

**English-Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the United Arab  
Emirates: The Perspectives of Students**

Submitted by

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified as such and that no material has previously been submitted and/or approved for the award of a degree by this or any other university.

Signature:

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'A. Solloway', with a small flourish underneath.

As professionals, we not only can, but must, voice our concerns when what we are teaching produces consequences of which we do not approve. If we are social scientists, we must evaluate and comment on the social processes occurring in our environment. (Judd, 1983, p.268)

EFL professionals in the Arab world, consciously or unconsciously, play a dangerous role when they glorify the use of English. (Troudi, 2009, p.211)

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## **Abstract**

This exploratory, interpretive study investigates the attitudes towards and experiences of English-medium instruction (EMI) within higher education (HE) on the part of female students completing an intensive foundation programme at a major federal tertiary institution in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Two data collection procedures were employed in this study, a 21-item questionnaire, and in-depth, face-to-face, semi-structured interviews. Content analysis was performed on transcriptions of the latter, a procedure which gave rise to recurring, emergent themes.

Such themes included the belief expressed by some participants that having the second language (L2) of English as the medium of instruction (MI) can act as a barrier to learning, and that it would be preferable to study in their first language (L1) of Arabic. Additionally, it was found that some students believed their secondary school education had failed to afford them adequate preparation for EMI HE, a disturbing finding given that the government of the UAE appears to have stated a desire to achieve universal HE for females, whilst also signalling its intention to eliminate university-based foundation programmes. In addition to such academic-related findings, it emerged that there exists significant ambivalence towards the place and standing of English in contemporary Emirati society, with a recurring theme being that whilst knowledge of and proficiency in English is required for the globalised economy, and thus for the future of the country, the pervasive spread of the English language in the UAE poses a threat not only to Arabic, but also to the religious identity and cultural integrity of the indigenous Emirati population.

The findings of this study lead to the recommendation that the UAE implement a paradigmatic shift in its language policy within federally-sponsored HE by reverting to Arabic as the primary MI, with English as a foreign language (EFL) or English as a second language (ESL) as a subject replacing EMI.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In this, the introductory chapter, I briefly outline the nature of the problem to be examined in this thesis, the underlying rationale for conducting the study, the significance of this research for English-medium tertiary education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and the specific research questions this thesis seeks to answer.

### **1.1 The nature of the problem**

Although Arabic is the sole official language of the UAE and the mother tongue (L1) of the indigenous Emirati population, it is English which is the primary medium of instruction (MI) in all government-sponsored institutes of higher education (HE) in the country. In 2010, however, it was reported that only 6% of school leavers who applied to commence tertiary studies at a federal university met the English-language entrance requirements for direct entry to a degree course (Lewis, 2010, February 23), and so instead had to first complete a foundation programme, an emergent property of the policy of employing English as the medium of instruction (EMI) at universities which, as reported by the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MOHESR), has been estimated to consume approximately one-third of the total federal HE budget (MOHESR, 2007), and which thus diverts considerable sums from the core mission of the respective institutions (Fox, 2007). More recent statistics from the government of the UAE indicate that in 2014 the percentage of students who could circumvent a foundation programme and proceed directly to undergraduate studies had climbed to 22% (*First-rate education system*, n.d.), which although a significant increase, nevertheless still leaves some 78% who have to undertake preparatory/academic bridging courses.

In addition to the substantial fiscal costs incurred by such a significant proportion of students having to embark on English-language preparatory programmes, fears exist that the privileged status afforded English by making it the de facto language of HE may have potentially deleterious effects on contemporary Emirati society. Common misgivings include a possible weakening of the relative status of Arabic vis-à-vis English (K. Ahmed, 2010; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011), that the policy demotes the Arabic language in the eyes of students (Findlow, 2006; Hunt, 2012), and can

result in lower levels of competence in and knowledge of the language (Al Jabry, 2013, May 19; Kenaid, 2011; Salem, 2013, June 12). Furthermore, there exists growing disquiet regarding the pervasive nature of English in the UAE, which is increasingly seen as posing a potential threat both to the cultural integrity of the country, the identity of its people (A. Ahmed, 2010, October 6), and, since it is intimately intertwined with Arabic (Al Allaq, 2014; Almaney, 1981; Jaspal & Coyle, 2010; Koch, 1983; Morrow & Castleton, 2007) through Muslims' sacred text, the Quran (Dahan, 2013; Morrow & Castleton, 2011; Shouby, 1951), Islam itself (K. Ahmed, 2010).

Moreover, although it is commonly assumed that the delivery of academic content via a second language (L2) will enhance and expedite mastery of said L2 on the part of the students, research conducted in this very area suggests that the practice of employing an L2 as the medium of instruction (L2MI) may in fact have somewhat negligible benefits as regards language learning (Brock-Utne, 2007a, 2007b; Choi, 2003; Lau & Yuen, 2011; Li, Leung, & Kember, 2001; Williams, 1996; Yip, Coyle, & Tsang, 2007), a conclusion which has also been reached within HE in the UAE, both via the collection of qualitative data (Craig, 2007), and through quantitative analysis (Rogier, 2012), as well as for English as a second language (ESL) students studying abroad on English-language immersion programmes (Amuzie & Winke, 2009; Storch, 2009). It has also been stressed that compelling students to undertake their tertiary studies in an L2 quite obviously places an additional cognitive and learning burden on learners (Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; McLaren, 2011; Troudi, 2009), the failure to adequately cope with which can lead to an erosion of students' self-esteem (King, 2014).

Furthermore, from the perspective of critical theory, the policy of EMI in HE in the UAE would seem to create inequities by favouring students who attended EMI secondary schools over those whose schooling was in Arabic (McLaren, 2011; Ronesi, 2011; Troudi & Jendli, 2011), a problem compounded by the fact that a growing number of students from the emirate of Abu Dhabi have the opportunity to attend ADEC (Abu Dhabi Education Council) schools where, since a recent reform, not only English language classes but also mathematics and science are taught in English. In addition, parents in the emirate of Abu Dhabi – by far the wealthiest of the seven emirates that make up the UAE – typically have the financial wherewithal to enrol their sons and daughters at a private (i.e., fee-paying) EMI school if so desired. However, the option of private schooling is less

viable for students from the less wealthy northern emirates, and vastly fewer choices exist for those who are indeed willing and able to make the considerable financial outlay required to enrol children at an independent school (see, e.g., Hatherley-Greene, 2012a, for a discussion on the situation in the northern emirate of Fujairah). No EMI-driven initiatives exist in government schools in the northern emirates akin to the programme currently in place in ADEC schools whereby mathematics and science are delivered via the English language, that is, through what is now popularly referred to as content and language integrated learning (CLIL).

## **1.2 Rationale for the study**

The linguistic human rights advocate Skutnabb-Kangas (1999, p.7) states that she finds the acronyms LEP (limited English proficiency) and NEP (no English proficiency), abbreviations often employed within the field of ESL in the USA, “humiliating” and (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p.32) “degrading, outrageous terms.” A similar feeling regarding the characterisation of university foundation programmes in the UAE – and thus, by extension, the very students who take such courses – as ‘remedial’, at the ministerial level (A. Ahmed, 2010, October 6), as well as in both the discourse of the national media (e.g., Lewis, 2010, February 23) and academia (e.g., Fox, 2007; Gallagher, 2017; Stockwell, 2015), acted as the initial impetus for conducting the research reported in this thesis. Specifically, I began to suspect that at least part of the reason why the vast majority of university applicants are unable to meet the English language proficiency requirements for direct entry to undergraduate study – typically an overall 5.0 in the academic variant of the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) examination, or ‘equivalent’ – and are thus placed on the “remedial treadmill” (Lewis, 2010, May 25) of a university foundation programme, has less to do with their being ‘remedial’ than with the fact that, for most students, the move from secondary school to university represents a radical switch in the MI from their native Arabic to the typologically (Khan, 2011; Scott & Tucker, 1974; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983) and rhetorically (Koch, 1983) dissimilar L2 of English, an unusual feature of HE in the UAE (Troudi, 2009) dubbed “late, late immersion” by Gallagher (2011a, p.68).

Indeed, during the course of my teaching I began to witness some striking disparities in the quality of the educational experience of students based almost exclusively, it seemed, on the MI of their

secondary school, and thus of course immediately wished to delve deeper into this issue. This, coupled with the realisation that, whether its practitioners wish to recognise the fact or not, English language teaching (ELT) is a highly political activity (Judd, 1983; Kazmi, 2003; Troudi, 2009) – especially in the Arabian Gulf following the events of 9/11 (Dahbi, 2004) and the subsequent invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq by the respective military forces of largely ‘Inner Circle’ (Kachru, 1996) countries (Edge, 2006; Walters, Quinn, & Walters, 2005) – led to the research reported in this thesis.

The rationale of this study, then, is to better understand female students’ attitudes towards and experiences of EMI in HE in the UAE, particularly as regards their experience of the transition, or ‘border crossing’ (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a), from secondary school to a university foundation programme, and especially for those for whom this transition entailed a switch from Arabic MI to EMI. The exclusive focus on female students comes about as a direct result of my former work context, viz., the female campus of a major federal university (henceforth, the case institution). This work context itself comes about as a result of HE student demographics in the UAE, for females constitute approximately 75% of the student population of the case institution, a gender bias which reflects national trends in HE (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ridge, 2009). As a consequence of this somewhat lopsided demographic, and since “in keeping with the prevailing mores and customs” all federally-sponsored HE in the UAE is segregated by gender (Ramazani, 1985, p.272), the majority of language instructors on the foundation programme teach female students exclusively.

However, despite their sheer numbers, and in spite of the fact that, at some 77% (Fergany, 2001; UNESCO, 1998), the share of women entering HE in the UAE is among the highest in the entire world (Ghazal Aswad, Vidican, & Samulewicz, 2011a) – and that no fewer than 4 out of 5 baccalaureate degree holders in the UAE are women (MOHESR, 2007) – there nevertheless exists a serious lack of research into the views of female Emiratis towards a wide range of issues (Madsen, 2009), with female HE students in particular constituting an under-researched subpopulation (Ronesi, 2011). It is hoped that this study will give a voice to these young Emirati women, in whose ranks it has been predicted by HH Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum

(Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai) that the talented individuals needed to take up future high level leadership roles will likely be found (Krane, 2010).

### **1.3 Significance of the study**

Little is currently known about female students' perceptions of and views regarding EMI within HE in the UAE, or their experiences of making the transition from secondary school to a foundation programme at a tertiary institution. This study is significant in that it adds to knowledge in this regard. As such this thesis builds upon a growing body of doctoral-level work examining the policy of EMI in the UAE, both in the environment of the secondary school (e.g., Sanassian, 2011; Stockwell, 2015) and in the HE sector (e.g., Hatherley-Greene, 2012a; Karmani, 2010; King, 2014; McLaren, 2011; Mouhanna, 2016). The present thesis departs from previous research, however, in that it highlights the situation in which, despite having experienced radically different educational backgrounds in terms of the MI in their prior schooling, students are nevertheless expected to successfully navigate identical English language proficiency requirements for entry to an undergraduate programme, an aspect of the secondary school-university transition which does not yet seem to have been adequately addressed in the germane literature. It is of vital importance to critically examine the 'unlevel playing field' possibly created by such a policy so that by the time this young country celebrates its golden jubilee in 2021, the laudable goal of ensuring that all Emiratis enjoy "equal opportunity and access to first-rate education" espoused by the leaders of the UAE (*Vision 2021*, 2010, p.23) is brought to fruition.

In addition to such societal significance, this study also has implications for the current policy of EMI in HE in the UAE, for if it transpires that students are not wholly in favour of undertaking their tertiary studies in the L2 of English, such ambivalence may arguably lead to what Lin (1999, p.394) refers to as a "want-hate relationship with English" on the part of learners, which could serve to retard learning and thus possibly diminish any pedagogical benefits to be gleaned from lessons and lectures being delivered in the vehicular language of English. This is of particular relevance in the current context in which more than 75% of university applicants must enter the "educational limbo" (Gallagher, 2017, p.142) of a 'remedial' foundation programme – and are thus potentially stigmatised (Allison, 1992; Talmy, 2008, 2010) – as any initial stigmatisation whilst

on such a foundation programme can impair the entirety of a student's university career, for, as noted by Evans and Morrison (2011, p.199), "research conducted since the 1950s indicates that the first year is a crucial stage in the process of socialisation into the undergraduate role and a highly sensitive touchstone for the quality of the student experience." As a country which seeks to achieve mass, and perhaps close to universal, higher education by 2021 (*Vision 2021*, 2010) this consideration is of obvious and especial importance to the UAE.

#### **1.4 Research questions**

The research questions (RQs) which inform and guide this study are enumerated below:

*RQ 1:* What are female students' views regarding and experiences of EMI in HE in the UAE?

*RQ 2:* What challenges do female students believe they face when transitioning from secondary school to EMI tertiary studies in the UAE?

*RQ 3:* What are the students' views regarding the English language proficiency requirement of an overall 5.0 IELTS, or equivalent, for admission to faculty studies at federal university?

These 3 questions arise from a confluence of my own personal experience of teaching at the case institution and a perusal of the relevant literature, and represent areas on which greater data is required. In reference to RQs 1 and 2, as noted above there is something of a paucity of data on the views of female students' perceptions of and views towards EMI within HE in the UAE as well as the transition students make when exiting secondary school and commencing HE. As regards RQ3, it could be argued that it is predictable that many students will harbour unfavourable views of the IELTS requirement for entry to faculty, and possibly of IELTS itself, and thus RQ3 might seem somewhat superfluous. However, what the third research question adds to this study is the possibility of gaining an insight into students' views regarding this particular language proficiency requirement, the accuracy, value, and relevance of such language proficiency examinations in general, and, arguably of the greatest importance, their views towards the fact that

all students must satisfy the same English-language proficiency requirement regardless of their linguistic experience and educational background.

Since each educational milieu arguably boasts of its own unique idiosyncrasies, the following chapter ‘sets the scene’ of the current study by outlining some features of the UAE which are particularly pertinent to the research described in subsequent chapters.

## **Chapter 2: Contextualisation of study**

As noted at the close of the introduction, the following chapter gives a brief sketch of the context in which this study takes place, with a focus on some of the broad socio-cultural, socio-economic, and educational issues which act as a backdrop to the research reported in this thesis.

### **2.1 The rapid development of the UAE**

In the UAE, remark Winslow, Honein, and Elzubeir (2002, p.568), “Camels wander alongside superhighways” and “Men armed with mini mobile phones head into the desert in luxurious four-wheel drives to practice the ancient art of falconry.” Such charming – and often stunning – contrasts between traditionalism on the one hand and modernity on the other arguably come about as a direct result of the sheer speed at which the country has developed. Some of the ramifications of this rapid development are discussed below.

#### **2.1.1 From Bedouins to bankers**

Although it is often stated that the story of the UAE is one of rapid development, this is in fact arguably something of an understatement; the term breakneck may perhaps better capture the sheer speed with which the country has entered the modern world. The explorer Wilfred Thesiger (Thesiger, 1959/2007, p.5), for example, notes that in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, “the changes which occurred in the space of a decade or two were as great as those which occurred in Britain between the early Middle Ages and the present day” (see also Dyck, 2010). Likewise, former diplomat and factotum, Edward Henderson, describes the development of the UAE as “startling” (Henderson, 1988, p.xiv). Such comments are not necessarily hyperbole. Indeed, one need only consider the fact that although revenue from sales of hydrocarbon resources has allowed Abu Dhabi – the capital of the present-day UAE – to transform itself from a poverty-stricken fishing village, described by Thesiger (1959/2007, p.262) immediately following WWII as a “small dilapidated town”, to a modern metropolis referred to by Tatchell (2009) as the “world’s richest city”, the conurbation did not benefit from electricity or telephones till 1967. Dubai, too, has undergone rapid and radical development. Portrayed by Thesiger (1959/2007) in the late 1940s as a simple

town of 25,000 inhabitants where “life moved in time with the past” (p.276), decidedly fast-paced present-day Dubai now boasts of numerous structural superlatives, not least the tallest building in the world, *Burj Khalifa* (Khalifa Tower). In addition, in 2020 Dubai will host the World Expo, which, it behoves us to remember, is the year before the UAE celebrates its golden jubilee.

In short, the previously loose confederation of seven tribal sheikhdoms, or “statelets” (Watt, 1968, p.495), of the former Trucial Coast now constitute a single political unity, one which possesses approximately 10% of proven global oil reserves (Shihab, 2001), which commands a sovereign wealth fund estimated at US\$627 billion (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a), and which has the top-spending population in the Arab world (Khalaf, 2005). Thus, although the “newly rich Bedouin who overnight changes his camel for a brand new Cadillac” may well be a myth (Ouis, 2002, p.315), it is however no exaggeration to say that “Adults who were Bedouins, tending goats and farming dates, have children driving Land Cruisers and studying in America” (Winslow et al., 2002, p.572), thereby transforming the average Emirati “from bedouin [*sic*] to banker in a little over 50 years” (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a, p.11).

## **2.1.2 Demographic, socio-cultural, and linguistic consequences of rapid growth**

### **2.1.2.1 Demographic imbalances**

Such monumental development in a sparsely-populated country necessitated an influx of foreign blue- and white-collar workers to take up positions created by the rapidly growing petrodollar-fuelled economy, a situation which has remained the same till today. Indeed, according to the 2010 census (Al-Khouri, 2012), non-nationals presently make up some 88% of the 8.2 million people in the UAE, and only 9.31% of the overall workforce in Abu Dhabi – and a mere 2.9% in Dubai – are national citizens (Toledo, 2013). Professional posts are typically filled by Europeans, of which British expatriates form the largest single group (Wilkins, 2001), and the vast majority of ‘migrant workers’ (as with other states in the Arabian Gulf, the UAE does not recognise or accept immigrants or refugees) stem from the subcontinent (Jureidini, 2003). Wilkins (2010), for example, notes that the UAE has some 1.75 million workers from India, and it has been reported (Randeree & Gaad, 2008) that the Indian male accounts for no less than 49.9% of the workforce

of Dubai, a point which leads Khalaf (2006, p.251) to quip that “Visitors to Dubai may comment that they actually feel they are in an Indian rather than Arab city.”

### **2.1.2.2 Socio-cultural tensions**

Such “demographic imbalances” (Al-Khouri, 2012, p.1; Martin, 2003, p.54), however, are something of a two-edged sword. For whilst Toledo (2013, p.39) asserts that much of the economic activity in the UAE “would not have been possible without the supply of a relatively cheap migrant labor force”, and that, as noted by Khalaf (2006, p.256), “In a sense, the nationals [in the states of the Arabian Gulf] are blessed twice: by the oil pipeline and the pipeline of cheap migrant labor”, some Emiratis interviewed by Ashencaen Crabtree (2007, p.584) condemned “the alien and therefore corrupt values brought in by the armies of multi-ethnic migrant workers that today flood the labour markets of the UAE” (see also Ouis, 2002). Thus, as stated succinctly by Shihab (2001, p.251), “a small indigenous population, a large expatriate population, and immense wealth generated by oil are the dominant socio-economic features of the UAE”, to which, on the part of Emiratis, we might add a sense of tension and alienation as a result of the “cultural tsunami” (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a, p.iii) which struck the country in the 1980s and, ultimately, of being a minority in their very own land (K. Ahmed, 2010; Al-Khouri, 2012; Martin, 2003; Nickerson & Crawford Camiciottoli, 2013; Rapanta, 2014; Raven, 2011), albeit an economically and politically privileged minority.

### **2.1.2.3 The linguistic landscape of the UAE**

With the UAE being such a melting pot of workers from different countries – Boyle (2011) for instance remarks that there are more than 200 different nationalities employed in the UAE – the country is now also something of a potpourri of diverse languages. Indeed, O’Neill (2017, p.13) states that, linguistically, the UAE constitutes a “superdiverse society.” Some of the ramifications of this linguistic diversity which have relevance to the current study are discussed below.

### **2.1.2.3.1 Domains of use: Linguistic dualism in the UAE**

The two most widely-used – and prestigious – languages in the UAE, Arabic and English, each occupy distinct niches and perform different functions in the country, that is, they boast of separate domains of use. Indeed, in an important and oft-cited paper, Findlow (2006) argues that in the UAE Arabic and English represent discrete worldviews, with the former embodying cultural authenticity, localism, tradition, emotions, and religion, and the latter standing for modernity, internationalism, business, material status, and secularism. Thus, whilst the federal ministries of the public sector – the chief employers of Emiratis (Al-Waqfi & Forstenlechner, 2010; Forstenlechner, 2008; Forstenlechner & Rutledge, 2010; cited in Forstenlechner, Madi, Selim, & Rutledge, 2012; Godwin, 2006; Walters et al., 2005; Walters, Quinn, & Jendli, 2006) – are by official decree staunchly Arabic (Al Baik, 2008, March 10), the private sector in contrast is overwhelmingly an English environment. In his survey of 22 of the top 100 companies in Dubai, for example, Wilkins (2001) found that whilst 50% of the firms give training in English and Arabic, 41% deliver staff training exclusively in English, and, tellingly, no companies offer training solely in Arabic (9% use various other languages).

In education, too, there are such bipartite linguistic domains. Government primary and secondary schools for example are predominately Arabic medium, whilst private schools are largely English-medium institutions. Within HE, Islamic law, arts, humanities, social sciences, and education are mostly taught in Arabic, while subjects with a “global orientation” (Findlow, 2006, p.25) are typically offered exclusively in English.

### **2.1.2.3.2 Traversing different domains of use: Code-switching**

The phenomenon of concentric language rings, that is, domains of use embedded within other, wider domains of use, also inevitably leads to actors in this complex linguistic landscape, especially Emiratis, having to employ different languages when moving between and negotiating different, sometimes overlapping, linguistic spheres. This switching of languages – or code-switching – takes many forms in the country. At home, for example, Emiratis would of course tend to use Arabic with their family, though might employ English with their gardeners, drivers,

nannies, and other household employees (Holes, 2011; O’Neill, 2017). Such code-switching between Arabic and English may also frequently take the form of peppering Arabic with English words (Holes, 2011; O’Neill, 2017), or vice-versa (Hopkyns, 2017; Hudson, 2013; O’Neill, 2017), and in some cases may be largely or wholly unconscious (O’Neill, 2017).

### **2.1.3 The burgeoning education system of the UAE**

Although the speed and extent of the growth of the economy and infrastructure of the UAE is indeed “remarkable” (Syed, 2003, p.338; *Vision 2021*, 2010, p.1), and the resulting complexity of the contemporary linguistic landscape of the country is staggering, the rapid transformation of the UAE is however arguably best illustrated – indeed, perhaps exemplified – by the growth and transformation of education in the country. For, whilst there was not a single HE institution when the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al Nahyan founded the UAE in 1971, there are now the federal tertiary institutions of the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU), Zayed University (ZU), some 17 Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT), the Emirates College for Advanced Education (ECAE), a teacher training college, and the “semi-public” (Chapman, Austin, Farah, Wilson, & Ridge, 2009, p.135) Khalifa University of Science, Technology & Research (KUSTAR).

This growth in the HE sector is however perhaps best demonstrated not by the number of tertiary institutions *per se* but rather by the number of their respective students. For, although as noted by Wilkins (2001), the UAE had a mere 46 nationals who held a university degree in 1971 (all of whom of course had had to pursue their studies overseas), recent statistics show that HCT has approximately 22,000 students spread throughout its nationwide network of campuses (*HCT Fact Book 2014-2015*), and that UAEU alone boasted of no fewer than 13,996 students (13,043 undergraduate students and 953 postgraduate students) in 2014 (*UAEU Annual Report Academic Year 2013/2014*).

It is not exclusively the HE sector in the UAE which has experienced recent and rapid growth, however; the number of primary and secondary schools has also experienced a dramatic increase. Syed (2003), for example, cites figures demonstrating that between 1985 and 1996 the number of students and schools in the UAE increased by 67.5% and 62%, respectively. As shown below in

Table 1, these somewhat staggering rates of expansion are also reflected in the number of teachers in the country.

**Table 1: Number of primary school and secondary school teachers in the UAE**

Year	1970	1985	1990	1995	1998
Primary school teachers	806	6,213	12,526	...	...
Secondary school teachers	363	4,237	8,565	10,061	16,302

Source: Chapman & Miric (2009)

Such exponential expansion of the school system has naturally had a profound impact on the education of the nation. Indeed, echoing the rapid general development of the country alluded to by Wilfred Thesiger above, Gardner (1995, p.293) notes that the “UAE achieved universal primary education in just 25 years, a feat that took much longer in the United States and Western Europe,” and illiteracy, once rife, has now been all but eradicated (*Library of Congress – Federal Research Division, 2007*).

## 2.2 Educational underachievement in the UAE

Perhaps as a result of the sheer speed at which it developed, the education system of the UAE unfortunately suffers from – indeed, is arguably plagued by – shortcomings. In this regard, the UAE does not differ from education in the greater Arab World, i.e., in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, where, it is generally acknowledged, underachievement is a characteristic – if not a defining feature – of the educational system, both in terms of general education (Bouhlila, 2011; Chapman & Miric, 2009; Heyneman, 1997) and EFL programmes, the latter of which, asserts Fareh (2010), have failed – and continue to fail – to deliver. In the states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), too, the school system suffers from underachievement, this despite that fact that, as noted by Barber, Mourshed, and Whelan (2007, pp.41-42), “Rather strikingly, the average student-teacher ratio in the GCC is 12:1 – one of the world’s lowest – as compared with an average of 17:1 in the member countries of the Organisation for Co-operation and Development.” In ESL/EFL, as well, standards in the GCC are low. Indeed, Said (2011, p.200)

quips, somewhat pointedly, that “It seems the Gulf is an ideal place to conduct research related to acquisition or rather non-acquisition of language.”

The UAE is no exception to such regional generalisations. As regards the school system of the country, for instance, Shaw, Badri, and Hukul (1995, p.10) assert that “Despite adequate funding and resources, the effectiveness of the state schools remains disturbingly low”, to which and Hokal and Shaw (1999, p.173) add that in UAE schools, “drop-out, repetition of years, and underachievement are common.” This also appears to be the case for HE. Of the 116 male Emirati first-year foundation programme students at HCT Fujairah studied by Hatherley-Greene (2012a), for example, 66% left within a year (including 25% within the very first 4 weeks), and the total drop-out rate in the lowest level was a disconcerting 97%. In terms of English language learning, too, results in the UAE would appear to be somewhat less than optimal, as those with experience of teaching (e.g., Troudi, 2009) and interviewing (e.g., Said, 2011) Emirati students often recount. Such anecdotal, arguably subjective, impressions are not the only evidence of relatively low levels of English proficiency, however. Gallagher (2011a), for example, points out that takers of IELTS in the UAE obtained the lowest scores out of 20 countries in 2006, trailing developing countries such as Bangladesh, Nepal, and Sri Lanka (*IELTS Annual Review 2006*). Highly similar results were obtained in 2007 (*IELTS Annual Review 2007*), 2010 (*IELTS Annual Review 2010*), and 2011 (*IELTS Annual Review 2011*).

Interestingly, for their part, Emirati parents would appear to be quite aware of such shortcomings in the education system of the country. Indeed, a recent study indicates that more than 50% of Emirati parents enrol their children at private, fee-paying schools (Kenaid, 2011). This is significant since free education is generally perceived as both a central tenet (Akkari, 2004) and a particularly tangible aspect (Burden-Leahy, 2009) of the ‘social contract’ – the mechanism by which revenues from oil and gas sales, or ‘rents’ (see Beblawi, 1987), are distributed among the populace by the rulers – as well as being emblematic of the “all-pervading welfarism” (Delacroix, 1980, p.13) associated with rentier states, of which countries such as the UAE are considered to be examples *par excellence* (Beblawi, 1987).

## **2.3 The rentier state, the social contract, and the rentier mentality**

### **2.3.1 The rentier state**

The anthropologist Khalaf (2006, p.245) notes that in the petroleum-exporting states of the GCC, “Locals often label their societies *al-mujtama’ t al-naftiyam*, which translates as oil societies” (italics in original). In the case of the oil society that is the UAE, the petrodollar-fuelled “instant urbanization” of the country (Abu-Lughod, 1983; cited in Khalaf, 2006, p.247) has transmogrified the country from a subsistence economy into a rentier state; indeed, the UAE may exemplify the Arabian Gulf rentier state. In this usage, the term rent refers to “the income derived from the gift of nature” (Beblawi, 1987, p.49), that is, the revenue (or external rent) states receive from the sale of indigenous natural resources. Countries which acquire a large proportion, or all, of their income from such rents are accordingly designated as rentier states.

### **2.3.2 The social contract**

As with most if not all monarchical rentier states with a relatively small indigenous population, a portion of the external rents accrued by the UAE through the sale of natural resources is distributed to the populace. As noted above, this distribution of rents on the part of the leaders is invariably known as the ‘social contract’ (Minnis, 2006). In the UAE the social contract has produced a “lavish” welfare system (Khalaf, 2005, p.240) which “offers womb-to-tomb free state services for all nationals” (Khalaf, 2001, p.2328). Lavish would certainly appear to be an apt term. Walters et al. (2005, p.64) for example note that oil and gas revenues have “provided a life of grace for nationals”, which includes Emiratis receiving (Walters et al., 2006) free education, low-cost medicine, lucrative employment with short working hours within the public sector, marriage grants, inexpensive housing, and (Walters et al., 2005) government pension contributions totalling some 40 percent national citizens’ income. However, Toledo (2013, p.41) argues that the comprehensive welfare afforded Emirati nationals – which is “based on the traditions of Bedouin societies” – constitutes an unambiguous moral hazard, stating that such economic privileges serve to “discourage UAE citizens from working or at minimum, from becoming productive workers.”

### 2.3.3 The rentier mentality

Beblawi (1987, p.62) refers to this disincentive to be productive as “the oil disease” and explains (p.52) that the

basic assumption about the rentier mentality and that which distinguishes it from conventional economic behavior is that it embodies a break in the work-reward causation. Reward – income or wealth – is not related to work and risk-bearing, rather to chance or situation. For a rentier, reward becomes a windfall gain, an *isolated* fact, situational or accidental as against the conventional outlook where reward is integrated in a *process* as the end result of a long, systematic and organized production circuit (original emphasis).

This rentier effect could be argued to have some not inconsiderable ramifications for education in the UAE. Indeed, a common hypothesised cause for the somewhat lackadaisical attitude towards studying evinced by many Emirati HE students, particularly females, previously remarked upon both by teachers (e.g., Freimuth, 2017; Martin, 2003; Hudson, 2012) and other commentators (e.g., Krane, 2010) is the comprehensive welfare enjoyed by national citizens, which, interestingly, is remarkably similar to the conclusion reached by Minnis (2000) in the context of the rentier state of Brunei. Indeed, one educator interviewed by Hatherley-Greene (2012a) was of the opinion that the only way to motivate students from such backgrounds would be to (p.172) “Make them poor!”

### 2.4 The ‘purpose’ of HE for females in the UAE

It has long been argued that the very objective of education – even tertiary education – can differ in divergent socio-economic and cultural contexts. Hickey (1980, p.476), for example, argues that “University education will involve different concepts in countries where it is free and in those where people have to pay for it.” This remark is especially germane to HE in rentier states such as the UAE. Minnis (1999, p.176) for instance remarks that the

purpose of education in such states is manifestly different from that found in developed countries. In rentier economies, revenues accrue directly to the state from oil and gas ‘rents’. Hence there is little or no connection between production and income distribution. Oil rents are then distributed to the

population in the form of highly subsidised imports, secure government jobs, subsidised housing and free medical services.

In addition, Al-Issa (2005, p.153) notes that such fundamental differences in the very purpose of education can also stem from different systems of underlying cultural organisation, remarking that “while education in individualistic societies is viewed as a way of improving one’s economic worth and self-respect based on ability and competence”, in collectivist cultures – of which it has been argued the UAE is a classic example – “education is seen as a way of gaining prestige in one’s own social group and of joining a higher social status group”. There is a parallel here with the remarks of Ashencaen Crabtree (2007), who opines (p.577) that

academic studies [on the part of Emirati women] do not appear to be undertaken for the love of learning solely, but rather that families view an education at this level as providing the final polish to a young girl’s life, that marks her out as being successfully poised on the brink of adult life, commensurate with Islamic and cultural expectations of womanhood.

Richardson (2004, p.433) concurs, stating that the “value of education for girls [in the UAE] appears to be to achieve a better marriage to enhance the family and to educate the next generation, rather than for individual job prospects.” Saqr, Tennant, & Stringer (2014, p.3), too, remark that

although tertiary education for young Emirati females is flourishing and despite rhetoric that encourages women to take their education to the workplace, it is evident that only a minority intend to use their acquired knowledge to pursue an active career upon graduation.

Indeed, although Emirati females certainly appear to be encouraged to pursue tertiary studies – all Emirati nationals enjoy wholly free education at all levels, from primary school through post-graduate study, free on-campus accommodation, and free transportation to and from university – it is nevertheless somewhat challenging to reconcile this with the fact that, as noted by Green and Smith (2006), Emirati women are also simultaneously instructed that it is nothing short of their national duty to have a minimum of six offspring so to alleviate the shortage of (national) manpower. As remarked for example by Khalaf (2001, p.2328), in the UAE, “Large families are encouraged by the state as a national policy”, a desire which has recently been reaffirmed in no uncertain terms: “We want large families”, states the Vision 2021 manifesto (*Vision 2021*, 2010,

p.3). Presumably, then, female Emiratis are indeed meant to attend university but then, apparently, are expected to bear children, and not necessarily ever actually apply or draw upon their tertiary education in the workplace.

Statistics would certainly appear to lend some weight to such an interpretation. For although, as previously noted, women indeed constitute the vast majority of students in HE in the UAE (circa 75%), and hold 4 out of 5 baccalaureate degrees held by nationals (MOHESR, 2007), female Emiratis nevertheless form but a distinct minority of the workforce, totalling an approximate 28% of citizens employed in the country (Ghazal Aswad, Vidican, & Samulewicz, 2011b). In this regard, tertiary institutions in the UAE would in some ways appear to resemble “campuses in many Arab countries [which] are seen (and used) as waiting rooms, temporarily saving their attendees from unemployment” (Romani, 2009, p.3), a situation common to the resource-rich rentier states of the GCC (Winckler, 2002). Furthermore, as noted by Gardner (1995, p.295), in the Arab world students “are not always allowed to choose their own course of study but are often assigned to specializations on the basis of scores on high school leaving tests.” In short, then, many female students are in fact studying a subject not of their own choosing, in a language which they may not be fully proficient in, to gain a qualification they will probably never need, let alone use.

## **2.5 Contrasts in education in the UAE**

As noted at the start of this chapter with the allusion to the archetypal Bedouin date farmer who has children pursuing their studies in the USA, the UAE is a country of contrasts. Such striking contrasts also exist within the education system of the UAE, particularly between HE and compulsory education. Four of the most striking dissimilarities between these two sectors – funding, staffing, curricula, and the different teaching methodologies employed in schools and on foundation programmes at tertiary institutions – are discussed below.

### **2.5.1 Facilities and funding**

One striking example of a contrast within education in the UAE is the sheer disparity between government funding for HE on the one hand and that, in stark contrast, made available to

compulsory education on the other. This is evident both in terms of the ‘hardware’ and the ‘software’ of the system. As regards the former, many HE institutions are nothing short of state of the art in terms of their facilities. The case institution, for instance, enjoys campus-wide wireless internet, interactive whiteboards (so-called ‘Smartboards’) in every classroom, and all academic staff are issued with digital tablet devices. Similar conditions are described at HCT in the northern emirate of Fujairah by Hatherley-Greene (2012a). A typical classroom there, writes Hatherley-Greene, has the ubiquitous Smartboard, a digital projector suspended from the ceiling, and a laptop on the teacher’s desk. This contrasts sharply with recent descriptions of secondary school classrooms in Abu Dhabi, which as previously noted is the wealthiest emirate of the UAE. Indeed, in her school-based study in Abu Dhabi, Sanassian (2011, p.175; appendix F) notes that the premises are characterised by “dangerous stair rails, broken stairs” and “holes in the classroom walls”.

Such disparities between tertiary and mandatory education appear to be far from uncommon in the Arab world. Indeed, as noted for example by Heyneman (1997, p.454) in a paper examining education in the MENA region, “At some point the question must be raised as to whether the quality of compulsory education is being neglected in lieu of higher education”, a charge which is more commonly made in relation to developing countries such as India (e.g., Tully, 1997), but which has also previously been levelled specifically against the UAE (see, e.g., Gallagher, 2011b).

### **2.5.2 Staff and faculty**

It is not merely facilities which highlight discrepancies between compulsory education and HE in the UAE, however. For an examination of those employed to teach in the two sectors – viz., the software, to continue the computer analogy – also arguably sheds light on some apparent incongruities and inconsistencies between these two distinct segments of federally-funded education. Syed (2003, p.338) for example notes that “Generally speaking, English [in the UAE] is taught by Egyptians, Palestinians, Jordanians, and other Arab nationals at the K-12 level while most teachers at the tertiary level are North Americans, Britons, and Australians, with some Arab nationals.”

