

History of English-as-a-Second-Language Teaching in the Middle East and the Current Scenario in Bahrain

Gita Ponnuchamy

(Former Professor of English)

Principal, Tylos Private School
Bahrain

Abstract

In the Middle East, independence from the colonial powers was synonymous with ‘Arabization,’ making Arabic fundamental to education (Findlow 2006). With the member nations of the Arab League striving to promote Arab-Islamic culture and the Arabic language, Arabic came to symbolize tradition and Islamic values and the English language and Western culture, modernity and materialism (Al Zeera 19990; Charise 2007; Findlow 2006). While government-run schools adopted Arabic as their medium of instruction relegating English to the status of a second language, most of post-secondary education continued to be imparted through the medium of English, leaving English-as-a-Second-Language (ESL) learners inept at coping with the academic demands of higher education. The introduction of ESL in Grade Four in primary schools is partly to be blamed for the ESL learners’ inadequacies. Rising criticism from tertiary level educators and employers necessitated the introduction of ESL in Grade One in 2004 in Bahrain (Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2003). Sweeping national reforms in the educational arena in Bahrain have led to the revamping of curriculum, instruction and assessment standards in an attempt to ensure Bahrain’s educational system is of international standards (Quality Assurance Authority for Education & Training 2011). The purpose of this review article is to trace the way English Language teaching has changed since the colonial days in the Middle East, especially in Bahrain and the reasons necessitating the change. This paper also has implications for research on the English proficiency levels of freshman students today who have learned ESL since Grade 1.

Key words: English as a second language, English curriculum, English language teaching in Bahrain, English language teaching in the Middle East, English proficiency

Cite as: Ponnuchamy, G. (2017). History of English-as-a-Second-Language Teaching in the Middle East and the Current Scenario in Bahrain. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (4).

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no4.30>