



Impact of the English-Only Policy on Learners at International Schools from the Perspective of Teachers and Parents: A Sociocultural Study in the Saudi Context

Ali Alsaawi^{a*} , Fahad Almulhim^b 

^a English Department, College of Education, Majmaah University. Email: a.alsaawi@mu.edu.sa

^b Department of English, College of Arts, King Faisal University. Email: fkalmulhim@kfu.edu.sa

Received: 02 March 2024 | Received: in Revised Form 08 April 2024 | Accepted 02 May 2024

APA Citation:

Alsaawi, A., Almulhim, F. (2024). Impact of the English-Only Policy on Learners at International Schools from the Perspective of Teachers and Parents: A Sociocultural Study in the Saudi Context. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(2), 1-11.

Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.10201>

Abstract

In Saudi Arabia, the policy of English-only approach to instruction adopted by many international schools has been potentially affected by the host country's language and culture. This study explores the issue of sociocultural influence of English-only policy from the perspective of parents and teachers in Saudi Arabia. The study used a mixed-method approach, utilizing a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews as data collection instruments from randomly selected parents and teachers. The results revealed that parents were keen to enroll their children in international schools to give them better opportunities in the job market. Neither the parents nor the teachers explicitly reported impact of the English-only policy on issues such as awareness of different cultures or celebrating Western cultural occasions. However, they did express other social impacts, such as bullying, using taboo terms, and cursing among peers. The findings of this study are in line with previous literature showing increasing interest among families in emerging countries in enrolling their children in international schools. However, parents' motivations are not exclusively linguistic, culture-related factors, including cultivating respect for time, openness, and acceptance of different opinions were highlighted. Thus, it seems that extra-linguistic factors are also a driver for parents choosing international schools.

© 2024 EJAL & the Authors. Published by Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics (EJAL). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Keywords: Language Learning, English-only Policy, Culture, Foreign Language, Social, International School.

Introduction

In Saudi Arabia, the first language is Arabic, which holds special significance as it is an integral part of Saudi culture and sentiments related to their identity and religion. The holy book, "The Quran," is the most prestigious and respected script for Muslims, further adding to the importance of the Arabic language. Saudi Arabia is a developing country where competence in English is viewed as increasingly important and it is gaining status as more than a foreign language. Some international schools in the country have adopted an English-only policy to attract enrolment among foreign nationals living in Saudi Arabia, as well as Saudi families seeking to improve their children's English (Brummitt, 2007). This is not unique to Saudi Arabia as many developing countries are facing the same phenomenon due to the dominance of English around the globe. For instance, in South Korea, English is becoming the second language rather than a foreign language

*Corresponding Author

Email: a.alsaawi@mu.edu.sa

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.10201>

due to the belief that competence in English is needed for the labor market (Yang & Jang, 2022). In addition, English is considered a universal language, or “lingua franca,” and accepted as a global communication tool throughout most of the world (Crystal, 2003; Drubin & Kellogg, 2012).

The teaching of English as a foreign language (TEFL) has experienced various iterations in terms of exclusion or inclusion of students’ first/other languages, from monolingualism as the preferred strategy to approaches such as trans-lingualism and plurilingualism. The key focus has been on which approach might be most beneficial for learners. However, the increased adoption of English in developing countries is not without controversy. Many people are cautious that it could have an impact on the younger generation’s attitudes towards their first language (Park, 2009) or their local culture (Macedo, 2000).

Thus, the spread of English in Saudi Arabia may be seen by some as a threat rather than an opportunity, while others view it as a response to the country’s development strategy, Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to make Saudi Arabia an international hub for business and trade. International schools are considered effective in enhancing students’ language competency due to the high quality of their teaching and extra-curricular activities and facilities. Recently, Saudi parents have shown interest in enrolling their children in international schools to prepare them for the job market. This paper, therefore, explores the implementation of an English-only policy in international schools in the context of Saudi Arabia, drawing on the perspectives of the English teachers and the parents of students. The study was based on the premise that the implementation of an English-only policy in international schools is appreciated by parents regardless of the benefits of allowing the use of the students’ first language in EFL classrooms.

While many studies have explored the impact of this strategy in terms of pedagogy and language functions, very few have addressed it at the level of culture and identity. This study thus addressed this research gap in literature by focusing on the context of international schools in Saudi Arabia and drawing on the perspectives of teachers and parents over the cultural and social issues. The paper seeks to highlight the reasons why Saudi families choose to enroll their children in international schools and the possible impact, if any, on students. Specifically, this study framed the following questions to explore the impact of the implementation of English-only policy in international schools in Saudi Arabia.

1. What are Saudi parents’ reasons for enrolling their children in international schools?
2. What cultural and social issues related to the application of English-only policy can be observed among Saudi learners in international schools?

