

## اتجاهات المجتمع الكويتي نحو تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في المدارس الابتدائية

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### ملخص

كان موضوع ادخال اللغة الانجليزية في منهج المدارس الابتدائية بدولة الكويت محل جدل بين المختصين في وزارة التربية . ولم يناقشه المواطنون حتى ابريل ١٩٩٣ ، عندما صدر قرار وزاري يقضي بتدريس اللغة الانجليزية في الصف الاول الابتدائي اعتبارا من سبتمبر ١٩٩٣ . وكما كان متوقعا ، فقد اثار القرار جدلا واسع النطاق في المجتمع الكويتي .

وتحاول هذه الدراسة تقويم اتجاهات المجتمع الكويتي نحو تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في المدارس الابتدائية ، وذلك من خلال الآراء التي تم الحصول عليها بعد توزيع استبانة على عينة عشوائية مكونة من ١٢٠٠ شخصا ، من مختلف المؤسسات والمناطق السكنية في البلاد .

وتشير نتائج الدراسة إلى تأييد غالبية أفراد العينة لمبدأ ادخال اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية . لكن أغلبهم أعربوا عن قلقهم بشأن اللغة الانجليزية على تحصيل التلاميذ في اللغة العربية وعلى تأثيرها على الجدول الدراسي بالاضافة الى نقص المعلمين المؤهلين لتدريسها ، خاصة الكويتيين ، سيما وأن معظمهم لم يتدبروا سابقا على التدريس .

كما وكانت آراء العينة متضاربة بشأن الفكرة القائلة أن سنوات التدريس الأولى هي أفضل فترة لتدريس اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس الابتدائية .

## **Attitudes of Kuwaiti Society Towards Introducing English as a Foreign Language at Primary Schools ( EFLPS )**

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### **Introduction :**

The introduction of English language syllabus in primary schools has been the subject of widespread controversy among educationalists in Kuwait and other Gulf countries. The controversy is reminiscent of the arguments in western countries after the second world war. The situation at that time was similar to the stage kuwait is passing through now. Until the midde of the century, foreign languages were taught at secondary schools, while the primary stage was considered appropriate for teaching first languages. Foreign language teaching at the primary stage was confined to private schools.

The idea of introducing a foreign language in government primary schools was thus not generally accepted until the fifties when the beginnings of reform and the trend towards international horizons focused attention on this idea.

There was subsequently increased acceptance of foreign languages at different levels of the primary stage in a growing number of countries. Several FLPS experiments were organized and financed by ministries of education in most of western Europe and the United States. Depending on their location and commercial as well as political interests, the countries chose to teach languages that seemed most useful to them.

Thus Britain started with French, and France began to teach English in some areas, whereas the Germans and Austrians introduced both French and English in their primary schools ( Samay and Mckeon, 1993 ).

Studies were carried out to examine the advantages of FLPS. One of the factors cited in its favour is that foreign language teaching at an early stage increases the length of time allocated to its learning thereby reducing the teaching load in subsequent years (Stern, 1985). This in turn improves the unsatisfactory foreign language level of secondary school leavers. Some of the studies concluded that the appropriate period for learning the foreign language is the stage that precedes adolescence. The aim is to produce individuals who are fluent in a FL and to provide them with the cultural knowledge essential for cross - cultural communication. (Liano 1985).

However, none of the experiments led to the wholesale introduction of early FL teaching in primary schools. It was argued that the outcome of FL programmes at the primary stage did not justify the efforts and the funds they entailed (Ward 1982, Stern 1985, Abdan 1991, Liano 1993).

By the mid - seventies the French language scheme set up in the UK came to an end. Also' most of the early FL programmes conducted in the USA fell short of expectations. Nevertheless primary language teaching as an educational innovation has continued in spite of difficulties that it has encountered. It may be added that primary language teaching is still controversial among policy - makers, educationists, researchers and the public - notwithstanding the considerable lapse of time since it was first introduced.

### **Problems of EFLPS :**

A number of problem areas stand out which pertain to issues such as the optimal age, inadequate or insufficiently qualified FLPS teachers, time allotment, lack of primary - secondary continuation programme, lack of advocacy and the problem of large classes (Superfine 1993).

