

## English Language in Kuwait's Educational System

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### Abstract

The present study investigates the role of the English language in the educational system of Kuwait. Specifically, it explores the views of parents regarding the choice of their children's education by focusing on the differences between school types, including Arabic-language public schools, Arabic-English bilingual schools, and private English-medium schools. It discusses such characteristics as affordability, quality of education, linguistic development, and the general requirements for education in a second language. The data collection includes a survey of Kuwaiti parents (N=77) and semi-structured interviews (N=6). Following the Bernstein model, the study examines the parental motivation behind school selection. The results show that English language proficiency is regarded as an important educational outcome regardless of the school type. Public schools are typically chosen for convenience, while bilingual and English-medium schools are associated with quality education, better English skills, and opportunities for study abroad. The results reveal that parents would change the type of education for their children if they could find a more suitable one. The study concludes by recommending a balanced-bilingual approach where Arabic continues to develop alongside English to strengthen the Arabic heritage while giving young Kuwaitis English skills valued in a global economy.

**Keywords:** *Education, Private System, Public System, Bilingualism, Diglossia*

### Introduction

It is a well-established fact that countries of the Gulf region are diglossic, and Kuwait is no different. Diglossia is a sociolinguistic phenomenon in countries with two coexisting language varieties (Fergusson, 1959), namely the standard (or the high variety) and the spoken vernacular (or the low variety), separated by domains of usage. The high or prestige variety, typically richer and more complex compared to the vernacular, is used in formal contexts such as education,

literacy, religious discourse, publications, and official communication. In contrast, the vernacular is used for informal everyday interactions. In Kuwait, the low variety is the Kuwaiti dialect of Arabic, while the high variety has traditionally been the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Recently, however, the Kuwaiti society has been experiencing a major language change, as in addition to diglossia, bilingualism in English is on the rise. This is largely due to the expat-based labor market model and the changing educational environment. The former necessitates daily interactions with workers, including domestic help, from various linguistic backgrounds for whom English is the lingua franca. The latter involves the government-sponsored teaching of English as the *de facto* second language, the growing popularity of private schools with English as a medium of instruction (EMI), government-funded opportunities to study abroad in English-speaking countries, as well as the proliferation of private tertiary institutions with American curricula, international faculty, and EMI. Many adolescent Kuwaitis today consider English as an important language, indispensable for social, academic, and professional advancement.

Although MSA has traditionally been the language of prestige, literacy, and formal education, English is emerging and gradually taking over the role of Standard Arabic, especially in the educational context. The education system in Kuwait has experienced major changes over time, mainly due to the increase in private schools with EMI. Many parents currently opt for private schools over public schools to provide their children with what is believed to be quality education and a diploma carrying a higher prestige. Although acting in good faith to maximize educational benefits for the next generation, Kuwaiti parents may not be fully aware of the drawbacks associated with English language acquisition in educational settings starting from a young age, as greater attention is paid to English than to the mastery of MSA.

There are many benefits of attending public schools, in addition to developing strong Arabic skills and upholding religious, cultural, and social values. Private schools with an English-only or a bilingual English-Arabic curriculum are expensive and exclusive. In contrast, public schools are free, easily accessible, and available to all Kuwaiti citizens and children of at least one Kuwaiti parent. It must be emphasized, however, that the curriculum in the public system is outdated, teaching methodologies have not been appropriately upgraded according to the latest education research, and some teachers may lack adequate professional training (Troudi & Al Hafidh, 2017), resulting in a much higher ranking of private schools regarding the quality of instruction and educational outcomes.

From a viewpoint shared by educators, parents, and students in Kuwait, there is a direct link between quality education, career opportunities, and English proficiency. “Competency in the English language has become synonymous with career success” (Troudi & Al Hafidh, 2017, p. 97). While there is no doubt that English is gaining in importance in comparison to MSA in Kuwait, the downside faced by the stakeholders in Kuwait’s educational systems is not simply ensuring the effective learning of the English language, but unduly according it more significance than it deserves, to the point that it hinders the mastery of MSA. Although private schools offer courses in Arabic, English is the dominant language, not just of instruction but beyond the school as well (Troudi & Al Hafidh, 2017). Due to their popularity, the number of private schools with EMI is increasing, and more Kuwaiti children are enrolled every year. English has a privileged status in the private educational sector, including bilingual schools, and it has been observed that subjects taught in English “carry more weight than Arabic in the

grading schemes in most private schools across the Arab region” (Albirini, 2016, p. 151). This is a clear indication that the English language is, to some extent, prioritized in the educational system in countries where Arabic (MSA) is still a *de jure* official language.

Although English is a global language associated with high prestige and a wider spectrum of career options, studies have shown that it is more beneficial to have the native language of students match the language of instruction. The benefits could be academic and social. As Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019) observe, “some researchers believe that using a foreign language as a medium of instruction could be harmful to the development of both, learners’ native language and their second language, as well as their performance in subject matter areas” (p. 214). In particular, young children at the elementary level, who have not fully acquired all registers of their mother tongue, may experience a foreign language interference, resulting in weak native language skills due to suppressed development. At the same time, the strong association of the English language with quality education may lead to the “marginalization of the Arabic language” (Mustafawi & Shaaban, 2019, p. 219) in the school system.

