



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This policy paper describes some key characteristics of the male English teachers working in government schools in Ras Al Khaimah, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and discusses the policy implications of this information. The data and analysis presented are the result of a research study conducted during the 2012–2013 academic year. This mixed-methods study is based on questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations with male English teachers. The findings have policy implications for the development of current teachers and the recruitment of new teachers. Policy recommendations include the development of a comprehensive assessment and feedback system and the piloting of alternative strategies for recruiting English teachers.

Who Teaches English in Ras Al Khaimah? Implications for the Recruitment and Development of Male English Teachers

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Introduction

The aim of this policy paper is to discuss the characteristics and experience of male English teachers in Ras Al Khaimah and the implications of this information for recruiting and training high-quality English teachers. The data and analysis presented here are from a research study conducted during the 2012–2013 academic year. This mixed-methods study is based on questionnaires, interviews, and classroom observations. The results indicate that there is no simple measure for identifying the characteristics of an effective English teacher in Ras Al Khaimah. At the same time, the results point to some possible policy options.

This policy paper begins with some contextual information then offers a review of relevant literature related to teacher characteristics and teacher effectiveness. Then the study's methods are described, and its findings are reviewed. Finally, the paper discusses possible policy implications and makes recommendations for improving English teacher recruitment in Ras Al Khaimah.

English and English Education in Ras Al Khaimah

Arabic is the official language in the UAE, and it is estimated that approximately 100 other languages are spoken in the country (Randall & Samimi, 2010). At the same time, the English language has become the de facto second language of the country (Randall & Samimi, 2010). English is used in many government offices and private companies and is the medium of instruction for most tertiary education in the country (Alwan, 2006; Randall & Samimi, 2010).

In government schools, English is a compulsory foreign language from grade one through grade 12 (Ministry of Education, 2014). There are indications that the leadership of the UAE and Ras Al Khaimah value the teaching and learning of the English language. At the federal level, a new call to improve the English language curriculum signals that developing students' English language levels is a priority (Ministry of Education, 2014). Dedication to improving English language outcomes in Ras Al Khaimah in particular is evident in light of the government's investment in English education initiatives. One such initiative is the genesis of this research project.

In 2012, the Al Qasimi Foundation, in conjunction with the Ministry of Education, offered a development program for English teachers in the emirate. This included evaluating the English teachers' English language skills through a paper-based TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) test. Some of these results are discussed below. Additionally, the Ras Al Khaimah Education Zone, the Al Qasimi Foundation, the American University of Ras Al Khaimah, and the Higher Colleges of Technology partnered to provide pedagogical and English language training to English teachers in Ras Al Khaimah. The participants in the pedagogy training are the subjects of the study discussed here.¹

Focus on Male Teachers

This research study focuses on the male teachers in Ras Al Khaimah. While female teachers participated in a professional development program to improve their English language skills, they did not participate in the pedagogy-centered program. There is cause for more concern about the quality of education in boys' schools than in girls' schools (Ridge, 2009; Ridge, 2010; Russell, 2012; Ridge & Farah, 2012; Ridge, 2014). For these reasons, the study focused on the teachers in boys' schools, who are all male. Examination of the female English teachers would likely yield useful, and possibly divergent, results but is outside the scope of this study.

Literature Review: Teacher Characteristics

There is a significant body of research from the West indicating that teachers vary in their effectiveness (see Hanushek, 1986 for a dated but comprehensive review of evidence from the United States). Some research indicates that teachers have an effect on student achievement, even though the particular characteristics that contribute to this effect may be unclear (Chingos & Peterson, 2011; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rice, 2012). In one large-scale randomized experiment of the effect of teachers in public schools in the United States, researchers found that the teacher affected student performance more than the overall school environment did. In other words, "which teacher a student happens to get within a school matters more than which school the student happens

to attend" (Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004, p. 247). The overall quality of a teacher is difficult to define, but scholars have used a variety of measures to characterize teacher quality. Here, the focus is on three of these characteristics: experience, education, and subject knowledge.

Experience

Much has been written about the role of experience in teacher effectiveness. Many studies (primarily in the United States), have found a correlation between experience and teacher effectiveness, particularly in the first years of a teacher's career. However, the correlation between years of experience and teacher effectiveness plateaus over time. After five to ten years of teaching, the value of experience declines and eventually becomes negative (Chingos & Peterson, 2011; Kane, Rockoff, & Staiger, 2008; Rice, 2010). According to the literature, teachers with a few years of experience are more effective than teachers with no experience, but teachers with extensive experience are no more effective than those with a few years of experience. In fact, some studies have shown that teachers with the most experience (more than 25 years) may be less effective than their peers who have less experience (Rice, 2010).

