



English Medium Instruction, Arabic and Identity in Oman's Higher Education Institutions: Teacher and Student Attitudes

以英語為教學媒介語、阿拉伯語和身分認同之於阿曼高等教育：教師和學生的態度

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Abstract

This study explored student and teacher attitudes towards English Medium Instruction (EMI) at the tertiary level in Oman, including its impact on learners' Arabic use and socio-cultural identities. Data was collected through a 40-item Likert response scale questionnaire administered in English and Arabic to 415 students and 55 instructors at five tertiary-level institutions across the sultanate. Results indicate that participants identified a number of advantages of EMI, including increasing employment opportunities and facilitating communication in education and workforce settings. However, significant challenges, such as limiting student course content understanding and family communication about their studies, were also present. Teacher participants generally did not believe that EMI had any negative effects on learner identity and Arabic language use, although students held neutral attitudes about these issues and maintained that their content understanding would be enhanced through Arabic medium instruction. Despite these areas of divergence, independent samples *t* tests indicated that teacher and student participants held similar attitudes across most remaining questionnaire categories. Implications of these findings for EMI and L1 use at the tertiary level in Oman and in other similar education settings are discussed.

摘要

本研究探討了學生和教師對阿曼高等教育中以英語為教學媒介語(EMI)的態度,包括其對於學習者在阿拉伯語使用和社會文化認同上的影響。我們使用了包含40個题目的李克特反應量表(包含英語版和阿拉伯語版)來對阿曼國內的五個高等教育機構中的415名學生和55名教師進行問卷調查。結果顯示受試者指出了以英語為教學媒介語的許多優勢,包括增加就業機會以及促進教育和勞動環境中的溝通。然而,以英語為教學媒介語仍然存在著相當挑戰,例如:侷限了學生對課程內容的理解亦限制了家庭中關於求學上的溝通交流。教師受試者普遍不認為以英語為教學媒介語對學習者的身份認同和阿拉伯語的使用會有任何負面的影響,而學生受試者對此則保持中立的態度,並認為若以阿拉伯語為教學媒介語的話,將會提高他們對於內容的理解。儘管存在這些分歧,但獨立樣本*t*檢驗表明,教師和學生受試者對其餘多數的問卷問題持有相似的態度。本研究亦討論了這些發現對阿曼和其他相似教學情境的高等教育中在英語和母語使用上的教學啟示。

Keywords English medium instruction (EMI) · Tertiary education · Oman · Student/teacher attitudes · Identity · Socio-cultural values

關鍵詞 以英語為教學媒介語 · 高等教育 · 阿曼 · 學生/教師態度 · 身份認同 · 社會文化價值觀

Introduction

English is today the dominant global lingua franca, with more than a quarter of the world's population being able to communicate, to some degree, in the language. This situation is unprecedented in history [17, 39]. A number of authors highlight the variety of international, or elite, domains that English dominates [13, 48], in addition to the “privileges” it has compared to other languages, and its wide geographical spread [10, 14, 16].

A growing number of international tertiary institutions offer courses where English is the dominant, if not the exclusive, medium of instruction [19]. Examples can be found across the world, including in Europe, sub-Saharan Africa and Asia [31, 32, 40, 41]. This is especially true of Arab countries, where local demand for access to branch campuses of Western universities [47] has driven an increase in the number of tertiary institutions offering English medium instruction (EMI) programs [12, 46] that complement often well-established state institutions.

Like many of its neighbours, English has played an important role in government education policy in Oman since at least the advent of the country's modern era in 1970 [20]. From the time the first public university was opened in the sultanate in 1986, English has been the dominant language of instruction for science, and some humanities, based subjects. This situation has been replicated by the growing number of private universities and colleges opening in Oman over the past 20–30 years.

Despite the centrality of EMI to tertiary systems across the Arab Gulf, research from the region and the greater Muslim world often reports a complicated mix of attitudes towards English and EMI [8, 21, 22, 30]. These studies suggest that Arab students in EMI courses tend to hold positive attitudes towards the English language and/or EMI itself. In addition, the majority of students are often described as aware of the instrumental value of English, especially in terms of its importance for their current studies and future careers. However, attitudes towards Western cultures are typically more mixed. Participants also often identify a number of important challenges associated with EMI, with limited content understanding perhaps being the most significant. Within this context, the current research investigated student and teacher attitudes towards EMI at the tertiary level in Oman, including its impact on learners' Arabic use and sense of socio-cultural identity.

Literature Review

English in Oman's Education System

Formal education is a relatively new concept in Oman. Historically, education predominantly involved the al Katateeb system where private teachers instructed students in

the Qur'an and basic literacy skills. Following the opening of the first regular public school in 1928 [36], three publicly funded Al Sa'eedeya schools were established between 1940 and 1970. These all-boys schools occupied purpose-built buildings and subjects were taught for the first time according to a syllabus. In 1970, the new ruler of Oman, Sultan Qaboos, placed the development of a nation-wide education system as central to his many reforms. Today, there are more than 1000 government schools across the sultanate and more than 500,000 students, with English taught as a subject in the Basic Education system from grade 1.

