Investigating students' beliefs about Arabic language programs at Kuwait University

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The current study attempted to identify students' of Arabic programs beliefs about their chosen programs. To achieve this purpose, a survey was developed to collect the data from randomly selected students in liberal-arts and education-based programs at Kuwait University. The results showed that students were statistically differentiated as a function of different beliefs insofar as the Arabic language programs are concerned. Yet beliefs were not just confined to materialistic benefits; students tended to value other types of benefits as well. Implications for educational policies and recommendations for future research were also included. The most important implication is that students along with their beliefs should be included in evaluating or revising the educational programs.

Introduction

The returns on different kinds of schooling are conceived as key factors in the demands for schooling. Demand for education is a kind of human capital investment because it confers benefits on individuals, enterprises and societies as a whole. These benefits can take two forms: market benefits like earnings and non-market benefits such as life goals (Blaug 1985; McMahon 2006).

Based on various benefits of education, Kuwaiti's public education enrolment at all levels has increased considerably over time (Ministry of Education 2008), and public expenditures on education have also accordingly increased. So, the crucial questions facing educators in Kuwait now involve the content of schooling at all levels: what does the educational process produce now and what should the education process produce in order to achieve the optimal goals of education?

Language-related programs are among those that have undergone close examination of content and delivery methods. In Kuwait, there are two types of programs which dominate the scene related to teaching and learning of Arabic—the liberal arts-oriented program and the education-oriented program (Kuwait University 2006). Equally important is the decision taken by individuals to pursue education in terms of the cost to individuals and the need to meet academic requirements and deferred entry into the labor market. Thus, individuals are viewed as important stakeholders to be considered in any educational policy studies.

Statement of the problem

The research problem is guided by the following research questions:

1. Do students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education differ in their motivations for joining such program, their career intentions and their choice of program from students of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts?

2. Do students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education differ in their perceptions of future employers' expectations from students of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts?

3. Do students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education differ in their aspirations for career development and long-term life goals from students of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts?

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study is to test the theory of human capital investment in education that links what students expect from a given academic program and their decision to join it. The focus of this study is to examine the beliefs of students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education and Arabic Language and literature at the Faculty of Arts about their respective programs.

Importance of the study

The justification for the present study is reflected in both future practice and research. With respect to future research, it is anticipated that the findings of this study will contribute to the body of knowledge related to students' beliefs about continued education. Such beliefs appeared to be closely linked to certain outcome variables like job specification and degree of efficiency (Yuan 2008). This study is the first to examine the variables which constitute Kuwaiti students' beliefs in terms of the different Arabic language programs. Moreover, this study will assist current and future administrators in making decisions regarding admission policies and in evaluating programs in an attempt to overcome imbalances among the students, labour market and academies. The information in this study can also provide educationists with data which they will communicate with prospective students and to give a better understanding of the students expectations prior to college enrollment.

Assumptions of the study

The study is based on four assumptions. First, students are believed to be rational when they decide to follow a specific program of study because of their predetermined beliefs about their chosen programs (Yuan 2008). Second, individuals think in terms of the relations between the cost and benefit in terms of gains they will obtain from joining a specific program. Third, based on equal opportunity in education, Kuwait University will continue to provide free education and to allow individuals to choose their own preferred programs of study. Fourth, all students who constitute the population of the study are assumed to meet the academic requirements for enrolment in their programs, particularly insofar as language proficiency is concerned.

Definitions of the study

Beliefs

These refer to the assumptions we make about ourselves, about others in the world and about how we expect things to be. Beliefs are about how we think things really are. Beliefs tend to be deep set and our values stem from our beliefs (Pietrandrea 2009).

Program of study

'A planned series of experiences in a particular range of subjects or skills, offered by institutions and undertaken by one or more learners' (Aggarwal & Thakur 20). In the present context, it is the type of the course that students choose to complete their degrees in Arabic language. They are the language-based and liberal arts-based programs.

Students of Arabic at the College of Education

Students who are preparing to be teachers of Arabic as a mother tongue language (language-based program).

Students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts

Students who study Arabic for its own sake (liberal arts-based program).

Hedonistic motivation

Refers to intrinsic interest or enjoyment in the participant.

Pragmatic motivation

Refers to choosing a specific program of study for vocational and longer-term reasons.

Fatalistic motivation

Refers to students who embark on their program of study by default, because they could not get into the program they preferred.

