Qatar's K-12 Education Reform: A review of the policy decisions and a look into the future

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The State of Qatar is a small, but wealthy state in the Arabian Gulf. Over the last 20 years, the country has witnessed some extraordinary transformations. One sector that has possibly undergone the most radical changes and development is Qatar's education sector. At the turn of the century, in order to improve their education system, Qatar's K-12 public schooling system underwent comprehensive reforms. In 2001, the Qatari government appointed the Rand Corporation to analyse and offer recommendations to modernize the local K-12 system. The result of Rand's assessment was the introduction of an independent school model and an educational reform initiative dubbed Education for a New Era (EFNE). These reforms included the implementation of English as a medium of instruction in all K-12 public schools. This paper reviews these education policy reforms and offers commentary on the implications of the changes since the adoption of EFNE, the current state of the K-12 education system, and suggests possible ways forward for the future development of the K-12 public schooling sector in the State of Qatar.

Keywords: Language policy, Education policy and reforms, K-12 system, International education, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

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1. Introduction

When Qatar declared its independence in 1971 upon the withdrawal of the British, it continued to cultivate close ties with Western powers as part of its national security efforts[2]. Qatar, an oil monarchy with a small population, is the wealthiest country in the world per capita as calculated by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Qatar is the largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG) in the world, and has been the world's leading liquefied natural gas (LNG) exporter since 2006, with a 31% market share in 2014[3].

As a result, the Qatari government is financially capable of providing a wide scope of benefits to its citizens such as free healthcare and education, and subsidized utilities. Its public sector is the largest employer of Qatari nationals, employing about 83% of Qataris[4]. However, the massive growth in the oil and gas industries and the resulting increase in revenues require a skilled and educated workforce, which Qatar's education system was not producing. The result is a dependence on a large expatriate workforce population.

This is one of the most fundamental challenges Qatar continues to face: the quality of its education system. In the past, Qatar had made several attempts to change a centralized and highly bureaucratic traditional education system that was not producing graduates who could meet the demands of the emerging labour market and the

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[2] Qatar | Geography & History. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved 7 September 2017, from
https://www.britannica.com/place/Qatar

[3] Qatar - International - Analysis - U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA).
(2015). Eia.gov. Retrieved 8 September 2017, from
https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=QAT

[4] Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education
Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from
https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-
manage-education-reform/

ambitious vision for Qatar's modernization and economic diversification. By 2030, Qatar's vision is to be an advanced, knowledge-based society able to sustain its own economic development, and it believes education of its human capital is vital to achieving these goals.

Since 1995, Qatar has implemented several economic, social and political reforms[5] in readiness for the day when fossil fuel reserves run out. The ruler at the time, Sheikh Hamad Al Thani, had put into motion an ambitious project of investing in human capital, specifically through transforming his country's education system[6].

While Qatar courted some of the top Western universities to open branch campuses in Qatar's Education City, the local reality became apparent that the K-12 public education system was not producing a calibre of students who could easily be accepted into these institutions either within Qatar or globally. There was also a lack of Qatari males in higher education[7].

In 2001, the Qatari government commissioned the RAND Corporation to evaluate the K-12 education system and propose reform options[8]. The Qatari leadership selected an Independent School model, based on the Charter School system, and in

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[5] Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-manage-education-reform/

[6] Nolan, L. (2012).

[7] Phan, A. (2010). A New Paradigm of Educational Borrowing in the Gulf States: The Qatari Example. Middle East Institute. Retrieved 30 August 2017, from https://www.mei.edu/content/new-paradigm-educational-borrowing-gulf-states-qatari-example

[8] Brewer, D., Goldman, C., Augustine, C., Zellman, G., Ryan, G., Stasz, C., & Constant, L. (2006). An Introduction to Qatar's Primary and Secondary Education Reform. Rand.org. Retrieved 28 August 2017, from https://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR399.html

2002, the EFNE reform initiative was launched. Under this program, the Supreme

Education Council (SEC) was set up to implement rapid and major changes to the K-12

education system. The SEC operated initially in parallel to the Ministry of Education

(MOE) as a second regulatory body, before the MOE was phased out eventually. Over

the following decade, a fast-paced reform and decentralization of the K-12 system took

place[9].

EFNE was meant to introduce flexibility and choice. From a traditional, rigid,

bureaucratic and hierarchical Ministry of Education, Qatar rapidly shifted to a model

based on autonomy, accountability, variety and choice. National Curriculum Standards

were developed in four core subjects: Arabic, Mathematics, Science and English[10].

English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) was initially introduced, only to later be

reversed as a result of the controversy it generated. Principals and teachers, key

stakeholders who directly impact the successful implementation of the reform were not

properly consulted or engaged originally. Qatari parents also struggled with EMI, and

students became increasingly demotivated. The initial EFNE reforms, which were

meant to also enhance student achievement, were subsequently reversed as results of

international tests such as Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS),

Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), and Trends in International

Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) came back showing significant progress but

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[9] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and
    Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way
    Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East
    and North Africa (pp. 121-198). Springer International Publishing AG.

[10] Brewer, D., Goldman, C., Augustine, C., Zellman, G., Ryan, G., Stasz, C., & Constant, L.
    (2006). An Introduction to Qatar's Primary and Secondary Education Reform. Rand.org.,
    from https://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR399.html

still placing Qatari students' bottom of the test scores globally[11]. As a result of public dissatisfaction, EFNE reforms were abrogated, and a voucher school system – another one of the options presented by RAND – phased in, and there was a gradual return to centralized control[12].

This paper looks at the decade long EFNE educational reforms in Qatar, from design, implementation to abrogation. To better understand the outcome of the reforms, the paper first covers a brief history of Qatar and its K-12 education system prior to the reforms. The local context and vision for the modernization of Qatar are essential to understand the rapid, full-scale implementation that happened without neither properly engaging nor preparing the key stakeholders.

2. Brief History of Education in Qatar

2.1. History of Qatar

The development of Qatar, since gaining independence from Britain in 1971, is profound. Over a century ago, Qatar was a relatively poor country with its wealth and trading at that time consisting of livestock, specifically camels and horses, pearl diving and trading. The main export was pearls. Other industries, such as agriculture and

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[11] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (pp.171-198). Springer International Publishing AG

[12] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

fishing were much less developed[13]. At the time, though the population was small but slowly increasing, a lack of economic development and job opportunities saw the population start to dwindle. However, over the last several decades, since the discovery of oil and gas, the latter being one of the highest reserves in the world, Qatar has seen major transformations[14]. Whereas before, residents were fleeing the country due to lack of opportunities, Qatar has become one of the most prosperous countries, based on GDP growth, as well as a country with one of the highest percentage of expat workers in the world[15].