Oman's first university was opened in academic year 1986/1987 and uses EMI for all science- and some humanities-based majors. Since its establishment, a growing number of higher education institutions have opened across Oman, many of which also employ EMI. The choice of English as a medium of instruction is due to the important part it plays in the country, including its role as the dominant language of the private sector and as a lingua franca. However, despite English's social and educational importance, the literature suggests that the transition from Arabic medium government schools to English-medium tertiary institutions poses a number of significant difficulties for Omani learners [26].

EMI in the Arab Gulf

This section begins with a general overview of some of the issues related to EMI at the tertiary level around the world. It then looks more specifically at studies about attitudes towards English and EMI in universities, including its impact on learner identity and Arabic use, in Arab Gulf countries. Areas of overlap and divergence in student attitudes are detailed, while the potential advantages and challenges of EMI in this context are also explored.

With its rapid spread across many of the world's regions, a great deal of research has been done about student and teacher attitudes towards EMI, including its potential benefits and challenges [11]. A systematic review of studies investigating EMI in higher education institutions around the world reported a number of benefits, often associated with EMI's potential to improve learners' English abilities, job opportunities, social mobility and ability to communicate with others [33]. EMI was also linked to national modernization and social prestige. Despite this, participants across numerous studies expressed concern about whether students' English proficiency was adequate for content learning through EMI. A number of authors also examined whether EMI has harmful effects on learner identity [37, 45] and first language use [27, 33], often with mixed results.

Similar advantages and challenges associated with EMI as reported above have also appeared in the Arab Gulf literature. Fahmy and Bilton [23] conducted one of the first studies examining learner attitudes towards EMI in Oman. The authors administered a 5-point Arabic language questionnaire about attitudes towards English and EMI, and potential cultural conflicts associated with learning English, to 74 Omani English major student teachers at the country's national university. Fahmy and Bilton reported that participants held largely favourable attitudes towards English, and associated it with the opportunity to gain a better understanding of English-speaking people. Very little evidence emerged about participants' fear of exposure to "harmful" foreign values associated with the language.

In Bahrain, Al-Ansari and Lori's [2] study of 65 College of Arts Arabic and English majors looked at several factors, including student attitudes towards English and to British culture. The researchers compared attitudes between English and Arabic majors by collecting data through a closed-item, Likert-type response scale questionnaire. Results indicate that English major participants held more positive attitudes to English and to British people than their Arabic major counterparts, thereby suggesting that the positive attitudes towards English and English-speaking people reported by Fahmy and Bilton in Oman may be heavily influenced by the medium of instruction learners study in.

Malallah [34] surveyed 409 Kuwaiti undergraduate students about a variety of topics related to their English language instruction. In exploring participant attitudes towards EMI, including its place within Arab societies and relevance to learners' future lives, the author administered a questionnaire that included items concerning the impact of English on Arab traditions and on the region's dominant religion, Islam. Of greatest relevance to the current study, over 90% of respondents expressed some form of disagreement with the item, "Learning English will harm the Islamic religion", while around 73% disagreed that, "Learning English requires gaining habits that are not required by Arabs". These results are similar to those offered by Fahmy and Bilton [23] in that they suggest positive attitudes towards EMI among students combined with a lack of fear of cultural deracination.

In the UAE, Findlow's [25] study explored whether 340 students would prefer to receive their university-level instruction in English or Arabic. The author reported that half of participants preferred instruction in English, compared to 22% who stated a preference for Arabic medium instruction, and 28% who wanted to receive instruction in both languages. Findlow states that these results suggest a growing ambivalence to English in response to the wider geopolitical context and to the potential for the language's normative baggage to negatively impact upon participants' socio-cultural identities – results that were not apparent in the work of either Fahmy and Bilton or Malallah but that were, nonetheless, suggested by Al-Ansari and Lori. However, although students involved in the study expressed a desire to increase their exposure to Arabic due to its association with Arab traditions and customs, overall more than three quarters still placed a high value on at least some degree of instruction in English.

Elyas [22] investigated the attitudes of 65 Saudi English major university students towards English and Western cultures by administering a 12-item Likert-scale questionnaire. Given a certain level of fear of the influence of Western cultures reported by Findlow above, an interesting finding to emerge was participants' strongly held beliefs that learning English should incorporate learning about the target language culture. Moreover, although slightly more than 50% of students believed their textbooks contained "alien or taboo information", overall they saw no "imperialistic purpose" embedded within their course materials or English instruction. Further, unlike Findlow's [25] respondents, participants here did not believe that EMI impinged upon their identities. Similar to the Omani and Kuwaiti studies reported above, Elyas concludes that most participants held positive attitudes towards English as neither the language nor the Western culture/s associated with it appear to threaten their traditional values.

