

Bilingual Identities of Kuwaiti Students at Universities with EMI

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Abstract : Though Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) is the only official language in GCC states, including Kuwait, and traditionally the preferred vehicle for literacy in the Arab countries, recent studies in Qatar and the UAE observe a growing role of English, particularly in literacy and knowledge transmission contexts. The present study examines the attitudes to Arabic and English and the use of both languages in literacy-related domains based on a sample of bilingual Arabic-English undergraduates (N=522) at a private university with EMI in Kuwait. The results indicate that Arabic (Kuwaiti dialect) is associated with familial interactions, Arabic-English bilingualism predominates in interactions with classmates, friends, on social media and at work, while English is prevalent in literacy-related contexts such as reading books, magazines, or online material, domains traditionally associated with MSA. Attitudes towards Arabic and English are equally positive according to the majority of the respondents, who report being comfortable expressing themselves and projecting their identity in both languages. No statistically significant differences were found comparing the importance of Arabic and English in the sample. Future trends were identified based on high agreement on the importance of speaking English with children and low agreement on speaking only Arabic at home. The study corroborates recently observed trends in the GCC favoring bilingualism across personal, academic and professional domains, with English becoming the preferred language of literacy among young bilingual Kuwaitis.

Keywords : bilingual, English, Arabic, EMI, identity

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