

Bilingual Education: Between Policy and Implementation in the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

Effective execution of policies that builds upon objectives deployed in institutional documents can be an overwhelming task. Failing to match the desired outcomes and policies has been recognized to be a gap, and that is one of the most important hindrances of making the anticipated outcomes of any educational institution attainable. In United Arab Emirates, considerable attention has been recently devoted to policy of bilingual education. This policy has been generated and organized in a top-down manner, which in turn contributed to depriving many subordinates, mainly teachers, from the positive participation in aligning the policy with its implementation. The study aimed at exploring the inconsistency, if any, between bilingual education policy and its implementation in public school and suggested ways to better implement this policy. Two qualitative research methods were employed. The results showed that educational policy not based on scientific views does not provide successful learning. Bilingual education has proven its advantages in fostering linguistic academic achievement; nevertheless, this cannot genuinely be achieved when students' actual level in English is critical (too low) and teacher's voices are not acknowledged. It is recommended that educational policy makers consider the results of the study to fine-tune the current educational policy to establish channels for communication between all those involved.

Key words: Bilingual education policy, United Arab Emirates

1. Introduction

1.1. Background of the study

The effective execution of policies that builds upon objectives deployed in institutional documentation can be an overwhelming task (Robichau & Lynn 2009). In spite of the context type, determining how policies have been implemented addresses the questions of consistency between the expected results and the scripted policy document. Failing to match those desired outcomes and policies has been recognized to be a gap, and that is one of the most important hindrances of making the anticipated outcomes of any institution attainable (Abu-Ayyash 2016). In educational institutions, it is not easy to determine with inevitability whether certain policies; for example language policy, are explicitly acknowledged and practiced in most domains. Language Education Policy (LEP) has

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been considered a powerful mechanism for creating de facto language policies in most countries (Tollefson 2002). Those countries, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) are no exception, have introduced LEPs that emphasize the need to learn a second language (L2) in addition to the mother tongue (MT) (Menken & García 2010). It is not a secret that English enjoys a considerable status and is hereby utilized as the major second language worldwide (Crystal 2003), including the Arab world and mainly the UAE (Godwin 2006). In UAE, considerable attention has been recently devoted to the policy of bilingual education, where reforming the emirate's education system and promoting a bilingual approach in learning and teaching are the main objectives of the strategic plan of supervising bodies of education such as Abu Dhabi Education Council's (ADEC) (ADEC 2017). It is needless to say that acquiring and utilizing the knowledge of two languages for educational purposes with a considerable degree of fluency, known as bilingual education, is increasingly and advantageously valuable in the academically globalized world (Kirkgöz 2009). Its significance has been highlighted in the *Policy 7110 Language of Instruction* in the ADEC Public School (p.12) Policy Manual under section 7000: instructional Program (ADEC 2015) ADEC, as a visionary response to the educational reform in UAE. It has embarked on promoting a bilingual education approach that begins at kindergarten (KG) and extends to grade 12-Math, Science and English learning by enshrining the fact that teaching literacy skills and content in two languages would equip students with the twenty-first century skills (ADEC 2017).

It is a fact that the educational system in the UAE is relatively new and that by supporting of the New School Model (NSM) as a part of the educational reform in the emirate of Abu Dhabi it is anticipated to obtain internationally notable results in educational standards. O'Sullivan (2015) reported that this reform has been extensively accepted since massive resources have been devoted to UAE education, yet student learning has remained generally inadequate. Quite understandably, the need for education reform that builds up language learning is becoming evidently significant. To achieve successful second language learning and teaching, emphasizing native and non-native speaker interactions in the emirate of Abu Dhabi is a necessity in order to improve students' language attainment and proficiency levels (Al-Khaili 2009). Nevertheless, enshrining the educational success and meeting the expectations of policy-makers encompasses the participation and consultation of all stakeholders involved in implementation; and teachers are the forefront. In reference to teacher's perspectives and the relevant document analysis, this study attempts to determine whether a gap exists between the reform-policy document that pursues promoting bilingual education and its implementation during the current reform climate.