Al-Mashikhi, Al-Mahrooqi and Denman [8] explored attitudes towards EMI among College of Science students in Oman by administering a 35-item questionnaire to 60 undergraduate learners. While the majority of participants acknowledged English as the preeminent language of science and technology, more than half stated a preference for Arabic medium instruction. This preference was associated with concerns about the way English can limit learners' course content understanding. Despite this, the authors note that participants did not report negative attitudes to EMI. Moreover, similar to participants in Fahmy and Bilton's research [23], they displayed both integrative and instrumental forms of motivation to learning English, and identified numerous benefits to EMI.

In Qatar, Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb [21] examined the attitudes of Qatar University (QU) students to the change from English to Arabic medium instruction introduced as part of a wider education reform. Around 295 students from the four QU colleges affected by the transition were administered a questionnaire. The authors reported that students, like those in Al-Mashikhi et al. [8], largely supported using Arabic as a medium of instruction. This was despite their awareness of how not using English could affect their chances for employment and pursuing postgraduate studies. Ellili-Cherif and Alkhateeb conclude that, as a result, it may be necessary for QU to offer English for Specific Purposes courses to improve learners' English skills in preparation for the future.

In the UAE, Solloway [44] examined the attitudes towards EMI of female students enrolled in a university-level foundation program. Data was collected through a questionnaire administered to 20 participants and semi-structured interviews with a further ten. The author reported that, while participants were aware of the importance of English in the UAE and for participation in the global economy, they nonetheless identified it as a potential barrier to learning. As a result, they stated a preference for receiving their university educations in Arabic rather than English. Solloway also reported the emergence of a level of ambivalence in the interviews to English among participants, with the language's pervasiveness seen as a potential threat to Arabic use and religious and cultural identity, even though this ambivalence was less apparent in the questionnaire data. Around 85% of participants agreed that they should be allowed to choose whether to study in English or Arabic.

Participant attitudes towards English and EMI, including its potential influence upon learner identity and Arabic use, reported in the above studies reveal a somewhat complicated pattern. Although several studies suggest that university students in the region may generally hold favourable attitudes towards English and EMI [23, 34], this is by no means universal. In a number of investigations, participants stated a preference for studying either in Arabic or in both Arabic and English [8, 21, 25, 44]. A certain amount of ambivalence towards English and the encroachment of Western cultures were also reported [25]. However, these findings were tempered by the fact that some respondents did not see the foreign cultures they identified as part of their EMI studies as a threat to their identities [22]. Moreover, there is evidence that participant attitudes to English and EMI might be influenced by their college and current medium of instruction [2]. It is within a framework informed by the complex nature of these results that the current study examined Omani tertiary-level learners' attitudes towards EMI and the potential impact of EMI on their use of Arabic and sense of identity.

Methodology

Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are student and teacher attitudes towards EMI at the tertiary level in Oman?
2. What effects, if any, does EMI have on students' Arabic use and sense of socio-cultural identity?

Sample

The researchers selected higher education institutions that were either within or around Oman's capital city of Muscat to recruit teacher and student participants. After receiving relevant institutional ethics approvals, the research team sought teacher participation by offering an overview of the research during staff room meetings. Teachers indicating a desire to participate were given the option of either the English or Arabic hard-copy version of the questionnaire. They were asked to complete and submit it to the research team within a 7-day period.

Students were approached during class time following relevant ethics, administrator and teacher permission. Like the teacher participants, students were reminded that participation was voluntary and that no personally identifying information would be collected. They were also assured that their choice to participate or not would in no way impact upon their standing in the class or at their college/university. Students were asked to select either the English or Arabic version of the questionnaire and to complete it in class to return to the researchers.

The teacher sample consisted of 55 tertiary-level instructors from five higher education institutions in Oman. The sample was almost evenly divided between female (50.9%) and male (49.1%) participants, who were aged between 22 and 29 (25.5%), 30–39 (29.1%), 40–49 (21.8%) and 50 years or older (23.6%). Most participants were Omani (32.7%) or Indian (18.2%), with others coming from diverse nations around the world.

A total of 415 tertiary-level students from five institutions also participated. Female participants (67.7%) outnumbered male participants (29.6%) in a way that generally represents the gender bias in Omani tertiary institutions (around 2.7% did not indicate gender). The majority of participants were Omani (87.7%), with the remainder coming from various Arab nations and Pakistan. They ranged in age from 17 to 43.

Research Instrument

The researchers developed Arabic and English versions of teacher and student questionnaires based on both the literature and on the instrument they previously used with College of Science students at the same research site [8]. Both teacher and student questionnaires were essentially identical and consisted of two main parts. The first elicited participant background information, and the second featured a series of items with a five-point Likert-type response scale. Response options ranged from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree with a mid-point of Neutral.