Literature Review

English-Only Approach in EFL Classrooms

The policy of an English-only approach in EFL classrooms derives from the belief that it is beneficial to employ only one language as the medium of instruction to foster and enhance language development. In international schools, stakeholders and policymakers are adopting this strategy with a view to supporting students’ language development and competence by providing them with an effective learning environment (Auerbach, 1993). This approach has influenced curriculum planning and teaching strategies in EFL contexts (Bae, 2015). Researchers such as Auerbach (1993), Cummins (2000); Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, and Dearden (2018), and Park (2009) were among the first advocates of monolingualism. More recent studies have explored the impact of an English-only policy on language development (Bae, 2015; Jeon, 2012; Piller & Cho, 2013). Some researchers, such as Butzkamm and Caldwell (2009) and Turnbull and Dailey-O’Cain (2009), have argued that language competence is the main target of language learning, and that mastery should not be the ultimate objective. In addition, it has been observed that certain cognitive and social language functions are developed through the inclusion of learners’ first language in the EFL classroom (McMillan & Rivers, 2011; Sah & Li, 2022).

However, the English-only policy has several drawbacks related to the issues of culture and identity. For instance, some studies have found that an English-only policy can impact immigrants’ cultural and linguistic identities, especially among young learners. This may hinder students’ acquisition of the second language (Cummins, 2000). Many people are cautious that it could have an impact on the younger generation’s attitudes towards their first language (Park, 2009) or their local culture (Macedo, 2000). In addition, Fredricks and S. Warriner (2016) Fredricks and S. Warriner (2016) have argued that an English-only policy is not the only approach that can be employed to enhance students’ target language. Moreover, it is almost impossible to dictate how to implement a particular language policy (Yang & Jang, 2022), and implementing the English-only approach in practice relies on the compliance of teachers and students in class (Lawrence, 2023).

English in Saudi Arabia

Arabic was the only language spoken in Saudi Arabia until 1937 when English was offered as an optional subject in Saudi schools (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). Since then, English has gradually gained a greater profile in the country. Following the establishment of the Ministry of Education in 1942, English as a subject—

similar to other subjects—underwent comprehensive development in terms of the curriculum, regulations, and teacher preparation. This contributed to awareness of the importance of English and led to the rise of a notable number of private institutions dedicated to teaching English, reflecting the increasing interest in English among Saudi families.

The launch of the Saudi Vision 2030 by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in 2016 was a milestone for the country, and indeed the region. The Vision set out goals to develop the country by initiating an ambitious economic and social reform plan (Grand & Wolff, 2022). One of the most important social and cultural goals of Vision that needs to be developed is linguistic diversity. Among the expected outcomes is that Saudi Arabia will attract foreign visitors in the areas of both tourism and business, hosting international exhibitions and conferences. This will entail Saudis interacting with visitors from all over the world using English as the medium of communication.

Previously, international schools in Saudi Arabia have catered to the children of foreign families in the country for work or business. However, this has recently changed due to the high demand from Saudi families to enroll their children (Alfaraidy, 2020). There are several possible reasons for this shift, but it could be related to Saudi parents' interest in providing a high-quality international educational environment for their children (Akkari, 2004). Indeed, this aim has been linked to the spread of international schools not only in Saudi Arabia but also in other countries (Tooley & Dixon, 2005). The curriculum is also a factor driving parents toward international schools (Hayden & Thompson, 1998). Parents who have been abroad either to complete their studies or for work purposes are particularly keen on international schools due to their experience of curricula in other countries, which they view as similar to those in international schools and preferable to public school curricula (Goldring & Rowley, 2006).

Cultural and Social Impact

The policy of English-only instruction in international schools has an impact on culture and identity. The social setting contributes to shaping opportunities for learning a new language and developing the learners' potential (Fillmore, 1989). According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), social context is crucial in shaping a second language learner's motivation, proficiency, and learning goals. Saudi society has its own characteristics and Saudis have certain social and cultural values, some of which are related to the mother tongue, Arabic. As pointed out by Osailan (2009), in the Saudi context, Arabic is a holy language, and it is viewed as necessary to preserve Saudi culture and identity. Some Saudis fear that Arabic usage might diminish with the rise of English, as reported by Alrashidi and Phan (2015) in the case of Dubai, where English is slowly replacing Arabic.

Mahboob and Elyas (2014) also report fears among groups in Saudi society concerning the influence of English on the people's identity, customs, and local culture, particularly given that language and culture are related. In this regard, Elyas (2008) found that most Saudi students consider it essential to study English culture to gain a better understanding of English. However, Gunantar (2016) argues that having become an international language, spoken worldwide by both native and non-native speakers, the English language is no longer related solely to English-speaking cultures. Indeed, English is considered a global language for international communication (Crystal, 1997).

Previous Studies

Several studies in the literature have addressed issues with the implementation of an English-only policy in EFL classrooms. For example, some studies have focused on the impact of excluding students' first language in the classroom, which can result in a lack of understanding of the lesson content (Joe & Lee, 2013). Others have expressed concern that an English-only policy might hinder the development of the students' first language (Macaro et al., 2018). Moreover, some stakeholders have argued that an English-only policy is not feasible, especially in contexts in which the students and teachers share the same first language (McMillan & Rivers, 2011).

