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Integrated language and content instruction in Qatar Independent schools: teachers' perspectives

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The aim of this study is to explore teachers' attitudes towards the shift to English as a medium of instruction in Qatari Independent schools. It focuses on the advantages and disadvantages of this approach for teachers and students, and the challenges they face in the process of its implementation. Data for the study were collected by means of a questionnaire and follow-up interviews. Findings point to teachers' beliefs that while the approach has benefited them and their students, it is a challenging process. The challenges teachers face are organizational in nature relating to ineffective planning for the introduction of the change, lack of teacher preparedness for its implementation, and parents' resistance to this change. These results have implications for teacher training in the Qatari context and for planning of the introduction of change in English as a Second Language or English as a Foreign Language contexts.

Keywords: teacher education; curriculum planning; teacher attitudes; integrated content and language instruction; English as a medium of instruction

Introduction

With the turn of the century, the Qatari government came to the realization that the existing education system was not efficient enough to ensure strong competitive growth of the nation. RAND, an international research corporation, was contracted to conduct an assessment of the system and suggest approaches for improving the performance of schools and students. The results of the evaluation revealed a top-down, centralized system that lacked a vision of quality education and the required structures to support it (Brewer et al. 2007), and led to a radical reform of the education system known as Education for a New Era (EFNE). EFNE introduced a two-pronged approach to reform that called for the establishment of government-funded Independent schools.

Independent schools are responsible for elaborating their visions and selecting the means to carry out their educational missions. They have the freedom to choose the instructional methods and materials that they deem effective to enable students to meet curriculum standards. Yet, they remain accountable to the Supreme Education Council (SEC), an entity that oversees the schools, sets broad educational goals, specifies curriculum standards, provides professional development for teachers and

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school leaders, and oversees the evaluation of school performance and student learning (Brewer et al. 2007).

Though involving some local expertise, the reform EFNE was essentially carried out by a foreign research corporation and a model was copied to be implemented. So far, the reform has generated great opportunities for educational consulting with international organizations that have flooded Qatar to offer their expertise in a variety of educational areas. These organizations have brought their own context-specific epistemologies, which are different from local epistemologies and cultural sensitivities (Bloch 2009). Henceforth, EFNE is built on the premise that the best educational practices emanate from western countries, and that for education modernization to attain high international standards as defined by the west, it requires importing policies and practices that were originally developed and proved to be effective in a different (western) cultural context (Sperandio et al. 2009). The belief is that when Qatari learners acquire cultural capital through transfer of educational practices, Qatar will be bestowed with legitimate power for world respectability (McNiff and McCourt 2010).

A cornerstone of the EFNE reform, announced in a decree by the Emir Sheikh Hammad Khalifa Al-Thani, is a largely bilingual education strategy starting from primary schools to university levels seeking to equip Qataris with the education, culture and ideas that will make Qatar a globally competitive country. Underlying this decision is an awareness of the importance of English for highly educated citizens, conversant in English and the latest technological and business trends.

The decision to move to English as a medium of instruction (EMI) has spurred tension and frequent discussions among the community in radio talk and in public media. While 'policy makers have intrinsically linked development and modernization with English' (Syed 2003, 338), other members of the Qatari elite consider this decision a threat to the mother tongue, local culture and national identity. For instance, in a *Peninsula* (a local newspaper) article on 23 April 2012, a professor of education at Qatar University (QU) indicated that as a result of using EMI the entire Arab culture and heritage could be marginalized in Qatar. Similarly, in an *Al-Sharq* (local newspaper) article on 5 June 2010, Al-Sai questioned the rationale for teaching in a language that is not the mother tongue of Qatari society. He claimed that teaching in English could lead to loss of Arabic (the mother tongue), self and identity. The tension is also portrayed in one of the challenges facing Qatar as expressed in the Qatar National Vision 2030, namely the need for Qatar to balance modernization and the preservation of traditions.¹ The Vision states the need to ground Qatari learners in their own culture and make them confident and secure in their own identity. At the opening of the Forum on the Advancement of Arabic Language, held in Doha on 29 May 2012, Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser urged Arab academics and researchers to join efforts to give back the Arabic language its prestigious and historic position as a language of science, culture and literature. She also supported SEC's decision to use Arabic as the medium of instruction at QU while pointing out that English proficiency should be mandatory upon graduation rather than on admission.

