"Most of the Teaching is in Arabic Anyway", English as a Medium of Instruction in Saudi Arabia, Between De Facto and Official Language Policy

Ismael Louber, University of Hail, Ha'il, Saudi Arabia

https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2953-6450

Salah Troudi, University of Exeter, Exeter, UK

ABSTRACT

There has been much debate about the issue of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) and the place of English in the context of international education in general and in the Arabian/Persian Gulf region in particular. This study explores the use of EMI in an undergraduate engineering programme in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). Using a qualitative approach to data collection by means of open-ended questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, this study explores the views of Arab expatriate teachers of scientific subjects, Saudi engineering students and preparatory year EFL non-Arab expatriate teachers on the use of EMI in their institution. The study sheds light on a certain gap in terms of actual classroom practices, between EMI as an official language policy and Arabic as de facto medium of instruction. Furthermore, the findings of the study suggest that the implementation of EMI may pose several challenges to both teachers and students.

INTRODUCTION

It would be hard to dispute the tremendous impact of English in the world and its political, cultural and technological implications. In the fields of trade, technology and scientific research for instance, English has become a global "currency" (Graddol, 1997, 2006) and mastery of the English language is so vital in the academic and business arenas that it is "sought as a talisman of success and an entry ticket to the good life" (Holly, 1990, p. 16). It is also interesting to note that there seems to be a firmly rooted unquestioned assumption amongst many academics and students that it is somehow 'natural' to study in the medium of English. However, although there is much debate around this issue, research tends to show that the implementation of EMI can be problematic in terms of local language and values (Abu Zayd, 2000; Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001; Troudi 2007, 2009) and students' achievements (Marsh 2006; Brock-Utne, 2007; Al-Bakri, 2013), especially if such a language policy is implemented without considering the numerous implications for all educational stakeholders involved in the change of the language of instruction. In Saudi Arabia, which is the focus of this paper, and other neighbouring Gulf countries such as the United Arab Emirates, the use of

Arabic is being significantly reduced and affected (Troudi 2007, 2009; Raddawi & Meslem, 2015; Troudi & Hafedh, 2017). With this in mind, this study, conducted in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA), empirically examined and shed light on EMI as a language policy in practice as perceived by a group of local practitioners and students.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Like in all other Gulf countries, universities in Saudi Arabia have adopted EMI for scientific subjects (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017) so the use of English is no longer limited to a discrete subject studied at school or university but is gradually taking a greater role within the education system. As a result, curriculum content, assessment and instruction are officially in the medium of English. Nonetheless, although English is widely spoken within the country, it has not reached the status of a second language and remains a foreign language for all Saudi students for whom the first and official language is Arabic and the language of instruction in state schools. It is also important to highlight that Saudi university students are all Arabic speakers, thus forming a rather homogeneous monolingual speech community. At the university where the study was conducted, the medium of instruction is English; however, no official curriculum seems to be in place and each department adopts a syllabus-based approach. Therefore, it has not been possible to put the official curriculum under scrutiny. As far as the teaching faculty are concerned, a wide majority of them are Arab expatriates mainly from Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and the Maghreb. Saudi nationals represent a minority of teachers but occupy all managerial and administrative positions. The university also recruits Western expatriates mainly for teaching the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) preparatory year courses.

EMI is being officially and gradually implemented across the country's universities and appears to be posing a number of challenges including the recruitment of a qualified, proficient work force; it is also a source of concern in terms of students' academic achievements and cultural identity. It is worth adding that EMI is, as described by Macaro (2015, p. 4), "a growing global phenomenon taking place primarily in tertiary education. It is also already being established as a potential engine of change in the secondary sector and it is not escaping the attention of those concerned with the primary section." This description already applies to the situation in some Gulf countries where the secondary and primary private sectors are increasingly shifting to EMI. There has also been a recent shift to EMI in the public sector at primary and secondary levels in the UAE (Sanassian, 2011). A recent British Council survey of fifty-five countries confirmed this global phenomenon, with some countries such as Uzbekistan shifting to EMI (Dearden, 2014). Saudi Arabia is therefore following a global and, seemingly, irresistible and unavoidable educational trend.

