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Preparing the Saudi Educational System to Serve the 2030 Vision: A Comparative Analysis Study

Abstract

Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision (2019) aims to solidify the kingdom's influence in the Middle East while also diversifying the economy and increasing quality of life and access to opportunity for Saudis. One critical component of preparing Saudis for the job market is addressing low English language proficiency among students in the public school system (Rugh, 2002a, 2002b; Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). This study reviews existing literature on the Saudi Arabian educational system, the controversy surrounding English language instruction, and the importance of English for economic opportunity. Then, using transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) as the theoretical underpinning, the researcher presents an analysis of educational policy documents for both nations. Finally, the researcher offers recommendations for how Saudi Arabia can institute reforms modeled after Bahrain's education system, which has experienced similar economic challenges and systemic obstacles. The conclusions of this study highlight the need for clear and specific policy language, specifically pertaining to the infusion of Islamic values and principles; additional emphasis on language instruction as a whole; and strong guidance on the integration and application of feedback and support for instructors in the Saudi Arabian educational system. This study builds off existing literature by reaffirming the value of transformative leadership in evaluating educational policy and contributes to the larger conversation in educational policy studies by providing recommendations for future research on using English language education to effect change in pursuit of large-scale economic policy initiatives.

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Preparing the Saudi Educational System to Serve the 2030 Vision:

A Comparative Analysis Study

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Wala'a Bunaiyan

August 2019

Advisor: Kristina A. Hesbol. Ph.D.

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Author: Wala'a Bunaiyan
Title: Preparing the Saudi Educational System to Serve the 2030 Vision: A Comparative Analysis Study
Advisor: Kristina A. Hesbol. Ph.D.
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ABSTRACT

Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision (2019) aims to solidify the kingdom's influence in the Middle East while also diversifying the economy and increasing quality of life and access to opportunity for Saudis. One critical component of preparing Saudis for the job market is addressing low English language proficiency among students in the public school system (Rugh, 2002a, 2002b; Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). This study reviews existing literature on the Saudi Arabian educational system, the controversy surrounding English language instruction, and the importance of English for economic opportunity. Then, using transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) as the theoretical underpinning, the researcher presents an analysis of educational policy documents for both nations. Finally, the researcher offers recommendations for how Saudi Arabia can institute reforms modeled after Bahrain's education system, which has experienced similar economic challenges and systemic obstacles. The conclusions of this study highlight the need for clear and specific policy language, specifically pertaining to the infusion of Islamic values and principles; additional emphasis on language instruction as a whole; and strong guidance on the integration and application of feedback and support for instructors in the Saudi Arabian educational system. This study builds off existing literature by reaffirming the value of transformative leadership in evaluating educational policy and contributes to the larger conversation in educational policy studies

by providing recommendations for future research on using English language education to effect change in pursuit of large-scale economic policy initiatives.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

Because Saudi Arabia's economy has been dependent on the oil and gas industry, English has long been intertwined with oil companies. Unlike other countries in the Gulf, Saudi Arabia was not colonized, and as a result, most of its educational changes have been driven by the country's economic needs as opposed to the pressures of imperialism (Habbash, 2011). Both Habbash (2011) and Elyas and Picard (2010) link the discovery of oil in Saudi Arabia in 1938 with the investment of American and British companies in the country. Saudi oil corporations, like Aramco, dominate the national economy and have come to depend on workers who are fluent in English in order to communicate with foreigners (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). According to Alrashidi and Phan (2015), "More than 9.5 million foreign expatriates work in S.A. occupying 88.4% of the labour force in the private sector" (p. 40). According to Al-Dosary (2004), while this trend of hiring foreign workers over Saudi citizens has reaped short-term financial benefits, it has created a crisis for the kingdom's economy. Younger citizens seeking jobs face high rates of unemployment and feel resentment towards foreigners who dominate private industries. In response to the negative job prospects faced by young Saudis, the practice of Saudization, which involves affirmative action for Saudi citizens and nationalization of the labor force, has dominated economic policy (Al-Dosary, 2004; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014).

Unemployment in Saudi Arabia

The discovery of oil led to increased investment from American and British companies into Saudi Arabia's economy, and consequently, Saudi corporations, such as Aramco, began to dominate the national economy. From the 1960s through the 1970s, Saudi Arabia was considered a developing country and continued undergoing massive changes to its economy (Knauerhase, 1974). Oil companies began to rely heavily on workers who are fluent in English and able to communicate with foreigners (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). As a result, most Saudi citizens in the labor force lacked the education and skills required to get a decent job. As Knauerhase (1974) observed, "Hundreds of government positions are vacant because the number of qualified Saudis is very small" (p. 128). Consequently, during this period of time, 45% of the labor market consisted of foreigners, who had the expertise required for high-paying jobs in the Saudi economy (Knauerhase, 1974). Foreigners filled a gap in the Saudi economy, and Saudi nationals were left behind, relegated to physical labor.

While Saudi Arabia is a member of the G20 and is no longer considered a developing country (Gelil, Howarth, & Lanza, 2017), it is still in need of economic reforms to help Saudis become more competitive participants in the workforce. According to Cordesman (2002), unemployment estimates in Saudi Arabia tend to overlook the reality and influence of "*disguised unemployment*" (p. 36)—particularly in the state, petroleum, and private sectors—on Saudi citizens' ability to find work. As noted by Alrashidi and Phan (2015), foreign workers still make up 88.4% of the private sector. Together, these studies demonstrate that Saudi nationals struggle to find good jobs in an economy dominated by foreign nationals. This dependence on foreign workers has

resulted in increased efforts in pursuit of Saudization, which focuses on “increasing employment for Saudi nationals across all sectors of the domestic economy” in addition to “reducing and reversing over-reliance on foreign workers” (Al-Dosary, Rahman, & Aina, 2006, p. 404). However, scholars question the effectiveness of such measures because they decrease competitiveness in the workforce, discriminate against foreigners, and fail to address the root cause of Saudi nationals’ inability to compete with foreign workers (Al-Dosary & Rahman, 2005; Mellahi, 2007). Saudi Arabia continues to implement measures aimed at curbing the country’s dependence on foreign workers, but as the cost of living increases for foreigners, the positions they leave behind are not being filled by Saudi citizens (Al-Omran, 2018). Saudi Arabia’s economic dependence on the oil and gas industry has translated to an economic dependence on English-speaking workers. Consequently, Saudi citizens face numerous challenges in competing for the same jobs that foreigners can easily acquire, due to their expertise combined with their fluency in English.

English Proficiency and Unemployment

Students who graduate from universities that primarily conduct courses in English tend to have better job prospects than graduates of schools that teach most courses in Arabic (Al-Dosary, Rahman, & Aina, 2006). Al-Dosary, Rahman, and Aina (2006) use King Fahd University as a case study that shows how English plays a major role in students’ ability to find jobs after graduation. Graduates of King Fahd University, regardless of nationality, experience similar rates of employment, but students who attend institutions that teach primarily in Arabic do not benefit from the same competitive rates of employment (Al-Dosary, Rahman, & Aina, 2006). This discrepancy in employment

opportunities shows that the labor market prefers students with higher levels of fluency in the English language. Further, according to Rugh (2002a), several Arab universities acknowledge that publications in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) are often published in English and have shifted toward using English as the medium of instruction for those courses. Similarly, there is an understanding that business and the private sector require proficiency in English, demonstrating a need for more English instruction beyond STEM (Rugh, 2002a). While certain institutions of higher education have adopted English as the primary language for instruction, this shift has not been universal, which poses challenges for providing effective English language instruction that prepares students to pursue higher education. By and large, extensive research has shown that Saudi students are unprepared for undertaking English-only coursework at the college level (Rugh, 2002a; Alnofaie, 2013; Al-Zahrani & Elyas, 2017). This poses challenges for students attending an English-only institution and risks perpetuating an employment gap between disciplines. Consequently, it is important to examine appropriate educational reforms at the primary and secondary levels to improve Saudi students' proficiency in English, regardless of whether students pursue higher education or careers in the private sector. This is especially prudent considering that Saudi Arabia aims to diversify its economy in pursuit of the 2030 Vision (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019).

The 2030 Vision

The 2030 Vision (2019) is a nationwide initiative aimed at reforming the Saudi Arabian economy by decreasing dependence on oil, improving quality of life, and establishing the kingdom's stance as a regional powerhouse. According to Saudi Vision

2030 (2019), the large-scale initiative originated as a means of preparing citizens of Saudi Arabia to participate in and contribute to a more sustainable, adaptable, and stable economy. Here is an excerpt from the Saudi Vision 2030 (2019) website:

Our ambition is for the long term. It goes beyond replenishing sources of income that have weakened or preserving what we have already achieved. We are determined to build a thriving country in which all citizens can fulfill their dreams, hopes and ambitions. Therefore, we will not rest until our nation is a leader in providing opportunities for all through education and training, and high-quality services such as employment initiatives, health, housing, and entertainment.

As shown in this excerpt, the 2030 Vision is focused on Saudi Arabia's long-term growth and expanding opportunities for the entire populace. Saudi Arabia sees education as a critical tool for implementing reforms that create lasting change for every facet of the economy. In pursuit of these lofty initiatives, however, educational reforms must be considered simultaneously.

Education Reform and the 2030 Vision

Saudi Arabia is currently grappling with how to transform its education system in order to fulfill the nationwide initiatives established by the 2030 Vision. This has posed unique challenges to educators, who must teach students the skills required for working in a globalized workforce. Further, these reforms are expected to be sustainable in an effort to solidify the country's long-term success. In order to better understand the challenges faced by educators in Saudi Arabia, it is necessary to provide context and background on the Saudi Arabian educational system. Then, the researcher will provide additional context on Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision.

While this dissertation focuses on public schools because the majority of Saudis receive their education from these institutions, it is important to understand the breadth of

options available to students. The educational system in Saudi Arabia comprises three types of schools: public, private, and international. Initially, public and private schools were the only options available to Saudi students. However, even though all students enrolled in public schools receive English language instruction starting in the fourth grade, these students enter higher education with limited proficiency in English (Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). This discrepancy in performance caught the attention of the Saudi Arabian government, and as a result, international schools opened their doors to Saudi citizens (Habbash, 2011). From the researcher's experiential background, she knows that international schools opened in 2010; Habbash (2011) states that Saudis are now able to attend international schools.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education permits international schools to utilize British or American curriculum for teaching core subjects, including math, language arts, and social studies, in English. Additionally, these schools must teach courses centered around Arabic, the national language of Saudi Arabia (Habbash, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2019b). While private schools use the same curriculum as public schools, private schools tend to have more autonomy, which enables them to devote more time to English proficiency, for example (Habbash, 2011; Ministry of Education, 2019a). International schools are not considered public schools, but rather a type of private school that exists to better meet the needs of students and provide more focused English instruction. They are permitted to utilize curriculum other than what is used by the public school system. International schools offer distinct advantages, including additional curriculum options and longer student instructional time. The implementation of international schools as an alternative educational option for students is in direct response

to outside pressure, especially from the American government, to teach values of liberalism and to combat extremism (Habbash, 2011). As such, these institutions emphasize English as a means for exposing students to these principles. In line with these goals, instructors in international schools are expected to be native speakers of English. While all teachers must be licensed, regardless of whether they work for an international, public, or private school, some international schools place more of an emphasis on qualifications and credentials in teaching English. Even though private schools are often better equipped to teach English language proficiency, they have an extensive amount of autonomy. As a result, factors such as curriculum, teacher preparation, and student support lack consistency from one private school to another. While international schools and private schools have made great strides in better supporting and educating students, public schools have made little headway in improving student achievement and fluency in English (ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013; Alharbi, 2015). The fact that the English language proficiency might vary depending on whether the student attends a public, private, or international school has raised questions about the efficacy of the English language acquisition programs.

Historically, the Saudi educational system has changed and adapted in response to both internal and external pressures. As Siddiqui (2014) notes, “Arab governments, including Saudi Arabia, have adopted western curricula and pedagogy with the aim to open up their country to the rest of the world” (para. 5), and international schools have served as one method of fostering this exchange of ideas between the educational systems of nations around the world. Elyas and Picard (2010) recount the historical developments and changes to the Saudi educational system as well as the cultural, political, and

economic pressures it has faced. Elyas and Picard (2010) note that English instruction has been a contentious issue in the past, due to the perception that “‘more English’ would mean ‘less Islam’” (p. 140). Mahboob and Elyas (2014) contend that those who express opposition to increased English usage and instruction perceive English as a colonizing language and “a threat to local cultures and values” (p. 140). Consequently, this fervent debate over the relevance of English and its impact on religious traditions, cultural practices, and national values has resulted in sub-par English instruction, and posed major challenges for effective English instruction in the kingdom’s public education system (Elyas & Picard, 2010; Siddiqui, 2014; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). In order to increase equity for Saudi Arabian citizens and to help them become applicants who are just as competitive as foreign expatriates (Rugh, 2002a), the education system must provide higher-quality English language instruction so that private industries and corporations are willing to look for talent within the kingdom instead of outside of it.

It is important to deconstruct current methods of teaching English language acquisition in the Saudi Arabian educational system, in order to reconstruct these practices and understand how they reinforce existing power dynamics while marginalizing certain students. Further, transformative leadership theory can elucidate opportunities for change that go beyond the surface and create meaningful and sustainable change (Shields, 2010). While the 2030 Vision establishes general principles and goals for such reforms, it does not provide specifics on how English language acquisition fits into the picture, which this study aims to address. The kingdom will need to respond appropriately to such influences in order to prioritize and promote the needs of its own citizens while balancing the responsibilities of being a major player on the global

stage (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019). On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision places significant emphasis on conforming to Westernized ideals, such as open markets, and must not sacrifice its own needs and values in order to assimilate. This will be particularly important since Saudi Arabian educational policy will likely continue to be influenced by multiple actors (Elyas & Picard, 2010; Siddiqui, 2014; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014) both within and outside of the kingdom, over the course of the implementation of the 2030 Vision.