Some of these problems are briefly discussed in the next section before dealing with the specific situation in Kuwait.

Schools throughout the world usually start their formal system of education at six years of age and continue to twelve years before transferring to secondary levels. The question may be asked about the age in which FL teaching can be commenced. While a few schools begin FL at nursery and kindergarten the majority start teaching it at ages of eight to ten.

Although there is scientific support for the belief that children are better at language acquisition than adults (Dulay 1982), some educationalists maintain that advocates of FL teaching in early childhood have gone too far from an educational view point (Muhamad 1992). Children at the ages of three to five are more in need of acquiring the first language (L1) and of attempting to master rules relating to phonetics, speech and the ability to express themselves correctly. These are related to the training muscles of the tongue since the vocal cords are in their early stages of development (Foster, 1990). They add that there is a need for the use of L1 as the sole medium of instruction at this vital stage of mental and linguistic development. This in turn requires that it should be soundly based so that the child can complete its L1 learning in the next phases.

If the second language (L2) is introduced in the early stages, it will subsequently hinder the children's practice, and delay their use of L1.

There are specific skills in every language that are related to speech, expression and writing which are different from other languages. It is difficult for the small child to learn the systems of two languages simultaneously. If exposed to such a situation, the child cannot be proficient in learning both L1 and L2. If it could master one of the languages, this will only be at the expense of the other. Consequently, it may be appropriate to concentrate on teaching the child L1, while L2 can be postponed until late childhood to avoid such language interference. These views are controversial and have remained a central theoretical issue in the

development of primary language teaching.

The critical problem facing the establishment of L2 programme at the primary school concerns the availability of a sufficient number of qualified teachers. This is evident in Europe where the demand for L2 instruction in primary schools has continuously increased since 1950s.

However, there has not been a corresponding growth in professional staff. Inadequate FLPS teacher preparation thus remains the main problem in most European countries (Council of Europe 1994). The question then arises whether to appoint teachers who know a great deal about L2, but relatively little about the primary school, or employ teachers with primary school qualification, but lack linguistic ability.

The success of primary language teaching also depends on ensuring articulation of primary and secondary school programmes. Many early FL teaching projects have been discontinued because of inadequate links between language learning in primary and in secondary schools (Stoks 1992). There is a need for continuous communication and cooperation on the part of FL teachers at all levels. In other words, secondary programmes should provide courses that are suitable to these learners who started FL study in the primary school (Wilson 1988).

Another factor that may lead to failure of FLPS is associated with overcrowded classes. The larger the class, the less FL spoken and learnt by the individual child. This is aggravated by the fact that FL at an early stage is mainly based on listening and speaking skills. It would be a difficult task for teachers to achieve individualized positive feedback of an utterance in large FL classes (Coleman 1991).

Lack of a firm base of public advocacy is another contributing factor to the failure of FL teaching in the primary school. Because of the importance of this phase of FL education, it is critical that decision-makers inform and ensure support by the professional community and parents. Initiating FLPS requires that such sectors of

society are informed of the benefits of early language learning and of the types of programmes conducted. Such public information is necessary to avoid the FLPS assuming a political bias. Indeed, it has been pointed out that "very often the decision is forgone and the reason is political or public - relation based" ( Rixon 1992 ).

A matter of much debate has been the time allotment for FL which is usually taken away from other subjects. Reports from various primary schools have shown that time can be found for FLPS by : (a) shortening the time given to other subjects in the curriculum on the assumption that this will not adversely affect the subjects concerned; (b) improving the planning of school routines ; (c) lengthening the total instructional time by curtailing recess periods or lunch hours ( Dunoghue 1980). However, shor sessions of FL teaching at this stage have proved their efficiacy. This is specially true in beginring FL study, as daily sessions have significant influence on mastering pronunciation and intonation (Stern 1985).

### **Relevant Studies :**

Some researchers assign first priority to public advocacy when considering foreign language education at the primary stage. They argue the introducing programmes at this level requires the dissemination of its benefits and expected results. Such information can be extended to encompass parents and education agencies as well as leaders of local communities. (Met and Rhodes 1990).

