

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There is an unmistakable global trend at present times, particularly in ex-colonies, of adopting the national languages rather than the foreign languages as the medium of instruction in education. According to Mohammed (1991) the implementation of the native language usually takes place in two stages. The first stage (phase one) is in general education, while the second stage (phase two) takes place at tertiary level.

The present study focuses on the second stage (phase two); with special attention given to the role and status of English language following the use of the national language as a medium of instruction in Sudan. Since Arabic is the national language under question we would refer to this transformation from English to Arabic as Arabicisation policy. University of Khartoum, the oldest University in Sudan, the previous British colony, is chosen as a field for the research.

This chapter consists of a background of the study, a statement of the problem under examination, basic assumptions, objectives of the study, significance of the study and proposed organization to the whole body of the research.

1.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Modern education in Sudan was established by the British during their colonization of the country from 1898 to 1956. University of Khartoum, which is considered the first University in that land, was inaugurated in 1902 under the name of "Gordon Memorial College." As its name implies, it was founded in the memory of the British General Gordon who was killed by the Mahdi's Muslim revolutionist during their capture of Khartoum in January 1885. Kitchener School of Medicine was established in the year 1924 and in 1926 the School of Law was established followed by the School of Agriculture and Veterinary Sciences. This establishment was developed by the addition of the School of Science and Engineering, and the School of Arts in 1940. In 1945 all these Schools except the Kitchener School of Medicine were joined under the name of Khartoum University College. In 1951 Kitchener School of Medicine joined the College which eventually became the University of Khartoum in 1956 immediately after the country's independence.

There are many reasons that justified the choice of English as a medium of instruction in the above-mentioned Schools and later in the University. First of all, all the teaching staff during the colonial times were either British or foreigners who could not speak Arabic, the language of the masses. Second, the official language of the country itself was English so it was understandable why the language of education was chosen to be English. Last, the aim of education at that time was to produce government clerks to assist the British in administering the colony. hence it became important for them to talk their bosses' language. The three reasons stated above show that the objectives of learning and teaching the English language in Sudan were very clear in the beginning.

On the eve of independence, an International Commission was invited to look into the educational system in the country and to evaluate it. One of the findings of that

Commission was that the academic standards of the students were continuously deteriorating (Sandell 1982). The reason given for this deterioration was the adoption of a foreign language as a medium of instruction, hence, they recommended that the whole educational system should be arabicized.

For nearly seven years after independence, all the educational policies – including the language of instruction – remained the same at school level and in higher education, despite the above recommendation and the continuing decline in the standards of English. It was not until 1964 that the first loud cry for the use of the national language was heard from the part of the Teachers' Council.

The arabicisation of general education officially started in the academic year 1965/66 through a governmental decree (Taha 1990 and Mohammed 1991). A report made on the then newly formed Higher Teachers Training Institute called for a smooth well-prepared transition to the use of Arabic in the secondary schools. However, with some difficulties in supplying suitable textbooks and trained teachers, the full implementation of the policy of Arabicisation at the secondary level was completed in 1968/69. English language was reduced to a mere school subject that is given a daily period of 40 minutes for six times a week in the schools' timetable.

This new situation raised concerns among many educators as to the role and status of English in the country. The first reaction to Arabicizing the system was a conference on English language in Sudan held by University of Khartoum. In his opening speech in the conference, the Vice-Chancellor of Khartoum University welcomed the implementation of Arabicization in secondary schools, but made it clear that such policy should be accompanied by more emphasis on teaching English (Dafa'allah, 1966). In that Conference, English was granted the status of a foreign language in the Sudan but it was emphasized that it should continue to be the chief link with the rest of the world and to be necessary as a medium in many branches of Higher education (Sandell 1982).

As for University of Khartoum, English had been the main medium of instruction since its development as a center for post-secondary education in the 1940s. The idea of Arabicisation in the University goes back to the sixties and probably earlier (Taha, 1990). In the 1966 Conference on English in Sudan, the late Vice-Chancellor of the University gave the opening address in which he mentioned that Arabicization should be the ultimate goal in the University. He did, however, concede that there were some practical problems involved in the process of Arabicizing university education; problems such as the insufficient number of qualified lecturers to teach in Arabic and the shortage of textbooks and references in Arabic. More importantly, he warned that 'any steps that are taken prematurely are bound to result in more loss than gain (Dafa'allah, 1966:5).