Education

A teacher's education (both the amount and the type) has an uncertain effect on student achievement. In many school systems, teachers are rewarded for additional degrees or coursework with higher pay based on the assumption that additional coursework will translate to more effective teaching. However, the empirical evidence on this issue is mixed. When examining the impact of advanced degrees on teacher effectiveness, the degrees are shown to have minimal and inconsistent impact (Harris & Sass, 2008; Chingos & Peterson, 2011).

The type of education that teachers receive may also impact teacher effectiveness. Generally, this is divided into pedagogical education versus subject or content knowledge education. Pedagogical education generally refers to programs that include foundational knowledge related to education (child development, educational psychology, etc.) alongside coursework for the development of the pedagogical skills required

¹ The author of this paper facilitated the pedagogy-training program. It included 15 hours of face-to-face classes and five homework assignments requiring reflection and application. Topics covered by the training included techniques for teaching English as a Foreign Language, classroom management, reflective teaching, and lesson planning. Each teacher was observed teaching and given feedback on his use of the techniques covered in the course.

for planning and delivering content to students. Some scholars, such as Linda Darling-Hammond (2012), have asserted that the pedagogical preparation of teachers is key to student success (Byrne, 1983; Cohen & Hill, 2000; Myhill, Jones, & Watson, 2013). In one study of 200 teachers, researchers found that the pedagogical coursework in teacher education was a more powerful predictor of teacher effectiveness than measures of subject matter knowledge (Ferguson & Womack, 1993). In contrast, others have found no difference between teachers with degrees in education and those with content area degrees (Chingos & Peterson, 2011; Murnane & Steele, 2007).

Subject Knowledge

There is some evidence that teachers' subject knowledge has an impact on student achievement; however, the extent of the impact is not certain. While the body of research is ambiguous, one study focused on language teachers found a statistically significant correlation between the teachers' speaking skills and student achievement in speaking and listening (Carroll, 1975). Harris and Sass (2008) also found that emphasis on content knowledge within a teacher-training program yielded more productive teachers.

Given the literature reviewed above, one might expect that teachers with degrees in education and with a solid knowledge of the English language would produce students with higher test scores. In addition, teachers with some classroom experience, but not too much, would perform better than their inexperienced colleagues.

Methods

The participants of this study were all male English teachers who participated in a professional development program sponsored by the Sheikh Saud bin Saqr Al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research and the Ministry of Education. The sample reflects the purpose of the teacher-training program. Ninety-four male English teachers participated, representing approximately 80% of the male English teachers in the emirate. Male English teachers within three years of retirement age or those pursuing or who already held master's degrees in education were excluded from the study, as they were not required to attend the training. The data were collected from 164 teacher questionnaires (pre- and post-training), 94 classroom observations, and 28 semi-structured interviews. While all participants filled out the initial questionnaire, twenty-four post-training questionnaires were not

returned. The research was conducted between September 2012 and May 2013 in Ras Al Khaimah.

Quantitative data were analyzed using simple correlational analyses that do not take into account other factors that may influence student performance, such as school resources or student characteristics. Therefore, the quantitative findings are limited in their utility. The qualitative data, including interviews and field notes, were coded and analyzed thematically.

This study sought to determine if some easily measurable teacher qualities are correlated with better student outcomes in English. The analysis is a first step in improving teacher recruitment and development for English education in the emirate. The gross measure of student test scores was used as a proxy for students' achievement. While this measure is simplistic, the results will inform more refined studies.

