

*On Perceptions of the Socialising Effects of English-Medium  
Education on Students at a Gulf Arab University with  
Particular Reference to the United Arab Emirates*

Submitted by  
Sohail Karmani

to the University of Exeter  
as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Education  
in the Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages

January 2010

This thesis is available for library use on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgment.

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

Signed: 

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This thesis would not have been possible had it not been for the support and encouragement of my wife and children.

## ABSTRACT

In the context of post-9/11 calls for educational reform in the Arab-Muslim world, this study investigates a set of underlying claims and assumptions about the socialising capacities of English-medium education. Specifically, the study examines perceptions about the socialising effects of English-medium education from the standpoint of Arab-Muslim students at a Gulf Arab university. In assessing these perceptions, the study compares students' perceptions on two levels: (i) on one level, it looks into students' perceptions about the socialising effects of English-medium education in direct contrast to those of Arabic-medium education; and (ii) on another level, it contrasts the perceptions of English-medium students with those of Arabic-medium students.

The research for this thesis was carried out at an international bilingual Arab university in the United Arab Emirates. Data for the study was gathered from two data collection sources, namely student questionnaires and group interview sessions. In both instances, students' perceptions were sought on a range of contrastive issues related to a series of underlying claims and assumptions about English-medium and Arabic-medium education. Overall, 365 Arabic-speaking students from both an English-medium and Arabic-medium educational background participated in the study. Within this sample group, students were drawn from four university colleges: College of Engineering, College of Business, College of Law, and College of Shari'a and Islamic Studies.

The study's findings unveil a complex, often mixed and divided picture of students' perceptions about the socialising roles of both English-medium and Arabic-medium education. In regard to English-medium education, it finds that though there is a general acceptance of the benefits of studying the English-language, there is also to some extent an acknowledgement of the culturally alienating effects on Arab-Muslim students.

The study therefore recommends that granted the paucity of research in this area there is a need to further investigate students' perceptions from a broader range of institutional cultures in the region.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>page</i>
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	<i>i</i>
<i>Abstract</i>	<i>ii</i>
<b>CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION</b>	
1.1 Rationale for the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the Problem	4
1.3 Significance of the Study	5
1.4 Research Questions	7
1.5 Organisation of the Thesis	7
<b>CHAPTER 2 - THE BACKGROUND</b>	
2.1 The Arabian Gulf Region	9
2.1.1 The Role of Islam in the Arabian Gulf States	10
2.1.2 The Regional Identification with a Collective Sense of Gulf Arab Identity	11
2.1.3 The Role of ‘Oil’ in Regulating Gulf Arab Economies	12
2.1.4 The Demography of the Gulf Arab Region	15
2.2 Overview of the Historical and Economic Context for the Spread of English	16
2.3 Summary of Chapter Two	20
<b>CHAPTER 3 - THE LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	
3.1 Theories of Socialisation	21
3.2 The Socialising Role of Mass Formal Education	27
3.2.1 Structural Functionalism	29
3.2.2 Social-Conflict Theory	32
3.2.3 Hidden Curriculum	36
3.3 Socialisation in the Context of Higher Education	41
3.4 Socialisation in the Context of Second-Language Education	43
3.5 The Socialising Effects of English-Medium Education on Arab-Muslim Students	47
3.6 Summary	50

## **CHAPTER 4 – RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

4.1	Theoretical Perspective	52
4.1.1	Social Conflict Theory	53
4.1.2	The Critical Research Paradigm	55
4.1.3	The Interpretative Research Paradigm	57
4.2	Research Questions	59
4.3	Research Design	60
4.3.1	Selecting a Viable Research Site	60
4.3.2	Defining the Participant Population	62
4.3.3	Selecting Suitable Data Collection Tools	63
4.4	Research Methods	64
4.4.1	Profile of Selected Research Site	65
4.4.2	Profile of Target Population	65
4.4.3	Construction and Administration of Questionnaires	66
4.4.4	The Planning and Delivery of Interview Sessions	73
4.5	Methods of Data Analysis	76
4.6	Ethical Considerations	78
4.7	Limitations of the Research Methodology	79

## **CHAPTER 5 – RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

5.1	Perceptions about the Societal Effects of English-Medium Education on Arab Societies	81
5.2	Perceptions about the Additive Socialising Effects of English-Medium Education on Arab Muslim Students	87
5.3	Perceptions about the Subtractive Socialising Effects of English-Medium Education on Arab Muslim Students	94
5.4	Perceptions about the Additive Socialising Effects of Arabic-Medium Education on Arab Muslim Students	97
5.5	Perceptions about the Subtractive Socialising Effects of Arabic-Medium Education on Arab Muslim Students	102

## **CHAPTER 6 - CONCLUSIONS**

6.1	Key Findings	109
6.2	Implications of the Study	111
6.3	Recommendations of the Study	112
6.4	Suggestions for Extending the Scope of the Study	113

References	114
Appendix 1: Questionnaires (English and Arabic Versions)	122
Appendix 2: Questionnaire Data (Percentages and Raw Scores)	131
Appendix 3: Certificate of Ethical Research Approval	146