1.2. Significance of the study

Cultivating bilingual language proficiency and encouraging learners to read in their mother tongue and another language have been a prerequisite for successful development in an increasingly globalized world. The significance of this study lies in it potentially giving the stakeholders insights on how important the in-depth knowledge of the contextualized teachers' perspectives on the bilingual education policy in Abu Dhabi is to make its implementation sustainable and successful.

1.3. Rationale of the study

The rationale for investigating the issue of bilingual education has evolved from the researcher's professional interest in the role of L1 in English as a foreign language classrooms. Being an Arabic/ English bilingual teacher of English in one of ADEC public schools means that the bilingual education policy has a direct impact on her practices.

2. Literature Review

Considering that this study gives prominence to bilingual education and the consistency between the written policy text and its employment, this chapter is consequently divided into two main sections. Bilingualism and policy models for bilingual education issues will be discussed in the first section, whereas the second will encompass a discussion of numerous studies that have examined the relationship between the written policy document and the implementation of the policy.

2.1. Conceptual Framework

2.1.1. Bilingual education

Defining bilingualism is no easy task. Throughout history, abundant definitions have been proposed in the literature (Baker 2011; Cummins 2000; Ellis, 2005; García 2009; González 2008), yet the communicative competence in two languages, with the same relative degree of proficiency is a mutual element (Hamers & Blanc 2000; Lanvers 2001). Bialystok (2017) describes bilingualism realistically by pointing to the realistic standards of second language proficiency, which involves competence to a certain degree of functioning in the second language; and that is a correspondent view with that of Hamers and Blanc (2000), who illustrated that the commonly held image of a bilingual speaker is that of a person who is not necessary evenly fluent in the two languages, but somewhat very proficient in the second one. On this point, Baker (2011) stated that bilinguals are not often equally good at both languages, but rather one language typically dominates.

Based on Bialystok's (2017) description, a new ability called "Bi-literacy", has been revealed. In academic contexts, bi-literacy is described as a competence in the receptive and productive skills in two languages; namely having the ability to communicate thoughts, comprehend ideas and write, using grammatical structures and terms in two languages (Baker 2011). And as one language is generally dominant for bilinguals, some receptive or productive skills would seem to be more developed than the others. This academically leads to differences in the bilingual's language competence (Cummins, 2000).

2.1.2. Categories of Bilingualism

According to Baker (2011), the development of bilingual language proficiency in second language (L2) learners typically follows the procedure of sequential bilingualism in which introducing students to L2 occurs when they are enrolled in educational institutions. In the past, numerous researchers were concerned about the delayed mental development and faulty language skills of early bilinguals (Byers-Heinlein & Lew-Williams 2013; MacNamara 1967; cited in Carroll 2007). However, the advocates of early bilingualism have currently spotlighted their views on the many potential advantages early bilingualism has, mainly for students' oral language skills and pre-literacy abilities (Erdemir 2013). Additionally, Cummins (2000) claimed that languages are interdependent and are controlled by a common processing system that permits knowledge and thoughts to be transferred. Thus, they advocated the hypothesis that proficiency in L2 acquisition is moderately reliant on children's first language skills.

2.1.3. Additive v Subtractive Bilingualism

The controversy and disagreements over bilingual education are grounded in the negative and positive results of undertaken studies and as a result two types of bilingualism - additive versus subtractive - were addressed (Cummins 2000).

Since proficiency in two languages is considered a linguistic and cultural advantage, a number of researchers advocates achieving additive bilingualism, which occurs when the bilingual person's first language and identity are not endangered to be depreciated or underestimated (Baker, 2001). The opponents of subtractive bilingualism argued in favor of additive bilingualism, stating that devaluing a bilingual person's L1 and culture and gradually replacing it with L2 is disadvantageous and not "a humanistic approach" (Atkinson 1987, p.242; cited in Levine 2003). Joining the discussions of bilingualism-related issues, it is important to shed light on the anticipated levels of language skills at which students will achieve competence in two languages. In response to research findings that tackle the impact of bilingualism on children's cognitive development and to lessen the subtractive effect of L2 instruction, Cummins (1976; cited in Cummins, 2001) developed the Threshold Theory, which assumes that learners are required to acquire and cultivate a threshold level of L1 proficiency, namely, receptive and productive skills, antecedent to second language acquisition.