Findings

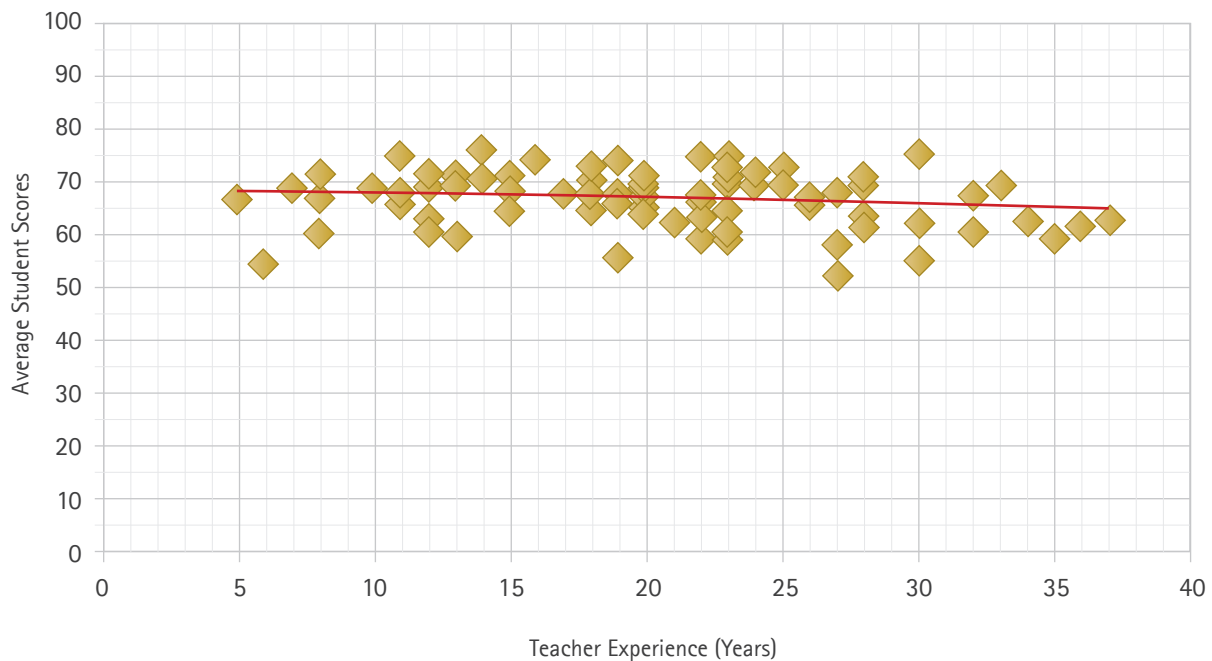
This section presents findings related to male English teachers' levels of experience. This is followed by information about the teachers' educations and their knowledge of subject matter.

Experience

The average number of years of teaching experience among male English teachers in the study was 21 years ($SD=7.5$, range 5-37). Since teachers who were nearing retirement were excused from the teacher-training program, we might conclude that the average experience of the study group is lower than in the total population of male English teachers in the emirate. The exclusion of teachers in education graduate programs has an unknown impact on the average number of years of teaching experience. In the sample, there were no inexperienced teachers. Unless those seeking graduate degrees were inexperienced, this indicates that none of the male English teachers in the emirate have fewer than five years of experience. As can be seen in Figure 1, when years of experience were correlated with student achievement (as represented by test scores), a weak negative correlation was found but was not of statistical significance ($r=-.12$, $p=.266$).

While not statistically significant, the finding does echo the research reviewed previously in the paper on the decreased impact of teachers who have more than 25 years of experience. If this trend is similar in Ras Al Khaimah, there is some cause for concern that the average length of teaching experience among male English teachers is high.

Figure 1: Teacher Experience vs. Average Student Scores



Education

The participants in this study have varied educational backgrounds. The teachers hail from eight countries,² each with different teacher preparation requirements. In the survey, participants were asked about their highest levels of education. From these answers, the teachers were assigned to three different groups. The "English" group reported having a degree in English. The "Education" group declared a major in education, and the "Other" group provided either a vague response or reported a degree in something other than English or education. The average TOEFL scores of each group were compared. While the scores differed, with the English majors having higher average TOEFL results, the differences between the groups were not statistically significant: $F(2, 48)=1.322, p=.276$. Similarly, there was no statistically significant difference among the groups regarding student outcomes as measured by test scores: $F(1, 91)=.014, p=.986$.

Two participants indicated that they had master's degrees, one in English literature and one in business. They were not excused from the course because the degrees were not in education. Some teachers who were enrolled in master's of education programs were excused from the teacher-training program, and are, therefore, not included in the sample. An additional two participants have since joined a master's of

education program. Because of the small number of participants with advanced degrees, no conclusions can be reached about the impact of this additional education. Interestingly, the participant with the business degree had highly favorable observation reports and was observed implementing the techniques he learned in the pedagogy-training program.