In light of the 2030 Vision, policy recommendations made in this study must consider how educational reforms can empower individual learning and language proficiency with the end goal of providing all students with equal opportunities for meaningful and fulfilling career paths. Simultaneously, these policy recommendations must balance the success and development of the individual while also considering the effects of such policies on society as a whole. Much like the discovery of oil in 1938, the 2030 Vision (2019) aims to be a catalyst for a foreign investment in the kingdom by expanding and evolving the economy from oil to global markets. However, at the risk of even more Saudi jobs being awarded to foreigners who speak English fluently, Saudi citizens must be prepared to engage with professionals from other countries by reaching higher levels of proficiency in English. As such, the 2030 Vision must recognize how English language acquisition programs fit into its long-term goals for preparing the country to participate in a globalized economy.

Comparing Education in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain

As English has become a *lingua franca* of sorts in the Gulf region, more scholars are drawing attention to the pedagogy and praxis of teaching English as a second

language in the Saudi educational system (Siddiqui, 2014). One major critique of the Saudi public education system is the reliance on rote memorization over the teaching of critical thinking or other analytical skills (Elyas & Picard, 2010). These skills are fundamental to language acquisition and development, which has likely exacerbated students' limited proficiency levels. Elyas and Picard (2010) argue that this has been detrimental for preparing and training workers to succeed in the workforce, and this lack of preparedness ultimately necessitates a major shift in the educational system. Further evidence of the growing need for workers who are fluent in English is the shift from Arabic to English in major universities and the language requirements of major Saudi corporations, like Aramco (Rugh, 2002a; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015).

Other Gulf states have experienced similar challenges and pressures in their own educational systems. Bahrain is the only island-state in the Persian Gulf; it also has the smallest land mass and population of all the Gulf states (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017). Both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia belong to the Gulf Cooperation Council, an alliance between six Arab states in the Persian Gulf, which also includes Oman, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2018). According to Abou-El-Kheir and MacLeod (2017), Bahrain's education system faced mounting challenges as the population grew, and it became more difficult to retain qualified teachers. Due to Bahrain's position as a British colony, English has played a major role in the country's educational system. After acquiring independence from the British in 1971, Bahrain underwent major reforms in order to implement substantial improvements to its education system. These reforms made education, up through middle school, free and compulsory. Currently, English instruction begins during the first year of primary school

in Bahrain, and many institutions of higher education conduct courses in English. The major economic initiative driving educational policy in Bahrain aims to transform the country into a knowledge economy while preserving Islamic values and providing quality English language education. Bahrain's educational reforms tend to be holistic in nature, reducing the long periods of change and creating a sense of stability for schools. The country also holds its schools to high standards, which promotes greater student achievement and a commitment to reforms that target areas in need of improvement (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017).

In an effort to improve ongoing systemic issues, education reform is fundamental to Saudi Arabia's large-scale policy initiative known as the 2030 Vision. The 2030 Vision aims to increase the Saudi Arabian economy's adaptability to an increasingly globalized world. By focusing on innovation, growth, and education from the bottom up, the government aims to strengthen connections with other nations and establish Saudi Arabia as a more competitive player in the global economy (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019). As part of this effort to institute reform on such a large scale, English language acquisition must be a top priority for preparing citizens to strengthen their acumen for intercultural communication, attain higher levels of education, and create and manage robust businesses and organizations. It is worth noting that there are an estimated 200,000 Saudi Arabian citizens who are studying abroad (The Tribune Trust, 2018), many of whom need high levels of English fluency in order to participate fully in their academic programs and take advantage of other professional opportunities.

Because this research aims to look at Saudi Arabia's educational system holistically, the researcher is more concerned with educational policy as opposed to

making specific recommendations for improving curriculum and pedagogy. While curriculum and instruction are certainly one piece of the puzzle, they are not the focus of this research. Therefore, it is important to note that while this research examines possible improvements that can be made in regard to curriculum and instruction, these improvements are explored as a means to an end, the end being a more equitable application of educational policy. As such, this research aims to identify areas of improvement within the Saudi educational system in order to make policy recommendations informed by the context of the 2030 Vision. Ultimately, the researcher hopes to make recommendations that will provide more equitable system-wide opportunities for improving English language fluency in order to provide students with more opportunities for social mobility. In this vein, it is critical to look at how the Saudi educational system can model itself after the success of other similar systems with similar large-scale economic initiatives.

Because several ministries and organizations must work together in pursuit of the 2030 Vision, making major improvements to the educational ministry will be critical for revitalizing and diversifying Saudi Arabia's economy. With a more robust educational ministry that prioritizes student success and achievement, the government of Saudi Arabia can demonstrate to younger generations that their contributions matter and that English proficiency is key to long-term success for individuals, organizations, and the country as a whole. Current levels of English proficiency are simply insufficient for long-term growth and development, especially in light of the necessity of collaboration with other English-speaking countries. From this researcher's perspective, if Saudi Arabia aims to maximize opportunities for international cooperation in the spirit of a free and

open global marketplace, then English language proficiency must be at the forefront of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision.

Statement of Problem

Even though Saudi Arabian students have grown up learning English since the fourth grade, by the time they reach higher education, they struggle to communicate fluently in English (Habbash, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). This dissertation aims to compare policy initiatives in the educational systems of Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in order to identify reforms that could improve outcomes related to English language fluency in Saudi Arabia. This is especially relevant considering that Saudi educators are not necessarily engaged with best practices and theories of English language acquisition (Alharbi, 2015). As such, this dissertation aims to review and discuss several aspects of the education system, including curriculum, student achievement, and educator involvement, in order to make appropriate policy recommendations. In the application of transformative leadership, it is critical to identify the most significant issues and recommend reforms to effect change and improve levels of English language proficiency.

Purpose of Study

In accordance with the 2030 Vision, which aims to enhance quality of life for citizens of Saudi Arabia, the purpose of this study is to consider how targeted reforms can help address systemic issues of inequity when considering international, private, and public schools in the Saudi educational system. This study aims to recommend appropriate policies that will support language acquisition programs and promote fluency and proficiency in English, which will ultimately help create opportunities for Saudi citizens to communicate more effectively and participate in both the national and global

economy. High levels of fluency in English will provide citizens with the skills necessary for intercultural communication, which is essential for 2030 Vision's goal of solidifying Saudi Arabia's position as a hub for global trade with a competitive labor force.

Ultimately, the end goal of this study is to support language acquisition by identifying opportunities for reform within the education system and recommending appropriate policies to address these systemic issues of inequity.

Research Question

The central research question for this study is as follows: By analyzing educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, what can be learned from Bahrain's educational system? The sub-question for this research is as follows: How can lessons learned from Bahrain's educational system be applied to enhance English language proficiency outcomes in Saudi Arabian public schools?

Framework

In order to implement change and reform on such a massive scale, transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) will be key for identifying opportunities for growth and targeting reforms to address those needs. Transformative leadership sees transformation and education as inseparable (Shields, 2010). Through a transformative lens, this study can address how power and privilege have shaped the educational system in Saudi Arabia while identifying opportunities for disrupting the current power relationships and encouraging change. Transformative leadership can be especially useful for instituting reform in light of the ongoing economic changes required by the 2030 Vision, in pursuit of a higher quality of life for every citizen. Further, by weaving together critical theory and transformative learning theory, the researcher can make recommendations for

pedagogical strategies that can be integrated into educational systems in pursuit of equity and social justice (Brown, 2004). In the spirit of improving quality of life, a key tenet of the 2030 Vision (2019), transformative leadership theory can help guide the construction of egalitarian alternatives to existing power structures that limit opportunities available to Saudi citizens.

Definitions of Key Terminology

For the purposes of this study, there are several key terms that require definitions in order to ensure clarity and coherence:

- **2030 Vision:** Saudi Arabia’s policy initiative for improving the country’s standing and reputation in both the Middle East and the world. Education is seen as a primary agent of enacting this reform (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019).
- **English language acquisition.** The goal of reaching fluency in English. In Saudi Arabia, it is an outcome aimed at preparing citizens for participating in both the national and global economy, within the context of the 2030 Vision. When referring to programs designed to teach English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, the term “ELA programs” will be used.
- **English language learners.** Students who are learning English as an additional or foreign language. While there are many terms for this student population, this dissertation will utilize the term “English language learners” or the abbreviation “ELLs.”
- **Transformative leadership.** A theoretical framework that “inextricably links education and educational leadership with the wider social contexts within which it is embedded” (Shields, 2010, p. 559). Transformative leadership sees

the goal of knowledge construction as “aid[ing] people to improve society” (Mertens, 2003, as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 25) and “to understand and accept the mandate for deep and equitable change” (Shields, 2017).

Organization of the Study

In this dissertation, the researcher will first review the relevant literature on English language acquisition programs, the Saudi educational system, transformative leadership theory, and the educational system in Bahrain. The researcher will then compare two educational policies, one from Saudi Arabia and one from Bahrain, in an effort to determine how Saudi Arabia can implement appropriate reforms for improving English language fluency in the public education system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This research seeks to understand how Saudi Arabian educational policies differ from those of Bahrain, with the goal of identifying opportunities for strengthening and improving policy initiatives established by the 2030 Vision in order to enhance learning outcomes pertaining to English language acquisition. The main objectives of the 2030 Vision are to diversify the Saudi Arabian economy and to invest in the long-term future of the kingdom (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019). In order to do this, the country must open itself up to global business opportunities and industries. Saudi Arabia recognizes its unique position as a mediator between several continents (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019), but in order to capitalize on this role, the kingdom must prioritize English language fluency so that its citizens can engage in the intercultural communication required for establishing productive partnerships with other countries (Habbash, 2011).

Saudi students enrolled in public schools are required to take English courses beginning in the fourth grade, but by the time these students reach higher education or begin looking for jobs, they are still struggling to learn and communicate in English (ur Rahman & Alhaisoni, 2013; Alharbi, 2015). Participation in both the Saudi Arabian economy and the global economy require higher levels of fluency than Saudis currently demonstrate. An interpretivist lens focuses on “how people interact in, with, and to create a social scene” (Manning & Kunkel, 2014, p. 3). By using an interpretivist lens, this study aims to identify opportunities for improving Saudi educational policy in order to

better support outcomes related to English language acquisition. To reach this goal, this study is guided by the following research question: By analyzing educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, what can be learned from Bahrain's educational system? How can these lessons be applied to enhance English language proficiency outcomes in Saudi Arabian public schools? This literature review will address scholarship on language acquisition programs, the Saudi educational system, and transformative leadership to provide the necessary context for identifying opportunities for increasing English language fluency in Saudi Arabian schools.

Saudi Arabia's Education System

Role of English

In order to understand how reforms can be implemented in an effort to increase English language acquisition outcomes in the country, it is necessary to understand the history of Saudi Arabia's educational system and the educational policies that have been enacted in response to major historical, social, and political influences. Since the discovery of oil in 1938, the Saudi Arabian economy has been dependent on the oil and gas industry (Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2010). Major oil conglomerates, like Aramco, came to dominate the workforce and provide the majority of employment opportunities (Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). According to Ottaway (2009), the influence of oil companies continued to expand as the world became more dependent on oil for energy, and the kingdom of Saudi Arabia became a major supplier for industrialized nations, especially the United States, whose postwar oil policy revolved around establishing and maintaining a strategic alliance with Saudi Arabia. In turn, ongoing

economic relationships developed between Saudi Arabia and many industrialized Western nations (Ottaway, 2009).

As Saudi Arabia's economy has come to rely on other industries in addition to oil and gas, English has only grown in its importance (Rugh, 2002b; Crystal, 2003; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Habbash, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). Habbash (2011) recognizes that English, as the language of globalization, has moved beyond a prestigious skill to one that is critical for securing professional opportunities and career advancement. Several universities only teach courses in English, and at other universities, courses in fields like medicine and engineering are only taught in English (Rugh, 2002b; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). As noted by Crystal (2003), "There is the closest of links between language dominance and economic, technological, and cultural power, too" (p. 24), underscoring the importance of a populace fluent in English for the kingdom's continued economic growth and development. While fluency in English is critical for increasing job prospects for Saudi citizens, it is also integral to the 2030 Vision's aim of making Saudi Arabia a regional hub where workers from three major continents can congregate in pursuit of mutually beneficial economic opportunities.

English proficiency is limited among Saudi citizens, a situation that has posed significant problems for the ability of Saudi citizens to compete in the workforce (Rugh, 2002a, 2002b; Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). As a result, there have been recent efforts to increase the amount of English instruction Saudi students receive. For example, English had only been required for students from seventh grade onward, but this was recently lowered to fourth grade (Habbash, 2011). In spite of this, and similar efforts at reform, student achievement and proficiency in English is still

low (Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). It is theorized that, to compensate for this lack of sufficient English instruction, Saudi citizens are taking advantage of opportunities to strengthen their English fluency through immersion, with over 50,000 students studying abroad in the United States or the United Kingdom (Habbash, 2011). Habbash (2011), Elyas and Picard (2011), and Alrashidi and Phan (2015) all validate the importance of English for improving opportunities for Saudi citizens, both inside and outside of the kingdom, while illustrating the negative impact that a lack of proficiency in English has on the national economy.

