



English Proficiency Among Public and Private High School Graduates in the Arab World

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إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية بين خريجي المدارس الثانوية العامة والخاصة في العالم العربي

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المستخلص:

تم تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية لعقود في المدارس الثانوية العامة والخاصة في جميع أنحاء العالم العربي. ومع ذلك، يثار التساؤل حول مدى إجادة طلاب المدارس الثانوية لهذه اللغة. للإجابة على هذا السؤال، تم اختيار عينة عشوائية من ٢٥٩ خريجًا من المدارس الثانوية الناطقين بالعربية من مناطق مختلفة للمشاركة في هذه الدراسة، التي تناولت الفروقات بين مستوى إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية لدى خريجي المدارس الثانوية العامة والخاصة التي تعتمد المناهج الوطنية. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تم إجراء اختبار تحليل التباين (ANOVA). أظهرت النتائج أن خريجي المدارس الثانوية من الذكور والإناث في العالم العربي لديهم مستوى مماثل من إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية، بغض النظر عن جنسهم. علاوة على ذلك، لم يبدو أن نوع المدرسة الثانوية التي التحق بها المشاركون يؤثر بشكل كبير على مستوى إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية لدى خريجي المدارس الثانوية في العالم العربي وفقًا لهذه الدراسة. يشير ذلك إلى أن جودة تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية متسقة نسبيًا عبر المدارس الثانوية العامة والخاصة في العينة. هذا الغياب للفروقات الكبيرة يشير إلى أن إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية، كما تم قياسها من خلال درجات الاختبار في هذه الدراسة، لم تتأثر بشكل قوي بهذا المتغير. هذه النتائج لها تداعيات هامة لصناع السياسات التعليمية ومطوري المناهج، حيث يمكن أن تكون مرتبطة بعوامل أخرى مثل كفاءة المعلمين، التربية الأسرية، أساليب التدريس، دافعية الطلاب، الوضع الاجتماعي والاقتصادي، أو التعرض الإضافي للغة الإنجليزية من خلال الأنشطة اللاصفية. لذلك، يوصى بشدة بفحص كفاءة وقيمة المدارس الخاصة المضافة في العالم العربي.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إجادة اللغة الإنجليزية، المدارس الثانوية، المدارس العامة، المدارس الخاصة.



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Abstract:

English has been taught for decades in both public and private high schools throughout the Arab world. However, the question arises about just how proficient high school students are at the language. To answer this question, a random sample of 259 native Arabic-speaking high school graduates from different regions participated in this research study that looked at the differences between English language proficiency of native Arabic-speaking graduates of public and private high schools that teach national curricula. Additionally, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed. The findings suggested that both male and female high school graduates in the Arab world have similar English proficiency, regardless of their gender. Moreover, the type of high school that the participants attended did not appear to significantly influence the English language proficiency of high school graduates in the Arab world in this study. This suggests that the quality of English education is relatively consistent across different public and private high schools in the sample. This lack of significant differences suggested that English language proficiency, as measured by the test scores in this research study, was not strongly influenced by this variable. These results had important implications for educational policymakers and curriculum developers, which could be related to other factors such as teachers' competency, family upbringing, teaching methods, student motivation, socioeconomic status, or extracurricular exposure to English. Thus, it is highly recommended to examine the efficiency and added value of private schools in the Arab world.

Keywords: English proficiency, high school, public school, private school.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Arab world has been teaching English education as an important foreign language for nearly a century, particularly within private schools where bilingual practices play an essential role in fostering a multi-cultural learning environment. By integrating both Arabic and English languages into curriculum, schools equip native Arabic-speaking students with the tools to communicate effectively with different people across the Arab world and, indeed, around the globe, as English has become the international language of communication. While English education practices really offer numerous benefits, they also present challenges, such as balancing the focus on Arabic and English languages in a way that addresses equal proficiency in both languages, a fact that some educational experts doubt.