However, some others emphasize the need for a cautious approach. The public may become over - optimistic, and expect substantial progress in the early years of the progamme. If the expectations are not fulfilled at an early stage, there may be a backlash of disappointment. (Rixon 1992).

As for practical experiments the introduction of European languages in Scotland may be cited. In August 1989, French and German were introduced in Scottish primary schools. The scheme was extended in August 1990 to the teaching of Spanish and italian. Parents reacted postively towards Spanish and italian, although

there was some parental antipathy towards Italian elsewhere (Connell 1991). At the same time, heads of primary schools felt that the Italian project should have been planned over a longer period. They also expressed disappointment at not being fully consulted at the initial stages. (McGhee 1991).

It may be recalled that another scheme was started in the United Kingdom a quarter of a century earlier. In 1964, French was taught in primary schools throughout the U.K. Ten years later the scheme was halted. It was concluded that no greater mastery was achieved by starting at eight rather than eleven years. A major reason for the scheme's failure was attributed to the primary teachers who had no FL competence, and were not given proper support (Khan 1991). Another reason was the hostility of secondary school teachers, who were not generally consulted or involved. Also, the British people, in general, viewed it with suspicion (McGhee 1991).

Austria has long been a leader in the field in the field of English for young learners (EYL). Children attend primary school for four years (ages 6 - 10). English as a foreign language is taught in the third and fourth grades. Since 1989, an experiment has been launched by the Vienna School Board. A pilot programme known as the LOLLIPOP project is conducted in Austrian primary schools in the field of EYL. The programme involves 24 classes of the first grade which contain 6 - year - old children. English is taught in short units everyday within the context of the subject matter taught. Parental support for the programme has been exceptionally strong (Felberbauer, 1993).

In the U.S.A, there has been an attempt to provide a national picture of foreign language education at the elementary and secondary levels. A questionnaire was completed by principals and FL teachers in 1416 public and private schools. Only a quarter of the elementary schools reported that their teachers were certified for FL teaching at this level.

The reason is due to lack of available teacher training across the country, since a

minority of universities offer such courses (Rhodes and Oxford, 1988). It may be added that lack of qualified teachers was instrumental in the failure of foreign language teaching at the elementary level during the fifties and sixties (Boynton 1990).

During late 1980s, a programme on Spanish as a foreign language known as ! Saludos ! was designed in the Broward County district at State of Florida. The aim was to provide English - speaking children with an understanding of Hispanic cultures and to learn the language skills.

Spanish classes were offered 60 minutes weekly in 25 elementary schools. Classroom teachers were qualified and fluent in Spanish. The programme was conducted in three phases. Over thirteen thousand pupils took part in the programme. In order to assess the project impact, questionnaires were distributed to 1,215 parents, 115 teachers and 1,042 pupils ( Badia, A. et. al. 1992 ). The results showed that the majority of parents and teachers were aware of the programme. They also confirmed the importance of foreign language for children's education. Results also indicated that over 80% of the pupils felt that the Spanish programme helped them with other activities in the school; and they started feeling better about themselves, and getting along with people.

In Jordan, an investigation was carried out to assess the effects of the early start of English instruction at private schools on student achievement in English at higher grades when they transfer to public schools. The findings of the study were broadly similar to the British experiment. That is, no significant differences existed in language achievement between those who began studying EFL in first primary grade in private schools, on the one hand, and those who started learning it four years later in grade 5 in state schools, on the other. (Zughoul, et. al 1988).

Another Arab country in which the possibility of introducing EFLPS was Saudi Arabia. An achievement test was administered to 160 male students of the third intermediated grade in public and private schools in Riyadh. The samples was



divided into FLES (FL in Elementary school) group and non-FLES group. The results indicated that greater exposure to learning EFL would have some positive effect on the general achievement, provided that the exposure is of good quality (Abdan 1991). This is contrasted with a number of investigations which found that older as compared to younger learners often attain higher levels of target language proficiency despite less exposure (Genesee 1989).

In Egypt a relevant study was conducted in 1990 (AL-Shikhaibi, 1990). A questionnaire was distributed to a sample of 190 teachers and administrators at the Ministry of Education as well as staff members at colleges of education. The aim was to investigate their attitudes regarding the merits and demerits of foreign language teaching at the elementary school (FLES) and its relation to some of the wider issues in society. The major results indicated that two thirds of the sample thought that FLES does not affect pupils' achievement in the mother tongue. They were of the opinion that it would not help the spread of some foreign habits and customs which are considered inimical to religious conventions.