Politically, Qatar is a de-facto constitutional monarchy ruled by the Al-Thani tribe following a primogeniture succession since 1825. Since June 2013, the country has been led by HE Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who succeeded his father, HE Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, who abdicated his rule[16].

2.2. History of Education in Qatar

Until the development of Qatar's economy, which was mainly due to the discovery and exportation of fossil fuels, education in the country was mainly limited to religious education in informal settings. Formal education in Qatar started to take shape in the late 40's and early 50's. The first official all boys' school was opened in 1949 and by 1951, it started receiving government funding. Over the next three years, the government opened and sponsored a further three schools for boys. In 1956, the

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[13] Connor P. Spreng, Policy Options for Interventions in Failing Schools, Santa Monica: Rand, (2005)

[14] Berrebi, C., Martorell, F. & Tanner, J.C., *Qatar's Labor Markets at a Crucial Crossroad,* The Middle East Journal, 63, no. 3 (2009)

[15] Abou-El-Kheir, A. English for the Future-English Language Profile: Qatar, British Council (2014)

[16] Ibid.

Department of Education was established. This was also the year that the first girls'

school was established, which was founded by a revolutionary Qatari female educator,

Amina Mahmud[17]. Students at these institutions studied Maths, English, Geography,

Arabic and Islamic studies. From the onset, girls were outperforming boys, a gap that

exists until today[18].

According to the 1970 national Census, the illiteracy rate was still close to 70%

at the time the survey was carried out. This number is a bit misleading; however, as

almost 80% of the younger population (15 to 19 year olds) was literate, while the older

generations had illiteracy rate exceeding 85%. These numbers appear to reflect the

positive impact the schools and education system had on the younger population of

Qatar[19].

Since the 1970's, the Qatari government has focused on education as one of its

main priorities and has made considerable strides in developing the education system in

the country. With the opening of more schools, the government were able to provide

free education to all its nationals as well as to many expatriate children[20]. In 1995, the

former Emir HE Hamid Bin Khalifa Al-Thani instituted substantial reforms to the

economy and infrastructure, as the population had begun to increase rapidly.

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[17] Toth, A. Qatar—Education and welfare. In H. Chapin Metz (Ed.), *Persian Gulf states, country studies: Qatar*. (Ch.4). Washington, DC: Federal Research Division/United States Library of Congress. (1994). Retrieved from Library of Congress Site

[18] MacLeod, P. and Abou-El-Kheir, A. English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa, Kirkpartick, R. (Ed.). Springer, (2017)

[19] Winckler, O. Population growth, migration and socio-demographic policies in Qatar. Tel Aviv, Israel: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. (2000)

[20] Berrebi, C., Martorell, F. & Tanner, J.C., *Qatar's Labor Markets at a Crucial Crossroad, The Middle East Journal*, 63, no. 3 (2009)

Throughout these changes and growth, the education system of Qatar has gone through various educational reforms in order to keep up with the country's ever-changing landscape[21][22]. However, the education system is torn between different ideologies. Up until the late 90's, the Qatari education system was focused on knowledge transmission whereby students memorized the concepts and information transmitted. The traditional education focused on maintaining the identity of the country as well as religious commitments. On the other hand, contemporary education emphasized the needs of the growing population as well as the expatriate children whose families work in Qatar. A specific issue that also needed focus was the gender gap, which was prevalent at the time[23].

In 2001, the Qatari government called upon the RAND Corporation to help reform and overhaul the government schools. One reason was to revamp the system in order to keep up with the ever-changing economic landscape in both Qatar and the globalized world[24]. Another reason was the Qatari government concern that students' education results were not up to international standards as suggested by international

[21] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (pp.171-198). Springer International Publishing AG

[22] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[23] Karkouti, I. M. (2016). Qatar's Educational System in the Technology-Driven Era: Long Story Short, International Journal of Higher Education, 5, no.3

[24] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

tests, such as the PIRLS, PISA, and TIMSS[25][26]. There was also a concern that students were not prepared to meet employers' expectations and could not compete for places at top university programs either at home or abroad. The result of the reforms was a program referred to as "Education for a New Era" (EFNE). The main thrust behind the reforms was to create a standards based education system with a focus on English, Science, Math and Arabic and to move towards English as a medium of instruction[27].

One of RAND's proposals adopted by the Qatari government was to implement a system based on a charter school model, where schools function autonomously under the direction and funding from the government. Schools were allowed to develop their own philosophies and curriculums, but had to meet the SEC's standards in the four aforementioned subjects. In theory, the idea of autonomy and choice in education should have positive effects, making schools and educators sensitive to the requirements of both families and teachers. In the charter school model, different schools have to compete to recruit both students and teachers, so their needs are of primary importance[28].

[25] Brewer, D. J., Augustine, C. H., Zellman, G. L., Ryan, G. W., Goldman, C. A., Stasz, C., & Constant, L. Education for a new era: Design and implementation of k-12 education reform in Qatar. Rand Corp: Santa Monica, CA. (2007).

[26] Romanowski, M.H., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., Al Attiyah, A. Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents. (2013).

[27] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[28] Ibid.

3. Reform of K-12, with a focus on RAND

3.1 The Development of Qatar's K-12 System

One of the first ministries established in the mid 1950's in Qatar was the Ministry of Education (MOE), with the goal of providing free education to a highly illiterate population. It modelled on the Egyptian system of education for its public education system and in the decade that followed, adopted curricula and textbooks from Egypt and other Arab countries. MOE-developed textbooks are used in all classes and are adopted content from exiting Arab texts.[29]

The highly centralized MOE oversaw all aspects of public education and several of private education. Government-funded education is free for children of Qatari nationals and also to expatriate children whose parents are government employees. In public schools, boys and girls attend separate schools. During its review of the K-12 system, RAND noted that pre-school and kindergarten were only available at private schools.

Any reform of the MOE would pose a challenge given its centralized and hierarchical nature as well as the complex rules and regulations it uses to govern schools and the education agenda. These stringent controls were designed to ensure things were done the MOE way, and unfortunately, they lacked tools to monitor or assess performance or implement changes for improvement, let alone to create goals for education.

A 2004 census documented about 744,000 residents in Qatar, about 20%being Qatari nationals, 80% foreign or expatriate workers, and their families with temporary

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[29] Brewer, D. J., Augustine, C. H., Zellman, G. L., Ryan, G. W., Goldman, C. A., Stasz, C., & Constant, L. "Education for a new era: Design and implementation of k-12 education reform in Qatar". Rand Corp: Santa Monica, CA. (2007).

residence based on their work permits. The 2004 census also showed that 15% of the Qatari labour force was women[30].

Despite the small percentage of Qatari Nationals, the government of Qatar felt the need to initiate "Qatarization" programs to increase the number of Qataris in the workforce. With Qatarization defining targets for private sector businesses to recruit Qatari nationals and companies were competing, but struggling, to hire skilled and qualified national graduates[31].