2.1.4. Perspectives on Bilingual Education

Bilingual education remains a topic of worldwide debate that is manifested in the dichotomy revealed in the studies investigating the effects of bilingual education on cognitive development and communicative skills. In general, the positive effects of bilingual education on students' cognitive development were first recognized in Pearl and Lambert's study (1962), which created a milestone in the field of bilingualism (Baker 2001; Hamers & Blanc 2000). The effects of bilingual education involve more than just academic benefits, they also embrace valuing culture and

heritage. (Ramos 2007). Bilingual learners linguistically outperform their monolingual peers. For example, bilingual learners have displayed advanced levels of cognitive processes and linguistic awareness that are associated with second language acquisition (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato 2001), while Cenoz, Hufeisen and Jessner (2001) demonstrated that bilinguals have a higher level in using communicative strategies.

2. 1.5. Policy document and implementation

Operationally, Ogonnaya (2003) defined policy as purposeful procedures in approaching essential issues, a set of anticipated objectives of an institution in conjunction with guidelines for action. Another comprehensive definition suggested by Honig (2006) stated that policy is a set of analogous decisions by political agents communicated to subordinates that encompasses the selection of objectives and the means for accomplishing them within particular conditions. Jacobsen and Young (2013) in their study on educational policy perceive policy as rules and structures established by top management and subordinates to generate positive results for the progress of the institution.

Whatever the definition of policy is and whatever field it encompasses, understanding the objectives of the policy establishes a better understanding of how its implementation takes place in that field, e.g., in education.

Policy implementation is basically turning the policy into practice with an emphasis on the association between the anticipated expressions of the institution's intention; either encouraging or discouraging the execution of something, and the obtained results (Rosli & Rossi, 2014). Rosli and Rossi (2014) demonstrated that the attainment of educational policy objectives is crucially based on the process of policy implementation. Robichau and Lynn (2009) correspondingly highlighted the importance of aligning the policy document with its implementation in order to make the educational policy decision meaningful and pursuable. They also added that developing policies do not reflect the success of the institution unless the policies are implemented effectively and thus they shared the belief that the implementation of a policy influences its outcome (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984). In order to make a policy and its succeeding implementation efficacious and to understand the nature of policy implementation over time, numerous theoretical policy-implementation models have been consequently offered; mainly the top-down approach, the bottom-up approach and the combined approach (Birkland, 2014). Utilizing those approaches mainly depends on the essence of the policy and the contextual setting of the policy implementation. Generally, top-down implementation involves the forming and executing of the policy decisions, which are set by policy designers, and then communicating them to the implementers, whereas the policy implementation in the other approach is a reciprocal process that involves collaboration between the policy makers and the subordinates, who have the discretion to modify the policy objectives or change the way of their implementation.

In order to better understand different dimensions of education policy implementation, Sultana (2008) reviewed a number of studies that tackle the relationship between policy objectives and its implementation and concluded that understanding the dimension of people, policymakers and implementers, the targets of the policy

and the context in which the policy is established deepen the understanding of how those dimensions interact to shape the implementation process and the objectives (cf. Figure 1).