From a more critical perspective, and employing a political metaphor originally due to Paikeday (1985), Karmani (2005a, p.93) refers to this dichotomy of nationalities as “a grotesque form of “linguistic apartheid””, and, echoing Syed (2003), notes (pp.93-94) that “on the one hand a community of largely white, Western, “native-speakers” of English is employed in the lucrative tertiary sector” while “on the other is the vast number of bilingual Arab teachers of English who work in the substantially underinvested secondary and primary school systems.” In a highly stratified hierarchical ‘being culture’ (Zaharna, 1995) such as the UAE (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a) where, as in many other small states (Minnis, 1999, 2000), one’s genealogy, family ties, tribal affiliations, and social connections are often more important than one’s actual accomplishments and achievements (which tend to be valued more in ‘doing cultures’ such as the USA and UK), this dichotomy can have some not inconsiderable consequences for education. One informant in Hudson’s (2013) study of teachers in tertiary institutions in the UAE, for example, states (p.190) that his male students had previously remarked that “school teachers don’t really have any authority, because they are Egyptians or Syrians and so are ranked lower than the Emiratis in the hierarchy.”

### **2.5.3 Curricula contrasts**

A further major difference between government secondary schools and federally-sponsored tertiary institutions in the UAE is that of their respective curricula, which in many regards reflects – and in fact arguably epitomises – the contrast in the country between traditionalism on the one hand and modernity on the other. The most striking feature of the curriculum in secondary education, for example, is the sheer emphasis placed on the Arabic language and the study of Islam. Indeed, Shaw et al. (1995, p.11) note that, depending on the year group, Arabic and Islamic studies may take up between 13 and 17 periods of a 30-period school week. On this point, Shaw et al. remark (pp.11-12) that

The centrality of Arabic/Islamic studies in the curriculum relates to the need to hold the line against western values and styles, and to ingrain and protect Arab/Islamic identity, seen as under serious threat from the ever-present western consumerist and secular lifestyle.

At the case institution, in contrast, two of the three components of the foundation programme, viz., mathematics and English, are EMI courses, and only one, Arabic, is conducted in the students' L1. The English strand of the foundation programme itself consists of four levels (levels I through IV), and each level is further subdivided into two streams, namely, writing (which incorporates 'grammar'), and 'integrated skills' (reading, listening, and speaking). The academic year on the foundation programme previously comprised two semesters of 16 weeks each, but this was changed so that the year consisted instead of four 8-week quarters. Each week students have eight 50-minute periods of both writing and 'integrated skills', with this being delivered via two such 50-minute periods for each skill four days a week. On a bi-weekly alternating basis, students also have an extra period of both skills on the fifth and final day of the week, which is a half-day. A pass in each class (i.e., writing and 'integrated') in levels I through III, as measured by results in tests which are created, invigilated, and graded in-house, is required to progress to the next level (the sole assessment for level IV in contrast is IELTS).

#### **2.5.4 Teaching methodologies**

There are also contrasts between the methodologies, and the educational philosophies which underpin such methodologies, which are employed at school and those which are adopted within institutions of HE, at least on the English-language strands of foundation programmes. Compulsory education in the UAE, for instance, is largely dominated by rote teaching (van den Hoven, 2014) and rote learning (Gallagher, 2011b) – a point which has been noted at the highest possible level. Indeed, Raven (2011) notes that the Ruler of Dubai, Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al Maktoum, has himself stressed the need for students to learn how to think for themselves rather than to simply memorise and regurgitate information. Similar sentiments have also been emphasised in official UAE government publications. The Vision 2021 manifesto, for example, asserts that by the year 2021, “A progressive national curriculum will extend beyond rote learning to encompass critical thinking and practical abilities” (*Vision 2021*, 2010, p.10). The “Policies and Procedures” document of the foundation programme at the case institution, in contrast, informs teachers that they “are expected to adopt a communicative, student-centered approach, so that during every lesson all students are actively engaged with the target language.” To this end, teachers are instructed to “use elicitation in their lessons as much as possible” and to “incorporate directed questioning, cross-checking,

concept checking, recycling, modeling, etc.” in their lessons. In another document entitled “Best Teaching Practices: Self-Audit Check List for Instructors”, which teachers are advised to complete following a lesson observation, instructors are asked, “Did you have a range of student-centered activities?” This latter document is of especial interest as lesson observations form part of the overall appraisal procedure, and thus constitute a significant component of the three “gatekeeping encounters” alluded to by Buckingham (2014, p.9), namely, “hiring, promotion, and contract renewal.”

It has previously been noted that it can be challenging for students in the region to acclimatise to such methodologies. Indeed, the way the ‘Western’, ‘student-centred’, ‘top-down’, ‘constructivist’ teaching methodology which students encounter when commencing HE clashes with the prior experience of instructional methods experienced by students at school – and how difficult it can initially be for learners to comprehend and adjust to the former after having previously been exposed exclusively to the latter – has attracted considerable attention in the germane literature. This point is tackled, for example, in work examining teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) and teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) in the Arabian Gulf in general (e.g., Dell-Jones, 2008), and in the UAE specifically, both from the perspective of secondary education (e.g., Raven, 2011; Sanassian, 2011; Stockwell, 2015) and HE (e.g., Baalawi, 2008; King, 2014; Martin, 2003).

This clash in teaching methodologies is particularly germane to the English foundation programmes at the federal institutions of HE in the UAE, especially the lower levels. Indeed, in their critique of ‘student-centred’ approaches to instruction, Kirschner, Sweller, and Clark (2006, p.81) for example assert that “failure to provide strong learning support for less experienced or less able students could actually produce a measurable loss of learning.” This is also precisely the conclusion Hatherley-Greene reaches in his doctoral study of Emirati male foundation programme students at HCT in Fujairah. Reporting on this research, Hatherley-Greene reports (2012b, p.6) that he “found that learner-centered instructional approaches favoured by colleges of higher education appear to negatively affect lower level foundational students.”

At this point it should perhaps be stressed that this brief discussion of different teaching methodologies and learning styles should in no way be interpreted as a criticism of Arab students, for (so-called) ‘student-centred’ approaches to study are not only often problematic for ‘non-Western’ students to comprehend. Indeed, Kubota (2001), for instance, relates (p.55) how her attempt to introduce World English-related topics to American students in North Carolina through a “dialogic, collaborative and inquiry-based approach” resulted in failure as the students appeared to be more used to “passive and teacher-directed learning.” It is also significant that in their classroom-based study of EMI at two Swedish universities, Airey and Linder (2006) report that one lecturer simply worked through each of the sections of a textbook on the board. The authors note (p.557) that

Often there was little difference between the pages of the book and what was written on the board. Our initial thought was that this would be a boring and unproductive lecturing strategy; however, this ‘walking students through the landscape’ was appreciated by all the students we interviewed.

The context of this study by Airey and Linder is highly relevant since, as noted by the authors, “Sweden is widely believed to be one of the countries in Europe with the highest levels of second-language English ability”, therefore “the problems [of comprehension] we have described would perhaps be even more pronounced in countries with generally lower levels of English language competence” (Airey & Linder, 2006, p.559).

## **2.6 Ramifications of a conservative culture for the education of women**

Abdalla (1996, p.29) writes that “despite the appearance of opulence, moderate advancement and educational achievements, it seems that Arabian Gulf women are locked in restrictive traditional roles.” This is certainly the case in the UAE, where Emirati women are subject to strict “sociosexual controls” (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007, p.585) and where social interaction between unrelated members of the opposite gender is not permitted. One ramification of this conservative element of Emirati society is discussed below.

### **2.6.1 A desire to be a teacher, though not necessarily to teach**

It must be noted that the educational experiences of female students, the focus of the current study, may have been adversely affected by less than fully committed teachers before commencing HE. This is since many female Emiratis may not have necessarily entered teaching out of a desire to teach, but rather as a result of cultural restrictions on interaction between unrelated males and females in UAE society. Since government schools are segregated by gender for both students and teachers, teaching is a popular choice of career for many Emirati women who desire to enter employment simply as it is one of very few potential work environments which is acceptable to both the woman's family (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007; Bahgat, 1999; Barber et al., 2007; Ibrahim, 2012; Randeree & Gaad, 2008; Sandiford, 2014; Saqr et al., 2014; Shaw et al., 1995) and, if married, her spouse (Tennant, Saqr, & Stringer, 2014), from whom women require permission to take up employment. Randeree and Gaad (2008, p.74), for example, relate the story of a female informant from Ras Al Khaimah (RAK) who, despite being enrolled on an education degree course, did not in fact desire a career in teaching. Rather, relates their informant, to her conservative family the "only (nearly) male-free environment is in a school, so I enrolled in education ... not because I love teaching but because I (would) love to work after graduation."

Some of the effects of such non-committed teachers committing themselves to a 'career' in teaching can be seen in the comments of those who have themselves been through the system. 'Amal', the pseudonym of an Emirati trainee teacher studied by Gallagher (2011b), for instance, remarks that her schooling was "dominated by teacher-transmitted rote learning and memorisation" (p.145). Similarly, some of the undergraduate female Emirati students interviewed by Madsen (2009) "described their school learning as non-engaging, particularly those who had attended government schools" (p.24). The teachers, states one such informant, "didn't ever show us how we could actually benefit from learning the information they were teaching us" (p.25). Some of the female pre-service teachers studied by van den Hoven (2014), too, stated (p.51) that they felt "disdain for the teacher-centered pedagogy they had experienced as students in Arabic classes, which one participant called "rote teaching"." It is also worth noting that, as reported by Ibrahim (2012), when holding the post of General Director of ADEC, Dr Mugheer Khamis al Khaili criticised the unsatisfactory level of new teachers produced by the three federal teacher

education programmes at HCT, ZU, and UAEU, the latter two of which cater exclusively for female trainee teachers.

## **2.7 Summary**

To sum up, the commercial exploitation of fossil fuels has – in less than 50 years – allowed the UAE to transmogrify itself from a loose collection of desert sheikhdoms to a modern state characterised by gleaming cities with skylines boasting of futuristic skyscrapers. This rapid societal transformation is perhaps best illustrated by the remarkable growth of education in the country, as evinced by the creation of an entire nationwide school and HE system from scratch and the near total eradication of illiteracy in little over a single generation.

However, the sheer rate of economic expansion experienced in this staunchly traditional Arab-Muslim-Bedouin culture, and the phenomenal wealth now enjoyed by the indigenous population as a result of the oil boom and the social contract, respectively, have led to the emergence of an array of challenges previously unknown to this tribal-based society. Indeed, the influx of foreign workers this breakneck growth necessitated – and the corresponding importation of alien values and foreign languages which accompanied this inflow of workers into the country – has ultimately culminated in Emiratis becoming something resembling strangers in their very own land; a people who now inhabit and who are thus required to negotiate an ever-increasingly complex linguistic landscape, one in which Arabic is in a perpetual ‘duel’ with English in the marketplace of languages. As for the extravagant welfare showered upon and the economic privileges afforded Emirati nationals, these aspects of the rentier state have acted as disincentives on the part of the populace to be competitive, productive employees, and have given rise to levels of unemployment unknown in industrialised Western nations.

The education system of the UAE, too, is plagued by problems, not least underachievement, as thus far the UAE seems to have been unable to translate the colossal windfall of the oil bonanza into tangible educational achievements and outcomes. A number of factors appear to be responsible for this lack of achievement, not least the challenges involved in requiring a large number of female Muslim students – who stem from conservative homes where traditional gender

roles are cherished culturally and propagated generationally – to successfully transit from an underinvested Arabic-medium and Arabic-staffed secondary school system, where teacher-dominated classrooms reign, to English-medium HE, where secular Western teachers are expected – indeed, compelled – to adopt ‘student-centred’ pedagogies, and this in order for female students to gain a qualification which may ultimately be at odds with the expectations of both their family and greater society as regards the appropriate role of women in the social order.

### **Chapter 3: Literature review**

In order to contextualise the current study, chapter 2 gave a brief and broad overview of some of the most pertinent historical, socio-cultural, and socio-economic issues relevant to any educationally-oriented research conducted in the present-day UAE. In order to give a fuller understanding of the specific pedagogical context of the research reported in this thesis, the following chapter reviews a select cross-section of the extant literature, which, from a wide range of perspectives, examines a number of topics germane to EMI in HE in the UAE.

The first section of this review clarifies and justifies the term EMI itself. This is followed by a discussion of the decisions which policy-makers need to make, the predicaments they face when making such decisions, and how in many cases the policy of EMI appears to have been adopted in something of an over-hasty fashion. Following this is an examination and critique of two possible motivations for the adoption of EMI within the HE system of the UAE, namely, that English is the dominant language of business as well as of science and technology and thus is required for these two spheres of the modern world. The next section briefly tackles the linguistic imperialism which would appear to underlie the policy of EMI, and how the practice arguably exemplifies Phillipson's (1992) fallacies of ELT. The subsequent section, the longest of this review of the germane literature, focuses on some of the discernible effects and non-effects of EMI which emerged from this survey of previously published research.

As regards effects, these include the influence the policy has been documented to have on classroom dynamics, and, from the standpoint of society, how the English-language proficiency requirements associated with the policy of EMI ultimately engender inequities of access to HE. There is then an examination of some of the problems frequently experienced in relation to EMI, including low levels of language proficiency often evinced by students undertaking EMI studies and reduced levels of student participation. Following this there is a discussion of the 'incidental' language learning which is often asserted, or simply assumed, to come about as a result of studying non-language subjects in an L2.

The final section reviews the attitudes of contemporary Emirati society towards the stature and role of English in the UAE, and the views of students towards the English language and the policy of EMI in HE. This chapter then concludes with a summary of the literature surveyed and the areas which warrant further research as highlighted through the review.

### **3.1 CLIL, L2MI, and EMI**

The procedure by which lessons and lectures are delivered in a language other than that of the L1(s) of the students is a methodology which has variously been referred to as content-based foreign language instruction (e.g., Met, 1991), content-based second language instruction (e.g., Akünal, 1992), content-based language instruction (e.g., Snow & Brinton, 1988), content-based instruction (e.g., Nunan, 2003), use of a second language as the language of learning and teaching (e.g., Probyn, 2009; Webb, 2002), foreign language mediated teaching (e.g., Moate, 2011), foreign language medium instruction (e.g., Sert, 2008), integrated language and content instruction (e.g., Short, 1993), and, most recently, content and language integrated learning (e.g., Coleman, 2006; Goredema, 2012; Hüttner, Dalton-Puffer, & Smit, 2013), or, more commonly, CLIL. As suggested by such programmatic titles, the philosophy underpinning such an approach is that, rather than being taught an L2 in an explicit, overt fashion, with a corresponding focus on the mechanics and vocabulary of the language, various non-language-related subjects – such as geography, mathematics, science, or sociology – are instead taught in and via that L2, with the pedagogical aim being that learners will “acquire the target language (TL) naturalistically by studying content through it” (Coleman, 2006, p.4), hence the more traditional appellation, immersion (e.g., Akünal, 1992; Llanes & Muñoz, 2009), though of course this latter term often carries the connotation of pursuing foreign language (FL) studies overseas where the TL is the L1 of the host speech community (e.g., Storch, 2009). In effect, then, CLIL brings the traditional FL ‘immersion experience’ to students in their very own linguistic environment, at least for the duration of lessons which employ this method.

It has to be stated at the very outset, however, that the term CLIL itself may be something of a euphemism, if not a disingenuous misnomer. For, in very much the same way that, as noted by Phillipson (2006), the ‘internationalisation’ of universities in fact typically equates to the

Englishisation of such institutions, CLIL invariably means EMI (Dalton-Puffer, 2011; Tange, 2010). In their study of students' and teachers' views regarding CLIL in colleges of technology and crafts in Austria, for example, Hüttner et al. (2013) report that the CLIL methodology was employed in some 65% of such colleges (49 of 75 sites), and, significantly, that approximately 50% of these colleges expressed the intention to extend and widen their use of the practice. However, Hüttner et al. (ibid., p.273) also note that "In every single case the first 'L' in CLIL stood for English." Indeed, that CLIL invariably means "CEIL" (Dalton-Puffer, 2011, p.183) is often simply assumed. One informant in the research of Hüttner et al. (p.277), for instance, opines that "you don't actually learn a language in CLIL but in your English lessons", where "a language" is in effect a cataphor of "English". In fact, as remarked by Hüttner et al. (ibid.), "This view is shared by all teachers interviewed, who construct CLIL clearly as additional to *EFL* instruction and not as a replacement" (emphasis added), and that (p.278) "CLIL is not constructed as an alternative to *EFL* classes" but rather is "seen as an extra provision of *English* practice" (emphasis added). In Finland, too, Nikula (2007, p.209) remarks that "schools which have kept CLIL in their programmes are investing more in it, e.g., by teaching more subjects through *English* than before" (emphasis added). More generally, Dalton-Puffer (2011, p.184) writes that "Parents believe that CLIL promises their children an edge in the competition for employment [...] and teachers often take the initiative, adapting their language practices to teaching through the medium of *English*" (emphasis added).

As previously noted in the introduction, the focus of the present study is EMI within HE in the UAE. Although employing English as the MI has itself also previously been referred to as English-medium teaching (e.g., Coleman, 2006), and English-medium education (e.g., Karmani, 2010), the term EMI appears to be that with the most currency in the UAE (e.g., Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; Hudson, 2013; McLaren, 2011; Rogier, 2012; Sanassian, 2011; Troudi, 2009; Troudi & Jendli, 2011; van den Hoven, 2014), as well as in other countries of the greater Gulf, such as in Oman (e.g., Al-Bakri, 2013), and well beyond the region, as in Turkey (e.g., Sert, 2008), and in the Scandinavian states of Finland (e.g., Hahl, Järvinen, & Juuti, 2014) and Denmark (e.g., Jensen, Denver, Mees, & Werther, 2013), and in Europe, such as the Basque Country in Spain (e.g., Doiz, Lasagabaster, & Sierra, 2011). In addition, EMI is the term frequently adopted in important studies conducted in African countries such as Namibia (e.g., Brock-Utne & Holmarsdottir, 2001) and

Tanzania (e.g., Brock-Utne, 2007b), as well as in the East Asian countries of mainland China (e.g., Hu, Li, & Lei, 2014; Lei & Hu, 2014), Hong Kong (e.g., Choi, 2003, Lau & Yuen, 2011; Lo & Macaro, 2012; Yip, Coyle, & Tsang, 2007), Indonesia (e.g., Zacharias, 2013), Vietnam (Anh, Nguyen, & Le, 2013), Japan (e.g., Chapple, 2015), and South Korea (e.g., Byun et al., 2011; Kim, Son, & Sohn, 2009; Lee, 2014), and as such is the term to be employed here.

It should also be borne in mind that although Ruiz de Zarobe (2008, p.61; fn.1) asserts that the vast array of labels which have been used to refer to the integration of content and language teaching reflect “subtly different approaches to the educational practice”, one common denominator is that all ultimately employ an L2 – as stated, normally English (Doiz et al., 2011; Nikula, 2007; Lo & Macaro, 2012; Sert, 2008; Tollefson & Tsui, 2014) – as the MI, and thus for the purposes of this study are interchangeable. Consequently, although Yassin, Marsh, Tek, and Ying (2009, p.58) suggest that the Malaysian initiative of PPSMI (*Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris*) – that is, the decision made in 2003 that science and mathematics would henceforth be delivered in schools through the medium of English rather than the national language of Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) – “can be considered as a type of CLIL”, the stance taken in this thesis is that the policy most certainly *is* an instance of CLIL, as is also the policy and practice of EMI. Accordingly, this review draws heavily on extant literature from both the field of EMI and that dedicated to CLIL.

Having clarified and justified the use of the term EMI, the next section examines some of the dilemmas faced by policy-makers when mandating the language to be employed as the MI, and how the policy of EMI would appear to have been adopted in many contexts without sufficient consideration being given to educational factors, and prior to adequate research being conducted. This is followed by a discussion of two reasons frequently forwarded for adopting English as the MI, namely, that English is required for the global economy, and is also ‘the’ language of contemporary science and technology.

### 3.2 MI as language policy: Decisions and dilemmas

Unlike the naturally-occurring phenomenon of communication within a given speech community, which it is futile to attempt to shape, constrain, or otherwise control through ‘rules’, ‘laws’, or ‘language policies’, as this would betray a “monolithic and static understanding of language and culture” (Fabrício & Santos, 2006, p.70), the MI of educational institutions is indeed a man-made policy, representing as it does the result of a decision made by leaders, politicians, and other policy-makers. However, although MI policies determine the language(s) employed within educational settings, at least ostensibly, their effects are not necessarily limited to classrooms and lecture halls. Indeed, since language policies touch upon an array of issues related to identity, domains of use, and culture – issues that often run deep among members of speech communities – decisions related to the language of instruction can have quite profound ramifications for society at large, and can engender discontent, tension, and even physical conflict (Probyn, 2001; Watson, 2007).

Thus decision makers often find themselves between a political rock and a pedagogical hard place. Indeed, it has been found in many different contexts that promoting indigenous languages at the expense of English, or other indigenous tongues, can often alienate and anger those the promotion is meant to help. Watson (2007) for example recounts that an attempt in Ghana in the early 1990s to develop a National Functional Literacy Programme to empower women in local communities met with stiff opposition, as many such women feared they were being prevented access to more widely-spoken languages, not least English. Similar problems have been experienced in Namibia, where, Watson (2007, p.258) notes, an attempt to develop a National Literacy Programme failed as participants did not wish to be “fobbed off with their own language”, but rather thirsted for access to English as this would afford them greater economic opportunities and social status. Thus, as noted by Holborrow (1993, p.360) in her review of Phillipson (1992), “the promotion of the once native language may not be without its own oppressive strategies; equally, the former dominant language need not be oppressive *per se*” (italics in original). That is, Holborrow continues, “linguistic rights are essentially about *choice*, free of discrimination, to speak the languages actually spoken” (original emphasis). This point will take on greater significance later in this thesis when examining students’ desire to be able to elect their MI.

On this theme of choice, Bisong (1995) speculates as to why English appears to have maintained an important role in post-colonial Nigeria. The Nigerian parent, writes Bisong (p.125), exercises her choice and strives to send her offspring to an English-medium nursery “to ensure a good future for the child, to make certain that the child does not lose out on anything good that is going.” In addition, the desire for access to a former colonial power such as English need not threaten one’s mother tongue. Bisong further notes (ibid.) that the

parent sends her child to the English-medium school precisely because she wants her child to grow up multilingual. She is also not unmindful of the advantages that might accrue from the acquisition of competence in English. Why settle for monolingualism in a society that is constantly in a state of flux, when you can be multilingual and more at ease with a richer linguistic repertoire and an expanding consciousness?

Thus, many states, particularly former colonies of erstwhile global powers, face something of a vexing predicament. Indeed, Watson (2007, p.258) notes that the governments of such countries often find themselves

caught between Scylla and Charibdis. If they pursue the use of a Western language as both the national language and the medium of instruction in schools they are merely widening the gap between those who have knowledge and power – and access to the Internet and further knowledge – and those who do not. On the other hand, if they try to develop schooling in indigenous languages they face the opposition from the very people they are seeking to help!

### **3.3 The adoption of EMI prior to conducting adequate research**

As noted above, language policies are the result of decisions made by political leaders, so perhaps it should not be surprising if political factors are prioritised over educational concerns, particularly if the interests of education and politics are not in concert. Tollefson and Tsui (2014, p.191) for example note that “Too often, education policymakers do not adequately consider the consequences of language policies for learning, and when they do, they are often faced with difficult decisions when educational and political agendas are in competition.” In relation to South Africa specifically, Probyn (2001) concurs, remarking (p.250) that language policies in the fledgling republic have “had to accommodate competing political, economic, social and

educational factors with decisions being based on political and socioeconomic factors rather than educational ones.”

One consequence of political and socioeconomic factors being given greater consideration than educational concerns is the policy of EMI being adopted without adequate – or indeed any – research being conducted in the local context, and without due consideration being given to the possible ramifications of the policy on the key stakeholders in the educational process. Nunan (2003, p.591), for example, writes that “Currently, governments and ministries of education are framing policies and implementing practices in the language area without adequately considering the implications of such policies and practices on the lives of the teachers and students they affect.” Hu et al. (2014, p.22) also note that, regrettably, the rapid spread of EMI within HE in China appears to have “preceded empirical research on its feasibility and effectiveness.” In Korea, too, Byun et al. (2011, p.436) remark that, although taken up with abandon in order to improve standards of education and research, the policy of EMI within HE in the country “may not be firmly grounded in empirical evidence.” Similarly, Akünal (1992, p.521) asserts that at the HE institution at which she conducted her research in Turkey, EMI had been implemented without any formal research to “assess the effectiveness of the model.” As regards EMI within HE in Sweden, and indeed Europe in general, Airey and Linder (2006, p.558) call for pedagogical decisions to be made “on empirical work rather than gut feeling.” In relation to EMI in HE in the UAE, the context of the present study, it has previously been asked whether we are indeed “fully aware of the short- and long-term implications of such a policy” (Troudi, 2009, p.206), a question which is of the utmost importance since, as noted by Byun et al. (2011, p.447), “promoting a policy like EMI, which will have a deep educational and administrative impact, without any empirical evidence puts students (and school staff, for that matter) at risk” (see Chapple, 2015, for similar remarks in relation to EMI within HE in Japan).

If it is not factors pertaining to education which are prioritised by decision-makers when framing policies revolving around the MI to be employed in educational settings, the question arises as to precisely what factors are indeed given priority. Two socio-politico-economic concerns which are frequently forwarded as reasons for adopting English as the MI, namely, that English is required

for the global economy and is ‘the’ language of contemporary science and technology, are discussed below.

### **3.4 The need for English: Two common justifications**

#### **3.4.1 English: A global language for a globalised economy**

Nunan (2003, p.597) writes that the “prevailing rhetoric is that as a global language, English is a crucial tool for economic, social, and technological advancement.” This generalisation holds for Hong Kong, where, in their examination of EMI in HE in the territory, Flowerdrew, Li, and Miller (1998) assert that it is predominately economic arguments which have been forwarded to justify the emphasis on English over that of Cantonese. According to such arguments, English is needed for international trade, finance, and information flow, so therefore the workforce of the territory requires English in order to be competitive, and thus maintain prosperity, in the increasingly ‘flat’ (Friedman, 2005, April 3) globalised village (Martensa, Dreherb & Gastonc, 2010) that is the world today. Flowerdrew et al. (1998, p.207) suggest that the “hegemonic nature of this positive, instrumental portrayal of English is likely to be influential in shaping attitudes towards the language” in the minds of the general public. Indeed, Flowerdrew et al. (ibid.) note (p.205) that the “driving force behind the move to English-medium instruction was primarily parents, who perceived that the future career success of their children depended on proficiency in English.” Interestingly, the UAE government – known for its overly paternalistic nature (Rogier, 2012) – appears to have adopted the role taken by parents in Hong Kong in being the driving force behind the policy of EMI, and, as with the dynamic business hub of Hong Kong, it is thus far largely economic arguments which have been forwarded to rationalise the policy. As noted by Troudi (2009, p.199), in the UAE, “English has been associated with growth and modernization and even presented as a condition for development and an active role in the global competitive market.” On this point, Troudi and Jendli (2011, p.26) remark that

proponents of the diffusion of the English paradigm employ discourses of social progress, economic and technological advancement, global communication, and trade as forces behind an inevitable EMI policy at the tertiary level, especially for scientific and a large number of academic subjects. Within this school of thought, government officials and academics make ideological and

practical associations between the learning of English and through English and economic viability, competitive national workforce, and an active role in this era of globalization.

However, as stated by Sanassian (2011, p.129), although a “good knowledge of English is crucial in today’s market economy” this “does not imply that English has to become the medium of instruction for thousands of students whose mother tongue is Arabic and whose historical and cultural background do [*sic*] not require such a move.”

### **3.4.2 The discourse of English as *the* language of science and technology**

Explaining the rationale for the paradigmatic shift of the MI for science and mathematics in Malaysian schools from the national language of Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) to the L2 of English, former Prime Minister Tun Dr Mahathir bin Mohamad stated, “We want our people to succeed, to be able to stand tall, to be respected by the rest of the world. Not to be people with no knowledge of science and technology” (cited in Yassin et al., 2009, p.54). An identical purported inseparable association between English and ‘science and technology’ – and thus the need for EMI – has also been explicated by policy-makers in the UAE. In 2009, for instance, in an example of the phenomenon discussed in chapter 2 whereby representatives of the government of the UAE use brief comments to the press to communicate “new policies or to report data to the public” (Gardner, 1995, p.290), Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak al Nahyan, then-Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, affirmed that English would remain the primary MI within HE, stating that the UAE was proud of its national heritage and Arab identity but that this would not entail students being deprived of the chance to learn and “interact with the outside world in English, today’s language of science and technology” (*Nahyan: English to stay as medium of instruction in varsities*, 2009). An identical justification for increasing the number of subjects to be taught in English at pre-tertiary level, at least in the emirate of Abu Dhabi, was forwarded in the same year by Dr Mugheer Khamis al Khaili, then-Director General of ADEC, who stated that “English is the international language of business and science and is central to Abu Dhabi achieving its vision of economic growth and diversification” (cited in Belhiah & Elhami, 2015, pp.4-5). Such a view is also often promulgated within academia. Graddol (1997; cited in Coleman, 2006, p.4), for instance, asserts that the

need to teach some subjects in English, rather than the national language, is well understood: in the sciences, for example, up-to-date text books and research articles are obtainable much more easily in one of the world languages and most readily of all in English.

This was precisely the primary justification for the decision to switch to EMI for science and mathematics in Malaysian schools (Pillay, 2003). Educators also often draw upon this discourse in order to justify EMI courses. One of the five teachers at the University of the Basque Country interviewed by Doiz et al. (2011), for example, stated (p.351) that “English is *the* language of science” (emphasis added). Such sentiments are also occasionally propagated by students themselves. One of the students interviewed by Karmani (2010, p.104) during his research into the socialising effects of EMI within HE in the UAE, for instance, remarks that, “Before Arabic was the language of the science. Now [...] it is English. So of course we must learn this language if we want to be same like them.”

Despite the seemingly unanimous nature of such views, there are however problems with this discourse. To take the comments made by Sheikh Nahyan above as an example, there is, quite obviously, a vast difference between studying an L2 and adopting that L2 as the primary MI. Similarly, whilst few would likely argue against the notion that pride in one’s heritage and identity does not necessarily preclude the learning of other languages, this does not necessarily entail that all lessons and lectures at tertiary level must be delivered in that, or any other, L2. Also, somewhat surprisingly for a Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Sheikh Nahyan appears to have been unaware that most students of HE in the UAE study subjects within the social sciences, not the hard sciences (Muysken & Nour, 2006; Ramazani, 1985). Indeed, in 1998, for example, 72% of those who graduated from UAEU, the flagship federal institution of HE in the country, held degrees in the arts (Wilkins, 2001). More fundamentally, as noted by Troudi (2009) in a riposte to the discourse of English as ‘the’ language of science and technology, scientific advancements are not the products or property of any one particular language, as evinced by Japanese and Russian scientists who overwhelmingly use their own national languages to describe their scientific research and technological innovations.

### 3.5 EMI and Phillipson's fallacies of ELT

What in the present-day, mainstream, constructivist, 'communicative', 'student-centred', 'native'-speaker-dominated fields of TEFL and TESOL have long constituted five central tenets of praxis, viz., that English is best taught monolingually, the ideal teacher is a native speaker, the earlier English is introduced, the better, the more English is taught, the better, and that standards of English will decline if other languages are employed (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000), have been problematized by Phillipson (1992). Indeed, what in the fields of TEFL/TESOL are often regarded as axiomatic tenets of praxis, are to Phillipson but fallacies, namely, in the order they are presented above, the monolingual fallacy, the native speaker fallacy, the early start fallacy, the maximum exposure fallacy, and the subtractive fallacy, all of which, asserts Phillipson, are propagated by 'core' English-speaking countries such as Britain, and 'charitable' organisations such as the British Council (Phillipson, 2006, 2008), in order to further advance the growing hegemony of English, solidify their power and influence, and ultimately bolster their coffers (Phillipson, 1998, 2001).

Although often considered to be five discrete concepts, some of Phillipson's fallacies are clearly interlinked. For example, many if not most 'native'-speaking-teachers of English – who, it would seem, frequently tend to be employed in preference to 'non-native'-speaking teachers (Clark & Paran, 2007; Mahboob, 2013; Selvi, 2010) – are typically monolingual (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999, 2000), thus cannot 'resort' to the students' L1, and may well take it upon themselves to discourage or even 'forbid' students from utilising their own L1(s) in the classroom. As noted by King (2014), this hiring preference (the native speaker fallacy) of course gives rise to a TL-only classroom environment (the monolingual fallacy), which, we could add, in turn results in an increase in the volume of the TL (the maximum exposure fallacy). What is often overlooked in this regard, however, is the fact that EMI itself exemplifies at least three of these fallacies, most obviously the monolingual fallacy, but also the maximum exposure fallacy, and the subtractive fallacy. In addition, the policy of EMI would also appear to epitomise the native speaker fallacy, for it is often simply assumed that 'native speakers' of English are best equipped to deliver English-medium programmes, especially within HE (Syed, 2003), as surveys of advertisements for vacant teaching posts rapidly reveal (e.g., Mahboob, 2013; Selvi, 2010).

### **3.6 Some effects and non-effects of EMI**

Once the political decision has been made to adopt an L2 as the MI, the implementation of the policy immediately has a number of ramifications for both the educational process and its key stakeholders, the students, as well as for society itself. In addition, some of the pedagogical benefits assumed to result from the enactment of the policy in classrooms, such as ‘incidental’ language learning, do not always seem to consistently materialise. Some of these effects and non-effects which have previously been documented and discussed in the germane literature are outlined below, starting with effects.

#### **3.6.1 Some effects of EMI**

The policy of EMI can affect the learning strategies employed and relied upon by students, the dynamics of classrooms and lecture halls, and indeed society at large. These ramifications of the adoption of EMI are discussed below, beginning with the possible effects on students.

##### **3.6.1.1 Fear of ‘losing face’**

It would appear that, seemingly as a result of cultural considerations, the employment of rote-productive surface learning strategies commonly employed by Emirati students both in secondary education (Sanassian, 2011; Stockwell, 2015) and HE (Craig, 2007; Hatherley-Greene, 2012a; Martin, 2003; Rogier, 2012) can actually often be accommodated by teachers. This would seem to come about as a result of the interests of both parties – specifically, the need to preserve ‘face’ – coinciding. This can often occur in a culture such as that of the UAE which, in terms of Hofstede’s (1986) 4D model of cultural differences, would be classified as *large power distance–low individualism–strong uncertainty avoidance–masculine*, and in which there thus exists a pressing need to maintain face, particularly in front of one’s immediate peers (Ryan Abu Wardeh, 2010). This appears to have been found within post-secondary education in neighbouring Oman by Al-Bakri (2013), one of whose informants proclaimed that he was afraid of making mistakes in English in the presence of his classmates, a fear that was also often found to be harboured by students of HE in Hong Kong (Li et al., 2001). Given the conservative ethos of Emirati culture and

society, it would seem to be a safe assumption to say that such fear would be even more strongly felt by female Emirati students,<sup>1</sup> as well as by teachers having to use an L2. On this latter point, Biggs (1990, p.21), for example, writes that it has been argued

that students with an inadequate grasp of English [...] do not come to grips adequately with the meaning of a text. Rather, they develop “survival” strategies, which deliberately avoid the assimilation of meaning. Teachers, for their part, develop their own survival strategies, such as appearing to question for meaning but in fact not doing so, because the social rules surrounding the teacher-student relationship frequently act to inhibit too drastic a confrontation. Both parties [...] need to preserve some residue of face. Questioning for comprehension may often be satisfied, for instance, by recombining different intact segments of text. This kind of strategy would be irrelevant to the usual meaning of surface and deep, as quite a different game is going on.

Indeed, as regards this different, arguably Bernian (Berne, 1964) game, Biggs (1990) argues that cultural considerations can be so pervasive that it may be difficult to offer a universally-acceptable definition of concepts such as rote learning, a similar point to which is made by Boyle (2006) in relation to the role of memorisation in education within Islam. With the Islamic tradition of memorisation and the desire within Arab societies to avoid public conflict at all costs (see, e.g., Jones, 2008), this is of particular relevance to education in the UAE. Furthermore, this fear of loss of ‘face’ may be a possible reason for students’ failure to participate in lessons and lectures (Flowerdrew et al., 1998), which appears to be another ramification of the adoption of an L2 as the MI.

### **3.6.1.2 Lack of student participation**

In relation to EMI in HE in the otherwise Cantonese-speaking territory of Hong Kong, Flowerdrew et al. (1998, p.218) note that the policy can result in “Students’ unwillingness to participate and ask questions”, reporting that “Most lecturers stated that their students did not ask as many questions as they would like and attributed this lack of participation to inadequate English.” This was found by Li et al. (2001) in their study of EMI at seven HE institutions in Hong Kong, with

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<sup>1</sup> Citing a survey conducted with 700 male and female HE students in the UAE, Eroglu (2011, p.319) notes that some 45% of males and 14% of females were of the opinion that “good women do not speak in public.”

students themselves believing that their English was not proficient enough to allow them to make contributions in class. Similar observations have been made in relation to EMI classrooms within HE in Malaysia. In their study of 291 students at a Malaysian university, including 103 from the Faculty of Education (FE) and 188 from the Faculty of Science and Technology (FST), for example, Majid et al. (2011) found that approximately 53% of FE students and 53% of FST students disagreed with the statement, “While learning in English, there is interaction between lecturers and students” (p.346). Beckett and Li (2012, p.56), too, report that one student in their study of EMI in HE at a university in China complained that there was no “in-depth communication between professors and students” in English-medium content classes. In another study of EMI, specifically within HE in the Basque Country, Doiz et al. (2011, p.353) found that the policy would seem to deter some students from participating in classes, with one teacher remarking that many otherwise able students had enrolled in their class but had stated that they did not “dare” to speak up in lectures, which is similar to one of the findings of Dalton-Puffer, Hüttner, Schindelegger, & Smit (2009) in their study of vocational EMI engineering classes in Austria, which revealed that some students “felt intimidated by having to use English” (p.24). Similar findings were given some time ago by Akünal (1992) in her study of EMI at a university in Turkey, who found that students would “balk” at participating in discussions (p.525), which, as noted by Akünal (ibid.), is “specially sad because it is not a primary school we are talking about, it is a university where students are supposed to engage in lively conversations and discussions; where they are expected to be active and creative.” In Korea, too, EMI in HE would appear to act as a deterrent to participation on the part of some students. One of 20 students interviewed by Byun et al. (2011) for example stated (p.440) that “There are some students who can speak English fluently, but most are not fluent, so only the fluent students speak or no one tries to take part in the discussion.” In their study of EMI at a Korean university, Kim et al. (2009) go somewhat further, suggesting (p.10198) that some “students might avoid certain classes solely because they are operated in English, even if they are interested in the subject and the learning of the subject is critical for their major.”

