A critical assessment of female middle school mathematics and science teachers’ perspectives of the Abu Dhabi education reform programme and the use of English as a medium of instruction.

Submitted by

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University.

Signature: Nina Leon Sanassian
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Abstract

The Ministry of Education in Abu Dhabi launched an extensive reform initiative developed by the Abu Dhabi Education Council (ADEC) in partnership with international operators. The reform has introduced innovative teaching methodologies, modern books, a new curriculum and the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in mathematics and science classes.

The research carried out for this thesis investigated 11 Emirati female teachers. The data was collected from interviews and several informal observations carried out in a public middle school in a town outside Abu Dhabi city, UAE. The rationale for this study is to critically investigate the effects that rapid reform is having on the performance of the female teachers in the classroom and the impact of this speedy reform on their professional and personal lives so as to highlight differences between reform theory and practice. This study is significant because few studies on female teachers in a Gulf educational reform environment have been undertaken and it is essential to uncover the foreign and non-egalitarian nature of the reform programme. Therefore, the study’s aims are to highlight teacher perspectives and teacher marginalization, EMI and consider whether the reform is being implemented successfully at the classroom level. Of course, an important aim of this critical study has also been to raise the consciousness of those participating in the reform.

This study has revealed mostly negative perceptions regarding the Abu Dhabi education reform programme, in particular with teachers’ perceptions of the work environment and the new pedagogy. It has also disclosed several instances of teacher marginalization as the result of a top-down reform and has exposed a prevailing sentiment of teacher disempowerment because of the presence of foreigners operating in the country. Teacher perceptions regarding EMI have been numerous in particular with cultural issues relating to the use of EMI in mathematics and science classes. Surprisingly, the study revealed a few unexpected positive findings with certain aspects of reform.
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