### Literature Review

Kuwait is a diglossic country undergoing a linguistic phenomenon known as language shift. That being noted, English is gradually replacing the standard variety of Arabic in the country as well as the “use of the colloquial variety of Arabic... had weakened the value and prestige of MSA” (Mustafawi and Shaaban, 2019, p. 210). English is being emphasized and spoken more frequently because of the prestigious status it is given in educational sectors. English has grabbed worldwide countries’ attention as it is situated itself as the language of business, technology, and science. In that respect, considerable efforts have been made in the Gulf states (Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar) to update and modernize language policies, specifically in the context of higher education, but also in primary and secondary schools, with changes ranging from mandatory teaching of English as a second language in grades 1-12 (e.g., Kuwait) to the teaching of math and sciences in English in grades 4-12 (e.g., UAE).

Aside from the deprivation of Arab youth’s opportunities to improve the level of literacy in Arabic, EMI has been proven to act as a major factor that “significantly slows down the learning process,” showing results where “students are apprehensive about communicating in English” (Belhiah and Elhami, 2015, p. 8). Teaching English as a foreign language requires students to “exert a double effort to process the content and simultaneously decipher the language” (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015, p. 19). In Gulf countries, including Kuwait, it seems that the widespread use of English in the educational context seems to be undermining the role of MSA in that domain.

The educational system of Kuwait offers three types of schools: public schools, bilingual private schools, and English-medium private schools. According to statistics compiled by the Ministry of Education, the number of private schools is increasing as “there are 310 schools versus 788 public schools” (Ministry of Education, 2012). Public schools in Kuwait use Arabic as a medium of instruction (AMI). All classes are taught in Arabic except for one class being

taught in English for one hour per day. They are easily accessible in every area/ district of the country, available to all Kuwaiti citizens free of charge. The curriculum of public schools is based on Kuwait's Ministry of Education, which is unified across all schools in the country. Bilingual schools in Kuwait are private schools with American or British curricula, where sciences are taught in English.

In contrast, Arabic language, history, social studies, and Islamic studies are taught in MSA. Lastly, private schools with EMI and American or British curricula prepare students for respective national exams (SAT or IGCSE) scored outside Kuwait. Thus, EMI schools teach all subjects English, with a minimal amount of time allocated to instruction in Arabic (3-5 hrs per week).

It is useful to compare the educational system of Kuwait to that of other countries in the region with similar economies and demographics, such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar. In the UAE's public educational system, English is similarly taught as a foreign language in state-sponsored schools, and students at schools with AMI tend to have similar obstacles in both countries. Graduates of public secondary schools experience language problems when they reach the tertiary level because English has already become the dominant language of universities and is widely used as the preferred medium of instruction (Shohamy, 2006). Sayahi (2015) argues that "the impact of the change in the language of instruction is so sharp that it is very similar to immigrating from one educational system to another one in a different county." The study conducted in the UAE examined the country's political paradigm in language policy because of the uneven distribution of English and Arabic languages in academic settings. Results from that study show a clear distinction that "Arabic is only a native academic language and not purely a native language" (Masri, 2019, p. 27).

Regarding Qatar's educational system and language policy, the rate of Qatari citizens' enrollment in international schools is increasing. Before that, international schools were mostly for non-Arab expatriates supported by respective embassies. Due to the high rate of expatriates in the country (circa 90%), the Qatari Supreme Education Council (SEC) implemented a strategic plan at public schools known as Education for a New Era (EFNE) with English as the language of math and science. Despite the initial enthusiasm on the part of most stakeholders, the plan lasted less than ten years. Subsequently, the government reinstated Arabic as the language of instruction in a public school in recognition of the plan's failure. Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019) noted an arising critical problem regarding the sharp decrease in students' level of performance and academic improvement. Acknowledging the fact that English has become an essential language in social and academic domains, Qatar predominantly enacted EMI in both educational sectors, private and public. Qatar's SEC also had a political and socioeconomic approach to it, which was explained as providing EMI in both educational sectors would result in social equality and equal job opportunities in the global market for all citizens. As a result, the attempt Qatar's SEC made realized that Cummin's Theory was successfully applied. It states that if the language of instruction is the first language of the student, academic skills, concepts, and assessments are acquired and understood easier, as well as better performance levels on tests, than in a case where a foreign language was used as the medium of instruction (Mustafawi and Shaaban, 2019).