Western Influence and Neoliberal Economic Policy

Saudi Arabia has faced both internal and external pressures to make significant changes to its education system in order to accommodate the wishes of westernized nations. Habbash (2011) notes that many countries have pressured Saudi Arabia to integrate elements of liberalism in its curriculum in order to combat extremist viewpoints. As discussed by Elyas and Picard (2010), Americans developed prejudices and assumptions about Saudi Arabia and its citizens after September 11th, 2001. In addition to foreign pressures, Rugh (2002b) notes that the private sector has expressed its concerns that the educational system has failed to prepare Saudi citizens for the economic challenges that come with globalization. With this in mind, it is important to recognize that globalization has promoted the development of fairly uniform, westernized educational systems (Alyami, 2016). Such systems can lift up the poor by providing them with access to education that fulfills the needs of the countries that dominate the world stage.

In exploring the neoliberal assumptions inherent to policy borrowing, one important text to consider is Hayes' (2017) article, "Deconstructing the 'magnetic' properties of neoliberal politics of education in Bahrain." Hayes is critical of Bahrain's practice of policy borrowing, particularly in adopting educational policies related to English language acquisition, in pursuit of large-scale economic reform. As Hayes notes, Bahrain's switch to emphasizing skill development over content did not necessarily reflect the needs of students, which posed a major problem for implementing reforms focused on learner-centered teaching models. While educational policies have assumed that students are eager to participate in a global economy, Hayes questions the relevance of such reforms for students whose "aspirations and outlooks on career prospects are very locally and internally focused" (p. 184), where English fluency is not necessarily required. When students perceive English as irrelevant for their future career goals, many lack the motivation to learn it, which in turn prompts teachers to revert back to practices that meet students' immediate needs, like exam preparation. Consequently, Hayes cautions against economic visions and educational reforms that prioritize the idea of "learning for 'export'" (p.186).

Elyas and Picard (2013) acknowledge the tensions between Islamic modes of thought and Western globalized discourse that is inherent in educational policy and reform in Saudi Arabia. However, the researchers also acknowledge that neoliberal reforms have likely failed because they seek to conform to western realities and ideologies without sufficiently modeling for students how to preserve and maintain religious values in a changing world. In response to critiques of neoliberalism, Elyas and Picard (2013) note that the very foundations of Saudi Arabia's educational systems resist

Western hegemony. For instance, educating its citizens is considered a theological imperative for the kingdom, and education is free for all students. In Saudi Arabia, there is no distinction between the secular and the religious; therefore, “educational policy related to general education, university education and even the teaching of English is likewise infused with the sacred” (Elyas, 2011). The sacredness of language is further explored in Alhamami’s (2018) work on how religious pilgrimages to Mecca can be viewed as a “multilingual phenomenon” (p. 61). The interaction of myriad cultures and languages at the holiest city in Islam demonstrates the power and significance of all languages, including English, in bringing Muslims together from around the world. As demonstrated by Elyas (2011), Elyas and Picard (2013), and Alhamami (2018), the Islamic foundation of Saudi Arabia’s government and educational system provides ample opportunities for embracing certain Western ideals while resisting hegemony and preserving the country’s own heritage and way of life.

In order to more effectively balance both Islamic and Western discourses, Elyas and Picard (2013) discuss the importance of “a broader emphasis on identifying how individuals (both those with comparative power and the comparatively powerless) can be assisted to achieve the wanted economic goals” (p. 38). Ultimately, Elyas and Picard advocate for policy borrowing paired with “glocalization” (p. 38), which would involve adopting policies but refining and adapting them to meet the needs of a new context—in this case, the needs of Saudi Arabia’s cultural norms and economic needs. Such an approach would ultimately be more equitable because it would shift educational pedagogy towards integrating both the local and the global in an effort to reconcile both, which would prepare students to compete in a global economy while also respecting the

needs of students who wish to remain in more localized careers. These arguments reflect the challenges faced by Saudi Arabia, as well as other Gulf countries, in implementing educational reform. In spite of this, the heart of the issue is whether Saudi Arabia's educational system can be reformed equitably, without succumbing to the needs and ideologies of western economies, while still preserving the kingdom's values and culture. On the one hand, change is necessary in order for the Saudi Arabian workforce to be competitive in a globalized economy. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision places significant emphasis on conforming to Western ideals, such as open markets, and must not sacrifice its own needs and values in order to assimilate.

English Language Acquisition

Scholars have noted that inadequate primary and secondary education places the burden of remediation on colleges and universities (Rugh, 2002b; Al-Zahrani & Elyas, 2017; Alnofaie, 2013). Rugh (2002b) notes that many incoming college freshmen are not ready to face the intellectual rigors of higher education. Alnofaie (2013) and Al-Zahrani and Elyas (2017) note that students in Saudi Arabia must take a language placement test prior to enrolling at university, and their results on the placement test dictate whether students must take a preparatory year before taking courses. In fact, Al-Zahrani and Elyas (2017) state that "the majority of [first-year students] are placed at beginner levels" (p. 136). While institutions of higher education have adapted to offer entire degree plans in English, they struggle to teach students who are not prepared to learn, study, and communicate in English, and as a result, students are set up for failure (Alnofaie, 2013). Research demonstrates that Saudi colleges and universities recognize the need to graduate students who are skilled in English, but these institutions are hamstrung by the

need for extensive remedial instruction. Their best efforts fall short because of students' lack of preparation—partially stemming from inadequate instruction—for studying entirely in English. To better understand how this issue can be addressed, this section examines the literature on how to better support both students and teachers while also making changes to curriculum used in the classroom.

System-wide efforts to support English language acquisition must focus on students' needs. Haneda (2008) states that system-wide efforts for establishing best pedagogical practices in English language acquisition programs are crucial for achieving outcomes related to language proficiency. Students have voiced concerns about the lack of additional supplemental resources for language learning, including English clubs and extracurricular activities (Dakhiel, 2017). Schools are unlikely to be successful without simultaneously providing support for ELLs through avenues outside of the classroom (Haneda, 2008; London, Gurantz, & Norman, 2011). Overall, school leaders and administrators, as well as the Ministry of Education, should consider monitoring the achievement and development of ELLs in all respects, across departments and courses, in order to meet the needs of ELLs and to help them succeed (Haneda, 2008). In considering future reforms, educators must consider each English language learner as an individual with intersectional identities that impact and influence each other in myriad ways (Coloma, 2008; Elyas & Badawood, 2016). Doing so can provide ELLs with more comprehensive support throughout the entirety of their academic performance and achievement.

One ongoing issue noted in the literature is that the Saudi educational system promotes outdated methods of teaching and learning English (Alnofaie, 2013; Alwadai,

2014; Al-Zahrani & Elyas, 2017; Elyas & Picard, 2010; Rugh, 2002a). As discussed by Elyas and Picard (2010), English teachers teach English the way they teach Arabic, in that they prioritize and emphasize rote memorization or teacher-oriented pedagogy. While this is not good instructional practice generally, this is worth examining and re-evaluating specifically in relation to English language acquisition. Rugh (2002a) argues that the Saudi educational system emphasizes and rewards rote memorization and fails to impart students with higher-level cognitive skills, like problem solving, analytical skills, and synthesis of information. Alnofaie's (2013) work has also identified severe limitations to the pedagogy of English language acquisition in Saudi public schools. Consequently, these pedagogical strategies limit students' abilities to become active participants in their own education, making it difficult for them to learn the skills necessary for attaining gainful employment and creating economic value (Rugh, 2002b). For context, Al-Zahrani and Elyas (2017) note that critical thinking "has often been considered a privilege limited to Western contexts, where critical thinking is a cultural norm" (p. 135). In Alwadai's (2014) study, 72% of respondents stated that they didn't have time to incorporate instructional practices that encouraged the practice of critical thinking into their classes, citing a pressure to cover extensive amounts of course material instead.

The Saudi Arabian education system's reliance on teachers disseminating knowledge poses challenges for English language acquisition. Teachers tend to lecture for the majority of classes (Alwadai, 2014; Alharbi, 2015), which limits student participation and is not conducive to language learning (Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). A teacher-centered approach, as opposed to a student-centered model, assumes that students

will be intrinsically motivated to learn and work hard (Gulnaz, Alfaqih, & Mashhour, 2015). As Alnofaie (2013) observes, adapting Western methods of teaching poses unique challenges for the school system in Saudi Arabia. Alwadai's (2014) research confirms this, with evidence that students tend to see their Islamic teachers as unquestionable authority figures, making it difficult for teachers to promote critical thinking in the classroom. In Alwadai's (2014) study, teachers felt that Saudi society does not necessarily promote critical thinking, presenting a significant challenge to implementing such thought processes in the classroom. In Saudi Arabia, a teacher-centered model is not considered a valued practice for teaching English, so it is critical to adopt a more student-oriented approach that prioritizes critical thinking in order to facilitate English language acquisition (Elyas & Picard, 2010; Alwadai, 2014).

Research suggests that inadequate teaching methodology may stem from a lack of support and professional development (August & Hakuta, 1997; Sifakis, 2004; Ovando & Casey, 2010; Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010; Al-Othman & Shuqair, 2013; Dakhiel, 2017). When hiring instructors for teaching English as a foreign language, it is critical to not only prioritize selecting instructors with experience and research-based training in principles and practices of English language acquisition, but also to provide them with the ongoing professional development and support they will need (Ovando & Casey, 2010). Sifakis (2004) found that there is a need to increase instructors' preparedness for teaching in ELL classrooms to help those students acquire the language. Oftentimes, educators hired to teach in foreign language acquisition programs lack the appropriate credentials and experience; as a result, they are unprepared for addressing the needs of English language learners and providing adequate support and language instruction

(Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010). Dakhiel (2017) found that educational administrators who have little or no training in language acquisition tend to see instructors' lack of familiarity with the expectations of English language acquisition programs as a major barrier to effective teaching and student achievement. Further, there is a discrepancy between knowledge and application when it comes to instructors' support and encouragement of English language learners (Al-Othman & Shuqair, 2013). As such, Saudi Arabia's public education system would benefit from implementing professional development and support systems for English language instructors that focus on bridging the gap between theory and practice. Such resources for instructors must acknowledge the realities and challenges of learning English as a second language while providing the appropriate tools and resources.

Even the most qualified instructors face myriad challenges when teaching in English language acquisition (ELA) programs (Sifakis, 2004; Elyas & Basalamah, 2012; Payne & Almansour, 2014; Dakhiel, 2017; Hayes, 2017). It is necessary for teachers to learn specifically how to interact with ELLs and to teach in an ELA program. Oftentimes, English is treated as a supplemental content area, so limited class time is devoted to English instruction (Sifakis, 2004). According to Payne and Almansour (2014), only three to four hours per week is allocated to English instruction in Saudi public schools. Consequently, instructors struggle with managing class time effectively (Sifakis, 2004), and students struggle to fully realize the importance of and maintain motivation for learning English (Payne & Almansour, 2014). As Hayes (2017) notes, this is especially true when students feel that English is irrelevant for their future career goals. Issues of motivation and participation are only exacerbated in the context of distance education

(Elyas & Basalamah, 2012). Dakhiel (2017) found that teachers lamented class sizes that were too large for effective teaching and learning, administrators' lack of sensitivity to and understanding of teachers' needs, and the lack of resources that would facilitate English acquisition.

In order to better support English language acquisition in students, there are several key reforms that the Saudi government should prioritize in order to develop a student-centered pedagogy: (a) hiring teachers who are trained in teaching English as a foreign language; (b) hiring teachers who understand Saudi Arabian culture and values; (c) identifying and responding to student needs; (d) encouraging student participation; and (e) strengthening student motivation to learn English. First, it is critical to hire teachers who are skilled in and understand the pedagogy of teaching a foreign language. As noted by Folse (2016), untrained native speakers are not equipped to teach English to language learners. Hiring teachers who are skilled in the teaching of English as a foreign language and academic English is crucial for supporting students' linguistic development (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014). Teachers with these qualifications understand how language is acquired and best practices for facilitating and development. They also understand how to teach English for academic purposes, and can provide students with the guidance required for using English to communicate in a classroom setting and with their instructors (DiCerbo, Anstrom, Baker, & Rivera, 2014). For teachers who are currently immersed in the system, it is crucial to provide them with professional development that focuses on teaching them best practices and pedagogies for teaching English as a foreign language. In their review of 33 studies, August and Hakuta (1997) found the following:

Effective schools and classrooms have the following attributes: a supportive, school-wide climate; school leadership; a customized learning environment, articulation and coordination within and between schools; some use of native language and culture in the instruction of language-minority students; a balanced curriculum that incorporates both basic and higher-order skills; explicit skills instruction; opportunities for student-directed activities; use of instructional strategies that enhance understanding; opportunities for practice; systematic student assessment; staff development; and home and parent involvement. (p. 171)

When educational administrators and instructors are able to work together to develop the aforementioned attributes, they can create an environment that is more conducive to language learning. As noted by Linan-Thompson and Vaughn (2007), these practices can be even more effective when they are integrated together. In examining and comparing the policies of Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, it is critical to identify how these attributes currently fit into educational policy and how they might be more effectively integrated into the education system.