In spite of this tension and the diverse opinions about the language of instruction, with the introduction of EFNE, Ministry of Education (MOE) schools that had taught exclusively in Arabic shifted to a bilingual model of education that integrates English and content instruction soon after the transition to Independent school status. In light of this tension, it is important to explore the attitude of teachers to the

use of EMI in Qatari schools since they are not only the implementers of, but are also directly affected by, this change.

This paper explores Qatar Independent school teachers' attitude to the use of integrated language and content instruction, their perceived advantages and disadvantages of the approach for them and their students, and the challenges teachers face in the implementation of the change. Before elaborating on the value of investigating teachers' perspectives relating to curricular change, the following section elaborates on the features of integrated language and content instruction.

Integrated language and content instruction

Integration of language and content teaching is a model of language education that emerged as early as the 1980s in Canada and the USA and has been gaining momentum since then for its documented efficiency in developing learners' language proficiency, cognitive ability, and content knowledge (Genesee 1987; Holobow et al. 1987; Johnson and Swain 1997; Swain and Lapkin 1991). In the literature, the terms *integration of language and content instruction*, or *content and language integrated approach* and *content-based instruction* (CBI), are used interchangeably (Dueñas 2004; Grabe and Stoller 1997; Short 1991a, 1991b, 1993; Short et al. 1994; Snow, Met, and Genesee 1989). In this paper, the terms *integration of integrated language and content instruction* (ILCI) and *integration* are adopted because they are used in describing the approach currently in practice in Qatar.

Integrated language and content instruction refers to the 'concurrent study of language and subject matter' (Brinton, Snow, and Wesche 2003, ix). It is built on the premise that language and content involve similar cognitive processes and should be taught concurrently. Different rationales (see Grabe and Stoller 1997) for this approach are offered, the most influential of which are in the area of second language acquisition research. Krashen's (1985) notion of comprehensible input (CI) and Swain's (1985) output hypothesis entail that a second language is best acquired incidentally when learners are extensively exposed to CI, and when students engage in productive use of the language. In CBI, the focus of instruction is on subject matter, thus providing opportunities to be exposed to and use language in context while the focus is on meaning rather than analysis of language as an object.

Cummins' (1979) notion of Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) provides further support for the integration of language and content instruction. Cummins argued that many second language learners develop Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) in a relatively short time; however, BICS do not enable them to cope with the demands of academic learning. They need opportunities to develop CALP to succeed in academic L2 (second language) learning contexts. Students need to be learning content information while they are acquiring CALP. An extension of this notion is offered by researchers who emphasize the social nature of language use in the definition of *academic language* (Valdés 2001; Villalva 2006). These scholars stress that the way language is used differs from one particular academic domain to another in terms of discourse features and communicative functions peculiar to each domain (Chamot and O'Malley 1986; Coelho 1982; Collier 1987; Halliday 1993; Short 1994; Spanos et al. 1988; Walsh 2006). Integrating language with content exposes students to ways in which language is used in a specific domain and illustrates how form and meaning are intertwined to express specific meanings.

Classroom training research also underlines the effectiveness of some instructional practices associated with CBI. This approach favors student-centered learning which entails assessment of students' linguistic and content needs and the provision of classroom tasks that help to meet those needs; use of cooperative learning which allows students with various levels of language proficiency and content knowledge to work in groups, collaborate, interact, and tutor one another to achieve a particular task (Crandall 1993; Slavin 1995; Swain 2001); and developing learning strategies that promote learner autonomy and independence, especially when strategy training is built within the curriculum as a consistent feature of content and language instruction (Chamot and O'Malley 1986; Grabe and Stoller 1997).

Studies on motivation also show that ILCI can increase student interest in learning. Dupuy (2000), for instance, suggests that motivation, is in part, a result of the recognition that one is learning and that what is being learnt is important, challenging, and worth the effort. In ILCI, the focus is on teaching content that meets students' academic and pedagogic needs, using techniques that are relevant to their cognitive levels and learning preferences.

Advocates of language and content integration stress that a key to effective implementation of content and language integration is a reconceptualization of the roles of the language and content teachers (Snow, Met, and Genesee 1989). Short (1991a) stressed that collaboration between content and language teachers should involve different processes of instruction such as identification of students' linguistic and academic difficulties and needs, specification of content and language objectives, selection/production of materials and instructional techniques, and adjusting teaching style and teacher speech patterns to allow for more student-centered learning, comprehensible input, and improvement of student cognitive processing.