3.2 The current Qatari context and the introduction of reforms

Qatar's leadership views education as a critical driver for sustaining social and economic change. The State has overdependence on foreign labour[32], and Qatar's education system, which was "rigid, outdated and resistant to reform[33]", was not producing the local human capital outcomes needed to drive the ambitious change

[30] Brewer, D. J., Augustine, C. H., Zellman, G. L., Ryan, G. W., Goldman, C. A., Stasz, C., & Constant, L. "Education for a new era: Design and implementation of k-12 education reform in Qatar". Rand Corp: Santa Monica, CA. (2007).

[31] Winckler, O. Population growth, migration and socio-demographic policies in Qatar. Tel Aviv, Israel: The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies. (2000)

[32] "Expatriates accounted for 94% of Qatar's total labour force of 1.3mn in 2012, the report shows: mainly due to the large requirements in the construction sector, which is also the largest employing sector in the country. The private sector currently accounts for 74% of the total jobs, with expatriates taking up the vast majority of available positions. In common with other GCC countries, the Qatari workforce is heavily skewed towards the public sector, with 84% of working nationals taking up jobs in the public sector". Qatar Economic Insight 2012. (2012) Qatar National Bank (QNB). Retrieved from http://www.qnb.com/cs/Satellite?blobcol=urldata&blobheader=application%2Fpdf&blobk ey=id&blobtable=MungoBlobs&blobwhere=1355542133194&ssbinary=true

[33] Brewer, D. J., Augustine, C. H., Zellman, G. L., Ryan, G. W., Goldman, C. A., Stasz, C., & Constant, L. "Education for a new era: Design and implementation of k-12 education reform in Qatar". Rand Corp: Santa Monica, CA. (2007).

taking place elsewhere in other sectors.

Qatar's leadership engaged RAND, a non-profit research organization, to evaluate the K-12 public school system in Qatar and provide its recommendations. At the time of the initial study in 2001, the Qatari K–12 education system catered for about 100,000 students, two-thirds of who were in government financed and operated schools.

Among Qatar's concerns was that its school system was not producing the desired results for Qatari students in the areas of academic achievement, college attendance, and success in the labour market. RAND analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the existing system and highlighted two main areas for reform: improving basic elements through standards-based reform and proposing a plan to deal with the system's overall shortcomings[34].

In terms of strengths of the existing system, RAND highlighted enthusiastic teachers who wanted to deliver a solid education and who were receptive to change and greater autonomy. Policymakers, teachers and administrators seemed to be aware of international developments in curriculum, giving hope that they would support internationally benchmarked changes that would take into account the local culture. Additionally, parents seemed likely to accept new schooling options.

However, the weaknesses that contributed to the system's poor performance – of which RAND highlighted fourteen - were extensive. There was no vision or goals for quality education and the structures needed to support it. The curriculum in government (and many private) schools was outmoded and rigid, and under the centralized control of the Ministry of Education. It was unchallenging and emphasized on rote

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[34] Brewer, Dominic J., Catherine H. Augustine, Gail L. Zellman, Gery W. Ryan, Charles A. Goldman, Cathy Stasz and Louay Constant. "A New System for K-12 Education in Qatar". Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.

memorization. The system lacked performance indicators, and the little performance information that it provided to teachers and administrators was meaningless since they had no authority to make changes. For a country with such wealth, the national investment in education was small, many school buildings were in poor condition, and classrooms were overcrowded. Schools lacked modern equipment and basic supplies, and teachers often used their own money to purchase instructional material. In addition, the teachers received low pay, poor incentives and little, if any, professional development[35].

3.3 Overview of the educational reform Education for a New Era (EFNE)

In 2001, Qatar decided to reform its K-12 public education and began a comprehensive education reform initiative. The first phase of Qatar's K–12 school reform initiative was called EFNE. The concept and design of EFNE was laid out in the RAND Corporation's recommendations for building an educational system that would meet the country's changing needs.

The new system design had to graduate Qatari students capable of contributing to an international environment and a modernising Qatari state. The design also had to be appropriate for Qatar and build on the existing system's strengths while understanding the constraints and challenges. Within a year of being retained, RAND, with the assistance of local experts, surveyed the existing pre-college educational system (covering both public and private schools) and recommended the putting in

35 Brewer, Dominic J. et al. "Education for a new era : design and implementation of K–12 education reform in Qatar". Rand Corp: Santa Monica, CA. (2007).

place curriculum standards to establish clear benchmarks in both content and performance. RAND proposed three models of reform and governance[36]:

(1) Option 1: A modified centralized model that reformed within the MOE but maintained the current system, while giving principals authority to hire and fire teachers, but limited parental choice;

(2) Option 2: The Charter School model that created a decentralized system, under a new regulatory body parallel to the MOE and allowed innovation by the school operators;

(3) Option 3: The Voucher system, a highly decentralized and privatized system that issued vouchers allowing parents to choose any public or private school.

The Qatari leadership selected Option 2 with the belief that a reform that retained the centralized authority system (as in Option 1) would not bring about meaningful change. They were also swayed at first by the audacious change versus incremental change presented by the third option, but felt they were not yet equipped for such reforms. RAND developed a detailed implementation plan specifying the creation of three new government institutions to help smoothen the transition of authority within the system. In 2002, the Supreme Education Council (SEC) was created as the new governing body. Dedicated to executing EFNE, the SEC would focus on modernizing standards and "making education highly accessible, regardless of economic status"[37].

Qatar started implementing RAND's recommended reforms and in 2004, the first group of Independent Schools was launched. Within a few years, standards were

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[36] Brewer, Dominic J. et al. "Education for a new era : design and implementation of K–12 education reform in Qatar". Rand Corp: Santa Monica, CA. (2007).

[37] Supreme Education Council, Qatar. Ministry of Education and Higher Education, referenced from http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/about/Pages/default.aspx

developed, students tested, and a growing number of Qatari students had enrolled in schools focused on learning with improved facilities and better-prepared teachers who taught against internationally benchmarked standards. By 2011, all MOE schools were converted to Independent Schools and vouchers were introduced in 2012.

Today, EFNE has effectively, although not by an official announcement, been rescinded as demonstrated by the reversal of several of its policies[38].

3.4 Background on Charter/Independent Schools

Of the three models of governance recommended by RAND, the Qatari government selected to implement a system based on the Charter School system. Overseen by the SEC, private owner-operators, who were Qatari nationals, were permitted to create their own philosophies and curricula but had to maintain standards in Math, English, Arabic and Science.

Students were allowed to move between schools while the State paid these Independent Schools by student[39]. Consequently, there were two types of public schools in Qatar: the SEC publicly funded Independent Schools privately operating alongside the centralized Ministry of Education schools[40].