To best support students, research has shown that it is important for teachers of English language learners (ELLs) to recognize and understand the influence of students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds in order to effectively teach these students (Sifakis, 2004; Haneda, 2008; Haworth, 2008; Durgunoglu & Hughes, 2010; Faez, 2011; Hansen-Thomas, Casey, & Grosso, 2013; Elyas & Picard, 2013; Payne & Almansour, 2014). While classrooms in Saudi Arabia tend to be fairly linguistically homogenous since Arabic and English are primarily the only instructional languages used (Payne & Almansour, 2014), it is clear that instructors must consider how the monolithic culture of Saudi Arabia might inform or influence learning and language acquisition. According to Elyas and Picard (2013), for teachers of English in Saudi Arabia, this must translate to integrating Islamic identity into the classroom. For instance, English curriculum that

exposes students to other cultures must position this content in a way that does not advocate for a Western lifestyle but rather encourages tolerance and intercultural cooperation (Elyas, 2008; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014). Ultimately, exposure to other cultures can provide opportunities for students to explore their own constantly-evolving identities (Elyas & Badawood, 2016). According to Mitchell and Alfuraih (2017), Saudi curriculum should ultimately maintain a focus on Islam but should be paired with modern teaching strategies in an effort to make curriculum more accessible. Further, teachers should be trained in how to work with and teach new curriculum in an effective way (Mitchell and Alfuraih, 2017; Hayes 2018). As noted by Kubanyiova & Crookes (2016), teachers are seen as moral agents “having an activist role in the maintenance of cultures and languages under threat” (p. 119), which is especially true in Saudi Arabia’s educational system (Elyas, 2008). To fulfill this responsibility, English must be taught in a way that respects larger societal values instead of as an alternative to Islamic schools of thought. Administrators and teachers must work together to ensure that English is seen as complementary and not hostile to Islamic values (Elyas & Picard, 2013).

In order for classroom environments to be more effective for learning English, instructors must identify and respond to student needs. As noted by Hayes (2017), educational reforms in pursuit of economic initiatives tend to overlook student needs, even when these reforms are supposedly directed at improving opportunities for students. To provide students with the education that will not only empower them to be confident members of society in Saudi Arabia but also prepare them for future employment, the school system must be realistic about how students will use their education and what they need from it (Hayes, 2017). As Al-Nasser (2015) notes, the curriculum used in Saudi

schools should focus on quality not quantity, as there is currently too much pressure to get through extensive content. By prioritizing what students need most, teachers can integrate more effective practices for teaching English without the pressure of teaching overwhelming amounts of content. In turn, Al-Nasser (2015) recommends focusing on evaluation over examination in order to truly ascertain whether students have acquired specific language skills.

Finally, the Saudi educational system must collectively encourage student participation and strengthen student motivation for learning English. Per Al-Nasser's (2015) recommendation, class sizes should be limited to 20 in order to create opportunities for teachers and students to engage with one another in a productive and engaging way, and additional time should be devoted to the study of English. The integration of multimodal teaching aids, paired with training and professional development in how to use these tools effectively, is critical for facilitating language acquisition (Al-Nasser, 2015; Lai, 2015; Mitchell & Alfuraih, 2017). According to Lai (2015), technology can be particularly helpful for encouraging self-directed learning, both inside and outside of the classroom. Furthermore, emphasizing the real-world applications of English, not only for career development but also for intercultural cooperation and critical thinking skills, can help to encourage students pursuing a variety of paths after completing their education (Al-Nasser, 2015).

Taken together, there are many barriers to effective English instruction, which make reaching higher levels of fluency more challenging for English language learners. When instituting appropriate educational reforms and making policy recommendations, it is important to consider how the perspectives of students, educators, and administrators

alike can each illuminate potential solutions. Through the analysis of policy documents, the researcher will be able to determine how elements such as student support, teacher preparation, professional development, and diversity are integrated into ongoing educational reforms in Saudi Arabia. Going forward, this study aims to illuminate how proposed policies view the relationship between educators and students in the classroom in order to identify opportunities for improvement when it comes to effective English instruction.

Transformative Leadership

Transformative leadership's emphasis on equity makes this theory the most appropriate and relevant framework for this study, which aims to examine how the Saudi Arabian educational system can provide more equitable opportunities for learning English. At its core, transformative leadership theory revolves around justice and democracy (Shields, 2010). This makes transformative leadership theory an appropriate framework for this study, which can support policy recommendations for responding to and alleviating systemic inequities in the Saudi public school system. Because the 2030 Vision aims to initiate long-term economic reform in an effort to increase equity among all Saudi citizens, its objectives must be evaluated through a lens that prioritizes equity. Access to employment depends heavily on English language fluency, and public schools fail to provide students with the level of fluency required for gainful employment. Privileged families recognize this and send their children to private or international schools to improve their English skills, in addition to sending their children abroad for immersion in an English-speaking country. Consequently, the lack of English proficiency among public school students can be viewed as a social justice issue, since students from

wealthier backgrounds have access to better opportunities for learning English. Students who cannot demonstrate proficiency in English are more likely to be underprepared for higher education or for work in the private sector (Rugh, 2002a; Alnofaie, 2013). In an effort to alleviate this inequity, this research aims to apply transformative leadership to provide recommendations for educational reforms focused on increasing English language fluency, thereby facilitating more opportunities for upward mobility.

The primary components of transformative leadership will provide guidance for what to look for when reviewing and critiquing policy documents. Shields (2010) identifies several key tenets of transformative leadership:

- A combination of both critique and promise;
- Attempts to effect both deep and equitable changes;
- Deconstruction and reconstruction of the knowledge frameworks that generate inequity;
- Acknowledgment of power and privilege;
- Emphasis on both individual achievement and the public good;
- A focus on liberation, democracy, equity, and justice;
- Evidence of moral courage and activism. (p. 562)

When applying these tenets to this study, it is important to deconstruct current methods of teaching English language acquisition in the Saudi Arabian educational system in order to reconstruct these practices and understand how they reinforce existing power dynamics while perpetuating the marginalization of certain groups of students. Further, transformative leadership theory can help this study elucidate opportunities for meaningful and sustainable change that goes beyond the surface.

Transformative leadership theory provides a relevant and timely framework when considering the exigency of the 2030 Vision. One emphasis of transformative leadership theory is on “the need for professors to retool their teaching and courses to address issues of power and privilege—to weave social justice into the fabric of educational leadership curriculum, pedagogy, programs, and policies” (Brown, 2004, p. 78). Such an approach would be helpful when considering how to alleviate the burdens faced by a plethora of Saudi citizens who lack access to opportunities for meaningful work. Further, this theory is also useful for developing alternative solutions for the Saudi Arabian educational system’s outdated teaching methods and curriculum, which is necessary for conforming to expectations established for the 2030 Vision. Finally, in the spirit of improving quality of life, a key tenet of the 2030 Vision (2019), transformative leadership theory can help assess how to construct egalitarian alternatives to existing power structures that limit opportunities available to Saudi citizens.

When considered in conjunction with the unemployment crisis faced by Saudi citizens, the need for a transformative approach to education reform is clear. Saudi Arabian citizens are finding it harder and harder to secure private sector jobs in their own country. In order to increase equity for Saudi Arabian citizens and to help them become applicants who are just as competitive as foreign expatriates, the education system must provide higher-quality English language instruction so that private industries and corporations are willing to look for talent within the kingdom instead of outside of it (Rugh, 2002b).

English Education in Bahrain

It is critical to provide context for why Bahrain is an appropriate comparison for Saudi Arabia. Like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain is a member of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a regional partnership between Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Qatar (Al-Khaldi, 2007). Similar to Saudi Arabia, Bahrain is characterized by its location in the Gulf and its dependence on English for economic success. While there are certainly differences between the two countries, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have many regional and cultural similarities, and the two countries also share similar educational challenges and policy goals. As such, Bahrain's education system provides an opportunity for Saudi Arabia to learn and benefit from Bahrain's policies.

Bahrain's educational system is believed to be the oldest in the Gulf Region, and since its inception, English has been used extensively in schooling. Bahrain had close ties with Britain since the 1830s and was colonized by the British until 1970 (Rugh, 2002b; Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017). According to Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, English is more ingrained into the history of Bahrain's educational system. For instance, the country started offering free public evening English classes in 1951. On the one hand, this exposure to English gave Bahrainis a head start in learning English, compared to citizens of other Gulf countries. On the other hand, this led the Ministry of Education to see English as a lower priority for the education system (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017). Further, public education has always been compulsory in Bahrain for citizens and foreign nationals alike (Hajjar & Al-Adel, 2016). According to Abou-El-Kheir and MacLeod (2017), in 1968, the first college opened in Bahrain: Gulf Polytechnic. In the following

decades, Bahrain began to focus on reforming education in order to respond to new economic realities and pressures (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017).

Today, Bahrain's universities are considered exceptional, competitive, and some of the best in the Gulf region. Students who score below 90% on the English placement test must take a semester of English prior to enrolling at university in Bahrain (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017). Because Bahrainis receive stronger English instruction throughout all of their primary and secondary schooling, colleges and universities can afford to set higher English standards because fewer students, when compared to Saudi Arabia, will need to enroll in remedial English instruction prior to beginning their post-secondary education. As Al-Musawi and Al-Ansari (1999) show, Bahraini students' scores on English proficiency exams, like the Test of English as a Foreign Language or the First Certificate of English exam, are predictors of academic success at the college level. Further, Hajjar and Al-Adel (2016) note that "educational and higher educational institutions (HEI's) in Bahrain can be 100% foreign owned, which may be a key factor in the success and growth of the Kingdom's many international institutions" (para. 7). Furthermore, much like Saudi Arabia, Bahrain's own Economic Vision 2030 aims to position the country as a "regional and international hub for banking and other services" (Abou-El-Kheir & MacLeod, 2017, p. 21). Bahrain's diversity and commitment to education reform has enabled the country to continually enact and revisit policies in order to serve the needs of a changing population.

As Hayes (2017) notes, Bahrain has faced many of the same concerns that Saudi Arabia has experienced in attempting to educate its citizens and prepare them for the workforce: "Bahrainization" mirrors the goals and intents of Saudization; some critics of

English education see English as a threat to Islamic values; and Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 closely resembles Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision. According to Thomas, Piquette, & McMaster (2016), employers in Bahrain expressed grave concerns about the inability of graduates to use English fluently in the workplace. Considering Bahrain's educational system and its similar policy initiatives, Bahrain makes an appropriate model for Saudi Arabia's own educational reforms. While Bahrain's Economic Vision 2030 and subsequent educational reforms have been scrutinized (Hayes, 2017), policy analysis that breaks down the differences between educational reforms in the two countries can serve to illuminate more effective reforms that address the problem of low English language proficiency in a more meaningful and substantial way. Through such an analysis, the researcher aims to learn from Bahrain's successes and failures in order to recommend policies that prepare students to compete in a globalized economy, while also supporting students pursuing localized careers and preserving the theocratic underpinnings of Saudi Arabia's educational institutions.

Chapter 3: Methods

In order to understand how to transform the Saudi Arabian educational system, it is important to analyze policy to identify how Saudi Arabia might be able to institute reforms modeled after Bahrain's educational system. Since both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia have embraced a 2030 Vision (Hajjar & Al-Adel, 2016; Saudi Vision 2030, 2019), Bahrain's educational system is a logical choice for examination. In analyzing Bahrain's system, the researcher can identify takeaways that might be relevant and beneficial to Saudi Arabia.

This study is qualitative in nature because the researcher will use an interpretivist lens to understand the relationship between English language instruction provided in Saudi public schools and the low levels of English proficiency demonstrated by Saudi students. According to Alrashidi and Phan (2015), foreign workers comprise 88.4% of the workforce in the private sector. Employers in the private sector seek out foreign workers because they are proficient in English, which is critical for their positions. Saudi citizens consistently fail to meet the levels of English proficiency required (Rugh, 2002a). The researcher's positionality as a citizen of Saudi Arabia means that she has observed how Saudi students continue to demonstrate low levels of English proficiency. This phenomenon has led the researcher to inquire about its systemic causes, and consequently, the research aims to understand how it is experienced by Saudi students and educators. Then, the researcher will explore how this phenomenon manifests in the

Bahraini educational system. This study utilizes policy analysis to define the problem and identify opportunities for improvement within the Saudi Arabian educational system.

For this study, the researcher will compare educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. Bahrain is a suitable choice for this study because it is “often recognized as the arbiter of modernization and liberalism within the GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council)” (Hajjar & Al-Adel, 2016, p. 1). Furthermore, “Bahrain boasts the oldest public education system in the Gulf, and [their] literacy rates are cited to be among the highest in the Arab world” (Hajjar & Al-Adel, 2016, p. 1), leading to Bahrain’s public education system as a logical choice for examination. Further, Bahrain’s economy ranks 54th on the Index of Economic Freedom (IEF), which measures an individual’s ability to “control his or her own labor and property” in 186 countries. This ranking makes Bahrain’s economy one of the freest in the region, suggesting that Bahraini citizens have a substantial degree of agency when it comes to the work available to them, their ability to accrue wealth in various capacities, and their ability to spend and invest their money (Index of Economic Freedom, 2019). As such, it is often ahead of the curve, and other countries in the Gulf region can look to Bahrain as an example of a country with a similar culture that is also able to thrive in a westernized global economy. Together, these factors make Bahrain’s education an excellent choice for comparison with the educational system in Saudi Arabia.

The goal of this study is to examine the Saudi educational system, especially pertaining to English language acquisition programs, in order to identify opportunities for reform and to propose policy recommendations aligned with the goals outlined by the 2030 Vision. As explained by Fakeeh (2016), “a flourishing economy gives chances to all

by building a training or education framework adjusted to market needs” (p. 46). The 2030 Vision aims to enhance the lives of Saudi citizens by preparing them for a more competitive workforce. As part of this effort, Saudi Arabia emphasizes the importance of reforming educational systems in order to prepare students to participate in a competitive labor force. In instituting such reforms, it is critical that Saudi Arabia examine opportunities for enhancing English language acquisition.