In the academic world, English language acquisition among students attending public, private, and international schools has garnered significant attention (Yi, 2023), thus inviting policymakers to find solutions that minimize the language gap while maintaining the language learning efficiency. As the issue of uneven language proficiency among bilingual students has been a concern (Alasmari et al., 2022), private schools that have more operational flexibility were founded as an excellent alternative for parents who are willing to give their children access to better opportunities for learning English. This shows how the ability to balance languages is crucial (Alzabidi & Al-Ahdal, 2022). Thus, ideologies surrounding English education for native Arabic-speaking students have been promoted, and, moreover, addressing language development in K–12 education became a hot topic (Allehyani, 2023). To rightly address such a crucial concern, Arab educators turned to innovative approaches that gained traction as an effective tool for promoting bilingualism among students (Candan-Yemez & Dikilitaş, 2022).

As a result, the purpose of this research was to look at the differences between the English language proficiency of native Arabic-speaking graduates of public and private high schools. Because some parents choose to pay for private education, which they believe provides better English education, an investigation into the English learning outcomes has been carried out to see if there are any significant differences that make sending children to private schools worth it in terms of English language proficiency. It is important to mention that the comparison in this research study was between public and private schools that provide the Saudi Arabian national



curriculum. The results could completely differ if the comparison were made with international school graduates.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is no doubt that in the age of globalization, English language acquisition is critical for everyone around the world. Students wishing to achieve academic excellence have to reach an advanced level in English (Serajuddin, 2023). In most countries, including the Arab world, the quest for English language proficiency seems increasingly crucial (Al-almi & Alhamami, 2024). As a result, many nations, including those of the Middle East, have been integrating English language learning into the curricula of other subjects. It is a fact that English proficiency is the gateway to many academic and professional opportunities. English increases students' career progress and also promotes their efficiency. Many countries known for their multicultural societies include English language courses in their K–12 schools. Teaching English internationally has become a broad move towards providing students with the required competences (Murad et al., 2023).

In the Arab world, both public and private schools adopt distinct English language instruction, influencing K–12 students' learning levels (Ndiaye et al., 2024). These public and private schools are supervised and guided by official ministries. However, public schools are visibly constrained by limited resources and confronted by challenges embodied in offering high-quality English language education (Khawaji, 2023). In contrast, private schools usually involve potentially greater resources that allow them to offer immersive English language education settings (Faruk, 2023). K–12 students face challenges during their English learning journey (Suliman et al., 2024) due to different reasons like weak resources, crowded classrooms, and so on. (Chen et al., 2024). As a result, private school students might have access to better resources that allow them to facilitate more personalized learning experiences (Velnic et al., 2023).

In order to minimize the gap between public and private schools, there are many initiatives that could be used to address disparities in English language education (Meng, 2023). Through peer-to-peer education and cultural exchange, students coming from diverse backgrounds could be motivated to collectively raise their language

proficiency levels (Danzeng, 2024). These initiatives may include many factors influencing language acquisition (Dzhubanova, 2024).

First, cultural norms could be one of the main factors impacting language learning. There is an initiative to focus on the linguistic differences between native Arabic-speaking students and English-language dialects. Second, the educational surroundings that students are expected to immerse themselves in have been taken care of. Third, resources (e.g., additional courses, tutoring services, and exchange programs) can be utilized to greatly enhance students' capabilities. This includes progressive support from mentors and peers through introducing adequate learning conditions. Fourth, as enthusiasm and patience are extremely important in learning, some stimulating programs should be offered for international students to effectively and repetitively communicate in the target language. Fifth, effective language learning techniques can hugely affect students' language learning. From vocabulary exercises to immersion experiences, varied methods can satisfy learning preferences. Moreover, steering learning and sustaining confidence during communication are really fruitful. Finally, the role of high-quality teaching is critical. The dynamic and attractive educational settings, personalized lesson plans, and constructive criticism are critical aspects to foster students' language learning. These mentioned strategies have made the difference between public and private high schools in terms of English language learning.

Change (2022) declares that the echo-systems of public and private schools combine advantages and disadvantages. Beginning with the strengths, both public and private schools provide an immersive English-speaking environment that can greatly benefit students learning English. Through interactions and discussion groups, students enhance listening and speaking abilities so that they can communicate and understand dialogues. Also, both public and private schools typically follow an equitably structured English language curriculum that covers reading, writing, grammar, and vocabulary. This inherently ensures that students receive a comprehensive education that embraces different language competences. In addition, public and private schools employ qualified English language teachers who can effectively teach language essentials and provide support. These are the aspects parents usually consider when selecting schools for their children.