The "shared language" assumption leads to another debate regarding the need to appoint native speakers of English rather than local teachers with high fluency in English. International schools tend to prefer native speakers of English based on the potential to provide an authentic learning experience for students (Park, 2009). However, the "native speakerism" approach has been criticized in the literature, especially in the EFL context (Holliday, 2006). Although many local bilingual teachers are highly qualified, some stakeholders and parents prefer native speakers of English to be employed, viewing bilingual teachers as less proficient and authentic (Park, 2009).

A recent ethnographic study conducted by Yang and Jang (2022) explored the English-only policy in private schools in South Korea. They examined how this strategy was employed with bilingual teachers and found that both bilingual and native-speaker teachers of English complied with the school policy, but the students' first language was used in limited situations when needed. However, they found that the native-speaker teachers held higher positions than the local bilingual teachers in terms of both their roles and responsibilities. The students' use of the first language outside the classroom was found to be related to their sociocultural identities and nationalism. Alfaraidy (2020) examined the reasons for Saudi families enrolling

their children in international schools. They collected the data in the capital city of Riyadh through a questionnaire distributed to five international schools and received a total of 431 responses. The results revealed that the curriculum, quality of education, and facilities were the main reasons for enrolling children in international schools.

Methodology

Research Design

The study employed a cross-sectional mixed-method approach comprising a questionnaire and interviews. As Dornyei (2007) points out, a cross-sectional research design in any sociolinguistic research ideally requires questionnaires to investigate people's opinions and attitudes. The questionnaire was designed drawing on the related literature to minimize measurement errors (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). In addition, the study aimed to engage parents who had spent time studying abroad to consider a wider range of factors that might influence their attitudes.

Consistent with ethical principles, all the participants were adults who gave informed consent to participate in the questionnaire and interviews. They were assured that the data were collected for research purposes only and that their identities and responses would remain confidential.

Sampling

The sample of schools encompassed various regions, including Riyadh, the Eastern region, Madina, and Qassim, and targeted participants from different geographical, social, financial, and educational backgrounds. A sample of 60 respondents comprising teachers and parents, randomly drawn for diverse regions, was given the questionnaire to complete, out of which 54 valid responses were received. In addition, there were four parents (two male and two female), who were sampled for getting clarification and in-depth information about why they had decided to enroll their children in international schools.

Data Collection Instrument and Procedure

According to Macaro et al. (2018), questionnaires are effective instruments in studies investigating English as the medium of instruction. A questionnaire comprising both quantitative and qualitative items was distributed in international schools in Saudi Arabia to survey the views of a diverse sample of teachers and parents. The questionnaire received 54 valid responses. Following this, four semi-structured interviews were conducted with four parents (two male and two female), who expressed their willingness in the survey to participate. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire items were ensured. The principals of international schools were approached for consent to distribute the online questionnaire to teachers and parents. Subsequently, teachers and parents were approached either directly or indirectly. Each respondent was sent a follow-up message as a reminder to complete the survey in time.

The questionnaire which as the main tool for data collection in this study consisted of two sections. The first section included general questions about the participants, while the second section focused on parents' attitudes regarding the reasons for enrolling their children in international schools. The open-ended questions in the questionnaire aimed to collect information, while closed-ended questions were added to facilitate data gathering. There were twelve items which unveiled the socio-cultural impact, and six items on English-only policy on Saudi students in international schools. The questionnaire utilized a five-point Likert scale for participants to rate their responses, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5).

The second instrument was a semi-structured interview conducted with four parents. Each interview highlighted certain issues and opinions mentioned in the questionnaire. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. There were five main questions in the interview:

1. What do you think about international schools in Saudi Arabia?
2. Do you have children enrolled in an international school?
3. Why do you think people send their children to international schools?
4. What is the possible impact of English-only policy at international schools on Saudi children?
5. Do you think that the Saudi national, cultural and religious identities are compromised in English-only policy at international schools?

Data Analysis

The data collected was analyzed using appropriate statistical tests in SPSS 28. Alphanumeric data was presented as numbers and percentages, while the items' two sections were presented as mean \pm SD. Additionally, the reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha formula for internal consistency. The obtained value of the Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient was 0.845, which exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7 (Cortina, 1993). This indicates high reliability and demonstrates that the entire questionnaire was highly reliable. The data was diverse and frequent responses were highlighted, which

provided rich contributions from the respondents that helped understand their perspectives. The data obtained from the interviews underwent a thematic content analysis after being manually transcribed.

Results

Reasons for Enrolling Children in International Schools

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of parents' opinions about the items regarding the reasons for enrolling their children in international schools ranked according to the arithmetic mean.