ENGLISHIZATION OF EDUCATION

EMI relates to the continuing Englishization of education –often referred to as internationalisation– of non-English medium educational institutions (Kirkpatrick 2014; Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015). With respect to the Gulf countries in general and the KSA in particular, the push for more English in education is seen by policy-makers as enhancing "their political and economic connection to the rest of the world" (Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015, p. 546). This, of course, also relates to the central role played by English in the process of globalisation in the education arena as the teaching of English as a foreign language is deeply intertwined with this phenomenon by being not only the result of this process, but also an active facilitator (Louber, 2016). Therefore, English and its place in the shift in the actual language policy of the country seem intimately linked to economic, financial as well as ideological considerations and driven by the ever-growing global economic forces. Nonetheless, as discussed later in this paper, even from a mere pragmatic perspective, the strategies adopted by most Gulf countries in terms of language education policy (LEP) are rather ineffective, because they do not realistically prepare students with the ability to work efficiently in their professional

and academic domains. The values that emerge from this Englishization are very similar in nature to the ones promoted by the modern capitalist society of production, consumerism, measurement and accountability, whereby education is seen as a preparation for career and work and students are trained to contribute and participate in the development of the local and global economy. Owing to this, and unsurprisingly, "a 'marriage' between school and business institutions" is viewed by a number of educationalists in the Gulf that have embraced this model as a way to face the challenges of globalisation and the economic transformations it has created (Rassekh & Thomas, 2001, p. 11). On the contrary, in our opinion, the consumerist tendency of this approach constitutes a real danger for institutions to succumb to the pressure of the market at the expense of education (Molesworth, Scullion, & Nixon, 2010; Barnawi, 2018) even if such approaches have proved to be ineffective.

LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY

Language is in itself not only a form of content, but also a vector and an agent of content; therefore, decisions on language of instruction should be investigated in light of different paradigmatic approaches on language policy. Likewise, a distinction should be made between two key terms used in this paper; while language education policy is specific to educational contexts (Shohamy 2006), language policy has been defined as a "means by which the government or other public bodies seek to influence or to change elements in the language itself, in language use or in status of a language" (Amara, Mar'i, & Mar i, 2002, p. 1). Simply put, it has also been referred to as "decisions people make about languages and their uses in society" (Shohamy, 2006, p. 77). The concept of language policy is not to be restricted to official statements, document or declared policies but exists in other forms and expressions such as hidden, unofficial or implicit 'de facto' policies or practices (Ricento, 2006a, 2006b; Shohamy, 2006). In this respect, a study by Dearden (2014) commissioned by the British Council showed that among the fifty-five investigated countries where EMI had been adopted, less than half of them had explicitly announced through official statements that English was the language of instruction in their educational institutions.

Nonetheless, practice plays a preponderant role in the success of any given language policy and top down declarations at the level of policy often enter in conflict with bottom up forces at the level of practice and implementation. As a result, the 'true', or the language policy in effect, is often found in the practices within the community. According to Spolsky, the field and scope of language policy go beyond official statements and legal declarations to refer to "all language practices, beliefs and management decisions of a community or polity" (2004, p. 9). These practices and beliefs cover a wide range of public transactions, social institutions and activities and affect the daily lives of people in every society. He also argues that clearly stated language policies do not necessarily translate into practice for "the existence of [an] explicit policy does not guarantee that it will be implemented, nor does implementation guarantee success." Taking language policy away from the spheres of authoritative bodies such as governments and institutions, McCarty (2011) places it within a sociocultural framework and views is as a process whereby "modes of human interaction, negotiation, and production [are] mediated by relations of power" (p. 8).

Such potential conflicts can be viewed in light of power issues whereby authority not only decides on the language that should be used, but also how it should be used. Therefore, such authoritative decisions cannot be regarded as neutral as they commonly serve as agents to promote political or ideological agendas (Tollefson, 2006). As a result, curricula, content, material and other resources become agents and vectors of ideology. Very often, language policies are being designed and enforced in a top down authoritative manner without any form of prior consultation or negotiation. Moreover, since language can be regarded as one of the expressions of freedom, interfering in the forms of these expressions may pose a threat to certain fundamental rights including freedom of thought and expression (Hornberger, 2006; Shohamy, 2006; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2006). As a result, fundamental questions of (in)equality and rights arise if the language of instruction, especially if it is not the first language of the learners, is to be decided from above.

PROBLEMATIZING ENGLISH AS A MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION

This has become a recent source of concern for a number of countries. Indeed, interestingly, despite the ongoing Englishization of education and the global general trend towards EMI, especially in the Gulf region, it is not always so easily embraced and adopted. For example, in the context of East and Southern Africa, a thorough review of language-in-education policies by Trudell (2016) strongly suggests that learning in the medium of English has a significant impact on learner outcomes; she argues for an effective mother-tongue-based bilingual education rather than a single language education policy. Likewise, Erling et al. (2016), who conducted a study in postcolonial contexts (India and Ghana), claim that language education policy should make full use of students' mother tongues in order to address their educational needs in a context where the need for English is ever growing. For other researchers such as Milligan et al. (2016) and Desai (2016) in Rwanda, EMI raises certain pedagogical concerns and they suggest designing language supportive materials and adopt bilingual strategies to help students overcome the learning challenges they face in the classroom.