After initial construction of the English versions of the questionnaires, they were submitted to a panel of five academics in the field who were not otherwise involved in the study. The validation panel was asked to examine the questionnaires in terms of theoretical coverage, item relevance, clarity, breadth and depth of concepts covered, length and matters of accessibility of presentation. Panel feedback received was used to modify the questionnaires and resulted in several changes to the number of items and item wordings. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each questionnaire category to determine internal consistency.

The resultant student and teacher questionnaires featured 40 items organized into seven categories: Reasons for Using English Medium Instruction at the Tertiary Level (7 items); Attitudes towards English Medium Instruction (8 items); Effects of English Medium Instruction on Arabic Use (4 items); Attitudes towards Arabic Medium Instruction (5 items); Effects of English Medium Instruction on Identity (5 items); Challenges associated with English Medium Instruction (4 items); and Factors Affecting Attitudes towards English Medium Instruction (7 items). The English versions of both the questionnaires were translated into Arabic by a university-based translator before being independently back-translated to check for accuracy.

Data Analysis

Descriptive analysis, with a focus on questionnaire category and individual item means and standard deviations, was performed to examine participant demographic features and to address the research questions. Following scholars such as Fernandez [24], evaluation ranges were calculated to facilitate interpretation as follows:

Strongly Agree: 4.20–5.00

Agree: 3.40–4.19

Neutral: 2.60–3.39

Disagree: 1.80–2.59

Strongly Disagree: 1.00–1.79

Independent samples *t* tests were performed to examine if statistically significant differences existed between teacher and student participants on category totals. Despite the potential chance of inflated type I error due to multiple testing, a Bonferroni correction was not made given the exploratory nature of the research. The acceptable probability level was set at $p \leq 0.05$.

Results

Table 1 indicates that Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each questionnaire category ranged from 0.50–0.94, with an average of 0.79, for the teacher questionnaire, and from 0.64–0.84, with an average of 0.75, for the student questionnaire. While almost all questionnaire category coefficients were acceptable, the level of internal consistency for teacher questionnaire category 5 was very limited. As one of the main concerns of the research is comparing teacher and student category means, it has been retained here. However, this coefficient level is explicitly acknowledged as a limitation (see “Conclusion and Recommendations”).

Table 1 Cronbach's alpha coefficients for teacher and student questionnaires

Questionnaire category	Teacher questionnaire	Student questionnaire
Category #1: Reasons for using EMI at the tertiary level	0.94	0.84
Category #2: Attitudes towards EMI	0.85	0.78
Category #3: Effects of EMI on Arabic use	0.89	0.73
Category #4: Attitudes towards Arabic medium instruction	0.72	0.78
Category #5: Effects of EMI on identity	0.50	0.76
Category #6: Challenges associated with EMI	0.82	0.73
Category #7: Factors affecting attitudes towards EMI	0.78	0.64

Table 2 features teacher and student response means for items from the first questionnaire category—reasons for using EMI at the tertiary level. Teacher and student participants expressed some form of agreement with all category items. Both groups agreed that it is important to study courses in English because “it is the world’s global language” (teacher $M=4.53$; student $M=4.06$) and “the language of science and technology” (teacher $M=4.49$; student $M=3.80$). They also agreed that studying courses in English “makes students more independent learners” (teacher $M=4.04$; student $M=3.83$), “increases graduates’ chances of finding suitable jobs after graduation” (teacher $M=4.44$; student $M=4.01$) and “makes it easier for students to continue their postgraduate studies” (teacher $M=4.52$; student $M=4.09$). Finally, teacher and student participants agreed that studying in English “makes it easier for students to communicate with their

Table 2 Reasons for using EMI at the tertiary level

Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
1 It is important to study courses in English because it is the world’s global language.	4.53 (0.75)	4.06 (1.12)
2 It is important to study courses in English because it is the language of science and technology.	4.49 (0.78)	3.80 (1.01)
3 Studying courses in English makes students more independent learners.	4.04 (1.02)	3.83 (0.99)
4 Studying courses in English increases graduates’ chances of finding suitable jobs after graduation.	4.44 (0.84)	4.01 (1.05)
5 Studying courses in English makes it easier for students to continue their postgraduate studies.	4.52 (0.84)	4.09 (0.97)
6 Studying courses in English makes it easier for students to communicate with their teachers.	4.35 (0.89)	4.09 (1.04)
7 Studying courses in English helps students to communicate with their co-workers in the future.	4.31 (0.82)	4.04 (1.02)
Category total	4.41	4.00

teachers” (teacher $M = 4.35$; student $M = 4.09$) and “helps students to communicate with their co-workers in the future” (teacher $M = 4.31$; student $M = 4.04$).