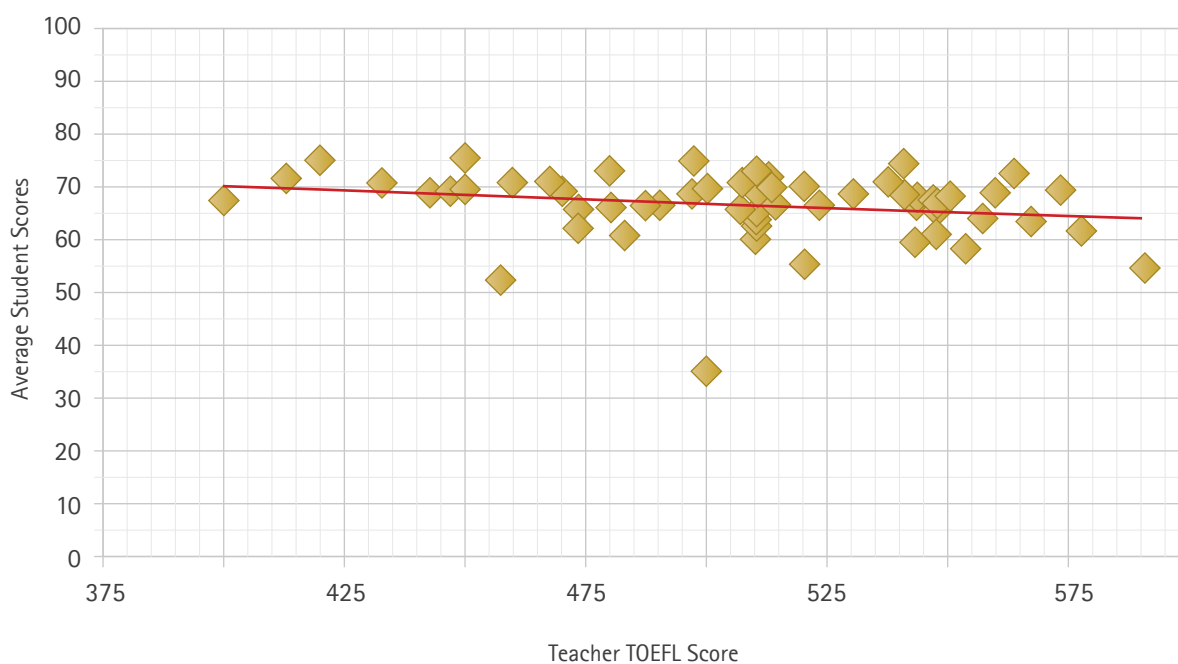
Subject matter knowledge

As indicated above, some research has connected subject matter knowledge with student achievement. Using TOEFL scores as a proxy for English language knowledge, teacher scores were compared to student test scores, and no statistically significant relationship was found ($N=61, r=-.21, p=.104$). This can be seen in Figure 2 on the next page.

The results suggest that the teachers' content knowledge may not contribute to student test scores. However, TOEFL scores were not available for many participants, creating a limitation for this finding. The average TOEFL score for the teachers in the training program was 507 ($SD=43.46$, range 400–590). Admission to most undergraduate programs in the UAE requires a TOEFL equivalent of 500. It is surprising that many English teachers did not meet this standard. In further study of English teachers, additional measures of English language proficiency may be informative.

² Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, and the UAE

Figure 2: Teacher TOEFL Scores vs. Average Student Scores



The quantitative data indicate that English language skills may not impact student test scores. However, the data from classroom observations provide a richer understanding of how teachers' English skills impact instruction. The study's researchers observed several instances in which poor English skills impacted the quality of the lesson being delivered to students. Researchers also observed teachers' using a variety of techniques to compensate for limited English skills.

One account offers examples of both phenomena. A teacher with a 450 TOEFL score used short video clips to introduce new grammar concepts rather than explaining them to the class himself. According to interviews, the teacher used outside resources such as videos to enrich lessons but also employed videos when he felt unsure of the material that he was to deliver. Despite using an outside resource to explain the concept, this teacher later explicitly taught an irregular past tense verb incorrectly. This was not the only instance in which the researchers observed teachers' giving students incorrect information in class.

It is also significant to note that all of the teachers who were identified as effective instructors on the observation evaluation³ had TOEFL scores that were at least 40 points higher than the average. This echoes some of the literature described above (Carroll, 1975; Harris & Sass, 2008) that shows a correlation

between content knowledge and teacher effectiveness. The results of this study contribute to this body of knowledge and warrant further investigation into the link.

There is a contradiction between the quantitative data correlating TOEFL scores with student test scores and with the qualitative teacher observations. The difference could point to the imperfect nature of using TOEFL scores and student test scores as proxies for English knowledge and student achievement. The impact of excellent teaching may not be immediately apparent in the test scores; benefits may be clearer some time later. Also, what the researchers deem "excellent teaching" in teacher observations may not lead to higher test scores. Further research will be needed to better understand this inconsistency in the data.

In sum, the study results indicate that the male English teachers in Ras Al Khaimah are an experienced group of expatriate Arab men with varying levels of preparation for teaching English. On average, their English language skills are lower than expected. No basic demographic information among teachers predicted better scores among students, but the teachers identified as demonstrating the best teaching abilities generally had higher TOEFL scores than did the other participants.