Comparing all educational systems in the above mentioned Gulf countries, Kuwait has not yet implemented an educational reform of the public schools' curricula. English is marginalized in public schools, and Arabic is well established as a medium of instruction. The approach taken by Kuwait's Ministry of Education is firmly rooted in the Arab and Islamic traditions, and changes motivated by socioeconomic or political reasons are taking place at a much slower pace compared to Qatar and UAE. At the same time, private schools in Kuwait marginalize the teaching of Arabic, alienating the citizens from the native language and preventing the mastery of MSA. However, regional examples of state educational reforms introducing a bilingual language policy, such as the ones previously pursued in Qatar or UAE, largely failed to deliver positive results. Therefore, a successful model attempting to balance the languages of instruction in public school remains elusive. In the meantime, public school graduates in Kuwait and other GCC countries continue to face difficulties when enrolling at tertiary level institutions due to inadequate English proficiency.

Parental involvement is very significant in a child's academic career. Parents' backgrounds and level of education is a key influence in choosing their child's type of school. Reasons for the school choices vary between parents and what they want for their children. Some parents want instruction to be mainly in English, while others want their children to learn in their mother tongue. Parents who recognize the impact of the English language on career choices and job opportunities prefer to enroll their children at EMI schools. They tend to send them from a young age following "the younger, the better" principle of language acquisition, which implies that the younger the child, the more successful the learning process (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2008).

However, except for early exposure to naturalistic input, empirical evidence shows no long-term benefits of formal instruction in English for young learners (Sharpe & Driscoll, 2000). On the other hand, the parents who choose AMI schools for their children value learning in the native language and desire that children primarily master their knowledge of Arabic and strengthen their cultural identity before devoting their time to learning a second language.

Because of the powerful impact the English language has globally, every type of school in Kuwait considers the importance of teaching English from public AMI schools to private EMI schools. The Ministry of Education in Kuwait added the English language as a subject to be taught as early as the first grade in the early 1990s (Unesco, 2011). However, in Kuwait, public schools teach English as a foreign language which does not give students much freedom to speak and practice the language they are learning.

When it comes to decision making regarding the choice of the educational system for their children, parents are typically considered the primary stakeholders, and their views of the educational system have an enormous impact on their children's academic experience and success. The attitudes and beliefs held by parents about a school play a crucial role in their decision regarding children's enrollment (Giacchino-Baker & Piller, 2006; Sheldon, 2002; Wesely & Baig, 2011). Practitioners and researchers established "that parents are key stakeholders in their child's education and simply need to be part of successful educational planning and decision-making" (Baig, 2011, p. 1). For example, in the context of language immersion schools in the United States, where all or most subjects are taught in a second

language (other than English), it is the parents who provide support and financial investment (Cloud, Genesee, & Hamayan, 2000). Similarly, to language immersion programs, EMI and bilingual schools in Kuwait demand parental support and substantial monetary contributions.

Regarding the benefits of language immersion schooling in the United States, research has found that in addition to bilingualism and biliteracy, education in a second language fosters academic achievement and higher levels of intercultural sensitivity (Fortune & Tedick, 2008, p. 10). Since the 1970s, education in L2 has been considered one of the most effective second language learning programs (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Genesee, 1987). Similarly, in Kuwait, EMI and bilingual schools have enjoyed an excellent reputation concerning second language learning as well as providing high-quality education across all subjects in the curriculum.

Many studies corroborate the observation regarding the parents' impact on their children's education (e.g., Anderson & Minke, 2007; Jeynes, 2005; Mo & Singh, 2008). It has been demonstrated that parents who are involved in educational choices play a significant role in their child's academic success and learning experiences. Research studies have shown that parental beliefs often influence these involvement decisions (Drummond & Stipek, 2004; Sheldon, 2002). Baig (201) has found that parents' personal experiences with educational institutions may shape enrollment decisions in the case of their children. Among those who choose private education in a second language, some desire a different kind of schooling from the type they had experienced themselves. In contrast, others are firm believers in the benefits of education alternative to the state-sponsored one.

While a variety of factors may influence school selection and parental motivation behind it, one of the frameworks capturing the complexity of underlying reasons is Bernstein's model based on "an instrumental order which controls the transmission of facts, procedures, and judgments involved in the acquisition of specific skills, and expressive order which controls the transmission of the beliefs and moral system" (Bernstein 1975: 54). The instrumental order deals with formal learning and the quality of education as measured by academic achievement. The expressive order, which deals with underlying values and character training, is divided into two dimensions, social and personal. The social order refers to the social make-up of schools (e.g., socioeconomic class, religious or cultural background) and whether the child would find the environment supportive and nurturing. The personal order takes into account the emotional and physical well-being of the child and his/her experience of the school as a safe environment. While instrumental order is divisive in function, expressive order bounds the school together as a moral collective. Both the instrumental and expressive orders help analyze parental motivation and the subsequent school choice.