Such pedagogical or ideological concerns have encouraged other countries to question EMI as a language education policy. As a matter of example, in Indonesia, as a result of a legal battle launched by educational stakeholders including teachers and parents, the court ruled against the implementation of EMI in public schools arguing that this language policy was posing a serious threat to the local vernaculars and to national identity, arguing it was socially divisive and leading to inequality (Dearden 2014). In Qatar, discontent with the effect of EMI on students' learning experiences has pushed the University of Qatar to reinstate Arabic as the main medium of instruction in a number of subjects (MacLeod & AbouEl-Keir, 2017). Placing EMI in the wider area of language in education, a number of researchers in several African countries (e.g. Trudell, 2016; Kuchah, 2016; Mulumba and Massazi, 2012) approached language of instruction policies from the perspectives of linguistics rights, access and equality. For example, Mulumba and Massazi (2012) have raised questions about the role of African and European languages, mainly English and French, in promoting or hindering cognitive, social and economic development in multilingual Africa. In this respect, like Mulumba and Massazi, Kuchah (2016, p. 312) argues that "the medium of instruction has the potential to promote, stagnate or stifle the acquisition of skills necessary for individual and societal development."

PROBLEMATIZING EMI IN SAUDI ARABIA

As the English language is increasingly playing a central role in the education system, especially at university, the demand for EFL teachers in the KSA has dramatically increased. Although there is much debate around this issue, research suggests that the implementation of EMI can pose a threat to the local language and values (Abu Zayd, 2000; Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001; Al-Jarf, 2008; Troudi, 2009) and may have a negative impact on students' achievements (Marsh, 2006; Brock-Utne, 2007; Belhiah & Elhami, 2015) especially if this particular language policy is implemented without considering the future impact and implications on professionals and students.

As a result, the adoption of EMI in the KSA, in the Arab world and elsewhere has led a growing number of researchers to take a critical stance towards this trend (Abu Zayd, 2000; Brock-Utne, 2007; Troudi, 2007, 2009; Al-Jarf, 2008; Al-Bakri, 2013). More specifically, Troudi (2007) suggests that adopting a foreign language as a medium of instruction is detrimental to students as it adds "additional learning burdens" and Brock-Utne (2007) claims that EMI impacts negatively on students' achievements. Furthermore, with particular respect to the Arab world, it has been argued that such language education policy causes concern for Arabic language and identity (Abu Zayd, 2000; Al-Jarf, 2008; Troudi, 2009). In the KSA, there seems to be contradictory discourses with regards the place of English within the education system with the desire to promote EMI on the one hand and the strong will to preserve the local Arabic Islamic identity on the other (Habbash & Troudi, 2015). Interestingly, it appears that the adoption of EMI could potentially create a "linguistic cultural dualism"

(Findlow, 2006). With particular reference to the UAE, Findlow (2006, p. 25) examined the impact of the various societal changes on higher education in terms of language use and representation and pointed to "the existence of distinct worldviews" with Arabic representing "cultural authenticity, localism, tradition, emotions [and] religion" and English embodying "modernity, internationalism, business, material status [and] secularism." This also reinforces the idea that values and worldviews are carried through the language and, therefore, through language instruction.

Likewise, Abu Zayd (2000), a Saudi scholar, makes similar claims and others contend that the choice of a medium of instruction does not only have implications in terms of content material or recruitment of teachers, but more importantly, it is fundamentally tied up with the nature of the values to be transmitted (Byram & Risager, 1999). This implies the existence of an implicit 'hidden' language education policy in the form of an "unspoken curriculum" (Holly, 1990) whereby language serves as a vehicle of thoughts, values and ideology. This idea has been further developed by Karmani (2010, p. 87) who investigated the role played by EMI in the United Arab Emirates in socialising Arab students. His findings strongly suggest that EMI has a strong socialising effect on Arab students "by shaping their general views about the roles of English and Arabic", which implies that EMI "acts as a kind of 'hidden curriculum' by instilling in students a sense of the proper role of Arabic and English in a modern university setting."