Bilingualism can provide myriad opportunities for citizens of Saudi Arabia, but by the time they reach higher education, most Saudis are still struggling to learn and communicate in English, which limits their opportunities for upward mobility (Al-Nasser, 2015). A competitive labor force is necessary for Saudi Arabia to solidify its position as a hub for global trade: a key component of the 2030 Vision (2019). In order for Saudi citizens to participate in both the national and global economy, they must be able to reach higher levels of fluency. By using an interpretivist lens, which “embraces subjectivity and acknowledges multi-realities and meanings and is socially constructed” (Rapley, 2018, p. 187), this study aims to understand the obstacles to English proficiency in the Saudi Arabian educational system. This study will provide policy recommendations and identify opportunities for educational reforms, with the goal of creating a more equitable educational experience for students. This study is guided by the following research question: By analyzing educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, what can be learned from Bahrain’s educational system? How can these lessons be applied to enhance English language proficiency outcomes in Saudi Arabian public schools?

Methodology

This study is qualitative in nature because it aims to examine the educational context in Saudi Arabia through an interpretivist lens, using the method of policy analysis in order to provide appropriate recommendations based on the tenets of transformative leadership theory. As such, the question that guides this study is open-ended in an effort to gain a variety of insights about “the complex systems and environments in which policy is made and implemented” (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014, p. 1073). The researcher aims to develop a deeper understanding of educators’ experiences in and perceptions of the Saudi Arabian educational system and to make recommendations for improvements in accordance with the goals outlined by the 2030 Vision. To do this, the researcher will first analyze the *Saudi Arabian Educational Policy* document, the current initiative driving educational policy in Saudi Arabia, and compose a policy brief. Then, the researcher will analyze the *Learning Law* document, Bahrain’s primary educational policy document, and compose a related policy brief. Utilizing the eight tenets of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) as the conceptual framework for this study, the researcher will compare the briefs to determine how the two systems differ and identify gaps in the educational policies for Saudi Arabia that can be addressed with strategies used by Bahrain’s educational system. Bahrain’s educational system will be used for comparison in this research because Islam is the cultural and social foundation for both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia. Further, in both countries, the official language is Arabic. As opposed to using a Western educational system for comparison, reviewing the educational policy of a society and culture similar to Saudi Arabia makes the transfer of educational leadership policy and practices more applicable. Finally, the researcher will

draft policy recommendations for Saudi Arabia's educational system in pursuit of the outcomes established by the 2030 Vision.

Examining the tenets of transformative leadership is well-suited for this study because the goals outlined by the 2030 Vision mirror transformative leadership. In particular, the 2030 Vision is aimed at effecting "deep and equitable changes" (Shields, 2010, p. 562) within the economy and the kingdom at large. In an effort to ensure more equitable access to opportunity and upward mobility, Saudi Arabia has conceptualized a political vision wherein education is critical for innovation and sustainable development for all (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019). In this policy, the Saudi government recognizes the challenges facing education, balancing the importance of improving individual achievement with larger systemic changes and reforms (Ministry of Education, 2019b). Further, in an effort to meld "both critique and promise" (Shields, 2010, p. 562), the 2030 Vision has made changes to the educational system in an effort to embrace best practices. Simultaneously, the Saudi government solicits public opinion on the policies outlined in the 2030 Vision (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019). In sum, the primary objectives of the 2030 Vision align with the intended focus of transformative leadership. Therefore, it is critical to apply transformative leadership theory in an effort to examine how the 2030 Vision responds to current challenges in the educational system.

This study aims to understand the gap between required English language instruction and actual demonstrated English language proficiency in Saudi Arabia. In developing a stronger understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher will be able to identify strategies for improving the Saudi educational system and closing the gap between English language instruction and actual English proficiency. Because the 2030

Vision has realigned the nation's priorities in an effort to facilitate economic growth and stability (Saudi Vision 2030, 2019), policy recommendations made in this study must position education as a means to a larger economic end. Additionally, this study follows an interpretivist approach, which is predicated on the assumption that there is not necessarily one true reality, but rather multiple realities that can be socially constructed according to one's own perspective and life experience (Creswell, 2014). As Yanow (2000) notes, policy analysis is "based on the presuppositions that we live in a social world characterized by the possibilities of multiple interpretations" (p. 5). When conducting a policy analysis, one must remember that "not only analysts, but all actors in a policy situation (as with other aspects of the social world), interpret issue data as they seek to make sense of the policy" (Yanow, 2000, p. 6). In other words, it is critical to examine how policies are manifestations of multiple agents and actors interpreting the causes of and solutions to a given problem. Policy analysis is an appropriate choice for this study because the question that guides this research is open-ended, with the goal of gaining various insights that can then be examined and even compared with existing research (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014). The application of policy analysis combined with the use of transformative leadership can facilitate inquiry into "the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality" (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1072). With these insights, it will be possible to identify opportunities for equitable reform.

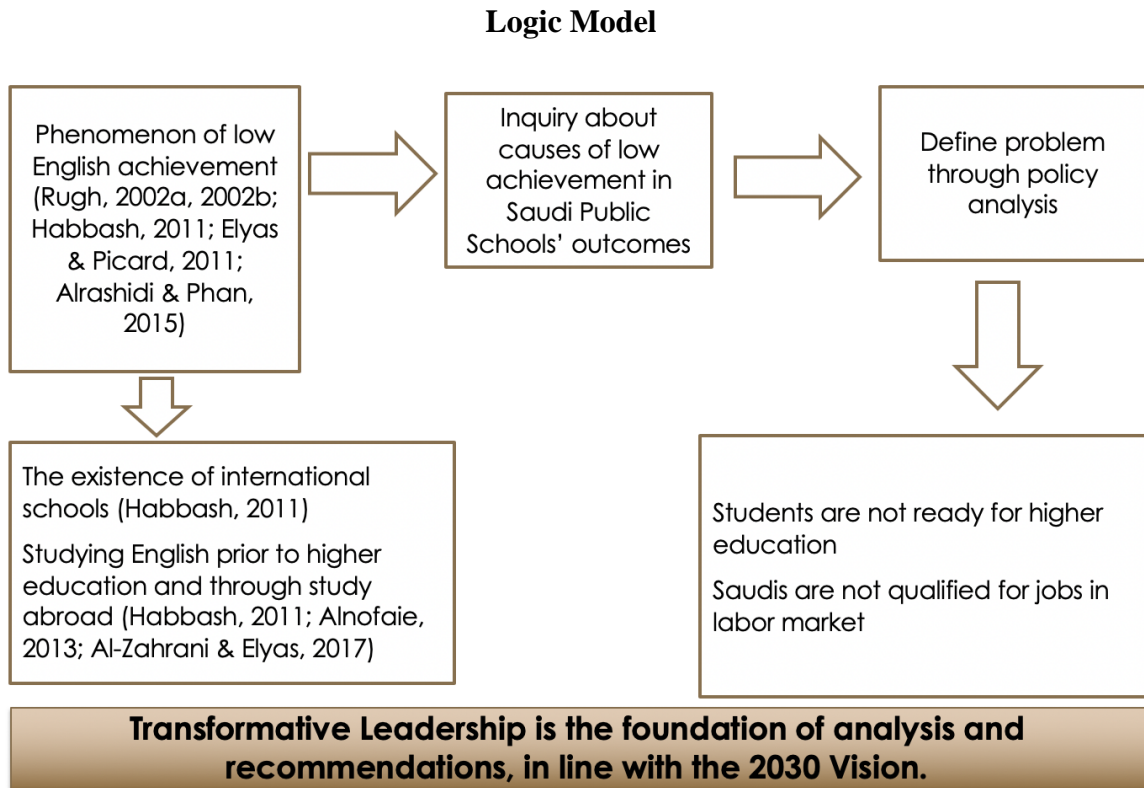


Figure 1. Logic model for policy analysis with a transformative leadership framework.

As illustrated in figure 1, this study uses existing literature to establish the phenomenon of low English language proficiency among students at Saudi public schools (Rugh, 2002a, 2002b; Habbash, 2011; Elyas & Picard, 2011; Alrashidi & Phan, 2015). This phenomenon has resulted in the creation of international schools (Habbash, 2011) and increasing numbers of students needing remedial English instruction prior to entering Saudi Arabian institutions of higher education or pursuing study abroad opportunities in an effort to strengthen their English language proficiency (Habbash, 2011; Alnofaie, 2013; Al-Zahrani & Elyas, 2017). Consequently, this study seeks to understand the factors that contribute to low levels of proficiency English language proficiency in order to clearly define the problem from a policy standpoint. By utilizing policy analysis combined with an interpretivist lens, the researcher can better understand the

phenomenon of low English proficiency levels and examine the ways that policymakers understand the problem and its causes in an effort to recommend more equitable educational policies. Through the application of transformative leadership theory to educational policy, the researcher aims to develop a better understanding of how to provide equitable educational opportunities within the Saudi educational system. Such opportunities are essential for students to pursue the career paths they desire and align with the goals outlined by the 2030 Vision. The researcher believes that the application of transformative leadership theory is integral to this research because it offers various approaches for examining educational policy with an emphasis on enacting change in an equitable manner (Shields, 2017).

Procedures/Data Collection

The researcher aims to understand how the current educational context in Saudi Arabia has been socially constructed and to utilize a policy analysis to identify challenges with managing English language acquisition programs in Saudi Arabia. This study uses a qualitative design to interpret the current educational context in Saudi Arabia and to identify opportunities for enhancing the educational system in the future in line with the 2030 Vision. Therefore, the primary method of data collection will be document analysis. First, the researcher will review the official *Saudi Arabian Educational Policy* document (in English), which can be obtained from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education website. Then, an official translator will translate Bahrain's *Learning Law* document, which can be obtained from the Kingdom of Bahrain's Ministry of Education website, into English. Once the document has been translated the researcher will review the English translation of the *Learning Law* document. In studying these documents, the

researcher will identify aspects of the policies that align with the goals established for the 2030 Vision. Then, document analysis will be used to compose a policy brief for each system in order to identify aspects of Bahrain's policy that are in line with the goals of Saudi Arabia's 2030 Vision. By comparing Saudi educational policy with that of Bahrain, the researcher will identify the similarities and differences between the policies.

Data Analysis

The researcher will review the documents, titled *Saudi Arabian Educational Policy* and *Learning Law* respectively, for themes and larger ideas. After she has organized and prepared the data, the researcher will list potential codes that she would expect to find in the policy documents based on what she has read in existing literature. The researcher will thoroughly read each document and take notes in the margins, partaking in open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Then, the researcher will engage in axial coding: she will note themes and patterns that show up repeatedly in the documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). In analyzing the data, she will apply the eight tenets of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010), which will inform the policy recommendations. Along the way, the researcher might also identify ideas and policies that are unusual. The researcher can then re-read these documents, looking for areas of divergence. Once the researcher has repeated this process for each set of policy documents, the researcher will compare and contrast the themes that appear in each set in an effort to determine larger arguments the researcher can draw from the data.

According to Bardach (2012), the first step to policy analysis is to define the problem. The researcher has reviewed existing literature, and suggest that policy is the primary influence on the lack of English language proficiency in Saudi Arabia. Through

this research, the researcher aims to provide a solution to this problem by examining Bahrain's primary educational policy document, *Learning Law*, in order to use this system as a model. The researcher will evaluate the aforementioned policy document to better understand where Bahrain's policy succeeds and where Saudis would benefit from aligning with the model presented by Bahrain. Within educational policy, the researcher hopes to identify specific targets that can be addressed with tailored policy recommendations. The second step is assembling evidence (Bardach, 2012). As part of this step, the researcher has reviewed available and relevant literature and will gather evidence from policy documents from each educational system.

In accordance with the third step of policy analysis as outlined by Bardach (2012), the researcher will attempt to construct alternatives to existing policies by reviewing and examining the two sets of policy documents. In reviewing the documents, the researcher will pinpoint policies that could benefit from alternative approaches. Initially, she will take a holistic overview of the policies by reading, annotating, and coding. Then, the researcher will document and consider as many alternatives as possible and, through further analysis, will narrow down the alternatives to the most appropriate and effective solutions. In her policy brief, the researcher will construct alternative policy considerations and provide specific recommendations for how to implement said policies. As recommended by Bardach (2012), the researcher will review the findings for evidence of her own presuppositions. As suggested by Sabatier and Weible (2014), the researcher will also closely examine potential areas of ambiguity by considering how alternatives might actually work together with existing policies or complement other recommendations.

As part of the policy analysis process, the fourth step involves establishing criteria for constructing alternatives to existing policies. Because this research is driven by the exigency of the 2030 Vision, the criteria is focused on social justice in order to avoid past practices (Bardach, 2012, p. 36). The criteria that guide the policy recommendations will be efficiency, equity, and justice. In defining and identifying criteria for her policy recommendations, the researcher must also narrow down her list of alternatives and project the outcomes for the recommendations, she will focus on, which is the fifth step of the process. Based on the literature, the researcher has reviewed, her policy recommendations will likely focus on teacher training and preparedness, student support, and quality and relevance of curriculum. At this stage of the process, the researcher will consider how the policies propose might affect stakeholders, including educational administrators, teachers, and students, in addition to parents and the school community. In order to truly effect transformation, the researcher will need to anticipate the needs of stakeholders and examine aspects of the recommendations that might need to change. For the sixth stage of the process, the researcher will need to review her outcomes to determine if they conflict with each other; if so, the researcher must decide which outcomes should take precedence (Bardach, 2012).