The Independent School model emphasized well-aligned standards, curriculum, assessments, professional development and accountability by measuring school and

[38] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[39] "The Report: Emerging Qatar 2007". Oxford Business Group. (2007).

[40] Goldman, Charles A and Augustine, Catherine H. "RAND Solution: Guiding Education Reform in Qatar". *RAND Education*. RAND Corporation, retrieved from https://www.rand.org/capabilities/solutions/guiding-education-reform-in-qatar.html#related

student performance. Data gathered from 2005-2007 and compared to student testing carried out before the Independent Schools began to operate, demonstrated higher student achievement in elementary grades and substantial changes in classroom practices[41].

The model was originally founded on four principles that were uniquely different to other regional government educational systems[42]. These four principles were:

(1) Autonomy through decentralized governance, where owners operate within the terms of a contract entered into with the SEC;

(2) Accountability, as mentioned above, through various measures;

(3) Variety in the philosophy and operational options;

(4) Parental choice in selecting a school for their child[43].

(5) Concerns about these four principles included the idea that with parental demand being so high for new schools, promoting accountability through parental choice would be limited by this excess demand to place children in the new schools.

The contrast of two K-12 public school regulators operating in parallel continued until 2009-2011 when all ministry schools converted to independent schools under the SEC[44]. In addition, in 2012 the Qatari government announced that it would

[41] Ibid

[42] Brewer, Dominic J., et al. *"Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education Reform in Qatar"*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.

[43] Brewer, Dominic J., et al. *"Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education Reform in Qatar"*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.

[44] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

provide vouchers for per-student funding to be used in some private schools[45], this also being one of the three reform options suggested by RAND in their 2001 study.

3.5 The focus on English as a medium of instruction (EMI)

English as a medium of instruction is more often used in private schools and is viewed as giving access to new opportunities. For students who do not go to or cannot afford private schools, this often means that they do not have an equal chance to learn English[46].

During its initial research, RAND noted that according to college officials and employers, graduates were unable to communicate or write well in English, nor perform basic mathematics and accounting tasks, or use technology such as computers. While Arabic was the national language, RAND felt that English was important in preparing students for the workplace and for international college education. As such, several Independent Schools adopted EMI. Cohorts one through six of the Independent schools taught most classes in English. Cohort seven and eight used a bilingual (Arabic-English) approach as their medium of instruction.

The curriculum, resources, planning, curriculum standards and student textbooks were in English. This was problematic and confusing to many students, parents and teachers[47].

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[45] Constant, Louay et al. "Promoting Quality and Variety Through the Public Financing of Privately Operated Schools in Qatar". Journal of School Choice, v. 4, no. 4. October 2010.

[46] Dearden, Julie. "English as a medium of instruction– a growing global phenomenon". The British Council. (2014).

[47] Romanowski, M.H., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., Al Attiyah, A. "Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents". (2013).

Public opinion in Qatar on EMI was mixed. There was controversy surrounding EMI and it was not welcome due to the way it was implemented[48]. Further concerns arose that a move back to a bilingual approach – although broadly welcomed – should be slowed to ensure that students were not hurt or did not suffer in the move back to Arabic, as had happened with the original decision to focus on EMI[49].

There were several changes and adjustments made to the EFNE by the SEC: in 2011, Independent Schools shifted from EMI to a bilingual approach for math and science. Even Qatar University, in 2012, announced that Arabic would become the language of instruction[50].

Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, the wife of the Emir and the Chairperson of the Qatar Foundation for Education, emphasized the importance of the Arabic language in maintaining national identity[51] and she urged researchers to reclaim the legacy of Arabic as a scientific language.

3.6 Stakeholders of the educational reform in Qatar

Independent schools are gender segregated and are broken into primary, preparatory and secondary schools. Each independent school has an owner or operator and a principal.

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[48] Dearden, Julie. "English as a medium of instruction – a growing global phenomenon". The British Council and EMI Oxford (The Centre for Research and Development in English Medium Instruction), University of Oxford. (2014). P. 23.

[49] Romanowski, M.H., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., Al Attiyah, A. "Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents". (2013).

[50] Lindsey, U. (2012). Debate arises at Qatar University over decision to teach mainly in Arabic. The Chronicle of Higher Education. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/Debate-Arises-at-Qatar-U-Over/130695/

[51] Ibid

The principals of all independent schools must be Qatari nationals and must undergo leadership development programs offered by the SEC.

The majority of teachers in independent schools are expatriates, mostly from other Arab countries and given the large expatriate population, there is also great diversity among parents with children attending independent schools. Teachers at independent schools collaborated to develop curricular content that took into account new international curriculum standards in the four key subjects of Arabic, English, science, and mathematics. They also adopted more student-centred teaching methods and provided more challenging learning environments, according to RAND.

Although EFNE generated controversy across the range of stakeholders, it gained success by "engaging Qatari parents and many sectors in the society to become active stakeholders in the educational process"[52].

4. The impact of the reforms

4.1 Authority – who is in charge?

The old system under the MOE had several layers and units that were hierarchal, bureaucratic and resistant to change, innovation and reform.

To implement the reform plans, three new institutions were formed to avoid conflict of interest in the contractual aspect of Independent Schools; the reformed structure consisted of two separate offices under the SEC[53]:

[52] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[53] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

(1) The Education Institute: oversees the contract process and provides minimum academic support. It also develops curriculum and performance standards, and began the process of school staff development;

(2) The Evaluation Institute: monitors and evaluates school performance and gathers data on the schools, parents, teachers, principals, and students. In 2004, it developed the first set of assessments based on Arabic, English, Mathematics and Science. Assessments were carried out before Independent Schools and standards were established. Assessments were then aligned with the curriculum standards.

4.2 A standards/performance based education

One of the outcomes of RAND's study was the recommendation for a standards-based system to guide Independent Schools[54] which were identified as:

- The School Evaluation Office: evaluates schools by developing "school report cards" that show school-level achievement results from the national test[55] and other evaluative data about the school. The results would be available to parents who could use them when choosing schools for their children, as well as to school administrators to help them improve;

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[54] Nasser, R. (2017). Qatar's educational reform past and future: challenges in teacher development. Open Review Of Educational Research, 4(1), 1-19. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2016.1266693

[55] Brewer, Dominic J., et al. "Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education Reform in Qatar". Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.

- Curriculum Standards Office[56]: sets a performance benchmark for Independent Schools by developing curriculum standards in both common content and student performance. K-12 centrally designed curriculum standards were developed for Arabic, English, Science and Mathematics – the four core subjects seen as critical to achieving Qatar's vision for social and economic goals. The new standards would also feed into the professional development of school personnel;

- The Student Assessment Office: conducts regular standardized assessment of students with school-level results publicly reported to inform stakeholders on how schools were performing. There were four components to the system: national tests of student achievement, a process for regular administration and monitoring of the tests, a process for maintaining test quality and a process for reporting student achievement[57].