Table 1: *Reasons for enrolling Children in International Schools.*

Items	Mean	Sd	Agreement
5. An international education will give my child a competitive edge in the job market.	4.25	0.76	Strongly Agree
3. I believe that international schools provide a better environment for learning English.	4.23	0.83	Strongly Agree
11. I believe that international schools offer a higher quality of education.	4.23	0.82	Strongly Agree
2. English language proficiency is essential for my child's future success.	4.12	0.87	Agree
6. I believe that international schools offer a more rigorous academic curriculum that will better prepare my child for university and beyond.	4.1	0.74	Agree
4. I enrolled my child in an international school to prepare them for the global job market.	3.95	0.94	Agree
1. I enrolled my child in an international school to improve their English fluency.	3.94	0.98	Agree
8. I believe that a well-rounded education includes both academic and extracurricular activities.	3.8	0.99	Agree
12. I want my child to be surrounded by other students from diverse backgrounds.	3.7	0.98	Agree
9. I want my child to have the opportunity to explore their interests and develop new skills outside of the classroom.	3.6	1.02	Agree
10. I enrolled my child in an international school to maintain my family's social status.	3.45	0.96	Agree
7. I enrolled my child in an international school for the variety of extracurricular activities and clubs offered.	3.4	1.03	Agree
13. Saudi parents' reasons for enrolling their children in international schools.	3.3	0.72	Agree

Table 1 shows that Saudi parents agree about their reasons for enrolling their children in international schools, with a mean of 3.90 (SD=0.72). The results reveal that Saudi parents primarily prioritize their children's future success, particularly in terms of job opportunities and global competitiveness. They strongly believe that an international education provides the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences to thrive in a rapidly changing world. English language proficiency stands out as a crucial element, alongside a rigorous academic curriculum and exposure to diverse cultures. While extracurricular activities and social status play a role, they are not as dominant as the overall desire for a high-quality education that prepares children for a successful future. Interestingly, maintaining social status was not a major driver for choosing international schools.

Unveiling the Socio-Cultural Impact of English-Only Policies on Saudi Students in International Schools

Table 2 lists mean and standard deviation of parents' opinions about the items Unveiling the Socio-Cultural Impact of English-Only Policies on Saudi Students in International Schools ranked according to the arithmetic mean.

Table 2: *Unveiling the Socio-Cultural Impact of English-Only Policies.*

Items	Mean	SD	Agreement
3. I have observed that my child struggles with Arabic language proficiency since attending an international school with an English-only policy.	4.36	0.72	Strongly Agree
2. I am concerned that my child's Arabic language skills will deteriorate if they continue to study in an English-only environment.	4.33	0.71	Strongly Agree
1. I have observed that my child and their peers primarily use English when communicating outside of the classroom, even in informal settings.	3.7	0.94	Agree
6. I am concerned that the English-only policy may create a linguistic divide among students and lead to social conflicts.	3.3	1.1	Neutral
5. I am concerned that the English-only policy may lead to an overemphasis on Western culture and a disregard for Saudi culture.	2.9	0.99	Neutral
4. I am concerned that the English-only policy may have a negative impact on my child's religious and national identity.	1.53	0.62	Disagree

Table 2 presents Saudi parents' perceptions regarding the socio-cultural impact of English-only policies in

international schools. Parents are most worried about the negative impact on their children's Arabic language skills (Items 3 & 2). The top two concerns focus on the potential negative effects of English-only policies on students' Arabic language skills. Parents strongly agree that their children are struggling with Arabic proficiency and worry about its further deterioration in an English-dominant environment. This indicates a strong sense of urgency to preserve Arabic language competency. They also acknowledge that English has become the primary language of communication even outside the classroom, indicating a shift in social dynamics. This raises concerns about the potential for language dominance and its impact on social interactions.

Moreover, they have observed a decline in Arabic usage (Item 1) and fear it will worsen. There is some limited impact on social cohesion and cultural identity: There's a neutral sentiment towards concerns from their opinion where social conflicts due to language barriers (Item 6) and overemphasis on western culture (Item 5). That was mixed feelings where parents express concerns about the potential for linguistic divides and social conflicts arising from the English-only policy. This suggests a recognition of the need for inclusivity and a balance between language learning and social harmony. They are also less concerned about the English-only policy leading to western cultural dominance and disregard for Saudi culture. This suggests a more nuanced understanding of cultural influence and the potential for intercultural exchange. While Parents strongly disagree (Item 4) that the English-only policy negatively impacts their children's religious and national identity. This indicates confidence in their children's ability to navigate cultural influences while maintaining their core identity.

Why Choose International Schools?

From a linguistic point of view, most parents viewed English as a core and essential skill for their children's future career opportunities (see Figure 1), and they sought to enroll their children in international schools to help them develop their language proficiency. In addition, reasons reported by parents for enrolling their children in international schools varied, but the majority highlighted that English would be essential for the job market (see Figure 1). Also, they noted that the activities, science clubs, quality of teaching, and infrastructure were better in international schools than in public schools.