Despite the above, a great number of officials and educational authorities are designing and implementing language policies without "adequately considering the implications of such policies and practices on the lives of the teachers and students they affect" (Nunan, 2003, p. 591). Saudi authorities, for instance, have "overlooked the many problems associated with its English-only policy" and whole-heartedly promoted English in the country (Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015, p. 545).

THE STUDY

In order to explore the participants' views on EMI within one tertiary institution in the KSA, the study sought to focus on three important issues: (1) the students' and teachers' views on the implementation of EMI in their institution, (2) the potential problematic expressions of EMI in their institution and (3) their views on the use of Arabic as a Medium of Instruction (AMI) in their institution. As this study did not seek to generalise findings to a wider population, only thirteen voluntary participants took part; they were recruited through emails and personal contacts. The participants were five Saudi engineering students, five engineering and science teachers who were Arab nationals and three EFL Western expatriate teachers who use English as their first language. Education being strictly gender-segregated in Saudi Arabia, collecting data from female participants was extremely challenging and not allowed; therefore, all participants were males.

Fundamentally, we thought that focusing on students and teachers was essential as "classroom practitioners are at the heart of language policy" (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996, p. 417); teachers and students are seen here as holding a central role and it was essential to examine EMI through the eyes of these important actors and not through an official statement. In addition, as the issues addressed in this study were not quantifiable in scientific terms, a purely qualitative approach was favoured. In doing so, the data collection comprised of several stages. Considering this was a small-scale study, open-ended questionnaires were first distributed among the participants as they seemed an effective way of obtaining an honest insight into their views prior to an in-depth interview. For instance, participants were asked to express their opinions about the perceived advantages and disadvantages of EMI in their institution and to compare between the use of Arabic and English in teaching and learning. They were then given the opportunity to elaborate on their thoughts during an interview. During the interviews, in addition to the issues investigated in the open-ended questions, several areas were investigated in more depth with the participants including the perceived rationale for adopting EMI in their institution, their views on the English language proficiency requirements in STEM and the potential problems related to teaching and learning in the medium of English. Finally,

participants were encouraged to make recommendations in light of the implementation of EMI in their institution. After the interviews, participants were asked to discuss, rectify, comment or reflect on their own answers using a printed transcript.

Through interviews, it was possible to capture meaningful descriptions from the perspectives of the participants, which gave them the opportunity to depict their own experiences of EMI as a language policy in practice. Interviews were all conducted in English with the teachers who were all fluent in English, but only with the students, Arabic was used to ensure they understood the questions. It was important to capture meaningful descriptions and experiences, so we felt it was necessary to ensure that students were comfortable talking about these issues, hence the use of Arabic during interviews. Interviews were then transcribed, coded and analysed inductively and thematically.

Furthermore, since the process of doing educational research involves collecting data about the people and from the people, ethical issues were addressed quite early in the research process. Therefore, all participants were protected by human subject research protocols and were fully informed about the nature and the focus of the study. They were entitled to withdraw from the research at any time. Each participant was assured in writing that their privacy, anonymity and confidentiality would be strictly guaranteed. In addition, ethical approval forms were distributed and signed by the participants. The name and the place of the institution as well as any element that could help identify the institution or the participants were not mentioned.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative approach to data collection and analysis allowed us to take a very close look at the participants' perceptions of EMI in the classroom. Following an inductive analytical process, the findings revolve around two broad themes that emerged from the data: (1) Arabic as a Medium of Instruction (AMI) as a de facto language policy, (2) the implications of EMI as a new consumerist trend.

Arabic as a Medium of Instruction: De Facto Policy

One of the striking elements is that all the participants without exception expressively talked about a certain gap between policy and practice. Although the official language of instruction is English, in practice, Arabic is being used as a medium of instruction. This confirms the points mentioned earlier regarding the existence of official language policies in declarations and documents and de facto policies at the level of implementation. This is why many participants, when asked about how they understood it, mainly referred to EMI as "administrative prescriptions and guidelines" or "official policy." This idea is recurrent among all the participants who clearly expressed the existence of an unofficial or implicit de facto policy in the form of AMI. This also suggests the importance of classroom practices over official statements and policies. For instance, an engineering teacher stressed on the fact that although books were in English and that they had been instructed to teach using English, despite the existence of any official guideline, most of the actual teaching was not done in the medium of English. He stated: "we're not implementing EMI, even the English books are not being used." This particular teacher went on to question the actual possibility of EMI being implemented in practice in his institution saying: "EMI cannot be enforced and I don't see EMI happening." This aspect can also be understood as a challenge to the effective implementation of EMI in this context as among the common concerns about the outcomes of the implementation of EMI in various contexts is the lack of clear guidelines (Dearden, 2014).