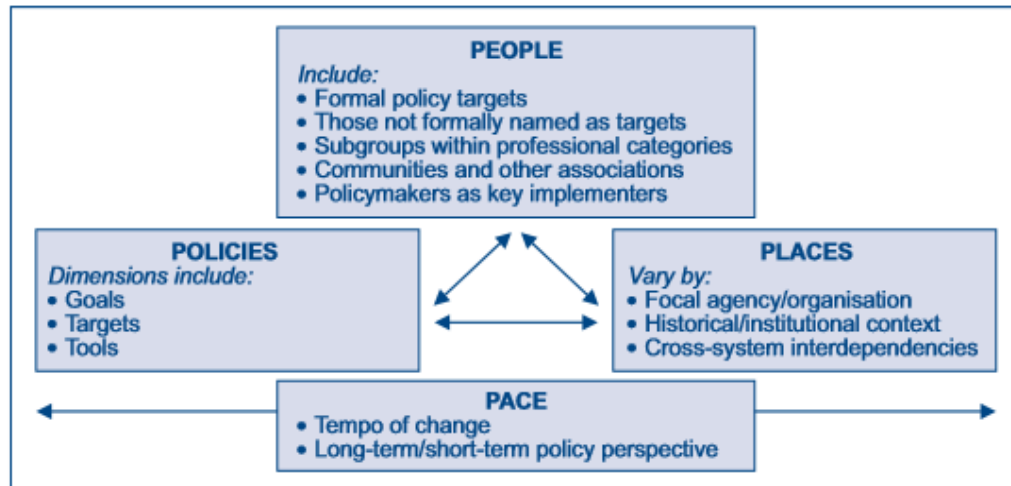


Figure 1. Dimensions of education policy implementation (Sultana, 2008; adapted from Honig, 2006)

2.1.6. Explanation of the increasing gap between policy objectives and implementation

As no versatile enough policy exists to fit all purposes, it is necessary to detect gaps between what was outlined in the policy document and what actually occurred. Some researchers argued that the complexity of educational issues in policy documents may lead to increasing gaps between the anticipated objectives and the instruments utilized for implementation (Rosi & Rosli 2014; Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002). Other researchers pointed that the realization of policies in the context of the UAE is based on the cultural context in line with the design of the policy and implementation tools utilized (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014).

In reference to Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner (2014) views, designing a policy includes the process of setting realistic and achievable goals and establishing efficient devices to accomplish these intended goals. They further claimed that the methods should involve regulatory and governmental elements, or financial and monetary elements, or agreement element or communication-based elements in order to generate an operational government policy (Lascoumes & Gales 2007; cited in Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2014).

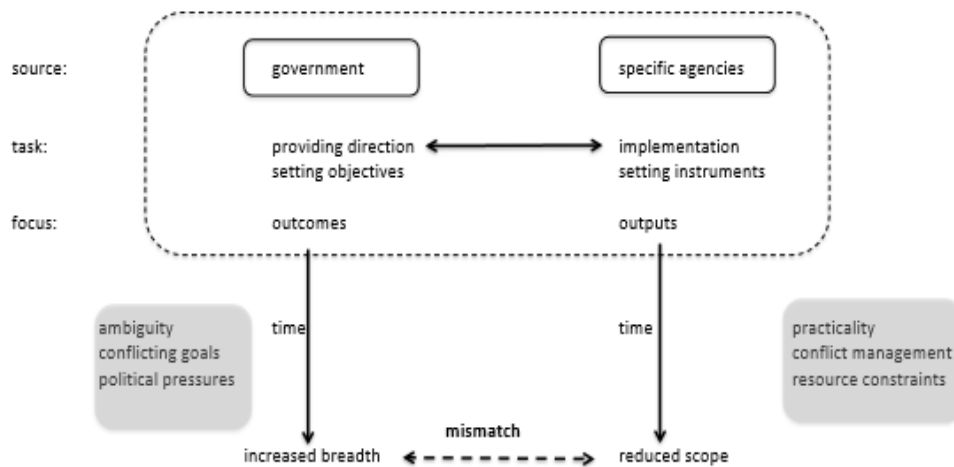


Figure 2. A framework illustrating the gap between policy objectives and implementations (Rosi & Rosli 2014)

Numerous explanations that pinpoint how policy is implemented in reference to its design, the administrative arrangements that operate the policy and the aptitude of those involved in the implementation of the policy have been proposed by scholars. The scholars premised their explanations on the importance of having assistance of agents, such as teachers, to achieve the aspirations of the institution and thus to make the ends of the policy a reality (Spillane, Reiser and Reimer, 2002). They further demonstrated that the gap is a result of the implementer's deficiency of the skills, knowledge, constructive understanding and assistance of the policy makers to establish consistent ways for better policy implementation. In order to provide an explanation on the gap between institutions' policy aspirations and its implementation, Rosi and Rosli (2014) provided a conceptual framework that consolidates different arguments on policy implementation (cf. Figure 2). The main focus in their proposed framework was how both a policy's setting and its implementation develop in different directions to create a mismatch between them.