In the Qatari context, teachers are used to a centralized system of education. Most Independent school teachers previously worked in MOE schools where they used a textbook and a prescribed curriculum that were provided by the Ministry of Education, and were required to comply with the national curriculum (Brewer et al. 2007). In addition, prior to the introduction of the reform, most teachers working in Qatari schools used traditional teacher-centered approaches (Al-Horr 1998).

Integrated language and content instruction is a departure from traditional approaches. It requires teachers to embrace new teaching styles and to use innovative learning and teaching strategies and techniques. It also requires teachers to assume new roles rather than simply follow instructions issued from the upper sphere of decision makers. This leads one to wonder how teachers are coping with the implementation of ILCI in Qatar.

Teachers' perspective and education change

Educators and scholars in the education field recognize the crucial role that teachers play in the implementation of educational change (Bailey 2000; Crandall 1998; Elliott 1994; Fullan 1993; Fullan and Miles 1992; Lieberman 1997; Nunan 2003; Rea-Dickens and Germaine 1998). Teachers are the agents of change, and the success of an innovation in teaching is to a large extent determined by their acceptance and ownership of the innovation (Carless 2001; Markee 1997; Nunan 1989). The changes in classroom practices demanded by a school reform ultimately rely on teachers (Fullan and Miles 1992; Spillane 1999). Teachers' attitudes to curricular change are also crucial in the implementation of change. However, as Nunan (2003)

pointed out, ‘governments and ministries of education are framing policies and implementing practices in the language area without adequately considering the implications of such policies and practices on the lives of the students and the teachers they affect’ (591), and argued that innovation may not be implemented if faced by teacher resistance. Troudi and Alwan (2010) investigated teachers’ feelings about change and concluded that excluding teachers from curriculum change has negative psychological effects such as marginalization and powerlessness. They argued for giving a voice to teachers in curriculum change by involving them in the curriculum development processes. According to Kennedy and Kennedy (1996), teachers’ attitudes to curriculum innovation need to be taken into account, not only before the introduction of change, but also during and after the implementation phase.

Scholars argue for the need to take into account teachers’ perspectives in the introduction of change or innovation (Kirk and Macdonald 2001; Lamie 2005; Troudi and Alwan 2010). Teachers are the practitioners and, thus, are knowledgeable about the realities of a given classroom context. They are the very individuals who carry out a curriculum and interact with and observe learners on a daily basis. They know better than decision makers, bureaucrats, what changes are appropriate and feasible. They are also in a better position to know what is likely to work and what is not based on their experience in the field.

However, teachers’ perspectives on change have often been ignored. To use Bailey’s (2000) words: ‘Teachers’ perspectives have been a missing factor in the development of innovations ... the content and process of change are typically not in the hands of practitioners; change is assumed to be possible without their expertise, and their perspectives on change are frequently ignored’ (112). Despite the centrality of teachers’ voice in the introduction and implementation of change, little research has examined teacher perspective on the use of integrated language and content instruction. Walker and Tedick (2000) pointed out that most of the research on bilingual education has addressed student language and learning issues, like the extent to which students are learning content through the L2 and how far they are learning the L2 through this approach. They contended that when research has focused on the teacher, it explored teacher classroom discourse, error treatment, and the extent to which teachers focus on the integration of language and content instruction: ‘Little effort has been made to enlist practitioners in the identification and elaboration of issues, problems, and outcomes related to immersion language education. More important, immersion teachers’ voices have rarely been heard’ (Walker and Tedick 2000, 6). Similarly, Tung, Lam, and Tsang (1997) stressed that there are very few studies of teachers’ attitudes to the medium of instruction in schools, and that most of these studies seek to find out whether teachers favored teaching through L2 or L1 (first language) rather than focusing on the issues they face while teaching through L2.

The teacher’s voice in the implementation integration in Qatar has not been investigated. The only study the researcher is aware of is the RAND implementation evaluation project that looks at the implementation of EFNE in general, but does not focus on the attitude of teachers to integration (Zellman et al. 2009). It is within this research space that the present study is located. It investigates teachers’ attitudes to the use of integration of English and content courses in Qatar Independent schools, with particular focus on their perceptions of the impact of the approach on them as teachers and on their students and the challenges they face in the implementation of the approach.