Therefore, studies have shown that it is more beneficial to have the native language of students match the language of instruction. However, English today is seen as a global language and is correlated with higher prestige and a wider spectrum of career options. Such benefits could be academic and social. In accordance to Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019), "Some researchers believe that using a foreign language as a medium of instruction could be harmful to the development of both learners' native language and their second language as well as their performance in subject matter areas" (p. 214). Keeping in mind, children of elementary level have not yet necessarily acquired their mother tongue language fully. Having a foreign language forcefully interfere with their first language will eventually result in a weak mother tongue, in

this case, being MSA. Teaching in the students' first language is also socially important because it builds one's self-esteem and confidence level, making one speak outside educational settings comfortably (Belhiah and Elhamy, 2015).

### **The Present Study**

Due to the rapid spread of English in the GCC, Kuwait's linguistic landscape is changing. More importantly, English is beginning to take over as the country's unofficial second language, especially in the domain of education, sidelining the official language, Modern Standard Arabic. While the Kuwaiti government's language policy and responses to the changing educational landscape have previously been described (Tryzna and Al Sharoufi, 2017), little is currently known about the educational decisions of another important group of stakeholders in education, the parents. We are not aware of any studies exploring the parental motivation behind the selection of an educational system for Kuwaiti children and youth based on the perceived strengths and weaknesses of each school type. The present study attempts to bridge this gap by exploring the reasons behind Kuwaiti parents' educational decisions regarding the choice of the public (AMI), private bilingual, or private EMI schools. The researchers follow Bernstein's model (1975), which distinguishes between instrumental and expressive orders. Besides, the study critically examines the impact of the AMI and EMI education on the academic outcomes and language proficiency of students in Kuwait. Specifically, the present study attempts to answer the following research questions:

1. Do Kuwaiti parents view proficiency in both Arabic and English as an important outcome of formal education?
2. What are the Kuwaiti parents' most important reasons for choosing public or private education for their children?
3. Are Kuwaiti parents satisfied with the educational choices for their children?

### **Methodology**

In order to explore the reasons behind Kuwaiti parents' selection of a particular educational system for their children, this study uses a mixed-methods approach to data collection. Quantitative data were obtained using an online survey to allow for pattern identification. In contrast, qualitative data were collected using semi-structured interviews to contextualize the findings and obtain an in-depth look at parents' interpretations.

For the quantitative approach, a 17-question survey targeted at parents was conducted anonymously using google docs, shared via WhatsApp and other social media platforms, with a total number of 77 completed surveys. This survey intends to explore the motivation behind enrollment of children at EMI, bilingual, or public (AMI) schools by listing the reasons according to Bernstein's model. Another aim of the survey is to gain insight into the usage of Arabic and English outside the school environment, especially between the parents and the children. The survey also examines the importance of English as a second language from the parents' point of view.

The survey consists of 5 demographic questions and 12 target questions. Demographic questions provide background information about the respondent that might allow for better data

analysis. The target questions consist of one yes/no question, seven multiple-choice questions about the parents' choice of the educational system for their children at every school level, and 4 rating scale questions (1-10) about English and Arabic proficiency levels and the usage of both languages. Rating scale questions both provide a more specific and detailed representation of the level of language as well as facilitate the answering process for the respondent. In addition, the survey has only one open-ended question in order to allow a degree of subjectivity to give a better understanding of the results and to ensure precision and accuracy.

As for the qualitative data, interviews were conducted with parents by asking them open-ended questions, most of which based on Bernstein's framework that divides parents' school selection into two orders, the first being the instrumental order that measures the academic achievement to determine the quality of education. While the second being the expressive order consisting of two dimensions, a personal order that goes into the well-being of the child and their experience of the school environment. Moreover, a social order that takes into account the social make-up of schools and how the child fits in the environment (Bernstein 1975: 54)—aiming to collect more specific answers and consider different viewpoints of parents from different age groups, whose children are enrolled in different educational systems. A total of six parents from different families were interviewed. The interview consisted of 12 open-ended questions asking the parents to rate their children's language skills and mostly focusing on the parents' opinions and judgments of different school and educational systems.

## Results

The respondents to the survey (N=77) were all parents of school-aged children. The demographic results show that the majority of respondents (62%) are above 40 years of age, with 26% of the parents between the ages of 30-39, and finally the minority (12%) between 20-29 years of age. In addition, 88% of the parents surveyed were of Kuwaiti nationality. Regarding the highest degree of education, the majority holds a bachelor's degree (64%), followed by a college diploma (13%), a high school diploma (9%), a master's degree (7%), and a Ph.D. (7%). The overwhelming majority of the respondents (96%) graduated from a public school.