In secondary school education, too, EMI would appear to affect student participation. Indeed, in her research into English-medium classes in Tanzania, Brock-Utne (2007b) found (p.496) that the “Yes” invariably produced by pupils in answer to questions such as “Do you understand?” – an

answer which in no way entails or evinces ‘understanding’ – was practically the only language articulated by students when taught subjects such as biology and geography in English. In contrast to such limited, monosyllabic ‘participation’, notes Brock-Utne (2007b), students were active, posed spontaneous questions, and eagerly answered questions when taught in Kiswahili. Of particular relevance, given the importance placed on fostering critical thinking skills on the part of Emirati students in the Vision 2021 policy document previously cited (*Vision 2021*, 2010), is the observation made by Brock-Utne (2007b) that, when taught in Kiswahili, Tanzanian students brought their own experiences into the classroom, challenged the teacher, and displayed evidence of critical thinking; behaviour which was never observed to occur in English-medium lessons. Indeed, in EMI classes, the students – in stark contrast – “were silent, grave and looked afraid” (p.493).

Similar observations have been documented in Scandinavian countries such as Sweden and Finland. This is of particular theoretical interest since, as noted by Airey and Linder (2006, p.559), the former “is widely believed to be one of the countries in Europe with the highest levels of second-language English ability” (see also Björkman, 2010; Hincks, 2010; Warschauer, 2000), and the latter, notes Coleman (2006), is also renowned for the levels of English commonly displayed by its population. Indeed, Finland and Sweden were both pioneers of EMI courses within HE (Doiz et al., 2011), and Finland presently boasts of the “largest share of HE in English outside English-speaking countries, is spoken of as ‘Little England’ in CLIL circles, and is now second choice for students who have failed to obtain an exchange with the UK” (Coleman, 2006, p.8). Thus, assert Airey and Linder (2006, p.559), it is not unreasonable to assume that any problems detected with employing English as the MI in a country such as Sweden “would perhaps be even more pronounced in countries with generally lower levels of English language competence.”

To the extent that this assertion is valid, the results of the research conducted by Airey and Linder (2006) do not augur well for EMI in HE in the UAE. For in their study of physics lectures given in both English and Swedish at two universities in Sweden, Airey and Linder (2006) found (p.555) that students’ willingness to ask and answer questions seemed to be “greatly reduced in English-medium lectures.” Also germane to the present study is the finding by Airey and Linder that work completed both prior and subsequent to lectures appears to take on greater importance when the

lectures are delivered in an L2. Airey and Linder remark (p.556) that “For students who take notes, their success in understanding the content of a lecture given in English appears to critically depend on the work done outside class after the lecture (or sometimes before the lecture),” a point echoed by a professor interviewed by Hu et al. (2014) in their study of EMI in a HE institution in China. This, however, is not just the view of professors and teachers. In their study of EMI courses at a university in Korea, for example, Byun et al. (2011) note (p.443) that students reported that undertaking EMI courses “requires additional studying at home to be able to fully understand things.” Similarly, in his study of EMI in both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Norway and Germany, Hellekjær (2010) reports that 63% of the 391 Norwegian respondents and 72% of the 47 German participants felt that English-medium courses were “more laborious” than studying in their respective L1s (p.19). The relevance for the current context here – and the challenge for educators in the EMI classrooms of the UAE – is that it has previously been observed that Emirati HE students often fail to take notes (e.g., Craig, 2007) or engage in independent study outside of the classroom (King, 2014; Martin, 2003; Rogier, 2012). Indeed, interviews conducted with teachers at ZU by Rogier (2012) reveal that students are often simply given ready-made notes by their teachers and lecturers as it is believed that the students are either unable or unwilling to take such notes themselves. A teacher interviewed by King (2014, p.160) in his doctoral study of EMI in HE in the UAE, too, remarks that students “are handed material and generally are not expected to read the textbooks.”<sup>2</sup>

### **3.6.1.3 Pedagogical pantomime and classroom charades**

Another, slightly awkward, problem caused by L2MI is the resulting target-language-only policy which itself can often lead to the somewhat unnatural situation whereby teachers and students who share a common language – indeed, who may in actual fact possess the very same L1 – are expected, or ‘forced’, either through general institutional expectations (Hunt, 2012) or actual explicit and official institutional policy (Dickson, Riddlebarger, Stringer, Tennant, & Kennetz, 2014; McLaren, 2011; Yip et al., 2007), to interact in what is an L2 for both parties. This problem has been identified within HE in Turkey (Collins, 2010; Sert, 2008), Austria (Tatzl, 2011), Hong

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<sup>2</sup> On this point, one is reminded of the words of Freire when he writes that “some professors specify in their reading lists that a book should be read from pages 10 to 15 – and do this to “help” their students!” (Freire, 1970/2000, p.76; fn.3).

Kong (Flowerdrew et al, 1998), and the UAE (Mouhanna, 2016), as well as with novice school teachers in the country (Dickson et al., 2014), the latter of whom note (p.5) how

One teacher described the conflict she felt at speaking in English to young students, since it was obvious from her appearance (the wearing of national dress) that she was in fact Emirati, and the children asked her why they were speaking in English.

In fact, the authors go on to note (ibid.) that “One teacher pretended not to be able to understand Arabic in an attempt to counteract those requests.”

Although this example stems from a study of neophyte teachers in the school system of the UAE, the general principle remains the same, and the arguably abnormal nature of such interactions calls into question the validity of the pedagogical ethics underpinning such practices, as well as the policies that promote them, not to mention the ‘coordinators’ and ‘managers’ that enforce them. This point is highlighted by Collins (2010) when she relates the story of a lecturer who states (p.104) that they “asked a question to a student, he asked me if he could answer in Turkish. I said ‘No, this is an English-medium university’ and he then did not answer my question.” In Korea, too, a student interviewed by Lee (2014, p.104) stated that students are “not allowed to speak Korean” in English-medium lectures. One is compelled to ask how this – what is effectively the silencing of students – is in any way meant to promote and foster a pedagogically sound, let alone humanistic, learning environment.

Such consequences of L2MI should not be trivialised; for any aspect of education which holds the potential of engendering anxiety on the part of students can be demotivating, can increase both the ‘social distance’ (Schumann, 1976) and the ‘cultural distance’ (Svanes, 1988) between students and the target language, and can lead to learners displaying what Lin (1999, p.394) dubs an ambivalent “want-hate” relationship with the L2 (see also Abbott, 1992; Kachru, 1996; Tollefson & Tsui, 2014), all of which can only ultimately serve to potentially hinder learning. A teacher in HE in Hong Kong interviewed by Flowerdrew et al. (1998), for example, remarked that Cantonese-speaking students may not be happy with a fellow Cantonese speaker using English with them simply as it is official policy, and as noted by Flowerdrew et al., this unhappiness may lead to

students harbouring a ‘mental barrier’ against listening to and processing English. In their study of EMI in HE in Hong Kong, Li et al. (2001, p.304) also point out that Cantonese-speaking students opting to converse with fellow Cantonese speakers in English could have “potential negative effects on human relationships” and could “jeopardize friendships.” For their part, students interviewed by Li et al. remarked (p.305) that their peers would think they wanted to “show off” if they used English with them, or worse, may think they were “crazy to talk in English.” In addition, of the 22 HE students studied by Canagarajah (1993) in Sri Lanka, only one agreed that they might consider using English with a fellow Tamil speaker who was also conversant in English; all others rejected the possibility out of hand.

Arguably of the greatest importance and concern, however, are the potentially adverse effects this policy would appear to have on the learning process itself. Dickson et al. (2014, p.5), for example, note that some of the Emirati primary school teachers they interviewed reported

that their principals had specifically forbidden them to use Arabic in the classroom. This was a challenge for some due to the variety in their students’ language levels, and they felt that using occasional Arabic to explain underlying concepts was acceptable.

One of the academics at a HE institution in the UAE interviewed by Baalawi (2008, p.134), too, notes that “I don’t see why I can’t explain some complex idea in Arabic if I have to. We [bilingual Arabic-English speakers] have an advantage”, points which were echoed by informants in King’s (2014) study of EMI in HE in the UAE. Similar opinions were also found by Tang (1997) in her research into the views of 47 Cantonese L1 teachers of English in Hong Kong, noting (p.578) that the teachers “found the shared mother tongue a useful instructional tool in teacher-student interaction.” In Korea, too, Byun et al. (2011, p.443) found that some professors thought the monolithic target-language-only aspect of EMI courses “deprived instructors of the advantages of using a shared mother tongue, where pedagogically appropriate, with their students.” In an oft-cited paper on this very topic, Lin (1999) gives numerous examples of instances where judicious use of the students’ L1 appears to benefit learners (see also Anwaruddin, 2011; Auerbach, 1993; Burden, 2000; Cook, 2001; Harbord, 1992; Nemtchinova, 2005; Nikula, 2007; Probyn, 2009; Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000; Tedick & Walker, 1994), and Walker (2010, p.58) goes so far as to

suggest that one reason for the abject failure of a two-year English enhancement programme in Hong Kong meant to smoothen the transition from Cantonese-medium lessons to EMI was that teachers “did not exploit the shared L1 as a means of access” to English. In their assessment of the EMI in secondary education in Hong Kong, Yip et al. (2007) also recommend that teachers be allowed to exploit the potentially supportive role of the students’ L1, particularly in their early encounters with English-medium lessons. In his research into the views of teachers in HE in the UAE, McLaren (2011) also found (p.2) that “many faculty were unconvinced that monolingual classroom environments were efficacious.”

There is also the question of the extent to which the classroom mirrors greater society. In relation to the target-language-only policy in HE in Hong Kong, Flowerdrew et al. (1998, p.229), for example, note that

Unless classrooms are to become sterile places, devoid of social interaction and reserved solely for the transfer of information, Cantonese will always play a role. Nowhere else in Hong Kong society is English used in social interaction between Cantonese speakers, and to expect it to be used for such purposes in the university classroom is unrealistic.

If we were to replace Cantonese and Hong Kong with Arabic and the UAE, respectively, we would have a fairly accurate criticism of the English-only policy present in federal HE institutions in the UAE. ‘Permitting’ use of the students’ L1 in the UAE, however, may have very real ramifications for one’s career (Hunt, 2012). It is also somewhat challenging to fail to see this rigid enforcement of the target-language-only policy as an overt expression of linguistic imperialism. Indeed, this somewhat overzealous adherence to this particular pedagogical ideology, that is, the desire to create a “little corner of an English speaking country” (Wingate, 1993; cited in Burden, 2000, p.147), can also sometimes spill out from the classroom into the administrative realms of the institution. McLaren (2011, p.64), for instance, cites a memorandum written by a senior administrator which was circulated at a HE institution in the Gulf which read, “Could I also suggest that from now on, our Arabic staff only speak English in the office environment, even with their colleagues?” Returning to EMI, whilst not everyone might agree that it is unreasonable that a Chinese historian interviewed by Flowerdrew (1999, p.244) “emphasised the importance of publishing in English his findings concerning the thirteenth century porcelain industry in Southern

China” – one could after all appeal to the need to “ensure international exposure” (Flowerdrew, 1999, p.244) – it is somewhat less obvious why the teaching of citizenship and Arab identity in ADEC schools in the UAE has to be delivered by Arabic L1 teachers to Arabic L1 students in the (culturally-irrelevant) L2 of English (Stockwell, 2015).

#### **3.6.1.4 A level playing field? L2MI as an exclusionary practice**

One effect of the policy of EMI in HE in the UAE which does not seem to have been adequately dealt with, or even identified, in the germane literature so far is that of the unlevel playing field which the English language competence eligibility requirements for entry to federal tertiary institutions arguably create for students from different emirates. This is somewhat surprising since in Malaysia, for example, such issues of equity and access were immediately recognised when the PPSMI initiative previously referred to was announced (Pillay, 2003), and an identical issue has been recognised to exist in Tanzania (e.g., Brock-Utne, 2007a), Indonesia (Zacharias, 2013), and Turkey (Akünal, 1992). The problem in the UAE stems from the fact that all students, no matter from which emirate they originate, require a minimum score of 150 in the Common Educational Proficiency Assessment (CEPA) examination to enter a foundation programme at one of the three government institutions of HE, and can proceed directly to a degree programme with a score of above 185, an overall band 5.0 in the academic variant of IELTS (bands in IELTS range from 1.0 to 9.0), or ‘equivalent’. However, this is precisely the problem, and from the perspective of critical theory would arguably constitute a clear case of gate-keeping, ultimately related to the various levels of wealth of the seven emirates which make up the UAE. This is since even though all Emiratis benefit from the social contract, it is often overlooked in the literature related to TEFL and TESOL that vast socioeconomic differences exist between the various emirates (exceptions include Aydarova, 2012, and Hatherley-Greene, 2012a). Indeed, Hatherley-Greene (2012a) cites recent statistics which indicate that while the average annual per capita income (in the local currency of the dirham, or AED) in the emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai was AED 267,948 and AED 153,256, respectively, RAK and Fujairah in stark contrast stood at AED 61,059 and AED 61,869, respectively, and in Ajman the average annual per capita income equated to a mere AED 45,522 dirhams. Thus, students who stem from the prosperous emirate of Abu Dhabi often enter HE from private schools which are typically exclusively EMI, or alternatively from bilingual

(Arabic/English) ADEC schools which now increasingly employ ‘native-speaking’-English teachers for English lessons, as well as, since a recent reform, for maths and science, too (A. Ahmed, 2010, October 6; Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011; Sanassian, 2011; Stockwell, 2015).

This situation is even more pronounced in the emirate of Dubai, where, despite the fact that free education is available to all national citizens, some 87% of Emirati parents have nevertheless recently been reported to have enrolled their children in private, fee-paying, and invariably, EMI, private schools (Kenaid, 2011). In the less wealthy northern emirates of RAK and Fujairah, however, very few Emirati students attend any institutions other than Arabic-medium government schools, many of which unfortunately have something of a less than stellar reputation, especially those which cater for boys (Ridge, 2010). In addition, even if a parent in the northern emirates did indeed wish to send their children to a private school, their choices would be severely limited. Indeed, as noted by Hatherley-Greene (2012a), there are only three private schools in the northern emirate of Fujairah, namely, Our Own English School, which mainly caters for children from South Asia, St Mary’s Catholic High School, which, wholly understandably, may not be perceived as being appropriate for a Muslim child, and Fujairah Private Academy. Thus, in short – and this is the very crux of the matter – although students from different emirates have radically different prior educational experiences, especially in terms of exposure to English, they all nevertheless encounter and ultimately have to negotiate identical English language proficiency entrance requirements to commence studies at government-funded HE institutions.

### **3.6.1.5 The emergence of a two-tier system**

In her paper on EMI in HE in Turkey, Collins (2010, p.107) notes that there is increasing dissent towards the employment of an L2 in education, with the main points of contention being possible domain loss suffered by the native language, and the prospect of the adoption of an L2 as the MI leading “to the establishment of a separate society within that society.” This possibility has long been acknowledged elsewhere in the world. In Holland, for example, when in 1989 it was proposed that all courses in HE be delivered in English a heated debate rapidly ensued (Altbach, 2004; Ridder, 1995). One key argument forwarded against the proposal was that the “use of English at universities [would] create an unacceptable gap between a cultural elite and the rest of the

population”, which led to the eventual rejection of the proposal (Ridder, 1995, p.45). The emergence of two distinct classes of citizens is precisely what seems to have been found by Gfeller and Robinson (1998) in their study of mother tongue education and French-medium instruction over the first three years of primary school in Francophone Africa. Reflecting on this ‘bilingual experiment’, Gfeller and Robinson remark (p.18) that “Schooling in Western languages has been a divisive failure, creating two social classes; a French-speaking intellectual élite, unable to convey its imported knowledge to the masses, and a rural underclass” (see also Probyn, 2009, for a similar insight from South Africa). Hu et al. (2014), too, found that EMI at a major tertiary institution in China essentially acted as a gate-keeper and merely served to reproduce educational and societal inequalities.

In the UAE there is already evidence of such a two-tier system emerging within HE. In their study of EMI in the country, for example, Troudi and Jendli (2011, p.34) note that according to one of their participants, approximately one third of a class of 30 students would be from a private school, “which implies that the majority of the students experienced a total shift in the medium of instruction at the time of their transition to tertiary education” (see also King, 2014). Ryan Abu Wardeh (2010, p.3), too, in her advice to new faculty at ZU, warns staff to “beware of the trap of thinking that the student who answers every question represents everyone. She doesn’t, and has probably attended an English-medium school.” Thus, as noted by McLaren (2011, p.180),

learners who have been to schools where certain subjects (Mathematics [*sic*] and Science [*sic*] are the usual choices) have been taught through the medium of English can find themselves in a comparatively privileged position (whatever their actual level of ability with their content subject itself) on arrival in the tertiary context. Whereas, those who might have struggled to master English, possibly through no fault of their own but as a result of extremely variable language provision and support, have an educational mountain to climb before embarking on the subject of their choice.

In short, as remarked by Troudi and Jendli (2011, p.41), there exists something of “a disparity in the quality of experience at university level due to English language proficiency.” As noted above in relation to teachers in compulsory education on the one hand and those within HE on the other, Karmani (2005a) has already identified what he asserts constitutes an instance of linguistic apartheid, and there appears to be a similar phenomenon developing within the body of students

in HE in the UAE. Indeed, as noted by Gallagher (2017, p.152), “students who are schooled within the Abu Dhabi emirate” will “become the country’s new bilingual elite.” Since this inequality in access to HE ultimately reflects the vast discrepancies in wealth between the various emirates of the UAE, this inequity is likely to be reinforced and reproduced in the future. It should be noted that this would appear to stand in glaring contradiction to a key sentiment espoused in the Vision 2021 document, namely that “All Emiratis will have equal opportunity and access to first-rate education” (*Vision 2021*, 2010, p.10).

It should perhaps also be noted that, as stressed by Findlow (2008), Article 9 of the Cultural Treaty of the Arab League of 1946 stipulates that members “of the Arab League will [...] work to make the Arabic language [...] the language of instruction in all subjects and in all educational stages in the Arab countries.”<sup>3</sup> Thus, the present policy of EMI within federal HE in the UAE, which as a newly-formed country was admitted to the Arab League in 1971, would appear to be in direct contravention of this charter.

### **3.6.1.6 Summary of effects**

In sum, this brief survey of a select cross section of the germane literature has revealed a number of effects which the policy of EMI would seem to hold the potential to bring about, such as the somewhat drastic impact the policy would appear to have on classroom dynamics, especially on levels of student participation and teacher-student interaction. Another recurrent theme which emerges from these studies is that of the exclusive use of an L2 resulting in the somewhat unusual situation whereby students and their teachers must sometimes ‘pretend’ they do not share a common L1, thereby preventing both parties from drawing upon a potentially powerful learning resource, namely, their mother tongue. Arguably of the greatest concern, however, is the socially-divisive effect the policy of L2MI would appear to have on society. This can be seen within HE in the UAE, with those with greater experience of English-language tuition – typically students from the wealthy emirate of Abu Dhabi – being indirectly favoured over those from the less affluent northern emirates of RAK and Fujairah.

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<sup>3</sup> As published in *Arab News Bulletin*, vol. 2, no.2, February 1, 1947 (see *Middle East Journal*, vol. 1, no.2, 1947, pp.207-209).

### **3.6.2 Some non-effects of EMI**

The adoption of the policy of L2MI also has some non-effects, not least in the realm of language learning, as discussed below.

#### **3.6.2.1 Language learning as a result of L2MI: ‘Incidental’ or coincidental?**

One of many common assumptions within the comprehensive lore surrounding TEFL/TESOL is that EMI ‘must’ have a positive, discernible effect on students’ proficiency in English (Phillipson’s maximum exposure fallacy), if only ‘incidentally’ (e.g., Georgiou, 2012). This view is often held by the general public and teachers alike, as well as by some education authorities, such as in the UK (Creese, 2005). Flowerdrew et al. (1998, p.222) for example state that “the majority view in Hong Kong is that instruction in English will lead to improved proficiency in the language” (see also Choi, 2003; Tao, 1994). In their study of students’ and teachers’ views regarding CLIL in colleges of technology and crafts in Austria, too, Hüttner et al. (2013) report that an “overarching view of student language learning in CLIL” on the part of teachers is that learning is incidental (p.277), and that language improvement on the part of students as a result of CLIL is “taken as fairly self-evident” (p.278). However, Hüttner et al. (p.278) also point out that one teacher remarked that “We have never tested” this assumption, and wondered whether in fact this was “really true.” In relation to EMI in HE in Turkey, as well, Akünal (1992, p.521) writes that in place of research to assess the efficacy of EMI there are instead “assumptions and claims that a foreign language is more effectively learnt when it is the medium of instruction.” On this point, Airey and Linder (2006, p.558) assert that obviously “we need to base our pedagogical decisions on empirical work rather than gut feeling.” It could be argued, however, that national language policies have typically been based on the latter more than the former. As noted for example by Nunan (2003, p.599) in relation to Hong Kong:

Despite the obsession with English and the huge amounts of money poured into English language education at every level, government and business remain (and have become increasingly) dissatisfied with the English language proficiency of students graduating from secondary school and university.

In the UAE, too, there appears to be something of a mismatch between the degree of emphasis placed on and the considerable financial investment made in English on the one hand, and resulting levels of proficiency in the language on the other, as is indeed arguably the case in the whole Gulf (Fareh, 2010; Said, 2011). Perhaps the most damning indictment of EMI in HE in the UAE, however, is that of the results obtained by Rogier (2012), who conducted a doctoral study examining the effect of EMI on Emirati HE students' competence in the language, as measured by quantifiable data generated by a standardised test, in this case IELTS. Indeed, Rogier examined the IELTS scores of 59 students at ZU when commencing their baccalaureate studies, and four years later when final-year students. The desired outcome as espoused by ZU was for students to achieve an (arguably decidedly modest) overall increase of 1 band in IELTS over the course of their four-year degree programme. Rogier found, however, that after their four years of EMI tertiary studies 38% failed to meet this expectation, and in the four individual skill areas, some 65% did not achieve the desired increase in reading, 51% in writing, and 48% in listening. Although 86% did indeed manage to meet this expectation in speaking, this, as noted by Rogier (p.136) when discussing possible shortcomings of her study (the lack of a control group consisting of Emirati females not enrolled at ZU, or indeed at any EMI HE institution), may not necessarily be a direct result of EMI *per se*, but rather through "everyday exposure to the English language in the Emirates" (on the pervasive nature of English in the UAE, see Boyle, 2011; Nickerson, 2015; Randall & Samimi, 2010). That is, this increase in the candidates' scores in speaking may have been coincidental rather than incidental. Equally disappointing results were found by Craig (2007) in a qualitative study into the effects of the 'front-loading' of EMI language proficiency courses at the Petroleum Institute (PI) in Abu Dhabi. Detecting little if any improvement, incidental or otherwise, in English on the part of learners, Craig (2007, p.250) notes that his results suggest "students progressing into the first year and second years of the [EMI] degree programme had not developed their skills to a more acceptable level."

Perhaps, however, the results obtained by Rogier (2012) and Craig (2007) should not be wholly unexpected. For the ultimate form of L2MI is surely that of overseas-based TL immersion programmes, and as has been found, such programmes do not always necessarily have the effect on their participants' language skills that may be commonly assumed. In a semester-long study of 25 ESL tertiary students of various nationalities (including Chinese, Indonesian, Vietnamese) in

Australia, for example, Storch (2009) documents that although the students' academic writing evinced improvement in terms of structure, content, and decreased informality, the grammatical accuracy and complexity of their writing did not improve as a result of this period of immersion in an 'English environment', nor did the range of academic vocabulary employed by students, or their acknowledgement of sources. Similarly, in their study of some 70 ESL students in the USA, Amuzie and Winke (2009) report that although in many cases the learning beliefs of students appeared to have undergone quite radical change, particularly as to centrality of their own role in the language learning process, overall dissatisfaction with their progress in English was a common sentiment, with one Korean student stating,

I realized that there is no such thing as automatic improvement in language learning. Study abroad can be a good opportunity if one makes a lot of efforts [*sic*] to take advantage of the context. Without my own efforts, the environment makes little impact.

Returning to Rogier (2012), her results – which sparked discussion at ZU as to why “improvement of English over four years of study was minimal” (p.83) – also have implications for one of the justifications forwarded for EMI examined earlier, namely, that English is the language of present-day science and technology. After all, it is questionable whether English-language research articles would be accessible to students with such modest competence in the language (as measured by IELTS). In this regard, it also has to be remembered that, as noted by Gfeller and Robinson (1998, p.29), in order to make the adoption of an L2 as the MI worthwhile, it is not a question of merely being able to *comprehend* scientific texts in a language, but rather being well-grounded enough in that language to be able to “*create* technologically and scientifically” (emphasis added). Given the current dominance of the English language in academic publishing (Phillipson, 2006) this should be of the utmost importance to a country which purports to seek to produce postgraduate students who “will themselves contribute to research in critical areas” and who “will help position the UAE as a regional leader in research” (MOHESR, 2007, p.36).

### **3.7 Attitudes towards English and EMI in the UAE**

#### **3.7.1 Societal attitudes towards English and EMI**

The perceptions of and attitudes towards English and EMI on the part of students in the UAE could reasonably be assumed to be influenced by the views held by the wider population concerning the place and role of the English language itself in contemporary Emirati society. Much of the work previously conducted into such views is at first glance contradictory, though such ‘conflicting’ accounts may simply reflect both the different segments of society so far researched and the on-going transitory nature of a nation still coming to terms with the rapid pace of its own development (see chapter 2). None of the 330 police officers and cadets from some 26 different police departments in Dubai surveyed by Randall and Samimi (2010), for example, expressed any resentment towards having to use English in the course of their daily duties. Indeed, in their view, Randall and Samimi note (p.49) that the “use of English is seen in a positive light, embedding ideas of modernization and development.” On the other hand, although in their study of the language of mass advertising in the UAE, Nickerson and Crawford Camiciottoli (2013) found (p.339) that many Emirati respondents had a neutral or positive attitude towards English, they also (p.344) unearthed “evidence that participants viewed texts in English as a potential threat to the local language and culture”, with one stating (p.345) that “Advertisements should be in Arabic too [*sic*] keep the mother language and national identity.”

This contrast may perhaps highlight a very real dilemma currently being experienced in many communities posed by the standing of English in today’s increasingly globalised world, namely the very real potential socioeconomic gain the language would often appear to afford its users on the one hand (Grin, 2001) versus the possible erosion of indigenous languages and cultures on the other (Canagarajah, 1993), an irony that is not lost on the part of many (English-medium) writers on the current potentially subtractive global dominance of English (e.g., Brumfit, 2006; Katunich, 2006; Lin, 1996; Morrow & Castleton, 2011; Phillipson, 1996, 2006). In the UAE, this quandary is perhaps exemplified in the attitudes of Emirati parents who enrol their children at private schools in cosmopolitan Dubai. For whilst recent research (Kenaid, 2011) indicates that some 87% of Emirati parents choose to place their children in such private (i.e., fee-paying, international)

schools in the city, and that a principal motivation for doing so is the firm belief that such schools will provide their children with superior quality English-language instruction, somewhat paradoxically, many such parents simultaneously express trepidation regarding what they perceive to be declining abilities in and knowledge of Arabic on the part of their children, the celebration of Christian holidays such as Christmas and Easter, and un-Islamic mixed gender classes. As with elsewhere in the world (Canagarajah, 1993; Edge, 2006; Guilherme, 2007; Holborrow, 2006; Mohd-Asraf, 2005; Nunan, 2003; Sellami, 2006), it seems that in the UAE English truly is something of a double-edged sword (Hopkyns, 2014).

Others in Dubai express more than mere trepidation regarding the place of English in contemporary Emirati society, especially the role of the language in education. Jamal Al Mehiri, a cultural adviser in the Dubai government, for example, is reported (Issa, 2013, March 6) to have stated that EMI is “a clear violation of the country’s constitution”, Article 7 of which states that the official language of the federation shall be Arabic.<sup>4</sup>

### **3.7.2 Student attitudes towards English and EMI**

There is something of a paucity of data on the attitudes of Emirati students towards learning English. The scant research that has thus far been conducted, however, appears to paint a somewhat negative picture. Mustafa (2002; cited in Troudi, 2009), for example, found that some 73% of the students studied at a selection of government schools in the UAE had negative attitudes towards studying the language. Data regarding the attitudes of HE students towards English are also somewhat scarce. In one recent study, however – which has particular relevance to the current thesis given its exclusive focus on female students – Hopkyns (2014) found (p.11) that only a fraction over one half of her subjects (female Emirati undergraduate students and female Emirati primary school teachers) had positive attitudes towards English, “which is a considerably lower percentage than results from other studies done in the region”, a point which, states Hopkyns, “could indicate that, with the younger generation in particular, attitudes may be starting to turn.” If, as suggested by Hopkyns (2014), attitudes towards English in the UAE may indeed be beginning to turn, then it would be reasonable to expect to see some form of resistance to EMI in

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<sup>4</sup> See Ismail et al. (2011) for a similar objection as regards the teaching of maths and science in English in Malaysia.

HE in the UAE. In a recent study, Diallo (2014) documents just such an indication, noting that (p.9) “the most revealing form of resistance for me came from a student (with strong religious views) who not only indicated his aversion to the textbooks used to teach English”, but who also (p.10) “questioned, on linguistic, religious and cultural grounds” why the learning of English was “imposed” on students in the first place. Similar insights are given by an informant in the study by King (2014) of EMI in HE in the UAE.

As regards Emirati students’ perceptions of and attitudes towards EMI itself, there exists somewhat greater data. In an important paper, Findlow (2006) reports the results of a survey she conducted with some 500 students in the three major, federally-sponsored HE institutions in the UAE. In this survey, 22% of students stated that they preferred to be taught in Arabic, 50% in English, and 28% answered both. However, more recently, Solloway (2017) conducted a survey with 43 female HE students at a federal institution in the UAE and obtained results that contrast with those of Findlow (2006). As regards the issue of EMI, a striking 42% of the students strongly disagreed that they prefer to be taught all subjects in English, with a further 40% disagreeing, thus giving a total of 82% opposed to the policy of EMI. In addition, in a survey carried out by Belhiah & Elhami (2015) in the UAE with 500 HE students – 288 of whom were Emirati – 62% stated (p.17) that they would prefer bilingual instruction, while only 27% stated that they would opt for EMI if given the opportunity to choose.

Perhaps such results should not be totally unexpected, for, as noted by Troudi and Jendli (2011 p.41), EMI in HE in the UAE is perhaps best described as “a choiceless choice” for the majority of students. On this point – that is, the question as to whether students should be able to *elect* their language of instruction – Solloway (2017) found that 63% of the students surveyed strongly agreed, a further 19% agreed, 7% strongly disagreed, 7% disagreed, and 5% had no opinion. In sum, then, no fewer than 82% of the students were in favour of being able to select their language of tuition. This is similar to the attitudes found to be held by Korean HE students by Byun et al. (2011), who note that a typical response was that EMI should not be compulsory, but rather that students should have a choice. It should perhaps be stated that students who express misgivings in regards to EMI are not necessarily opposed to learning English *per se*, but rather often appear to be unsure about the value of learning academic subjects, and English itself, in and via the vehicular

language of English. Solloway (2017), for example, although uncovering some not inconsiderable resistance towards and resentment of EMI, also found that more than 90% of the informants believed that English was vital for international business, trade, and commerce, and, significantly, that nearly 90% desired for their children to be able to speak English in the future. Similarly, one student (not an Emirati, but a third-year business student from Libya) interviewed by Karmani (2010) in his research into the potentially socialising effects of EMI in HE on students in the UAE expressed this sentiment in no uncertain terms when remarking (p.85), “Learning English is fine. Just it doesn’t have to be *in* English. I’m not saying don’t learn English. You must learn English, but not in this way” (original emphasis).

### **3.8 Summary**

This brief review of a representative cross section of the germane literature has revealed a number of aspects of EMI which should be of concern to those engaged in English-medium education in the UAE, and indeed elsewhere in the world. First, as in many other varied educational contexts, EMI in HE in the UAE appears to result in reduced student participation, and can lead to the somewhat abnormal situation whereby educational stakeholders who share a common L1 may, somewhat bizarrely, be expected, or simply ordered, to interact in what is an (imperfectly mastered) L2. In addition, when conducted in an L2, lessons and lectures also have a tendency to become more teacher-centred, with fewer interactive episodes, and less spontaneity, thus being more reminiscent of didactic ‘chalk and talk’ knowledge-transmission instruction. At a societal level, L2MI can also create something of an unlevel playing field. Indeed, the policy can drive a wedge into society, engendering the wish on the part of many students that they could study in their mother tongue, or at least choose their primary MI. Furthermore, any improvement in language proficiency that comes about during periods of English-medium study may be coincidental rather than ‘incidental’.

### **3.9 Further research required**

In addition to highlighting these ramifications of EMI on learning and society, this review has also revealed some relative lacunas in extant knowledge as regards the policy within HE in the UAE.

The previous doctoral-length studies alluded to above, such as Karmani (2010), McLaren (2011), Hatherley-Greene (2012a), Rogier (2012), King (2014), and Mouhanna (2016), though all important contributions to the nascent field of work critically examining EMI in the tertiary sector in the UAE, either focus exclusively on teachers' views (King, 2014; McLaren, 2011; Mouhanna, 2016), study students' views but only those of males (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a; Karmani, 2010), or concentrate on female students but do not offer insights into their attitudes towards and perceptions and experiences of EMI (Rogier, 2012). Indeed, perhaps the greatest shortcoming of previous studies in this area is the acute absence – or the deafening silence – of female students' voices, which, with females constituting the overwhelming majority of the HE population in the UAE, is obviously required for a fuller picture of the impact of the policy of EMI in tertiary education in the country. It is precisely these voices which the current study seeks to document. The following chapter on the methodology employed in this thesis outlines how such voices were collected.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.1 Paradigms: Ontologies, epistemologies, and methodologies

In recent times, the term paradigm has come to be associated predominately with Kuhn (1962), who popularised the phrase “paradigm shift” (p.10), an expression he coined to account for punctuated advances in the sciences, which, in his view, are often brought about not so much as through the production of new experimental data, as more by periodical transformations in scientists’ interpretation of pre-existing data (Hammersley, 1995). However, although associated primarily with Kuhn (1962), the way he himself uses the term paradigm is far from monolithic. Indeed, as noted by Guba (1990; cited in Larson, 1993), Kuhn appears to use the word in no fewer than twenty-one different senses. It is arguable, however, that this should not be taken as a defect of Kuhn’s (1962) work, which itself stimulated a paradigmatic shift in the philosophy, sociology, and psychology of science (Wenner, 1989), but rather as an indication that the expression is something of a “complex and slippery term” which encompasses “an entire set of beliefs about the world” (Larson, 1993, p.283). These beliefs include what is ‘real’ (one’s theory of reality, or ontology), what can be ‘known’ (one’s theory of knowledge, or epistemology), and how one can come to ‘know’ that which is indeed believed to be ‘knowable’ (methodology).

Though a researcher’s ontology and epistemology are both inherently philosophical, the inclusion of methodology within the “complex and slippery” umbrella term paradigm may perhaps appear to be somewhat incongruous. It could, after all, be argued that data collection instruments, such as tests and surveys, are highly tangible and thus anything but philosophical. However, it should perhaps be remembered that any methodology employed by a researcher – even a laboratory-based chemist, biologist, or geneticist – represents an attempt to gain ‘knowledge’ (which rests on one’s epistemological viewpoint) of a postulated ‘reality’ (which itself rests on one’s ontological perspective). Indeed, it could be argued that it is the more palpable nature of research instruments which makes methodology the most important component of a paradigm, for it is the methodology employed by a researcher which ultimately expresses the paradigmatic stance taken in the research (Carter & Little, 2007). On this point, Savage (2000, p.325; citing Ellen, 1984), for example, defines methodology as “an articulated, *theoretically informed* approach to the production of data”

(emphasis added). Larson (1993, p.287), concurs, remarking that the term paradigm “designates the overall structure of convictions and assumptions about the world (or some part of it), and about ways of knowing the world that *guide our inquiries and actions*” (emphasis added). In this view, then, methodological approaches rest on – and are driven by – certain epistemological assumptions, which themselves in turn presuppose certain ontologies. Thus, since a researcher’s ontology and epistemology both inform and largely determine the methodology employed, the methodology in turn thus gives an insight into a researcher’s ontological and epistemological assumptions. That is, ‘concrete’ methodologies are arguably but the observable manifestations of less tangible underlying philosophical concepts such as ontology and epistemology (Carter & Little, 2007).