In the United Arab Emirates, (UAE) it was decided to teach English to first year primary school children at the age of 6, beginning September 1987. Its teaching started on an experimental basis in order to assess it before proceeding further. It was implemented in 24 schools representing the various educational areas in the country. A distinguishing feature of the experiment was the preparations that were undertaken prior to its commencement. (Ministry of Education, UAE 1993). Thus careful consideration was given to the choice of the textbook to be used. In addition, an intensive training course was organized for teachers in the schools concerned to familiarize them with the various aspects of the experiment and the methods of its implementation. The experiment was monitored closely through frequent visits by the senior educationists, fortnightly reports by the teachers and random oral tests to the pupils. These were supplemented by seeking assistance of experts and paying particular attention to any adverse impact on the learning of the mother tongue and other subjects.

The results were analysed on a continuous basis. They indicated encouraging response by pupils. No negative influence was found on the learning of L1. On the contrary, some reports showed a positive feedback on the teaching of the mother tongue. In contrast, some shortcomings were noted in audio-visual aids, and the length of sentences in the textbook. Consequently, there was widespread support to the suggestion of extending EFL teaching to all primary schools. This was commenced in 1992 / 1993 school year.

An attempt has been made in Kuwait to assess the overall attitude of the public towards the introduction of EFLPS. This took place one year before the Ministerial decree referred to above (Al - Mutawa, 1994). A questionnaire was administered to fourth secondary - school students during December / January 92 - 93 school year. The results of the study indicated that 70% of respondents disagreed with its introduction in the first grade at the primary school, and 54% suggested that it should be introduced at the fourth primary grade. It may be concluded that this sector of Kuwaiti public is in favour with the principle of introducing EFLPS, and does not encourage teaching it at a very early age.

### **Objectives And Methodology :**

In Kuwait, English was, until 1992 / 1993, taught commencing the first year of the intermediate stage in state schools and continued until the end of the secondary stage.\* Pupils started learning it at the age of ten, that is after completing the primary school. Consequently, they were taught the language for eight years, during which they learnt the oral, written and grammatical aspects of the language. This was expected to enable them to pursue English subjects without hindrance, and to take part in practical life with little or no problems as far as English is concerned.

However, the prevailing attitude among specialists was that the general level of secondary school leavers is weak in English. Many university students are unable to continue their academic studies, and to use English in other general activities.

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\* Each of the primary, intermediate and secondary stages lasts four years.

This has prompted Kuwait University to seek ways through which the weakness can be overcome. It thus organized remedial programmes in addition to the compulsory courses in English. But the view about the weak standard of pupils and graduates is still widely held (AL - Mutawa 1992).

The Ministry of Education has also been investigating ways to alleviate this problem. The idea of introducing EFL in the primary stage was proposed some time ago.

In 1969 the chief inspector at the Ministry suggested introducing English at the third primary grade, at the same time pointing out that the teachers shortage would not allow the realization of the scheme (Khurma 1969).

The idea of introducing EFLPS was extensively discussed at the Ministry in subsequent years. But it was not subjected to widespread public debate until the Ministerial decree was issued in early 1993.

The decree stated that teaching English at the first grade of state and national private primary schools was to commence in September 1993.

As expected, the decree caused growing controversy among the Kuwaiti public. Since the time available was insufficient to experiment with different schemes of teaching prior to implementation, the textbook used in the schools of the United Arab Emirates was adopted. The haste with which the decision was taken and carried out increased the anxiety of the Kuwaiti public.

The present study aims to assess the attitudes of the public toward the introduction of English at the primary school in Kuwait and the adoption of UAE project. It utilises the response of a sample of Kuwaiti adults working in the field of education and other professions to investigate the impact of a number of factors on attitudes. The factors considered include sex, age, education, profession and language proficiency. This study thus seeks to answer the following questions :

1 - What is the overall attitude of Kuwaiti citizen towards EFLPS ?

- 2 - Are there significant differences in the attitudes of Kuwaitis towards EFLPS regarding the demographic variables, namely, sex, age, education, profession, major, level of English and residential areas ?.