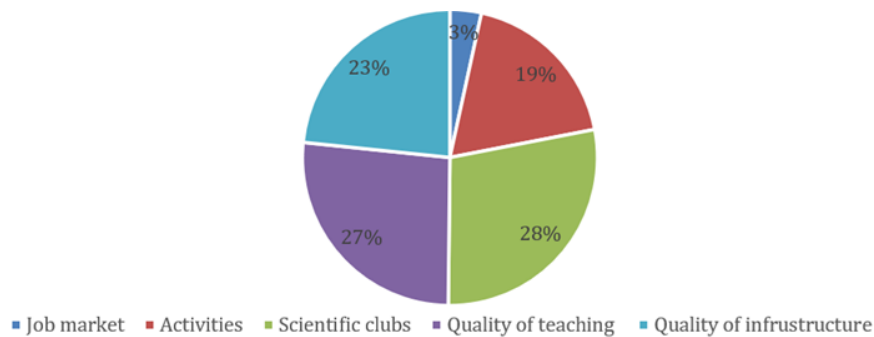


Figure 1: Languages Viewed as Important for Future Job Opportunities.

The teachers reported that parents wished their children to be taught in Arabic and English at the same time to ensure their future prospects. More than 70% of teachers stated in affirmative that learners in international schools struggled with studying Arabic and religious courses in Arabic (see Figure 2).

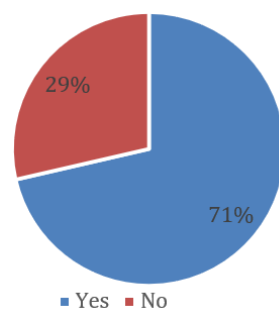


Figure 2: Learners struggle to study Arabic and religious courses in Arabic.

Cultural and Social Observed Issues

The teachers reported that 86% of students used English outside the classroom with their peers (see Figure 3). They also indicated that English was sometimes used improperly for bullying, using taboo terms, and insulting their peers. More than 70% of teachers reported that learners struggled with studying Arabic and religious courses in Arabic. In addition, learners were also reported to be suffering from bullying from peers in and outside class. As a result, the teachers reported that students experienced a fear of committing mistakes and self-consciousness. Moreover, the students' struggles to comprehend and engage in analysis in

courses taught in Arabic led to lower attainment. The teachers concurred that weakness in Arabic was a concerning issue and suggested solutions to overcome this problem, such as providing extra teaching hours in Arabic. They argued that this issue needed to be addressed from an early age for students living in a country with Arabic as their first language. As one teacher stated, “An alert should be given to parents to value Arabic and teach it for their children as the first language, as English is a secondary language that can be practiced later at a proper age.”

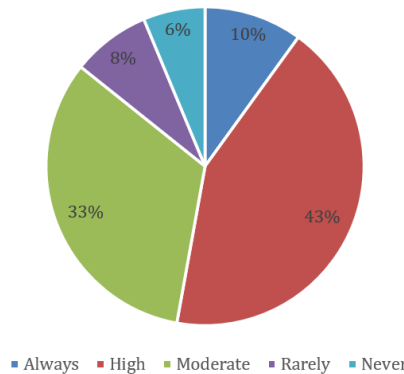


Figure 3: Use of English outside the Classroom.

Around 71% of teachers reported that their learners were influenced in some ways by the culture of English native speakers (see Figure 4). The data show disagreement among teachers regarding the influence of the second language on students’ beliefs, culture, religion, and identity. A few denied that there was any such influence, while others stated that although there was an influence, it was not necessarily negative. Some participants reported negative effects related to differences in beliefs, celebrating Western cultural occasions, and imitating the English manner of speech. In contrast, others expressed positive attitudes, for example citing respect for time, openness, and acceptance of different opinions.

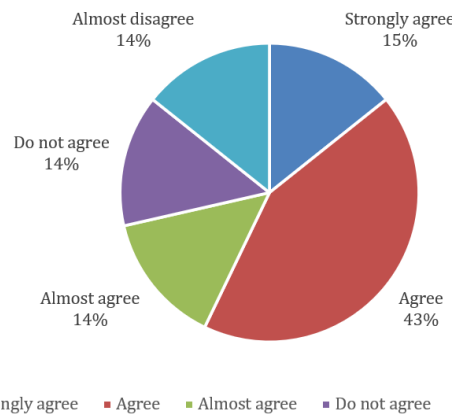


Figure 4: Teachers’ Belief that Learners are Influenced by the Native-Speaker English Culture.

Figure 5 shows that 78% of children used English at home while only 6% indicated that they never use English at home.

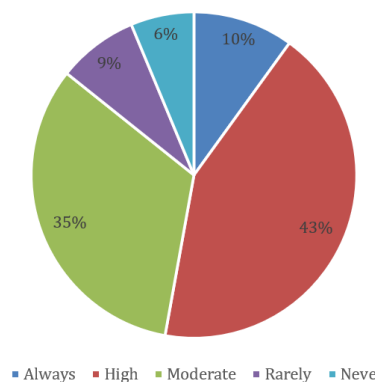


Figure 5: Children’s Use of English at Home (reported by their parents).