Methodology

Participants

Participants in this study are teachers working in the eight Cohort I Qatar Independent primary schools. Cohort I are the first schools that acquired Independent school status in 2004 with the launch of EFNE, and, therefore, have the longest experience with the practice of integration in Qatar. The reason for the selection of these schools is to ensure that the teachers surveyed have practiced integration for long enough to be able to hold a clear opinion about it.

A total number of 170 questionnaires were distributed and 127 teachers responded; thus the return rate is 75%. The sample included 75 upper grades (Grades 3–6) teachers and 52 classroom teachers who teach English, mathematics, and science to Grades 1 and 2. Their overall teaching experience ranged between 4 and 16 years. The Grades 3–6 teachers included 32 science teachers, 23 math teachers, and 20 English teachers. None of the participants had used EMI before teaching in Qatar. All the teachers were Arab nationals who were expected to master the English language since they were either English as a Second Language teachers or taught content courses in English. However, the researcher's experience and knowledge about the local educational context allows her to predict that some teachers' proficiency in English might not be high. Therefore, respondents were given the choice to answer in Arabic or English. Responses were translated by the researcher and double-checked by another bilingual faculty.

Interview respondents were 12 teachers who had accepted a request for an in-depth interview. Initially, 16 teachers accepted to be interviewed and 12 were selected so that they included an equal number from the different categories of teachers. Thus, the sample of interviewees was three classroom teachers, three math teachers, three science teachers, and three English teachers.

Data collection

Data for this study were collected in two steps. First, a questionnaire investigating teachers' perspectives on the use of ILCI in Qatar Independent schools was administered. Taking into account ethical protocols (Perry 2005) required of research that investigates personal opinions, experiences, and views, an accompanying information letter was attached explaining the aim and scope of the study, and reiterating that teachers were free to choose whether or not to complete the questionnaire. It was also made clear that their identities would remain anonymous and confidential, and that information they provide would not be disclosed to any other party that might be a threat to their job security such as the SEC or the school leadership.

The first section of the questionnaire collected demographic information about the respondents like their gender, nationality, teaching experience, and grades and subjects taught. The second section of the questionnaire included open-ended questions enquiring about the participants' overall opinion about integration, their perceived advantages and disadvantages of the approach for them and for the students, and the challenges they face when using integration. The reason for opting for the open-ended format was determined by the exploratory and interpretive nature of the study, which seeks to explore teachers' perspectives relating to the use of ILCI in the Qatari context, and to obtain rich insights into their experience with the approach. Closed-type questions might limit teachers' answers to the choices

provided in the questionnaire, while open-ended questions allow development of an insider's view of the phenomenon under study; they allow for flexibility while keeping the respondents focused on the purposes of the study (Patton 2002).

The second step of data collection consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with 12 of the surveyed teachers. The aim was to get informant feedback on the categories that emerged from the questionnaire data analysis, and to gain in-depth information about the categories and issues identified. For instance, one of the challenges that emerged from the questionnaire responses was professional development. In the interview, teachers were asked probing questions about the nature of the professional development they received, and the amount and type of training they were offered as a preparation for integration. The data collected through interviews were used to provide more in-depth understanding of the themes that emerged from the questionnaire data and to illustrate findings.

Data analysis

Teachers' responses to the questionnaire were analyzed for emergent themes. The researcher read the answers to all the questions to get to know the data. Then, in order to focus the analysis, she re-read the answers to each question looking for consistencies or recurrent themes and differences. This step allowed her to identify themes and to organize them into preliminary coherent categories. Where differences in responses were noted, the researcher re-read the responses to individual questions by category of teacher, namely school level and subject taught. This analysis yielded other themes. The researcher read the teachers' responses several times and counted the themes in terms of frequency of occurrence in the data.

Several readings of the data and careful categorization of themes were intended to monitor for the researcher's ideology (Holliday 2001) and to avoid shaping the data according to her knowledge of the context under study. Peer debriefing and consultation of the validity of categories with colleagues were used to increase internal validity of the data analysis process (Guba and Lincoln 1994). In addition, following analysis of the questionnaire data, semi-structured interviews were conducted and the data collected in this step confirmed initial findings from the questionnaire. Each interviewee was presented with the emergent themes and asked if they agreed they applied to them, then they were asked probing questions to obtain richer explanations about the themes.

