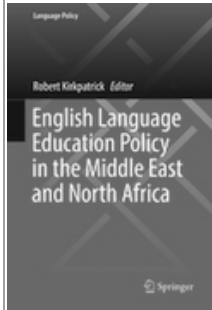


<b>English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa</b>		
<b>Author:</b>	Robert Kirkpatrick (ed.) (2017)	
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The rise of English as a lingua franca all around the world has reached an unprecedented pace in recent decades and remains a hot topic on the educational agenda in most English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) countries. Considering Kachru’s (1997) notion of concentric circles and Widdowson’s (1994) Ownership Theory, both emphasizing that space of the English language is not controlled by its native speakers, EFL and ESL countries deserve a remarkable amount of mention in terms of how they handle the “issue of English.” Aiming to make a fresh contribution to the existing policy-related literature, *English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa* provides an up-to-date overview of the national English language education policies pursued in 15 of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries in alphabetical order, except for the misorder of the chapters on Turkey and Tunisia. Composed of 16 chapters written with the contributions of 24 international experts, the book is intended for language teachers, academics, policy makers, and the interested layman.

Following Chapter 1 that constitutes an introduction to the whole volume, Chapter 2 is devoted to English language teaching (ELT) policies in Bahrain, a member of Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The other members, which include Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates, are covered in Chapters 6, 9, 11, 12, and 16, respectively. The authors draw attention to the growing status of English in these countries, most of which are former British protectorate, and state that English is now taught to primary school students from Grade 1. The exception is Saudi Arabia, where students are introduced to English from Grade 4. As for higher education, most universities are reported to have English medium instruction (EMI), which raises concerns among the citizens about the future of Arabic. The authors suggest that a balance should be made between English and Arabic at

higher education through various solutions (e.g., offering technical and scientific courses in English and traditional courses in Arabic). Despite decisive policies of the states and recent curricular improvements, English proficiency levels of public school graduates in particular are far from being satisfactory due to factors such as poor materials and outdated methods employed by English language teachers, especially in Kuwait, Oman, and Saudi Arabia. The authors suggest that GCC countries adopt common language teaching policies to obtain better results in ELT.

Focusing on the English education policy at the pre-university stages in Egypt, Chapter 3 indicates that English is introduced to Egyptian students beginning in their first year of schooling. The author presents a historical overview of the policy reforms of English education in Egyptian public schools with a specific emphasis on the curricular improvements. The major problems mentioned are the limited number of experimental public schools that offer intensive English courses and the vast differences between private and other public schools.

The authors of Chapter 4 first introduce the ups and downs of English before and after the Islamic Revolution in Iran and then conclude that the State today, with serious reservations about the possible subtractive effects on the native language and culture, half-heartedly supports the growing role of English in education considering its key power in the global world. The dilemma experienced by the State has led to the emergence of an enormous private sector of ELT that attracts an ever-growing number of learners who deem English as a language of opportunity.

Concentrating on the situation in Israel, Chapter 5 clearly says that English is seen as a prestigious language in the country where students are introduced to it from early ages, even from kindergarten in some cases. However, a considerable part of the society regards it as a threat against the promotion of Hebrew, their native language. Chapter 10 covers the ELT policy in Israel's immediate neighbour, Palestine, which is a former British protectorate. The authors state that great importance is attached to ELT at all levels of education despite difficulties (e.g., crowded classrooms, restricted diversity of textbooks, and extensive use of L1 (Arabic) in English classes).

Focusing on ELT in Libya, another country with Arabic L1 background, Chapter 7 describes language policies before and after the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime. One of the most interesting pieces of information provided is the prohibition of any foreign language in the country from the late 1980s to the mid-1990s due to political tensions with the West. Such experiences are counted by the authors as among the factors behind the negative stance of the Libyan society towards learning foreign languages. However, the dominant oil industry has somehow made English an indispensable part of the educational system. Although the language policy reforms in 2000 and 2011 both aimed to revolutionize ELT, the Grammar-Translation Method still appears to be the number one preference of the teachers.

Chapters 8, 13, and 15 cover the ELT policies pursued in Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia, respectively. These countries all formerly existed under the French mandate, and the chapters touch on the persistent influence of French on their educational systems. While Morocco and

Tunisia are reported to experience an intense French-English rivalry in education, Syria adopts a policy in favor of English and introduces it to students as a foreign language starting in Grade 1.

Chapter 14 examines the ELT policies adopted in Turkey. After presenting an overview of the Turkish EFL context and curricular reforms such as the integration of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) into the national curricula in the recent past, the author reports that Turkish state schools offer English as a foreign language from Grade 2 while private schools mostly start it from Grade 1. English also maintains great importance at Turkish universities and EMI is in effect at many universities, either on a whole-university or program-specific scale. In addition, the internationalization of Turkish universities is covered in relation to the Bologna Process and attracting international students from all around the world. The author concludes that despite all the steps taken by the State to optimize ELT in Turkey, there is still a considerable gap between policy and practice.

The volume has various strengths, one of which is the rich, interesting, and up-to-date content it provides for readers. It offers numerous valuable information about how English is regarded and how English language teaching is implemented by states in the MENA region which has long been characterized by political turmoil. The chapters are mostly based on current research and data and enable readers to see the similarities and differences between current ELT policies and practices of the countries considering their historical, political, economic, social, and L1 backgrounds. Furthermore, the suggestions at the end of each chapter shed light on the future of ELT in the region.

Along with its notable strengths, the volume possesses two major drawbacks. First, while some of the chapters cover ELT policies encompassing both K-12 and higher education, some omit the important higher education aspect and focus solely on K-12 (e.g., Chapter 3). Second, the authors of some chapters do not appear to be natives of the covered countries, which might have caused some inadequacies in their content. For instance, Chapter 13 on Syria, contrary to its title, cannot offer satisfying information about the current outlook of ELT in the war-ravaged country. A Syrian author may have provided some more to-the-point and illuminating details.

Nonetheless, this edited volume provides useful, critical, and constructive insights for language-related policy-makers and practitioners in the MENA region. Access to the vast diversity of specific experiences in different countries will enable readers to make comparisons between current effective and ineffective ELT policies, which can be expected to contribute to the construction of better policies in the future. Furthermore, readers beyond the MENA region will see the reflections of the lingua franca status of English on the current ELT policies in various countries with different L1 backgrounds. Considering all these, it can be said that this work should be definitely added to the list of must-have books on ELT.

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## Reviewed by

Dr. İsmail Yaman

Ondokuz Mayıs University (Turkey)

[<ismail.yaman@omu.edu.tr>](mailto:ismail.yaman@omu.edu.tr)

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