#### **4.2 Constructionism and the interpretive paradigm**

Atkinson (1985) – who argues that much traditional teaching of positivistic science unfortunately “fosters naive realism” (p.729) – asserts that reality does not exist independently of humans, that is, is not ‘out there’ waiting to be ‘discovered’, but rather (p.734) is

an interaction between us and something else. We may call that something else “nature” or the “natural world” but we have no knowledge of it; it is not real without the interaction. Such a definition of reality is not subjective in the sense that reality is produced by the mind; after all, the interaction requires the “something else” as well as “us.” Being neither objective nor subjective, scientific knowledge is perhaps best termed interactive.

In this view, realities – in the plural – are at least in part mental constructions (Sandelowski, 1993), and, unlike positivism, under which the researcher is believed to be able to take an impartial, perhaps even disinterested, objective stance towards research, post-positivist inquirers do not necessarily believe they can distance themselves from that which is being researched (Guba, 1981). Thus, as argued by Atkinson (1985) above, findings from research conducted within this paradigm are regarded as the result of an *interaction* between the researched and the researcher. Along with this role that the researcher plays in the very creation of the natural world, this theory of reality would also assume that knowledge is always partial and incomplete – indeed is inherently

“uncompletable” (Solsken, 1993, p.319), as has perhaps been most forcefully argued in the case of interpretive ethnographic studies (e.g., Geertz, 1973).

Thus, ‘reality’ can never be fully known or comprehended, objectivity can only be approximated, and the multi-faceted nature of ‘reality’ suggests that researchers would profit from employing multiple probes. In such a multi-pronged approach, which Larson (1993, p.288) refers to as “creative discovery”, qualitative data is sought in and from natural settings, and said data emerge from the inquiry, rather than from *a priori* hypotheses.

### **4.3 Data in an interpretive study**

Though the current study is not an ethnography, it is, following Davison (2005, p.226), somewhat “ethnographic-like” in that it seeks to understand the views and perspectives of participants “from an insider, or *emic*, perspective, over an extended period of time” (original emphasis). This contextually-sensitive, interpretive approach arguably highlights certain aspects of the research context which would perhaps go unnoticed in experimental-interventionist research, i.e., in a strictly positivist, quantitative study. This of course raises the question as to what, precisely, counts as data in a qualitative, interpretive study.

#### **4.3.1 Forms of data in an interpretive study**

As opposed to quantitative data, which consist primarily or exclusively of numbers, qualitative data in contrast are typically words (Carter & Little, 2007; Crossley & Vulliamy, 1996; Hadjistavropoulos & Smythe, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1984), and in fact it should perhaps be remembered that these words themselves often represent fellow words. After all, as noted by Howe (1985, p.15) “concepts like “reasoning,” “achievement,” and “attitude” do not readily lend themselves to relationships like *f = ma*” (italics in original) and so must be explored, ‘defined’, and ‘explained’ with and through other words.

It has previously been suggested that such language-data can stem from a number of sources, including segments of conversations, narrative vignettes, descriptive accounts of features of a

programme under study (Ernst, 1994), introspective diaries (Chaudron, 1986), students' doodlings in textbooks (Canagarajah, 1993), field notes, audiotapes and videotapes of discussions, student writing samples, interviews with teachers, students, parents, and other school personnel (Athanasas & Heath, 1995), and, since they can "help provide insight into certain aspects of the policy, teacher opinions and teaching practices", qualitative data, assert Tan and Lan (2011, p.9), can even originate from "Informal chats with teachers in the staffroom and school corridors."

#### **4.3.2 What qualitative data can reveal**

Obviously, the sorts of phenomena that can be investigated through such qualitative data differ from those which are more naturally researched via the collection and analysis of quantitative data. As noted by Crossley and Vulliamy (1996, p.441), since they typically stem from observations and interviews, qualitative data provide descriptions and accounts of the "processes of social interaction in 'natural' settings", and as such, "Culture, meanings and processes are emphasised, rather than variables, outcomes and products." That is, whereas quantitative studies seek to show relationships of 'statistical significance', naturalistic qualitative inquiry can shed light on the "pleasures and pains, thoughts and values, perceptions and emotions, intentions and actions, beliefs and desires, fears and hopes", that is, the concepts which Wakefield (1995, p.10) notes make up human experience, and which Jardine (1990, p.215) refers to as the "contours of life as it is actually lived." It is this "lifeworld" (Angen, 2000, p.384), that is, the "enlanguaged" (Angen, 2000, p.385) lived experiences of human agents, that qualitative studies can delve into, and from which we can gain "an understanding of the actors' meanings for social actions" (Davis, 1995, p.433). Olivo (2003), for example, explores institutional control in a Canadian high school ESL classroom, whether and how students resist, and attempts to understand "the social forces that affect a person's (or a group's) desire, willingness, and ability to learn a second language" (p.51), and Karmani (2010) investigates the socialising and 'Westernising' effects of EMI in HE in the UAE, all of which constitute aspects of education to which quantitative study and data would be largely if not wholly blind. In addition, though it might be assumed that it would be quantitative data which could assist in improving educational systems, the view taken in this study is that one of the greatest strengths of a qualitative study is in fact "its ability to probe the policy/practice interface and thus inform policy-makers" (Crossley & Vulliamy, 1996, p.443).

#### 4.4 The current study: Research questions and paradigmatic stance

Paraphrasing Mills (1959), Bullough and Pinnegar (2001, p.14) assert that when conducting research, “methods must not prescribe problems; rather, problems must prescribe methods.” Harp and Richter (1969) concur, as do, more contemporarily, Howe and Eisenhart (1990), Drisko (1997), Brinkmann and Kvale (2005), and Braun and Clarke (2006), the latter of whom stress (p.97) the importance of selecting a method appropriate to one’s research questions, rather than “falling victim to ‘methodolatry’”, that is, where, in contrast to the research questions of a study being given priority, a commitment to a particularly methodology influences – and perhaps even wholly determines – the formulation of one’s very research questions.

In addition to the preferable nature of the research questions of an inquiry determining the data collection methods to be employed, as discussed above, the methodology adopted also in turn presupposes a certain ontology and epistemology, that is, the paradigmatic stance the researcher takes. With this being the case, it is necessary to return to the research questions which acted as the initial impetus for this study and which have driven the project throughout. For convenience, these are reproduced below.

*RQ 1:* What are female students’ views regarding and experiences of EMI in HE in the UAE?

*RQ 2:* What challenges do female students believe they face when transitioning from secondary school to EMI tertiary studies in the UAE?

*RQ 3:* What are the students’ views regarding the English language proficiency requirement of an overall 5.0 IELTS, or equivalent, for admission to faculty studies at federal university?

It will be immediately apparent that such research questions do not readily lend themselves to a strictly ‘scientific’, positivist inquiry, with the corresponding production of quantitative data and the resulting statistical analysis. Indeed, terms such as *views*, *experiences*, and *believe* in the research questions indicate that it is students’ perspectives based on their lived experiences that will be investigated. As such, this research is an exploratory, meaning-centred approach to

understanding students' perspectives, that is, a context-embedded, qualitative, interpretive inquiry with, as will be seen below, an element of quantitative data – “quasi-statistics” (Becker, 1970; cited in Maxwell, 2010, p.476) – gleaned from questionnaire responses. The ontological stance of this study is thus that reality “is multiple and interpreted” by the researcher (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p.70) and is neither ‘fixed’ nor external (‘out there’), but rather is created by and shifts with the changing perceptions and beliefs of the viewer (Duncan, 2004), and the epistemological assumption is that the researcher “interacts with that being researched” (O’Gorman & MacIntosh, 2015, p.70), that is, that ‘reality’ is co-constructed.

#### **4.4.1 Research design**

Due to the relative current dearth of knowledge regarding female students’ attitudes towards and experiences of EMI within HE in the UAE, the present study employs an exploratory approach (Boudah, 2011). Adopting such an approach allows researchers to collect data so as to begin to make inroads into gaps in extant knowledge (Babbie, 2013) in a tentative, probing, descriptive, and ethnographic-like fashion, rather than in an experimental manner (Cleghorn & Genesee, 1984). The two data collection procedures employed within this exploratory framework – questionnaires and interviews – are discussed below.

##### **4.4.1.1 Data collection procedure**

###### **4.4.1.1.1 Questionnaires**

The first research instrument to be employed in this study was a 21-item questionnaire developed by the researcher (see appendix D), which is a revised and extended version of the questionnaire previously employed in Solloway (2017). Following Tatzl (2011), this was used in order to ‘set the scene’ for later interviews with a select number of respondents, to have participants reflect on some issues which they may never previously have consciously considered, and to obtain an overall impression of students’ views as regards the place, role, and standing of English in the UAE vis-à-vis Arabic, particularly, though not exclusively, as a MI within federally-sponsored HE.

Theoretically, the use of questionnaires enables the researcher to form meaningful generalisations as regards the perceptions, views, and experiences of respondents, and can be a highly efficient – and cost-effective – means of gathering valuable data. In the current study, in addition to ‘setting the scene’ for later interviews in the minds of the participants, as indicated above, themes which emerged from students’ completion of the questionnaire also acted as catalysts for topics to be followed up and further explored in interviews.

The 21 individual items of the questionnaire can be grouped into 3 broad thematic categories. The first category, which comprises Q1, Q2, and Q5, seeks to ascertain students’ views on the extent to which they believe that English plays an integral role in today’s globalised world, and how the Englishisation of the global economy is perceived to affect the UAE. The second group, which consists of Qs7-10, delves into students’ views on the target-language-only methodology employed on the foundation programmes at the case institution and the policy of EMI itself, the latter of which constitutes the fulcrum around which the current thesis turns. The third group, which is made up of all remaining items in the questionnaire (viz., Q3, Q4, Q6, and Qs11-21), tackles issues all ultimately related to domains of use, with the individual questions themselves seeking to ascertain the extent to which the students believe that English has ‘infiltrated’ Emirati society, exerts a ‘Westernising’ socialisation effect on its learners and L2 users, and poses a threat to their culture and religion.

Since one of the major areas being researched was students’ perceptions of and attitudes towards EMI (as opposed to Arabic being employed as the MI), it was not desirable to afford either one of the languages any greater status over the other and, as it was necessary to ensure as far as possible that participants fully comprehended the questionnaire, it was decided, following Karmani (2010), Daleure, Albon, Hinkston, Ajaif, and McKeown (2014), Belhiah & Elhami (2015), and Hopkyns (2017), to create a bilingual, English/Arabic document, which respondents could complete in the language of their choice, or in a combination of the two. The desire for full potential comprehension is presumably also the rationale behind the bilingual English/Arabic instructions of the CEPA examination (Coombe & Davidson, 2014), and it was noted that in their research of female Emirati university students, Thomas, Khan, and Abdulrahman (2010) acknowledge the absence of a bilingual research instrument as a salient shortcoming of their study. Bilingual

questionnaires have also been employed by researchers elsewhere in the world, such as in Mainland China (Beckett & Li, 2012), Hong Kong (Walker, 2010), Japan (Chapple, 2015), and Malaysia (Tan & Lan, 2011).

The initial Arabic translation of the survey was completed by a final-year student of (English-Arabic) translation, which was subsequently reviewed by a Masters-trained Tunisian instructor of English, as a result of which a small number of minor edits were made to the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) employed in the questionnaire.

Participants were invited to sign a bilingual (Arabic/English) consent form (see appendix B), were assured that their identity would remain confidential, and were given an unlimited amount of time in which to complete the questionnaire, which for my own students was distributed near the end of class, and for those who were not my students was typically completed at home or in the student hostel in their own time. It should be noted that in order to mitigate against the potentially confounding factor of social desirability response bias – the phenomenon whereby respondents answer according to prevailing social norms rather than their own opinion (Collins, Shattell, & Thomas, 2005) – and in keeping with the exploratory nature of the study, it was emphasised to participants that there were no ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’ responses. It should also be noted that, anecdotally, as with Karmani (2010), participants who completed the survey in my presence appeared to do so with some not inconsiderable earnest; indeed, without exception students appeared to relish the opportunity to express their opinion, even anonymously. In total, 20 students completed the survey, including 6 exclusively in Arabic, 4 in English, and 10 who completed it in both English and Arabic. (For a complete overview of the questionnaire response patterns, see appendix F.)

Although the limitations of “forced choice surveys” (Ebbs, 1996, p.219; citing Casey, 1992) – such as the potential for a disempowering effect and the possible simplification of issues (see also, Hall, 1975; Hyrkstedt & Kalaja, 1998) – are indeed acknowledged, after due consideration it was nevertheless decided to follow Tan and Lan (2011) and employ a Likert scale so as to “avoid

ambiguity or fence sitting” (p.9) on the part of participants.<sup>5</sup> In an attempt to counter and compensate for any ‘forced choice’ effect associated with the Likert scale, however, space for additional comments was provided to afford informants the opportunity to give a more nuanced view of their choices if so desired, thereby adding a qualitative layer to the otherwise quantitative data. Interestingly, some 50 such additional comments were made, with 31 in English and 19 in Arabic.

#### **4.4.1.1.1 Quasi-statistics**

It is important to note that, as an interpretive study with language-rich qualitative data, the primary purpose of which was to explore and document students’ experiences of and views and attitudes towards EMI within HE in the UAE – and not necessarily the factors affecting those views and attitudes – inferential statistics have not been computed. However, descriptive, quasi-statistics (Becker, 1970; cited in Maxwell, 2010) from the results of the survey are presented in the discussion contained in the following chapter so as to assist in the identification of salient trends and patterns in the responses (Sandelowski, Voils, & Knafl, 2009; cited in Maxwell, 2010).

As noted above, though a valuable data collection tool in its own right, the survey also acted as a precursor to interviews, in which the smaller number of issues addressed in the research questions could be probed in greater depth with a select number of participants.

#### **4.4.1.1.2 Interviews**

Although, as noted, the student survey plays a significant role in the present study, the primary data collection method was that of face-to-face, in-depth interviews, a methodology previously utilised in numerous oft-cited qualitative studies within TEFL/TESOL (e.g., Canagarajah, 1993; Flowerdrew et al., 1998). Interviews – which have previously been dubbed “the soul of qualitative research” (Hutchinson & Wilson, 1992; cited in Collins et al., 2005, p.198) and the “central resource through which contemporary social science (and society) engages with issues that

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<sup>5</sup> As will be become apparent in chapter 5, however, the format of a ‘forced choice’ questionnaire did not force all students to avoid ambiguity or ‘fence sitting’.

concern it” (Rapley, 2001, pp.303-304) – are commonly employed by qualitative researchers since, as noted by Westbrook (1994, p.243; citing Whyte, 1979), “any able field worker will supplement what is learned from observing and participating with some interviewing.” This is of especial relevance in studies carried out in the interpretivist, qualitative tradition since, as noted by Spolsky (2000, p.162), interviews afford researchers the “opportunity to explore in conversation and through stories and anecdotes the attitudes, identities, and ideologies of our subjects and to gather reports of language use in various domains and with various members of their social networks.” This method of data collection also exemplifies the philosophical tenets of interpretive inquiry and the co-construction of meaning. Nunkoosing (2005, p.702) for instance notes that “what becomes accessible through the process of the interview is often a construction of experiences into words that is a product of the interview itself.”

Despite the value of such an exploratory data collection method, it must however be borne in mind that, as with other research methodologies, interviews rest on certain (often overlooked) assumptions. Winslow et al. (2002, p.566), for example, remark that the interview-based “approach to collecting qualitative data is based on the assumption that people are an important source of information about themselves and the issues that affect their lives and that they can articulate their thoughts and feelings.” Nunkoosing (2005, p.705) concurs, noting that in interviews “We talk with people about their experiences of things, events, people, and places on the assumption that what is lived can be talked about.” Westbrook (1994, p.245), too, notes that such an approach is “based on the premise that the many words from interviews and observations can be reduced to categories in which words share the same meaning or connotation” (see also Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Building on this point, and echoing the idea discussed above that ‘reality’ is co-created by humans and is based upon shared, overlapping perceptions, which are themselves perhaps perpetually shifting, Hüttner et al. (2013, p.270) remark that

we view the beliefs held by our interviewees as social constructions of their reality and as changeable and possibly contradictory. Other characteristics we associate with beliefs are that they are dynamic rather than static mental representations [...] and inherently complex.

Since structured interviews, which in fact are likened to open-ended questionnaires by Nunkoosing (2005), tend to produce quantitative data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Seale & Silverman, 1997), and as the aim was to “facilitate a more focused exploration of a specific topic” (Hewitt, 2007, p.1150), the interviews conducted in the current study were semi-structured, which, as noted by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), is the most commonly used interview format in qualitative research. A protocol was used (see appendix G), though informants were allowed – indeed, were encouraged – to elaborate on points if they so wished, and to shift the emphasis of the interview in the direction of their choice.

The 16 basic questions of the semi-structured interview format consisted of some general background questions (Qs 1 and 2) to indicate the start of the session, as well as to make the participants relaxed, or, as in the case of Q16, to assist in signalling the end of the interview. Other questions are directly correlated with research questions. For example, Qs7 to 12 and Q15 correspond with RQ1, Q5 and Q6 with RQ2, and Q13, Q14 with RQ3. However, whilst most questions can be linked to research questions, and thus the issues such questions sought to probe, others – such as Q3 and Q4 – defy any simple categorisation. Q3, for instance, could be seen as acting as a probe for RQ1, RQ2, or RQ3. After all, students’ views regarding and experiences of EMI in HE could be predicted to differ according to whether they had attended an Arabic-medium school or an English-medium school (RQ1). Similarly, the challenges students face when commencing EMI HE would, it could reasonably be assumed, depend on the MI of their secondary education (RQ2). In addition, a students’ attitudes towards the requirement of an overall 5.0 in IELTS so as to progress to faculty (RQ3) would most likely depend on their own level of proficiency in English, which, again, could be said to be linked to and stem from the MI of the school.

#### **4.4.1.2 Population sampling**

Although there is some controversy in the relevant literature regarding convenience sampling (see, e.g., Ferguson, Yonge & Myrick, 2004), in the present study it was felt that, not only was there no alternative to surveying and interviewing students at my place of work, but in fact this was highly desirable. Indeed, though recruited through such convenience sampling, the non-probabilistic

population in the current study form a purposive sample, that is, participants were “selected to serve an investigative purpose rather than to be statistically representative of a population” (Carter & Little, 2007, p.1318). One advantage of such sampling is that the process resulted in a pool of participants who were “fairly homogenous” and thus able to “share critical similarities related to the research question” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.317). However, in reference to student-based studies, Ferguson et al. (2004) note the desirability of involving participants who are not the researcher’s own students. Athanases and Heath (1995), too, stress the importance of selecting a variety of informants for different perspectives. This was achieved in the present study by also surveying and interviewing a number of students at the case institution who did not have, and who had never had, myself as their teacher, and by selecting students from different emirates, at various stages of the foundation programme, and with dissimilar future majors. As with respondents to the questionnaire, all interviewees were invited to sign a bilingual (Arabic/English) consent form (see appendix B).

In total, 10 students were interviewed for this study, with the average interview lasting approximately 30 minutes (the range being from 21:00 minutes to 48:06 minutes). Six of the students (Aisha and Asma, Salama and Yamna, and Ghadeer and Latifa) were interviewed in pairs, while the remaining four students, Zainab, Bahkita, Maryam, and Alanoud, were interviewed individually.<sup>6</sup> Though there is no ‘set’ minimum number, or ‘critical mass’, of participants required for qualitative studies (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007), analysis conducted by Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) indicates that data and thematic saturation is likely to occur with fewer interviews than may often be assumed. Guest et al. (ibid) conducted 60 in-depth interviews, from which they note a total of 109 content-driven codes emerged from the first 30, of which 80 (73%) such codes were identified within the very first 6 transcripts, with an additional 20 codes emerging from the following 6 transcripts. Thus, 100 codes (92% of the total) – a point very close to data saturation – emerged from the first 12 transcripts. This insight leads Guest et al. (p.76) to conclude that “If the goal is to describe a shared perception, belief, or behavior among a relatively homogenous group, then a sample of twelve will likely be sufficient.” It should be noted that, as remarked above, participants in the current study were relatively homogenous in that, although from different emirates, they were all ultimately teenage female students of HE at the same university in the UAE.

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<sup>6</sup> All participants’ names have been substituted with pseudonyms.

In addition, Guest et al. note (p.78) that their 4 meta-themes – defined as “high-level, overarching themes [...] sufficient to enable development of meaningful themes and useful interpretations” – emerged after a mere 6 interviews. This assertion that between 6 and 12 interviews are required (see also Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007) coincides with many previous doctoral level qualitative studies carried out in the UAE. Baalawi (2008), for instance, interviewed 8 senior managers, both King (2014) and Mouhanna (2016) conducted interviews with 9 content teachers, Sanassian (2011) interviewed 11 teachers, and Stockwell (2015) held interviews with 12 teachers. Exceptions include Karmani (2010), who interviewed 24 students, and Hudson (2013) who held extended, in-depth interviews with a somewhat staggering 32 teachers. It is interesting to note, however, that although Karmani conducted interviews with 24 students, this was achieved by having 4 focus groups each with 6 students, and whilst Hudson (2013) interviewed some 32 teachers, he himself notes (p.108) that attempting to transcribe every interview would have run the “danger of producing an unmanageable amount of data.”

#### **4.4.1.3 Cultural challenges of interviews**

Goldstein (1995), who dedicates a paper to the challenges posed by conducting interviews in settings where the cultural practices of the interviewer and those interviewed differ, notes that diverse cultural groups often have different constraints on what are deemed appropriate and permissible questions, as well the circumstances under which such questions can be posed. Furthermore, notes Goldstein (*ibid.*), these restrictions may differ depending on the combinations of gender, i.e., a male researcher interviewing female participants or conversely a female researcher interviewing male participants. Goldstein also draws attention to the need to be aware of and sensitive to linguistic differences between interviewers and interviewees, a point with particular relevance to the current study where, as in Sanassian (2011), the English language proficiency of some participants indeed presented a challenge. Karnieli-Miller, Strier, and Pessach (2009, p.286) also refer to the need to take into account the language ability and background of the interviewee, advising interviewers to “Make meticulous use of language tailored to the interviewees’ capabilities and life experience.” One benefit of having spent extensive time in the research site – as in the current study where, at the time of conducting the interviews, I had been teaching at the case institution for five years – was the ability to indeed tailor the English language

employed in interviews to the relevant language competence and background of the students, and to conduct the interviews in a culturally-appropriate manner.

#### **4.4.1.4 Importance of piloting interviews**

Although in the current study extensive time in the research setting allowed for the interviews to be conducted in a manner appropriate to the culture, and for the language used in interviews to be tailored to the language proficiency level of the individual participants, it was nevertheless felt that the piloting of interviews was an important aspect of the data collection procedure (Goldstein, 1995). For this reason, I piloted the interview with 2 students and subsequently analysed the audio-recording to ascertain whether any aspect of the interview needed to be modified. As a result of this review of the pilot interviews, as with Hudson (2013), I modified my interview technique so as to minimise, and hopefully eradicate, initial and follow-up questions which were leading, too long, too specific, or unclear.

#### **4.4.1.5 Interviews: Procedure and technique**

Since interviews were the primary data collection method in this study, it was of the utmost importance to conduct the interviews in such a way that participants felt at ease and able to engage in a frank, interactive dialogue, on an equal footing with the interviewer – as far as is possible given the inherent power imbalance of the dyadic interviewer-interviewee relationship (Collins et al., 2005) – rather than simply partaking in a question and answer session-cum-interrogation. One method which can assist in fostering such an interview climate is that of self-disclosure and reciprocal sharing. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen, & Liamputtong, (2007, p.332), for instance, note that “In order to ensure that the relationship between the researcher and the participant is non-hierarchical, researchers are often involved in a reciprocal sharing of their personal stories.” When asking one participant, Aisha, for example, whether it ever felt unnatural being required to converse in the L2 of English with a fellow Arabic L1 Emirati student, in the spirit of reciprocity I recounted my feelings of unease at being expected to communicate in German with other English L1 students when myself an undergraduate, as shown in the exchange below:

Researcher: My first degree was in German...

Aisha: Yeah...

Researcher: And when I was asked to speak German with another English student I felt very uncomfortable – it did not feel natural.

However, so as to not ‘lead’ the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006) by demonstrating such empathy, the above information was added to the dialogue after Aisha had herself stated her own feelings on the topic (see appendix H). On other occasions, and in keeping with the emphasis on exploration in naturalistic research and the interpretive paradigm, it was desirable to gently encourage participants to expand on a certain point, though again without applying unethical pressure or coercion, leading them, or otherwise ‘putting words in their mouth’. This technique of employing “non-inquisitorial questions” (Rapley, 2001, p.316) so as to signal “the need for further clarification without leading the interviewee” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.316) is illustrated below:

Asma: No, the studies in school didn’t help me ... for university.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Asma: The materials, we study in school, it didn’t tell you or didn’t help you about English.

One benefit of showing such follow up questions is that doing so arguably affords the reader an element of “interactional detail” so as to better contextualise and thus interpret the interviewee’s comments (Rapley, 2001, p.306).

Finally, in order to avoid “environmental hazards” (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000, p.705) such as extraneous noise and interruptions that could impair the fidelity of the interview audio-recordings, and as well as to afford the interviewees a comfortable environment, the interviews were conducted in a quiet meeting room which was unused at the time of the interviews.

#### 4.4.1.6 Transcription of interviews

There exists some controversy in the relevant literature as to whether the verbatim transcription of an interview is in principle possible (Cook, 1990; Green, Franquiz, & Dixon, 1997; Hewitt, 2007; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; Lindsay & O'Connell, 1995; McLellan, MacQueen, & Neidig, 2003; Roberts, 1997; Tilley, 2003a), and, if so, whether such a transcription is always required, or even desirable (Tilley, 2003a). In a paper dedicated exclusively to this very question, Halcomb and Davidson (2006) argue that the need for verbatim transcriptions ultimately depends on the type of analysis to which the data are to be subjected, noting that the techniques which seek to identify common, recurring ideas in the data, such as thematic and content analysis, do not necessarily necessitate the verbatim transcription of interviews (see also Fasick, 1977). For this reason, and following Karmani (2010) and Hudson (2013), it was felt that there was little to be gained from transcribing the interviews conducted for this study in their entirety. Rather, as key themes and sub-themes began to emerge during repeated reviews of the audio-recordings (Brown & Holloway, 2008; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999; McCormack, 2000a; Wellard & McKenna, 2001), relevant portions of the interviews – which were selected as they are illustrative of emergent themes and serve an analytical point (McLellan et al., 2003; Rymes & Pash, 2001) – were transcribed. Through this process of “selective transcription” (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006, p.40), I have, following Karnieli-Miller et al. (2009, p.287), used “the participants’ own language in writing, to best reflect what they wanted to say”, though since content and thematic analysis do not require the same level of detail of transcription as conversation or discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Halcomb & Davidson, 2006; MacLean, Meyer, & Estable, 2004), following Ernst (1994) and MacLean et al. (2004), but contrary to the advice of McLellan et al. (2003), conversational fillers (e.g., “um-huh,” “hmmm”, etc.) have been elided in order to make the transcribed interview extracts less taxing to peruse, a point of especial relevance when interviewees are speaking in an L2 and such fillers tend to appear to a far greater extent than would normally be expected when interacting in an L1 (MacLean et al., 2004).

The portions of the interviews which have been transcribed were completed by myself, for although transcription has long had a reputation for being a “troublesome, time-consuming” (Bevis, 1949, p.631) as well as an “exacting and tiresome task” (Bucher, Fritz, & Quarantelli,

1956, p.436) and, as such, some researchers prefer to have all or some of their interviews transcribed by a third-party (Dickson-Swift et al., 2007), I concur with the majority of the qualitative researchers interviewed by Dickson-Swift et al. (2007, p.337) who believe that undertaking one's own transcribing is "an important first step in the data analysis" (see also Easton, et al., 2000; Tilley, 2003a; Wellard & McKenna, 2001). Indeed, the view taken here is that the process of transcription is not a mundane, technical procedure, but rather is a research method in its own right, and a vital link in the tape-transcribe-code-interpret (TTCI) chain (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), and thus an integral component of the interpretive qualitative enterprise itself (Bird, 2005). In addition, performing my own transcription allowed me to avoid the "transcriptionist effect" (MacLean et al., 2004, p.119), that is, the errors that can be introduced into a transcript when the task is performed by an outsider, even a professional stenographer, who lacks knowledge of the particular subject area and the corresponding topic-specific terms. Throughout the process of transcription, it was borne in mind that, as stated by Wellard and McKenna (2001, p.185), "Researchers have an ethical responsibility to ensure that transcripts are accurate reflections of the interview and that interpolation does not occur."

#### **4.5 Data analysis**

The current research employs content analysis,<sup>7</sup> described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) as "a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data", with a theme itself being defined as that which "captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of *patterned* response or meaning within the data set" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82; original emphasis). In this method of analysis such themes *emerge* from the data (Westbrook, 1994). However, although in this inductive approach themes arise from the qualitative data, repeated appearances in the data set alone does not necessarily make a theme. This is since thematic analysis is not a method associated with quantitative study and thus a view, opinion, or experience which exemplifies a certain theme does not have to be articulated by a 'statistically significant' number of informants. Rather, "researcher judgement is necessary to determine" what constitutes a theme (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82).

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<sup>7</sup> On the distinction between qualitative content analysis and grounded theory, see Cho and Lee (2014).

Following Hudson (2013), all data generated by the interviews and the survey were analysed by hand, myself, as this was felt to be the optimum method by which to maintain ‘closeness’ to the data (Halcomb & Davidson, 2006). Although qualitative data management software packages such as NVivo are currently growing in popularity and can undoubtedly “be a tremendous aid in data management and the analysis process” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.319), ultimately such programs cannot analyse or interpret data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; McLellan et al., 2003; Ryan & Bernard, 2003). Analysis of the data ceased when no new themes seemed to emerge – that is, when it was felt that the point of “saturation” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.318) or “thematic exhaustion” (Guest et al., 2006, p.65) had been reached.

#### **4.5.1 Analysis of interview data**

As noted above, when repeatedly listening to the audio-recordings of the interviews, comments made by students which were judged to shed light on the issues explored through the research questions posed in this study were transcribed, analysed, and then, depending on the thrust of the remarks, taxonomised thematically (see appendix J for samples of coded themes highlighted in an interview transcript). This procedure is thus an operationalisation of the TTCI chain referred to above.

#### **4.5.2 Analysis of questionnaire data**

Similarly, additional comments made by students in response to the questionnaire were analysed through a procedure of content analysis so as to ascertain which existing theme such remarks, that is, qualitative data, could most naturally be categorised under, or whether the comments themselves gave rise to new themes. As regards the quantitative data generated by the survey, student responses were tallied up and tabulated in order to determine on which issues students appeared to concur and those on which they seemed to be divided. As noted above, these data are presented in the following chapter in the form of quasi-statistics (e.g., 7 out of 20 students strongly agreed, or 5 students disagreed).

#### **4.6 Validity, reliability, and generalisability: Credibility and trustworthiness**

Citing Kvale (1996), Angen (2000, pp.381-382) notes that “Validity, reliability, and generalizability have been called the “holy trinity” of the natural sciences.” It may of course be objected that, since qualitative data cannot typically undergo the same checks of validity and reliability as quantitative data, qualitative studies do not therefore possess the same credibility and trustworthiness as quantitative investigations. However, whilst, as noted by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Angen (2000), it may be true that interpretive qualitative research cannot be subjected to the same evaluative criteria as quantitative approaches, as argued by Angen (2000, p.380):

We want to claim that because we have made all the right moves, we have procured the truth. However, life as we live it is not static enough to allow for this kind of certainty: It is much more fluid, contextual, and relational [...] If we pay attention to the lifeworld, the realm of our everyday experiences, we will become more attuned to the myriad influences that impinge on human thought, speech, and action and see that we can no longer strive for some unitary truth of human behavior using exclusively reductive, positivist procedures. Instead, what we require is an interpretive approach to social inquiry that will enlarge and deepen our understanding of what it means to be human in this more-than-human realm. To do this is to risk certainty, but this loss is mitigated by what we stand to gain in moral and practical relevance.

Indeed, although as argued by Westbrook (1994, p.251; citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the results of qualitative studies may never be ‘certain’, and thus as noted by Hammersley (1995, p.62), qualitative researchers require something of a “fallibilistic frame of mind”, an identical objection could in fact also be levelled at quantifiable statistics-based work conducted within the positivist paradigm. After all, as noted by Westbrook (1994, p.251; citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985), no one has “ever produced a perfect statistical finding, significant at the .000 level.” As regards ensuring the integrity and credibility of naturalistic, interpretive work – and thus the generalizability and transferability of the findings of a study – Westbrook (1994, p.250) asserts that this is “no more difficult for naturalistic work than it is for positivist work”, but simply that “the means differ.” That is, argues Westbrook (1994), while positivists employ random samples, among other measures, to support the generalizability of their findings, naturalists on the other hand use “prolonged engagement, persistent observation, and triangulation” in order to support the transferability of their results (Westbrook, 1994, p.251; citing Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As regards

the authenticity of data collected from interviews in the interpretive tradition, for example, Nunkoosing (2005, p.701) notes that the

interviewee can choose whatever means is available to him or her to construct his or her story. The interviewer does not just collect data, as if picking daises; he or she colludes with the interviewee to create, to construct, stories. In this context, all the stories are *authentic rather than true* (emphasis added).

Seale and Silverman (1997, p.379) concur, remarking that “Authenticity rather than reliability is often the issue in qualitative research.” In terms of the insights into the policy of EMI within HE in the UAE gained from the interviews with students in this study, as with some of the data provided by informants in Peel, Parry, Douglas, and Lawton (2006), these are often retrospective accounts to which I had no direct access, so am unable to confirm the ‘authenticity’ of such accounts. However, it should be noted that interviewees often employed active voicing (i.e., reported speech) when recounting their experiences, which arguably lends a degree of immediacy and authenticity to their accounts.

#### **4.7 Limitations of the interview medium and transcriptions**

Although undoubtedly an invaluable source of qualitative data – it has for example been estimated that some 90% of research carried out within the social sciences draws on interview data (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; cited in Peel et al., 2006) – it must be emphasised that, as with all data collection procedures, interviews harbour their very own intrinsic shortcomings. Most obviously, as noted for instance by Brown and Tandon (1978, p.198), “interviews are in themselves fleeting events”, a point also stressed by Sandelowski (1993). Indeed, it is for this very reason that interviews are often audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed, if only in part. However, transcriptions, too, arguably contain their very own limitations. As argued for example by Kvale (2007; cited in Sanassian, 2001, p.80), “transcripts are not copies or representations of some original reality [...] transcribing involves translation from an oral language, with its own set of rules, to a written language with another set of rules”, a point on which some computational and corpus linguists would appear to agree (e.g., Sampson, 2001).

In short, as noted by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006, p.318), when transcribing interviews, “transcribers are forced to make judgement calls” for even the “insertion of a period or a comma can change the meaning of an entire sentence” (see also Bucher et al., 1956; Hewitt, 2007; McLellan et al., 2003; Tilley, 2003a).

## **4.8 Setting and participants**

### **4.8.1 Setting: Education in the desert**

Westbrook (1994) notes that in very much the same way a positivist must recognise the intervening effects of the artificial nature of a laboratory upon subjects’ reactions and responses, those engaged in naturalistic inquiry must also acknowledge the potential impact that the research site has upon the study, even if it is the setting which is most ‘natural’ for those observed and studied, for the research setting will always arguably have an effect on the inquiry. With this in mind, the following section briefly outlines some of the most pertinent features of the research site.

The setting for the current study is a major government-sponsored university in the desert interior of the UAE, specifically in the Eastern Region of the emirate of Abu Dhabi, precisely the sort of location which according to the anthropologist Khalaf (2006, p.247) exhibits “staunch social and cultural conservatism” when compared to the “cultural tolerance and wider outlook on the world” associated with coastal dwellings.

The case institution itself is a predominately English-medium institution catering primarily to UAE citizens (circa 95%), of which females constitute approximately 75%, a gender bias which, as noted earlier, reflects national trends in HE in the UAE (Abdulla & Ridge, 2011; Ridge, 2009). In order to reassure concerned, conservative parents (Findlow, 2008), students at the case institution are strictly segregated by gender, with the university in fact boasting of two separate campuses, one for males and another for females, with a structure reminiscent of the former Berlin Wall separating the two. As with the federally-sponsored all-female HE institution in the UAE at which Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, and Schvaneveldt (2005) carried out their research – which is quite possibly the same anonymous institution about which Martin (2003) writes – the female campus

of the case institution is “gated, and guarded” and “no males (except faculty and staff) are allowed on campus” (Schvaneveldt et al., 2005, p.78).

#### 4.8.2 Participants

As noted in the introduction, a primary aim of the research reported in this thesis is to give a voice to female Emirati HE students. It was decided to study – and give a voice to – this particular cross-section of Emirati society for a number of reasons. First, there exists a serious lack of research into the views of female Emiratis towards a wide range of issues (Madsen, 2009), not least the place of English in the UAE (Ronesi, 2011). Furthermore, as Muslims of Arab descent, Emiratis constitute “a particularly politicized and racialized cultural group” (Giroir, 2014, p.35), which is frequently subject to othering in the EFL/ESL context (Rich & Troudi, 2006), and it is arguable that in the post-9/11 era it is vital to know more about Muslims’ views, opinions, and priorities, as well as to obtain deeper insights into their *Weltanschauung* (Lambert, 2008). This is especially important in the present case since Emiratis constitute an affluent, “economically powerful Muslim population” (Nickerson & Crawford Camiciottoli, 2013, p.330). In addition, as a (it is hoped, culturally-sensitive) reflective practitioner à la Minnis (1999), it was desirable to endeavour to learn more about my students. This, presumably, is what some of the teachers in Saudelli’s (2012) study mean when they (p.106) urge others to “learn to see beyond the veil.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, as noted by Ghazal Aswad et al. (2011a), at 77% (Fergany, 2001; UNESCO, 1998), the proportion of women entering HE in the UAE is among the highest in the entire world.

