paid to identifying the need for future interventions and reforms.

Areas for improvement

Given the current status described above, there are still some questions that need to be answered and room for improvement. We need to determine if exposing children to their native language and English at the same time is actually the right approach. In order to answer this, we need further research about whether it is possible to simultaneously teach children literacy in two languages, or if this just confuses them since Arabic letters and writing are so different from English. It is crucial that classroom practitioners know which strategy should be used in individual approaches while differentiating learning objectives. The curriculum content needs to be further analysed based on Gallagher's findings suggesting that students should not be taught core subjects such as science or math only in their second language. Many scholars, such as Baker, Cummins and Garcia, claim that students' educational progress depends on their comprehension. Additive bilingual programs are most likely to help students succeed. Linguistic as well as cognitive advantages are seen when literacy in both languages is developed. (Baker, 2006; Cummins, 2000; Garcia, 2009). Yet, bilingual or English-only education has dominated the UAE in recent years. Many Emirati families are choosing private British or American schooling for their children even though this decision may not be supported by research findings. Research projects conducted outside the UAE have shown that putting students into a classroom where they are taught in an unfamiliar language might lead to poor performance (Lin, Man, 2009).

Cummins (1979) research on bilingual children learning English is worth further consideration. According to his findings, in order to learn a second language well, students must have a strong foundation in their native languages (Cummins, 1979). He explains that some students placed into a bilingual system might struggle if not enough attention is paid to their first language. He does not blame bilingual education itself, but points out that language development will remain incomplete without being given sufficient time. Another finding that supports this statement is the threshold hypothesis. Similar to Cummins, this theory states that L2 learners must reach a certain threshold in their mother tongue before being able to be fluent in a second language. Baker (1996) suggests that one of the ways to help bilingual learners acquire a new language is to instruct them in their native language, "alternating between languages to ensure clarity and understanding but without translating" (ibidem: 187). Therefore, perhaps it would be worth considering limiting immersion classes in English to less demanding subjects such as PE or Art, and teaching key content classes in the student's native language. This process is consistent with the model of bilingual European schools. For now, the UAE is faced with problems caused by the employment of monolingual Anglophone teachers, with school leaders taking over teaching previously conducted in Arabic.

There is still a possible danger. In spite of all the efforts made to protect Arabic, it might become weaker in the Gulf. Findings show that less socially prestigious and powerful languages are more vulnerable to language loss. In an already cosmopolitan and multicultural region where almost everyone speaks English, Arabic is at risk. Where governmental and charter schools are only attended by Emiratis, it is more likely that Arabic will still be a priority or at least equally important. The situation might be a bit more complicated in the private sector schools which include Emirati students sent there by parents. In these, children are exposed to mostly English in the classroom and during break times when pupils mix with international colleagues' and teachers; consequently, English is becoming the dominant language.

Conclusion

It is clear that bilingual education has proven to be successful around the world. The Abu Dhabi bilingual education model can be very successful over time with its long-term perspective and philosophy. The Abu Dhabi Department of Education will continue to support the concept of bilingual education and the ability to communicate in at least two languages. Acquisition of two powerful and prestigious languages can be a great asset to the young Middle Eastern population if both tongues are considered equally important. More research and classroom observations must be conducted and carefully analysed. These findings will facilitate future progress and consolidation of the bilingual program in Abu Dhabi. Schools must promote and support an educative model and its approach. As Akabri says, we must reflect, listen to teachers and act to help ensure the victory of this project.

> To come up with an … accurate reflection of what takes place in language teaching classes, an important assumption must be made and accepted. Our profession must come to the realization that no grand theory or overarching idea can capture the local narrative of all L2 classes across time and space, … [we] must get … [our] inspirations not from postmodern philosophy or academic discussions per se, but also from the reflections of teachers and their wisdom. ... [we] must be able to help teachers theorize their practices by including their voices in its tenets, not speaking on their behalf from a purely theoretical perspective. ... As long as our academic discourse community ignores practitioners' plight, continues to make impossible demands, and refuses to replace idealism with realism, … [this discussion] will remain just a topic for lectures and argumentative academic articles. (Akbari, 2008: 650–651)

As Shaikh Zayed said, the future of the country depends on an educated population, and we must agree with Akbari that teachers are critical to achieving this goal. We must listen and learn from each other and work together. For a very young country, the UAE has definitely achieved a lot and we shall look closely at how its bilingual education system develops in the future.

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Streszczenie
Edukacja dwujęzyczna w Zjednoczonych Emiratach Arabskich

Artykuł opisuje podejście do dwujęzyczności i sposobu jej nauczania na przykładzie emiratu Abu Dhabi w Zjednoczonych Emiratach Arabskich. Praca ta przedstawia zarówno zarys pedagogiczny, aczkolwiek głównie skupia się na kontekście społeczno kulturowym. Porusza ważny problem możliwości utraty dziedzictwa kulturowego podczas dwujęzycznego program nauczania i w jaki sposób rząd i ministerstwo edukacji chroni swój naród przed tym zagrożeniem. Kolejno omawia podstawy prawne sektora edukacyjnego w Abu Dhabi i Zjednoczonych Emiratach.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja dwujęzyczna, program nauczania, podejście kulturowe, ZEA, szkoły