The study is based on the premise that the various aspects of EFLPS need to be assessed continuously. Only through such in - depth analyses will it be possible to introduce the necessary revisions for teaching English, and the stage in which it can be advantageously taught.

### **The Tool :**

A questionnaire on attitudes was prepared, consisting of 30 items, distributed over six broad categories as follows :

1. Attitudes towards the principle of introducing EFLPS, consisting of items 1, 12, 18, 27, 30,
2. Attitudes towards the optimal age and grade for introducing EFLPS, consisting of items 2, 7, 13, 19, 21, 25, 28,
3. Attitudes towards language interference, consisting of items 3, 8, 14, 20, 26,
4. Attitudes towards EFL teaching experience, consisting of items 4, 9, 22, 29,
5. Attitudes towards the national dimension in this process, consisting of items 5, 10, 16, 23,
6. Attitudes towards the present teaching timetable, consisting of items 6, 11, 15, 17, 24. ( See Appendix ).

In order to achieve consistency, the draft of the instrument was submitted to a number of referees. The questionnaire was subsequently modified to take their comments into account. This resulted in clarifying some items and replacing others. As a result, the questionnaire became more in line with the objectives of the study.

The variables for analysing the attitudes were defined as sex, age qualification, major during study, linguistic standard and the governorate in which the respondents live. In addition, five scales were defined to assess attitudes, to which the numbers 5 to 1 were assigned. These are : Strongly Agree, Agree to Some Extent, Uncertain, Disagree to Some Extent and Strongly Disagree. To ensure reliability of the tool, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the total number of respondents. This was found to be 0.53.

The scale was taken to consist of six sub-scales, each measuring a different aspect of attitudes of the sample toward EFLPS in Kuwait. The aspects relate to principles of introducing EFLPS, optimal age, language interference, teaching experience, national dimension and teaching timetable. The relationship between the main score and the sub-score was calculated. Significant correlations were found between the sub-score and the total score. Furthermore, inter-scale correlations proved significant in major points, except for the first sub-scale which indicates non-significant correlation for the second, third and the sixth sub-scales (Table 1). This may indicate that the component relating to the principles of introducing EFLPS has its independent status compared with the other. The significant positive correlation values shown in the Table indicated the following :

- a ) the internal consistency of the main scale.
- b ) the unlikelihood of dropping any of the sub-scales.

as each of them enjoys some sort of independent status. Thus, the reliability of the scale is acceptable for the study.

**Table ( 1 )**  
**Inter-Scale Correllation**

No.	Sub-Scales	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	1.00					
2 -	Optimal Age	.023	1.00				
3 -	Language Interference	-.008	.350**	1.00			
4 -	Teaching Experience	.198 **	.252**	.240**	1.00		
5 -	National Dimension	.182**	.149**	.186**	.315**	1.00	
6 -	Teaching Timetable	.024	.267**	.406**	.253**	.211**	1.00
7 -	Total	.411 **	.549**	.604**	.691**	.602**	.611**

Sig = \*\* = .001

## **Subjects :**

In October 1993, one thousand and two hundred questionnaires were distributed randomly to a sample from the public in various residential areas and institutions. A response rate of 87% was achieved Table (2).

The salient features of the samples can be summerized as follows :

1. The number of females exceeds that of males, their number accounting for 58% and 42% respectively.
2. The majority of respondents i. e. 75% are in the 20 - 40 age group .
3. The largest number of respondents hold a university degree (77%).  
The majority, 65%, work in educational professions.
4. Over fifty per cent of the sample have a good command in English.