A further reason for studying female Emirati students stems from the fact that the difficulties (‘border crossings’) experienced by males when transiting from secondary school to higher education (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a) are only compounded for females. This is since Emirati females have vastly less experience with ‘the outside world’ than do their male counterparts (Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007; Richardson, 2004; Rogier, 2012; Sanassian, 2011), and, for the vast majority of female students, commencing HE studies will be the first time they have ever had a male teacher. Indeed, for some this will be the very first time they have ever been in the same room as, and interact with, a male from outside of their immediate family.

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<sup>8</sup> Though in fact only one of the participants in this study, Bahkita, was normally veiled.

To this we can add the fact that, as with most of Madsen's (2009) informants and those studied by Clarke (2007), the students who participated in the current study are among the very first in their families to undertake HE, and for that reason alone are arguably of especial interest. Indeed, only 6% of the students at ZU studied by Walters et al. (2005) had parents who had both graduated from university. Similarly, in their survey of 1,173 students and 30 guardians, Daleure et al. (2014) found that more than 75% of the participants' parents had no post-secondary education, and in fact more than 50% had no more than a primary education. Finally, although as noted by Goredema (2012, p.61), the views of students who undertake studies in an L2 should "form an integral part of the assessment" of L2MI, as previously noted, relatively little is known about Emirati students' views of EMI in HE in the UAE.

Before examining the views and experiences of the participants, it is perhaps necessary to first give a brief summary of some of the most pertinent features of the individual students' respective backgrounds so as to contextualise their remarks and comments.

#### **4.8.2.1 Participants' backgrounds and biographic data**

Aspects of the participants' backgrounds which are germane to the study and which arguably have a bearing on their later remarks are presented below, in the order in which the interviews took place.

##### **4.8.2.1.1 Aisha & Asma**

Aisha and Asma attended the same Arabic-medium school in Al Ain together, where they had English for 90 minutes five days a week, in which they report Arabic was used extensively. Both entered the English foundation programme at the case institution at level I, the lowest of the programme's four levels, though both are keen, active, self-motivated learners of English. Aisha's father is Emirati, though her mother is from Saudi Arabia, the most conservative of the Islamic monarchies of the Arabian Gulf. Neither Aisha nor Asma were ever students of mine during my tenure at the case institution.

#### **4.8.2.1.2 Salama & Yamna**

The next two participants, Salama and Yamna, both have highly atypical backgrounds for students at the case institution. Indeed, these two students were invited to participate in the study as I felt they could possibly offer alternative perspectives on the issues explored (Athanases & Heath, 1995). Salama, for example, though a British citizen who was raised and indeed attended school in London, has English as an L2. Similarly, although Yamna is Emirati, and in fact hails from the capital city of Abu Dhabi, she attended a private primary school in the UAE before going to a high school in the USA for 3 years after her father relocated there for business reasons. Upon returning to the UAE, Yamna completed her secondary education at a private EMI school which followed an American curriculum. Of all the students who participated in this study, Yamna's English is, unsurprisingly, by far the most advanced, as attested to by her IELTS overall grade of 7.0. In fact, having already satisfied the English language requirements for faculty study at the case institution, Yamna was only on the foundation programme since, at time of the interview, she was yet to meet the Arabic proficiency requirements for entry to faculty studies. Yamna was never a student of mine, though Salama had previously been.

#### **4.8.2.1.3 Zainab**

In contrast to Salama and Yamna, Zainab attended an Arabic-medium government high school in Al Ain, where only English classes themselves were delivered in English. However, although it has previously been noted that female Emirati students typically have little experience, and thus knowledge, of the outside world, and certainly vastly less than their male counterparts (e.g., Ashencaen Crabtree, 2007; Rogier, 2012), this is not necessarily the case for Zainab. Indeed, Zainab's father, a retired, former high ranking officer in the UAE armed forces, owns a home in Germany where Zainab and her family often spend at least a part of the summer. Also noteworthy is that Zainab remarked that she usually speaks English with her Indonesian domestic helper. Zainab had previously been a student of mine.

#### **4.8.2.1.4 Bahkita**

One of three students in the study from the northern emirates, Bahkita was born in Fujairah, parts of which, it behoves us to remember, did not have electricity till as late as 1978 (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a). Bahkita reports that at the government school which she attended all lessons apart from English were in Arabic, though some English vocabulary was employed in subjects such as chemistry, physics, and biology. Interestingly, as noted earlier, Bahkita was the only veiled student among the participants, though she removed the garment for the interview, as she also would for lessons. Bahkita had previously been a student of mine.

#### **4.8.2.1.5 Maryam**

Maryam attended school in Sweihan, in ‘rural’ Abu Dhabi, where all lessons were in Arabic until grade 8, at which point the MI for mathematics and science subjects switched to English. As a confident and outgoing student, Maryam involved herself in a number of university activities and, as a self-motivated learner with a gregarious nature, also took every available opportunity to practice her English with teachers as she encountered them on campus. Maryam was never a student of mine, though I was acquainted with her from such chance encounters on campus as well as the frequent visits she would make to the various learning centres at the case institution, such as the speaking centre.

#### **4.8.2.1.6 Ghadeer & Latifa**

Ghadeer and Latifa are both from the northern emirate of RAK, where they attended the same Arabic-medium school together. Both tested into the English foundation programme at level III, which is fairly unusual, as the vast majority of students tend to enter at level I or II. Neither Ghadeer nor Latifa had ever been students of mine.

#### 4.8.2.1.7 Alanoud

Alanoud, the final student to be interviewed, attended an Arabic-medium government school in Al Ain, and though has Emirati citizenship from her (deceased) father, has an Urdu L1/Arabic L2 Indian mother. Alanoud tested into the English foundation programme at level III and was the only participant to be a student of mine at the time of the interview.

The most essential biographical and demographic data of these 10 interviewees is presented in table 2 below.

**Table 2: Biographical and demographic data of interview participants**

Pseudonym	Nationality	Home emirate	Age	Location & MI of school attended	Researcher's student?
Aisha	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	18	Al Ain, Abu Dhabi/Arabic	No
Asma	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	18	Al Ain, Abu Dhabi/Arabic	No
Salama	British	–	20	London, UK/English	Former
Yamna	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	19	USA & UAE/English	No
Zainab	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	19	Al Ain, Abu Dhabi/Arabic	Former
Bahkita	Emirati	Fujairah	18	Fujairah/Arabic	Former
Maryam	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	19	Sweihan, Abu Dhabi/Arabic	No
Ghadeer	Emirati	RAK	18	RAK/Arabic	No
Latifa	Emirati	RAK	18	RAK/Arabic	No
Alanoud	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	18	Al Ain, Abu Dhabi/Arabic	Yes

#### 4.9 Ethical considerations

Although the stance taken in this thesis is that familiarity with the participants and the research site offers a host of advantages, it must be acknowledged that this approach does nevertheless also give rise to a number of distinct ethical challenges, if not dilemmas, particularly in terms of micro-ethics, that is, ethical procedures and concerns at the level of the individual participant (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005). In addition, conducting research in the UAE itself presents considerations related

to macro-ethics, that is, at the level of the general public and the research community (Brinkman & Kvale, 2005). The most pressing of these ethical considerations are discussed below.

#### **4.9.1 Double agency and ‘captive’ participants**

The first such challenge posed by the current study is that of double agency, defined by Ferguson et al. (2004) as the simultaneous adoption of two roles by a party in relation to a group of the same individuals. With my being both a teacher and a researcher at the case institution, I was, in one way or another, implicated in some aspect of all the participants’ lives, and as such this study constitutes a clear instance of such double agency. Obviously, though often intangible, the power which teachers can hold over students, wittingly or otherwise, can be considerable, as has long been recognised (e.g., Jamieson & Thomas, 1974). The first ethical dilemma to arise from the inherent double agency nature of participant research is thus that of the ‘captive’ status of the students-cum-participants. Although the participants in this study were not literally captive as were the incarcerated women reported in Tilley (2003b), they were nevertheless part of a status relationship and thus may, perhaps even inadvertently, have felt pressure, either overt or covert, real or otherwise, to act as ‘willing’ participants in a teacher’s research (Ferguson et al., 2004), an incorporeal compulsion so strong it can also be felt by school teachers themselves towards university-based classroom researchers (Athanasas & Heath, 1995). For this reason, it is of the utmost importance that the teacher-researcher be aware of the “role of authority and power” (Athanasas & Heath, 1995, p.268) which they hold in this example of a fiduciary relationship (Ferguson et al., 2004), that is, a relationship in which an individual places complete confidence and trust in someone who has a fiduciary (i.e., ethical or legal) duty to act for said individual’s sole benefit.

Furthermore, employing students as ‘captive’ research participants can create obvious difficulties for voluntary and informed consent (Ferguson et al., 2004), since, as with patients in a health setting (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009), students may feel an obligation to participate in the research as a direct result of the unequal power relations inherent in the teacher-student dynamic (Collins et al., 2005). How these concerns were tackled in the current study is discussed below.

#### **4.9.2 Informed consent**

Ferguson et al. (2004) emphasise the importance of prospective participants being fully informed of all aspects of any study in which they are participants, including who will have access to data collected from them, the demands their participation in the research can be expected to place on their time, that is, the potential burden which participation in the study entails, and that they can elect to refuse to answer any questions. Somewhat less negatively, they also note that participants should also be informed as to any possible benefits of the study, as this too is part of informed consent. Ferguson et al. (ibid.) also stress the unethical nature of masking the intent of any research, that is, “strategically obscuring some of the research goals” (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p.282), as doing so is of course tantamount to subterfuge. (To view the information given to potential participants prior to agreeing to take part in the study, including the possible benefits of the study, see appendix C.)

It has been suggested that, despite participants’ right to withdraw from a study at any time being explicitly stated on consent forms, participants may in fact not do so for fear of appearing indecorous or uncooperative (Sinding & Aronson, 2003). This possibility is of especial concern in the current context, since in addition to being overwhelmingly respectful, affable, and unassuming, female Emirati students of HE can also be exceedingly polite. A further advantage of possessing extensive knowledge of research site and its actors, however, is an ability to ‘read’ participants’ reactions to an extent greater than would be possible by newcomers to the environment, and so I believe that the possibility of students being too embarrassed to decline to partake in the research was not an issue. Indeed, experience of the research setting tells me that female Emirati students can often be surprisingly assertive and forthright with their views, as evinced by some potential participants who were approached (politely) refusing to take part in the study (usually by courteously declining to sign the consent form).

#### **4.9.3 Protection of participants’ identities**

Ferguson et al. (2004) note that ethical issues are inherent in all research designs due, principally, to the intrinsic tension which arguably exists between the needs of the researcher to collect data

on which to base generalisations on the one hand, and the need to protect participants' identity – so as to maintain their anonymity and thus dignity – on the other. As noted by Ferguson et al. (ibid.), maintaining the anonymity of participants is of particular importance when researching potentially sensitive topics, a point which is also stressed in relation to ELT-oriented studies by Holliday (1996). This has resonance in the current research setting of the UAE, where critiquing a government policy can be construed as dissent, which is not only frowned upon culturally, but can in fact also be actionable under the country's strict *lèse majesté* laws. Of course, the aim here is not to promote militancy, undermine the government, or to foment dissent, but simply to research students' lived experiences of EMI. Nevertheless, protection of participant's identities is naturally of the utmost importance.

The gender of the interviewees in the current study is a further reason for the vital importance of ensuring the anonymity of participants. For although the UAE is not as conservative as the Yemen – where, for example, Boyle (2006) notes that she was not permitted to record the voices of female teachers and students – the country does nevertheless display strict patriarchal values, with many families passionately striving to shield female kin from public view. Pseudonyms were thus substituted for participants' names, though, following Grinyer (2002), an attempt was made to 'rename' individuals in an appropriate manner. The Anglo *Wendy*, for instance, would not seem to be an appropriate pseudonym for an Arabic-Muslim *Aisha* or *Mariam*, as it is not an 'equivalent' name. In addition, in cases where a third party was alluded to by a participant, they too have had their name substituted with a pseudonym (McLellan et al., 2003) since, as noted by Hadjistavropoulos and Smythe (2001), such third parties have not given their consent to 'participate' in the research.

#### **4.9.4 Ethical dimensions of interviews**

Though interviews can often afford researchers candid insights into participants' views and attitudes, it must be acknowledged that the interview medium, which is inherently invasive (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), does also present some specific – and arguably unique – ethical challenges, the most obvious being that using such a qualitative data collection procedure can result in themes emerging during the course of the inquiry which were not initially covered in

the original consent form at the outset of the study (Cutcliffe & Ramcharan, 2002; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Hewitt, 2007; Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009; Nunkoosing, 2005). In an attempt to counter this, following the advice of Hadjistavropoulos and Smythe (2001), Cutcliffe and Ramcharan (2002), DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), and Allmark et al. (2009), this study implemented continuous, process, or on-going consent, whereby consent was reaffirmed by the researcher throughout the interview process, thereby affording interviewees the opportunity to reconsider their participation at periodical intervals (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).<sup>9</sup> Thus, although participants had, for example, agreed to be interviewed, additional consent was subsequently sought to audio-record the interviews, for, as advised by the British Sociological Association Code of Ethical Practice (1992; cited in Grinyer, 2002, n.p.), research participants “should be able to reject the use of data gathering devices such as tape-recorders and video cameras.”

A further potential danger of interviews, and thus another possible ethical consideration, is that of the interviewee, inadvertently or otherwise, “becoming a puppet to researcher intentions” (Holliday, 1996, p.248), that is, becoming a data-producing being (Cohn & Lyons, 2003) harnessed and exploited by the researcher (Cohen, 2000; Dickson-Swift et al., 2007) to benefit and ultimately further their academic career through the “dissemination of findings” (Cohn & Lyons, 2003, p.44), that is, through the publication of the research in the form of a book or an article in an academic journal (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005) and the resulting esteem that this can often confer upon the researcher (Holliday, 1996; Wolcott, 2001). In an attempt to counter this, I strove to constantly remind myself of the goals of the research in terms of the benefits it could potentially hold for female students of HE in the UAE.

#### **4.10 Summary**

This chapter has outlined the theoretical underpinnings of and the rationale behind the data collection procedures employed in this study, and has scrutinised the practical and ethical considerations involved in the methodology utilised to elicit participants’ attitudes towards and

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<sup>9</sup> For an example of this process consent applied ‘on the wing’ in an interview setting, see Sinding and Aronson (2003).

experiences of EMI within HE in the UAE. In the next chapter we examine these very attitudes and experiences, as related by the participants in the study.

## Chapter 5: Findings and discussion

The themes and subthemes (italicised) which emerged from the interviews and the survey are shown below in Table 3, along with the research questions to which they have relevance (see appendix I for illustrative examples of these themes and subthemes).

**Table 3: RQs and emergent themes**

RQ1	RQ2	RQ3
Fear <i>Fear of commencing studies at an EMI university after having attended an Arabic medium school</i> <i>Fear of using English before one's peers</i> Unnaturalness of using an L2 with speakers of the same L1 English versus Arabic Non-enactment of EMI: Code-switching Student MI preferences Teacher competence in English Adverse impact of EMI on academic performance Coping strategies English for the future of the UAE English as a threat to the cultural and religious identity of the UAE Benefits to students of Arabic L1 teachers <i>Knowledge of students' L1</i> <i>Advantageous for lower levels</i>	School not adequate preparation for HE <i>MI and materials mismatch</i> <i>The switch from an Arabic-medium school to EMI HE</i> <i>Switch in teaching styles</i>	'Washback' from IELTS <i>Resentment of and resistance towards IELTS</i> An even unlevel playing field

The themes with relevance to the aim of the first research question, viz., to gain an insight into students' views regarding and experiences of EMI in HE in the UAE, are discussed below, in tandem with and in reference to responses given by students to relevant items in the questionnaire (as previously noted, for an overview of the full questionnaire response patterns, see appendix F).

## **5.1 RQ1: What are female students' views regarding and experiences of EMI in HE in the UAE?**

The first recurrent theme to have emerged from the interviews with relevance to the research question 1 – that of fear – is discussed below.

### **5.1.1 Fear**

#### **5.1.1.1 Fear of commencing EMI HE after having attended an Arabic-medium school**

As noted above, the first prominent recurring theme to have emerged during interviews was that of an initial fear of commencing studies at an EMI HE institution after having previously attended a predominately Arabic-medium secondary school, with vocabulary such as *worried* and *afraid* being employed by students to express such feelings of trepidation. When asked to reflect on how she felt prior to commencing the intensive English-medium foundation programme at the case institution, Aisha, for instance, remarked that:

Aisha: I felt worried. It is good for us, but it has some learning difficults. But I must learn it.

Bahkita, too, commented that she had experienced some apprehension before beginning her HE studies, though added that this anxiety was alleviated to some extent by what appears to be the skills her first teacher displayed to teach lower level students in an effective fashion:

Bahkita: At first I was afraid of the study in the English language because we are in public schools we used most of the materials in Arabic and sometimes not much English

in science articles and use it to communicate in English. And I was thinking that language lessons will be difficult to understand what the Dr say. In fact it was easy because the teacher in the university use the simplest word...words....and method to f...tate...

Researcher: To...facilitate?

Bahkita: Yeah, the understanding of the student and not to confuse the student.

Alanoud related a very similar experience:

Alanoud: Actually, it was good for me...because I start here with level III [English]...and the teachers...when they talk with me they talk clearly – I don't have to think what they say...it was easy, *hamdullah*, and they help me a lot.

Although, as in the case of Aisha above, it would seem that some students may be able to overcome any initial anxiety through what may best be termed 'dogged determination', and, as with Bahkita and Alanoud, some students would seem to have benefitted from having experienced teachers who are well versed in delivering level-appropriate lessons in an engaging fashion, during interviews it nevertheless became apparent that many students continue to fear – if not dread – using English before their peers.

#### **5.1.1.2 Fear of using English before one's peers**

When asked whether she or any of her classmates may feel nervous about speaking up in class in English, Asma asserted that:

Asma: Yeah, I think some of the people they didn't speak in class because they are shy.

Ghadeer concurred, remarking that:

Ghadeer: There is a lot of my friends...shy.

Yamna, too, when asked whether she had any experience of classmates evincing fear of using English in class, answered in the affirmative, and added that she had actually witnessed fellow students trembling – and “freaking out” – at the prospect of having to give a presentation in English:

Yamna:        During presentations I can tell that they are very, very scared, like they’ll start shaking, they’ll start freaking out before the presentation...they’ll come up to me and say “Can you say this word again? Can you pronounce it for me?”, so I have to always keep reminding them it’s okay.

Although this may appear to be somewhat extreme, such physical reactions on the part of female students within HE in the UAE are by no means a novel, undocumented phenomenon. One informant in Madsen (2009), for instance, remarks (p.24) that when asked to stand and read, “My body was shaking, and my voice was shaking. I even started to sweat.”

It is interesting to speculate on the causes of such distress at the prospect of having to give a presentation in English. At least part of the reason may be the cultural mores of the UAE, that is, the forces of socialisation to which Emirati females are subject, and the conservative cultural ‘code of conduct’ to which they are expected to adhere. A female student at the private, coeducational HE institution of the American University of Sharjah (AUS) interviewed by Al-Issa (2005), for example, explains (p.159) in relation to presentations that:

Girls from the gulf region are often taught to be soft-spoken, shy and not to make any eye contact with members of the opposite sex. During the final presentations of a communications course I had a lot of trouble presenting because my professor demanded that I be loud and make eye contact with the audience. The professor did not appreciate my “timidness” and gave me a poor grade for that course.

This cultural ‘timidness’ of female students in the Arabian Gulf being, presumably, misconstrued as an inability to give a ‘forceful’, ‘effective’, and ‘confident’ oral presentation suggests that such an activity may not necessarily be particularly well suited to English language assessment within HE in the UAE, which, as previously discussed, is overwhelmingly populated by females. Indeed,

Salama and Yamna – who, as noted above, both have first-hand experience of ‘Western’ education, having attended school in Britain and the USA, respectively – agreed that presentations could perhaps be seen as a culturally-biased ‘Western’ academic exercise:

Researcher: I don’t know if it’s true but some students have told me at high school here a presentation would be very, very rare – in English or in Arabic – and this might be the first time they have given a presentation. Do you think that might be true?

Yamna: Maybe, I’m not sure. I’d say...yes.

Researcher: Maybe?

Yamna: Yeah. I’d say the girls here are very honest.

Researcher: Yeah, I know, I agree totally. What I am trying to say is that I really think it is possible that giving a presentation might be very ‘Western’.

Yamna: Yeah.

Researcher: In some cultures it’s really not normal to put someone up on a pedestal and say, “Okay, present this information.”

Salama: Yeah, it’s a bit hard for them.

Yamna: I agree.

In addition to such cultural bashfulness, a number of students expressed a further possible source of such anxiety. Bahkita, for instance, remarked that:

Bahkita: The students are scared of speaking in English about the fear of making mistake.

Researcher: So you think they are scared of making a mistake?

Bahkita: And shy maybe.

Researcher: And shy?

Bahkita: Yeah.

Maryam was of the same opinion:

Maryam: There is a many of students they scared to talk with others because maybe they will say something by mistake.

Zainab concurred with Bahkita and Maryam, and, echoing Maryam, stated:

Zainab: Because maybe she shy or because she will, “I will do mistake and then they will laughing”, you know? That’s a very important point.

Researcher: Do you think that is a common problem? Do you think lots of girls might be shy or scared of making a mistake?

Zainab: Yeah, yeah. That’s it.

Although the conservative ethos of the country, in tandem with an underlying cultural shyness and a pronounced fear of making mistakes, may be the reason for a reluctance on the part of many female Emirati students to use English in class, it should perhaps be stressed that such feelings of anxiety are by no means exclusive to female students in the UAE. Indeed, Zacharias (2013) relates the case of a male teacher in Indonesia who himself was hesitant to use English through a fear, whether imagined or otherwise, of his students ridiculing him in the event of his making a mistake.

In addition to what appears to be fairly widespread feelings of anxiety among students in relation to the possibility of making mistakes before their peers, a further theme which emerged from interviews was that of the arguably unnatural nature of communicating with fellow L1 speakers of Arabic in an L2.

### **5.1.2 Unnaturalness of using an L2 with speakers of the same L1**

Both Aisha and Asma agreed that a further possible cause of reticence in the classroom could be the arguably somewhat peculiar nature of being expected to communicate with a speaker of the same L1 in what is an L2 for both parties, as indicated in the exchange below:

Researcher: My first degree was in German...

Aisha: Yeah...

Researcher: And when I was asked to speak German with another English student I felt very uncomfortable – it did not feel natural.

Asma: Yeah!  
Me: It just felt strange.  
Asma: Yeah.  
Researcher: And it felt like I was pretending. What about you, Asma, would you feel uncomfortable or unnatural?  
Asma: Yeah.

Even Maryam, who, as noted above, is a student keen to seize opportunities to practice her English, was of the opinion that such behaviour was distinctly odd, as indicated by her three separate uses of the adjective *strange*:

Maryam: To be honest, I know many girls here they became...they are senior here, so they talk to me in English, so this why I use this thing, you know? It's like practicing with someone...it's like conversation practice in English so I just keep talking with them, but, to be honest, it was strange to me, because she's an Emirati or, okay, another girl maybe from Saudi Arabia, not Saudi Arabia, from Sudan, Egypt, and Syria, you know some of them just, you know they talk to me but isn't much like her, she's an Emirati girl and she speak to me in English! What is that? I said to myself, that's very strange, she's Emirati and I'm Emirati why she didn't speak with me in Arabic? [...] So, it is strange to see Emirati people talk to you in English, you know, it is *Emirati* to *Emirati*, not Emirati to Westerners...

Latifa also used the adjective *strange* to express her feelings towards L1 speakers of Arabic conversing in the L2 of English:

Latifa: If anyone will see us talk with another one with using English, but he know Arabic, I think it's a strange habit.

The sense of abnormality associated with communicating with fellow Arabic L1 speakers in the L2 of English expressed by these Emirati students – and the feelings of unease resulting from such a practice – should not, perhaps, be totally unexpected. The UAE is after all, officially at least, an

Arabic-speaking country – in the sense that Arabic is the sole official language of federal ministries (Al Baik, 2008, March 10) – and so two Emirati Arabic L1 speakers opting to converse in the L2 of English in the Arabic-speaking environment of the UAE could on balance appear somewhat peculiar. Indeed, such unnaturalness can even be felt by speakers of the same L1 when the L2 is the predominant, or sole, language of the surrounding speech community. Amuzie and Winke (2009, p.373), for example, relate how one of their interviewees, a Korean student on an ESL immersion programme in the USA, only spoke Korean with her compatriots since she felt that “It is funny to speak English to them.”

However, whilst the Korean informant in Amuzie and Winke (2009) thought that using an L2 with speakers of the same L1 was “funny”, and that in the current study students such as Maryam and Laifa expressed mere unease and mild irritation at fellow Arabic L1 speakers opting to converse in English, other students – such as Aisha – had somewhat stronger feelings on the matter, as underscored by her two uses of the verb *hate* in relation to this phenomenon:

Researcher: Would you ever talk with another Emirati in English, or would it feel strange speaking English with someone else who you know speaks Arabic?

Aisha: I hate this thing. Because I think if you want to practice your language it is okay, but only to say, to see [show] the people, “I have another language”, it’s bad for me. I hate those people. Really!

Although Aisha states that she “hate[s]” seeing her Arabic-speaking compatriots speaking in English, as she also notes above, this is not the case if the behaviour has a utilitarian purpose:

Researcher: However, what about if it is your little baby brother or sister, and you want to help them with their homework?

Aisha: Sometimes I talk with them in English to help them think about meaning.

Ghadeer, too, when asked if there were any circumstances in which she would ever use English with a fellow L1 speaker of Arabic, gave an example:

Ghadeer: Maybe with my sister, just with my sister.

Researcher: What, to practice?

Ghadeer: Yeah.

In addition to such a pedagogic purpose being a socially acceptable motivation for using English, it is also interesting to note that the dislike of Emiratis communicating in English expressed by many students does not seem to extend to the paramount sheikhs of the UAE, some of whom have recently taken to posting messages on their official social media platforms in both Arabic and English. Indeed, in response to the statement of “I like how some UAE leaders tweet in both Arabic and English” (Q21 in the questionnaire), 11 students strongly agreed and a further 6 agreed. No students disagreed and only 1 strongly disagreed (1 expressed no opinion and 1 left this field blank).

Thus, in sum, the attitudes of students towards fellow Arabic L1 speakers opting to communicate in English range from that of mild irritation, through unease and discomfort, to a pronounced dislike, if not loathing, of the practice (though the leaders of the country appear to be exempt from any such feelings). It is interesting to speculate on the underlying causes of the rather strong feelings expressed by the informants at the latter end of this spectrum of views, which, it must be stated, experience suggests is quite rare for female Emirati students to articulate. One possible cause of such reactions may be that of an underlying fear of domain loss, that is, a concern that the use of English by Emiratis (other than high-profile policy-makers) in the UAE may encroach upon – and thus potentially threaten – their mother tongue of Arabic.

### **5.1.3 English versus Arabic**

Above, Maryam articulated her view that it is arguably somewhat odd for L1 speakers of Arabic to communicate in English with each other, though she does seem willing to tolerate such exchanges if it affords her an opportunity to practice. However, the possibility that some Arabic L1 students may speak together in English in order to ‘show off’, rather than to merely practice their conversational skills in the L2, appeared to engender feelings of some not inconsiderable resentment on the part of the otherwise tolerant Maryam:

Maryam: Some young ladies they use English to show us “I am a perfect. I am a unique” or “I am...a VIP. I am”, for example, “from rich family, so yeah, I use English”. So they do that many times [laughs sardonically].

Researcher: And you don't like that?

Maryam: Yeah, it's okay but...okay, my first language is Arabic, okay? [...] It's okay, it's nice to speak in English, it's nice, but others, if they use it to show us “I am a VIP person. I am important”, so yeah they use it like “I am a classic”, you know, “I am a classic girl” or something like that.

Thus to Maryam, such a use of English would appear to be superfluous at best, and her unsolicited, somewhat defensive, reference to her mother tongue suggests that, to her mind, such unessential uses of English may present a potential threat to her native Arabic. Indeed, Maryam went on to explicitly remark that:

Maryam: As we know, English it's international language, we have to learn it, but on other hand we have to not forget the Arabic because it's my...it's...it's our language, it's tongue, mother tongue.

In addition to expressing a concern that English may present a possible threat to the primacy of Arabic, the remarks made by Maryam are of interest since, as with Aisha above, it appears that it is not the use of English by and between Emiratis *per se* that she finds so vexing, but rather the context; that is, the purpose of and intention behind selecting English as the means of communication.

This issue, namely, the extent to which Emiratis feel English has unnecessarily pervaded the society of the UAE – as ‘measured’ by the frequency with which their compatriots opt to communicate with each other in the language – has been probed in a previous study (Solloway, 2017). In that survey of female students of HE in the UAE, 37% strongly agreed that they were annoyed by fellow Arabic L1 Emiratis conversing in English, and a further 26% agreed. Echoing the views of Aisha above, one student who agreed qualified her opinion by adding, “Its okay if

they (ONLY) practicing their English,” and another who strongly agreed echoed the concerns expressed by Maryam above by remarking, “Because it is not our language.” When presented with the statement “It annoys me when I hear Emiratis speak English together” in the questionnaire conducted as part of the present study (Q20), 3 students strongly agreed and a further 4 agreed, though 6 disagreed and 4 strongly disagreed, and 2 had no opinion (1 of the students left this particular field blank). Interestingly, reflecting both the results of Solloway (2017) and those of the interviews conducted for the current study, one of the students who disagreed with Q20 in the questionnaire remarked that speaking in English “helps them to increase knowledge and speak fluently”, though one student who strongly agreed added, “They should speak in their own language and respect their language.”

Thus the picture which emerges from both the interviews and the survey conducted for this study is one of division. Indeed, while some female Emirati students state that in their view it is socially permissible for their compatriots to choose to communicate in English, with the caveat that the underlying motivation for and purpose of conversing in English must merely be to practice, others in contrast assert that Emiratis using English with one another is disrespectful towards their native Arabic, and therefore unacceptable. The problem from the point of view of education and language policy, however, is determining where – in the view of the students – innocuous practice comes to an end and ‘showing off’, and thus also the threat to Arabic, begins. In fact, abstracting away from the classroom, this issue could perhaps be seen as a microcosm of the larger, country-level problem of English enjoying predominance within federally-sponsored HE in the UAE. For, implementing the policy of EMI within tertiary education is arguably akin to attempting to create a “little corner of an English speaking country” (Wingate, 1993; cited in Burden, 2000, p.147) in the otherwise staunchly Muslim-Arabic environment of the UAE.

On other occasions, however, it is not a question of using either Arabic or English, or of the latter challenging the status of the former, for the simple reason that the two languages are, it seems, often mixed together.

#### 5.1.4 Non-enactment of EMI: Code-switching

Yamna, who, it will be recalled, attended high school in the USA for 3 years and who, upon her return to the UAE, enrolled at a private school following an EMI curriculum, related how two of her lecturers at the case institution routinely engaged in code-switching between English and Arabic, and stated that she believes such frequent switching between the two languages ultimately results in lessons being more complex and mentally taxing:

- Yamna:           So far I have this math professor that speaks in Arabic and English at the same time. And also with my other professor he does the exact same thing.
- Researcher:      Code-switching?
- Yamna:           Yeah, they change. Like, they'd say something in Arabic and then change it to English and then something in Arabic. It was, it was, it's complicated!
- Researcher:      And that's, you're saying it's complicated, and you're a fluent bilingual.
- Yamna:           Yeah.

When asked to speculate on the possible reasons for a lecturer engaging in frequent code-switching, specifically, whether she believed this verbal behaviour was pedagogically-motivated and meant to enhance learning, or whether she thought it stemmed from an inability on the part of lecturers to conduct a full lesson solely in the L2 of English – or whether she simply saw it as normal verbal behaviour – Yamna stated:

- Yamna:           I'd say it's natural. I mean, I do that.

Zainab, though a vastly more modest user of English than Yamna, agreed that code-switching between Arabic and English was indeed normal, but added that peppering one's Arabic with English loanwords – lexical items adopted by speakers of one language from another with little or no modification – was also distinctly fashionable, especially when using online communication platforms such as Messenger:<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> It should perhaps be noted that the 'English' typically employed by the younger generation of Arabic L1 speakers on computer mediated communication (CMC) platforms such as Messenger is in fact the "trendy" form of Latinised Arabic (Aboellezz, n.d.) referred to as "Arabizi" by Allehaiby (2013) and "Arabish" and "3arabizi" by Bianchi (2012). The most striking feature of this is

Zainab: When we have break we joking in English...words...we say “section” – in English – we have sections in the high school. When I ask about my friend I didn’t see her another friend she said “another section”, like that.

Researcher: Even if you’re speaking Arabic you’ll use that English word?

Zainab: Yeah, there is some of word...English. Also when we do message on Messenger...we talk sometime in English, not because we don’t like Arabic, no, it’s because it’s...like...fashion, like...model.

To a certain extent, the results of the survey tend to corroborate the assertions made by Zainab above. When asked, for example, whether Arabic should be kept free of English loanwords such as *check*, *recharge*, *class*, *break*, etc. (Q19 in the questionnaire), 9 students disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed, whereas only 4 agreed and 2 strongly agreed, though 3 opted to express no opinion (1 left the field blank).

However, although the attitude of 50% of the students towards the assimilation of English loanwords by Arabic appears to be one of ‘trendy’ acceptance, it remains to be seen whether the code-switching on the part of the lecturers referred to by Yamna above is intended to enhance student learning, as has been previously been observed in EMI lessons in schools in Indonesia (Zacharias, 2013), rural schools in South Africa (Probyn, 2009), with pre-service teachers in Vietnam (Anh et al., 2013), and within HE in the UAE (Mouhanna, 2016; King, 2014), or whether such code-switching acts as an accommodation strategy, employed as the lecturers feel that the English language proficiency of the students does not permit strict adherence to an English-only classroom, as has also been previously found in township schools in South Africa (Probyn, 2001), secondary education in Malaysia (Yahaya et al., 2009), and in HE in the UAE (Mouhanna, 2016), or whether such code-switching is purely ‘natural’ as suggested by Yamna, or simply ‘fashionable’ as asserted by Zainab. However, no matter what the underlying motivation for or cause of lecturers engaging in code-switching between Arabic and English, as with EMI in HE in Hong Kong (Li et al., 2001), it is clear that in some cases at least there exists a clear mismatch at the case institution

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that it is written in Latin script and uses “arithmographemics”, that is, it employs “numbers as letters to represent Arabic sounds that do not occur in English” (Bianchi, 2012, p.89).

between the official policy of EMI on the one hand and actual ‘chalk-face’ classroom realities on the other.

Indeed, despite the fact that the official MI at the case institution for the majority of subjects is English, as stated by Yamna above, there is often a great deal of Arabic used by lecturers in the classroom. It should perhaps be noted, however, that not all students are ‘unwitting victims’ of the failure on the part of some lecturers to implement the officially-espoused policy of EMI in a consistent fashion. That is, the use of Arabic in the classroom may not always necessarily be against all students’ wishes. On the contrary, Yamna stated that on some occasions her classmates actively urge their lecturers to conduct lessons solely in Arabic:

Yamna:           Because I’m the only one who understands English more in the classroom all of them want it...the professor to teach in Arabic, except for me, so he will teach in Arabic and but then he’d say “No, we have to learn English, too” so he’d start saying stuff in English.

Similarly, Yamna also noted that:

Yamna:           When I sit in class most of the time he’ll [the maths teacher] be speaking in Arabic but then he’ll say “No, we have to say this in English” because the girls will answer in Arabic and then he’ll stop and say “No, you have to know what this is in English” because once the [progress test] comes up you won’t know what that word means.

Although, as stated by Yamna, on these particular occasions the lecturers in question switched back from Arabic to English, it is nevertheless interesting to ponder how often Arabic L1 content teachers might be tempted to succumb to such requests from their charges, that is, to agree to teach Arabic L1 students in their native Arabic in an Arabic-speaking country.

The comments made by Yamna above clearly challenge the assumption of an English-only classroom and thus the definition of an EMI programme at the case institution. Furthermore, in addition to giving an insight into the amount of Arabic used in ‘English-medium’ classrooms,

Yamna's remarks also clearly call into question the desirability on the part of students to indeed have English as the primary MI.

### 5.1.5 Student MI preferences

As with student views towards 'fashionable' English loanwords being assimilated into the Arabic lexicon, to a certain extent the results of the survey tally with the anecdotes offered by Yamna above regarding attitudes towards EMI. At the very least it seems that female students are clearly divided on the appeal of English as the MI within HE in the UAE. When asked as to their preferred MI via the statement, "I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in Arabic" (Q8), for example, 7 students strongly agreed and another 7 students agreed, with only 4 students disagreeing and 1 strongly disagreeing (1 student opted to express no preference). This would thus seem to be an unambiguous, firm preference on the part of the students surveyed (75%, no less) to have Arabic as the primary MI. However, when presented with the statement, "I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in English" (Q7), only 5 of the students disagreed, and only 4 strongly disagreed, while 4 strongly agreed and 6 agreed (again, 1 expressed no opinion). The student who on this occasion gave no opinion qualified their 'fence-sitting' by adding, "I agree if the students are very well in English. I am not agree if their their English medium because it makes the subjects more difficult and hard to learn."