- Professional Development Office: conducts needs assessments within Independent Schools and subsequently designs professional training programs for teachers, principals, school operators, governing boards and others. Since a key success factor was having well-trained professionals, the model specified direct delivery of professional development in at least the first five years of the reform.

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[56] Nasser, R. (2017). Qatar's educational reform past and future: challenges in teacher development. Open Review Of Educational Research, 4(1), 1-19. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2016.1266693

[57] Brewer, Dominic J., et al. "Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education Reform in Qatar". Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007.

A key success factor of a standards-based system is the alignment of classroom teaching with the curriculum standards[58]. This serves as an incentive for operators and administrators to develop teachers as well as innovative teaching materials and methods to enable students achieve the standards.

4.3 The choice of an independent/charter school model and the alternative choices

Once the charter school model was settled upon by the Qatari leadership, the name the new schools were assigned in Arabic meant 'independent schools', because 'charter school' when translated in Arabic had a commercial connotation. "Independent" also highlighted the autonomy of the new schools and more clearly communicated their decentralized nature to stakeholders. Hence the reason the Qatari leadership chose the term Independent as opposed to Charter Schools[59].

Other than the ability to maintain some control and common structure over these publicly funded schools, another reason the Qatari reform committee chose the second option presented by RAND was because the model would give them more time to handle the consequences and cultural difficulties of undoing the existing bureaucratic hierarchy of the centralized system that had been used to doing things the way they had always been done[60].

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[58] Hamilton, Laura S., Brian M. Stecher and Stephen P. Klein. Making Sense of Test-Based Accountability in Education. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2002. https://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1554.html.

[59] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[60] Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from

Rather than risk whether the existing centralized hierarchy would transform itself to meet the behavioural conversion required for change and innovation, a parallel regulatory body that would embrace change and innovation - the SEC – was created to oversee the transformation. The SEC oversaw the implementation of the chosen Independent School model, with the understanding that, over a decade, both the SEC and Independent Schools would gradually replace the MOE and the centralized school system.

4.4 Current outcomes based on the results of international tests

Large–scale international education achievement comparison studies assess students on core subjects such as Reading, Mathematics and Science. Data is gathered by administering achievement tests to students of many participating countries with many different languages[61]. The results enable Qatar to assess the progress and effectiveness of their educational reform efforts.

- Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA): Highlights knowledge of scientific skills. PISA assesses reading skills as well as six proficiency levels in science and mathematics. It calculates the percentage of students in each country who achieve each level. Almost 10,500 students (roughly 15 years old) from 135 schools, including Private Arabic, Independent, community and International schools, in Qatar participated in PISA 2009. Out of the 65 countries that participated, Qatar recorded one of the highest rates of score

https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-manage-education-reform/

[61] Soh, K. (2014). Test language effect in international achievement comparisons: An example from PISA 2009. Cogent Education. Retrieved 27 August 2017, from https://www.cogentoa.com/article/10.1080/2331186X.2014.955247

improvements at most proficiency levels compared to the 2006 score results[62].

Despite the significant improvement, Qatar is still ranked close to the bottom of the list of participating countries.

- Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS): Highlights knowledge of scientific content. Results from 2012 show significant progress over results from TIMSS 2007 with science achievement of 4th and 8th graders increasing by over 30%. The TIMSS progress is greater than the PISA improvement rate. However, despite this impressive rate of progress, the Qatari students fell well below the international TIMSS scale average, and again had among the lowest science scores in the group. Most notably, they also scored lower than students in neighboring Arab countries[63].

- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS): An international comparative study that assesses the reading ability of 4th graders in their native language and provides "reliable measurement of trends in reading comprehension over time on a 5-year cycle"[64]. In 2005, Qatar participated in PIRLS for the first time. The SEC believes that highlighting strengths and weaknesses in reading literacy of Qatari students will enable more focused

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[62] Average scores for reading and maths improved by 16% and science scores improved by 9%. Said, Z., & Friesen, H. (2013). The Impact of Educational Reform on Science and Mathematics Education in Qatar. Eujournal.org. Retrieved 27 August 2017, from http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/1379

[63] Improvement percentage over 2007 results in TIMSS: Grade 4 maths: 39.5%; Grade 8 maths: 25.1%; Grade 4 science: 34%; Grade 8 science: 31.3%. Said, Z., & Friesen, H. (2013). The Impact of Educational Reform on Science and Mathematics Education in Qatar. Eujournal.org. Retrieved 27 August 2017, from http://eujournal.org/index.php/esj/article/view/1379

[64] Mullis, I., Martin, M., Foy, P., & Drucker, K. (2012). PIRLS 2011 international results in reading. Chestnut Hill, Mass.: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center [u.a.].

improvement efforts[65]. Notable in the PIRLS results was the reading achievement differences between Qatari girls and boys with substantial gaps favouring girls. This was a common factor with several of the Arab countries where girls had higher average reading achievement than boys. However, once again, despite showing progress over time, Qatari student scores are lower than almost all non-Arab countries, but higher than students in most of the other participating Arab countries[66].

One of the main goals of Qatar's national strategy, as outlined in its Vision 2030 document, is diversification away from oil and gas towards scientific knowledge and invention. The above results have been positive but not outstanding enough to "attain science achievement that meets or exceeds that of regional neighbours and the international average"[67].

4.5 Balancing stakeholders' expectations

Schools need to balance SEC guidelines, teacher development, the varied skills of the students, and parental demands. School leaders are under tremendous pressure to drive the reform locally and foster new innovative educational practices into the school culture.

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[65] PIRLS. Ministry of Education and Higher Education Qatar. Retrieved 28 August 2017, from http://www.edu.gov.qa/En/SECInstitutes/EvaluationInstitute/SEO/Assessments_Tests/Pages/International_Tests/Pirls.aspx

[66] Gonzalez, G., Karoly, L., Constant, L., Salem, H., & Goldman, C. (2008). Facing human capital challenges of the 21st century. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corp.

[67] Said, Z. (2016). Science Education Reform in Qatar: Progress and Challenges. EURASIA Journal Of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education, 12(10). http://dx.doi.org/10.12973/eurasia.2016.1301a

The success of Independent Schools depends in part, on building teachers' capacity and improving schools. Despite the complexity of the changes being implemented, it will only become a part of the system when teachers start using new materials and practices, and integrating new beliefs. Hence, in effect, school administrators are held responsible for transitioning the reform from the implementation phase to being established within the local context[68].

Principals are also expected to develop English language skills, change work ethos and engage parents with the school. As such, they must find balance between the various stakeholder demands and ways to engage the stakeholders if the reforms are to be successful. Principals must encourage staff, parents and students to overcome any uncertainty and embrace the changes taking place. This is important when one considers the performance standards by which the school and students are measured.