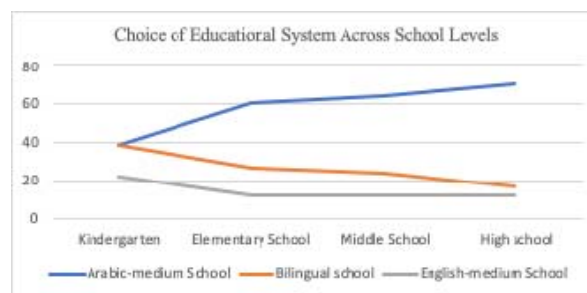


Figure. 1. The choice of the educational system in Kuwait

As shown in Figure 1, Arabic medium schools dominate the parents' choices across all levels. In regards to the kindergarten level, an equal amount of parents (39%) chose Arabic-medium schools and Bilingual schools, and only 22% enrolled their children in an English-

medium school for the kindergarten level. As for the elementary level, the rate of Arabic-medium schools' enrollment increased to 61%, and both English and bilingual decreased. The rate of bilingual schools being 27% and English-medium 12%. Lastly, having the majority of parents (71%) enroll their children in an Arabic-medium high school, and a gradual drop in bilingual school enrollment with only 17%, and with no change in the English-medium rate of enrollment between elementary, middle school, and high school. Subsequently, the parents were asked to rate the reasons behind their choice of education at various levels. Below we are reporting on the top reasons behind the parents' choices of government, bilingual, and private English-medium schools (British and American).

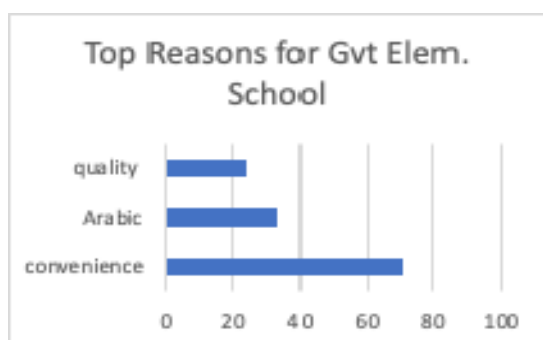


Figure. 2. Top reasons for government elementary school.

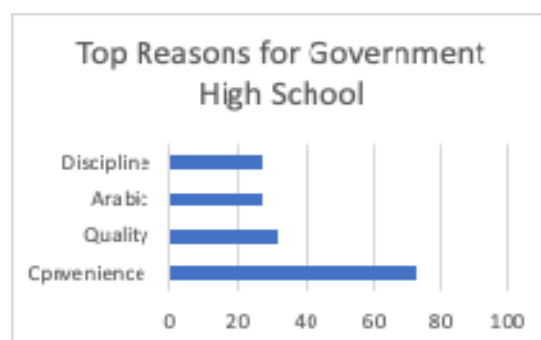


Figure. 3. Top reasons for government high school.

When participants were asked about the choice of the educational system for their children at the elementary level, the majority (61%) chose government schools, with the leading reason for this choice being convenience (i.e., “closer to the house”).

At the high school level, Arabic medium schools continue to dominate, with the majority of parents (71%) enrolling their children in governmental schools. The most common reason for choosing this educational system is once again convenience as the school is within a short distance from the house. Furthermore, the second most common reason is a better quality of education. Parents believe that this educational system caters to what they consider a quality education, possibly having to do with Islamic studies and Arabic heritage. The third most common reason is both better behavior or discipline and better Arabic skills, which is a surprising outcome considering that by this age, students should have already developed their Arabic.

We now turn to the analysis of the reasons behind selecting private bilingual schools, which was a choice made by 27% of the parents in our sample.

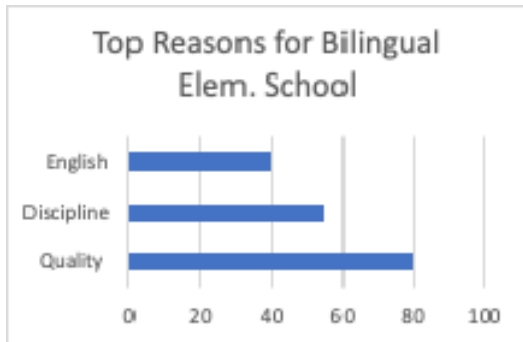


Figure 4. Top reasons for bilingual elementary school.

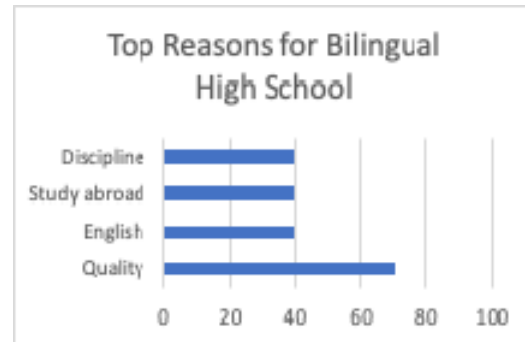


Figure 5. Top reasons for bilingual high school

As the above figures show, the leading reason for the choice of bilingual schools is a better quality of education. The second most popular reason among parents of bilingual elementary school attendees is better discipline, while the third most important reason is the development of English skills. Parents of adolescents in bilingual high schools rate English language skills, discipline, and study abroad opportunities equally high.

Only a small minority of parents in our sample (12%) chose schools with EMI (British and American curricula). Similarly to parents with their children in bilingual schools, the leading cause of selecting English-medium schools is the quality of education.