As shown in the table, the framework examines the contrast between the two sources of policies; the first one is the government that sets the policy aspirations, whereas the second is the agency that is required to implement the policy by means of assembling a suitable instrument. Over time, the policy process encompasses a complex array of aspects that interact with many levels of agencies. Therefore, it is expected that in conjunction with the different levels of pressure that may occur between the objectives and the implementation, a developing mismatch will arise particularly when the policy involves ambiguous and complex issues. According to Rosi and Rosli (2014), if the issues are extremely convoluted, different perspectives will emerge in interpreting the issue. Thus, the understanding will become more ambiguous and the gap between policy makers and implementers will tend to increase.

In line with Rosi and Rosli's framework, Bach, Matt and Wolff (2014) suggest that policy ambiguity that results in poor implementation is not only a result of establishing poor alliance and agreement in the policy development process, but also it is a consequence of communication problems addressed by policy developers.

In a comparative analysis of the challenges of policy implementation, Sultana (2008) stated that disregarding and overlooking any group or position of people in the education system during the reform process, such as teachers, education officers and inspectors, creates a gap which in turn leads to critical problems with implementation. She further suggested to involve deputy principals, inspectors and parents in benchmarking and promoting the implementation of practices and standards of the reform process.

2.2. The theoretical underpinning

Language development faculty is one of the most essential and thought-provoking sets of theories applied to second language acquisition (Krashen 2013). This study is based on Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which claims that, in order to obtain a systematic linguistic output, students learning second or third languages should have an extensive exposure to those target languages (Krashen 2013).

Additionally, educational policy is a dynamic negotiation between diversified performers, including teachers, superintendents, and policy developers. Thus apprehending the complication of its implementation can occur through considering the interactions and negotiations between the performers in particular policy contexts (cf. Figure 3). That interaction is grounded in Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that giving individuals room for social and cultural interaction can help them to construct and reflect on their knowledge (Vygotsky, 1978). This sociocultural framework consolidates examining the policies and the interplay between policy and the performers.

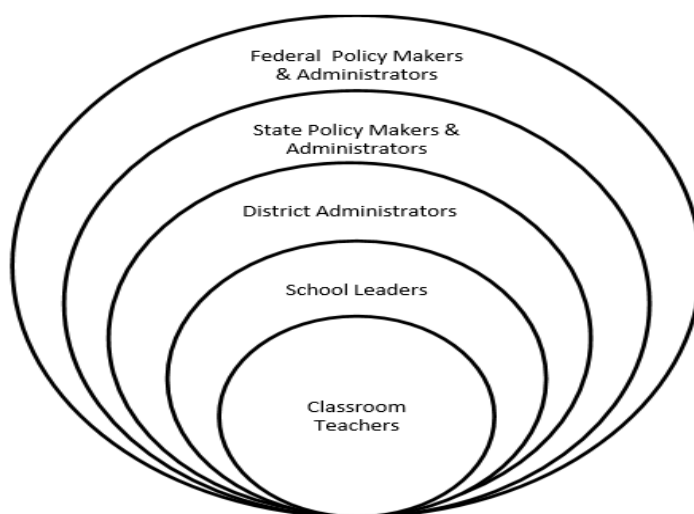


Figure 3. Multiple Layers and Actors in Educational Policy (Colón & Heineke, 2015).