Owing to that situation, another engineering teacher addressed the feasibility of implementing EMI and resorting to AMI expressing the view that the latter was gradually being implemented in practice as "more and more teaching is carried out using Arabic." When questioned about the reasons that prevented, in their view, the effective implementation of EMI, participating teachers mainly referred to the poor "level of English" of the students while students explained that using Arabic with their teachers was "easier and more practical" for them. One student clearly referred to this aspect

saying: "my basics in English are limited and my vocabulary is just enough to communicate that's why I want the teachers to explain in Arabic." In addition, one student mentioned: "we ask them [the teachers] to speak to us in Arabic because like this, we do not have to translate into Arabic ourselves." Interestingly, one student referred to the practical aspect of AMI while admitting that EMI was needed: "I still think it is better to study in English although we ask the teachers to use Arabic in the class."

The above quotes are indicative of a unanimous view among the participants and support the claim that the idea of language policy must be understood as a multilayered concept (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) whereby various agents and forces enter in constant conflict. Teachers and students represent these bottom up forces of implementation that shape the true explicit de facto language policy. Based on this, the data seem to suggest the existence of a certain gap between the official and the de facto policy and between intended practices and actual classroom practice. Although classroom observations were not conducted in this study, this particular point has been repeatedly reported by all the participants. Indeed, although teachers appear to be aware of the official policy that instructs them to use EMI, they all resorted to AMI in their daily teaching practice. This can be explained, notably, by the absence of negotiation between educators and officials, as expressed by a number of teachers. It is also worth noticing that this point was corroborated by the students' views who all reported that they expressively requested their teachers to use Arabic in class, as it has been clearly mentioned by one participant: "we ask [the teachers] to teach us in Arabic."

This can be explained by the fact that the students reported that they felt that using the Arabic language with their Arab teachers facilitated their learning. This, of course, is mainly possible with Arab teachers or with teachers fluent in the language, which is not always the case due to the significant number of foreign teachers (i.e. non-Saudis) from non-Arab countries such as India or Pakistan for instance. More importantly, the fact that students seem to favour being taught in Arabic, which is their mother tongue, in itself can be regarded as a form of empowerment as this relates to both a human right and a pedagogical necessity (Benson & Kosonen, 2013; Kirkpatrick, 2014). Indeed, a number of participating students simply stated: "it is natural for me to use Arabic because this is my first language, but English is not." In addition, one EFL teacher clearly expressed that EMI could, on the contrary, be problematic because it could prevent "somebody from being a very good engineer just because he does not have English."

The above de facto policy seems to be well-known and acknowledged within the institution where the study was conducted. Indeed, even EFL teachers, who are regarded in this university as important agents to a 'successful implementation' of EMI, are fully aware that although their role is to ensure students are able to study their majors in the medium of English, Arabic was being used in the day to day teaching of subjects at university. The following quote from an EFL teacher is an example of their views: "most of the teaching is happening in Arabic anyway; Arab teachers use English books, but the instruction is happening in Arabic." This also sheds light on the idea that EMI may not be thoroughly implemented on a practical level by students and teachers who seem to resort to Arabic to facilitate teaching and learning in the classroom despite the official policy. This shows how local actors are exercising forms of power and voice through the enactment of AMI. Indeed, EMI may also constitute for teachers and students in this study a form of resistance to macro level policies imposed without negotiation. This also raises the question of the effectiveness of EMI in teaching and learning, not only at this university, but also at other institutions within similar contexts. These findings may also provide valuable information on the practicality of using an English only medium of instruction in the STEM disciplines. Moreover, based on the above conflict between the official and the de facto language policy, the study explored how participants perceived the rationale for adopting EMI at their institution.

EMI as a New Consumerist Trend

A great number of higher education institutions are now explicitly expressing the desire to integrate educational objectives to the demands of the labour market and the dominant objective led curriculum

model is seen as promoting certain fundamental tenets of the capitalist market economy (Rassekh & Thomas, 2001; Ricento, 2006a; McKernan, 2008). Moreover, the English language and the implementation of EMI in higher education has become a key instrument in this process. In the context of globalization, the increasing need for English proficiency seems closely linked to economic development (Crystal, 2003; Casale and Posel, 2011; Dearden, 2014) but rarely promoted, at least in higher education settings, in relation to language development.