Clearly, one point regarding the responses to these two items in the questionnaire warrants further discussion. To diminish, and hopefully eradicate, the risk of 'automated response patterns,' Q7 and Q8 were presented in such a way that would vary the positive-negative cline of the 5 available options (*strongly agree, agree, no opinion, disagree, and strongly disagree*). That is, these two items essentially acted as controls on each other. It will be observed however that the responses to these two statements are far from being reverse images of one another. On the contrary, no fewer than 4 students agreed with both Q7 and Q8, 1 student strongly agreed with Q7 though then also agreed with Q8, and 1 student disagreed with both Q7 and Q8, all combinations of responses which would appear to be wholly contradictory. However, although such response patterning would be unlikely to achieve a significant negative Spearman rank order correlation under a strict quantitative, statistical analysis (which would indicate that respondents had not contradicted

themselves), this does necessarily imply that these students answered the questions blindly, automatically, or untruthfully.

Indeed, two students who agreed with both Q7 and Q8 attempted to qualify, and perhaps justify, their seemingly mutually exclusive responses by adding optional comments to both answers. To Q7, for example, one student added, “As science/knowledge progresses and continues to develop, students’ learning of many important subjects in various languages will continue to increase”,<sup>11</sup> and to Q8 also added “Because it is easier to study those subjects in Arabic than in English.”<sup>12</sup> The other student who agreed with both statements added the following comment to Q7, “Its okay to study in English its not more problem”, and to Q8 added “to learn more think in Arabic way and take easy.”

It should perhaps also be noted that this would not be the first time students of HE in the UAE have refused to comply with ‘forced choice’ questionnaires. For example, in reference to the results of the survey presented in her major paper previously alluded to, Findlow (2006, p.26) notes that when asked their preferred language of tuition, 22% of the students stated they preferred to be taught in Arabic, 50% in English, and, tellingly, some 28% simply “ignored the rubric of the answer sheet and inserted ‘both’.”

It is also interesting to note that student attitudes towards English being the MI within HE in the UAE appear to have changed quite considerably in the decade since the publication of Findlow’s (2006) oft-cited paper, in which, as seen above, only 22% of students surveyed stated that they would prefer to have Arabic as the MI. ‘Zain’, an informant in Mouhanna’s (2016) recent investigation into the attitudes of content teachers towards EMI in HE in the UAE, for example, speculates (p.136) that

We have around 25 percent of students, they drop out from the programme because they can’t finish their requirements for IELTS [...] I’m telling you, they drop out because of the language [...] but they don’t want to officially, they don’t raise this question because of the culture in the [university], but if you honestly ask them one by one, all of them. I can tell you right now, do a survey

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<sup>11</sup> Translated from the original Arabic of: كلما تغير العلم وتقدم إلى الأمام كلما كان الطالب يعرف الكثير من الأمور المهمة في شتى اللغات.

<sup>12</sup> Translated from the original Arabic of: لأنها قد تكون سهلة أكثر من دراستها بالانجليزية.

an anonymous survey, 90 percent they will tell you they prefer, even the good ones [...] Arabic language as instruction, as the main language.

This estimate that, if given the choice, 90% of Emirati students would opt to undergo HE in their native Arabic tallies closely with figures ascertained in recent research conducted in this area. In one such recent study, Solloway (2017) found that 81% of female Emirati HE students surveyed were in favour of all classes being taught in their native Arabic (58% strongly agreed, and 23% agreed). In the current study, too, as seen above, many students – some 70% of those surveyed, in fact – would appear to prefer to be able to undertake their tertiary studies in their L1 of Arabic, which perhaps reflects a growing disenchantment with EMI since the publication of Findlow’s (2006) research. Furthermore, a strong preference on the part of the students to be able to *elect* the MI for their degree programme was unearthed. In response to the questionnaire statement of, “I should be able to choose whether I study in English or Arabic” (Q9), some 12 students strongly agreed and a further 5 agreed. Only 2 students disagreed, and, interestingly perhaps, no students strongly disagreed (though 1 expressed no preference). One of the students who strongly agreed added, “Because some of student are good in English so they can continue in English but some are not.”

In interviews, too, some students expressed a strong hypothetical preference to have Arabic as the MI for their tertiary studies. Indeed, when asked whether, if given the choice, they would elect English or Arabic as the MI, Aisha and Asma – both of whom, as noted above, are keen, active learners of English – were adamant that they would opt for the latter:

Aisha:           Of course I would choose Arabic.

Asma:            Arabic.

However, as with the results of the survey, during interviews it became apparent that students were by no means unanimous on their desire to have Arabic, rather than English, as the principal MI within HE. It is important to recognise this divergence of views for the simple fact that, as stressed by Seale and Silverman (1997, p.380), there is a need to consider “deviant” cases, i.e., “instances in data which contradict emerging hypotheses”, for doing so can “increase the plausibility of the final research report” (p.381). Brown and Holloway (2008, p.239; citing Seale, 1999) concur,

noting that the “willingness to present deviance from overall patterns found in data analysis serves to improve the trustworthiness of research” (see also Drisko, 1997). Thus it must be noted that, in contrast to Aisha and Asma above, Alanoud, for example, stated:

Alanoud:        If my English is not good or I didn't do very well...first...the first time I would use it in Arabic then, after I improve my language in English I would use it in English.

Although this suggestion may boast of some initial appeal, it should be remembered that any such ‘staggering’ or ‘gradual introduction’ of EMI within HE would ultimately merely serve to make “late, late immersion” (Gallagher, 2011a, p.68) ‘even later, late immersion’. Perhaps it is for such reasons that some students appeared to hold views diametrically opposed to those of Aisha and Asma. Maryam, for instance, stated that if given the choice she would elect English as the MI from the very start of HE, and justified this opinion, albeit in a somewhat Anglo-biased fashion, by going on to note:

Maryam:        Because, you know, it is the international language and...I love English, by the way, and I want to learn the British accent because the British accent it is the real accent for the English. So, and I hear about – a lot about – English, the histories of English, so English from England.

The problem with such valorisation of (British) English is of course that not all English teachers at the case institution stem from Britain; indeed, not all teachers originate from an ‘English-speaking’ country at all. In fact, the vast majority of mathematics teachers, for example, seem to come from Egypt, Syria, and Palestine, etc., and thus do not have English – the language in which, officially at least, they are required to teach – as their L1. Thus it is possible that at least part of the reason for the code-switching on the part of some lecturers reported by Yamna above comes about as the teachers in question do not possess the language competence required for a strict adherence to an EMI policy. That is, it is possible that such code-switching may stem from an inability to cope with the demands made by the policy of EMI on teachers whose L1 is a language other than English.

### 5.1.6 Teacher competence in English

The ability of lecturers to conduct lessons and lectures in an L2 – which, as noted by Tange (2010, p.142), is a “very language-intensive task” – has previously been investigated from the perspective of Malaysian university students by Majid et al. (2011). Of the 291 students (103 from FE and 188 from FST) surveyed, approximately 43% from FE and 27% from FST disagreed that “Lecturers deliver the content of mathematics and science in English satisfactorily”, approximately 38% from FE and 32% from FST disagreed that “Lecturers’ presentation [*sic*] in English can be understood”, and approximately 47% from FE and 36% from FST disagreed that “Lecturers are able to communicate properly with students in English during teaching” (p.346). This issue has also recently been researched within the context of HE in China by Beckett and Li (2012), who found (p.56) that 47% of the students surveyed thought their professors had limited proficiency in English, with one student remarking that “We don’t often understand what they say.”

On the surface this issue would appear to be one of simple definition, and would seem to relate essentially to whether the lecturers referred to by students in such studies are viewed primarily as content teachers, language teachers, or content teachers who simply happen to teach in an L2, and who should thus ideally evince high levels of proficiency in that language. However, lecturers and professors are, understandably, typically employed on account of their discipline-specific knowledge and expertise (Dalton-Puffer, 2011), and, even if they do indeed enjoy mastery of the L2, may not necessarily possess any prior professional training in or personal experience of teaching academic content to L2 students. This is a problem which has long been identified for L2MI mathematics courses (e.g., Cuevas, 1984), and which has more recently also been acknowledged for EMI HE courses in Denmark (Tange, 2010), Hong Kong (Flowerdrew et al., 1998), Korea (Lee, 2014), Malaysia (Yahaya, et al., 2009), Austria (Hüttner et al., 2013) and the UAE (Baalawi, 2008; King, 2014; Rogier, 2012). Indeed, Rogier (2012) estimates that approximately 45% of the faculty members in her study of EMI at ZU fitted this latter profile.

Since competence in English on the part of lecturers is integral to the successful delivery of an EMI programme, and since, as indicated by the research of Majid et al. (2011) and Beckett and Li (2012), the problematic issue of having those for whom English is an L2 teach EMI courses may

be somewhat more widespread than perhaps commonly assumed, students' views towards this issue were explored in some of the interviews conducted for the present study.

When asked whether she personally had had any experience of a teacher who may have seemed to struggle with English as an instructional language, Aisha, for instance, stated that she indeed had, and that she believed this had adversely affected her learning:

Aisha: I have, I had, one teacher he was from, he is from Morocco. When he spoke English his language it was very bad. You know, *yanni*, the accent it's, he mixed it between the accent of Morocco and English, and I hate that.

Researcher: Do you think that affected your learning at all? Did that have an impact on your learning? Did that make it more difficult to learn that subject?

Aisha: Yeah, it was.

Maryam, too, relates having previously had problems understanding lessons delivered by a teacher for whom English was an L2:

Maryam: I had problem in mathematics because I choose – the first time I choose the...a Greece teacher called Markus, so he's teach me – taught me mathematics in English so it was difficult to me to understand what he talking about.

As with Aisha above, Maryman – understandably, perhaps – felt that this had had deleterious effects on her learning. Indeed, she went on to say that she believed that her inability to understand the teacher had led to her failing the in-house mathematics level exam (a pass in which is required to proceed to the next level). For this reason, Maryam thinks her L1 of Arabic would be a more appropriate MI for that subject:

Maryam: I prefer the Arabic teacher to teach me mathematics. Because first time when I studied mathematics here, you know, mathematics level I, I pass it by exam first time, but mathematics level II I start studied here, so when I studied the

mathematics here I am not pass because I can't understand what the teacher talking about.

It could of course be argued that the students interviewed for this study, many of whom are themselves still obviously in the throes of building fluency in the English language, are not necessarily the best judges of the language proficiency of their teachers, a point made by some lecturers in reference to their charges in the study of EMI in HE in Denmark by Tange (2010). However, what is important here are students' subjective *perceptions* of their lecturers' proficiency in English, and, as noted by Lavelle (2008; cited in Jensen et al., 2013), if those perceptions are negative then the credibility of lecturers can be eroded in the eyes of students, which can, in turn, may possibly result in learning being impaired.

In addition to students such as Aisha and Maryam believing that their learning had been adversely affected by having a teacher who appeared to struggle to teach in the L2 of English, a number of students also believed that EMI itself acted as a barrier to the learning of subject matter, and thus resulted in a decline in their academic performance.

### **5.1.7 Adverse impact of EMI on academic performance**

When asked whether she felt that if, for example, mathematics was taught in Arabic, she would progress through the curriculum at a more rapid rate, be able to delve deeper into the subject matter, or whether she believed her academic performance would ultimately remain the same, Aisha was adamant that it would not be the same and that she would achieve more in her native Arabic:

Aisha: No, it's not the same, because, I think the mathematics it has a lot of vocab, hard vocabulary. And I know all of this vocab when I am maybe, maybe when I am in Grade 3.

Researcher: In Arabic. You knew the terminology, the mathematics vocabulary.

Aisha: Yeah, yeah, all of them. So, it was easy for me to learn it in Arabic, but in English...Also, I will understand more fast.

Both Salama and Yamna agreed with Aisha:

Researcher: If mathematics was in Arabic do you think the students would achieve more?

Salama: Yeah.

Yamna: Yes, if they were in an Arabic school and they come here and take math in Arabic I think they'd ace it. And same thing with English. If you were in an English school and come here and take math in English obviously....

Bahkita, too, believed that if Arabic was used to deliver mathematics lessons then it would be easier for the students, stating that one negative consequence of the policy of EMI was that it made the content matter

Bahkita: Hard to understand.

Researcher: For the students?

Bahkita: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: Do you think, for example, if a student studies mathematics, she does a mathematics degree in English, do you think if she did that degree in Arabic it would be easier, or faster?

Bahkita: Easier. Of course, easier. Because in mathematics it have hard words.

Maryam concurred:

Maryam: Yeah. From my generation, yeah. Study mathematics in Arabic it will be more easier to me and faster because I studied in Arabic when I was in school, now here I have to study it in English so maybe it will be a little bit difficult to me, but sure, yeah, if I studied in Arabic yeah it will be easier to me and I will finish the course faster.

On this point one is reminded of the insight provided by a content teacher at a HE institution in the UAE interviewed by Mouhanna (2016), who, in reference to the impact EMI has on teaching in terms of speed of delivery and engagement with the subject matter, stated (p.148) that “We pay

a price for the language.” This certainly appears to be the case for Aisha, who, when asked about the switch from Arabic MI at secondary school to EMI at university, stated that:

Aisha: It was very terrible and difficult for me because, well, when I was in the school I learn maths in Arabic but now...all in English, yeah, but, you know, it was difficult for me to learn the vocabulary and the, you know, the question, how does it work. It was difficult for me.

Researcher: So, was it the *mathematics* that was difficult, or learning the mathematics *in English* that made it difficult for you, or both?

Aisha: No, I was good in maths in school in Arabic, but in English it was terrible for me.

Researcher: Okay. That’s a very interesting insight.

Aisha: And I fail in this course.

Latifa, too, when asked whether she felt that it was the mathematics on the foundation programme at the case institution which was challenging, or whether she believed it was studying mathematics in English which presented difficulties, stated:

Latifa: In my experience, I was in level II [foundation programme mathematics], really, maybe the first month, I did not know what is “the function” mean. Really! Just I see the sir [teacher], he told us, “Function, function, function, equal, plus”. What is that mean? Then I understand.

When asked if she could think of any disadvantages of the policy of EMI in HE in the UAE, Aisha also alluded to courses taking longer to complete when the L2 of English acted as the MI:

Aisha: Also, the disadvantage for this, I think the university pay a lot of, pays a lot of money for teacher who teach this materials. Also, student takes a lot of time to pass this, or to learn this, in English.

Here, Aisha touches upon two important ramifications of the policy of EMI in HE in the UAE, both of which have previously been recognised in the literature. As regards the fiscal

considerations of EMI alluded to by Aisha, Fox (2007), for instance, notes that public HE costs in the UAE are relatively high since faculty and their families have to be relocated to the country from overseas, provided with housing, and given flights to their country of origin each year. In relation to the extra time Aisha states it takes students to complete an EMI degree programme, as conceded by the MOHESR itself, “Because of the need to provide additional preparation for many students, what should normally be a four-year baccalaureate program becomes a five- or six-year program as students take developmental education classes for one or two years” (MOHESR, 2007, p.26), which it has been argued acts as a “deterrent” against Emirati males pursuing HE (Fox, 2007, p.9).

In addition to the effects which EMI would appear to have on the academic performance of students, it seems that the policy may also hold the potential to have deleterious effects on both a student’s attitude towards their studies and their academic integrity.

#### **5.1.8 Coping strategies**

Maryam related how she deals with unfamiliar vocabulary which she encounters during the course of her studies, but then went on to criticise how many other students respond to the same challenge, and hypothesises as to the cause of such academically undesirable behaviour:

Maryam: Then if I have some word I didn’t understand I will translate only *the word*, not the whole note. Because there is many students in faculty they translate the whole *lessons*, not only the note, so...and they use the Google translation [sighs]. So bad. So it is so bad. But, do you know why they do that, and why they have problem right now?

Me: To save time? To save energy?

Maryam: No, no, no, no, no! They, you know, pressure themselves to take the IELTS exam. And so they work hard for one day, two day, then okay, they got the IELTS exam, after that they go to the faculty...they don’t know anything. They don’t have any idea how to take the note or something so...

Interestingly, for a free online translation platform which has been in existence for some time, and as a service which seems to enjoy widespread levels of popularity among students in the MENA region, Google Translate has only recently begun to receive attention in the relevant literature (e.g., Hammad, 2016). An EMI content teacher in HE in the UAE interviewed by Mouhanna (2016), for example, asserts (p.141) that students “can’t explain what they’re doing when I ask them what they do. They write in Arabic then they translate. Now with the [online] tools, they Google Translate. Most of them, they do translation.” In his study of EMI within HE in the UAE, King (2014), too, refers to the use of and reliance on Google Translate on the part of students, noting (p.156) that

Translating at home or via online translators in class, as well as seeking translation from peers or from siblings can be seen as coping strategies to survive and reduce the anxiety of studying in a language in which they are not fully comfortable.

King may be correct in his assessment as to the cause of students’ use of – and possible reliance on – Google Translate, and it should perhaps be noted that it is not merely students who rely on such aids in order to deal with the linguistic hurdles posed by having an L2 as the MI. As noted for example by Zacharias (2013), in order to combat the challenges posed by teaching EMI courses in Indonesia, “Many teachers use translating gadgets such as Google Translate or ‘Alfalink’ (a calculator-like bilingual dictionary) when summarizing the textbook in a power point [*sic*]” (p.101).

However, in addition to students utilising Google Translate and other such programs as a strategy with which to cope with studying in a language in which they are not fully proficient, it is, alternatively, also possible to view the use of such translation platforms as a form of resistance to the policy of EMI. As noted for example by Masemann (1982), avoidance of academic exercises, of which the use of translation software is arguably an example, and trivialisation of academic work by cheating, which, again, use of translation aids such as Google Translate arguably constitutes an example, could both be interpreted as manifestations of an underlying resistance to education, or, as in the current case, to having an L2 as the MI. Some credence is lent to this latter possible interpretation by another instance of the trivialisation of academic tasks offered by Maryam:

Maryam: Some student doesn't work hard, you know? And sometimes there is one common thing we do it we did it in school, that one girl do the homework and others copy from her, so we still do it here. Others said to me, yeah, "Do the homework and we will copy from you." So, they didn't study too much.

With all the negative aspects and ramifications of EMI within tertiary education in the UAE outlined above, one is compelled to wonder why students believe English is indeed the MI within federal HE in the country, that is, why students believe English is so vital to the UAE that it necessitates the policy of EMI. The first reason given by Maryam above for her preference to have English as the MI – namely, that of English as an international language, and thus English as an essential language for business and travel – brings us to the next theme which emerged in interviews, English for the future of the UAE.

#### **5.1.9 English for the future of the UAE**

When asked why she felt HE in the UAE is conducted chiefly in English, Asma replied:

Asma: I think that the English is the language for future, so we can work in this language more than Arabic [...]

On this point of English as an international language and thus a – or, the – language of the future, Aisha concurred, adding:

Aisha: Also, it unite...all of the world.

However, whilst Asma and Aisha agreed that English is an important international language, both also acknowledged that having English as the MI renders tertiary studies more challenging:

Researcher: It's international, it's an international language. However, on the other hand it does take a lot more work for the students to study in that language. Is that fair to say?

Aisha/Asma: [In unison] Yeah.

[...]

Asma: I think the disadvantage for that is it is not easy to learn, because I have my mother language, it's better than other language.

When asked why they felt the government of the UAE had made English the main MI within HE, Yamna and Salama also both referred to the future as the primary reason or the implementation of the current policy:

Yamna: I honestly feel like it's because they want them to have more opportunities for the future and stuff, so...

Salama: It will help them in the future. Now English is more important than other language so that's why they have to...

Researcher: So you mean it is an international language?

Salama: Yeah.

Yamna: Yeah.

Bahkita also believed that English is a vital international language, and, as with Aisha above, stated:

Bahkita: After graduation we will have very academic ability to continue with the largest segment of society.

Researcher: Okay, with English?

Bahkita: Yeah, yeah.

Researcher: So do you think it is a very important language in the UAE?

Bahkita: Yeah.

Researcher: And do you think it's also a very sort of international language?

Bahkita: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Highly similar sentiments were expressed by Maryam:

Maryam: English, it's the general...general language around the world.

Researcher: Sort of like an international language, a global language?

Maryam: Yeah, so we have to learn English if we want to connect with others.

Researcher: For business, and travel, and study?

Maryam: Yeah, as a country we have a lot of business with other country so...they need the student, students who know to speak English, if they want to get job, so they try to find those student and give them job and let them connect with others.

Latifa also referred to the importance of English for international business:

Latifa: When student will graduate from university, especially in Expo 2020, they will see more people from another country...they should...

Researcher: Who can't speak Arabic?

Latifa: Yeah. They should speak English, and that will help their country and theirselves.

In addition to its perceived importance for international business and Expo 2020, Latifa also stressed that:

Latifa: Of course using English it will help student to improve their skills, to know about different culture and learning...

Ghadeer: [Interjecting] About language, and maybe it's open their mind about the outside world.

In the survey, too, there emerged a clear belief in the perceived importance of English for the global economy, as well as for the place of the UAE in that 'flat', globalised 'village'. Indeed, when presented with the statement, "English is vital for international business, trade, and commerce" (Q2), for example, students were unanimous in their agreement, with 12 students strongly agreeing and the remaining 8 agreeing. As regards the proposition of, "The UAE needs English to become a leading nation in the world" (Q1), students were close to unanimous, with 11 agreeing and a further 7 strongly agreeing, with only 1 student disagreeing and 1 strongly disagreeing. The reason for this one student strongly disagreeing appeared to be a fear of domain loss, with English being seen as a potential threat to Arabic. Indeed, to explain her opinion this

student stated, “Because we have to preserve the Arabic language.” Although this is only the view of 1 of the 20 students surveyed, it is nevertheless worth briefly reflecting on this minority opinion, if only for the fact that there appears to be something of a contradiction in this particular student’s views. For although this respondent, as all others, agreed that the English language is an integral component of international markets, she nevertheless disagreed – indeed, strongly disagreed – that the UAE requires English to compete at the highest level in this English-saturated globalised economy. It seems the only way to interpret this is to assume that, if given a choice between the UAE becoming a leading nation in the world – for which this student believes English is vital – and preserving Arabic, this participant would opt for the latter.

Zainab, however, did not appear to see English as a potential threat to Arabic. On the contrary, Zainab stated that:

Zainab: It’s not a big problem because we should know another language...we...it’s not [inaudible] when I just want to talk Arabic, I want just to talk in [inaudible: home/whole?] my life in Emirates language, in Arabic language. Also, I study just in Arabic because when I will travel in another place in another country at another place I will not can talk with anybody there because I will be like a crazy woman I didn’t what they say I didn’t understand any word but when I when I know both of language English and Arabic I can move in my life.

Researcher: So you’re saying that English is like an international language and Arabic is also a major world language as well.

Zainab: Yeah.

Researcher: Can you think of any disadvantages of studying in English at university?

Zainab: [Extended silence] I don’t know what I will say but...I think the Arabic language and English language it’s the same.

Researcher: Okay.

Zainab: For me it’s the same.

Researcher: So you think it’s important to have both?

Zainab: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay.

Zainab: Because without English I cannot see my future...I cannot see my work...I cannot see my job...I cannot see my point, you know?

Researcher: You mean your target, your goal, your future life?

Zainab: Yeah. Without also Arabic I cannot life with my parents because my father it's very old...he just talk Arabic. He know German language, he know English language but first language it's Arabic...when he nervous when he anything he just say in Arabic. Also, when I will married I will bring children also my children should know Arabic also should know English because that's both language for future.

In addition to her two separate references to the importance of English for the future, Zainab also makes an allusion above to the concept of the linguistic division of labour between Arabic and English in the UAE (Findlow, 2006), whereby the two languages fill different niches, command discrete domains, and perform distinct roles. Here, for example, Zainab states that Arabic is the language of the home – as has previously been asserted in the literature (e.g., Hunt, 2012; Nickerson, 2015) – and thus of the family, while English is for the future, both hers and for that of her future children. Even here, however, there is an added layer of complexity and a dimension of linguistic dualism. For although Zainab states above that, for her, Arabic is the language of the home, as noted earlier she also remarked that she spoke English with her Indonesian domestic helper. Zainab does not appear to be alone in this regard. For although elsewhere in the world it would be somewhat challenging to imagine employers having to speak a foreign language with their employees in their very own home, this appears to be quite commonplace in the UAE, at least for those surveyed in this study, with some 12 students agreeing and a further 2 strongly agreeing with Q6, viz., “I speak in English with a domestic helper (housemaid, cook, etc.)”, and only 4 disagreeing and 2 strongly disagreeing.

Given the sheer number of such domestic helpers in the region (Roumani [2005] for instance reports that 58% of children under three years of age in the Arabian Gulf are cared for by housemaids for between 30 and 70 hours per week), and in the UAE specifically (Al Sumaiti [2012] relates that 94% of Emirati families employ maids and nannies to perform household chores and to care for children), it seems clear that either there is a great deal of code-switching taking place in Emirati villas or these responses represent a smidgen of evidence for the claim that “there

is a pattern emerging of Arabic being replaced by English as the main language in some Emirati homes” (Burden-Leahy, 2009, p.536). Although this may initially appear to be something of an outlandish claim, the results of the survey would suggest that a number of the respondents have one or more parents who can converse in English, a fact which could thus possibly begin to facilitate such a shift in the primary language of the home. In response to the statement of “One or both of my parents can speak English very well” (Q4), for example, 2 students strongly agreed and a further 9 agreed, while 4 students disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed (2 students expressed no opinion).

However, although there appears to be wide-spread recognition of the need for English for the future of the UAE, to a certain extent this may be an instance of pragmatic acceptance fused with a sense of grudging resignation. When surveyed as to whether “Foreigners in the UAE should learn Arabic” (Q11), for instance, some 8 students agreed and a further 6 strongly agreed. Only 5 disagreed – and interestingly, no students strongly disagreed – and 1 gave no opinion on the topic. Similarly, when asked to respond to the questionnaire statement of, “I am happy when foreigners learn Arabic” (Q12), 9 strongly agreed and 8 agreed, with only 1 disagreeing (1 gave no opinion and 1 left this field blank).

This demand for English in the present-day UAE arguably creates something of a clash of views. For, there are students such as Latifa and Ghadeer, who, as seen above, refer to knowledge of English granting its users increased access to different cultures, and thus possibly being more receptive to previously foreign or alien ideas. On the other hand, however, students such as Maryam fear for the place and standing of their native Arabic, a problem which has long been recognised in the region (e.g., Fellman, 1973). This contrast exemplifies a point of perpetual tension in the UAE, namely the conflict between English, the language of modernism, globalisation, the Internet, and the assorted cultural baggage that “rides piggyback” (Qiang & Wolff, 2007, p.61) on the language, and traditionalism (Islam, Arabic, conservative cultural mores), and the potential threat the former poses to the latter.

### **5.1.10 English as a threat to the cultural and religious identity of the UAE**

Although, as seen above, only a tiny minority of students surveyed in this study believed that the prospect of the UAE becoming a chief player in the globalised economy would pose a potential threat to the place of Arabic in the country, one quarter of students did however believe that, more broadly, “The English language is a threat to UAE culture and traditions” (Q14 in the questionnaire). For while 5 students disagreed and 6 strongly disagreed with this statement, 3 students nevertheless strongly agreed and a further 2 students agreed, and, interestingly, perhaps, 3 students opted to give no opinion (1 left this field blank). Similarly, whilst the majority of students did not agree that “The English language is a threat to Islamic values and customs” (Q15 in the questionnaire) – 6 students disagreed and another 6 strongly disagreed – 2 students did nevertheless agree and a further 3 students strongly agreed (2 students left this field blank, and 1 gave no opinion).

Again, although these are minority views, it must nevertheless be recognised that, ultimately, 25% of the respondents stated that they believe that the current status of English presents a potential threat to both the culture and traditions of the UAE, as well as the Islamic principles of the country. As such, the popularisation of the English language within the UAE is perhaps seen by these informants as a form of ‘soft’ colonisation (Pan & Seargeant 2012) – and perhaps secularisation, or even de-Islamification – of the country. Teachers of female students within HE in the UAE should perhaps be aware that, to the extent that the results of the survey obtained in this study can be extrapolated to the wider population, up to a quarter of their students may believe that English, no matter whether it is the object of study or simply the vehicular language for the delivery of other subject matter, threatens to undermine and erode both their culture and their religion.

Of greater concern is the belief that English has a specific effect of socialisation on students. For, whilst, as has been seen, it is ultimately only a minority of the students surveyed who believe that English poses a threat to the cultural and religious values of the country, students were, however, more evenly divided on the question as to whether they believe that “Learning English makes students more Westernised” (Q13 in the questionnaire). Indeed, 4 students strongly agreed and a

further 2 students agreed, while 5 disagreed and 3 strongly disagreed. Again, interestingly perhaps, some 4 students opted to give no opinion and 2 left this field blank.

It is important to note here that while some students fear that English poses a potential threat to their culture and religion, and that the language may have a ‘Westernising’ effect on its users, students do not however appear to be opposed to the background of those who propagate the language, that is, the teachers who deliver English lessons and lessons in English. That is, they do not seem to regard those who bring English into the UAE as “de-Islamising agents” (Karmani, 2005b, p.266). On the contrary, when surveyed as to whether they believe that “Muslim students should only have Muslim teachers” (Q16), only 1 student agreed and only 1 strongly agreed, whereas 9 disagreed and a further 6 strongly disagreed (2 students answered no opinion and 1 left this field blank).

Interestingly, however, although some students, as seen above, believe English threatens both the indigenous culture and religion of the UAE, exerts a ‘Westernising’ effect on its users – and, more importantly perhaps, that some 70% of the students stated that they would prefer all subjects to be taught in Arabic – when asked in the questionnaire whether in the future they would want their very own children to learn English (Q5), as for example Zainab above stated she would, 13 students strongly agreed and a further 6 agreed, with no students disagreeing and only 1 strongly disagreeing, which is strikingly similar to the results obtained by Pessoa and Rajakumar (2011) in their study of university students in Qatar.

Thus, it could be argued that there exists something of a contradiction here. For, despite the fact that some 25% of students felt that English threatens the culture and traditions of the UAE and the Islamic values of the country, and that 30% believed that English has a socialising effect which itself smacks of ‘Westernism’, and everything that entails, all but 5% of the students nevertheless expressed a desire for their future offspring to learn English (Q5 in the survey), and thus arguably further perpetuate the cultural, religious, and existential threats posed by the language. However, as noted in chapter 3, this perhaps does not so much highlight any inconsistency on the part of the students, as more evince the reality of the complexities – and the inherent contradictory, paradoxical nature (the potential economic gain the language affords its users [e.g., Canagarajah,

1993; Grin, 2001] versus possible erosion of culture) – of the place, role, and standing of English in today’s increasingly globalised world. Unfortunately, of course, the uneasy tension created by such ambivalence – that is, an acknowledgement of the importance of English on the one hand and a pronounced dislike of the cultural and religious ramifications of the propagation and penetration of the language on the other – can invariably lead to students harbouring what Lin (1999, p.394) dubs a “want-hate relationship with English” (see also Abbott, 1992; Kachru, 1996).

One potentially confounding factor in this picture however is that students who, as with Maryam above, express a fear of English potentially encroaching on the place and status of Arabic in the UAE may in fact harbour a concern of a possible weakening of the standing of their faith in the country. For, as noted in chapter 1, Arabic and Islam – and indeed Arabness itself – are interwoven. This entwined nature of the Arabic language, Arab ethnic identity, and the religion of Islam can be seen in both geo-demographic and linguistic terms. Al-Khatib (2000), for example, notes that the Arab world consists of 21 independent states,<sup>13</sup> and estimates as to the percentage of Arabs in these countries who are practicing Muslims range from 80% (e.g., Sidani & Thornberry, 2009) to as high as 95% (e.g., Al-Khatib, 2000). As regards the linguistic link, the Arabic language definitely boasts of a distinct Islamic flavour. Indeed, as noted by Morrow and Castleton (2007, p.205) “Arabic religious expressions are so common that the language counts *Allah* as its most common content word” (italics in original). Indeed, an example of such a “religiously-loaded” (Hudson, 2013, p.38) Arabic term was encountered above when Alanoud uttered the term *hamdullah* (praise be to God).

One indicator of the extent to which Muslims believe Arabic and Islam are knotted together, and thus the extent to which it may be believed that English poses a threat to Islam, is thus whether they believe that all Muslims, no matter what their ethno-linguistic background, should learn Arabic. Although in the current study a majority of the students surveyed did indeed believe that Arabic is essential to Islam and practicing Muslims, it was something of a slim majority. When asked whether “All Muslims in the world (from Indonesia, etc.) should learn Arabic” (Q18 in the questionnaire), 5 agreed and a further 4 strongly agreed, with 3 disagreeing and 1 strongly disagreeing. Interestingly, however, 5 of the students opted to give no opinion (and 2 left this field

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<sup>13</sup> Kulwicki, Khalifa, and Moore (2008) state that there are 22 Arab nations in the MENA region.

blank). This result was largely unexpected, for both the extant literature (e.g., Lambert, 2008; Simadi & Kamali, 2004) and personal experience suggest that female Emirati students are “deeply devoted to the theology of Islam” (Schvaneveldt et al., 2005, p.79). Indeed, 3 of the students who strongly agreed added, “To let them read the Quran and pray to the god”, “to learn and read Quran”, and “Because Arabic language for muslims and they should know every important things about the Islam.”

Another, more fundamental, issue related to Islam and language is whether the learning and use of foreign languages is even permissible. For, traditionally, the use of any language other than Arabic by a Muslim has been highly controversial, and, some have asserted, in contravention of Islamic principles. Abdussalam (1998, p.60), for example, notes that the Islamic theologian Ibn Taymiyah (1263–1328) maintained that “speaking in languages other than Arabic is permitted only for the native speakers of these languages” and that the “use of non-Arabic languages should be restricted in order to attain distinction from unbelievers.” Similarly, notes Abdussalam (ibid.), Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) believed it was “obligatory not to speak any language other than Arabic under an Islamic regime.” It is for such reasons that in Wahhabist Saudi Arabia, the *hadith* of “He whoever learns other people’s language will be secured from their cunning” (من تعلم لغة قوم أمن مكرهم) is, as noted by Elyas and Picard (2010), often employed by private language centres as a motto to promote – and to justify on religious grounds – the study of foreign languages.

Interestingly, a large number of students surveyed appeared to be unaware of, or to not wish to be drawn on, this particular issue. Indeed, when asked whether they believe that all “Muslims have a duty to learn foreign languages” (Q17), some 10 opted to give no opinion. Of those who expressed an opinion, however, 3 strongly agreed and a further 2 agreed, whereas 2 strongly disagreed and 1 disagreed (2 left this field blank).

## 5.1.11 Benefits to students of Arabic L1 teachers

### 5.1.11.1 Knowledge of students' L1

The use of students' L1(s) in the L2 classroom – either by the teacher and/or by the students themselves – has long been a controversial issue (e.g., Auerbach, 1993). Some argue that rather than disrupting the L2 acquisition process, the use of the L1 can be harnessed as a resource in order to actually enhance the language learning process (e.g., Anwaruddin, 2011; Cook, 2001; Harbord, 1992; Lin, 1999; Tedick & Walker, 1994). In the UAE, however, 'permitting' use of the students' L1 may have very real ramifications for a lecturer's career (Hunt, 2012). Presumably, it is fear that teachers with knowledge of Arabic may 'slip into' or 'revert to' the language which seems to have resulted in very few Arabic L1 speakers being employed as English teachers on the respective foundation programmes of the three major federally-sponsored institutions of HE in the UAE (Karmani, 2005a).

Somewhat oddly, however, given that they are the ones most affected by this pedagogical policy, students themselves are rarely, if ever, asked whether *they* believe *their* L1 could assist *their* study of an L2 (Burden, 2000). Q10 in the questionnaire, viz., "Using Arabic in English lessons can help me learn English", was designed to elicit just such opinions from students. It transpired that 8 of the students surveyed strongly agreed with the statement, and a further 7 agreed. In contrast, only 4 students disagreed, and 1 gave no opinion. In interviews, too, some students were of the opinion that they had benefitted from having a teacher of English with an Arabic L1 background. Asma, for instance, stated:

Asma: I think it is good because actually the first teacher I meet, Dr Ali, so he is from Egypt, so it is easy to connect with him, and he give us the easy language we can learn it.

Researcher: That's interesting, so he was teaching English?

Asma: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay, but his first language is Arabic?

Asma: Yeah.

Researcher: And that could help you?

Asma: Yeah.

Researcher: That's interesting.

Asma: Because he used the easy and good word, it's from English.

Of course, there is no actual mention here of the teacher in question using Arabic in the classroom. Rather, it appears that in this case Asma believes she benefitted from having an Arabic L1 teacher who, having himself previously learnt English as an L2, could, it seems, empathise with Arabic L1 students of ESL/EFL and assist them in the language learning process, especially, it seems, more elementary students in the lower levels.

#### **5.1.11.2 Advantageous for lower levels**

It has previously been suggested that some EFL/ESL teachers on foundation programmes within HE institutions in the UAE – who, as noted above, tend to be ‘native’ speakers of English – may overestimate new students’ English language abilities. Hatherley-Greene (2012a, p.123), for example, notes that upon starting HE in the UAE, students “find themselves in a new landscape where almost everyone speaks English ‘at them’, assuming they understand almost every word.” Similarly, in her advice to new foundation programme teachers at ZU, Ryan Abu Wardeh (2010, p.3) writes that new students “need time to accustom the ears to the onslaught of fast speech coming at them.” Both Aisha and Asma, however, seem to have benefitted from having a bilingual Arabic L1/English L2 teacher who appears to have not made the error of overrating their proficiency in English:

Aisha: Also, something I want to mention, we, when we come to, came to university, we was, we were in level I, so it was easy to learn.