Figure 6 reveals with whom students used English at home clarifying that this was with their parents (26.3%), with siblings (35%), maids and private drivers (40%).

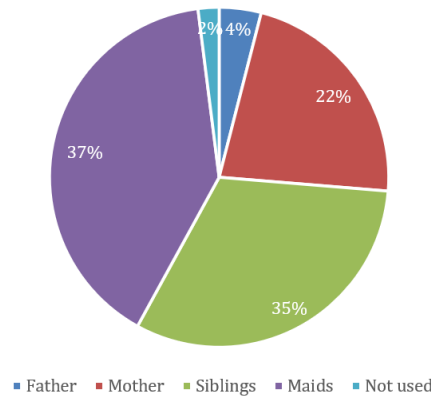


Figure 6: *Those with Whom Students Use English at Home.*

In addition, a minority (22.2%) reported their children's use of improper language, such as cursing and taboo terms. Slightly under half (44.4%) of parents considered that their children could be influenced by the culture of the speakers of the foreign language, including blind imitation, culturally and socially unacceptable habits and ways of thinking, and substituting Arabic terms with English alternatives. When asked whether this might affect their cultural and religious identity, most (88.9%) said not. Around a third (33.3%) of parents reported that their children suffered bullying from peers and 22.2% were of the view that bullying might affect the children's attainment. Around 89% of parents highlighted students' weakness in the first language as an increasing phenomenon that should be addressed through greater exposure to Arabic.

In the interviews, the parents were cautious about recounting the real reasons for enrolling their children in international schools. They cited, for instance, the valuable experience overall. They proposed that international schools are particularly suitable for talented students due to the activities and science clubs on offer. They also mentioned excellence in teaching and academic outcomes, as well as the multi-language environment and the ability to raise children's awareness of different cultures due to the diversity of students. Parents who had been abroad mentioned that they looked to international schools as an option due to their belief in the superiority of international schools over public schools. All the parents interviewed had children of their own in international schools, so their opinions reflected their experience. The reason most cited for enrolling their children was mainly the desire to prepare them for the job market and their graduate studies. They believed English competence to be crucial in today's global environment and viewed international schools as the best available option to develop proficiency.

As for the possible impact, the interviewees expressed the benefits of international schools, such as the variety of activities and science clubs, which give students the opportunity to improve their skills and develop their potential. In addition, they frequently highlighted English language proficiency as a major benefit. However, they also pointed out some drawbacks and challenges, such as the financial cost of international schools and deficiencies resulting from lack of exposure to Arabic. This latter aspect worried them as they felt it might impact their children's engagement with their peers, friends, and relatives outside of school. While the interviewees did not note any impact on the students' religion or identity, this was highlighted in the questionnaire. One interviewee remarked that international schools develop awareness of the different traditions and customs of non-Saudi students.

Discussion

The findings show that Saudi parents prefer international schools to public schools for a variety of reasons. Improving English is the main one, as also reported by [Brummitt \(2007\)](#), as this may increase potential recruitment opportunities by providing a key skill needed for the labor market ([Yang & Jang, 2022](#)). Therefore, an increasing number of Saudi parents are in favor of enrolling their children in international schools, consistent with the high demand also reported by [Alfaraidy \(2020\)](#). However, the parents' motivations are not exclusively linguistic. In justifying their choice of international schools, they also mentioned culture-related factors, including cultivating respect for time, openness, and acceptance of different opinions. Hence, it seems that extra-linguistic factors are also a driver for parents choosing international schools. In addition, keeping their social status and seeking educational quality; parents who had returned from living abroad, for example, following a study-abroad scholarship, were likely to enroll their children in international schools. This could be due to their favorable experience with curricula while abroad and the similarities they saw in the curricula of international schools ([Goldring & Rowley, 2006](#)).

Another factor influencing this choice could be the child's level of proficiency in the first and/or second language: For a child weak in English, parents may favor international schools. However, the children of Saudi parents returning from abroad studying in international schools have been reported to be weak in their

first language, Arabic, compared to their peers in public schools. Parents whose children have satisfactory competence in Arabic may comfortably choose between the two paths.

Socially and culturally, the findings show some impact of international schooling on students. For instance, some participating teachers reported cases of bullying and the use of taboo terms. Other impacts concerned instances such as learners singing songs without understanding their meaning, as well as gaining an openness to foreign cultures and engaging with Western movies, series, and songs. These findings are in line with those of Mahboob and Elyas (2014), who identified fears among groups in society regarding the potential influence of the increased presence of English on identity, customs, and local culture.