Interestingly, one teacher simply referred to EMI as another "consumer good from the West" while for another teacher, EMI was adopted "just to follow certain universities that adopted this western model." Similar findings were reported by Louber (2016) whereby EFL teacher participants in Saudi Arabia depicted EMI as a process and a product of consumerism and as a "by product" and consumer good from the West exported to the Arab world. This seems to suggest that, for the participants, English and EMI have become a manifestation of certain wider socio-economic processes. This finding is not surprising given the prevalence of consumerism in worldwide whereby certain educational models are becoming export goods (Lewin, 2008) and because a great number of higher education institutions have now embraced marketing principles and mechanisms as the panacea for success (Molesworth et al., 2010; Natale & Doran, 2011), particularly in the Gulf region and Saudi Arabia (Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015). In the UAE for instance, very similar aspects were noted by Troudi (2007, p. 11) who reported how teachers described the adoption of EMI as a "marketing slogan."

In addition, as discussed earlier, research strongly suggests that for many students around the world, especially when English is not spoken in their communities, EMI constitutes an obstacle to engagement with the curriculum. In the KSA, officials have justified this language policy as a way for students to acquire basic knowledge and skills for the purpose of better employment and socio-economic prosperity (Dearden 2014; Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015; Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017). Beyond this official justification, the study sought to shed some light on the views of the participants with respect to the rationale behind the implementation of EMI. As a result, the reasons invoked by the participants seem to fall under two interrelated categories that relate to issues of access and status.

When discussing the possible advantages or disadvantages of adopting EMI at university, an engineering teacher explained that "students can have access to more jobs opportunities" while the interviewed students referred to EMI as "a way of finding a better job." This perceived rationale suggests that for these participants, and for officials alike, EMI is considered as a way for students to gain access to "a global academic and business community" (Dearden, 2014, p. 16) and "feed the workforce with skilled" individuals.

EMI is also perceived by the participants as a way to gain access to knowledge in general and scientific knowledge in particular as English was described as "the language of scientific research, technology and progress." According to the participating teachers, EMI is a way to give students the "means to acquire scientific knowledge, to have access to research publications or to follow the advancements in sciences and technology." Likewise, students employed a very similar rhetoric and referred to EMI as a way to "to do research and to have access to research." A physics teacher explained how he mainly saw English as a tool to acquire knowledge: "It is a fact; I mean, you have to give your students the means to understand science [...] the language issue is not intrinsic to scientific knowledge; it's just a matter of accessing knowledge."

In addition, in terms of the syllabus, most participants, including teachers and students expressed concerns about the books imported from the US or the UK arguing that they were "out of reach" in terms of the "English level" and "not suitable" because they were "initially designed for English-speaking countries." On student expressed his view regarding what he referred to as a contradiction; he claimed: "it is better to use Arabic in the classroom, but the books are in English; it is a contradiction." In the same vein, another student explained that "it would be OK to study English as a subject but have Arabic books in our major subject [i.e. STEM subjects]. One teacher went further and argued that it was a way "for western publishers to make money in the KSA." Another student expressed the view that the books "were too thick and very complicated, that's why we never finish the whole book."

The above quotes raise a number of issues in terms of equality and rights. Indeed, since good proficiency in English may serve as means to acquire essential knowledge and skills in higher education, likewise, certain students may de facto be denied the right and opportunity to study in their mother tongue –Arabic– and have their academic or professional aspirations disregarded because of poor or insufficient mastery of a foreign language imposed on them. This issue is stressed by Barnawi who argues that because of EMI which he views as a neoliberalist policy and the Englishization of education in the KSA, "Saudi students are denied access to education and critical enquiry in Arabic, but at the same time they are unable to pursue their education in English; hence they become victims of the current policy and practices" (2018, p. 69).

In addition to issues of (denied) access to scientific knowledge, the participants' views on the rationale for adopting EMI reveal that English has become a form of "high status knowledge." Although the hegemonic and ideological nature of high-status knowledge is an issue that has been discussed in the literature (Apple, 2004), this does not appear to be a major concern for the participants and the data revealed conflicting views regarding the hegemonic nature of EMI. For instance, one teacher explained that EMI was in place to "follow the US and the West" and not the result of a "reasoned choice", implying that it was ideologically driven. One student feared that EMI could cause students to "forget their own language." Nonetheless, most students, on the contrary, when questioned about this issue, did not seem to show any concern about the ideological nature of EMI. They referred to far more pragmatic concerns such as "getting a good job", being able to "have access to scientific knowledge" or even "learn about different cultures", "communicate outside the KSA" and "use the internet."