A similar pattern can also be witnessed in response to category items about attitudes towards EMI (see Table 3). Both teacher and student respondents expressed some level of agreement with almost all items. The one exception was item 13—“People respect students more if they study courses in English”. Although teacher participants ($M = 3.52$) agreed with this item, student participants ($M = 3.14$) were neutral. Teacher and student participants nonetheless agreed that studying courses in English is “the most effective way to learn subject content” (teacher $M = 3.83$; student $M = 3.58$), “increases students’ sense of pride” (teacher $M = 3.79$; student $M = 3.51$) and “makes students more educated” (teacher $M = 3.68$; student $M = 3.66$). Teacher and student participants expressed their strongest level of agreement with items 11 and 12—“Studying courses in English helps improve students’ English language proficiency” (teacher $M = 4.38$; student $M = 4.02$), and, “Studying courses in English allows students to interact with people from different cultures” (teacher $M = 4.43$; student $M = 4.11$). Finally, both groups agreed that studying in English “helps equip students with the skills they need in their future careers” (teacher $M = 4.06$; student $M = 3.74$), and “develops students’ personalities” (teacher $M = 3.74$; student $M = 3.54$).

Questionnaire category 3 explored the potential effects of EMI on Arabic use (see Table 4). Teacher participants disagreed that studying courses in English “may make students forget subject-specific Arabic terms” ($M = 2.47$) and “decreases the use of Arabic in Omani society” ($M = 2.33$), although students expressed neutrality in response to these items ($M = 2.89$ and $M = 2.83$ respectively). Both teacher and student

Table 3 Attitudes towards EMI

	Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
8	Studying courses in English is the most effective way to learn subject content.	3.83 (0.83)	3.58 (0.98)
9	Studying courses in English increases students’ sense of pride.	3.79 (0.80)	3.51 (1.05)
10	Studying courses in English makes students more educated.	3.68 (1.00)	3.66 (1.12)
11	Studying courses in English helps improve students’ English language proficiency.	4.38 (0.63)	4.02 (0.97)
12	Studying courses in English allows students to interact with people from different cultures.	4.43 (0.77)	4.11 (0.91)
13	People respect students more if they study courses in English.	3.52 (1.04)	3.14 (1.21)
14	Studying courses in English helps equip students with the skills they need in their future careers.	4.06 (0.76)	3.74 (1.00)
15	Studying courses in English develops students’ personalities.	3.74 (0.83)	3.54 (1.09)
	Category total	3.95	3.67

Table 4 Effects of EMI on Arabic use

Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
16 Studying courses in English may make students forget subject-specific Arabic terms.	2.47 (0.94)	2.89 (1.25)
17 Studying courses in English means students do not learn subject-related terminology in Arabic.	2.67 (1.02)	2.87 (1.16)
18 Studying courses in English decreases the use of Arabic in the workforce.	2.80 (1.08)	3.11 (1.14)
19 Studying courses in English decreases the use of Arabic in Omani society.	2.33 (1.04)	2.83 (1.26)
Category total	2.57	2.92

participants were neutral about whether studying in English “means students do not learn subject-related terminology in Arabic” (teacher $M = 2.67$; student $M = 2.87$), or “decreases the use of Arabic in the workforce” (teacher $M = 2.80$; student $M = 3.11$).

Table 5 features items from the fourth questionnaire category about attitudes towards Arabic medium instruction. Teacher participants expressed neutrality about all five category items, while student participants were neutral in response to two and agreed with the remainder. Both teachers and students were neutral about whether, “Arabic is more effective as a medium of instruction than English” (teacher $M = 2.71$; student $M = 3.36$), or if, “The Arabic language should be emphasized more in university courses” (teacher $M = 2.78$; student $M = 3.31$). However, teachers were neutral about, and students agreed with, all remaining items. These included, “Most students prefer Arabic as a medium of instruction in their college/institute” (teacher $M = 3.15$; student $M = 3.40$), “Studying courses in Arabic increases students’ standard Arabic proficiency level” (teacher $M = 3.31$; student $M = 3.45$) and, “Studying courses in English makes students more loyal to the Arabic language” (teacher $M = 2.94$; student $M = 3.45$).

Questionnaire category 5 was about the effects of EMI on learner identity (see Table 6). Student participants were neutral in response to all five items, while teacher participants disagreed with almost all items. Examples of this can be witnessed in

Table 5 Attitudes towards Arabic medium instruction

Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
20 Most students prefer Arabic as a medium of instruction in their college/institute.	3.15 (0.76)	3.40 (1.09)
21 Arabic is more effective as a medium of instruction than English.	2.71 (0.79)	3.36 (1.02)
22 The Arabic language should be emphasized more in university courses.	2.78 (0.92)	3.31 (1.11)
23 Studying courses in Arabic increases students’ standard Arabic proficiency level.	3.31 (0.95)	3.45 (1.05)
24 Studying courses in Arabic makes students more loyal to the Arabic language.	2.94 (0.98)	3.45 (1.15)
Category total	2.99	3.39