**Table ( 2 )**  
**Distribution of Sample**  
**According to Independent Variables**

No.	Variables		Number	%
1 -	Sex	Male	435	42.4
		Female	592	57.6
2 -	Age	20 - 30	406	39.3
		30 - 40	371	35.9
		40 - 50	226	21.9
		50 +	29	2.8
3 -	Degree	Ph. D	37	3.7
		M.A.	45	4.4
		B.A / s	784	77.4
		Secondary -	147	14.5
4 -	Major	Science	441	51.2
		Social and H. m. Stud	420	48.8
5 -	Profession	Educational	638	65.1
		Non - educational	342	34.9
6 -	Level of English	Good	547	52.9
		Average	424	41.0
		Weak	63	6.1
7 -	Area	Hawalli	433	41.7
		City	308	29.7
		Favwaniyah	169	16.3
		Ahmedi	87	8.4
		Jahra	41	3.9



**Results :**

In response to the first research question posed elsewhere in the study, the findings show that the overall attitude of the sample under study appears to be positive regarding four dependent variables i.e. principle of introducing EFLPS, optimal age, teachers' experience and the national dimension. Table (3) below shows their M (18.40, 22.79, 15.65, 14.24 ) exceeding their Hypothetical Mean (15,21,12,12).

The M in the remaining two variables, namely, language interference and teaching timetable is, however, less than the HM, indicating negative attitude.

**Table (3)**  
**Overall Attitudes of Sample**

No.	Variable	M	SD	H. M*
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	18.40	2.96	15
2 -	Optimal Age	22.79	3.57	21
3 -	Language Interference	14.72	2.85	15
4 -	Teaching Experience	15.65	2.90	12
5 -	National Dimension	14.24	2.48	12
6 -	Teaching Timetable	14.54	2.95	15

\* HM = Hypothetical Mean is the multiplication of number of items of the variable indicated by medium score 3 i. e. ( uncertain ).

As for inferential statistics concerning the independent variables ( i.e. sex, age, degree, major, profession, knowledge of English and governorates) chi-square was utilized to depict the attitudes of Kuwaitis towards EFLPS. The following Table (4) shows no significant differences between males and females, regarding the dependent variables 1 to 5. However, only on the teaching timetable is there a significant difference between the two groups.

**Table (4)**  
**Significance of Differences of Dependent**  
**Variables According to Sex**

No.	Variable	X <sup>2</sup>	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	23.14	17	.144
2 -	Optimal Age	12.76	22	.939
3 -	Language Interference	18.85	17	.336
4 -	Teaching Experience	20.21	14	.123
5 -	National Dimension	19.78	14	.137
6 -	Teaching Timetable	31.79	19	.032

To see which group is more positive, t value was calculated. Table (5) indicates that males are not significantly different from females regarding the Means with respect to the teaching timetable.

**Table (5)**  
**t value of Differences Between**  
**Males and Females**

Variable	sex	N	M	SD	t
Teaching	M	410	14.68	3.11	1.11
Timetable	F	556	14.47	2.82	

With regard to age. Table (6) shows no significant differences between groups on all the dependent variables. X2 value is less than the significance level : EFLPS (X2 = 53,12) ; optimal age

(X2 = 57.54) ; language interference ( X2 = 53.17) ; teaching experience

(X2 = 50.33) ; national dimension (X2 = 41.73) ; and teaching timetable

(X2 = 55.43).

**Table (6)**  
**Significance of Differences of Dependent Variables According to Age**

No.	Variable	X2	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	53.12	51	.392
2 -	Optimal Age	57.54	66	,761
3 -	Language Interference	53.17	51	.390
4 -	Teaching Experience	50.33	42	.177
5 -	National Dimension	41.73	42	.482
6 -	Teaching Timetable	55.43	57	.533

As for the educational level, Table (7) illustrates no significant differences between groups in the first five dependent variables.

A significant difference is, however, explicit in the teaching timetable variable ( $X^2 = 86.03$ ).

**Table (7)**  
**Significance of Differences of Dependent**  
**Variables According to Degree ( Educational level )**

No.	Variable	X2	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	45.68	51	.684
2 -	Optimal Age	66.74	66	.451
3 -	Language Interference	33.61	51	.971
4 -	Teaching Experience	50.79	42	.165
5 -	National Dimension	52.77	42	.123
6 -	Teaching Timetable	86.03	57	.007

In Table (8) a significant difference relating to major is apparent between groups on the national dimension variable ( $X^2 = 30.49$ ). As for the remaining variables (1,2,3,4,6)  $X^2$  shows no significant differences between group.