Given the complexity and rapidity of the reforms' implementation, it is expected that controversy will often arise, which again underscores the challenges of both balancing expectations and meeting the demands raised by the reform agenda and SEC guidelines.

4.6 Stakeholders' reactions to reforms

Given the autonomy of Independent Schools, stakeholders' experiences are influenced by the individual school, and so their perceptions will contrast from one school to another. Although EFNE generated controversy, stakeholders do acknowledge the

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[68] Ben Jaafar, S. (2012). Leadership in Qatar's Educational Reform. Retrieved 5 September 2017, from https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-94-007-4095-2_10

positive effects[69]. Principals, teachers and parents share a general positive view on the varied contributions of EFNE such as the resulting improvements in leadership, teaching and learning. This improved leadership style of principals enhanced their relationship with the teaching staff, which in turn generated better communication between teachers and parents.

EFNE helped raise teacher motivation to develop professionally so as to improve on their teaching practices and technology integration and consequently, some students improved academically.

On the other hand, the decision to move back to a bilingual approach of education, while applauded, once again left many stakeholders, who went through the first rapid change in the language of instruction, wary of the speed of change of language of instruction.

In studying stakeholder perceptions, Romanowski et al. found that teacher and principal's workloads increased as they struggled to implement the needed changes to meet the requirements of EFNE. The reforms put teachers, school leaders and parents in a position that required them to undertake tasks for which they did not have the skills[70] needed to achieve results.

From the teacher's perspective, the decision to teach mathematics and science in English frustrated those who did not have the required English language proficiency. It also frustrated parents who needed English language skills to help their children with

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[69] Romanowski, M., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., & Al Attiyah, A. (2013). Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents. International Journal Of Education, 5(3), 108. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v5i3.3995

[70] For example, parents who could not read the report cards, or who could not speak English. Or teachers who did not receive adequate development or training to enable them to perform adequately under the new standards.

homework. Further, the emphasis on English led to a feeling among stakeholders, the

Qatari society and the wider region in general that Arabic language and culture was

being diminished[71].

5. Evaluation and further developments since the Rand reforms

5.1 Educational/policy borrowing - Importing international programs overseas

Over the past two decades, Qatar as well as some of its Gulf neighbours, have imported

a globally unprecedented number of educational institutions, systems and programs to

address the labour market inefficiencies and drive their reform agendas.

Often cited are the high performing successes of the proposed system in its

original context abroad – and in turn these successes are used to defend policy choices

with a caveat that the imported system could be adapted to local Qatari cultural

contexts.

Even with the view of education as a service or commodity that has become

traded for international consumption, imported education initiatives in Qatar are

strategically researched and aligned to a national goal, results-oriented and highly

adaptive partnerships[72]. Despite the best efforts and planning, the implementation of

imported education models will face challenges, modifications, unpredictability and

resistance.

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[71] Romanowski, M., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., & Al Attiyah, A. (2013). Qatar's Educational
Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents.
International Journal Of Education, 5(3), 108. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v5i3.3995

[72] Phan, A. (2010). A New Paradigm of Educational Borrowing in the Gulf States: The Qatari
Example. Middle East Institute. Retrieved 30 August 2017, from
https://www.mei.edu/content/new-paradigm-educational-borrowing-gulf-states-qatari-
example

As highlighted earlier, Qatar has undergone a steep modernization curve in a short period. The Qatari leadership has a vision and are progressively analysing what works and what does not work in their context. As such, their strategy and decision making are fluid and adjusted as decided by the leadership. The imported education reform models and systems are implemented, adapted and amended to suit the evolving Qatari strategy and learning curve of what works and what does not work for the leadership's vision and Qatar's culture.

5.2 Dearth of consideration for context or culture

In planning a new education system for Qatar, RAND's goal was for an evidence-based plan that was based on education reform around the world, yet suited to the Qatari situation[73].

Prior to the EFNE reforms, Qatar's K-12 system was based on deep-rooted cultural traditions of Arabic schools. The sudden move from an entirely bureaucratic, traditional and static centralized educational model to innovative decentralized independent schools occurred before large-scale stakeholder engagement. This created many critical challenges including "social attitudes towards the change, inefficiencies and disparities in the new schools, and unclear and inconsistent administrative procedures"[74].

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[73] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK.

[74] Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-manage-education-reform/

The K-12 reform also awakened cultural sensitivities since the SEC implemented a sudden shift to mandatory English teaching as well as math and science courses being taught entirely in English. This made the teachers, students and parents struggle with the rapid shift from their mother tongue as Islamic studies and Arabic courses were also scaled back.

This disconnect between the internationally competitive perspective driving this rapid educational reform and the stakeholder engagement played out in negative press coverage. The use of western consultants and the new curricular specifications were perceived as an attack on traditional Qatari identity and Islam's role in the social fabric[75]. The dearth of the reform's consideration for culture was criticized regionally as well with numerous religious leaders dubbing it "forced secularization"[76].

5.3 Lack of preparation from the Ministry for schools and teachers

Reform agendas in Qatar have short timelines and the leadership is eager to see fast results and progress. The K-12 reform was implemented quickly and with great hope, but the rapid speed was a let-down as it neglected engaging, preparing and developing the capacity of the key stakeholders on whom the long-term success of the reform depended.

This lack of trained teachers and staff directly impacted the successful implementation of new curriculums designed to meet international standards. Although Qatar tried to address this by recruiting considerably from abroad to meet short-term

[75] Nolan, 2012

[76] Nolan, 2012

EMI needs, "for the reform to take hold and be culturally acceptable, the training of Qatari teaching staff must be a priority"[77].

The lack of prior fundamental stakeholder engagement also led to a bureaucratic backlash, namely from the MOE who had been the largest employer of Qatari nationals[78].

5.4 The controversies of the reforms

Implementation of borrowed reform efforts in general is unpredictable and problematic[79]. The full range of challenges is often difficult to fully predict in the planning stages where key success factors of indigenization scenarios should be highlighted. The Qatari leadership had an ambitious national strategy and was eager to move ahead rapidly with the K-12 RAND reforms that were needed to feed into the success of the Vision 2030's ultimate human capital goals.

The main controversy generated by the K-12 reform initiative was rooted in the shift to English as a medium of instruction (EMI). As highlighted earlier in the paper, EMI was introduced to better prepare Qatari students for entry into higher education institutions that required English proficiency through minimum International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) testing scores. The process of implementing the RAND recommendations was hushed without proper consideration for the local context; hence it was not appropriately

[77] Nolan, 2012

[78] Nolan, 2012

[79] Phan, A. (2010). A New Paradigm of Educational Borrowing in the Gulf States: The Qatari Example. Middle East Institute. Retrieved 30 August 2017, from https://www.mei.edu/content/new-paradigm-educational-borrowing-gulf-states-qatari-example

indigenized from any of the stakeholder perspectives. Students, teachers and parents alike struggled as they were not properly prepared to adapt to the sudden shift to EMI, and consequently, controversy grew out of the dissatisfaction and frustration.