Interestingly, the term "prestige" has been repeatedly used by the participants to refer to the status of the English language and English medium institutions. Likewise, the term "prestige" has been used by other Saudi participants in a study by Dearden (2014) to depict the status of the English language in Saudi Arabia. This point raises the question of access to this high-status knowledge as it is also interesting to note how the argument of access to knowledge can also appear contradictory to other evidence from the participants' responses. Indeed, English has also been referred to by all the participants as one of the "barriers" or "obstacles to academic success." In this regard, it is worth noticing here that one EFL teacher participant stressed how EMI could be perceived as disempowering for certain students saying that this language policy could be responsible for "preventing somebody from being a very good engineer just because he does not have English." Likewise, two students expressed concerns about this issue, arguing that "maths and physics are about numbers and not language" and that it was "sad to be forced to learn in English because a student can be good in science even if he is not good in English." Similar criticism was voiced by Marsh (2006, p. 30) who contends that EMI may sometimes act as "a barrier to learning."

It has also been argued that English language proficiency can affect students' academic achievement when they study in the medium of EFL (Marsh, 2006; Brock-Utne, 2007; Al-Jarf, 2008) and it is now generally accepted that EMI may be the cause of "social sufferings as well as various cognitive, pedagogical and educational" problems for learners (Le Ha & Barnawi, 2015, p. 558). Students and teachers alike referred to this problem; for instance, a number of students explained that "solving problems in English can be difficult (because they) have to do a double effort of understanding English and understanding the concept." In this study, the student participants complained about the fact that they had to resort to translation because they could not understand what the teachers were saying in the class if they were not using Arabic. For instance, a student explained: "I have to make a double effort to follow the lesson in English; I have to understand the English words and the content of the lesson, so it's hard sometimes." Another student explained that "in exams, you might get it wrong just because you don't understand the English" and that "solving problems is more difficult in English." One teacher also mentioned that when they only use English, they often "have to stop to translate because students cannot follow so they ask us to use Arabic." One student also explicitly referred to this aspect and criticised the fact that he had to learn English to become an engineering:

"why do I have to be good in English? I want to be an engineering, but the English is making it difficult for me."

This point directly relates to a common negative outcome of EMI as reported in the literature. For instance, for Troudi (2007, p. 10), this EMI can cause practical as well as pedagogical problems, particularly with younger learners who "find it difficult to focus on the double task of learning" concepts in addition to new symbols and terminology in a foreign language. This is why EMI can often be "directly linked to educational exclusion and failure" (Marsh, 2006, p. 30).

On the other hand, and despite the above, in the KSA, English is "recognised as a basic skill and there is prestige attached to English ability" (Dearden, 2014, p. 22). A recent study by Habash and Troudi (2015, p. 58) in Saudi Arabia also pointed to the "persistent conviction among government officials that English is necessary for access to success and modernity and the perceptions of students, teachers and parents not dissimilar to the official view." They also showed that Arabic, according to the participants, is being relegated to second class status. Similar findings were also reported by Findlow (2006) who highlighted how English had gained a higher status over Arabic in the United Arab Emirates.

Finally, another idea that emerged from the data collected amongst teachers and students is that the adoption of EMI was not perceived by the participants as resulting from any sort of critical evaluation, or that this language policy had been thoroughly studied and prepared in cooperation with the principal education stakeholders. This is also why, as briefly addressed earlier, the absence of negotiation, consultation and evaluation for adopting EMI was also perceived as a major reason for the adoption of AMI as a de facto policy.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Nonetheless, it seems important to note that the participants' views discussed above seem to reveal certain contradictions. Indeed, as explained earlier, teachers and students seem to have similar perspectives on EMI and AMI, which can be regarded as somewhat surprising given that studies in other contexts such as Malaysia and Vietnam have shed light on individual differences in teachers' responses to top-down EMI policies. Several explanations can be suggested for this. First, it is worth bearing in mind that this study was conducted in a monolingual, mono ethnic and mono religious context while other studies investigated multilingual, multi ethnic or even multi religious contexts such as Malaysia. In this study, teachers and students share the same language and the same religion, that is, Arabic and Islam, which explains why EMI is regarded as somewhat artificial. Simply put, it is worth raising the question: why would one study in another language?