In 1969, a Ministerial Committee was formed by the Chancellor of the University to look into the administrative structure of the University and propose reforms that would enable it to play its full role in the development of the country. One of the main recommendations of the Committee with regard to academic reform was that Arabic should be given a rightful place in the University as the language of study. The Committee also indicated that students should be helped to maintain high proficiency level in at least one foreign language.

The arabicization policy had very negative drawbacks on the standards of English of students entering the university. For the students themselves it was a very challenging and sometimes disappointing situation to change suddenly from Arabic medium education to that of English. The freshmen felt that there was a barrier between them and the knowledge that they wanted to acquire from their field of specialization.

As a remedy to this situation a Service English program was introduced in the University of Khartoum with the aim of bridging the gap between the students' real

competence in English and the level needed for the pursue of studies in the University. Consequently, in 1975, the English Language Servicing Unit(ELSU) was established by the University in collaboration with the British Council.

The Unit used to offer a two-year English course of 100 hours to the Faculty of Science and a one-year English course of 60 hours to the rest of the Faculties, except the Faculties of Arts and Education which were serviced by their own English Departments.

During the 1970s and 1980s research was conducted on the Arabicization process and its implications on the standards of English both in Sudan and the Arab world in general. Most of the findings of these studies supported the Arabicization process in Arab universities.

Finally, in 1983, the National Council for Higher Education in Sudan issued an official directive in favor of the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction at the higher educational level. The Council called for different institutions to take decisions and formulate a clear program with regard to the process of implementation.

The Council of University of Khartoum adopted the policy of Arabicization in the same year. Initially, approval was given to the implementation in the Faculties of Laws, Arts and Education. The Council also decided that other Faculties should follow as from the 1984-5 academic year (Taha 1991:293).

The greatest change in the government's policies towards the use of Arabic as a medium of instruction in place of English in Higher Education. came in 1990. A year before that a military government backed by the National Islamic Front came to power. In September 1990, the revolutionary government announced sweeping reform in Sudanese education. These include a doubling of students intake to higher education and tripling the number of new universities in the country. What is of concern here is

the language of instruction. It has been decided that the medium of instruction in all universities and for all disciplines should change from English to Arabic. The academic year 1990/91 witnessed the immediate implementation of the mass Arabicization in University of Khartoum where all subjects were to be taught in the National Language (Mohammad 1992).

In 1996, the University introduced what is known as University Requirements Subjects, which includes English, Arabic and Islamic Studies. These subjects were administered by the Arabicization Administration to which the English Language Servicing Unit was attached.

In 1998, the University introduced two more subjects namely Computer Skills and Sudan Foundation (Sudanese culture) under a new establishment called the Administration for University Requirements. Consequently, ELSU was dissolved into the new administration and an English Department was created. It is worth mentioning that with this new change in the status of ELSU, the teaching of Scientific English proper has ceased. Alternatively, the trend of teaching English for University students is focusing on common core English.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

In 1991, the University of Khartoum decided to change the language of instruction in all its Faculties from English to Arabic in the same academic year, following a national directive to Arabicize the instruction in all institution of higher learning. As a response to that, all faculties of the University started to teach in Arabic, while most of their textbooks and reference books were still in English. English was made a mandatory subject that every student is required to take.

Although English was given the status of a "University Requirement", English Instructors felt that the objectives of teaching the language in the University were not defined and more critically the purpose was not clear. For example, instead of adopting an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, to help students access the immense volume of information available in English, the University decided to opt for a common core English course that focused on teaching the four language skills and translation from Arabic into English, despite the fact that students no longer need skills such as speaking, listening and writing in their academic activities.

There was no real planning or research done before embarking on the Program. The program developed as response to the day-to-day challenges. For example, between 1991 and 1993, the teachers continued to teach the same type of ESP materials that were used when English was a medium of instruction and the role of ESP at that time was to help student cope with the English medium classes. Only by 1994 was a Committee formed to look into the English syllabus. The Committee recommended that the ESP Program should cease and a common core course should be taught throughout the University.

They suggested a four-year syllabus in which English would be taught for 240 hours over a period of 4 years. This syllabus was designed and implemented without consulting the teachers. After two years of operation, that syllabus was cut down to a two-year syllabus with only 90 hours. Despite the reduction in years and hours, the objectives of teaching English and the content of the course remained the same.