Table 6 Effects of EMI on identity

Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
25 Studying courses in English detracts from students' Arab identities.	2.33 (0.91)	2.84 (1.11)
26 Studying courses in English decreases students' pride in the Arabic language.	2.25 (0.91)	2.83 (1.13)
27 Students encounter harmful foreign values when they study courses in English.	2.42 (0.85)	2.95 (1.10)
28 Studying courses in English decreases students' pride in Omani culture.	2.18 (0.88)	2.73 (1.19)
29 Studying courses in English does not contribute to students' sense of identity.	2.89 (1.21)	2.97 (1.09)
Category total	2.40	2.87

response to each of the following items: “Studying courses in English detracts from students' Arab identities” (teacher $M = 2.33$; student $M = 2.84$), “Studying courses in English decreases students' pride in the Arabic language” (teacher $M = 2.25$; student $M = 2.83$), “Students encounter harmful foreign values when they study courses in English” (teacher $M = 2.42$; student $M = 2.95$) and, “Studying courses in English decreases students' pride in Omani culture” (teacher $M = 2.18$; student $M = 2.73$). Teacher and student participants, however, were both neutral about whether studying courses in English “does not contribute to students' sense of identity” (teacher $M = 2.89$; student $M = 2.97$).

Four items were associated with the questionnaire category of challenges associated with EMI (see Table 7). Teacher participants disagreed that studying courses in English “decreases students' understanding of subject content” ($M = 2.58$) and “makes it harder for students to understand content in their English language textbooks” ($M = 2.53$), while student participants were neutral ($M = 3.01$ and $M = 3.17$ respectively). The opposite pattern is evident in response to item 33—“It takes longer for students to learn subject-related terms in English than in Arabic”—with student participants agreeing with this item ($M = 3.44$) and teacher participants being neutral ($M = 3.08$).

Table 7 Challenges associated with EMI

Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
30 Studying courses in English decreases students' understanding of subject content.	2.58 (0.92)	3.01 (1.12)
31 Studying courses in English makes it harder for students to understand content in their English language textbooks.	2.53 (0.92)	3.17 (1.10)
32 Having exams in English decreases students' grades.	2.64 (0.94)	3.31 (1.16)
33 It takes longer for students to learn subject-related terms in English than in Arabic.	3.08 (0.90)	3.44 (1.11)
Category total	2.71	3.25

However, both student and teacher participants were neutral about whether, “Having exams in English decreases students’ grades” (teacher $M=2.64$; student $M=3.31$).

Seven items were featured in the final questionnaire category about factors affecting attitudes towards EMI (see Table 8). Both teacher and student participants agreed with the majority of these. They agreed that, “Students’ parents usually understand the importance of studying courses in English” (teacher $M=3.71$; student $M=3.61$), “Students’ English proficiency influences their grades in the courses they study in English” (teacher $M=3.96$; student $M=3.63$), “Students usually find it easier to understand teachers’ explanations in the courses they study in English” (teacher $M=3.40$; student $M=3.43$) and, “People in the community usually understand why it is important for students to study courses in English” (teacher $M=3.80$; student $M=3.73$). Both groups were neutral about whether, “Studying courses in English does not make it difficult for students’ family members to help them in their studies” (teacher $M=3.04$; student $M=3.32$). However, although teacher participants agreed that, “Students’ peers’ attitudes towards studying in English affects their performance in English medium courses” ($M=3.60$), and, “Studying courses in English allows students to learn more than studying in Arabic” ($M=3.44$), students were neutral in response to both ($M=3.25$ and $M=3.21$ respectively).

Independent samples t tests, with acceptable significance levels set at $p \leq 0.05$, revealed statistically significant differences between teacher and student groups for questionnaire categories 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6. For category 1, student participants recorded a lower overall mean score ($M=4.00$) than teachers ($M=4.41$) ($t(430)=-3.81$; $p=.000$). Here, both group means indicate agreement about the importance of EMI, although teachers expressed a higher level of agreement than students. For category 2,

Table 8 Factors affecting attitudes towards EMI

	Item	Teacher mean (SD)	Student mean (SD)
34	Students’ parents usually understand the importance of studying courses in English.	3.71 (0.79)	3.61 (1.01)
35	Studying courses in English does not make it difficult for students’ family members to help them in their studies.	3.04 (0.96)	3.32 (1.05)
36	Students’ peers’ attitudes towards studying in English affects their performance in English-medium courses.	3.60 (0.76)	3.25 (0.94)
37	Students’ English proficiency influences their grades in the courses they study in English.	3.96 (0.69)	3.63 (0.97)
38	Students usually find it easier to understand teachers’ explanations in the courses they study in English.	3.40 (0.85)	3.43 (1.00)
39	Studying courses in English allows students to learn more than studying in Arabic.	3.44 (0.81)	3.21 (1.13)
40	People in the community usually understand why it is important for students to study courses in English.	3.80 (0.85)	3.73 (1.02)
	Category total	3.56	3.27

student participants ($M = 3.67$) again recorded a lower mean total than teachers ($M = 3.95$) ($t(433) = -3.34$; $p = .001$). However, both participant groups' overall means were within the agree response range, thereby indicating that students and teachers both generally had positive attitudes about EMI.