Review of the literature

This section of the paper is divided into two major parts: contextual background and theoretical background. The first part gives an overview of the State of Kuwait and its people, status of Arabic education in Kuwait, and higher education in Kuwait, namely the College of Education and the Faculty of Arts at Kuwait University. The second part presents the theoretical concepts around which the study revolves.

Contextual background

Kuwait is a constitutional state in south western Asia, located at the upper angle of the Arabian Gulf, and is a small country: 45% are native Kuwaitis and 55% are foreign residents. Petroleum is the sole economic product, and it has made Kuwait a classic welfare state and a tax-free country where education, health, housing and other public services such as building roads are free (Ministry of Information 2002).

Kuwait looks very different now from what it did in the aftermath of World War II. Like other developing countries, Kuwait's major motive

for this development in education was developing its own human resources in order to be fully independent from the colonial powers of that time (Al-Shaye 2002). The government of Kuwait bears all public expenditure at all levels of education to include both capital expenditure and current expenditure. Public expenditure in the field of education covers such outlay/costs as staff salaries and benefits, contracted or purchased services, books and teaching materials, welfare services, furniture and equipment, minor repairs, fuel insurance rents, telecommunications and travel (The Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization 2008).

There are two higher education institutions in Kuwait: Kuwait University and the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. These two institutions contribute to achieving the ultimate goal of the Kuwaiti educational system—building well-balanced citizens who can advance the welfare of the country and humanity. Among the 12 colleges of Kuwait University, there are two colleges offering Arabic language programs: the College of Education and the Faculty of Arts (Kuwait University 2006).

The main goals for the College of Education are (College of Education 2008–2009):

• Preparing highly qualified manpower in the field of teaching profession.
• Increasing awareness of the importance of practical educational research.
• Meeting the needs of society in the field of educational services.

The different disciplines which are represented in the Faculty of Arts aim to produce well-rounded graduates (Faculty of Arts 2008–2009):

• Developing critical thinking skills in a cross-cultural manner.
• Enhancing awareness of the wider perspectives and relationships between contiguous areas of knowledge.

• Improving the ability to implement the practical applications and orientations of their knowledge within societal and national contexts, while appreciating different points of view.

The Arabic language is highly visible in the Kuwaiti landscape. For first-time visitors, advertisements in streets and shops are often in Arabic, and graffiti is mainly also found in Arabic. Arabic continues to be widely used in the Kuwaiti media. Arabic can also be found in foreign publications, and on radio and TV local or satellites (The Academy of Arabic Language 2006). The emphasis of this study is not on what education in Kuwait is about, what the policies are or how policies are made; but on what Kuwaiti students perceive that they will gain from different programs of study. This perspective focuses on the user side rather than on how policy-makers work and on what the education providers intend to achieve (EL Touny 2002).

Arabic language teaching is designed to fulfil the following cluster of objectives as stated by the Ministry of Education (2008):

• Developing the learners' proficiency in understanding and using the language in spoken and written form.
• Improving the learners' competence so that they can communicate in these situations where they have to use Arabic.
• Enabling the learners to become well-informed about the life and culture of the countries that use Arabic as a means of expression.

Theoretical background

It is necessary at the outset to examine how established the topic of students' beliefs is as a research subject. The concept of human capital, which conceptualises a relationship between human capital investments (that is, education, time and effort) and diverse benefits, assumes that the expected benefits of education are key factors in the demand for 'investment in education' (Becker 1964). For the purposes of this study, themes relevant to the concept of human capital, and students' beliefs are discussed.

Human capital theorists stress that relating education to purely materialistic gains has distorted the multi-faceted value of education (e.g. Psacharopoulos 2000, Woodhall 1998). In narrow versions of human capital theory, skills and knowledge are instrumentally perceived, insofar as they raise individuals' productivity and hence, other things being equal, their lifetime earnings. In contrast, the human capital model may be interpreted more broadly so that we can see the overall picture. Learning should not be limited to higher market earnings (McMahon 2006), but should also include a knowledge of and capacity to appreciate world cultures. For example, learning may provide a future benefit not reflected in market earnings. The notable contribution of the human capital model emphasises the importance of non-economic considerations in addition to economic ones. Thus, monetary and non-monetary returns on education are complementary, not exclusive. Schultz (1963) observed that the classical viewpoint of education had put us on the wrong road of economic thought; he claimed that the individual human was a form of capital that could be developed. Therefore, Schultz's important contribution was the assertion that *skills* and *knowledge* are a form of capital.