On the other hand, weaknesses include the fact that public schools suffer from large class sizes, which can hinder individualized



attention. This may affect the instruction quality and limit opportunities for practice and feedback. Moreover, though private schools do usually have smaller class sizes, they also may include classrooms that fail to accommodate all students. Add that to the fact that public schools often possess fewer resources compared to private schools, which can impact the availability of learning materials and the utilization of technology.

Furthermore, public schools host enormous populations featuring diverse socio-economic status levels, which could bring challenges concerning meeting individualized aspirations. In turn, this could cause unequal experiences because students find themselves individually vulnerable to information distortion and comprehension confusion. Generally, private schools try to avoid such bothersome situations. However, they still face challenges in teaching the English language to students lacking the minimum requirements. In addition, public schools usually do not ask parents to pay tuition fees, whereas private schools are costly. This makes private schools less inclusive and hardly accessible for those students coming from lower-income families. This financial barrier could obviously hinder some students from getting involved in exclusively private educational settings that private schools provide.

In fact, in many parts of the world, public schools have the advantage of diversity where students come from many different populations (Aitenova, 2023), which offers then a melting pot of cultures and organic language exchange (Norman, 2024). However, it is not necessary that the small, diverse communities of these students positively affect their English language education. It really depends on the language and culture of the societies in which they are learning English. According to Alasmari (2022), public school students usually take 1.5 to 2 years to achieve English proficiency, depending on student effort and teacher support. In contrast, private school students show faster English language learning rates; it takes them 1 to 1.5 years, which might be the effect of smaller class sizes, special attention, and tailored programs (Yas et al., 2024).

For example, AlFahal (2022) stated that the English language acquisition rates of Saudi Arabian public schools steadily increase over time. Albiladi (2022) found that approximately 60% of the students in public schools demonstrate basic English proficiency by graduating from secondary school. In comparison, Albeshri (2023)

mentioned that private schools allow intensively targeted approaches for developing language capabilities through specialized language programs and individual tutoring. In addition, Alhawsawi and Jawhar (2022) stated that private schools integrate cultural immersion activities to motivate students to practice English both inside and also outside the classroom.

According to Almesaar (2022), compared to public schools, English language learning rates in private schools look better. Around 75% of students in private schools achieve an apparently proficient level before starting the university. Alawfi (2022) found that private schools' students learn English at a rate of 30% higher than their public schools' students. Furthermore, Alrashidi (2022) stated that graduates of private schools show a higher propensity for multilingualism. It has also been claimed that almost 80% of private schools' graduates are English proficient.

For that, parents in the Arab countries, like all other parents in the world, might face troubles when selecting between public schools, private schools, or even international schools in order to make sure that their children receive the best education. For example, if vocabulary size could be used as an indicator, English language learners averagely acquire around 2,000 to 3,000 words per year (Alanazi & Alsager, 2023). Another example is that it should take from three to five years for English language learners to reach a level where their pronunciation becomes easily understood by English native speakers. Having limited language resources, public schools keep doing their best to teach the foundational English language skills, which is absolutely a dedicated and appreciated effort to bridge the gaps among students coming from different socio-economic backgrounds. This is important and helpful to learn the basics, but is it enough to start communicating using the target language? In contrast, private schools often have special resources to teach English language better, but are they utilizing the resources in the best way that is reflected in the learning outcomes?

Considering the teacher as the most important part of the educational process, private schools provide access to native English-speaking teachers, enhancing students' language acquisition through immersive experiences (Allehyani & Alfayez, 2024). Making the right choice may seem exhausting, since deciding between public schools and private schools requires that parents consider their sons' learning goals and personal talents. As indicated, public schools offer diversity and inclusivity while private schools provide tailored instruction, and



consequently, the best choice is mainly ascribed to the students' inclinations.