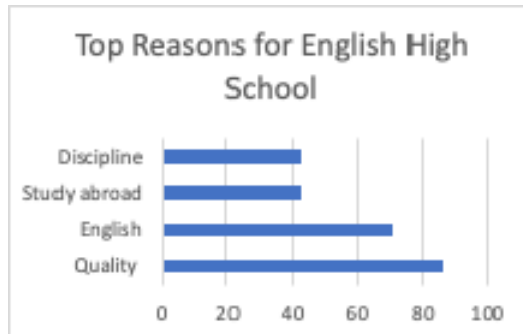


Figure 6. Top reasons for English elementary school.

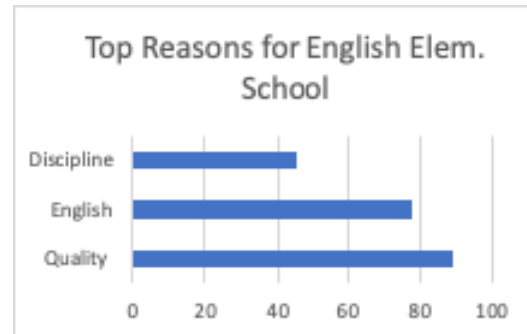


Figure 7. Top reasons for English high school

The second highest reason is developing better English skills, which shows that parents are very much aware of the importance of the English language for the next generation as it is the language of modernization. As the above results suggest, parents with children in schools with EMI believe that teaching all subjects in English from a young age will have a positive impact later in life. The third most common reason behind choosing an EMI school is stricter discipline and, therefore, better behavior among students. British or American schools have a reputation for implementing effective disciplinary measures and character formation techniques, which lead to correcting misbehavior and reducing behavioral issues. Similar to the reasons for choosing a bilingual high school, parents of adolescents in British or American schools count on the appropriate academic preparation of the children for study abroad opportunities.

Regarding the qualitative data obtained through the semi-structured interviews, a total of six parents were interviewed. Two parents from each of the educational systems in Kuwait discussed in the present study were interviewed: public system, private bilingual system, and private English system. The interview questions were a total of sixteen questions. Roughly following the Bernstein's Model, four open-ended questions are classified as expressive, meaning they are self-development and values related, and twelve questions are classified as instrumental as they are associated with students' academic achievements and quality of educational outcomes. The main results we got out of the interviews to indicate that children's level of proficiency in Arabic and comparatively in English is not balanced. Parents seem to enroll their children in a specific educational system based on the curriculum taught and the teachers' and administration's reputation. The majority of parents agree that a change in the language of instruction may not be essential since Arabic is viewed as more important, and their children should be proficient in it before learning a new language or implementing a new MI. So, based on the interviews, we learned from parents that choosing an educational system is more than just learning a language. Teachers also impact parents' choices as they could influence their children's values, behavior, way of thinking, and contribution within the society.

## Discussion

The two data collection instruments used with participating Kuwaiti parents show slightly different results but ultimately lead to a similar conclusion. While the survey results strongly suggest that English language proficiency is an extremely important educational outcome for the majority of the parents, the interview results reveal that mastering Modern Standard Arabic is even more important than training high proficiency in English. The interviewed parents believe in giving the children a strong foundation in the native language before starting to learn a second language. The majority of the interviewees agree that a well-balanced bilingual educational system could result in better linguistic outcomes and overall academic achievement. A similar idea is implicit in the educational decisions taken by the survey respondents, the majority of whom enrolled the children in the public school system with Arabic as the medium of instruction despite firmly believing in the importance of the English language for the next generation.

Regarding the mastery of Standard Arabic, parents with children in the public school system agree that their children attain high proficiency in MSA, which is not necessarily the case with English. In response to the hypothetical question about creating an optimal school environment, the parents had different views. One parent thinks that a bilingual system where both Arabic and English are practiced equally is best. In contrast, the other parent mentions that they would like a school that focuses on the ethics and conduct of the children, along with granting the student the opportunity to study many different languages and sciences. Based on the parents' answers, the most important qualities they see in schools are the efficiency of the teachers, and administration with a good reputation, and convenience, as in how close the school is to the home.

Following Bernstein's expressive order, both parents think that their children do not have the chance for adequate self-development due to the lack of attention to the students' talents and the different activities they might like to practice in order to express themselves. When asked about

the possible consideration of a switch from AMI to EMI, one parent says that they would not make the switch because “Arabic is the language closest to my children’s hearts” and discourages any other language of instruction while offering other languages strictly in foreign language classes. In regards to the importance of the language of instruction, the two parents seem to disagree. On the one hand, one parent views the language of instruction as a vessel of the information given to the student and values the actual material and the efficiency of the instructor over it. On the other hand, the second parent emphasizes the importance of the language of instruction and thinks it must be the child’s native language. Going back to the level of Standard Arabic proficiency, both parents agree that their children’s proficiency has been improving, but not because their children are enrolled in AMI schools, but because both parents mention devoting times during the day where they focus on reading stories strictly in Standard Arabic.