For category 3, effects of EMI on Arabic use, student participants recorded a higher overall mean ($M = 2.92$) than teachers ($M = 2.57$) ($t(454) = 2.28$; $p = .006$). The student mean suggests neutrality about whether EMI had negative effects on student Arabic use, while teachers disagreed about the existence of these effects. For category 5, which was concerned with the effects of EMI on learner identity, student participants recorded a higher overall mean ($M = 2.87$) than teachers ($M = 2.40$) ($t(447) = 4.36$; $p = .000$). The students' response mean again indicates neutrality about whether EMI has negative effects on learners' sense of Arab identity, while teachers generally disagreed that such effects existed. The final questionnaire category where statistically significant differences were found was category 6—challenges associated with EMI. Although the student mean ($M = 3.25$) was higher than for teacher participants ($M = 2.71$) ($t(447) = 4.36$; $p = .000$), both still represented overall levels of neutrality. This indicates that both groups neither agreed nor disagreed about the extent of the challenges EMI raises for learners.

Discussion

Findings suggest that both student and teacher participants agreed EMI offered learners a number of potential benefits and held largely positive attitudes towards it. Teacher and student participants recognized English as the world's global language and the language of science and technology, while also agreeing that knowledge of English increases learners' chances of gaining suitable employment upon graduation. Respondents also maintained that EMI equips learners with the skills necessary for future careers. This point is closely tied to demand for English in Oman's private sector workforce, and the subsequent role it plays as a gatekeeper to employment [3, 5, 6].

Participants identified the value of English in facilitating communication both within tertiary settings and across Omani society by agreeing that EMI makes it easier for students to communicate with their teachers and future co-workers. The role English plays in Oman as a bridging language between the country's various linguistic and cultural groups is well documented [42], so it is little surprise that tertiary students appear to be aware of the language's potential usefulness in this regard. Given the importance of English as a bridging language and as a key to social and professional mobility, teacher and student beliefs that EMI improves learner English proficiency is associated with developing an important social and professional skill.

The recognition of the potential social and professional benefits of EMI was acknowledged by participants as being influenced by various factors. Teacher and student participants agreed that parents, family and community members understood the importance of EMI. However, both groups were neutral about whether EMI made it difficult for students' family members to help them in their studies. Considering the fact that the extended family and local communities in Oman often have greater influence on learners than in more Western contexts, and that Omani students often report quite high levels of parental concern with their studies [7], this proves to be a mixed result.

That is, while family and community support suggests somewhat positive attitudes towards EMI in the wider socio-cultural milieu, the limited involvement parents can have in their children's studies due to EMI may contribute to the kind of "bifurcation" of society between English and Arabic spheres that Findlow [25] describes. Further, the fact that students were neutral about whether EMI decreased their content understanding, while teachers and students were both unsure about whether exams in English decrease learner grades, may have a negative influence on learners' knowledge acquisition. This could have an important impact on learners' postgraduation work performance and employability.

Another interesting finding relates to participants' attitudes towards Arabic medium instruction. Although teacher and student participants agreed that studying courses in English is the most effective way to learn subject content, a level of divergence emerged in attitudes towards the potential use of Arabic. While most student participants preferred Arabic medium instruction, claiming it would improve their levels of standard Arabic and make them more loyal to the language, teachers were neutral about whether it would be beneficial. Findlow [25] reported around 28% of her participants preferred to receive their tertiary-level educations in both English and Arabic, while 85% of Solloway's [44] participants stated that students should be able to choose their language of instruction. Although not enough evidence is currently available in Oman to recommend pursuing such courses of action at this time, further investigation may examine whether there is widespread interest among Omani tertiary learners in EMI programs with the possibility of studying in Arabic.

When the effects of EMI on learners' socio-cultural identities and Arabic use were examined, discrepancies between teacher and student participants again arose. Although teacher participants disagreed that EMI would make students forget subject-specific terms in Arabic and decrease the use of Arabic in Oman, student participants were neutral. Teachers also disagreed that EMI detracts from learners' Arab identities and their pride in Omani culture, and that it was a source of exposure to harmful foreign values. Even though student participants did not explicitly agree with these statements, they were nonetheless neutral about whether studying in English was harmful to their identities.

In the literature, there is a somewhat complex pattern of beliefs about whether learning in and about English entails exposure to foreign values, and, if it does, whether these values are "harmful". While Malallah [34], Fahmy and Bilton [23] and Al-Mashikhi et al. [8] describe participants as not seeing any potential threat in exposure to English, Solloway [44] and Findlow [25] report the opposite. To further complicate the matter, Elyas [22] maintains that, although his participants reported encountering foreign values in their textbooks, they nonetheless did not see this as a threat to their identities, and they actually wanted to learn more about foreign cultures associated with English.