Researcher: Okay. So you came in right at [foundation programme] level I?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: Was it easy or difficult to adjust? Asma, you're saying it helped to have a teacher who could speak Arabic *and* English.

Asma: Yeah.

Researcher: And are you saying going in at level I made it easier, or more difficult? [Asma nods]  
It made it easier?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: Okay.

Aisha: I'm like her.

In addition to students' competence in the English language often being overestimated, it has also been suggested that students may require a greater amount of time than may be commonly assumed to adjust to the 'Western' styles of teaching discussed above. Hatherley-Greene (2012b, p.7) in fact argues that

with the lower level students, the learner-centered approach to English language teaching adopted in higher education is simply not appropriate for second language learners newly arrived from a teacher-centered and teacher-dependent high school environment [...] Teachers need to gradually introduce learner-centeredness and encourage learner independence over a longer period of time, being respectful at all times of individual learner differences to this adjustment. Lower level students in academic bridge programs appear to require at least a year to adjust.

When asked how long she believed it took her to adjust to university, Alanoud, who it will be recalled entered the foundation programme at the case institution at level III, replied:

Alanoud: Maybe one week.

However, Ghadeer, who also entered at level III, stated that it took her considerably longer to adjust:

Ghadeer: Maybe a semester, a semester and a half.

Thus, students such as Asma and Aisha, who both joined the foundation programme at the case institution at level I, may well have benefitted from initially having a teacher with an Arabic background. It is also possible that Asma's entry to HE was made less traumatic due to having an Arab teacher who may possibly have taught in an 'Arab' (i.e., more school-like) fashion, which

could have resulted in a smoother transition to the more ‘Western’ styles of teaching which are commonly employed on the foundation programme at the case institution, and which, as suggested above by Aisha, may be implemented in something of an overzealous fashion.

## **5.2 RQ2: What challenges do female students believe they face when transitioning from secondary school to EMI tertiary studies in the UAE?**

There emerged from interviews the firm belief on the part of many students that their secondary school education had not prepared them in an adequate fashion for EMI studies at university. On this point, it is perhaps important to remember that, whilst normally it could be argued that schools should simply concentrate on school work and should not be concerned with preparing students for post-secondary education, such an argument would not necessarily hold in relation to female students in the UAE. This is since, as already noted, the country appears to have opted to follow a policy of mass education of females at tertiary level, and may well be aiming for universal HE for female citizens (*Vision 2021*, 2010).

Thus, arguably, the secondary school system should indeed prepare students for tertiary studies. Indeed, there have been recent calls for the foundation programmes currently in operation at the major federally-sponsored institutions of HE in the UAE, viz., UAEU, HCT, and ZU, to be ‘shifted back’ to high school so as to better prepare students for the challenges of university. The Ministry of Education (MOE) Strategy 2010-2020 (MOE, 2008), for instance, explicitly “calls for more of the learning that takes place during the foundation year to happen during the public school years” (Lewis, 2010, February 23).

### **5.2.1 School not adequate preparation for HE**

Three principal reasons were cited by students as to why they believe that school had not given them adequate preparation for EMI HE. These were a mismatch between the language of the class materials and that employed in the actual classroom, the switch in the MI between school and university, and the paradigmatic shift in teaching styles experienced when moving from secondary to tertiary education.

### 5.2.1.1 MI and materials mismatch

The first reason given by students for why they believe school had not given them adequate preparation for EMI HE was that of a misalliance between the language of learning materials on the one hand and the actual language employed as the MI on the other. Zainab, for instance, stated that whilst her mathematics textbooks were in English, her classroom teacher actually taught in Arabic, though also seemed to imply that this was at the behest of the students:

Researcher: When you went to high school here in Al Ain, at your government school, what language were most of your lessons taught in? Were they taught in Arabic? For example, geography, mathematics, science?

Zainab: In Arabic.

Researcher: In Arabic, okay.

Zainab: In high school only I study English in English language. Also, my mathematic...it's...English...book, but my teacher from Emirates she talk with me Arabic...Also the numbers, it's English but she say it in Arabic.

Researcher: Oh, okay, so you had an English textbook...

Zainab: Yeah

Researcher: ...but the lesson was taught in Arabic by your Emirati teacher?

Zainab: Yeah, because the girls want in Arabic because they will understand it more...more than when she say it in English.

Interestingly, however, Zainab went on to say that she did not necessarily find this discrepancy to be particularly confusing:

Researcher: Was that confusing at all, having the lesson in Arabic but the textbook in English?

Zainab: No, no, it's okay, because she do it practice for us in Arabic and then we copy it in English...that's it.

In contrast, Maryam, who related that she experienced an identical mismatch between the language employed in her mathematics textbook and that actually used by her mathematics teacher in lessons, stated that she did indeed find this incongruity confusing:

Maryam: You know, in high school and in school in general I studied mathematics in Arabic, even if the book is written in English. So the teacher in school didn't teach us in English, even [if] the book was in English.

Researcher: So your materials and textbooks might have been in English but your Arabic-speaking teacher would have taught the lesson in Arabic?

Maryam: Yeah, so...

Researcher: Was that confusing?

Maryam: Yeah, confusing, and we don't care about the...what written in the mathematics book, because she translated to us and she teach us in Arabic. Sometimes she didn't translate but she speaking Arabic, you know, she didn't speak in English.

However, although Maryam found this mismatch to be confusing and that it ultimately resulted in students not being required to psychologically 'notice' the English vocabulary in the materials, the most frequently cited reason for students believing that their secondary school education had failed to prepare them for HE was, quite predictably perhaps, the radical switch in the MI that this move from compulsory education to tertiary studies entails.

### **5.2.1.2 The switch from an Arabic-medium school to EMI HE**

When asked whether she thought high school had helped her prepare for the English environment of the case institution, for instance, Alanoud was somewhat ambivalent, remarking:

Alanoud: When I come to university it was...not easy a lot, not hard a lot...it was medium.

However, Yamna, who it will be recalled completed a significant portion of her secondary education in the USA, took a different view:

Researcher: Looking at the girls around you in your classes, maybe they come from Ras Al Khaimah, maybe they come from Fujairah, maybe they come from Abu Dhabi, but they come from a primarily Arabic-medium high school, and they come to university, it's 99 percent English, do you think their secondary school education helped them prepare for this?

Yamna: I don't think so, I really don't think so. I think because they came from a government school everything was taught in Arabic, and it was easy for them, that's just their language, they're used to it so...

Relating her own experience, Bahkita stated:

Bahkita: In fact, it did not help us because most of our lessons we used the Arabic language. Lessons were studying English at the university have been difficult for us in the beginning.

Latifa, too, was of opinion that school had not succeeded in preparing her for tertiary studies, and, as with Yamna and Bahkita, put this down to the switch in the MI:

Researcher: Do you think your studies at high school helped you prepare for having English at university?

Latifa: Not too much.

Researcher: What makes you say that, Latifa, why do you think that is?

Latifa: Most of subject are teaching in high school with Arabic, not with English, that's hard.

Even Latifa – who, as noted above, tested in from high school direct to the English foundation programme at level III as a result of her CEPA score – stated that this switch in the MI made for an overly taxing and challenging 'border crossing' (Hatherley-Greene, 2012a):

Latifa: It's *too* difficult. Too much change between the high school and university.

Ghadeer, who also tested in to the foundation programme at level III, stated that when she began at the case institution with Latifa:

Ghadeer: We don't know about anything. Really!

However, the idea that school did not provide adequate preparation for EMI HE is perhaps exemplified by the experience of Zainab. Zainab related that whilst she achieved grades in placement tests in both mathematics and Arabic – subjects which she studied in Arabic at school – which allowed her to circumvent these courses on the foundation programme at the case institution, the grade she obtained in the CEPA examination however meant that she was required to undergo the English strand of the programme:

Zainab: Yeah, because now I didn't have for [foundation programme at the case institution] math or Arabic because in my high school I studied math very well and I study Arabic also very well. When I do the first exam for me to see my high I do it all.

Researcher: So you don't have to take maths or Arabic on the foundation programme?

Zainab: No.

Researcher: Only English.

Zainab: I do it all, but English because...I...when I do the CEPA exam it's easy but I'm just play, you know? I didn't take it in serious....

Researcher: Okay....

Zainab: ...in serious way. That's why I'm now in [the foundation programme at the case institution]. But now I will take the IELTS.

The comments made by Zainab above highlight a somewhat peculiar aspect of the role and purpose – or rather, the roles and purposes – of English within the secondary and tertiary education in the UAE. For whilst in secondary education English is essentially studied as EFL, what was a foreign language at school then becomes the MI within tertiary education. As noted by Troudi (2009), preparing for a future MI is not the typical purpose of or motivation for studying a foreign language at school.

Zainab then gave an interesting response to the direct question as to whether she believed her secondary education had assisted in paving the way for her tertiary studies:

Researcher: Do you think your English language lessons at high school helped you prepare for English at university?

Zainab: [Extended silence] Sometime.

Since Zainab tended to give fairly lengthy answers to questions posed in the interview, the protracted silence prior to her one-word answer above – which we also saw earlier when Zainab was asked whether she could identify any disadvantages of EMI with HE – is intriguing, and warrants further comment and analysis.

A number of observers have commented on such prolonged silences on the part of informants during interviews. Collins et al. (2005; citing Hutchinson & Wilson, 1992), for example, cite silences as one of many “problematic respondent behaviors” inherent in the interview medium, though in contrast McCormick (2000b) argues that protracted silences can afford researchers valuable data, as they can often signal hesitancy or uncertainty on the part of the interviewee. A further arguable advantage of possessing extensive experience of the research site and knowledge of its actors is being able to hypothesise and ‘intuit’ the possible meaning and significance of such hesitancy and uncertainty. For, as remarked by Green et al. (1997, p.173), “To see silence as meaningful, and not merely the absence of talk, or to see someone as taking the role of questioner involves cultural understanding of the discourse practices of a social group.”

In the instance of the prolonged silence on the part of Zainab above, I would agree that, as noted by Ryan and Bernard (2003), a refusal to give an immediate answer can be used by interviewees in countries with strong centralised control as a strategy to show resistance to – and in their own way to protest against – government policies with which they do not necessarily agree. At the very least I could sense Zainab’s unease with the question, which engendered her silence, and this silence may also have signalled fear on her part of the possible ramifications of expressing an opinion which could conceivably be construed as criticism of a government policy – and which could thus also be interpreted as a lack of patriotism (King, 2014) – and thus led her to remain

silent for an extended period of time, before giving a guarded, and somewhat evasive, if not enigmatic, response.

Others, however, were somewhat less hesitant in their response to the question as to whether they believed school had helped in their preparation for university. Maryam, who is normally extremely talkative, for example, was somewhat less loquacious than usual, putting her answer in monosyllabic form:

Maryam: No.

Though not as blunt as Maryam, Asma also thought that her school had not prepared her for English-medium tertiary studies, but, somewhat vaguely, that it had nevertheless helped her learn to communicate with non-Arabic speakers:

Researcher: How do you think – or, do you think – your secondary school helped you prepare for university? Because it's a big jump, right? Do you think your high school helped you prepare for university?

Asma: Well, my English teacher is, she's from America, so that's easy to talk with someone in English and I think that's help me, but for studies, no.

Researcher: Okay, so your teacher, your English teacher at school, was from America?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: Did you have the same, Aisha?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: And that helped you prepare for *English* at university?

Asma: Not to prepare for English, they help us to...to connect with other people they didn't understand Arabic.

When encouraged to elaborate on why she believed that school had not helped her prepare for EMI tertiary level study, Asma alluded to the quality and relevancy of the materials used in school:

Asma: No, the studies in school didn't help me...for university.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Asma: The materials, we study in school, it didn't tell you or didn't help you about English.

Aisha, who also doubted whether her school had helped her prepare for an EMI programme at university, referred to what she saw as the unqualified status of her English teacher to account for this:

Aisha: ...they don't have any degree, but their mother language is English so they find a job.

Aisha touches upon a controversial topic within education in the UAE with this remark, namely, the hiring of 'native' English speakers to teach English at secondary schools. As noted for example by Al-Issa and Dahan (2011), when ADEC recruited a batch of almost 1,000 foreign teachers to help implement their New School Model curriculum and pedagogical reform, there was a conspicuous absence in the media reports lauding their arrival of any mention of the teachers' qualifications or germane professional experience. In fact, state Al-Issa and Dahan (p.7), the teachers were never praised "for anything other than their native language" of English. Although within the field of TEFL/TESOL such lionisation of 'native'-English-speaking teachers is commonplace (Phillipson, 1992), with teachers from 'native'-English-speaking countries frequently being portrayed as 'one-size-fits-all', 'magic bullet-like solutions' to all the ills and woes of a country's EFL/ESL programme(s), such a stellar portrayal is often arguably unwarranted (Scovel, 1994; Skutnabb-Kangas, 1999, 2000). One of the Arab L1 teachers of English in an ADEC school interviewed by Stockwell (2015, p.139), for example, questioned the employment of some of their 'native'-English-speaking colleagues, remarking, with some obvious resentment, "We are replaced by someone who is supposed to but doesn't know more. How can he be from a country where he uses English every day but can't spell?"

Students also appeared to be divided on the need for English teachers to stem from 'native-speaking' countries, at least to the extent that the motivation for such hiring policies was to afford students an experience of and an insight into the cultures of 'Inner Circle' (Kachru, 1996) states. When asked in the questionnaire whether they believed that "Learning about the culture of English-

speaking countries (England, America, Canada, Australia, etc.) is important when studying the English language” (Q3), for example, 7 students agreed and 2 strongly agreed, and 7 disagreed and 1 strongly disagreed (3 students gave no opinion). One of the students who strongly disagreed added, “Their culture is not that important to us.”

On the other hand, however, Maryam related how she preferred ‘native-speaking’ teachers of English as she had previously found the pronunciation of her Arabic L1 English teacher to be somewhat wanting:

Maryam: The [English] teacher was Arabic, from Arabic country, so...I’m just talk to them in Arabic, they want us talk in English...you know sometimes...some student feel scared so they try to speak with them in Arabic then try to speak with them in English, but to be honest it was not good idea because the pronunciation is different, you know? The Arabic people when they try to speak in English sometimes the pronunciation it’s difficult so we learn words, or something, in different...in wrong pronunciation. So yeah, but after that they changed the teacher...now...they change all the teacher from grade...from KG until high school all the teacher are Westerns [Westerners]...not...not Arabic.

Thus, while some students put the failure of schools to help in their preparation for EMI at HE down to the switch in the MI, others cite suboptimal materials, and still others point to under- or unqualified teachers. However, no matter what the causes of this failure, it appears to be well-recognised by students. This was expressed in no uncertain terms by Bahkita:

Bahkita: I think I improve my English in university not in secondary school.

Although Emirati students have not had the number of years of English instruction commonly referred to in the literature (Troudi, 2009) – for when school holidays are taken into account students in the UAE have a number of school days which is far below that of the global average (Pennington, 2015, March 10) – comments such as those by Bahkita above should nevertheless give food for thought to, and be serious cause of concern for, teachers, lecturers, school principals,

policy-makers, and indeed anyone who is in any way involved in education in the UAE. Indeed, given that the government of the UAE appears to have stated its desire to achieve universal HE for females (*Vision 2021*, 2010) whilst simultaneously signalling its intention to eliminate university-based foundation programmes by 2018 (Pennington, 2016, October 17; Salem & Swan, 2014, February 4), the finding that many students believe that their school had not afforded them adequate preparation for EMI HE is somewhat disconcerting, if not downright disturbing.

As noted above, another challenge faced when commencing the foundation programme at the case institution cited by students was the teaching style which had greeted them at the new environment of the university.

### **5.2.1.3 Switch in teaching styles**

Ghadeer believes that she had discerned what she saw as a radical switch in the underlying philosophy of teaching between her secondary school and that employed at university, noting that in the educational system of the latter, students were required to become more responsible for their own learning:

Ghadeer: I think that it's...it's big change, because in the university you are, you are responsible for yourself, and you should do hard in English...

Researcher: Okay, you mean like you're responsible for your own learning?

Ghadeer: Yes. And also it's easy in the school, but here it's hard and everyone responsible for themselves.

Aisha agreed that the move from secondary school to university dictated that students become more responsible for their own learning and that commencing tertiary-level studies involves experiencing a change in teaching styles, but also alluded specifically to the didactic 'rote-teaching' methodology (Jochems, 1991) commonly associated with the school system in the UAE (Gallagher, 2011b; Madsen, 2009; Sanassian, 2011; Stockwell, 2015; van den Hoven, 2014):

Aisha: I think the best way to study at university is to be more responsible, not like in school because in school the teacher always repeat the information.

Researcher: And tells you what you have to learn and how you have to learn it, yeah?

Aisha: But now a lot of them don't do that.

When asked to elaborate on this point, however, Aisha stated that she believed that both the approach to teaching typically employed at school and that encountered at university boasted of their own distinct advantages:

Researcher: Do you think it's true that at school the teachers *tell you* what you have to learn, but here at university, some of the teachers, they don't make it so clear, they expect you to sort of find out for yourself what you need to learn. Do you think that might be true?

Asma: Yeah.

Aisha: I think both of them are good.

Researcher: Okay...

Aisha: Because I think the teacher must let the student search about the information and the knowledge. Also, we must give them a lot of – what is it?

Asma: Information.

Aisha: Yes, information about the materials.

In addition to touching upon what appears to be a fundamental difference in both the educational philosophy and practical classroom pedagogics between her secondary school and university, an issue previously discussed in chapter 2, Aisha also appears to suggest that the 'Western' teaching methodologies employed at the latter, i.e., at the case institution, might be implemented to excess.

Themes which emerged from interviews with relevance to the aims of the third and final research question posed in this study are discussed below.

### **5.3 RQ3: What are the students' views regarding the English language proficiency requirement of an overall 5.0 IELTS, or equivalent, for admission to faculty studies at federal university?**

#### **5.3.1 'Washback' from IELTS**

Above, Maryam asserts that, since some students did not prepare for IELTS in an academically sound manner when on the foundation programme, but instead just worked hard for one or two days immediately prior to the examination, they now, as a consequence, struggle with the challenges of faculty-level EMI study, and so rely on Google Translate. Although not everyone would necessarily agree with Maryam when she states that IELTS is an examination which can be 'crammed' for one or two days before the test, it should again perhaps be stressed that what is important here – and what is being explored – are students' subjective views and attitudes, for they are, after all, the key stakeholders in HE. Furthermore, Maryam does appear to have a point when she remarks that the IELTS examination may not necessarily give an accurate reflection of a candidate's study skills and academic potential, but rather may merely present a 'snapshot' of a student's performance in English on the day of the actual examination.

It should perhaps also be noted that Maryam is not alone in believing that international examinations such as IELTS are not necessarily the best indicator of the academic potential of students with aspirations, or a mandatory requirement, to undertake an EMI degree programme. In their small-scale study of the predictive accuracy of IELTS in relation to the academic performance of first-year ESL undergraduate students of business, science, and engineering at an Australian university, for instance, Dooey and Oliver (2002, p.36) report that they found "little evidence for the validity of IELTS as a predictor of academic success." Such conclusions are by no means novel, however. Indeed, in some classic early work in this area, Vinke and Jochems (1993, p.281) conclude that

In general academic achievement is mainly determined by the extent to which a student makes an effort for the successful completion of a course (which we shall call "student effort"). Another factor is the extent to which he or she has certain abilities that are relevant to a specific academic discipline [...] Previous

knowledge of relevant subject matter – and in the case of an English-medium instructional setting – English proficiency are among these abilities.

The point here is that even in an EMI setting, English proficiency is but one of an array of prerequisites for the eventual successful completion of the course. Furthermore, Vinke and Jochems (1993, p.283) assert that their findings suggest “that a language test such as TOEFL [Test of English as a Foreign Language] does not measure the language skills that foreign students need in order to be academically successful at an English-medium university or college.” A similar suggestion has been made in relation to the relevance and suitability of IELTS for trainee teachers in the UAE. An Arabic L1 content teacher in the faculty of education interviewed by King (2014) in his study of EMI within HE in the UAE, for instance, notes (p.139) that “the kind of English which is tested on IELTS is not the sort of English our students are going to use as teachers.” Such observations are important since any perceived mismatch or disconnect between examinations and future use can of course lead to resentment of and resistance towards both the examinations themselves as well as that which is tested.

### **5.3.1.1 Resentment of and resistance towards IELTS**

There is no shortage of evidence relating to resentment of and resistance towards IELTS within education in the UAE in the recent, relevant literature. In her study of ostensive curricular and pedagogical reform within ADEC schools, for example, Sanassian (2011, p.119) reports that in interviews, ““we hate IELTS!” became a recurring phrase by teachers.”

At least part of this resentment of IELTS may stem from the fact that the examination has arguably become a gate-keeping exercise, and a somewhat arbitrary one at that. Sanassian (2011, p.120) notes that, “Obviously, tests have power. The power of tests lies firstly in the fact that they tend to use numbers. For example [*sic*] the science/mathematics teachers need to score a 5.5 in order to keep their jobs.” One might reasonably ask why teachers are required to obtain an overall 5.5 in IELTS, and not, for example, 6.0 or 5.0, or 6.5, or 4.5 (Templer, 2004). Additionally, as suggested above by the informant in King (2014), the relevance of the examination may not always be immediately obvious to all stakeholders. Indeed, Sanassian (2011, p.119) argues that the IELTS “test utilizes examples and context that are completely foreign to Emirati society, and yet it has

become the deciding factor in ADEC's hiring of teachers." In fact, Sanassian believes that feelings towards IELTS among the teachers she interviewed were so strong that the test even tainted their attitudes towards the English language itself, remarking (p.120) that the "IELTS requirement did nothing to help improve the attitude of teachers towards English."

For their part, too, students in the UAE are also often unconvinced as to the appositeness of the IELTS for their future studies – as are also some UAE-based researchers (e.g., Freimuth, 2017) – and are thus also confused as to why they need to obtain an overall grade 5.0 in the examination, or indeed any grade. Zainab, for example, noted that:

Zainab: I think no need to take exam for IELTS. If I...if I...if I need English in my life...okay, I will do [the foundation programme at the case institution] and then we'll have final exam and I have a mark...but if I bring [take] the IELTS I didn't need it in my life because my college it's all subject Arabic subject, only one subject from English but that's very, very easy.

Researcher: And your major is going to be...your college will be which one?

Zainab: Law.

Researcher: Law, okay, so that will be 99% in Arabic, right?

Zainab: Yeah. But now I go to study for the IELTS exam every day, but I think the IELTS exam no need to me because I am in...I will be law...and I not talk English just now [foundation programme] and then it's okay and then I go to my college, but why I should bring [take] the IELTS I didn't know. Because it is...like...like...a game. If you failed you will go out the university. If I get it I will won [...] Because now when I give you paper and then I said, "Mr Anthony, you should do it that one in one year", but that one not easy for you because it's in Arabic...and I give you practice for *all the time* about this exam, but it's not the same questions, that's very, very difficult for you, because it's not the same questions, because also that's not...first language for you, that's why I don't like to do IELTS because I don't need it in my life because when I will work...when I will have the job I will do all the things in Arabic, but if any person come from English I will know how to talk with English but no need to bring [take] the IELTS, you know? I will learn English

[...] No need to IELTS, I can study English *whole*...all the time at the university, I want to learn English because it's...it's funny subject, but not I should bring [take] IELTS, also it's 945 dirhams. I should buy [pay for] it just to do the exam.

Researcher: And some girls take it 10 times. That takes a lot of money.

Zainab: Yeah. If I didn't get it I will bring it back [take it again] bring it back [take it again] bring it back [take it again]. Okay, no need.

In addition to airing the grievance that students are unable to memorise a number of 'stock answers' which can be regurgitated verbatim on the day of the test ("I give you practice for *all the time* about this exam, but it's not the same questions, that's very, very difficult for you, because it's not the same questions"), Zainab here also alludes to an important, though often overlooked, aspect of international English examinations such as IELTS, namely, the financial cost of taking the tests borne by candidates, especially when having to do so repeatedly, a point also raised by Templer (2004) in his critique of examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL from the perspective of social justice.

With such a large percentage of school leavers in the UAE being required to undertake a foundation programme so as to obtain an overall 5.0 in IELTS, or 'equivalent', it is perhaps not surprising that resentment of the examination, and other international English language proficiency tests, has become intertwined with – and expressed through – resentment towards such preparatory programmes. Indeed, in interviews at least one student appeared to harbour some not inconsiderable resentment towards having to complete an academic bridging course in order to obtain an overall 5.0 in IELTS before being permitted to progress to her faculty studies. When asked if she had any advice for future students, Ghadeer for example stated that they should strive to obtain the required grade in IELTS before applying for university studies, so as to circumvent the preparatory programme:

Ghadeer: Make hard, and do anything to get the IELTS before they come to the university.

What is interesting about this comment is that, as with Zainab, who likens the IELTS requirement to "a game", Ghadeer seems to view the IELTS grade required for admission to faculty studies not

so much as a valid demonstration of a student's English language proficiency, which itself will aid their studies, as more a box to be ticked or a hoop to be jumped through, with little if any discernible benefit to a student's actual academic career.

### **5.3.2 An even unlevel playing field**

As was seen above, Maryam appears to be somewhat sceptical as regards the ability of IELTS to accurately gauge the academic potential of students, Zainab is confused – if not baffled – by the need to achieve an overall 5.0 in IELTS in order to undertake an Arabic-medium degree, Ghadeer seems to harbour some not inconsiderable resentment of this particular requirement, and both Zainab and Ghadeer would appear to regard this prerequisite for entry to faculty studies as something resembling a game.

Another contentious aspect of the IELTS to emerge from interviews with students was that of the equitable nature, or otherwise, of students being obliged to obtain an overall 5.0, or 'equivalent', in order to progress to faculty-based studies. As noted in both the introduction and chapter 3, there exist vast discrepancies between the various emirates of the UAE in terms of exposure to English at school, an issue most sharply put into focus by the contrast between the network of ADEC schools in the emirate of Abu Dhabi on the one hand, and government schools in the northern emirates of RAK and Fujairah on the other. For whilst in the former a number of subjects are taught in English, the latter are strictly Arabic medium.

Interviewees were split on the question as to whether, given the fact that different schools have varying amounts of English tuition, it was reasonable that all students had to meet the same English language proficiency requirements for entry to faculty studies. Maryam, for example, stated:

Maryam: It isn't fair, by the way, because some of them they learn the English...they have English in all subject so it will be easy to them to take the IELTS. Okay, for example, for me maybe it will be a little bit difficult to take IELTS 5 but for the Arabic girls it will be too much difficult to them if they want to pass the IELTS exam.

Bahkita, who it will be recalled, stems from and attended a government school in the northern emirate of Fujairah, also did not believe that the blanket IELTS requirement was fair:

Researcher: So you told me you come from a high school in Fujairah and most lessons – all the lessons are in Arabic, apart from English. Other girls come here from private schools...

Bahkita: Yeah.

Researcher: ...it's all English.

Bahkita: Yeah, all English.

Researcher: Other girls....

Bahkita: And take the IELTS 8 or 9....

Researcher: It does happen, yeah.

Horayah: Yeah.

Researcher: Other girls come from schools that have half English half Arabic.

Bahkita: Yeah.

Researcher: For example, maths and science might be in English. But they all come here and everyone has to get IELTS 5 to go to faculty and start their degree. Do you think that's good, or bad, right, or wrong? Do you think it's fair or unfair?

Bahkita: No, it's not fair. Schools must unite education in terms of the use of language in the materials.

Unfortunately, of course, any attempt to standardise the language of materials employed in schools throughout the seven emirates of the UAE would be an extremely difficult undertaking. For one paradox within the education sector of the country is that the MOE is in fact now only responsible for implementing the national curriculum in the northern emirates; the two major emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai “branched off in 2005 and 2008 respectively to implement their independent curricula” (Farah & Ridge, 2009, p.7; fn.3), via ADEC in Abu Dhabi and the Knowledge and Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai.

Other students, however, did believe that the universal IELTS requirement was fair:

Ghadeer: I think that it's fair, because the...the student...maybe the country want, or the university want...want the student show them how they...what the skill they have, and it's fair because all student the same in the university, so it's one score, 5, so all people who pass this come...

Asma, too, remarked:

Asma: Yeah, I feel that's fair because the IELTS will, if everyone take IELTS it will be the same level so that will help them to be the same level to understand the subject.

Alanoud concurred, stating:

Alanoud: I think it's a fair because...all of them have to...get the exam, and they will improve their study in exam, so if they...if they do it well they will pass it, if they don't so they have to learn from beginning in...here in university.

Somewhat paradoxically, however, Alanoud supported the IELTS requirement of an overall 5.0 despite recognising the vastly different educational experiences of students when it came to the MI at their respective schools:

Alanoud: We have different kind of students. Some of them learn English all of...all of study was in English in school and some of them are not, and some of them have in English and some in Arabic, so I don't think all the students are the same – have the same way in university.

On the other hand, though acknowledging that the IELTS is a uniform examination, Aisha believed that greater consideration should be given to the different backgrounds of students, an opinion more aligned with that of Bahkita above:

Aisha: I agree with that but I think the university must think about the different levels or how they taught them in the school.

Latifa also believed that students' backgrounds should be taken into account:

Latifa: They should equal between the IELTS score and student...how do you say...skill of the school. That's better.

When asked to elaborate further on this point, Latifa continued:

Latifa: I think they should change the IELTS score for each one...I don't know but, whose come from Arabic schools it's too difficult than the private school.

The remark made by Latifa above is in fact similar to a suggestion forwarded by Templer (2004) in his critique of international English language examinations such as IELTS and TOEFL from the perspective of critical theory and social justice. As an alternative to fixed proficiency benchmarks, Templer (p.210) advocates experimentation with a handicap system, similar to that employed in golf, but which would take into account "socioeconomic status, quality of education system, gender, education of parents and several other factors in a kind of social calculus."

This discrepancy in the prior educational experience of students in terms of the MI at their schools, is however, somewhat oddly, perhaps best illustrated by the case of Yamna. As will be recalled, Yamna attended high school in the USA for 3 years before returning to the UAE, where she enrolled at a private school which followed an American curriculum. Consequently, Yamna has a command of English and a degree of confidence in herself well beyond that of the vast majority, if not all, of her classmates:

Yamna: During high school I had to take SATs and I failed twice, it was very difficult, it is very difficult. And then the third time I did it passed everything and it made my English so much stronger, so when I came here [to the case institution] like my English was so powerful but then looking at the girls their English wasn't that good and I felt like I was on a different level, like I...I wasn't supposed to be here, I was supposed to be in a much stronger university, with strong English, and taking literature or psychology or something...

If Yamna felt as if she should not have been at the case institution – that she was “on a different level”, as it were – one need only imagine what it must have been like for Yamna’s peers to have had her as a classmate, and this may be another cause of at least some of the reluctance on the part of some students to speak English in class documented above.

However, although the overall grade 7.0 obtained by Yamna in the IELTS allowed her to circumvent the English language component of the foundation programme at the case institution, at the time of the interview it was the (written component of the) Arabic language proficiency requirement for entry to faculty studies with which Yamna was struggling and which prevented her from progressing to her degree programme. For this reason, it seems that Yamna could empathise with students on the English foundation programme struggling to meet the English language proficiency requirement of an overall 5.0 in IELTS, as she herself was facing an identical linguistic challenge, though in reverse:

Yamna:           You see I’m kind of going through that but in Arabic. It’s very hard.

#### **5.4 Summary of findings**

To sum up, this investigation into female students’ attitudes towards and experiences of EMI within HE in the UAE has revealed a number of problematic issues and areas of concern. As regards the first research question, it would appear that some students seem to harbour a pronounced fear of both commencing EMI HE and of using English in front of their classmates, that a number of students feel a sense of unease and unnaturalness when being required to use the L2 of English with fellow L1 speakers of Arabic, and that some students believe that English poses a potential threat to the place and standing of Arabic in the UAE. Furthermore, it emerged from this exploration into students’ experiences that a considerable amount of code-switching between English and Arabic would appear to take place on supposed EMI courses, that students are divided on whether they indeed wish to have English as the predominant MI for their tertiary studies, and that, disturbingly, perhaps, some students are of the view that not all teachers necessarily possess the levels of proficiency in English required to deliver EMI courses in an academically sound and pedagogically effective fashion.

Moreover, this study has revealed that some students believe that EMI can thwart learning, and therefore exert deleterious effects on their academic performance. It was also reported that in order to cope with, or perhaps to ‘protest’ against, the linguistic challenges experienced when required to undertake HE in what is for the vast majority only a partially-mastered L2, there is widespread – and academically inappropriate – use of translation aids such as Google Translate among some students. More generally, while it was readily apparent that students overwhelmingly believe English to be an essential ingredient of the global economy, some also simultaneously fear that the pervasive nature of English in the UAE may pose a semi-latent threat to the traditions, cultural values, and religious identity of Emiratis. Finally, it emerged that some students, especially those in the lower levels, are of the view that they can benefit from having Arabic L1 teachers when studying EFL/ESL, which would appear to contradict the de facto employment policy of the case institution, and possibly all federally-sponsored HE within the UAE.

As regards the second research question posed in this study, a major theme to emerge from this study was the strong belief on the part of some students that their secondary school education had failed to prepare them for the challenges of EMI tertiary studies. To account for this failure, students cited the conspicuous mismatch between the language of learning materials at school on the one hand and that actually employed in the classroom on the other, and the switch in the MI between school and university. In addition, some students recounted how they had perceived a fundamental shift in teaching styles between these two different tiers of education, and stated that it was initially very challenging to adjust to the teaching methodologies encountered in the university environment.

Finally, in reference to the third research question, it transpired that there exists considerable academically counterproductive ‘washback’ from the high-stakes IELTS examination, and that there is evidence of both resentment and resistance towards, and scepticism regarding, this particular English language test, as well as the requirement of an overall 5.0 to progress to faculty studies. Indeed, this study has revealed that students are split on whether they believe the universal requirement of an overall 5.0 in IELTS for entry to faculty studies at the case institution is feasible, let alone reasonable. For while one camp maintains that, since students have had radically different amounts of and exposure to English in their respective secondary school careers, the blanket

requirement of an overall 5.0 is patently unfair, others, in contrast, contend that it is the very fact that all students, no matter what their educational background, have to achieve the same grade which makes the requirement a fair and 'levelling' benchmark.

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

By exploring EMI within HE in the UAE through the views and lived experiences of female students currently within the system – the present research being, I believe, the very first such study to do so at the doctoral level – this interpretive, exploratory study has revealed a number of problematic issues which should be of concern to all educators in the UAE, and indeed to anyone who is in any way involved in education in the country. However, as with all studies, there nevertheless exist some arguable shortcomings in the research reported in this thesis. Before examining some of the areas which it is suggested warrant further research, it is perhaps apt to first consider the possible limitations of the current study.

### **6.1 Limitations of study**

There are four broad aspects of the research reported in this thesis which could be subject to criticism. These are the fact that the interviews – the primary data collection method of the study – were conducted in what is an L2 for the students, and that the number of students who completed the questionnaire ( $n = 20$ ) and who were interviewed ( $n = 10$ ) was relatively low. In addition, it could be argued that the data collected from both the interviews and the survey may potentially have been tainted by a curious phenomenon whereby informants opt to simply give researchers the responses they believe are desired, rather than express their genuine thoughts and feelings, and that, furthermore, the presentation of such data has been distorted and misrepresented by a biased selection of voice. These four possible shortcomings of the study are discussed in this order below.

#### **6.1.1 Interviews conducted in an L2**

As noted above, the first criticism which could be levelled at this study is that students were interviewed in the L2 of English, a language in which the vast majority are unable to communicate freely. As noted for example by MacLean et al. (2004), it has previously been reported, and is reasonable to suppose, “that conducting interviews in interviewees’ second languages negatively affects the quality of data.” However, whilst this may be so – and I personally believe it to indeed be the case – that in fact is the whole point. Participants could indeed have expressed themselves

in a more articulate manner in their L1, but if being interviewed in an L2 has such a drastic impact on the ‘quality’ of the interview and the resulting data what then of the effect of undergoing HE in an L2?

### **6.1.2 Small sample population**

The second arguable shortcoming of this study is that of the relatively small number of participants. However, it is important to remember that, as an interpretive study conducted at a single research site, the primary aim of which was to document female students’ experiences of and attitudes towards EMI within HE in the UAE, rather than to necessarily generalise from the findings, the size of the sample population is arguably not the most vital factor in the research. In addition, as discussed in chapter 4, research conducted by Guest et al. (2006) suggests that fewer interviews may be required than is frequently assumed, with their work indicating that the point of data and thematic saturation will tend to be reached after the analysis of between 6 and 12 interview transcripts. That the current study presents the findings from in-depth, face-to-face interviews with 10 students may in fact thus be considered a relative strength of the research, and not necessarily a shortcoming.

As regards the number of students who completed the questionnaire, 20 is indeed a relatively low sample population – or at least it would be if the aim was to survey a large enough pool of respondents so as to be furnished with a pool of data boasting of robust, internal statistical significance. That, however, was not the principal goal of this research instrument. Rather, as noted in chapter 4, the questionnaire was employed in order to ‘set the scene’ for later interviews with a select number of students, to have potential participants reflect on a number of thorny issues – some of which they may never have previously pondered – and, most importantly, to obtain an overall impression of female students’ views as regards the place, role, and standing of English in the UAE, particularly as a MI within federally-sponsored HE. In addition, it could perhaps be argued that having a relatively small number of students respond to the questionnaire – most of whom completed it in front of the researcher, and thus were aware that it was not a ‘mass survey’ in which they were but a faceless statistic – led to a higher than average number of additional comments being made by respondents, thereby potentially adding another layer of qualitative data

to the study. Indeed, one student added optional remarks to 10 of the 21 questions (see appendix E).