Moreover, backed up by the study by Masri (2019) that states “Arabic is playing a very minor role not only in an academic context but also in society in general due to the dominance of English also outside gates of universities” (p. 21), both parents agreed that Arabic is in fact, marginalized in the Kuwaiti society nowadays. Finally, when asking the parents about their opinions, and recommendations for the Kuwaiti educational system, both parents stress the importance of reading, improving the libraries in schools, and disapprove of the lack of reading in public schools. Also, correlating to a study conducted in the UAE (Masri, 2019) reverberate the results found in this present study, stating that “the use of English as MI is a real threat to Arabic since in “diglossic societies, the formal and prestigious functions are the first to be lost; hence the importance of higher education” (Coleman, 2006, p. 2)”, one parent touches on bilingual schools and says that they should pay more attention to teaching Arabic as well as recommending public schools to refrain from teaching any language other Arabic in the first four years of elementary school.

Although the two parents with children in private bilingual schooling vary in their children’s degree of proficiency level in both languages, Arabic and English, they do agree on the same ideologies and hopes from Kuwait’s educational system. One main similarity between the two parents is that they both consider changing their children’s current school system to another. A reason for such, that was pointed out while conducting the interview is the dissatisfaction of the school’s share in developing students’ growth and points of views. Parents are aware of the importance of learning English and the positive effect it carries upon their children today and/or in the future. However, they also chose to enroll their children in a private bilingual school for reasons like discipline, manners, and quality of education. Interviewees believe that the language of instruction alone does not influence their children, but it is also the teachers and the western curricula followed that influences and impacts their children. Due to that, suggestions from parents include updating the curriculum, implementing new teaching procedures and techniques, and training teachers and instructors intensively regularly. In order to fulfill the parents’ hopes of having a strong public education system that satisfies parents’ and students’ educational needs and be proud of it, major procedures should be put into practice. The private bilingual educational system seems to affect children’s interests and way of thinking and take part in society. Lastly, parents strongly view changing all educational systems in Kuwait to an equally balanced bilingual system of Arabic and English as the optimal and most beneficial approach.

These results from the interviews echo similar conclusions to the study conducted in the UAE, which “suggests implementing a bilingual curriculum in which instruction is delivered in both English and Arabic,” as it is a “greater need for a move towards bilingualism” (Belhiah and Elhami, 2015, p. 20). Because both interviewed parents with children in a bilingual system believe that Arabic today is sidelined, a balanced bilingual educational system is beneficial as long as English does not weaken students’ Arabic proficiency level and its culture (Belhiah and Elhami, 2015).

Survey results from parents who have their children enrolled in a bilingual school, however, show that parents are not solely focusing on learning English, but are also aware of the importance of the strengthening the Arabic language as well. In other words, parents are willing to pay for their children’s education in exchange for better, well-balanced language proficiency outcomes. The online survey also resulted in pointing out the most important reasons behind parents’ choices of their children’s enrollment. Parents trust in the disciplinary measures of bilingual schools to produce better-behaving students. This possibly concludes that parents do not believe that public schools are adequate when it comes to teaching English. The preparation of bilingual school systems to supply their students for studying abroad is also one of the major factors parents take into account when enrolling their children. Overall, according to the survey results, parents comply with their current choice of enrolling their children in a bilingual educational system as they believe that this educational system provides their children with a quality of education that is superior to Arabic medium schools. As Alqahtani (2014) mentioned, parents could divide their reasons behind their choice of the educational system for their children as “academic, such as pedagogical aspects of the school they choose for their children, and nonacademic, such as parental services. These two types of factors constitute parental satisfaction” (p. 177). In Qatar, a similar pattern appeared as well. Parents agree that learning English and having better language proficiency will assist students in the future to fit well in a globalized world, without marginalizing one’s mother tongue (Mustafawi and Shaaban, 2019).

Parents who enrolled their children in English medium schools both admit that their children’s Arabic fluency is deficient. However, one parent states that their child speaks the Kuwaiti dialect well, and the other states their child’s Kuwaiti dialect is also lacking. Both parents think their children’s English fluency is proficient, which is evident because their school system is entirely in the English language. In both the survey results and the interviews, it is noteworthy to state that parents who enroll their children in EMI schools seem to care more about the quality of instruction rather than the language of it. When asked about the ideal educational environment for children in school, the two parents had different answers. One parent focused on the quality of instruction and the school environment. They mention qualities like qualified teachers, an applicable school building, as well as the proper facilities that are up to date for modern learning. The other parent had an interesting answer that contradicted their school choice; they wanted their child to be able to be fluent in English and Arabic under an ideal system. Both EMI parents indicated they were not thinking of changing their child’s school system, and they were not thinking of changing the language of instruction too, which shows that they are content with their choices. They also think the school had a positive impact on their

child's personal development. It is worth mentioning that both parents notice their children's declining knowledge of Arabic over time. Both parents accepted that their choice in EMI schools was because of the modernized curriculum and that public schools should be up to date with their instruction and curricula. Public education seems to have a reputation of being outdated and in need of improvement. As listed above, the English language has a prestigious presence in the world today, especially in the workplace. "proficiency in English would improve learners' chances of fitting well in a globalized world" (Mustafawi and Shaaban, 2019, p. 226). EMI parents acknowledge the importance of having strong English proficiency for their children. Almost all university-level education is taught in English. Therefore, enrolling their children in English medium schools from a younger age will grant them a better chance in higher education later on.