The findings show that most parents with children enrolled in international schools did not consider the English-only policy exerted a social and cultural influence. However, some parents recounted their children cursing and using taboo terms. They also mentioned blind imitation, culturally and socially unacceptable habits and ways of thinking, and substituting Arabic terms with English alternatives. When the parents were asked whether this might affect their children's cultural and religious identity, 88.9% said not. This perhaps reflects the point made by Gunantar (2016) that as English is an international language spoken worldwide by both native and non-native speakers, it is no longer related solely to English-speaking cultures.

However, they did consider that the English-only policy influenced the children's first language, Arabic, which could impact their ability to learn the Quran. This is critical, as Arabic is the holy language, and is viewed as integral to preserving the Saudi culture and identity (Osailan, 2009). There are fears among some Saudis that Arabic usage might diminish with the rise of English, as in the case of Dubai, reported by Alrashidi and Phan (2015). It is worth noting, moreover, that some limitations were encountered during data collection such as the number of responses where more participants were desired. Also, selective interviews were conducted with participants who expressed their willingness to participate but they may not be the appropriate participants to deepen our understanding of the phenomenon. These limitations might affect the possibility of generalizing the results although it was geographically diverse.

Implications and Conclusion

The policy of English only in international schools is considered helpful for enhancing students' language competency. However, students also need to develop their first language. Recently, Saudi parents have become increasingly keen to enroll their children in international schools as a way of preparing them for the job market in the future, largely based on their view that international schools offer better teaching quality and facilities, as well as extra-curricular activities and science clubs, which are not provided by public schools.

Language and culture are closely related and an English-only policy may have implications for students' culture and identity. The participating parents and teachers in this study did not explicitly report this, but they did suggest some impacts, such as the awareness of different cultures and celebrating Western cultural occasions. Other social impacts were expressed, such as bullying, using taboo terms, and cursing among peers. The findings of this study are in line with previous literature, showing an increasing interest among families in emerging countries to enroll their children in international schools. The reasons may vary, but they mainly agree that the main goal is to prepare children for the job market, which requires fluency in English, together with an awareness of and openness to different cultures.

Further research is needed to focus on other aspects, such as issues of identity in relation to language development among students in international schools, and whether or not the impacts might apply in other contexts. Moreover, comparative research between conservative and liberal communities may provide valuable insights into the impact of the increased prevalence of English-only education.

Acknowledgment

Dr Ali Alsaawi would like to thank the Deanship of Postgraduate Studies & Scientific Research at Majmaah University for supporting this research under project No. R-2024-1141. Moreover, Dr Fahad Almulhim thanks the Deanship of Scientific Research, Vice Presidency for Graduate Studies and Scientific Research, King Faisal University, Saudi Arabia for supporting this research under project number KFU241078.

References

- Akkari, A. (2004). Education in the Middle East and North Africa: The current situation and future challenges. *International Education Journal*, 5(2), 144-153. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ903844.pdf>