Findings and discussion

In the analysis of the data many themes have emerged but this section will explore the themes that are most pertinent to the educational context in Qatar. These relate to the instrumental and academic benefits of EMI for students, the dilemma between content and English proficiency, benefits of the approach for teachers, as well as the organizational and planning challenges that they face in its implementation.

Impact of integration on students

The responses to the question that asks about the advantages and disadvantages of integration for students show that teachers think this approach is mainly beneficial to the students, even though they mentioned one negative aspect.

Benefits for students

About two-thirds of the teachers indicated that integration has both instrumental and academic benefits for students. It is notable that most of these benefits were stated by the lower grade teachers. They stressed what the English language can provide for the students. It helps to develop the learners' English proficiency, which in turn guarantees them opportunities to continue secondary and higher education, as evident from the following comment:

For me, integration is good for the students because if they study in English from primary school, they will know the language very well and this will facilitate studying at later stages, like secondary school and university, abroad or in Qatar because most of the teaching is in English.

High proficiency in English also offers students opportunities to secure future employment; it increases their chances of being hired since good mastery of English has become a requirement to get a job in most institutions in Qatar.

In addition to these instrumental benefits, many respondents (72%) stressed that integration enables students to establish links between different subjects and to become aware of the meaningfulness and relevance of school subject matter to real life. According to some respondents, integration 'helps them [students] realize that different subjects are related' and 'it helps students to extend knowledge and apply it in real situations'. Other respondents (58%) declared that integration provided opportunities to reinforce students' learning. It allowed for 'better chances to remember the lesson' and 'reinforcement of the teaching of standards' and it served as 'a way for students to become familiar with a lot of vocabulary'. In brief, most of the respondents believed that integration had some positive impact on students' learning.

The dilemma between content and language proficiency

Even though teachers believe that integration is beneficial to students, many math and science teachers (81%) pointed out that integration is a major cause of student poor performance in school as well as national tests. One of the respondents wrote: 'One danger of integration is that students who do not know English get low grades in exams, weaknesses in English lead to weak results in the subjects.' This view was also echoed by interview informants when asked to clarify the reason for student low performance in math. One of them said:

I really think that students are not doing well in tests because of a language problem, they do not understand the instructions in the tests, when I translate the instructions in Arabic and use simple language, they can solve the math problems and do well.

More than two-thirds of the respondents (69%) thought that integration is too demanding on students due to their limited proficiency in English. A science teacher indicated that students must 'make a double effort, the effort to understand the concepts and the effort to understand the language which is foreign to them'. Other teachers argued that 'students need more time and more concentration when they study science in English', and 'they need to make a lot of effort because they have to understand the subject matter and understand the English language'. The following metaphor, offered by one of the interviewees, sums up this view succinctly:

If you are talking about integrated lessons, then it's like a glass we are filling with water and the water is dripping outside and nothing stays inside ... we try hard to teach the students but they do not get it because they don't understand the language.

The reservation over the effectiveness of integration in improving academic achievement has been echoed by some scholars. Collier, for instance (as cited in Baker and Jones 1998, 561), argued that literacy is most easily learnt in the home language; and Ibrahim (2004) contended that: 'Forcing learners to use undeveloped second language at school may lead to academic failure' (125). Marsh (2006) argued that the adoption of English as a medium of instruction has sometimes been 'responsible for widespread school wastage in various continents. In some of the poorest countries in the world, the use of a foreign language such as English as the medium of instruction in schools is directly linked to educational exclusion and failure' (2). Qatari students' results in national and international tests seem to support this view. The Qatar Comprehensive Educational Assessment results for 2007–08 reported that for all grades, with isolated exceptions, low proportions of students performed at the 'Meets Standards' level (typically about 10% of students in English and close to 0% of the students in math and science). This raises some questions about the reason for students' low performance: Is it due to a lack of proficiency in English? Is it due to a lack of mastery of content courses? Or is it due to both, and why? Answering these questions is beyond the scope of this study, but these concerns constitute one impetus to ask teachers about the problems they face while implementing integration.

Impact of integration on teachers

In response to the question on the advantages of integration for teachers, the respondents' impressions centered on the increased teacher motivation for their work, and additional opportunities to learn.