³ As measured by an observation rating system created for this project and adapted from an instrument developed by The New Teacher Project (2011).

Policy Discussion

This study highlights the need to develop policies that address the recruitment and retention of quality male English teachers in Ras Al Khaimah. Four policy options are outlined below.

Option One: The most basic possibility is that Ras Al Khaimah's government schools remain on their current path. This trajectory includes continuing to recruit expatriate Arab men from a variety of countries to teach English in the emirate and maintaining the current teacher development processes. Without further intervention, one can assume that student outcomes will not improve.

Option Two: If the recruitment pool of expatriate Arab men were to remain the same, efforts could be made to ensure that new recruits have higher standards of English. Our results indicate that no simple measures of teacher experience or education will easily predict which teachers will produce students who perform well on the English exams. However, there is some indication that the teachers who have higher TOEFL scores relative to other English teachers will teach at a high level. Therefore, it may be beneficial to recruit and employ men with higher TOEFL scores.

Option Three: Another alternative to staffing English classrooms with expatriate Arab men is to recruit from an entirely different group of teachers. Possible recruits could include Emirati men (the scarcity of whom is the reason expatriates are currently employed), native English speakers, or Southeast Asian teachers. Administrators should enact such a drastic change in hiring practice with caution. A pilot program with rigorous evaluation measures should precede any large-scale recruitment of new types of teachers. Alternatively, Emirati women could be allowed to teach English in cycle two and three schools.⁴ This may be a controversial approach, but academic achievement results from girls' schools are higher than those from boys' schools (Ahmed, 2011; Ridge, 2010; Walker, 2011). While there are a variety of social factors contributing to this (Russell, 2012), teacher effectiveness is likely a factor indicating that using female teachers may be an effective way to improve English education in boys' schools.

Option Four: A key to improving student outcomes independent of recruitment effort may be the adoption of a teacher assessment program to identify highly effective teachers currently teaching in Ras Al Khaimah. These effective teachers can then be rewarded, and their talents can be leveraged through mentoring and other development programs. While

a teacher appraisal system exists in Ras Al Khaimah, teachers in the study indicated that they are not observed regularly and rarely receive feedback. One noted that the researchers in the study were the only individuals to observe his teaching and give him feedback in the previous four years.

The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards Certification (NBPTS) system in the United States is an example of a successful teacher assessment program. This is a voluntary certification program available to teachers. Teachers who are certified by the NBPTS have been found to be more effective than those who are not certified (Chingos & Peterson, 2011). A similar program of teacher assessment and self-reflection may assist in determining which teachers should continue teaching in Ras Al Khaimah and who should be rewarded for excellent teaching. The recently announced teacher licensure program (see Dajani & Pennington, 2014) is an opportunity to create a high quality assessment system that could include analytic feedback and support for further teacher professional development. In addition to rewarding excellent teaching, this type of teacher assessment system would allow struggling teachers to be identified early and provided with appropriate interventions and professional development to improve their effectiveness in the classroom.

Recommendations

A reasonable plan of action would combine elements from the four options above. The current course of recruiting expatriate Arab men to teach English in Ras Al Khaimah can remain in place while policymakers pilot alternative solutions related to teacher recruitment. Administrators should implement a comprehensive system of assessment and feedback for the current English teachers. Additionally, because of the importance of English language skills in this community, policymakers should also invest in pilot programs in order to determine the effectiveness of a variety of recruiting models. As with any large-scale intervention, rigorous evaluations of these changes are necessary to ensure the improvement of English language education in the emirate.

The following general recommendations stem from this project:

- Education leadership should include some standard measure of English language competency, such as TOEFL testing, in the process of recruiting English teachers;
- Implement a rigorous system of evaluation and feedback for English teachers; and

⁴ At the primary level, female teachers teach in some boys' schools.

- Pilot alternative strategies for recruiting English teachers.

While an easy solution—such as hiring only teachers with education degrees—may be attractive, the research indicates measures like this would not guarantee improved student achievement scores. The study found

that teacher experience and education were not clearly correlated with student test scores. Therefore, without simple measures to predict who will be an effective teacher, we should look towards more sophisticated ways of identifying teachers who perform well and whose skills translate to student achievement.

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- to enrich the local public sector, especially education, by providing educators and civil servants in Ras Al Khaimah with tools to make a positive impact on their own society, and
- to build a spirit of community, collaboration, and shared vision through purposeful engagement that fosters relationships among individuals and organizations.

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