- Alfaraidy, H. A. (2020). Factors influencing Saudi parents' choice of international schools in Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 19(3), 220-232. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1177/1475240920976259>
- Alrashidi, O., & Phan, H. (2015). Education Context and English Teaching and Learning in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: An Overview. *English Language Teaching*, 8(5), 33-44. doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v8n5p33>
- Auerbach, E. R. (1993). Reexamining English only in the ESL classroom. *TESOL quarterly*, 27(1), 9-32. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/3586949>
- Bae, Y. (2015). The influence of native-speakerism on CLIL teachers in Korea. In *(En) countering native-speakerism: Global perspectives* (pp. 75-90): Springer. doi: https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137463500_6
- Barnawi, O. Z., & Al-Hawsawi, S. (2017). English education policy in Saudi Arabia: English language education policy in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Current trends, issues and challenges. *English language education policy in the Middle East and North Africa*, 199-222. doi: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-46778-8_12
- Brummitt, N. (2007). International schools: exponential growth and future implications. *International Schools Journal*, 27(1), 35-40. doi: Retrieved from <https://openurl.ebsco.com/EPDB%3Aged%3A15%3A17646831/detailv2?sid=ebsco%3Aplink%3Ascholar&id=ebsco%3Aged%3A28145690&crl=c>
- Butzkamm, W., & Caldwell, J. A. (2009). *The bilingual reform: A paradigm shift in foreign language teaching*. Narr Francke Attempto Verlag. doi: <https://elibrary.utb.de/doi/abs/10.5555/9783823374923>
- Cortina, J. M. (1993). What is coefficient alpha? An examination of theory and applications. *Journal of applied psychology*, 78(1), 98-104. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.78.1.98>
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a global language*. Cambridge university press. doi: Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/english-as-a-global-language/690D300092A3B5E4733677FCC9A42E98>
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language*. Cambridge university press. doi: Retrieved from <https://www.cambridge.org/pk/universitypress/subjects/languages-linguistics/english-language-and-linguistics-general-interest/english-global-language-2nd-edition-1?format=PB&isbn=9781107611801>
- Cummins, J. (2000). *Language, power, and pedagogy: Bilingual children in the crossfire* (Vol. 23). Multilingual matters. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853596773>
- Dornyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics*. Oxford university press. doi: <https://doi.org/10.5054/tj.2010.215611>
- Drubin, D. G., & Kellogg, D. R. (2012). English as the universal language of science: opportunities and challenges. *Molecular biology of the cell*, 23(8), 1399-1399. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1091/mbc.e12-02-0108>
- Elyas, T. (2008). The attitude and the impact of the American English as a global language within the Saudi education system. *Novitas-ROYAL (Research on Youth and Language)*, 2(1). doi: Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/26513299>
- Fillmore, L. W. (1989). Language learning in social context. The view from research in second language learning. In *North-Holland Linguistic Series: Linguistic Variations* (Vol. 54, pp. 277-302): Elsevier. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-87144-2.50014-8>
- Fredricks, D. E., & S. Warriner, D. (2016). "We speak English in here and English only!": Teacher and ELL youth perspectives on restrictive language education. *Bilingual Research Journal*, 39(3-4), 309-323. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/15235882.2016.1230565>
- Goldring, E., & Rowley, K. J. (2006). *Parent preferences and parent choices*. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association San Francisco, CA, April.
- Grand, S. R., & Wolff, K. (2022). *Assessing Saudi Vision 2030: A 2020 REVIEW*. Atlantic Council. doi: Retrieved from <https://sakhf1.kku.edu.sa/sites/sakhf1.kku.edu.sa/files/2021-06/Assessing-Saudi-Vision-2030-A-2020-review.pdf>
- Gunantar, D. A. (2016). The impact of English as an international language on English language teaching in Indonesia. *Language Circle: Journal of Language and Literature*, 10(2), 141-151. doi: <https://doi.org/10.15294/lc.v10i2.5621>
- Hayden, M. C., & Thompson, J. J. (1998). International education: Perceptions of teachers in international schools. *International review of education*, 44, 549-568. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1003493216493>
- Holliday, A. (2006). Native-speakerism. *ELT journal*, 60(4), 385-387. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/ccl030>
- Jeon, M. (2012). English immersion and educational inequality in South Korea. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 33(4), 395-408. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2012.661438>
- Joe, Y., & Lee, H.-K. (2013). Does English-medium instruction benefit students in EFL contexts? A case study of medical students in Korea. *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, 22, 201-207. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40299-012-0003-7>
- Kimberlin, C. L., & Winterstein, A. G. (2008). Validity and reliability of measurement instruments used in research. *American journal of health-system pharmacy*, 65(23), 2276-2284. doi: <https://doi.org/10.2146/ajhp070364>
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (2006). *Understanding language teaching: From method to postmethod*. Routledge. doi: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410615725>

- Lawrence, L. (2023). Emotion and identity: The impact of English-only policies on Japanese English teachers in Japan. In *Discourses of Identity: Language Learning, Teaching, and Reclamation Perspectives in Japan* (pp. 321-339): Springer. doi: Retrieved from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-031-11988-0_17
- Macaro, E., Curle, S., Pun, J., An, J., & Dearden, J. (2018). A systematic review of English medium instruction in higher education. *Language teaching*, 51(1), 36-76. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444817000350>
- Macedo, D. (2000). The colonialism of the English only movement. *Educational researcher*, 29(3), 15-24. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X029003015>
- Mahboob, A., & Elyas, T. (2014). English in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia. *World Englishes*, 33(1), 128-142. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12073>
- McMillan, B. A., & Rivers, D. J. (2011). The practice of policy: Teacher attitudes toward “English only”. *System*, 39(2), 251-263. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2011.04.011>
- Osailan, G. M. (2009). *The English literacy experiences of advanced Saudi EFL professionals in the United States*. (Doctoral dissertation). Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Retrieved from <https://lib.clisiel.com/site/catalogue/30587>
- Park, J. S.-Y. (2009). *The local construction of a global language: Ideologies of English in South Korea*. Mouton de Gruyter. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110214079.bm>
- Piller, I., & Cho, J. (2013). Neoliberalism as language policy. *Language in society*, 42(1), 23-44. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047404512000887>
- Sah, P. K., & Li, G. (2022). Translanguaging or unequal languaging? Unfolding the plurilingual discourse of English medium instruction policy in Nepal’s public schools. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(6), 2075-2094. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1849011>
- Tooley, J., & Dixon, P. (2005). Private education is good for the poor: A study of private schools serving the poor in low-income countries. doi: Retrieved from <https://www.policyarchive.org/handle/10207/5811>
- Turnbull, M., & Dailey-O’Cain, J. (2009). *First language use in second and foreign language learning*. Multilingual Matters. doi: <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847691972>
- Yang, J., & Jang, I. C. (2022). The everyday politics of English-only policy in an EFL language school: practices, ideologies, and identities of Korean bilingual teachers. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 25(3), 1088-1100. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2020.1740165>