Integration increases teacher motivation for their work

Most of the respondents (78%) stated that integration increased their motivation for, and interest in, their work. These teachers seem to get motivation from different sources. While some derive interest from the use of new teaching techniques and strategies, others are motivated by the use of more attractive and exciting resources. One of the participants indicated that 'integration is interesting and motivating because it pushes me to look for new ways to improve my teaching and explain things better for my students'. Another respondent wrote:

When I teach science, math and English together, it creates a better atmosphere in the classroom, teaching math or science alone is boring, it is dry, and teaching them in English it adds fun because there is a lot of materials that are fun in English like English websites with interesting movies and videos and songs and stories for math and science.

The comment points to the motivation the teacher gets from using materials and resources in English. Interview informants also stressed this point, explaining that Independent schools spend more money than MOE schools on obtaining interesting resources that teachers can use.

Additional learning opportunities

In addition to raising teachers' interest and motivation, integration is thought to provide teachers with additional learning opportunities. This view was mainly expressed by content subject teachers. One math teacher wrote: 'Integration increases the depth of my understanding for my subject and how it could be effective for other subjects. When I integrate math and English, I discover new ways to present the information to my students.' Another indicated: 'integration gives me the chance to observe other skills in teaching and dealing with students so I learn from them, and so it allows for better understanding and grasp of some topics'. Other respondents believe that using integration improved the relationships between teachers since it provided more opportunities to collaborate with and learn from colleagues from other departments, to 'exchange and share information with other colleagues' and to get constructive feedback and support from them.

Challenges faced in the implementation of integration

In spite of the perceived positive effects of integration on teachers and students, teachers declared that they are also facing challenges which revolve around the following themes: (a) the language handicap, (b) overload on teachers, (c) inadequate teacher preparation, (d) ineffective planning of the innovation, and (e) parents' lack of support.

Language handicap

One of the challenges stated by most content subject teachers (93%) is students' low proficiency in English. Students have difficulty understanding 'concepts and new information I present to them', technical words of science, word problems, instructions, and 'anything I ask them to read'. A math teacher pointed out: 'My students don't know English well, so I spend a long time reading and explaining the English part of the word problems before starting to explain the math part of the problem.'

Another math teacher admitted that: 'Some students have problems understanding English, so we need to repeat everything twice.' A third teacher indicated that students always ask for translation in Arabic, and 'often respond in Arabic even when I ask questions in English'. Other students even '[r]efuse to engage in classroom activities unless I translate the instructions in Arabic' and 'don't even open the book at home; they think it is too hard and impossible for them to learn so they don't even try'. These comments point to the frustration caused to students as a result of integration of English in upper grades.

The language handicap is not a challenge facing students only. Many content subject teachers admit that they themselves 'have difficulty teaching in English'. One of the interviewees explained that: 'Many teachers taught in government schools and moved to Independent schools ... so they were teaching in Arabic, and they lack the adequate level of English proficiency that enables them to teach content courses in English.' Another interviewed teacher added that some of the teachers are 'required to take language courses offered by the British Council in collaboration with the Supreme Education Council' in order to improve their English proficiency. Teachers' low proficiency in English is a challenge that has often been expressed in studies investigating teachers' attitudes to teaching content through a second language (Walker and Tedick 2000).

In brief, students' low proficiency in English, the language of instruction, is considered a major challenge for teachers who become concerned that it negatively affects their students' learning and academic attainment. Teachers also seem to believe that they are not being of great help to their students because they themselves do not have the adequate language skills to teach content courses effectively.

Integration: an additional burden

The second most recurrent challenge expressed by 82% of the respondents is the large amount of time needed for planning and preparing integrated lessons. They argue that it is a time-consuming and demanding process. These quotes illustrate this concern:

It [integration] requires a lot of preparation that needs a lot of time, writing a lesson plan where I integrate with another teacher takes twice as much time as when I write a lesson plan for my subject.

The big challenge is I don't have time to work with another teacher to integrate subjects.

Additional tasks required from teachers as a result of the introduction of integration also make them feel that the implementation of integration is a daunting process. With the move to integration, they are responsible for materials selection, lesson planning, and implementation of innovative approaches that inform best practices in their areas of specialty. These new roles and tasks that require additional time are overlaid on a traditional school day structure that does not provide for such time. Some interviewees added that some teachers have to stay beyond work hours if they need to work on integration.