Black (2008) explained that an individual's beliefs are information that is gathered from past experiences, knowledge about predecessors› experiences, peer group, or even public opinion, pressure, and social norms that are associated with certain programs of education. Since these sources of expectations are vulnerable to variation as a result of various factors, it is likely that they will be imprecise calculations of the expected returns in the chosen program (Lopez 2008). Beliefs themselves are not fixed; rather they depend on how favourable individuals perceive their circumstances to be in the changing situation (Chen 2008).

In the most basic terms, students expect continued participation in education to give them good earning ability, a high living standard, a respected social status in the future, and positive personal development (Purcell & Pitcher 1996). In her study, Al-Kandary (2004) found that Kuwait University students' decisions to pursue higher education are affected by their beliefs about how those decisions will alter their future lifetime earning. Similarly, Menon (1997) revealed that students of Cyprus display similar traits with respect to their decisions to pursue higher education. Interestingly, Menon found significant differences between the anticipated beliefs of students intending to pursue higher education and those who are not. In fact, not only deciding to continue participation in education is critical, but also what area of study is chosen.

Across different regions of the world, Arabic language programs study still attract a fairly large number of students. However, as with other language programs, students' beliefs about Arabic programs are based upon program-related differences. Boys et al. (1988) examined British students' entry behaviour in different disciplines, including English, at nine different institutions, each of which had its own philosophy and mission, particularly teaching-based institutions and research-based institutions. They found that the choice of a specific program of study has adjusted overtime to reflect students' beliefs. For example, students choosing a liberal arts-based English degree program had different beliefs with respect to lifelong values from those selecting a teaching-based English program. The latter expected that their programs would provide them with different benefits. Besides appreciating the humane side of language study, there were a number of references to communication skills, which were held to improve the ability to assimilate and present information, so that when students select their majors, they would be well-equipped. Based on the researchers' findings, an important point was made—the relationship between academic study and students' beliefs is extremely complex due to the complex relationship that reflects the changing nature of students' beliefs.

In their study, Martin and Gawthrope (2004) revealed that students of English show a mix of attitudes towards English and expected benefits. Although students of English at liberal arts school scored low on direct career relevance, their decisions to continue studying the subject for pure enjoyment are often hedged with taking up another, more applied subject in a combined program. Brennan and Williams (2003) observed the following with respect to students of English at a liberal arts school in the UK:

> If we compare the skills English graduates feel they lack to those the English benchmark statement reports they should possess, there is a mismatch in terms of developing team-work, time management/organisation and IT skills. Moreover, these same skills were all mentioned to a greater or lesser extent in the search of websites. And indeed … employers felt that English degrees were worst at developing time management and building relationships … although the evidence … is limited, it suggests that English departments may not be developing the full range of attributes and capacities outlined in the benchmark statement (p. 27).

This may point to several issues in the area of the interaction of language education and the real world. Most obviously it points to a widespread disappointment among graduates of language, with the quality of working life after a mismatch between beliefs and experience. Those entering liberal arts or education-based language programs may indeed have an idealised image of career development, or an assumption that the degree is a ticket to a lifetime of demanding and rewarding work. However, it must also be considered that many beliefs are not unreasonable (Martin & Gawthrope 2004). The question of content and delivery method of language education has arisen out of this new circumstance.

The emergence of language programs that focus more on applied sides of language has become a phenomenon. Skills such as written communication skills, oral communication skills, documenting, searching and the like have dominated the prospectus of language-related programs, whether liberal-arts or education-based (Grin 2002).

Method

This section is divided into the following parts: (a) research hypotheses; (b) a description of the study populations and the methods used to obtain the samples; (c) instrumentation for the study, including a description of the dependent and independent variables; (d) data collection; and (e) data analysis.

Research hypotheses

Based on the findings of the previous literature that there is a relationship between students' beliefs and the program of study they choose (Dominitz & Manski 1996; Williams 2001), the following are the research hypotheses:

H1-a   Students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their hedonistic motivations for investing in higher education, their career intentions, and their choice of program from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

H1-b   Students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their pragmatic motivations for investing in higher education, their career intentions, and their choice of program from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

H1-c   Students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their fatalistic motivations of investing in higher education, their career intentions and their choice of program from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

H2   Students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their perceptions of future employers' beliefs from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

H3-a   Students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their aspirations for career development from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

H3-b   Students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their long-term life goals from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

The null hypotheses regarding the above research hypotheses to be tested are that two study samples came from the same population.