In fact, it is noticeable that English language education in the Arab world is really promising. Public and private schools keep developing functional strategies to help students through their learning journey (Shamim, 2024). For example, in the case of Saudi Arabia as part of the Arab world, Alruwaili and Atalab (2023) found that 26% of the students at public schools rightly enhance English language skills, which emphasizes that both public and private schools receive large attention from educational experts and policymakers. Also, 80% of English language teachers in public schools in Saudi Arabia have taken training programs related to instructional and teaching skills. Not only that, but also 65% of public and private schools utilize technology tools in English language learning in order to make the teaching moment more interactive and engaging (Damanhour, 2024).

As a theoretical framework, the present study emphasizes the importance of recognizing the diversity and language abilities of students. It is evident that many students, especially in the Arab world, face some difficulties in language competences (Vadivel et al., 2024). Furthermore, the present study compared the public and private schools that offer implications related to English teaching to students coming from such diversified socioeconomic status levels.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Question

Based on the purpose of the research study, the following research question was addressed: Are there any statistically significant differences between the English language proficiency of native Arabic-speaking graduates of public and private high schools?

B. Participants

A total of 259 native Arabic-speaking high school graduates, 188 female participants and 77 male participants, took part in this research study. Also, most of the participants graduated from high schools located in big cities. In addition, 212 participants graduated from public high schools, while 47 graduated from private high schools. Fewer than five participants mentioned that they studied high school in small villages.

C. Data Collection Procedures

Educational institutions at different addresses were contacted to prepare a dataset of high school graduates that included their gender, city, type of high school, and their English proficiency results as shown in a test taken after high school graduation. Data related to a total of 1,903 high school graduates were partially collected. However, these data could not be used due to some missing information such as type of school, English test results, and so forth. Hence, the dataset that was ready to use for this research study included 259 high school graduates.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Statistical analysis was conducted to evaluate the effect of gender and high school type on the English proficiency of high school. The purpose of this analysis was to determine whether gender as a variable significantly influenced English proficiency within the context of public and private schools, as measured by the English test results. To investigate if there were a significant difference in English proficiency between male and female high school graduates, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was performed. The ANOVA test was appropriate for comparing the means of multiple groups to determine if there were any statistically significant differences.

As shown in Table 1, the F-value of 0.133529 indicated that the variance in English proficiency between the two gender groups (males and females) was minimal. Moreover, this low F-value suggested that the gender does not contribute significantly to the variation in English proficiency within the research topic's context. Also, the p-value of 0.715101 was considerably higher than the standard significance level of 0.05. A p-value greater than 0.05 indicated that the observed differences in mean scores between male and female high school graduates could be due to random chance rather than a true effect of gender on English proficiency. Thus, based on these analysis results, there was no statistically significant difference in the English language proficiency of male high school graduates and female high school graduates in Middle Eastern schools. Therefore, gender does not appear to be a determining factor in English language proficiency within this dataset. This finding suggests that both male and female high school graduates have similar English proficiency, regardless of their gender.



TABLE 1
 ANOVA RESULTS FOR GENDER

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F-Value	P-Value
C(Gender)	28.2357	1	0.133529	0.715101
Residual	54344.4	257		

Next, the impact of high school type on graduates' English proficiency was analyzed using another ANOVA test. The high school types included in this research study were public high schools and private high schools. Due to the very limited numbers of participants, a sample of international school graduates was not qualified to be included in this analysis. The goal was to determine if the type of high school attended by graduates had a significant impact on their English proficiency. As shown in Table 2, the F-value of 1.2284 suggested that there was some variation in English proficiency among graduates from different types of high schools. However, the magnitude of this variation was relatively small. The p-value associated with this F-value was 0.299865, which is significantly higher than the 0.05 threshold for statistical significance. A p-value greater than 0.05 implies that any observed differences in mean test scores across the different high school types were not statistically significant.

In other words, the differences could be due to random variation rather than a systematic effect of the high school type on English proficiency. As a result, the analysis indicated that there was no statistically significant difference in English test scores between students attending public and private high schools in the Arab world. High school type did not appear to significantly influence English language proficiency among high school graduates in this research study. As a result, this result suggests that the quality of English education is relatively consistent across all different public and private high schools in the Arab world in the sample.