They [teachers] have no release time for this extra preparation of materials and lesson planning; in addition, they have to use new approaches and strategies so they have to look for something new all the time ... there is a mismatch between what is expected from them and the reality. I mean, there is overload on teachers' time, whereas integration needs more time to find the suitable strategies and plan accurately.

Therefore, because of their teaching load and the administrative tasks they are required to do, subject and English teachers seem to be frustrated by the introduction of integration.

Inadequate teacher preparation

The lack of adequate teacher preparation was reported to be another major challenge faced by teachers. Many respondents (89%) indicated that they had not received training in how to use integration. The training they had received was about 'modern instructional strategies but not specifically about integration and how to implement it'. While English teachers pointed to their lack of training in how to teach content courses which required different methodologies from those used in teaching English as a Second Language, content subject teachers declared that they were not well prepared to use integration: their proficiency in English was not adequate to enable them to teach in English.

This finding was surprising because numerous teacher training programs accompanied EFNE and were offered by the Professional Development Office (one of the three institutions working under the SEC that is responsible for preparing teachers to implement the reform). Interviewed teachers were asked to provide clarifications about this point and one of them explained:

I think the problem is that not all teachers participate in teacher training ... the SEC selects or asks the school to select some teachers or coordinators to attend the training, these people then train the other teachers at school... but I don't think that training is very efficient.

This interviewee points to the lack of efficiency of the 'training of trainer' model. Another interviewee said the 'workshops were either theoretical in nature, focusing on telling trainees rather than showing them how to use techniques, or they were not related to how to teach integration'.

The situation is similar to that described by Crandall (1998), who wrote:

Too often, teacher preparation focuses on decontextualized theory, with limited attention to practice. Too often, in-service teacher development is mired in the daily challenges of teaching, and opportunities for continued development may be limited to workshops or brief seminars, without opportunities for reflection, application to the classroom, or opportunities to explore new theories or approaches. (2)

Ineffective planning of the innovation

Another concern expressed by the respondents is the lack of adequate planning for the introduction of integration. More than half of the teachers commented that the move to teaching content subjects in English was 'not well prepared' or 'inefficient'.

In my opinion, I don't think that there are disadvantages about integration itself, but the disadvantages come from the procedures taken to introduce integration. It is not explained to us how and when to use it.

According to other teachers, there was a lack of proper planning that should provide teachers with guidelines as to what topics and standards are common to different subjects and can be taught simultaneously by the different subject teachers. One of the interviewees shed light on this point indicating that:

In order to implement integration between subjects, teachers need to know in advance when two subjects teachers can teach related topics at the same time ... sometimes I realize that a topic can be integrated with another subject and I go to discuss it with the other teacher, but I find out that the teacher has already taught that theme or that he has planned to teach it later ... teachers should not be left alone to decide when and what to integrate, units that teach the same topics in different subjects should be pointed out to the teachers in the scheme of work provided by the SEC.

Another indication of the lack of effective planning of the introduction of integration is the lack of clear decisions regulating the systematic practice of the approach at school level. The practice of integration was not a requirement; it was a decision left to the discretion of the school leaders. The result was a random and ad hoc practice of integration by individual teachers. In addition, most schools have opted for the use of EMI as soon as they have acquired Independent school status,

but changed practices the next year(s) and reverted to the use of Arabic and English in teaching content courses.

Parents' resistance

The last challenge brought up by 48% of the teachers is parental attitudes regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction. Some respondents pointed to the pressure that parents put on teachers due to the use of English as a medium of instruction.

Parents always come to me and ask for translation, they want me to give the students lists of vocabulary in English and in Arabic, this is for them [parents] so they understand the technical terms we teach in math and science, even parents need help.

In an interview with a science teacher, she reported that in conferences with parents and their children:

Parents do not hide their view that science is difficult, they often mention that their child is not getting high grades in science because it is a difficult subject and that the difficulty is due to instruction in English, parents often argue that their children used to get higher grades in the subject when it was taught in Arabic and that now, because it is taught in English they are not achieving high.

For these reasons, parents may discourage students who become reluctant to make efforts in the science class.

The challenges faced by teachers are mainly out of their control. They are organizational and planning challenges that are due to a lack of consideration of the requirements and specificities of the Qatari context and teachers more specifically.