The teaching material of the course constituted another challenge. For about six years, the teachers were teaching without an approved course-book. Until 1996, they were using the same ESP textbooks that were used in the English Course taught before the Arabicization Policy, although the nature of the course has been changed to a common

core English. When a textbook was finally produced and put to test in 1997, teachers categorically resisted it. The teachers ignored the assigned course-book and started to use their own compiled materials, which were basically drawn from available ESP books.

Since the Program started as an ad hoc response to the challenging pressure exerted by the Arabicization Policy, the University did not take the trouble to conduct any needs analysis survey to take into account the opinions of learners, teachers and subject specialist. They constructed the English program based on presumed needs.

The whole English program now stands at a crossroad, as far-reaching conflicts are going on at the moment. Examples for these conflicts are the following:

1. While the syllabus covered the four language skills, in actuality the students required reading skills for academic purposes.
2. Although the University plans for a General English proficiency course, the teachers are practically teaching an ESP Course.
3. Despite the fact that the University designs the materials that should serve the purpose of the syllabus, the teachers rejected the course-book and judged that they should use their own compiled materials.

The problems that underlie the English Program at the University of Khartoum include the following area: objectives, planning, funding, syllabus, materials and learners needs. This research seeks to investigate these problems and suggest possible solutions for them. These problems came as a result of a lack of any kind evaluation for the English Program. In fact, since the inception of the program, no formative evaluation has been carried out to assess any shortcomings that emerged during the development of the program. This lack of evaluation for almost 13 years since the beginning of the program

made English reach a state of being taught just because it is a university requirement, with most of the teachers were disappointed with the progress made by their students. This research comes as contribution to the issue of evaluation; it provides a formative evaluation to the current English program with the hope to give some suggestions that will help the program to progress.

1.3 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This research attempts to achieve the following objectives:

1. To evaluate the perspectives of participants on the English Language Program currently taught as a University Requirement at the University of Khartoum. Such investigation includes planning for the course, its objectives, syllabus, materials, funding, administration and so on, to see whether the Program meets the types of needs that have emerged after the introduction of Arabic as a medium of instruction in the University.
2. To investigate participants' perspective on the Program's effectiveness through surveying opinions on students' level of proficiency in the four language skills, their perspective about the most important language skill and their perspective about the most focused language skills in the program.
3. To investigate the perception towards English and Arabic as mediums of instruction in the University.
4. To investigate the role of English in performing academic activities at the undergraduate level and the extent of the use of English and Arabic in preparation for exams, assignments and test and in performing other academic activities required in their subject of specialization.

1.4 THE BASIC ASSUMPTIONS

This study is based on the following assumptions:

1. The English Language course in the University of Khartoum does not fulfill the type of needs that emerged after the implementation of Arabicization Policy in Sudan. As the syllabus and materials were prepared without proper survey of needs and the nature of English Program was decided with no planning.
2. The low level of English language proficiency leads students to depend on lecture notes, handouts in Arabic and limited textbooks available in Arabic in the Library.
3. Because of the prestigious status that English was giving to the University of Khartoum and the haste in which the Arabicization policy was implemented, most of the respondents would not agree with the Arabicization policy and would rather prefer to go back to teaching in English.
4. Students need to be taught an English for Academic Purposes course that focuses on developing the reading skills, rather than a common core English course that targets the four language skills and training in translation.

1.5 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research is planned to provide answers for the following questions:

1. How do students evaluate their level of English Language in the four language skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing?
2. Which language skill do they think is more important for them?
3. What is the most focused language skill in the current English Program?

4. Were there any clear objectives for teaching English at the University of Khartoum?
5. Was there any planning done before implementing the English Program?
6. Does the syllabus design meet the needs of the students?
7. Are students motivated to study English?
8. Were students instrumentally oriented or integratively oriented to study the different language skill?
9. How do participants evaluate the present English Program?
10. What is the participants' attitude to using English and Arabic as a medium of instruction at the University level?
11. To what extent do students use English and Arabic in preparing for Exams or doing research papers?

1.6 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This research is very significant to the situation of English at the University of Khartoum for the following four reasons. First, this study is considered one of the first attempts to evaluate the English program which has been run by the University for over a decade. The program passed through many stages so far. The nature of the course was changed from an ESP to a common core English that focused on teaching the four Language skills. The Program started as a four-year course then reduced to a two year course. The teaching materials are still under preparation. All these developmental stages make such a research both crucial and beneficial to the teaching of English in the University. This study is timely because by now the English program has been run for

around 12 years without any review. So, it is high time that a course evaluation is carried out.