In interpreting these findings, it is perhaps necessary to refer to Clarke's [15] description of his Emirati university learners' responses to English as falling into one of three categories: (1) a naive celebration of English; (2) nostalgia for Islamic-Arab purism; and (3) a pragmatic engagement with the language's socio-political implications. However, it is important to reiterate that, of the Omani research reported above [8, 23], it is the response of pragmatic understanding of the value of the language without negatively affecting users' identities that dominates.

Despite these areas of divergence, teacher and student attitudes towards EMI at the tertiary level in Oman demonstrate a relatively high level of overlap. This was in evidence during the application of independent samples *t* tests to determine if statistically significant differences existed between students and teachers on questionnaire categories. Although differences were found on five questionnaire categories, in general these were differences in magnitude rather than direction. For instance, in response to category 1 about reasons for using EMI, students and teachers both expressed overall agreement, although teachers generally agreed more strongly. Similar trends were witnessed in response to category 2, with both respondent groups expressing generally positive attitudes towards EMI, and category 6 where teacher and student participants were neutral about the impact of challenges associated with EMI.

The only exceptions to this rule were category 3, about the effects of EMI on Arabic use, and category 5, which was concerned with the effects of EMI on student identity. In both cases, student responses indicated neutrality about the possible threat of EMI to their mother tongue and socio-cultural identity, while teacher participants disagreed about the extent of this threat. However, despite overall means that fall within different response ranges, these figures again suggest that teachers and students have quite similar attitudes about the lack of threat of English to students' identities and Arabic use.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In seeking to draw conclusions based on these findings, a number of limitations of the current study need to be taken into account. These include the exclusive reliance on a closed-item questionnaire for data collection, the imbalance in numbers between student and teacher samples and, perhaps most importantly, the poor level of internal consistency of the teacher questionnaire category about the effects of EMI on learner identity. Any future research that employs a similar version of the questionnaire will need to closely examine its psychometric qualities with a view to revising it. While the use of Cronbach's alpha coefficients and the validation panel in the development of the questionnaire was considered sufficient for the exploratory nature of this study, future research could also employ confirmatory factor analysis to advance the instrument's development. Finally, giving participants the choice of either the English or Arabic versions of the questionnaire was deemed necessary due to the potential wide range of English proficiency among both sample groups. Research employing a similar approach in the future could explore whether respondents' selection of either the English or Arabic questionnaire versions was related to the attitudes examined here.

With these limitations acknowledged, it is perhaps possible to conclude that participants generally recognize English's value as a lingua franca in a variety of domains, and also understand the importance of English language proficiency for Oman's job market. This belief is fully supported by the Omani government's recognition of English as a national resource that allows the country to better participate in the globalized economy [6]. Attitudes towards EMI were found to be largely positive from both instructors and students due to the language's utilitarian value. Similar findings have been reported across the literature both within the Arab world and other Muslim-majority nations [1, 4, 9, 35, 38, 43]. Despite these largely positive attitudes towards

EMI, student participants tended to highlight the potential benefits of Arabic medium instruction. These include increasing learners' Arabic proficiency, and making them more "loyal" to the language.

The English language was generally viewed by participants as a global language existing beyond the socio-cultural values of inner-circle Anglophone nations [28, 29]. Due to this global status, the language was not explicitly acknowledged as a carrier of "harmful" foreign values—even if the neutrality student participants exhibited should not be interpreted as complete rejection of this concern. The tentative finding that Omani students may not see English as a threat to their sense of identity supports the findings of similar studies from Oman [23], the Arab world [4, 43] and the greater Muslim world [18]. However, the expression of neutrality in the current study, and the fact that scholars such as Clarke [15] and Findlow [25] reported significant sub-sections of their samples as viewing English as a threat to both their traditional values and use of Arabic, means this is an area that will benefit from further research.

Results of the current study, therefore, tend to support findings from other researchers that EMI at the tertiary level in Oman is generally viewed by students and teachers as offering numerous benefits [8, 23]. However, despite this seeming level of acceptance, student participants were neutral about whether EMI decreases the use of Arabic, and agreed that most students prefer Arabic as a medium of instruction in their college/institute. These are findings that have been reported elsewhere in the Arab world, though which are somewhat unique in the Omani literature. Therefore, it is recommended that further investigative attention is paid to the extent to which higher education students in Oman, and, indeed, across similar education settings around the world, prefer EMI or would rather receive their tertiary-level educations in their first language or a combination of their L1 and English. Future research should also explore whether EMI employed in a diverse range of contexts worldwide satisfies Macaro et al.'s [33] criteria for determining the value of EMI by enhancing learners' English proficiency and not being detrimental to student content understanding. Exploring these issues in more detail will provide stakeholders around the world with a clearer picture of the social and academic impact of the spread of tertiary-level EMI programs.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

Conflict of Interest The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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