2.3 The present study

The path to policy implementation, which has become a crucial driver in the attempt to improve the quality of education, generates a lot of challenges across the world (Rosi & Rosli, 2014; Spillane, Reiser & Reimer, 2002), and the UAE is no exception (O'Sullivan, 2015). Quite understandably, laying the foundation for dramatic quality improvement in the education reform is considerably vital; however, some policies that emerge in the reform require a wide-ranging discussion to make their content comprehensible. Although ADEC strives to develop education, educational policies in the UAE, similarly to any other worldwide educational environment, are inevitably subject to global influences (Robichau & Lynn 2009). O'Sullivan (2015) stated that the problem of the educational policies followed in the UAE is that they are not home-grown or reflective of the country's needs. She elaborated that although the supervising body of education in the emirate of Abu Dhabi has attempted to increase the quality of education for four decades, the education system seems to have been unsuccessful. To help achieve the objectives of ADEC's vision, numerous policies concerning bilingual education system have been created. Yet, those policies have not been indigenous and therefore it is expected that the inborn policies in the UAE may lead to gaps between the policy and implementation.

Correspondingly, in their whole-school reform model, Datnow and Castellano (2000) based their arguments on specified and comprehensive research-based models in respect of policy-implementations guidelines. According to them, in order to have a reflective educational system, its policies must be established indigenously. To meet the needs of educational reforms, they further emphasized the importance of including all members involved in the learning and teaching process, in particular, students and teachers.

As a matter of fact, the worldwide supremacy and dominance of the English language over other languages on account of the economic, political, and technological reasons extends to the Arab world (Crystal, 2003), including the UAE (Godwin, 2006). That superiority made English the medium of instruction in higher education institutions in the UAE, and it turns out that secondary schools will be accountable for equipping students with a considerable level of proficiency in English. That was illustrated in a report in a local newspaper which documented a decision taken by the UAE's Minister of Higher Education at the Federal National Council (FNC) to disassemble English foundations programs at higher educational institutions by the year 2018 (Salem & Swan, 2014). The authors further argued that the decision of the abolition of the foundation programs will require critical changes to the curriculum and thus considered secondary schools responsible for qualifying students for university education.

However, favoring English over Arabic (the UAE's first language) and making it the medium of instruction in the context of Emirati higher education institutions has been a topic of controversy in the past few years (Issa 2013). Issa (2013) in her report documented arguments of a number of educational experts in the field of linguistics and the FNC's members who urged to make Arabic the major language at state universities; and thus warned that abandoning using Arabic will result in a violation of the UAE's national identity and constitution. The author further illustrated, in reference to cultural advisors, that Arabic will not be an obstacle to the country's development and,

on the contrary, that successful nations around the world acknowledge the importance of student's first language in scaffolding the nation's striving for excellence in education.

Having understood all the previously mentioned arguments and due to ADEC's lack of experiences in designing and implementing educational reform, ADEC has established a constructive bilingual education policy that adopts teaching English, Math, and Science using an English-language curriculum. The curriculum was designed by Australian consultants and applied in secondary schools in 2007. That process commenced with establishing public-private partnerships (PPPs) which were assigned to qualify and mentor Emirati teachers to implement the curriculum designed by numerous foreign companies. Nevertheless, the plan changed in 2009 into recruiting native licensed English speakers to teach in secondary schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi (ADEC, 2017).

3. Methodology

This chapter describes the specific fieldwork techniques employed to collect data to answer the research questions.

3.1. The Research Approach

Considering that the study is contextually particular to investigating the inconsistency, if it exists, between bilingual education policy and its implementation in public schools in Abu Dhabi in reference to teachers' perspectives, the researcher employed the case study research method (Creswell, 2013). The researcher considers using this all-encompassing research method to study the phenomenon of bilingual education policy in a bounded system of a secondary school in the emirate of Abu Dhabi. According to (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009), using the case study method leads to concrete knowledge that resonates with the reader's experiences due to its tangibility. This study is described as heuristic and will provide readers with new insights and understanding beyond their original knowledge.