As outlined by Bardach (2012), the seventh step of the process involves re-examining the policy recommendations the researcher has constructed and committing to a course of action. In the eighth and final step of the process, the researcher must identify an appropriate audience and tell her story. This might require re-examining the policy recommendations the researcher has committed to so that the researcher can frame them in a way that is accessible to administrators in Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education. This

will also require the researcher to circle back to the problem so that she can reiterate what she has found to be the causes of this issue and to contextualize and justify her recommendations (Bardach, 2012). The researcher's story will take the form of two policy briefs that outline her recommendations in a succinct and accessible manner, which will help her target audience to make an informed decision.

Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations for this study focus on keeping the researcher's assumptions and biases out of the policy analysis process as much as possible (Creswell & Poth, 2017). To do this, she chose to have the Bahrain policy document translated by Ezadeen Elsharif, an official translator at the Abdulrahim Ibrahim Al-Harby Translation Office in Saudi Arabia. While Goodwin (2010) argues that translation is inherently ethical, the researcher reviewed the translator's work in order to ensure that the documents are accurately represented and that certain subject-specific contexts were not mistranslated. In order to ensure trustworthiness, she utilized data triangulation. Additionally, the researcher used an external editor to review the project in its entirety (Creswell, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). A second reviewer will help to address biases and assumptions in the researcher work and accommodate for them.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher is a multilingual Muslim woman from Saudi Arabia and an international Ph.D. candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at the University of Denver. She has experience working with language learners in the United States through her work at the Aurora Public School District. Each of these factors shape her interest in educational reform in Saudi Arabia and will help her develop a stronger

understanding of the current situation in the Saudi educational system. Because of her work studying various theoretical lenses, she is more prepared to analyze data from multiple lenses. The researcher's positionality also gives her a unique perspective in comparing the Saudi educational system with the American educational system.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure validity and reliability, the researcher has opted to hire a professional translator to translate the Bahraini policy documents into English. This will account for any biases that the researcher might have inserted into the translation herself.

Additionally, the researcher will review the translations and identify any areas of concern that might arise from the translator's unfamiliarity with educational policy.

Another step the researcher will take is to compare her results and analysis with existing literature and scholarship. This will enable the researcher to determine whether previous results and findings were consistent with the finding of the current study significantly diverge from previous studies. Per Creswell's (2014) recommendations, the researcher will utilize triangulation to determine the accuracy of the research findings by comparing the results of the policy analysis to what transformative leadership theory argues and to what existing research has demonstrated about this topic. This will be critical for demonstrating that her recommendations do align with the issues that have been previously identified and to the eight tenets of transformative leadership. Further, because several principles of transformative leadership overlap with the intended goals of the 2030 Vision, this will provide an opportunity to identify opportunities for improvement in order in pursuit of the 2030 Vision. She will share the findings with outside reviewers to confirm her observations about the policy documents and to check

the accuracy of the findings and themes. The researcher will also document and record outlying findings that do not fall into any themes or categories (Creswell, 2014).

Delimitations

The most important delimitation for this study is that the researcher is not doing any interviews with key actors and policymakers. Her research for this study is strictly limited to using policy analysis in order to understand the educational system in Saudi Arabia. Additionally, by putting her research within the context of the 2030 Vision, her findings may be less generalizable. One key assumption that might be a delimitation is that teachers are inadequately prepared for teaching courses in English language acquisition. Further, the researcher's location and limited access to the Saudi educational system has posed challenges for her research.

Limitations

Relevant limitations might include the researcher's own assumptions about the nature of the education system in Saudi Arabia, based on her own experiences. However, the researcher is seeking to develop a stronger understanding of the current system, regardless of her own assumptions, in an effort to identify authentic opportunities for reform. During the researcher's analysis, she must be careful not to map the assumptions and biases onto the policy documents.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this study, the researcher utilized the method of policy analysis in order to identify potential reforms that could address and respond to the current issues in the Saudi Arabian public education system. With this method, the researcher applied both transformative leadership theory and an interpretivist lens. This combination allowed the researcher to identify opportunities for reform within the educational system, particularly English language instruction with a focus on equity and social justice. Ultimately, the researcher provided recommendations to make educational policy more equitable, which aligns with both transformative leadership theory and the goals outlined by the 2030 Vision (2019), the primary economic policy initiative guiding Saudi Arabia. A strong educational system will be essential for meeting the objectives outlined in the 2030 Vision. As such, it is important to consider opportunities for improvement within the public educational system and to recommend appropriate reforms aimed at improving English language proficiency outcomes. The research question that guides this study was: By analyzing educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, what can be learned from Bahrain's educational system? With the sub-question, how can these lessons be applied to enhance English language proficiency outcomes in Saudi Arabian public schools?

In line with this research question, the researcher completed a policy analysis of the educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain. While Saudi Arabia's policy

documents were translated into English, Bahrain's Ministry of Education website did not offer English versions of their educational policies. Consequently, prior to analyzing the documents, the researcher had the Bahraini educational policy documents translated from Arabic into English. To ensure an objective and unbiased translation, the researcher had the documents professionally translated by an official translator in Saudi Arabia, thereby enhancing the reliability of the research. After having the documents translated, the researcher's methodology included: (1) practicing open coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) by closely reading each set of documents: the *Saudi Arabian Educational Policy* documents and Bahrain's *Learning Law* documents; (2) during this process of reading, taking notes in the margins of each text, using existing literature as a point of reference and transformative leadership theory as a framework for identifying the ideas that would help to answer the primary research question; (3) engaging in axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015) by reviewing each text and the notes in order to look for and synthesize recurring patterns, ideas, and themes across both sets of documents. Through this process, the researcher also looked for relationships between codes in order to better understand the context for and function of recurring ideas. This chapter outlines the key findings from this open and axial coding of each text.

Saudi Arabian Educational Policy

The primary foundations that underlie the Saudi Arabian educational system pertain to the role of Islam. The first foundation is faith in Islam, while the second and third foundations reiterate the importance of practices that promote rational human civilization, human dignity, and honesty (Ministry of Education, 2019b). This is reinforced on several other web pages that outline educational policies on the Ministry of

Education website. Additional foundations address the importance of educating each child while also drawing connections between educational reform and the exigency of the 2030 Vision. Finally, the last foundation listed requires that Arabic is the medium of instruction (Ministry of Education, 2019b).

Saudi Arabia's educational policies outline key initiatives undertaken by the Ministry of Education. According to the Ministry of Education (2019c) website, one such initiative is the Afaq project, which focuses on the use and application of technology in order to facilitate access to e-learning and distance education. The stated goal is to make higher education more accessible to Saudi citizens. In accordance with this goal, the Kingdom established the center for National Center for eLearning and Distance Education (NCeL). In partnership with the Afaq program, NCeL aims to increase access to technology in order to expand educational opportunities for Saudi citizens. The educational policy proposes funding to increase the share of private education to 25% and to incentivize investment from private and international universities. The consistency section aligns initiatives with goals pertaining to the work force. They identify several initiatives that can facilitate larger developmental policies (Ministry of Education, 2019c).

The Ministry of Education (2019d) outlines the goals of each level of education. First, these outcomes reiterate the importance of an Islamic foundation for the educational system, with some additional items that are listed as foundations but are not mentioned as such anywhere else on the website. These objectives state that the educational system must “support the students to acquire various knowledges [sic] and skills” in addition to “nurtur[ing] constructive attitude [sic] and behavior” (Ministry of

Education, 2019d). Following these foundations, the Nursery and Kindergarten level goal establishes the importance of these levels for future student success. The Primary Level outcome reiterates the value of primary school for establishing faith and Islamic principles. The Middle School outcome specifically references the Islamic faith, which previous level-specific outcomes did not. The Secondary Level outcome emphasizes the agency of individual educational institutes and schools and the importance of adhering to objectives Ministry of Education, 2019d). When broaching the level of higher education, the Ministry of Education (2019d) also states that “among all types and levels, higher education level is the practical specialization level. It cares for people who are talented, and further develops their talent, to fulfill community needs in present and in future, as per national development goals and its noble purpose” (para. 8).

Bahraini Educational Policy

To avoid personal biases, the researcher relied on an official translation of the educational policy documents, known as *Learning Law*, listed on Bahrain’s website. The primary policy document consists of several articles, which focus in on specific aspects of educational policy (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019). Initially, the first few articles explain that educational policy is driven by Islam and illustrate the larger purposes and functions of education within Bahraini society. Bahrain’s educational policy presents education as a right for all, while also emphasizing the importance of an Islamic foundation in pursuit of a comprehensive life. The document also reinforces the kingdom’s desire to collaborate with Gulf countries. Of note is that the policy documents distinguish between Arab countries and Islamic countries. Further, Bahrain’s policy explains how education intends to help Bahraini citizens meet individual goals and

elaborates on this point by illustrating how education fits into family, community, and the world. The aims of Bahrain's education policy focus on personal development, which in turn influences other broader issues, like conservation and human rights (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019).

Additional articles flesh out the educational system's operations, functions, responsibilities, and purposes in more depth (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019). In Article 4, the policy document shifts gears to focus on the Ministry of Education's responsibilities and establishes criteria for evaluating the educational system. Article 5 speaks to how the Ministry of Education aims to understand what the country needs and to ensure that educational outcomes align with these needs. The policy puts the focus on the individual first and illustrates how this influence expands outwards to impact broader areas of Bahraini society. Specific aims listed here also allow for developments and improvements as needed to demonstrate a commitment to reform and change when it is needed. Additionally, private education is recognized as a tool for expanding access to education, and the educational policy document provides private schools with a degree of autonomy. To ensure competitiveness and effectiveness, Bahrain states the importance of ongoing training and professional development of teachers to ensure that they are on the cutting edge of practice and pedagogy. The Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education (2019) is also looking forward to how the educational system can meet the needs of the labor market. Another aim of note is Article 10, which reinforces the importance of education for "religion, Arabism, and the homeland" (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019). The remaining articles included in this policy document mention some of the pragmatics of implementing and changing educational policy. An additional

supplemental policy document explains Karaism, a reading program intended to improve literacy rates in Bahrain. This supplemental policy outlines steps to improving literacy while encouraging a focus on English alongside Arabic and provides ideas for utilizing and applying global measurements of fluency. Finally, this document discusses curriculum and its relation to the labor market at different levels of education (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019).

Summary of Findings

Saudi Arabia	Bahrain
Islamic foundation	Islamic framework
Identity established through Islam and Arabic language	Individual skills and personality help shape Islamic identity
Clear, specific standards to ensure quality of education	Support for helping instructors meet standards
Foreign language, only if needed	Emphasis on importance of foreign languages
English in 4th grade	English in early education
Importance of feedback	Integration and application of feedback
Broad policy language, outcomes, and goals	Procedures for implementing policy
Bahraini educational system is more actionable compared to Saudi educational system.	

Figure 2. Key differences between Saudi Arabian and Bahraini education systems.

While the policy documents provided a starting point for the researcher, most of what the researcher was able to glean about the most appropriate solutions and policies for the system came from supplemental material on the Ministry of Education websites as opposed to the policy documents in and of themselves. This was true for both Saudi Arabian educational policy and Bahraini educational policy. The documents themselves are lean, which is simultaneously a critique of the documents and systems themselves but also a limitation of the study. While the researcher’s findings are limited in this regard,

the limited information contained in the policy documents allowed the researcher to identify many opportunities for expanding upon and clarifying existing policy language. That being said, when necessary, the researcher filled in gaps by referencing and consulting the respective Ministry of Education websites for each system.

While Bahrain's educational policy utilizes Islam as a framework for the education system, Saudi Arabia uses Islam as a foundation for the education system. At the forefront of Saudi Arabia's educational policy is adherence to Islamic doctrine, and from this foundation, students will build and establish their identity, knowledge, and skills. In contrast, Bahrain's foundation is the development of students' identities, knowledge bases, and skillsets; from this foundation, students will explore and establish their Islamic identity. Saudi Arabia's educational policy clearly identifies the importance of establishing clear standards and qualifications for instructors in order to maintain the quality of education. Bahrain's educational policy states the importance of identifying instructors who are not meeting standards and providing training to help instructors apply what they've learned to the classroom, in order to enhance teacher performance throughout the system. Bahrain's educational policy also states that the Ministry of Education is responsible for establishing criteria for teacher performance and for enforcing standards in addition to training teachers. While Bahrain's educational policy requires that English education begin in kindergarten, Saudi Arabia's policy notes says that English education begins in fourth grade.

Comparison

The vision for Saudi Arabia is "an exceptional education that is globally competitive and builds a knowledge-based community" (Ministry of Education, 2019e,

para. 1). Bahrain's objective is focused on supporting the learner "culturally, socially, and behaviorally within the framework of the principles of the Islamic religion, the Arab heritage, contemporary culture, the nature of Bahraini society, customs and traditions" while also teaching students to practice loyalty to Bahrain and its king (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 2). Saudi Arabia's educational policy does not mention the integration or application of feedback. In alignment with its objective, Bahrain's educational policy affirms the need to integrate feedback and opportunities for professional development into the educational system. Saudi Arabia's educational policy is primarily concerned with establishing goals for the educational system, while Bahrain's educational policy is more focused on action that can be taken to improve the educational system.