Participants

The population of this study comprised students of Arabic at the College of Education (210 students) and the Faculty of Arts (390 students) (College of Education 2008/2009, Faculty of Arts 2008/2009). The samples of the study were divided into two groups: students of Arabic at the College of Education (n=171), and students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts (n=180). The sample size is as important as the sampling procedure, so a process of random selection within each group was utilised.

Instrumentation for the study

Data were collected through the use of a survey administered to the participants. The survey questionnaire that was used in this study is based on the published literature. The survey consisted of the following parts:

- Independent variable:
- There is one main independent variable: Program of Study (students of Arabic at the College of Education and students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts).

- Dependent variables: there are three dependent variables:
  - Students' motivations: Purcell and Pitcher (1996) categorised three kinds of motivation with respect to the chosen program: (a) hedonistic refers to intrinsic interest or enjoyment in the participant; (b) pragmatic refers to choosing a specific program study for vocational and longer-term reasons; and (c) fatalistic refers to students who embark on their program of study by default, because they could not get into the program they preferred.
  - Students' perceptions of future employers' expectations; and
  - Students' aspirations for career development and long-term life goals.

All these variables were assessed on a five-point Likert scale. For positively and negatively worded statements, high scores reflect positive attitudes, whereas low scores reflect negative attitudes. Although the scale was a five-point Likert scale, the scale format was of different presentations such as 'agree,' 'possible', and/or 'important'. However, these different presentations were based on their relationship to each concept respectively.

Data collection

Since this study is related to students' beliefs about their chosen programs of different Arabic language programs (Arts and Education), the necessary paperwork was submitted to obtain permission for conduct of the study. Since the average class size is 25 students, a number of classes were randomly selected from each program to obtain the desired number of participants mentioned previously. Subsequently, course instructors were contacted for permission to administer the questionnaire to their students during a class period. The instructors were assured that the complete administration of the survey would not take more than 30 minutes from their class time.

Data analysis

In order to create a data file for analysis, a coding system was designed based on the questionnaire items and response categories. Each question and measured item formed a variable, and each response category within the variable was defined and assigned a numeric value. For the purpose of this study, each variable was coded according to its appearance in the instrument. Following data collection, an identification number was assigned to each questionnaire in order to keep track of each case and to check the accuracy of the data. Based on the coding system, responses were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences version 11.0, Microsoft Windows.

Based on the research questions and hypotheses, the levels of measurement (nominal and interval) and the types of variables (continuous and discrete), two data analysis procedures were conducted: descriptive statistics, and inferential statistics, namely, two independent sample t-test. The two independent-sample t-test was used to determine if there were any statistically significant differences between the two groups of students of Arabic at the College of Education and the Faculty of Arts.

The pilot study

The pilot study showed that the Cronback's alpha reliability coefficient of the whole measure was fairly high (alpha = 0.89). It seems clear, therefore, that the measure assessed the variables of interest with high levels of internal consistency (Pedhazur & Schmelkin 1991). The pilot study was also used to check whether the time needed for completing the survey form was sufficient and to test whether participants had any difficulties in understanding the questions. The outcome was satisfactory.

Findings

This study was conducted to investigate how students in different academic programs of Arabic at Kuwait University differ in their beliefs about these given programs.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 was whether students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education differ in their motivations for joining such a program, their career intentions and their choice of program from students of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts. The hypotheses predicted that students of the Arabic teaching program at the College of Education are different in their hedonistic, pragmatic and fatalistic motivations for investing in higher education, their career intentions and their choice of program from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1:   T-test results for items showing statistically significant differences in students' opinions regarding motivations for choosing a specific program

Type of motivation	Program of study		t-value	Sig.
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
	Education	Arts		
Hedonistic motivation	16.8 (4.8)	15.7 (5.4)	-2.10 (347.28)	.04
Pragmatic motivation	14.6 (5.63)	12.5 (4.6)	-3.80 (330.7)	.0005
• Training opportunity	2.10 (1.2)	1.7 (1.03)	-2.30 (332.25)	.02
• Specialised skills and knowledge	1.57 (1.12)	1.33 (.80)	-2.34 (306.97)	.02
• Job motivations	2.20 (1.29)	1.78 (1.15)	-3.23 (339.26)	.001
• Getting chosen career	2.46 (1.36)	2.06 (1.29)	-2.83 (349)	.005
• Pursuing education	2.16 (1.24)	1.92 (1.12)	-2.53 (343.58)	.01