3.2. Research Design

This study adopted qualitative research, which is characterized by an inductive approach that focuses on interpreting participants' perspectives (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). This approach was appropriate to capture the participants' perspectives in order to provide an in-depth explanation of their practices in normal setting (May, 1993; cited in Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2009). As this qualitative research is an open-ended endeavor that the researcher intends to make responsive to the context and setting under study, the data collection plan was designed to craft a conceptually sound and persuasive document that provides reviewers with an argument for supporting the proposed study.

3.3. Instruments

To explore the perspectives of Grade 10 and Grade 11 public school teachers of English, Math and Science concerning the ADEC educational reform dealing with the implementation of the new bilingual education policy, the researcher utilized two qualitative research methods: document analysis and e-mail interviews. Using e-mail to hold a structured interview with the participants was more effective due to the fact that teachers were busy in designing, administering, moderating and marking exams, so engaging in an ongoing e-mail conversation was less intrusive as they were given the freedom to answer either synchronously or asynchronously (Gay et al. 2009). The document analysis involved reviewing and evaluating documents systematically in order to formulate meaning and obtain empirical knowledge for a better understanding of the policy (Bowen 2009).

3.4. Sample

Purposive sampling was employed to select six teachers from one secondary school, two teachers for each of the subjects concerned: English, Math and Science. The use of purposeful-criterion sampling helped the researcher to identify and select experienced participants with a knowledge of the investigated topic (Creswell, 2013).

3.5. The site selection

The school selected for the research implements the ADEC's curriculum for teaching all subjects. Teachers are provided with all teaching resources via the ADEC's portal. English, Math and Science are taught by licensed native speakers of English and Arabic-speaking teachers. Each teacher delivers 18 classes a week with no assistants. During the Science and Math exams, students who are Arabic speakers are provided with two-language versions and they have the freedom to answer in either of the languages.

3.6. Data collection

The policy document of bilingual education that serves the basis of this research is in the Policy 7110 in the ADEC Public School Policy Manual (ADEC 2015). The researcher additionally referred to the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) results for English, Math and Science that were released in 2012 by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In fact, the accessible presence of this off-the-rack source of data made it easy to the investigator to adopt a system for establishing descriptive categories. Having adopted the system, the researcher commenced analyzing and interpreting the obtained results (Merriam & Tisdell 2015). In order to validate whether the bilingual education policy text is implemented by participants in the setting under study, e-mail interviews were held.

3.7. Data Analysis

The researcher utilized qualitative policy analysis procedures that encompassed the use of interviews and document analysis to address the research questions. Having used the conventional and direct content analysis by coding and establishing themes, the researcher was able to systematically generate a reflective and interpretive synthesis that addresses the research questions (Gay et al. 2009).

3.8. Ethical Considerations

As the researcher approached the school teachers in one educational institution to gather data, applying comprehensive ethical considerations was a priority. The researcher ensured respect, protection, confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the school under study as a paramount concern at all times.

3.9. Study Limitations

As this study used the purposive sampling technique to select participants in a school during the academic year 2017-2018, the sample may not represent the perceptions of the target population and therefore the generalization is restricted to the sample and the context examined.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1. The Policy Text of the Language of Instruction

The policy commences with the purpose followed by the policy statement. The policy statement comprises four sections; namely

1. Bi-literacy
2. Arabic and English Medium Subjects
3. Co-planning and co-teaching
4. Integration of Arabic and English.

The sections included detailed description and an in-depth picture of the policy goals. The purpose of the policy is clearly and explicitly stated. The purpose outlines how English and Arabic are intended to be the languages of instruction in all cycles in ADEC public schools. The first section in policy statement draws on developing bi-literacy in reference to ADEC's aspirations and policy. It is clearly articulated that ADEC strives for developing learner's Arabic and English academic proficiency by recruiting Arabic Medium Teachers (AMTs) and English Medium Teachers (EMTs) to deliver instruction in both languages.

