

English Literature in Qatari English Language Classrooms

*What perceptions about the use of English literature texts
are held by Arab Muslim [primary or high school] English
language teachers in Qatar, in relation to their society's
traditional cultural values?*

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Preface

The confidentiality of the research participants appearing in this thesis has been protected by using pseudonyms for the individuals and for the institutions which were mentioned during interviews..

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores views of expatriate male Muslim Arab teachers in regards to the use of English literature, particularly graded English language readers, in the teaching of English as a second or foreign language in Qatari Independent (State) schools (Yrs 1-12). It adopts a phenomenological methodology in analysing the life experiences and perceptions of Arab Muslim English language teachers in Qatar and other Middle Eastern nations. It finds that these teachers have a dual responsibility in supporting local Muslim cultural and religious values while utilizing best practice in using English literature to support English language acquisition.

Specific research literature about the impact of western ideas reflected in literature used in ESL programs in Arab Muslim countries is limited. But this thesis takes the funnel approach to research, identifying the research of parallel issues in parallel contexts, and thus providing a broad background to the topic. The discussion is complex, by virtue of the range of views that those bearing the name Muslim can and do espouse, and by the range of subjects, values and worldviews represented in the literature of the English language. Nevertheless, the issue is significant as the event which provided the catalyst for this research demonstrated. The event was a parent/teacher interview at a state high school in Doha, Qatar, where the father of a Year 10 student asked his expatriate Arab teacher of English, “Why is my son reading Western (English) literature in his English class?” This parent objected to the possibility that his son was being exposed to literature reflecting Western values and ideas, which can be offensive to Muslim parents and educators. This research therefore provides a valuable contribution to an important discussion in international education.

In-depth interviews were conducted with six male Arab Islamic primary school and secondary school English teachers. They were questioned about the role of the teacher in promoting Islamic values and culture. They identified in interview and in survey the key values they aimed to support. They also identified elements of western culture that they believe should be avoided in order to support and protect the religious values of their students and the community.

The research importantly focuses on the demands of expatriate Arab teachers seeking to implement best Western language teaching practice in a rapidly developing Muslim nation while supporting the prevailing local customs and beliefs. This study will investigate the perspectives of respondents to using Western literature as an English language teaching resource. This literature often contains literary characters whose values, attitudes and behaviours may be considered offensive to Islamic stakeholders (parents, students, teachers or community members). The study explores the participants' selection and treatment of this literature in the light of competing educational and cultural imperatives. The research suggests that educational objectives can be met, along with religious and cultural objectives, if adjustments are made in literature selection and application.