Fatalistic motivation	16.47 (4.29)	18.05 (4.49)	3.35 (349)	.001
Finding employment	2.88 (1.53)	3.51 (1.44)	3.99 (349)	.0001
Suitable job	3.44 (1.41)	3.89 (1.38)	2.98 (349)	.003

Sig. value is 0.05

Hedonistic motivation

The data suggest that there was a statistically significant difference only in the total scores of hedonistic motivation for students of Arabic in the Faculty of Arts and College of Education, and thus the H1a is not rejected. Specifically, the students of Arabic in the College of Education were more intrinsically-motivated and had more enjoyment from their experiences than their counterparts from the Faculty of Arts.

Pragmatic motivation

The data suggest that the two groups of students demonstrated a statistically significant difference in the total scores of pragmatic motivation, and thus the H1b is not rejected. This pragmatic motivation specifically manifested in five components.

Students of Arabic in the College of Education and their counterparts in the Faculty of Arts demonstrated a significant difference in their opinions regarding the job training opportunity which their chosen programs would provide. Participants from the College of Education consistently thought that enrolling in the College of Education would give them the training that they were seeking. Accordingly, participants from the College of Education had a mean difference in their beliefs with respect to the specialised skills and/or knowledge that their program would help them to develop higher than that of participants from the Faculty of Arts.

Students of Arabic in the College of Education scored more highly than their counterparts in the Faculty of Arts with respect to job-related motivations. Participants from the College of Education

expected better job prospects than participants from the Faculty of Arts. Similarly, students of Arabic from the College of Education expected a better chance to enter their chosen career than did students of Arabic in the Faculty of Arts. Not only were students of Arabic from the College of Education motivated by job-related concerns, they also expected more positively that their chosen program would enable them to pursue their postgraduate studies than did students of Arabic from the Faculty of Arts.

Fatalistic motivation

With respect to fatalists, students who embark on their program of study by default when they could not get into a preferred program, the findings were surprising. In contrast to the hedonistic and pragmatic motivations, the data indicate that students of Arabic from the Faculty of Arts were less fatalistic than their counterparts from the College of Education, and thus the H1c is not rejected. Specifically, finding employment rather than being a university student was not as applicable to the participants from the Faculty of Arts as to participants from the College of Education. Moreover, students of Arabic from the Faculty of Arts did not cite negative reasons that 'not finding a suitable job was their motivation to be in this program' as did their counterparts from the College of Education.

Research Question 2

Research question 2 asked, 'Do students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education differ in their perceptions of future employers' expectations from students of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts?' The hypothesis was that students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their perceptions of future employers' expectations from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts.

Data suggested that there were no statistically significant differences in the total score with respect to the perceptions of future employers'

expectations for students of Arabic at the College of Education (M = 42.10, SD = 13.60), and students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts (M = 19.70, SD = 2.02), $t0.025(348)$ = -1.64, p = .10. Thus, the H2 is rejected. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the item concerning the perception of the importance of 'time management' between participants from the College of Education (M = 2.97, SD = 1.44) and participants from the Faculty of Arts (M = 2.58, SD = 1.48), $t0.025(349)$ = -2.51, p = .01. This last difference between the two groups is inconsistent with what Brennan and Williams (2003) observed about the lack of time management among students of Arabic at liberal arts schools.

Research Question 3

Research question 3 centred on whether students of the Arabic Teaching program at the College of Education differ in their aspirations for career development and long-term life goals from students of Arabic Language and Literature at the Faculty of Arts. The hypotheses were that students of Arabic at the College of Education are different in their aspirations for career development and long-term life goals from students of Arabic at the Faculty of Arts. Table 2 shows the results.

Table 2:   T-test results for items showing statistically significant differences in students' beliefs about aspirations for career and long-term life goals

Item	Program of study		t-value	Sig.
	M (SD)	M (SD)		
	Education	**Arts**		
Future career aspiration:				
• Changing employer	2.8 (1.4)	2.4 (1.4)	-2.2(349)	.02
• Achieving higher position	3.9 (1.3)	3.6 (1.5)	-2.5 (345)	.01
• More secure employment	3.8 (1.3)	3.4 (1.5)	-2.8 (342)	.005
• Changing their field of responsibilities	3.2 (1.35)	2.8 (1.22)	3.31 (349)	.001
Lifelong goals	41.2 (5.0)	40.7 (5.5)	-.75 (349)	.45

Sig. value is 0.05

Future career aspiration

The data suggested that there was no statistically significant difference in the total score of the future career aspirations for participants from the College of Education and participants from the Faculty of Arts, and thus H3a is rejected. However, there were some items under this dimension where the two groups showed statistically significant differences (see Table 2).