Chapter 5: Discussion

For this study, policy analysis was utilized to identify areas of improvement within Saudi Arabia's educational policy, using Bahrain's educational policy as a point of comparison. To do this the researcher completed the following steps: (1) applied transformative leadership as a framework, in addition to an interpretivist lens, as she coded the policy documents for both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia; (2) in each document, identified themes and recurring ideas, in line with what was anticipated based on existing literature reviews; (3) reviewed these themes and ideas to draw larger connections between them and answer the central research question of this study. The central question was: By analyzing educational policies for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, what can be learned from Bahrain's educational system? How can these lessons be applied to enhance English language proficiency outcomes in Saudi Arabian public schools?

Process of Policy Analysis

Steps	Bardach's (2012) Process	The Researcher
1 st	Define the problem	Reviewed existing literature
2 nd	Assembling evidence	Reviewed and gathered evidence from policy documents from each educational system
3 rd	Construct the alternatives	Took a holistic overview of the policies by reading, annotating, and coding; documented and considered alternatives; narrowed down most appropriate and effective solutions
4 th	Select the criteria	The 2030 Vision and transformative leadership theory in order to obtain the equity and social justice
5 th	Project the outcomes	Aimed to focus on teacher training and preparedness, student support, and quality and relevance of curriculum; considered impact of policies on stakeholders
6 th	Confront the trade-offs	Reviewed the outcomes to determine there is no conflict between them
7 th	Decide	Re-examined the policy recommendations and committed to a course of action
8 th	Tell the story	Identified an appropriate audience to tell the story

Figure 3. Bardach's (2012) steps to policy analysis applied to Saudi Arabian and Bahraini educational systems.

In analyzing the educational policy documents of both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, the researcher followed Bardach's (2012) process for policy analysis and applied the eight tenets of transformative leadership (Shields, 2010) as the framework. First, the researcher reviewed existing literature in order to define the problem her research would focus on (Bardach, 2012). Based on this scholarship, it was concluded that deficiencies in English language proficiency stem from educational policies. As outlined by Bardach (2012), the next step was assembling evidence, which involved gathering the policy documents to analyze and obtaining translations of documents when necessary. Therefore, the methodology included identifying recurring ideas and opportunities for improvement in educational policy within and across both documents and brainstorming alternative policies, outcomes, initiatives, and goals in an effort to determine which

recommendations would be the most viable alternatives. Through this process, the researcher reviewed the findings for evidence of bias or presuppositions and focused on the criteria established for constructing policy alternatives: efficiency, equity, and justice. These criteria were informed by the end goals of the 2030 Vision and the key principles of transformative leadership theory, including efforts to effect deep and equitable change, the acknowledgment of power and privilege, and a focus on both individual achievement and the public good (Shields, 2010).

In accordance with Bardach's (2012) work, the next step in this process involved narrowing down policy alternatives to focus on the most viable options and forecasting the outcomes of these policies. After pinpointing the policies for greater investigation, the researcher listed potential impacts of these policies on stakeholders both inside the educational system, like teachers, students, and educational administrators, and outside of it, including parents and the school community. In developing these recommendations further, the researcher also evaluated whether any outcomes of any policy outcomes were in conflict with one another. Before finalizing the recommendations, the researcher also re-examined the most promising and actionable ideas to create meaningful change. The final step was to identify a target audience for the recommendations and compose policy briefs for both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain in an effort to inspire change in the Saudi educational system (Bardach, 2012).

Policy Brief for Saudi Arabia

Introduction

The 2030 Vision is a large-scale initiative guiding Saudi Arabian economic policy. The goal of this brief is to identify areas of improvement within educational

policy in order to better serve the needs and outcomes of the 2030 Vision. English language fluency is instrumental to reaching these targets. Therefore, it is important to identify how Saudi Arabia's educational system can make improvements that better prepare students to not only be fluent in English but also to receive an education of the highest quality.

Case Summary

Representation of Islam.

While Saudi Arabian educational policy clearly outlines the importance of an Islamic foundation, it is not clearly defined how Islam should inform educational policy. This opens up the influence of Islam in educational policy to interpretation. Consequently, Islam manifests itself in myriad ways, with little to no consistency across schools and regions. Ultimately, this poses challenges for administrators, faculty, and educators in terms of what aspects and values of Islam to apply to curriculum, pedagogy, and student engagement.

Role of language.

The Ministry of Education asserts that Arabic is the primary language for education in Saudi Arabia. Foreign language acquisition is only encouraged for students who enter fields where bilingualism is essential. It is unclear how the Ministry has defined the needs of the labor market and whether they have established procedures for coordinating with various work sectors to determine these needs. Furthermore, private or international schools and institutions of higher education often conduct courses in English. In turn, students who have not learned a foreign language may find themselves unprepared for higher education and for a viable career in their industry of choice. The

Ministry of Education must revise existing policy to make the study of languages, Arabic and otherwise, imperative to student success. This recommendation also aligns with the 2030 Vision's goals of developing global competitiveness while also expanding opportunities in the workforce for Saudi citizens.

Teacher growth and development.

Saudi Arabian educational policy establishes the importance of high standards for teachers but does not elaborate processes for training and supporting teachers in reaching these standards. By clearly outlining resources for teachers and opportunities for support and professional development, the Ministry of Education can provide clarity regarding the expectations for teachers in the public school system. Teachers need to meet high standards in order to reinforce global competitiveness, and by publicizing processes for quality assurance, the Ministry of Education might be able to attract stronger candidates who seek out professional development opportunities.

Private education.

The Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education provides a degree of financial support to private institutions. However, these institutions are not required to follow the same guidelines that are in place for public schools. Further, the Ministry of Education does not define how private education complements public education. The Ministry does encourage collaboration between both public and private institutions within Saudi Arabia, as they have done with the country's universities. These partnerships provide opportunities to pool resources and enhance the quality of the education students receive. With differing standards, however, it is difficult to collaborate when expectations are not consistent across institutions. While this collaboration can be helpful, the Ministry should

first hold private institutions to the same standards in order to create more meaningful partnerships in pursuit of global competitiveness, equity, and the public good, as outlined by the 2030 Vision.

Access to additional education.

Talented and gifted individuals are provided with additional resources and support, but at the same time, the policy assumes that only talented and gifted individuals are pursuing higher education. To ensure equity and expand access to additional education, be it higher education or otherwise, the Ministry of Education must revise this policy to be inclusive of all students, regardless of giftedness or talent.

Current Ministry Initiatives and Projects

The primary incentive for initiatives and projects developed by the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education is the increasing competitiveness of the global economy. In order to shift to a knowledge-based economy. The Ministry of Education is prioritizing higher education because they see it as a means to promote knowledge in pursuit of this shift in the economy.

The connection between certain educational policy outcomes and the 2030 Vision is clear only if you are intricately familiar with the goals established by the 2030 Vision. For example, the Afaq project's stated goal is to expand access to technology in order to promote distance learning. In pursuit of this goal, the Kingdom established a center for National Center for eLearning and Distance Education (NCeL). While the idea makes sense if one knows that a key tenet of the 2030 Vision is to make education more equitable, this connection is not clearly stated in Saudi Arabia's educational policy documents.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education has established quality standards for teachers in the public school system. The Ministry recognizes the importance of consistent guidelines and expectations across public institutions and has adopted the responsibility of ensuring that teachers reach these high standards. Such standards are critical to ensuring that public education meets the needs of students and of the Saudi Arabian economy.

Saudi Arabia's Ministry of Education has taken steps towards promoting collaboration and competition within the educational system. This is crucial for improving these institutions and providing them with opportunities to learn from one another. Such initiatives are also focused on enhancing the global competitiveness of these institutions and their pupils.

Publishing globally is a major emphasis of the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education. The Ministry sees Saudi contributions to discourse as evidence of the country's ability to compete at the same level as globally recognized institutions. Cementing the influence of Saudi scholars and researchers can help to build a stronger reputation for Saudi Arabia's educational institutions.

Policy Brief for Bahrain

Introduction

Bahrain's educational policy is guided by its own version of the 2030 Vision. Bahrain's 2030 Vision promotes the principles of sustainability, competitiveness, and fairness, with the goal of improving quality of life for all Bahrainis. The Kingdom of Bahrain is concerned with the long-term growth and development of the country, which is addressed through this economic policy and reinforced in educational policy.

Summary of Educational Policy

Bahraini educational policy asserts that education is a right for all Bahrainis. In line with this idea, Bahrain's Act 27 requires 9 years of compulsory education, from kindergarten through middle school. Specific goals and outcomes are not identified for each level of education. It is also important to note that high school is not required. Bahrain's policy documents also emphasize the importance of lifelong learning, but this does not currently translate into guaranteed access to high school or to higher education. The educational policy also establishes the necessity of loyalty to Islam, the homeland, Arab heritage, and the king himself.

Fluency and proficiency in language is critical to the vision and mission of Bahrain's educational system. The mastery of Arabic is critical, but other languages are also portrayed as valuable in and of themselves and as additional languages for Bahrainis. Foreign language teacher is critical to Bahrain's goals of promoting human rights and facilitating international cooperation. Bahrain views multilingualism as essential for establishing mutual respect between countries and cultures. Ultimately, the foundational underpinning of Bahrain's educational system is harmony between individual, society, and country.

Current Actions

Bahrain's current actions reflect the holistic values mapped onto the educational system. There are efforts to integrate technology into the classroom, especially for teaching languages. Technology is also viewed as imperative for free expression and collaboration with other individuals and institutions. It is also positioned as a means of increasing competitiveness in the Bahraini economy. In line with the needs of the

Bahraini economy, educational outcomes are expected to correspond with the needs of the labor market in order to prepare students for the workplace. To keep up with the needs of the labor market, curricula is routinely modernized and updated.

Bahrain's educational policy embraces a variety of resources for establishing and strengthening schools while promoting educational goals and values. Private schools are treated as one of many resources that can contribute to a stronger education system. These institutions are not considered fundamentally responsible for educating large sects of the population.

The needs of individual teachers in the public system are highly prioritized. Bahrain's educational policy demonstrates a commitment to working with teachers to make sure they have the support they need. This is critical for ensuring that teachers are better prepared to create a supportive classroom environment, meet the needs of each individual student, and reach the performance standards established by the Ministry of Education.

Analysis and Recommendations

In reviewing these documents, there are several key areas of divergence between the Saudi Arabian and Bahraini educational policies. In this section, the researcher will outline these key differences to understand how Saudi Arabia's educational policy could benefit from improvements and revisions to its existing educational policy. This study focuses on the following themes: 1) representation of Islam, 2) role of language, 3) teacher growth and development, 4) role of private education, and 5) access to additional education.

Representation of Islam

While the educational policies of both Saudi Arabia and Bahrain are centered on Islam, Bahrain's educational policy emphasizes the ways in which the educational system is shaped by Islamic values. Bahrain's educational policy compares its efforts and outcomes to those of other Arab countries, noting similarities and common values, especially in relation to Islam. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's policy documents emphasize the importance of Islam as a foundation but do not necessarily provide specific illustrations of how Islam is embedded in the system. In other words, Saudi Arabia is consistent in reiterating the importance of an Islamic foundation throughout its vision, goals, outcomes, and initiatives for the educational system, but the documents do not define what that Islamic foundation looks like and involves. Saudi Arabia's lack of explication with regards to Islam's role in educational policy leaves Islamic values open to interpretation and application. Consequently, there are competing perspectives regarding what these values look like in practice.

In accordance with existing research, this difference in interpretation can cause conflict over what is prioritized in curriculum and in the classroom, especially as it pertains to English language instruction (Elyas & Picard, 2010; Elyas, 2011; Elyas and Picard, 2013; Siddiqui, 2014; Mahboob & Elyas, 2014; Alhamami, 2018). Leaving Islamic values open to interpretation within educational policy poses challenges for educational administrators who must prioritize which Islamic values and principles to incorporate at each level of education and in the classroom. This is exhibited in how English language instruction is integrated into the educational system. While some might see English as a critical part of the curriculum in accordance with Islamic imperatives,

others might view the integration of English as a threat to religious and cultural values. Further, those who advocate for additional English instruction are in a position where they cannot point to educational policy as a rationale for its inclusion in curriculum, thereby hindering efforts to improve proficiency outcomes. Ultimately, Islamic principles are integral to the 2030 Vision. Therefore, it is critical to clearly define how specific Islamic values inform educational policy, not only for clarity of vision but also for stronger alignment with the goals of the 2030 Vision.

Bahrain's educational policy excels at tying Islamic values into larger global and social initiatives. In other words, Islamic principles are viewed as a means of creating or maintaining the desired culture and economy. In contrast, Saudi Arabia's inclusion of Islamic values is centered on the idea that Islam is the defining aspect of Saudi Arabian culture and society; therefore, Islam should be an important part of educational policy. Islamic principles are mentioned but not detailed in terms of how Islam should inform various levels and stages of education. The level of clarity in Bahrain's policy documents is helpful because it leads to more direction and guidance pertaining to curriculum, and learning outcomes. Pointing to specific Islamic values that can be taught and enforced at various levels of education will give educational administrators and instructors more guidance as to the qualities and skillsets they should prioritize in the classroom. Further, it will be clear how Islamic values further larger goals and outcomes, especially in relation to the 2030 Vision.