**Table ( 8 )**  
**Significance of Differences of Dependent**  
**Variables According to Major**

No.	Variable	X <sup>2</sup>	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	22.04	17	.182
2 -	Optimal Age	32.71	22	.065
3 -	Language Interference	14.23	16	.581
4 -	Teaching Experience	16.54	14	.281
5 -	National Dimension	30.49	14	.006
6 -	Teaching Timetable	17.88	19	.530

To see which group is more positive, t value was calculated. Table (9) indicates that those majoring in social studies are more positive in their attitudes towards the national dimension of EFLPS than their counterparts majoring in sciences, as indicated by M in the Table below :

**Table ( 9 )**  
**t value of Differences Between**  
**Science and Social Studies**

Variable	sex	N	M	SD	t
National Dimension	Sc.	426	13.99	2.47	-2.50
	Soci	407	14.41	2.38	

Table (10) shows similar results to Table (8). That is, except for the national dimension variable, all other dependent variables have no significant differences between groups according to profession.

**Table ( 10 )**  
**Significance of Differences of Dependent**  
**Variables According to Profession**

No.	Variable	X2	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	20.53	17	.247
2 -	Optimal Age	30.37	22	.109
3 -	Language Interference	19.46	17	.302
4 -	Teaching Experience	17.20	14	.245
5 -	National Dimension	27.38	14	.017
6 -	Teaching Timetable	27.13	18	.076

To see which group is more positive, t value was calculated. Table (11) shows that candidates working in educational sectors have a more positive attitude towards the national dimension of EFLPS than their counterparts in non-educational professions.

**Table ( 11 )**  
**t value of Differences Between Educational**  
**and Non-Educational Profession**

Variable	Prof.	N	M	SD	t
National Dimension	ED	614	14.46	2.44	3.46 ***
	N Ed.	332	13.88	2.48	

\* = .05 \*\* = .01 \*\*\* = .001

Table (12) shows that optimal age along with language interference proved to be significant indicating differences between groups relating to the knowledge of English variable (X2 = 61.47) and (67.31) (X2 = 67.31).

**Table ( 12 )**  
**Significance of Differences of Dependent**  
**Variables According to Knowledge of English**

No.	Variable	X2	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	30.07	34	.629
2 -	Optimal Age	61.47	44	.041
3 -	Language Interference	67.31	34	.000
4 -	Teaching Experience	20.28	28	.853
5 -	National Dimension	28.10	28	.458
6 -	Teaching Timetable	51.94	38	.065

To see which group is positive, Anova was utilized. As Table (13) shows, Scheffe' range indicates that the difference between those with an average command of English and those with a Good command is in favour with the former. (i-e- the average level ) concerning attitudes towards language interference.

**Table ( 13 )**  
**ANOVA for Attitudes Towards Language Interference**  
**by Knowledge of English**

Variable	DF	Sum of Squares	M of Squares	f	t
Between Groups	2	113.71	56.85	6.56	Average Good
Within Groups	970	8405.31	8.66		

There are no significant differences among groups on all the dependent variables as labelled by residential area. This is manifested in Table (14).

**Table ( 14 )**  
**Significance of Differernces of Dependent**  
**Variables According to Area**

No.	Variable	X2	DF	SIG (.05)
1 -	Principle of Introducing EFLPS	60.61	68	.725
2 -	Optimal Age	89.99	88	.420
3 -	Language Interference	52.74	68	.913
4 -	Teaching Experience	58.04	56	.399
5 -	National Dimension	45.64	56	.836
6 -	Teaching Timetable	73.72	76	.552



## Discussion :

Since the announcement of the Ministerial decree in April, 1993, the Kuwaiti public has been preoccupied with the issue of language interference. There has been extensive debate of this topic in the public media. A number of committees\* have been set up to deliberate on it. Seminars\*\* were held subsequently for this purpose.

The results of the present study are broadly in line with the prevailing trends. The overall attitude of the sample under study appears to be negative with regard to language interference, as indicated in Table (1). It may be recalled that there are two opposing views on this issue. Some researchers argue that teaching a foreign language at an early age has adverse effects on acquiring one's mother tongue, and focusing on the latter will promote the study of the foreign language (Jalal 1993, Al-Ameen 1982, EL - Shimmary 1989). On the other hand, advantages of early foreign language learning on language acquisition have been claimed from European research.