TABLE 2
 ANOVA RESULTS FOR HIGH SCHOOL TYPE

Source	Sum of Squares	df	F-Value	P-Value
C(Gender)	774.585	3	1.2284	0.299865
Residual	53598	255		

To further explore whether there might be an interaction effect between gender and high school type on English proficiency, a two-way ANOVA could be conducted. However, in the current analysis, the focus was on the main effects of each variable independently. The lack of significance in both the gender and high school type analyses suggested that even if there were an interaction effect, it would likely be minimal. Hence, previous studies on gender differences in English language proficiency among high school graduates in the Arab world have yielded mixed results. Some studies have found that males outperform females, while others have reported no significant differences. The analysis of this research study found that the observed differences in mean scores between male and female high school graduates were not statistically significant. This suggested that the reported disparities may be attributed to random chance rather than a true effect of gender on English proficiency. These findings align with the growing consensus that gender stereotypes and biases in language education may play a more significant role than inherent differences in language learning abilities.

V. CONCLUSION

The statistical findings revealed that high school types did not significantly affect the English proficiency of either male or female high school graduates. This lack of significant differences suggested that English language proficiency, as measured by the test scores in this research study, was not strongly influenced by this variable. These results had important implications for educational policymakers and curriculum developers, which could be related to other factors such as teachers' competency, family spoiling, teaching methods, student motivation, socioeconomic status, or extracurricular exposure to English. All of these factors might play more critical roles in determining performance in English. Further research could explore these potential influences to better understand what drives English language success among students.

The findings of this study suggest that gender and high school type have limited influence on English proficiency among high school graduates in the Arab world. This implies that the quality of English education is relatively consistent across different public and private schools in the sample. While the study did not find significant differences based on these variables, it is important to consider other factors that may contribute to English language proficiency.



These factors could include, first, teacher competency. The qualifications, training, and teaching styles of English teachers can significantly impact student outcomes. For instance, teachers who are skilled at creating engaging and interactive lessons are more likely to motivate students and foster a positive learning environment.

Second, there is family support. Parental involvement, encouragement, and exposure to English at home can play a crucial role in language development. Parents who read to their children, speak English with them, and provide opportunities for language practice can help to reinforce classroom learning.

The third factor is teaching methods. Innovative and engaging teaching approaches, such as communicative language teaching or technology-integrated learning, can enhance learning outcomes. For example, using authentic materials like news articles, songs, and movies can help students connect with the target language and develop real-world communication skills.

Fourth is student motivation. Intrinsic motivation and a positive attitude towards English can lead to greater proficiency. Students who are interested in learning English and see the value of language skills are more likely to put in the effort required to succeed.

Fifth is socioeconomic status. Access to resources, such as tutoring or English language programs outside of school, can influence language development. Students from families with higher socioeconomic status may have more opportunities to practice English and receive additional support.

Finally, there is extracurricular exposure. Participation in English clubs, debates, or international exchange programs can provide valuable opportunities for language practice. These activities can help students to develop confidence in their language abilities and gain exposure to different cultures and perspectives.

To address the limitations of this study and gain a more comprehensive understanding of English language proficiency in the Arab world, future research should consider many factors. The first factor to consider is a larger sample size. A larger and more diverse sample would increase the generalizability of the findings. This would allow researchers to examine the effects of gender, high school type, and other factors across a wider range of schools and students.

The second factor for consideration should be the inclusion of international schools. Including international schools would provide

insights into the effectiveness of different educational models and approaches. International schools often have unique curricula, teaching methods, and resources that may influence student outcomes.

The third factor is multiple measures of proficiency. Using a variety of assessment tools, such as interviews, essays, and real-world language tasks, would provide a more holistic picture of language abilities. Standardized tests can provide a snapshot of a student's language skills, but they may not capture the full range of their abilities.

Fourth in the things to consider for further research is qualitative research. In-depth interviews or case studies could explore the factors that contribute to English language proficiency in greater detail. This would allow researchers to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences, motivations, and challenges.

Finally, further research should include more longitudinal studies. Tracking students' progress over time would help to identify the factors that influence language development and the effectiveness of different interventions. Longitudinal studies can provide valuable insights into how students' language skills change over time and what factors contribute to their success or failure. By addressing these recommendations, future research can contribute to a deeper understanding of English language proficiency in the Arab world and inform educational policies and practices.



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