In clearly pinpointing specific Islamic values that should frame the educational system's policies and practice, Saudi Arabia will be able to demonstrate "moral courage and activism" (Shields, 2010, p. 574) by clearly pinpointing specific Islamic values and

by advocating for their centrality to curriculum, student support, and teacher development. In asserting the relevance and importance of key Islamic tenets, specifically social justice and diversity, the Ministry of Education can lead the way in creating a more equitable society that not only fulfills religious imperatives but also works towards key outcomes of the 2030 Vision. It is critical to recognize that these values go hand in hand. In order for the country to preserve its Islamic and Arabic heritage, the country must first define what that heritage looks like. As Elyas (2011) notes, “educational policy related to general education, university education and even the teaching of English is likewise infused with the sacred,” so it is critical to model what a sacred education, infused and inspired by Islamic values, looks like. By committing to the use of specific Islamic values as a framework for educational policy and practice, the Ministry of Education will be able to better support educational leaders in reinforcing these values while also working towards a more equitable economy that works for every student in the Saudi educational system, not just those who can afford private education.

Role of language

In Saudi Arabian educational policy, the importance of English is not directly stated and foreign language proficiency is only encouraged if needed. This poses challenges for consistent outcomes and expectations of English language proficiency. In turn, this lack of emphasis on English or foreign language proficiency does not work to reinforce the goals of the 2030 Vision. The 2030 Vision prioritizes making Saudi citizens more competitive, and acquisition of a foreign language, whether it’s English or not, is likely integral to this goal. Furthermore, the idea of English being necessary for certain fields is not expounded on in this document, so it is not clear when English is considered

essential for a given field. Arguably, there are many fields that could benefit from dual speakers of Arabic and English, but one is left to figure out which fields those are. This manifests as the inconsistent integration of English language instruction into curriculum and into the classroom, as certain districts, schools, or teachers may be left to decide how much emphasis should be placed on English.

In Bahrain's educational policy, there are few references to language teaching, but even these minimal inclusions provide more guidance than what Saudi educational policy advises regarding the teaching of language in education. In Bahrain's educational policy, foreign languages are portrayed as integral to the educational system's goals and viewed as additional skills students should learn along with Arabic. Bahrain's educational policy document includes the goal of "promoting education of Arabic language and its advancement in order to be mastery and use in various fields of knowledge and giving special attention to the teaching of foreign languages" (Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education, 2019, p. 2). The importance of languages in general, not just Arabic and not just English, is inherent in Bahrain's educational policy. As such, Bahrain demonstrates a stronger awareness of how its educational system meets the needs of a more diverse population, consisting not only of Muslims but also people of other faiths and cultures. Interestingly enough, Bahrain's Ministry of Education does not provide an English version of their policy documents, while Saudi Arabia's educational policy is available in English, which demonstrates some awareness of the need for English translations of critical documents. In Saudi Arabia's policy documents, Arabic is established as the medium of instruction. Consequently, arguing for the inclusion of English language instruction in curriculum and pedagogy is difficult because Arabic is positioned as the

only legitimate mode of instruction, which does not help to advance the 2030 Vision's goal of opening the economy up and making the Saudi Arabian workforce more competitive. While both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia could benefit from greater emphasis on language in their policy documents, Saudi Arabia should consider embedding the importance of language as a skill, including both one's native language and additional languages that students learn, into educational policy.

Teacher growth and development

Saudi Arabia's educational policy document speaks to the importance of teacher quality. The documents also establish criteria that teachers must adhere to as instructors for the Saudi educational system and reiterate the importance of such criteria. According to the educational policy outlined by the Kingdom of Bahrain Ministry of Education (2019), the Ministry takes on the role of

pay[ing] attention to the teacher by training him to improve his performance and develop his abilities to keep up with the changes of era and enable him to continuously grow the [sic] scientifically and professionally and provide the appropriate environment for that. (p. 4)

Bahrain's educational policy also reiterates the importance and significance of teachers meeting or exceeding certain teaching competencies and standards, with an emphasis on training and supporting teachers in reaching those standards. The Ministry of Education recognizes that standards and criteria are only useful if teachers understand what those standards look like in practice, and if teachers are given the prompt feedback, professional development, and resources they need to meet those goals.

Ultimately, Saudi Arabia would benefit from outlining the training requirements for teachers so that there is less ambiguity as to whether the training is sufficient for

teachers' needs, and to improve student learning. By doing so, the Ministry of Education can work towards integrating critique into the system in an effort to balance both the needs of individual instructors and the educational system's capacity to contribute to the public good (Shields, 2010). Further, this change would help to better align the educational system with the 2030 Vision's goals of encouraging growth and transformation in professional development. The teacher training system should be made transparent so that teachers, and parents, can understand how the process works and what is required of teachers in the public school system.

Role of private education

Saudi Arabia conceptualizes private education as a reasonable complement to public education but does not recognize the potential inequities created by these institutions. As such, this is an especially integral aspect of the recommendations made in this study. As Shields (2010) notes, "emphasizing both private and public good" (p. 574) is a key component of using transformative leadership as a lens for evaluating educational policy. Because private schools are partially funded by the Ministry, private schools are able to attract students with more privilege and more means to pay for these schools. Because private institutions accept funds from the Ministry of Education, standards and expectations for teachers at these institutions should adhere to guidelines established by the Ministry of Education to ensure a consistent high-quality experience for students.

Further, private schools should focus on enhancing the quality of education available to students by collaborating with other institutions. These larger partnerships can be a way to consolidate resources and to provide opportunities to students that

otherwise might not be available. Competing at the same level for student outcomes is only possible if the schools are uniformly adhering to the same standards and expectations. As such, the requirements of the current educational system to be competitive at the global level can be enhanced by forming partnerships with other schools. By pursuing this approach, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education will be better able to balance the success of both private and public institutions, both of which serve an important role when it comes to educating students and preparing them for the workforce. Further, in recognizing how each type of institution can learn from and support the other, Saudi Arabia's focus will be able to help both private and public schools to thrive, so that students of all backgrounds, privileged or not, see that the Ministry of Education is invested in their success. Such partnerships can help to move towards the 2030 Vision's goal of competing at a global level, in a sustainable and viable way.

Access to additional education

Because the 2030 Vision emphasizes the importance of switching to a knowledge-based economy over a resource-based economy, it is important for the educational system to prepare students for these new industries and positions and for higher education to be attainable for all. In preparation for more competitive jobs and industries, educational programs must be rigorous, and funding must be available for those who desire to go into these new career fields. Further, new positions will likely be created, and the skillsets required for these positions will be diverse. Saudi Arabia will also need to invest heavily in education in order to create programs and supply resources for an ever-diversifying workforce; consequently, the educational system will need to be responsive to change

and willing to engage with new fields and disciplines that meet the needs of students and attract a wide variety of workers.

In line with these goals, the Saudi Arabian Ministry of Education must deconstruct and reconstruct its existing knowledge framework (Shields, 2010) that informs educational policy, which includes the following statement: “Among all types and levels higher education level is practical specialization level. It cares for people who are talented, and further develops their talent, to fulfill community needs in present and in future, as per national development goals and its noble purpose” (Ministry of Education, 2019d, para. 8). This aspect of Saudi Arabian educational falsely equates higher education with being gifted and talented. Such an assumption promotes inequity by implying that students who are not gifted and talented do not need or should not pursue higher education (Shields, 2010). By addressing this inequity and by putting public education at the center of these moves, Saudi Arabia can be at the forefront of the modernizing economy and in creating access to various career paths for students with varying educational attainment. Saudi Arabia’s Ministry of Education will likely need to deconstruct how the current system perpetuates inequity and lack of access to opportunity, specifically in the case of those who may or may not be able to pursue higher education in the form of attending a university or college. To keep pace with job creation and to incentivize students to pursue fields that might have different educational attainment requirements, Saudi Arabia might need to consider investing in alternative methods of education, focused on teaching trades or skills that students might not get from a traditional classroom environment to ensure that students are prepared for a variety of career fields.

Conclusion

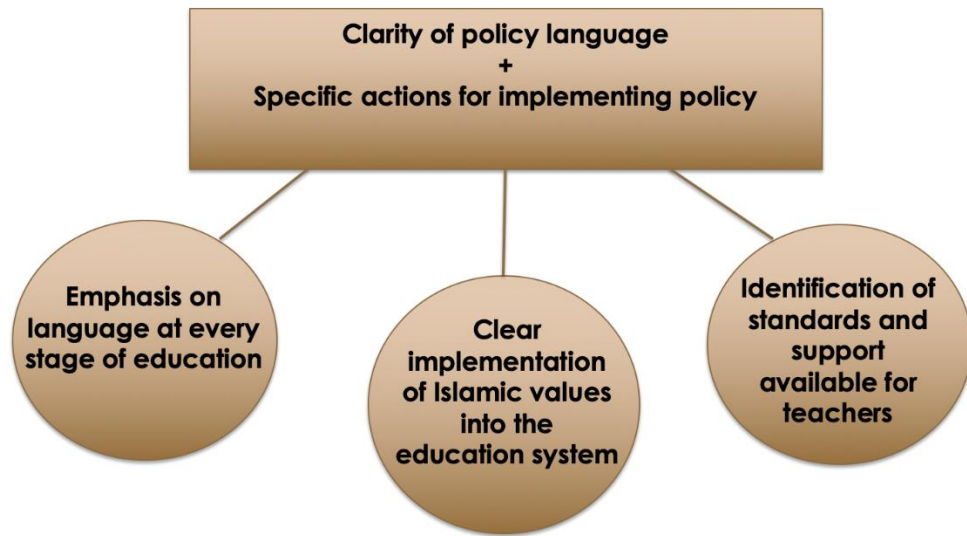


Figure 4. Recommendations for Saudi Arabia’s educational system.

In Saudi Arabia, “More than 9.5 million foreign expatriates work in S.A. occupying 88.4% of the labour force in the private sector” (Alrashidi & Phan, 2015, p. 40). The ramifications of this figure for Saudi Arabian citizens are staggering: Many students who are educated in the Saudi Arabian public school system leave school unprepared to find a job in a market that already favors of foreign workers seeking jobs. Because the Saudi Arabian public school system fails to prepare students for both higher education and for the job market, opportunities are limited and the promises of the 2030 Vision seem out of reach for many Saudis. However, through major systemic changes to the educational system, Saudi Arabia can provide students with the education and preparation they need to find work, pursue additional educational opportunities, and contribute to the national economy.

This study has explored the importance of policy analysis and transformative leadership in identifying opportunities for creating a more equitable educational system.

While the focus of this research is Saudi Arabia, there are certainly takeaways and considerations for all educational systems. English fluency is a challenge for many systems, and many educational leaders struggle to balance the needs of native speakers with students who demonstrate limited proficiency in English. Going forward, educational leaders must move away from viewing these students as deficient linguistically; instead, educational leaders must conceptualize ways in which diverse experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds can be integrated into the classroom in a way that promotes learning for native and non-native speakers alike. Additionally, educational leaders must support teachers in serving and working with ELLs by providing them with training and professional development.

Further, educational leaders and practitioners should advance the application of transformative leadership in an effort to mitigate barriers to equity and identify opportunities for reform within the educational system. Paired with policy analysis, transformative leadership can prove useful for not only understanding where inequity exists within the system but also for connecting with policy makers and legislators who can effect change. Ultimately, researchers ought to consider how transformative leadership and policy analysis can contribute to systemic change and reform from the top down. While this study focused on English language acquisition and preparing students for the workforce, there are many opportunities for applying these lenses in an effort to reduce inequity in all its manifestations. For example, future studies might focus on how diverse and homogenous school districts should work towards integrating cultural diversity and inclusion into the classroom, curriculum, and professional development opportunities for educators. Because transformative leadership can be used to target

inequity of all kinds, scholars can apply transformative leadership to target inequities specific to their district or region. The value of pairing transformative leadership with policy analysis is evident in how inequities are ingrained into systems, which trickles down into classrooms and interpersonal relationships within schools. By advocating for policy changes in response to school- or district-specific issues, educators can work to make their recommendations come to fruition. With targeted reforms, school leaders can work to effect change in widespread, far-reaching ways.

Ultimately, as demonstrated by this policy analysis, Saudi Arabia has opportunities for creating more equity within the public education system. While Bahrain's educational policy is not perfect, it does provide a strong model of a comparable education system. Through synthesis of both policies, it is clear that there are stark differences between the two systems, and Saudi Arabia can benefit from putting ideas and approaches from Bahrain's educational policy into practice. As mentioned, both Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are working towards an economic vision centered on the year 2030. The educational systems in both nations play an integral part in reaching these large-scale goals.

Going forward, Saudi Arabia should focus on clearly defining how an Islamic framework informs educational policy. By identifying specific Islamic principles, educational administrators and teachers will be in a better position to make decisions that are in line with the goals and expectations of the Ministry of Education. The Ministry should also explain the processes for teacher training in more detail. This will provide transparency regarding the type of support teachers will receive and the standards they are expected to meet. Standards for private education should also be aligned with those

that guide public schools. By creating consistency in the expectations and outcomes for both public and private institutions, Saudi Arabia can work towards promoting effective collaboration in an effort to reduce inequity and increase the competitiveness of Saudi institutions.

Inequity in access to educational and professional opportunities should be addressed by prioritizing language instruction for not only Arabic but also English. This is critical for several reasons: English language proficiency is a key component of preparing students for higher education and for their future careers. English proficiency cannot be treated as an optional skill in the educational system; it must be integrated and reinforced throughout a student's education. Finally, inequity must also be addressed by revising educational policy to be inclusive of all students regarding additional educational opportunities and higher education. Higher education should not be reserved for the gifted and talented, but rather an opportunity available to all who want it. Higher education is a mechanism for encouraging individual and personal growth while also contributing to the public good, and all students should have the opportunity to further their education. The goals of the 2030 Vision are within reach but only if the Saudi Arabian educational system is equipped to educate and support the future generations who will meet and exceed our wildest expectations.

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