Implications and suggestions

The major implication of the study is that the teachers' voice should be honored. Investigating teachers' perspectives with regard to the use of a new instructional approach helps point to the feasibility and usefulness of curriculum change and the challenges they face. They can reveal ways in which change can be better planned so that it is implemented as intended by the designers. Teachers are aware of the constraints of the teaching situation they are working in, and they are better judges of what works or not in that context. They should be involved in the various processes of curriculum change: the design, implementation, and evaluation of change.

Another implication of the study is that the Qatari context does not seem to be ready for the introduction of integrated language and content instruction. Teachers lack the adequate preparation they need to implement the approach; students' proficiency in English does not seem to help them achieve high and parents seem to resist the use of EMI.

Based on the results of this study and their implications, the following suggestions are offered:

- (1) The introduction of a new instructional approach needs to take into account the readiness of the local context: teachers, students, and the community. Investigation of teachers' needs should highlight ways they can be prepared to use the approach. Assessment of students' needs and investigation of their

prior knowledge and learning experience should reveal when and at what grade level it is appropriate to introduce EMI in English as a Second Language or English as a Foreign Language contexts. Also, more communication with parents to sensitize them to the benefits of the new approach should contribute to an efficient implementation.

- (2) The third suggestion is the need for adequate teacher preparation for the implementation of integrated instruction. Teachers in Qatari Independent schools need to become aware of, understand, and be able to teach English through content and content through English. In the literature, there have been calls for teacher preparation to teach content-based instruction, which fall under two major strands. Wong-Fillmore and Snow (2002) argued that teachers should have a deeper understanding of linguistic and discourse features peculiar to a particular content area, and an understanding of the academic language competencies students need to function successfully in the content area classroom. Other scholars in the field of sheltered instruction,² such as Echevarria, Vogt, and Short (2000), contend that teachers need an awareness of how to use language to make academic content accessible to second-language students. While these types of training are useful to teachers working in the Qatari context, there is a need for training to include teacher preparation in other educational processes that are new to them.
- (3) Teacher preparation should involve more than training in classroom instruction and strategies. With EFNE, the roles of teachers in Qatari Independent schools have expanded to include decisions about processes like choice of instructional approach, materials selection and/or design, collaborative lesson planning, collaboration with colleagues, and continuous assessment of students' needs. These new roles require teachers to be equipped with appropriate skills to be able to carry out these new tasks.
- (4) Finally, the introduction of curriculum change needs to gauge the amount of effort and work that its implementation requires from teachers. In this study, a major challenge for the teachers was the overwhelming nature of the approach. In the absence of clear guidelines with regard to the implementation of integration, teachers need to make decisions about how and when lessons can be integrated, which seems to be a time-consuming task. However, this factor does not seem to have been taken into account in planning the introduction of the new approach. A reduction in teaching load and the allocation of time as part of teachers' workload to collaborate in order to plan integrated lessons, look for appropriate materials, and adapt them to the local culture and their students' levels as well as capabilities, seems to be imperative.
- (5) The study investigated Cohort 1 teachers' attitudes to ILCI and the challenges they face. The findings are not generalizable to all teachers in other Cohorts (2–7). More research needs to be carried out to gauge the generalizability of the present study's findings, and the extent to which teachers' claims reflect the reality of their classroom practices.

Conclusion

Investigating teachers' perspectives relating to the use of integrated content and language instruction in the Qatar educational context shows that teachers can provide

useful insights as to how carefully planned change is. The results indicate that teachers tend to be aware of the benefits of the approach for them and for the students and to favor its use, but they are essentially challenged by their lack of preparation for the implementation of change, and the readiness of their students and parents to support the change. It is, therefore, key that curriculum planners involve teachers in the planning and evaluation of an innovation as these practitioners are in a better position to judge what works and what does not in a particular educational context.

List of acronyms

BICS:	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CALP:	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CBI:	content-based instruction
CI:	comprehensible input
EFNE:	Education for a New Era
EMI:	English as a medium of instruction
ILCI:	integration of/integrated language and content instruction
L1:	first language
L2:	second language
MOE:	Ministry of Education
QU:	Qatar University
SEC:	Supreme Education Council

Notes

1. Qatar National Vision 2030 (The General Secretariat for Development Planning 2013). Accessed March 12, 2014. http://www.qu.edu.qa/pharmacy/components/upcoming_events_material/Qatar_National_Vision_2030.pdf
2. Sheltered instruction refers to an approach that integrates language and content instruction to provide access to mainstream grade-level content and to promote academic English language development.

Notes on contributor

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