Second, this study is one of the earliest studies on the role and position of English in the light of the Arabicization policy in the University. Previous research such as Taha (1990) and Muhammad (1991) were concerned about the English language issue under Arabicization, but they were both conducted at the time when that Policy was implemented in a very limited setting and at reluctant paces in the Faculties of Arts and Law. After 1991, the role of English and the purpose for teaching it has totally changed, that is why such a study is needed to investigate the nature of the new role for English.

Third, the outcome of this research would be of great help to decision-makers in the University, because it provides insights about the needs that emerged after the change in the medium of instruction. Especially if we consider the fact that there was no needs analysis survey conducted before embarking on the program. This study surveyed the views of students, subject lecturers and Language Instructors, their opinions would be very influential in drawing up an English Program that suits the current situation.

Fourth, the study would provide valuable information about the use of English and Arabic for academic reading and the effect of that on the academic standards of the University. It goes without saying that, student with a low level of proficiency in English will depend on lecture notes and handouts in Arabic in addition to the few textbooks available in that language. The vast majority of textbooks and reference books in the library are not be accessible to students. This results in producing university graduates with weak academic standards who are not prepared to conduct postgraduate research of any value.

1.7 SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study is limited to the situation and population of University of Khartoum in Sudan. The results do not represent the situation in the Faculty of Medicine, as it has temporarily been exempted from teaching in Arabic, for practical reasons, such as availability of medical reference books in Arabic. Only registered, full-time undergraduate students were considered in the sample, all postgraduate and Diploma students were excluded.

The English Program under investigation refers to the English Course that is taught for students in all Faculties as a University Requirement. That excludes English Programs at the Departments of English in the Faculties of Arts and Education, where students study English as specialization starting from second year. The English Diploma Program offered by the Faculty of Arts is also excluded.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following are definitions of terms and abbreviations used in the body of the text:

Arabicisation

Refers to the changing of medium of instruction in schools or universities from a foreign language mainly English or French, to Arabic Language. The term is also written as Arabicization.

Arabization

Refers to the changing of the status of the official language of an Arab country from French or other foreign language to Arabic. It refers particularly to the countries previously colonized by the French who used to influence and change all the segments

of people's life in countries they colonized, including the civil service, education, daily language, media etc.

AUR

Refers to the Administration of University Requirements, which is the body that runs the UR courses mentioned above.

EAP

Refers to English for Academic purposes.

ELSU

It refers to the English Language Servicing Unit at the University of Khartoum. The Unit was established in the mid 1970s and was assigned the teaching of English (ESP and General English) in all Faculties of the University except the Faculties of Arts and Education. The Unit was dissolved after the establishment of the AUR mentioned above.

ESP

Refers to English for Specific Purposes

U. of K.

It refers to University of Khartoum, which is the oldest university in Sudan. It was established as a college in 1902 and developed into a full independent university in 1956. The language of instruction was English, until in 1991 when the sweeping policy of Arabicization, brought a change in the medium of instruction to Arabic. This university constitutes the setting of this study.

UM

It refers to University of Malaya, which is the oldest university in Malaysia. UM also passed through the process of changing the medium of instruction from English to the national language. They established a grand project to prepare for the English Program to be taught after that change took place.

UR

Refers to University Requirement, which is a status given to three courses: English, Arabic, Sudanese studies and computer skills offered by the University of Khartoum. Although these courses do not constitute part of the students' field of specialization, students are required to take them and secure a pass before they can be awarded their degrees. These course were introduced shortly after imposing the Arabicization Policy.

1.9 THE METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The samples of the study were taken from the population of University of Khartoum. They include students and subject lecturers from the Faculties of Arts and Science; and instructors involved in the teaching of English as a University Requirement for all Faculties of the University. The data was gathered through three sets of questionnaire surveys distributed to the above respondents in addition to interviews and analysis of documents. The collected data was coded, compiled and fed into the computer. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 10.0 was used to analyze the data. (For more on this see chapter 5 of this volume)

1.10 THE ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The report of the study is presented in seven chapters. Chapter one is an introduction, which includes: background of study, statement of the problem, objectives, basic

assumptions, research questions, scope and limitations and significance of the study. Chapter two gives a background to the study and Chapter three consists of a theoretical framework on which the research is based. Chapter four, on the other hand, reviews the related literature and explores past studies. While Chapter five presents the methodology for gathering information from the subjects. In Chapter six, the results of the study are presented and discussed. The final chapter provides the summary, conclusions, implications and recommendations.