Others believe that the SEC's last minute policy changes and failure to hire or train enough teachers proficient in fluent English was a key factor in the lack of successful outcomes of EFNE – and not the EMI policy itself[80].

The legacy of the K-12 reforms is negative:

"After more than 13 years after launching the reform, there is one common sentiment that underpins the reaction of the educators interviewed […]: bitterness. There is bitterness about what their dream project could have achieved but has not, as well as bitterness about their genuine efforts and good intentions that have been misinterpreted or forgotten [amid] the public outrage that accompanied the educational process during those years. All the initial reform policies have been completely reversed after causing unprecedented social controversy and after years of policy instability. It is an indication that something went wrong at one or several points"[81].

5.5 Abrogation of the reforms

After the controversy and resulting pressure generated by EMI, the SEC rapidly reversed the language of instruction. Subsequently, SEC did not renew its ten-year

[80] Romanowski, M., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., & Al Attiyah, A. (2013). Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents. International Journal Of Education, 5(3), 108. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v5i3.3995

[81] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

contract with RAND, citing the failure to increase test scores as one of the reasons[82].

Although the charter school model has been full abrogated, public schools are still called Independent Schools as a remnant of the past reforms.

Some reforms were reversed before the return to a centralized system, such as converting independent schools from for-profit to non-profit schools in 2005-2006[83]. Other reforms were undone after 2011 with the SEC even reverting to some MOE practices such as distributing the weekly teaching schedule to schools[84]

In 2012, the third option presented in the initial RAND study – the Voucher model - was adopted by Qatar. It had been rejected initially in 2001 as the leadership did not believe their system was yet ready for a Voucher model. Every Qatari student thus became eligible for a school voucher to attend a private school approved by the SEC. The use of vouchers grew quickly, and the SEC has increasingly been adding more private schools to its approved list.

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[82] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (pp. 121-198). Springer International Publishing AG.

[83] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[84] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

This change has also generated concern that the surge of private schools – which are mostly Western oriented - could overshadow the public schools thus jeopardizing students' local cultural Arab/Islamic identity.[85]

5.6 A return to a centralized system

For a State like Qatar where the leadership decisions are not openly questioned, the return to a centralized system highlights the challenges encountered when it comes to educational reform. The K-12 educational reforms were designed to be change the system and grant more autonomy to schools. At first, both the SEC and MOE operated in parallel, however, gradually the SEC took over MOE's schools and role until it completely absorbed it towards 2011, while at the same time reversing many of the reform's policies[86].

The challenge of reforming coupled with a lack of clear guidelines, undermined public confidence. The public discontent combined with insufficient progress in international assessment tests (TIMSS, PIRLS, PISA), resulted in a steady return to a centralized system under the control of SEC. In his book, Nolan[87] quotes SEC officials and stakeholders as saying, "Right now we are back in a centralized system, but we don't want to admit it… the reform needs a reform", and "The political will is there, the

[85] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[86] AlKhater, L.R.M, (2016). Qatar's Borrowed K-12 Education Reform In Context. In M.N. Tok, L. Alkhater & L.A. Pal (Eds.), Policy-Making in a Transformative State. The Case of Qatar (pp. 97-130). Palgrave Macmillan: UK

[87] Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-manage-education-reform/

financial support is there, but what is missing is the right set-up and human resources. We need a clarification of vision".

5.7 A larger focus on Arabic as a language of instruction

Any fast-paced reform initiative needs continuous improvement and re-evaluation of goals and objectives. To address the frustration and controversy generated by EMI, the SEC reversed that policy. As of 2012, independent schools and Arabic private schools have begun teaching mathematics and science classes in Arabic to preserve Qatar's cultural heritage. This in turn has resurfaced fears that students will not be easily accepted to prestigious international universities set up in Qatar's Education City because they use EMI, and that it would decrease employment opportunities for graduating students[88].

In the span of a decade, the SEC changed its language policy twice. Even after the return to Arabic as the medium of instruction, many parents in Qatar were still concerned with the promotion of Arabic in schools.

6. Conclusion

6.1 A more 'localized', contextualized and culturally appropriate system

The history of global educational reform experiences has often warned about the challenges of borrowing educational systems and policies. "Whether the educational transfer is whole, selective or eclectic, the transfer isolates education from its political,

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[88] Khatri, S. (2013). Qatar's education system grapples with language challenges. Doha News. Retrieved 4 September 2017, from https://dohanews.co/qatars-education-system-grapples-with-language-challenges/

economic, and cultural context"[89].

Qatar should build on its reform experiences and look at lessons learned to develop a more culturally appropriate system, as opposed to looking to other models designed for a Western context. With over fifteen years of experience since EFNE, there is a solid pool of local experts and stakeholders who can re-evaluate the reform initiative within the local Qatari context.

Qatar needs to draw on the lessons learnt since the implementation of EFNE as well as use local experts to develop their own unique reform model that meets the needs of Qatari students and considers its stakeholders. The pitfalls of a top-down approach with rapid change prior to stakeholder engagement must be one such lesson taken to heart, especially considering the SEC shifted its schools back to Arabic instruction as rapidly as it had shifted them out of it.

6.2 The need to involve all relevant stakeholders in the process

"Everybody is a stakeholder in primary education in Qatar"[90]. The fast pace of the reforms, without first engaging stakeholders, created social and economic complications which led to the reversal of several of EFNE's reforms as well as re-centralization under the SEC, which has now been incorporated into The Ministry of Education and Higher Education. The pace of reform should be determined by the system's ability to train its

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[89] Romanowski, M., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., & Al Attiyah, A. (2013). Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents. International Journal Of Education, 5(3), 108. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v5i3.3995

[90] Author's interview with Ministry of Finance/Education 2002/3 committee member, Doha, Qatar, February 2011. Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-manage-education-reform/

teachers and administrators. In the absence of this, educational reforms will not achieve intended improvements in the classroom that depend on professionally developed teachers and capable principals[91].

In recent years however, Qatar has sought out stakeholder feedback on the system. Additionally, the SEC set up a Teachers' Council to get teachers' feedback on improvements to the education system[92]. For any future educational reform to be successful in Qatar, it must seek the support of its stakeholders and understand the role each stakeholder plays, as well as their views on the issues raised by the previous reform experience[93].

6.3 Preparing schools and teachers

In the early years, the SEC acknowledged that for the Independent School system to succeed, it needed a strategy to ensure the availability of highly qualified and well-trained educators. Simply attracting the best qualified Qatari educators and staff was not enough, as they would still require a different skillset for the decentralized standards based on EFNE system[94].