Some educationists have argued that the introduction of foreign languages at the primary stage has no negative impact on the learning of the mother tongue or its acquisition (Freudenstein 1991). Hence the need for language awareness. This is clear in France, where pupils are supplied with ministerial guidelines for foreign language learning at the primary level in order to make them aware of the differences between a foreign tongue and a mother tongue (Candelier 1992). Similarly, attempts have been made in Britain to promote a positive attitude of pupils towards languages in general (Freudens 1991).

With regard to the sample under study, there is a negative attitude towards the teaching timetable. Although the principle of introducing EFLPS is widely accepted by the Kuwaiti public, many people think that three periods per week are not sufficient for English in the primary stage. This view is also supported by Piper (1993) who argues that children did not learn the FL quickly and easily when

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\* Faculty of Education Committee on EFLPS June, 1993.

\*\* Seminal of Kuwaiti Teachers' Association on EFLPS, June, 12 - 14, 1993.

taught for only an hour per day. In addition, replacing other subjects with English, according to respondents, militates against the primary school objectives. This may be contrasted with the claim of Donoghue (1981) that "when time is subtracted from mathematics, social studies, or English (mother tongue) in order to offer daily FL instruction, there is no detrimental effect upon pupil achievement in the basic learning, according to scores or standardized tests".

As for the national dimension, respondents majoring in social studies and working in educational sectors think that EFLPS should be taught by kuwaiti nationals, that kuwait can adopt EFLPS texts from neighbouring countries or can design its own texts, and that EFLPS will depend on expatriate teachers for a long time.

This is not the case with their counterparts majoring in science studies and working in non-educational careers. The latter group is concerned with the status of English in general and the pupils' command of the language in particular. This is in line with the claim that university students majoring in science often face problems of understanding the subjects taught in English. Consequently, many of them withdraw from the English - medium Faculties (Issa and AL-Mutawa 1986). In addition graduates have to pass proficiency testing before being employed in some jobs.

Such concern implies that adequate resources should be deployed for EFLPS application if the objective is to improve the language status among student at advanced stages. Yet inadequate attention has been given to the provision of appropriate material. The United Arab Emirates EFL teaching materials adopted by kuwait do not correspond with the kuwaiti EFL objective at the first primary stage (EFLPS Evaluation Committee, 1994). This is compounded by the fact that the EFL objectives at kuwait primary school have not been articulated with EFL objectives of later stages. According to Girard (1993), such a course of action will be as disappointing as in past experiments, due to lack of continuity between primary and secondary teaching.

A significant difference exists among age groups with regard to the optimal age for EFLPS. However, the controversy on this issue has continued without a clear - cut outcome. Educationalists are often misled by the distorted research for the optimal starting age (Stam, 1985). Consequently, it is more productive to study the specific features of foreign language learning at different stages, than spending time trying to prove that either the early or the later years are optimal for language learning.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations :**

Foreign languages have been introduced at primary schools in an increasing number of countries. However, they continue to arouse controversy. The questions of language interference, optimal age, time allotment and pedagogical development remain topics for debate.

Matters of concern of the Kuwaiti public responding to this study focus on the effect of EFLPS on Arabic acquisition and vice versa.

They also show concern about the time allowance for EFL which is taken away from other areas of the primary school curriculum.

The belief that early years of schooling are the optimal stage for EFLPS has received support from some respondents. Others thought it would be difficult to offer clear - cut ideas that a particular age or stage can produce satisfactory results.

To enhance the process of FLPS the following recommendations may be considered :

- 1 - All sectors of society should be informed of the merits and demerits of early foreign language teaching and of the types of programmes adopted.
- 2 - Constant involvement of parents and the public at large is needed in order to provide the necessary support for the success of the experiment especially in the near future.

- 3 - Links and exchanges of views between primary, intermediate and secondary FL teachers should be initiated and expanded.
- 4 - FLPS curriculum should be articulated with that of the intermediated and secondary programmes.
- 5 - FLPS teachers should be competent enough linguistically and professionally to be able to deviate from prescribed books.
- 6 - Quality FLPS teacher - preservice and in - service programmes are needed.
- 7 - Evaluation as an essential component of FLPS programme must be included.
- 8 - Classroom - based research on various aspects of teaching learning FLPS Should be promoted.

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