Also, with regards pedagogical explanations, the language competence of students is such that even teachers who believe in EMI, often appear to change their mind about this policy. This is often due to the fact that materials used in teaching and learning in the Gulf region, such as course books, are designed for native speakers of English although no solid pedagogical preparations have been put in place to enable students to achieve that level. This is a very pragmatic concern for students and teachers. The similarity in their views regarding EMI and AMI should not be seen as out of the ordinary. Rather, it needs to be explained within the characteristic of the context. The linguistic preparation at secondary level for students is not sufficient to handle EMI. This is partly because the EFL curriculum in secondary schools has not been designed with EMI in mind and EFL is only taught as a discreet subject. This, later, constitutes a major gap between university and secondary school and even the preparatory year meant to bridge this gap does not seem to meet the demands of most students in terms of linguistic competence. Therefore, the gap between the current language competence of the students and the linguistic demand of the textbooks and the scientific discourse is too wide, which, in turn, forces teachers to resort to Arabic as a simplification strategy and a pedagogical tool, hence the wide spread use of translated summaries of main ideas or terminology lists in Arabic. Therefore, given that scientific textbooks used at university are designed for a very

different audience, it is very likely that students will study a subject without having dealt in depth with specialised authentic texts, which can seriously affect their academic achievement.

Therefore, in light of the above, the idea of negotiation –or absence of– seems central to the issue of language policy as teachers appeared to reject, in their daily practice, the implementation of EMI and resorted to using Arabic with their students, hence using the Arabic language as a de facto medium of instruction. More importantly, participants' use of AMI can be seen as a form of empowerment for students who seemed to be taking control of their learning by using their mother tongue in the classroom when possible. Nonetheless, this reveals a certain gap between policy and practice as all participants were aware of the official guidelines with respect to implementing EMI, which suggests that the official policy ought to be negotiated, or at least discussed with policy-makers and officials. To the best of our knowledge, to this date, there are no plans to examine its implementation at the university where the study was conducted and also at the wider national level in the KSA.

Due to the limited scope and scale of this study, further studies might shed light on this issue by evaluating the results of this switch of language policy in higher education. Indeed, proficiency in English is often presumed with little or no provision made for supporting language development. Years of research evidence shows how consequently for many students living in communities where English is not spoken outside of school, EMI acts as a barrier to engagement with the curriculum (Milligan, 2016, Brock-Utne et al., 2010). Because of an overall low proficiency in English at the time of starting university studies, EMI becomes a barrier to conducive learning and overall competence in academic disciplines. For example, Alazemi (2017) reported an increase in the percentage of withdrawal from scientific subjects in a major national university in Kuwait because students could not meet the demands of EMI. Students are in fact being punished for low proficiently in a foreign language and denied access to education. In this sense, EMI can be seen as an oppressive practice which, because of the pressures of market-driven forces, positions students and teachers as liabilities (Giroux, 2017).

It is important to bear in mind that the participants welcomed positively the idea of adopting AMI while acknowledging the importance of providing the students with strong EFL instruction. Arabic has had its share in contributing to knowledge and until now some research is still produced in Arabic. Also, since intrinsic connection between language English and scientific knowledge cannot be argued and because AMI seems to be adopted in this institution as a de facto policy, this research suggests rethinking or reshaping the institutional language policies in place at university.

Nonetheless, due to the small-scale nature of the study, further research is crucial in this domain as the findings may be substantiated by the fact that the data need to be regarded as perceptions of "reality" and not objective descriptions of what happens in the classroom, especially due to the fact that no classroom observations could be conducted. Although we have no reason to doubt the honesty of our participants, they cannot be considered as infallible witnesses to a certain objective reality. The data, therefore, ought to be treated as such and more research by way of classroom observations or involving larger samples may provide further insights into this phenomenon.

However, based on our interpretations, active political involvement seems to be required in order to overcome the problems of resources and material that were raised by many participants if Arabic is to be used as a medium of instruction. This study has also raised serious questions concerning the actual trend followed by many institutions in Saudi Arabia and in the Gulf as EMI appears as yet another model for consumerism in education which denies the human factor. It seems therefore crucial for Saudi higher education institutions to find a reasonable balance between meeting the needs of their communities and facing the challenges of globalisation and the global status of English, but also between education and instruction. Although the global trend does appear to be towards more English and more EMI in higher education, as explained earlier, certain countries, such as Indonesia, are resisting and reversing the trend by carefully reconsidering all the material, social, educational and human implications of this language policy.

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Ismael Louber is an assistant professor in EFL and academic skills at the Univerisity of Hail, in the KSA. He specialises in TESOL and his research interest mainly revolve around the implications of the spread of English in international education.

Salah Troudi is an academic at the Graduate School of Education, University of Exeter. He specializes in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Language Education. His research interests are in the areas of critical applied linguistics, curriculum and syllabus design and language of education policies.