On a similar note, based on the results of the survey, parents who enroll their children in EMI private schools primarily chose that educational system to facilitate English learning and give them a head start in terms of early literacy and numeracy. Parents with children in EMI schools seem to be satisfied with their choice of the educational system as they strongly believe that it is the best option for learning English and bettering their children's English skills. The results of this present study match a study done in Qatar by Mustafawi and Shaaban (2019), which states that "EMI proved its ineffectiveness in improving learners' English proficiency although it involved increasing hours of instruction in English" (p. 219). This shows that the mother tongue language of students is always dominant and more efficacious. Although learning English brings along many advantages, but it does not seem to work efficiently in general terms in educational systems in the Gulf, specifically Kuwait. In addition, parents who participated in a study in the UAE and parents who participated in this present study agree that "the use of Arabic in class would ensure that at least a minimum threshold of understanding and knowledge has been achieved (Belhiah and Elhami, 2015, p. 19). This is a clear indication that at the end of the day, parents want their children to be taught and able to understand the content and material. Using the native language eases the process of teaching in some contexts to ensure that students fully understand.

One parent out of the six pointed out the fact that having the past Arabic curriculum taught to today's generation of students may be the ideal solution to build a stronger Arabic tongue before learning any other second language.

## **Conclusion**

As the present study argues, in a diglossic country like Kuwait, language education is extremely important. Having a strong Arabic foundation and solid knowledge should give students a better understanding and appreciation of their Arab identity. It might also help them to position themselves more effectively concerning the English language, which has become dominant globally. In other words, a solid foundation in Arabic combined with high English proficiency will help the younger generation become more competitive in the future by strengthening the local Arab identity while developing the capacity to expand globally. However, solid linguistic foundations cannot exist without proper education, well-trained teachers, and strong curricula. Therefore, every parent should carefully weigh the benefits and the drawbacks of every type of school as each offers something different and unique. Though in Kuwait, citizens are free to

choose the most suitable education style for their children, parents are aware that private schools have a better reputation in terms of quality of education, compared to public schools, because public schools need substantial reforms and upgrades. At a minimum, when teaching Arabic, public schools should adopt a modernized curriculum to give teachers a degree of autonomy in the classroom to try new and creative teaching methods in order to make students more engaged in the classroom and eager to make progress.

When parents choose a school for their children, they need to take into consideration what that school offers, and public schools offer a strict, old-fashioned system taught mostly in Arabic, while private schools teach in English – a global language useful for university studies as well as living or working abroad. It is no surprise that the majority of parents view English as an important language to acquire because of its influence around the world with business, science, entertainment, and technology being offered predominantly in English. While parents are not necessarily prioritizing English over Arabic for their children's education, only some admit they desire for their children to have a deeper understanding of their Arab heritage and culture.

While many factors are motivating the parents' choice of school, the decisive ones are quality of education and convenience. The majority of parents with children in public schools (elementary level and high school level) do not emphasize the Arabic language foundation, instead prioritizing convenience, since government schools are free and easily accessible in every area of the country. In other words, the quality of education, whether the Arabic language or any other academic subject, is not their main concern. Conversely, bilingual, and English medium school parents are mainly concerned with the quality of education for their children, believing that an international curriculum is more competitive for today's youth. Therefore, to effectively compete with the reputation of bilingual and private schools, Kuwait's Ministry of Education should update the public schools' curricula and focus on improving the quality of education for all citizens. Moreover, public schools should offer effective education of both Arabic and English to provide Kuwaiti students with more opportunities for higher education and wider career choices. At the same time, private schools should strengthen the teaching of Arabic as it is an important language of the region in order to produce graduates who are balanced bilinguals, ready to contribute their skills and knowledge to the multilingual society of the future.

Lastly, based on the present study and the acquired findings through both the interviews and surveys, the educational environments in Kuwait should opt for a more flexible language of instruction policy in order to increase the rate of student achievement (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015). According to Belhiah and Elhami (2015), a study's results ensure the fact that "the use of Arabic is likely to enhance students' understanding of course content." However, with English strictly being the language of instruction alone, students' proficiency in Arabic may be lost, and their use of MSA would be underdeveloped and extremely simplified. Although private schools in Kuwait are based on westernized curricula, Arabic should be emphasized in order to reach an equilibrium of both languages considering that education is being delivered in an Arab country with Arabic as the official language and mother tongue.

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