The second section is sub-divided into three sections based on the cycles of ADEC public schools. The first item tackles the implementation of the New School Model (NSM) in KG. To support its implementation, KG learners will be taught by both AMTs and EMTs who are required to work collaboratively to advance students' linguistic

skills. Additionally, co-teaching will be a prerequisite for further language development support. The next items - cycle 1, cycle 2 and cycle 3 of the policy - consider altering language in delivering contents of some subjects. Table 1 outlines the information stated in the second item of the policy statement.

Table 1. Arabic and English medium subjects – General information

Language of instruction	Subjects	Teachers
Arabic language	Arabic language, Islamic Education, Social Studies, Civics, Art, Music, Health and Physical Education	AMTs
English language	English, Math, Science	EMTs

The third section provides details on co-planning and co-teaching. The policy states that in order to facilitate the learning of concepts and skills across subject areas, AMTs and EMTs are required to engage in join planning of curriculum units and further co-teach classes where lesson availability allows.

The last section indicates that supporting student's bi-literacy is the responsibility of all teachers and thus introducing key terminology is to be done in both languages. Understandably, it can be concluded that supporting students' linguistic awareness and development is essentially anchored in using both Arabic and English as the languages of instruction.

4.2. PISA international assessment results

The results of the PISA (OECD 2014) show a significant discrepancy between the aspirations of the bilingual education policy and students' academic proficiency: the UAE ranked in the bottom third for English, Science and Math with the countries with a share of low achievers above the OCED average. This reveals that students do not exhibit the knowledge and skills that are supposed to be developed in reference to the targets of the policy (OECD 2014).

4.3. The Bilingual Education Practice

The interviews with the six teachers showed a number of key categories, precisely: disfranchisement of teachers, nonselective and indiscriminate importation of overseas approaches and a top-down approach. These categories led to a gap between theory and practice.

The participants, both AMTs and EMTs, claimed that this policy made their voices and consultation discarded in the curriculum reform process. Emirati AMTs stated that margining their role and the over-reliance on EMTs and the foreign methods in teaching Math and Science made them feel side-lined; and they further emphasized that having marginalized them conflicts with the nationwide Emiratisation initiative. The random and extensive

importation of foreign procedures was extremely criticized by all participants. The criticism was exemplified by the problems occurring due to the non-home-grown curriculum, which was reflected in the TIMSS (2016) (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) results. Finally, all the participants documented that this policy was not piloted preceding its launch and neither teachers, nor principals were consulted or trained to face the difficulties that might have arisen.

5. Discussion

It is undeniable that developing a generation of proficient and innovative learners has been an essential preoccupation of the educational visions in the UAE. However, the implications of an across-the-board and unplanned educational policy without consulting the involved individuals are problematic. As shown above (Erdemir 2013; Kirkgöz 2009), bilingual education is advantageous on condition that students' second/foreign language skills are on a level which permits subject teaching in it (Levine 2003; Ozfidan and Burlbaw 2016). This is a significant and disregarded issue or unacknowledged reality / precondition that can make adopting the bilingual education policy in public schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi feasible.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study illustrated the issue of bilingual education in the context of UAE, which revealed that an extensive discussion in order to better comprehend its essence, significance and rationale is required. The advantages of bilingual education are unquestionable; however, the conditions encompassing its implementation are disputable.

Considering the results, educational policy makers are encouraged to be aware of considering the educational, cultural and social context in their countries (Abu Dhabi, in this case) and thus generate a new approach that considers student's level and social aspects of the reforms. To generate an effective policy, Emirati cultural-experienced policy makers need to provide guidance and continuous professional development of teachers and principals. Opening ways for honest for honest and realistic discussions between teachers and policy developers must be a priority. Taking no measures in the bilingual education program students and teachers will not be able to reap the fruitful harvest. On the other hand, these measures have to be well-prepared.

Further investigation needs to be conducted in this field; for example, a longitudinal study to track participants' perception over a period of time will add more authenticity and effectiveness to the results of the study. It is recommended that the policy makers consider the results of the study to fine-tune the current educational policy in order to establish better ways for communication between all those involved in the process of change. By viewing different perspectives valuable opportunities for bridging gaps to have a better implementation of any policy will be attained.

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