There was a statically significant difference in the score of the possibility of changing employers for participants from the College of Education and the score for participants from the Faculty of Arts. Additionally, the participants from the College of Education and the participants from the Faculty of Arts showed a statistically significant difference in the possibility of achieving a higher position. Also, participants from the College of Education and participants from the Faculty of Arts showed a statistically significant difference in their belief in the possibility of achieving more secure employment. However, in contrast to this line of difference in the respective future career aspirations for both groups, where participants from the College of Education showed higher scores than their counterparts from the Faculty of Arts, the latter group believed they were much less likely to change their field of responsibilities than the former group.

Lifelong goals

The data suggested that there was no statistically significant difference in the total score on the lifelong goals scale for participants from the College of Education and participants from the Faculty of Arts, and thus H3b is rejected.

Discussion of the findings

It is relevant at this point to raise two issues. First, it is important to know that both groups showed some rationale in choosing their field of study (Becker 1964)—that is, participants perceived benefits from their investment in education. The statistically significant differences between the two groups were in the degree, not in kind (Abu-Allam 1994). Second, the bipolar dichotomy of concepts is better seen as a continuum; that is, if some people are pragmatically motivated, it does not necessarily mean they are not hedonistically motivated as well (Al-Thabeity 1998). In fact, this continuum nature of combining different or even conflicting factors explains why some people showed varying levels of conviction with respect to different factors.

As students decide to continue participating in education, it is clear that they are aware of making an investment in their human capital (Blaug 1985; Schultz 1963). The mosaic of beliefs shows that relating any program of study to merely materialistic benefits is not realistic; non-materialistic returns to individual investment in education such as knowledge and skills are apparent in students' perceptions (Psacharopoulos 2006; Quiggin 1999; Woodhall 1998).

Although students of Arabic have what might be called 'generic' beliefs with respect to investing in continued higher education in Kuwait, students who clustered within certain categories held different beliefs as a function of course content (Boys et al. 1988). Hence, students of the two programs showed no statistically significant differences in terms of lifelong beliefs about their programs and their general philosophy of higher education. Moreover, since the future employer is very probably the government (El Touny 2002), different programs of Arabic language appear to be a less prominent indicator of future employers' expectations than if the employment were part of the private sector.

Implications for educational pedagogy

The findings of many studies, including the current study, have demonstrated that students' beliefs about investing in higher education have become, or are becoming, an important tool and an essential part of educational policies. The findings from this study suggest a number of implications to be taken into consideration by educational planners in Kuwait. First, they need to be aware of the role of students' beliefs in investing in further education and to encourage students and their families to communicate those beliefs about the potential benefits of their chosen program with those who are in a better position for advising them. The channels of communication are various. Second, students' beliefs are of no less importance as an input than other indicators to policies concerning education and employment. Third, it is plausible to let each program present itself as it is, whether liberal arts-based or professional-based language programs (Grin 2002). The case should be, however, that the whole community believes in the unique contribution of each program, respectively (Martin and Gawthropem 2004). The ultimate goal is to enhance students' achievement and understanding of the content of their chosen program.

Recommendations for future research

This exploratory research has revealed fascinating patterns within the beliefs of the students of Arabic enrolling in career-based and liberal arts-based programs. First, the extent to which students' beliefs of enrolment in different programs are being and are likely to be true, and the extent to which their beliefs about the transition from education to real world are realistic, can only be assessed properly over a longer period of time (recommendations for future research below). Second, if I was to approach the research again, I would rather conduct a two-stage study, comprised of a quantitative followed by a qualitative study. Alternatively, it is suggested that a qualitative study be built on the findings of this and other similar

studies. The main strength of the qualitative approach would lie in providing a deeper understanding of a given phenomenon through answering 'how' and 'why' questions, and placing emphasis on tracking situations over a period of time rather than tracking frequencies of occurrences. Basically, the qualitative approach could provide us with two crucial outcomes (see Creswell 2003):

- understanding participants' ways of making their experiences and events meaningful, and how their beliefs and behaviour are reflected in the real world mutually influencing each other, and
- understanding the particular context within which participants act, and how this context affects their actions.

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