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[91] Nolan, L. (2012). Liberalizing Monarchies? How Gulf Monarchies Manage Education Reform. Brookings. Retrieved 1 September 2017, from https://www.brookings.edu/research/liberalizing-monarchies-how-gulf-monarchies-manage-education-reform/

[92] MacLeod, P. and Abou-El-Kheir, A. English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa, Kirkpartick, R. (Ed.). Springer, (2017)

[93] Romanowski, M., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., & Al Attiyah, A. (2013). Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents. International Journal Of Education, 5(3), 108. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v5i3.3995

[94] Brewer, Dominic J., et al. "Education for a New Era: Design and Implementation of K-12 Education Reform in Qatar". Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2007

After reverting to Arabic as a medium of instruction, in part due to the lack of English proficiency on the part of many Independent School teachers and parting of ways with RAND, Qatar shifted their focus to teacher education reform as a means to improve the K-12 system[95]. The SEC put in place teacher quality assurance measures and partnered with Qatar University's, National Center for Educator Development (NCED), which was established in 2010. According to their website, their mandate is 'to develop well qualified teachers for Independent Schools and to conduct research to develop best practices for teachers in Qatar, and to inform policy decisions and to facilitate leadership development'.

Another factor to consider is the big difference between spoken Arabic dialects and the standard written Arabic as this often confuses students when it comes to class instructions. Qatar could address this by allocating more resources into the teaching of Arabic. There are currently no teacher training opportunities focused either on the teaching of Arabic or English which seems a significant oversight given the new emphasis on teacher quality and the importance of language to learning[96]. The results of the strategy that plays out post-EFNE will hopefully provide insight into the changing of language of instruction – which is the correct path for Qatar[97].

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[95] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (pp. 121-198). Springer International Publishing AG.

[96] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (pp. 121-198). Springer International Publishing AG.

[97] Romanowski, M., Cherif, M., Al Ammari, B., & Al Attiyah, A. (2013). Qatar's Educational Reform: The Experiences and Perceptions of Principals, Teachers and Parents. International Journal Of Education, 5(3), 108. http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ije.v5i3.3995

Furthermore, the SEC in partnership with Qatar Foundation and Qatar Petroleum launched an Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO) called Teach for Qatar[98][99], that recruits recent university graduates and trains them as part of a two year leadership and teaching program, and then places them in Independent schools.

The SEC has accepted that a crucial factor in realizing its goals is improved teaching and to this end is planning other initiatives with Qatar Foundation, such as a new professional development centre for teachers[100].

6.4 The need to pilot potential projects prior to large scale rollout.

Fullan identifies four crucial criteria that must work together in order to judge the effectiveness of a driver[101] to bring about successful whole educational system reform[102]. Specifically, the right drivers would: a) foster intrinsic motivation of both teachers and students; b) foster continuous improvement in teaching and learning; c) inspire teamwork, and d) Affect all teachers and students.

With the considerable effort and expense that has gone into Qatar's educational system reforms, the challenges that arose could have been addressed in a limited scale

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[98] Teach for Qatar. http://www.teachforqatar.org/en

[99] Indecently, and although this program (Teach for Qatar) is the right idea, it is also a program borrowed and imported from an international initiative, Teach for America.

[100] MacLeod, P., and Abou-El-Kheir, A. (2017). Qatar's English Education Policy in K-12 and Higher Education: Rapid Development, Radical Reform and Transition to a New Way Forward. In R. Kirkpatrick (Ed), English Language Education Policy in the Middle East and North Africa (pp. 121-198). Springer International Publishing AG.

[101] Fullan defines a wrong driver as a deliberate policy force that has little chance of achieving the desired result, while a right driver is one that achieves better measurable results for students.

[102] Fullan, M. (2011). Choosing the wrong drivers for whole system reform. East Melbourne, Vic.: Centre for Strategic Education.

pilot group on a smaller scale, before the system-wide roll-out[103]. The advantages of piloting potential projects first include lower risk of failure, assessing the actual performance outcomes in a limited smaller control group, the ability to learn by testing and validating proposed solutions, and then improving them before large scale roll-out, increase stakeholder buy-in and build stakeholder relationships.

System-wide reform, once implemented, is costly when it comes to addressing failure and implementing learning on a wider scale. Identifying and correcting wrong drivers on a smaller scale as well as testing simulations for process improvement are some of the more manageable traits of a pilot group.

6.5 Fostering a culture of academic achievement

Teachers play a crucial role in student motivation. Nasser[104] studied the associations among teacher support, peer support, social power goals, gender, and academic achievement of Qatari students and found that gender and social power were not considerably linked with achievement, but that teacher and peer support were positive predictors of academic achievement. Competent and supportive teachers who practice fairness and respect in their classrooms were proven to motivate students to learn. Likewise, supportive friends and peers provide social and emotional support, which motivates academic achievement.

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[103] Pilot & Implementation Planning - Six Sigma Study Guide. Six Sigma Study Guide. Retrieved 6 September 2017, from http://sixsigmastudyguide.com/pilot-implementation-planning/

[104] King, R., Bernardo, A., & Nasser, R. (2016). The Psychology of Asian Learners. Springer.com. Retrieved 6 September 2017, from http://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789812875754

The results of Nasser's study show that schools and teachers can foster a culture of academic achievement by creating scenarios in schools and classrooms that enhance positive interactions among students and between students and teachers. Teachers could use collaborative learning techniques in class such as group work and support the achievements of students.

Efforts taking place within schools to build a culture of academic achievement should also be reinforced at home. Nasser[105] highlights the importance of communicating to parents the role of social motivation in providing support and encouragement. As part of a roll out of such efforts, parent workshops are recommended to educate them on what they can do in terms of support and setting goals for their children's educational achievements.

7. Recommendations

Qatar has undergone development at an unprecedented pace. The education sector has been part of this great growth and transition. Since the turn of the century, the Qatari government has invested vast amounts of funds and resources in reforming their underachieving K-12 sector. While there have been numerous controversies of the implemented reforms, trying to balance and respect national and cultural expectations on the one hand and attempting to modernize the education system on the other to not only keep up to world standards but to also produce a population prepared for post-secondary education as well as to undertake the challenges of a 21st century knowledge economy. There have also been some great achievements, such as high, and increasing,

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[105] Nasser, R. (2017). Qatar's educational reform past and future: challenges in teacher development. Open Review Of Educational Research, 4(1), 1-19. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2016.1266693

literacy rates, improved, albeit at a slower than expected rate, and international test scores.

The education sector is still learning what the best way forward as a nation is in order to fulfil their vision of becoming an independent and knowledge producing country, and although Qatar is not finished with their reforms, they have come a long way from a relatively non-existent education system a few decades ago which had a highly illiterate population. Qatar is gradually establishing itself as a leading education centre in the Arabian Gulf and the greater Middle East.

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