### **6.1.3 Polite responses**

Another objection that could be made in reference to this study concerns the possibility that informants may conceivably have not given ‘genuine’ responses to the issues probed in the questionnaire and in interviews. Indeed, the possibility that participants may shy away from giving researchers answers which they feel may be offensive or embarrassing, and instead opt to give polite, innocuous responses, has long been recognised within the field of qualitative research (e.g., Svanes, 1988). This issue is of particular relevance in the UAE since, although it is certainly the case that I believe the students in this study answered questions in both the interviews and the questionnaire totally truthfully, it is also possible that, even with the guarantee of anonymity, participants ‘modified’ their answers so as to avoid causing possible offence. That is, student responses may harbour examples of the “Emirati graciousness” alluded to by no fewer than 14 of the 19 participants in Saudelli’s (2012) study of foreign teachers in the UAE, and which Ashencaen Crabtree (2007) in her study of generational change in the UAE suspects made her informants tone down their condemnation of what they saw as alien values being brought into the country by foreigners.

However, although the possibility that participants may have given polite responses can never be ruled out entirely, it has to be stated that, as is evident from the previous chapter, the students are clearly divided on a number of issues, so who, if anyone, gave a polite response in such cases?

### **6.1.4 The selection of voice**

The image of the researcher simply ‘giving voice’ to participants is, write Braun and Clarke (2006 p.80; citing Fine, 2002), a “naïve realist view of qualitative research.” In fact, the authors assert, participant voice is selected, edited, and deployed to bolster an investigator’s specific argument. Thus, the fifth and final objection that could be made in relation to the findings of the present study is that student voice has been misrepresented through biased selection of interview extracts.

However, whilst the interviews conducted for this study have not, of course, been reproduced in full, and extracts have indeed been ‘selected’ – at least in the sense that they appeared to naturally slot into one or another theme – I do not believe that student voices have been edited or deployed in order to bolster any one particular argument. Indeed, the sheer number of issues reported in this thesis on which the students are clearly divided is, I believe, a strength of this study. Furthermore, a sample transcript (appendix H) affords the reader the opportunity to judge for themselves the extent to which student voice has been selected, edited, and deployed to bolster any argument which has been made in this thesis.

## **6.2 Further research required**

A number of areas related to the topic of EMI in HE in the UAE would appear to warrant further study, particularly through the lens provided by interpretive research. The field would, for instance, be enriched with data originating from students at other federal institutions of HE. What, for example, are the attitudes towards and experiences of EMI of female students at HCT, which has an extensive network of some 17 colleges spread throughout the UAE? Do the views and experiences of students at HCT RAK tally with those in HCT Dubai? If not, along what lines do they appear to differ?

It would also be beneficial for data to be collected from students who are now completing their majors in their respective faculties so as to juxtapose their views and experiences with those of students on foundation programmes. What are the views of such faculty students towards foundation programmes now that they have progressed to their majors? In addition, what are the attitudes towards and experiences of HE of the slim percentage of students who, either as a result of their CEPA score, or as they managed to obtain an overall 5.0 in IELTS or ‘equivalent’ prior to commencing tertiary studies, were able to circumvent a foundation programme and proceed directly to their faculty-based studies?

Additionally, although but a tiny minority of the overall population of HE in the UAE, it would be valuable to acquire data on the experiences of and attitudes towards EMI on the part of male students, especially in light of the recent introduction of compulsory military service for all Emirati

males aged between 18 and 30. What, for example, do male students think of the fact that they only constitute an estimated 10% of the HE population, while the government appears to desire universal, or at least close to universal, HE for women?

### **6.3 A recommendation**

The recommendation which arises from the issues probed in this research is clear – namely, that the UAE implement a paradigmatic shift in its HE language policy by designating Arabic as the primary MI, with EFL/ESL as a subject (Hill, 1978; Rogers, 1982) replacing EMI.

The recommendation that EMI within HE in the UAE be replaced with EFL/ESL and that Arabic be reinstated as the primary MI is of course far from novel. Indeed, an identical course of action is urged by both McLaren (2011) and Sanassian (2011), and is also a possibility forwarded by King (2014). What is new in this thesis, however, is that the recommendation to revert to Arabic as the MI within HE stems from a survey and analysis of the views and experiences of students, the principal stakeholders within tertiary education. Many English teachers on the respective foundation programmes of UAEU, ZU, and HCT would no doubt be opposed to any such move, but the question policy-makers should ask themselves is how much of that opposition and resistance from teachers would be in relation to a concern for the academic welfare of the students, and how much would stem from a fear of losing their own employment?

At a more general level it could be argued that, logistically, any such proposed shift in the primary MI would be impractical and prohibitively expensive, entailing as it would sweeping changes in staff and faculty, as well as in both teaching and assessment materials. However, it is often overlooked that the flagship university, UAEU, was itself originally an Arabic-medium institution (Burden-Leahy, 2009), and thus this establishment at least would not so much need to ‘switch’ to Arabic as more *revert* to mother tongue instruction, which is arguably an inalienable linguistic human right (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). Furthermore, there is a recent model of this very process available for use as a guide to help streamline such a transformation. Qatar University, for instance, has recently “mandated that the majority of courses in many faculties where English has been the medium of instruction would be terminated and replaced by courses taught in Arabic” (Abou-El-

Kheir, 2017, p.119). Moreover, though such a move would undoubtedly be a costly financial undertaking, even with the benefit of a regional model on which to draw, the societal price ultimately paid by the UAE for not implementing such a shift might be vastly greater.

#### **6.4 The potential consequences of maintaining EMI within HE in the UAE**

Dalton-Puffer (2011) argues that although there exists a fear that use of an L2 for non-language-related content teaching will serve to hamper mastery of academic subject matter on the part of students, this concern is difficult to test empirically since few countries employ standardised examinations for subjects within the hard and social sciences. Thus, writes Dalton-Puffer (p.188), “ready-made constructs of subject-specific competence in a particular area are hard to come by, making quantitative surveys and cross-country comparisons more problematic than those regarding language attainment.”

Whilst Dalton-Puffer may be correct that it is impractical to attempt to ascertain whether L2MI helps or hinders the mastery of academic content through cross-country comparisons, in-country temporal comparisons are nevertheless possible, and in fact the recent history of education in one country, Malaysia, offers a particularly poignant – and, for the UAE, foreboding – example of just such a temporal comparison. Referring to the TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) report of 2007, for example, Ahmad, Jaaman, Majid, and Rambely (2013) recount how student achievement in mathematics plummeted in Malaysia from 10<sup>th</sup> place in 2003 to 20<sup>th</sup> place four years later in 2007. Perhaps not wholly coincidentally, as stated by Ahmad et al. (ibid.), the PPSMI initiative, viz., the change of the MI for science and mathematics from the national language of Malay (*Bahasa Melayu*) to the L2 of English, was implemented in Malaysian schools in 2003. In addition, with relevance to the discussion in chapter 3 of the ‘incidental’ language learning which is often assumed to take place as a result of L2MI, Suradi et al. (2012) note that, as there was also no discernible improvement in the English language skills displayed by Malaysian students as a result of the PPSMI policy, the scheme was eventually abolished in 2012.

## 6.5 Final words

As noted in the introduction, this exploratory study builds upon a growing body of doctoral-level work which, from a wide range of perspectives, examines the policy of EMI within HE in the UAE (e.g., Hatherley-Greene, 2012a; Karmani, 2010; King, 2014; McLaren, 2011; Mouhanna, 2016; Rogier, 2012). Through the lens provided by rich, qualitative data and the interpretive paradigm, I believe this thesis has contributed an important and revealing new dimension to this literature, namely, that of student voice. In a sense, however, although constituting an original contribution to the extant literature, the findings of the current study merely reinforce reports on the effects of EMI such as those from Malaysia above, and more generally, those which point to the greater efficacy – and ethicality – of mother tongue instruction over that of L2MI (e.g., Brock-Utne, 2007a, 2007b; Gfeller & Robinson, 1998; Probyn, 2001, 2009; Williams, 1996).

As to the future and how the current thesis itself could be built upon, it has been argued that, in this post-modern age, demonstrating the potential that the results of a study have for extrapolation to a wider population may not be the responsibility of the researcher, but might in fact reside with the reader (Sanger, 1996; cited in Probyn, 2001). It is my hope that the voices of the students – the awe-inspiring young ladies of this study – are able to find just such a responsive audience among fellow teacher-researchers, and that they may be moved to reflect on, and indeed further pursue, the many issues raised in this thesis.

## Appendix A: Ethical research approval



### GRADUATE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

St Luke's Campus  
Heavitree Road  
Exeter UK EX1 2LU

<http://socialsciences.exeter.ac.uk/education/>

### CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: 'English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates: Problems and Paradoxes, Incongruences and Inequities'

Researcher(s) name: Anthony Solloway

Supervisor(s): Dr Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh; Prof. Vivienne Marie Baumfield

This project has been approved for the period

From: 10<sup>th</sup> May 2016

To: 31<sup>st</sup> May 2017

Ethics Committee approval reference: D/15/16/40

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Durrant', with a small star-like mark at the end.

Signature:  
(Dr Philip Durrant, Chair, Graduate School of Education Ethics Committee)

Date: 8<sup>th</sup> April 2016



## كلية التربية للدراسات العليا

### استمارة موافقة

لقد اطلعت على أهداف و دواعي هذا المشروع أنا واعية بما يلي:

#### **English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates: Problems and Paradoxes, Incongruences and Inequities**

- أنني غير ملزمة بالمشاركة في المشروع، وإذا اخترت ذلك فإنني أستطيع سحب مشاركتي في أي مرحلة من مراحل المشروع.
- لدي الحق بعدم السماح بنشر أي بيانات تخصني.
- أي معلومة أدلي بها تستخدم فقط لغرض مشروع البحث والذي يشمل إمكانية النشر.
- يستطيع باحثون آخرون مشاركون في هذا المشروع الإطلاع على أي معلومات أدلي بها على أن يتم الاحتفاظ بسرية المصدر.
- كل المعلومات التي أدلي بها تبقى سرية.
- سيبذل الباحث/الباحثون جهودهم للحفاظ على سرية مصدر المعلومات.

اسم المشاركة:.....  
توقيع المشاركة:.....  
التاريخ:.....

\* تحتفظ المشاركة بنسخة من هذه الإستمارة ويحتفظ الباحث بنسخة أخرى.

للتواصل مع الباحث:

إن كانت لديك أية استفسارات بشأن المشروع أرجو مناقشتها مع:

Dr Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh:

E.Abdollahzadeh@exeter.ac.uk

شارلي مكارثي (منسق قسم الطالبات)

قانون حماية البيانات: إن جامعة إكستر هي مجهزة للبيانات ومسجلة مع مكتب وكالة حماية البيانات كما هو مطلوب القيام به بموجب قانون حماية البيانات لعام 1998. إن المعلومات التي تقدمها تستخدم لأغراض البحث وتعالج وفقا لتسجيل الجامعة وقانون حماية البيانات الحالي. وستكون المعلومات سرية للباحث/الباحثين، ولا يتم الكشف عنها لأطراف ثالثة غير مصرح لها من غير موافقة المشارك. وستكون التقارير التي تستند على البيانات في شكل مجهول المصدر.

**CONSENT FORM**

I have been fully informed about the **aims** and **purposes** of the project:

*English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates: Problems and Paradoxes, Incongruences and Inequities*

**I understand that:**

there is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me

any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications

If applicable, the information, which I give, may be shared between any of the other researcher(s) participating in this project in an anonymised form

all information I give will be treated as confidential

the researcher(s) will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....  
(Signature of participant)

.....  
(Date)

.....  
(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher(s)

Contact email of researcher: [REDACTED]

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

**Dr Esmaeel Abdollahzadeh: [E.Abdollahzadeh@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:E.Abdollahzadeh@exeter.ac.uk)**

or

**[REDACTED] (English programme coordinator): [REDACTED]**

Data Protection Act: The University of Exeter is a data collector and is registered with the Office of the Data Protection Commissioner as required to do under the Data Protection Act 1998. The information you provide will be used for research purposes and will be processed in accordance with the University's registration and current data protection legislation. Data will be confidential to the researcher(s) and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties without further agreement by the participant. Reports based on the data will be in anonymised form.

## **Appendix C: Information sheet**

### **English Medium Instruction in Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates: Problems and Paradoxes, Incongruences and Inequities**

#### **Introduction**

My name is Anthony Solloway. I am a language instructor here at [REDACTED] and I would like to invite you to participate in this project, which is concerned with how female Emirati students perceive English medium instruction at university. I am also interested in how you feel about studying in and via English, your experiences of English medium instruction, and how you cope with studying in a foreign language.

#### **Why am I doing the project?**

This project is part of my doctoral degree at the University of Exeter. It is hoped that the project will provide useful information for both educators and policymakers in the United Arab Emirates, and thus, hopefully, improve the educational experience of future students.

#### **What will you have to do if you agree to take part?**

If you may be interested in taking part, you can email me at: [REDACTED]

1. We will arrange a time to meet which is convenient for you, either in my office or in the student food court.
2. There will be a bilingual (English/Arabic) survey, and a single interview with myself during which I will ask you questions about your feelings towards and experiences of English medium instruction in higher education. This interview is expected to last no longer than one hour and is a one-off event.
3. When I have completed the study, I will produce a summary of the findings which I will be more than happy to send to you if you are interested.

#### **How much of your time will participation involve?**

A survey which may take between 10 and 20 minutes to complete, and one interview lasting no more than one hour.

#### **Will your participation in the project remain confidential?**

If you agree to take part in this study, your name will not be recorded on the questionnaire or interview transcript, and no personal information will be disclosed to any other parties. Your responses to the questions in both the survey and the interview will be used for the purpose of this project only. You can be assured that if you take part in the project you will remain totally anonymous.

#### **What are the advantages of taking part?**

A pilot study I completed two years ago at [REDACTED] tells me that many students find such projects interesting and enjoy answering questions and talking about their feelings towards, and experiences of, studying at university in English. Once the study is finished, it could provide information about female Emirati students' perceptions and experiences of English-medium instruction in higher education and this may enhance the educational experience of future students, perhaps even your future children.

**Are there any disadvantages of taking part?**

You may not be comfortable talking about your views and experiences of studying in English at university.

**Do you have to take part in the study?**

No, your participation in this project is **entirely voluntary**. You are in no way obliged to take part. You have been approached as a student of higher education with a view that you might be interested in taking part, but this does not mean you have to. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to give a reason and you will not be contacted again. Similarly, if you do agree to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time during the project if you change your mind without notice and without having to give a reason.

**What happens now?**

If you are interested in taking part in this study, you are asked to email me ([REDACTED]). Once I have received the email from you I will contact you so we can arrange to meet at a time that is convenient for you. We can then meet and I can give you the survey. After that we can arrange a mutually convenient time to hold the short interview.

If you decide you would rather not participate in this study you do not need to email me. Simply ignore this letter and no further contact will be made.

Regards,

Anthony Solloway, BA (Hons), MA, CELTA, EdD TESOL (candidate)

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Appendix D: Questionnaire

General information	معلومات عامة
1. Nationality: _____	1- (الجنسية) _____
2. Age (years): _____	2- (العمر) _____
3. Major (subject): _____	3- (التخصص) _____
4. Home emirate: _____	4- (الإمارة) _____

*Please read the 21 statements below and indicate whether you **strongly agree** (SA), **agree** (A), **have no opinion** (NO), **disagree** (D), or **strongly disagree** (SD). If you wish to make any comments please do so below each statement.*

**1. The UAE needs English to become a leading nation in the world.**  
**SA A NO D SD**  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**2. English is vital for international business, trade, and commerce.**  
**SA A NO D SD**  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. Learning about the culture of English-speaking countries (England, America, Canada, Australia, etc.) is important when studying the English language.**  
**SA A NO D SD**  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. One or both of my parents can speak English very well.**  
**SA A NO D SD**  
 Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

الرجاء قراءة الأسئلة التالية واختيار موافق بشدة أو موافق أو ليس لديك رأي أو لا موافق أو لا موافق بشدة. وإذا أردت أن تعلق على إحدى هذه الأسئلة، فالرجاء كتابتها في المكان المخصص بعد كل سؤال.

1- تحتاج دولة الإمارات إلى اللغة الإنجليزية لتكون أمة رائدة.

أوافق بشدة      لا موافق  
 لا رأي لدي      لا موافق  
 لا موافق بشدة

التعليق: \_\_\_\_\_

2- اللغة الإنجليزية ضرورية للأعمال التجارية الدولية .

أوافق بشدة      لا موافق  
 لا رأي لدي      لا موافق  
 لا موافق بشدة

التعليق: \_\_\_\_\_

3- عند دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية، فإنه من المهم جداً دراسة ثقافة الدول الإنجليزية مثل (بريطانيا، أمريكا، كندا، أستراليا، الخ).

أوافق بشدة      لا موافق  
 لا رأي لدي      لا موافق  
 لا موافق بشدة

التعليق: \_\_\_\_\_

4- يتحدث أحد أو كلا والدي اللغة الإنجليزية جيداً.

أوافق بشدة      لا موافق  
 لا رأي لدي      لا موافق  
 لا موافق بشدة

التعليق: \_\_\_\_\_

5. In the future I want my children to be able to speak English.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

6. I speak in English with a domestic helper (housemaid, cook, etc.).

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

7. I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in English.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

8. I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in Arabic.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

9. I should be able to choose whether I study in English or Arabic.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

10. Using Arabic in English lessons can help me learn English.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

11. Foreigners in the UAE should learn Arabic.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

5- أريد لأبنائي في المستقبل أن يتحدثوا اللغة الإنجليزية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

6- أتحدث باللغة الإنجليزية مع العمالة الأجنبية مثل (الخادمة، الطباخ، الخ).

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

7- أفضل أن تُدرّس المواد التالية (رياضيات، علوم، الخ) باللغة الإنجليزية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

8- أفضل أن تُدرّس المواد التالية (رياضيات، علوم، الخ) باللغة العربية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

9- أفضل ان أكون مختيراً بين الدراسة باللغة العربية أو اللغة الإنجليزية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

10- إن استخدام اللغة العربية في محاضرات اللغة الإنجليزية يسهل علي تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

11- يجب أن يتعلم الأجانب المقيمون في الدولة اللغة العربية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

12. I am happy when foreigners learn Arabic.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

13. Learning English makes students more Westernised.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

14. The English language is a threat to UAE culture and traditions.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

15. The English language is a threat to Islamic values and customs.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

16. Muslim students should only have Muslim teachers.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

17. Muslims have a duty to learn foreign languages.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

18. All Muslims in the world (from Indonesia, etc.) should learn Arabic.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

12- أشعر بالسعادة عندما يتعلم الأجانب اللغة العربية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

13- دراسة اللغة الإنجليزية تجعل الطلبة "غربيي الثقافة والمظهر".

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

14- إن اللغة الإنجليزية تهدد للعادات والثقافة الإماراتية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

15- إن اللغة الإنجليزية تهدد للقيم والتقاليد الإسلامية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

16- الطلبة المسلمون يجب أن يدرسوا على أيدي أساتذة المسلمين فقط.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

17- لدى المسلمين واجب لتعلم اللغات الأجنبية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

18- يجب أن يتعلم كل المسلمين في العالم (إندونيسيا، الخ) اللغة العربية.

أوافق بشدة  
لا رأي لدي  
لا أوافق بشدة  
التعليق:

19. We should keep Arabic free of English words (e.g., 'check', 'recharge', 'class', 'break', etc.).

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

20. It annoys me when I hear Emiratis speak English together.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

21. I like how some UAE leaders tweet in both Arabic and English.

SA A NO D SD

Comments:

19- يجب أن تخلو اللغة العربية من الكلمات الإنجليزية مثل (شيك، شارح، كلاس، بريك، الخ).

أوافق بشدة أوافق

لا رأي لدي لا أوافق

لا أوافق بشدة

التعليق:

20- يزعجني أن أسمع الإماراتيين يحدثون باللغة الإنجليزية فيما بينهم.

أوافق بشدة أوافق

لا رأي لدي لا أوافق

لا أوافق بشدة

التعليق:

21- أحب أن أرى بعض قادة الإمارات يكتبون تغريدات باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية.

أوافق بشدة أوافق

لا رأي لدي لا أوافق

لا أوافق بشدة

التعليق:

Thank you for your time!

شكراً لوقتكم!

**Appendix E: Example of additional comments on questionnaire**

<p>5. In the future I want my children to be able to speak English.</p> <p>SA <input checked="" type="radio"/> A NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>Because the English language is the most popular in the world and they use it in every side in the world</u></p>	<p>5- أريد لأبنائي في المستقبل أن يتحدثوا اللغة الإنجليزية.</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>
<p>6. I speak in English with a domestic helper (housemaid, cook, etc.).</p> <p>SA <input checked="" type="radio"/> A NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>I like to use my English language because it helps me to improve my skills</u></p>	<p>6- أتحدث باللغة الإنجليزية مع العمالة الأجنبية مثل (الطباخ، الخ).</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>
<p>7. I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in English.</p> <p>SA A <input checked="" type="radio"/> NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>I agree if the students are very well in English. I am not agree if their English is medium because it makes the subjects more difficult and hard to learn</u></p>	<p>7- أفضل أن تُدرّس المواد التالية (رياضيات، علوم، الخ) باللغة الإنجليزية.</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>
<p>8. I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in Arabic.</p> <p>SA A <input checked="" type="radio"/> NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>It makes the subjects more difficult and hard to learn</u></p>	<p>8- أفضل أن تُدرّس المواد التالية (رياضيات، علوم، الخ) باللغة العربية.</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>
<p>9. I should be able to choose whether I study in English or Arabic.</p> <p>SA <input checked="" type="radio"/> A NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>Because some of student are good in English so they can continue in English but some are not.</u></p>	<p>9- أفضل ان أكون مخيراً بين الدراسة باللغة العربية أو اللغة الإنجليزية.</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>
<p>10. Using Arabic in English lessons can help me learn English.</p> <p>SA <input checked="" type="radio"/> A NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>It helps the Arabian students a lot.</u></p>	<p>10- إن استخدام اللغة العربية في محاضرات اللغة الإنجليزية يسهل علي تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>
<p>11. Foreigners in the UAE should learn Arabic. SA A <input checked="" type="radio"/> NO D SD</p> <p>Comments: <u>Arabic language will help them to understand and communicate easily.</u></p>	<p>11- يجب أن يتعلم الأجانب المقيمون في الدولة اللغة العربية.</p> <p>أوافق بشدة لا رأي لدي لا أوافق بشدة</p> <p>التعليق:</p>

**Appendix F: Questionnaire & students' responses (raw scores)**

Item	SA	A	N	D	SD	B
1. <i>The UAE needs English to become a leading nation in the world.</i>	7	11	...	1	1	...
2. <i>English is vital for international business, trade, and commerce.</i>	12	8	...	...	...	...
3. <i>Learning about the culture of English-speaking countries (England, America, Canada, Australia, etc.) is important when studying the English language.</i>	2	7	3	7	1	...
4. <i>One or both of my parents can speak English very well.</i>	2	9	2	4	3	...
5. <i>In the future I want my children to be able to speak English.</i>	13	6	...	...	1	...
6. <i>I speak in English with a domestic helper (housemaid, cook, etc.).</i>	2	12	...	4	2	...
7. <i>I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in English.</i>	4	6	1	5	4	...
8. <i>I prefer to be taught all subjects (maths, science, etc.) in Arabic.</i>	7	7	1	4	1	...
9. <i>I should be able to choose whether I study in English or Arabic.</i>	12	5	1	2	...	...
10. <i>Using Arabic in English lessons can help me learn English.</i>	8	7	1	4	...	...
11. <i>Foreigners in the UAE should learn Arabic.</i>	6	8	1	5	...	...
12. <i>I am happy when foreigners learn Arabic.</i>	9	8	1	1	...	1
13. <i>Learning English makes students more Westernised.</i>	4	2	4	5	3	2
14. <i>The English language is a threat to UAE culture and traditions.</i>	3	2	3	5	6	1
15. <i>The English language is a threat to Islamic values and customs.</i>	3	2	1	6	6	2
16. <i>Muslim students should only have Muslim teachers.</i>	1	1	2	9	6	1
17. <i>Muslims have a duty to learn foreign languages.</i>	3	2	10	1	2	2
18. <i>All Muslims in the world (from Indonesia, etc.) should learn Arabic.</i>	4	5	5	3	1	2
19. <i>We should keep Arabic free of English words (e.g., 'check', 'recharge', 'class', 'break', etc.).</i>	2	4	3	9	1	1
20. <i>It annoys me when I hear Emiratis speak English together.</i>	3	4	2	6	4	1
21. <i>I like how some UAE leaders tweet in both Arabic and English.</i>	11	6	1	...	1	1

SA = strongly agree, A = agree, NO = no opinion, D = disagree, SD = strongly disagree, B = field left blank

## **Appendix G: Interview protocol**

1. Which emirate are you from?
2. Where did you go to school?
3. What language were most of your lessons taught in at school?
4. How much English instruction did you receive? Were any lessons, for example, geography, maths, or science, taught in English?
5. How did you feel when you first began your university studies? What did you think about most lessons being taught in English? How did you adjust? Was it easy/difficult?
6. To what extent do you think your studies at secondary school helped you prepare for EMI at university?
7. What are some of your experiences of EMI at university?
8. Why do you think university studies in the UAE are mainly in English? Can you think of any advantages and disadvantages with EMI in HE?
9. Do you think EMI affects learning at all? Do you think students have to change the way they study? How is studying at university different from studying at school?
10. How do you or any of your friends/classmates feel about speaking up in English in class? Do you think EMI affects how much students participate in lessons?
11. Would you ever talk with another Emirati in English? What does it feel like to speak English with someone else who you know speaks Arabic?
12. Are all your teachers from English-speaking countries, such as England, America, Australia, etc.? Do any of your teachers seem to have any problems teaching in English? If so, does this affect your learning at all?
13. Different schools have different amounts of English. What then do you think about students who attended schools which had very little English having to meet the same English language proficiency requirements as students who went to schools with more English?
14. Do you think university is the same for all students, no matter which emirate they come from?
15. What is it like to study subjects such as mathematics in English?
16. What would you say to a secondary school student who wanted to attend university? What advice would you give them?

## Appendix H: Sample transcript (Asma & Aisha)

- Researcher: So when you first came to university...See, you went to secondary school where most or everything was in Arabic, and you came to [the case institution] where most or everything is in English, right? The teachers speak English, the signs are English, all your lessons are in English, how did you feel when you first came here, Aisha?
- Aisha: I felt worried. It is good for us, but it has some learning difficulties. But I must learn it.
- Researcher: Okay, it is a big change, right? To go from an Arabic school to an English university. What about you, Asma, what do you think?
- Asma: I think it is good because actually the first teacher I meet, Dr Ali, so he is from Egypt, so it is easy to connect with him, and he give us the easy language we can learn it.
- Researcher: That's interesting, so he was teaching English?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay, but his first language is Arabic?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: And that could help you?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: That's interesting.
- Asma: Because he used the easy and good word, it's from English.
- Aisha: Also, something I want to mention, we, when we come to, came to university, we was, we were in level I, so it was easy to learn.
- Researcher: Okay. So you came in right at [foundation programme] level I?
- Aisha: Yeah.
- Researcher: Was it easy or difficult to adjust? Asma, you're saying it helped to have a teacher who could speak Arabic *and* English.
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: And are you saying going in at level I made it easier, or more difficult? [Asma nods] It made it easier?
- Aisha: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay.
- Aisha: I'm like her.
- Researcher: Okay, great. How do you think – or do you think – your secondary school helped you prepare for university? Because it's a big jump, right? High school, Arabic, all girls, with Arabic teachers – Emirati teachers, then you come to university, it's all English, with foreign teachers, and you told me all your teachers at high school are female, right?
- Aisha: Yeah.
- Researcher: And you come to [the case institution] and most the teachers are male, so you have lots of new experiences, right? So, do you think your high school helped you prepare for university?
- Asma: Well, my English teacher is, she's from America, so that's easy to talk with someone in English and I think that's help me, but for studies, no.
- Researcher: Okay, so your teacher, your English teacher at school, was from America?
- Aisha: Yeah.
- Researcher: Did you have the same, Aisha?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: And that helped you prepare for *English* at university?

Asma: Not to prepare for English, they help us to ... to connect with other people they didn't understand Arabic.

Researcher: Okay, that's interesting. You said it helped with English but not with other things, for example, were there any big shocks coming to university, any big differences?

Asma: No, the studies in school didn't help me ... for university.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Asma: The materials, we study in school, it didn't tell you or didn't help you about English.

Researcher: Do you think it's true that at school the teachers *tell you* what you have to learn, but here at university, some of the teachers, they don't make it so clear, they expect you to sort of find out for yourself what you need to learn. Do you think that might be true?

Asma: Yeah

Aisha: I think both of them are good.

Researcher: Okay....

Aisha: Because I think the teacher must let the student search about the information and the knowledge. Also, we must give them a lot of – what is it?

Asma: Information

Aisha: Yes, information about the materials. About my high school, actually it helped me but not too much because the teacher there they not have they were not having, I can't say it...

Asma: Experience?

Aisha: No.

Researcher: Sufficient experience to teach you?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: They did not have sufficient experience to teach you? Okay, you're talking about other lessons, not English, now?

Aisha: No, English, because they don't have any degree, but their mother language is English so they find a job.

Researcher: Okay, so they could help with the language, but maybe not with the study of English.

Aisha/Asma: [In unison] Yeah.

Researcher: Do you have any experiences of English medium instruction at university, any good experiences or any bad experiences?

Aisha: I had. It was mathematics. It was very terrible and difficult for me because, well, when I was in the school I learn maths in Arabic but now ... all in English, yeah, but, you know, it was difficult for me to learn the vocabulary and the, you know, the question, how does it work. It was difficult for me.

Researcher: So, was it the *mathematics* that was difficult, or learning the mathematics *in English* that made it difficult for you, or both?

Aisha: No, I was good in maths in school in Arabic, but in English it was terrible for me.

Researcher: Okay. That's a very interesting insight.

Aisha: And I fail in this course.

Researcher: Oh, sorry. How many hours a week did you have at school of mathematics?

Aisha: Every day.

Researcher: So why do you think universities in the UAE are mainly in English? Mathematics, we used to have IT in English. Why do you think all these courses are in English, and can you think of any advantages and disadvantages of having these lessons in English in higher education in the UAE?

Asma: I think that the English is the language for future, so we can work in this language more than Arabic, and I think the disadvantage for that is it is not easy to learn, because I have my mother language, it's better than other language.

Researcher: Okay, what do you think, Aisha?

Aisha: I think, study this materials in English it's better for all of university, because a lot of student they are not Arabic, so it is easy to understand this material. Also some teacher here maybe from Arab, they from Arabic country but they speak different accent or like that. A lot of student they didn't understand them. So, if they speak English all of the student can understand them.

Researcher: Okay, you mean, if the teacher is from for example Tunisia or Algeria, very different Arabic?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: True. Okay, good point.

Aisha: Also, the disadvantage for this, I think the university pay a lot of, pays a lot of money for teacher who teach this materials. Also, student takes a lot of time to pass this, or to learn this, in English.

Researcher: Okay, so you've identified some advantages and disadvantages, okay. So Asma, I think you're saying that English is like the language of the future, like the main language of business and...

Asma: Yeah

Researcher: ...science and economics.

Aisha: Also, it unite...all of the world.

Researcher: It's international, it's an international language. However, on the other hand it does take a lot more work for the students to study in that language. Is that fair to say? So, on the one hand it's a very important international language...

Aisha/Asma: [In unison] Yeah.

Researcher: So what about the way you learn? Do you think the way you learn in the classroom is affected by having your lessons in English rather than Arabic, or do you think you learn the same way? Or do you think you have to change the way you learn when you come to university from secondary school?

Asma: I think it changed my way of study.

Researcher: Oh, really? How?

Asma: I don't know but, I tried to found the good way to study in English, but in Arabic I have one way and I always do it and I tried to do that in English – I love to write, when I study I love to write – so I...

Researcher: You mean making notes?

Asma: Yeah, so I do that in Arabic, and in English till now I don't take something that is seriously, but I tried to do the same way when I do it in Arabic, but it's difficult. It's more difficult. Because I have some words that I don't understand and I should to translate and other things.

Researcher: So you have identified this problem, how do you work around it? Do you sometimes make notes in Arabic or use a dictionary or look for translations, or do you not make notes? How do you deal with this difference?

Asma: I try to understand, I try to understand it, organise it in Arabic in my mind and after that try to study it again and put it in notes. I think that is what happens.

Researcher: And this is different from how you studied at secondary school?

Asma: Yeah.

Aisha: I think the best way to study at university is to be more responsible, not like in school because in school the teacher always repeat the information.

Researcher: And tells you what you have to learn and how you have to learn it, yeah?

Aisha: But now a lot of them don't do that.

Researcher: Do you or do any of your classmates or friends feel scared about speaking up in English in class?

Asma: Yeah, I think some of the people they didn't speak in class because they are shy.

Researcher: Would you ever talk with another Emirati in English, or would it feel strange speaking English with someone else who you know speaks Arabic?

Aisha: I hate this thing. Because I think if you want to practice your language it is okay, but only to say, to see the people, 'I have another language' it's bad for me. I hate those people. Really!

Researcher: My first degree was in German...

Aisha: Yeah...

Researcher: And when I was asked to speak German with another English student I felt very uncomfortable – it did not feel natural.

Asma: Yeah!

Researcher: It just felt strange.

Asma: Yeah.

Researcher: And it felt like I was pretending.

Researcher: What about you, Asma, would you feel uncomfortable or unnatural?

Asma: Yeah.

Researcher: However, what about if it is your little baby brother or sister, and you want to help them with their homework?

Aisha: Sometimes I talk with them in English to help (?) them think about meaning.

Researcher: You told me that your first teacher was from Egypt – his mother tongue, his L1 was Arabic – and that might have helped you with English, so, however, when you study maths and IT I don't think all of your teachers are from Britain, or Australia, or America, right? Some will be from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, you know, Algeria, Tunisia. Can all of them speak very good English, or not, or is this ever a problem or does it not matter, it is a problem for you?

Aisha: I have, I had, one teacher he was from, he is from Morocco. When he spoke English his language it was very bad. You know, *yanni*, the accent it's, he mixed it between the accent of Morocco and English, and I hate that.

Researcher: Do you think that affected your learning at all? Did that have an impact on your learning? Did that make it more difficult to learn that subject?

Aisha: Yeah, it was.

Asma: The last year I had an Australian teacher, she teach me English, I don't like the accent. I cannot understand what she say and sometimes when I write what she say I delete the 'r' because she eat it! And I try all my best but she, it's really, something is difficult. I tried to found like American and British they are different from Australia.

Researcher: Different students go to different schools in different emirates, and they have different amounts of English, and some students have Arabic teachers teaching English from the Emirates, or from Algeria, or Tunisia; some students have teachers from England or Australia. Some people have English every day for two hours, some only have it once a week for one hour. And they all come to the university and everyone has to get IELTS 5 to go to faculty and start their degree programme. Do you think that's fair, or not? What do you think, Asma?

Asma: Yeah, I feel that's fair because the IELTS will, if everyone take IELTS it will be the same level so that will help them to be the same level to understand the subject.

Aisha: I agree with that but I think the university must think about the different levels or how they taught them in the school.

Researcher: Do you think university is the same for all students, no matter which emirate they come from?

Aisha: I think the student must look and search about....the chance the university give it for us. It doesn't matter if you are poor or very rich.

Researcher: So you think the university gives everyone the same opportunities, the same chance?

Aisha: Yeah. Also, it's free, university.

Researcher: Is it difficult to study subjects such as mathematics in English? Do you think if you had for example mathematics in Arabic you could study it faster, or do you think you could study more and go deeper, or do you think it would be the same?

Aisha: No, it's not the same, because, I think the mathematics it has a lot of vocab, hard vocabulary. And I know all of this vocab when I am maybe, maybe when I am in Grade 3.

Researcher: In Arabic. You knew the terminology, the mathematics vocabulary.

Aisha: Yeah, yeah, all of them. So, it was easy for me to learn it in Arabic, but in English...Also, I will understand more fast.

Researcher: If you could choose English or Arabic for mathematics which one would you choose?

Aisha: Of course I would choose Arabic.

Asma: Arabic.

Aisha: You know, if I will go to business, I will choose it in English, but if it doesn't work with me I don't want it, you know, in English, so I will forget it if after I study it in English, and that's what's happened.

Appendix I: Themes

RQ1: Theme	Illustrative example of theme extracted from interview or survey result
<p><b>1. Fear</b></p> <p>1.i) Fear of commencing studies at an EMI university after having attended an Arabic medium school</p> <p>1.ii) Fear of using English before one’s peers</p>	<p><b>Bahkita:</b> At first I was afraid of the study in the English language because we are in public schools we used most of the materials in Arabic and sometimes not much English in science articles and use it to communicate in English. And I was thinking that language lessons will be difficult to understand what the Dr say. In fact it was easy because the teacher in the university use the simplest word...words....and method to f...tate...  <b>Researcher:</b> To...facilitate?  <b>Bahkita:</b> Yeah, the understanding of the student and not to confuse the student.</p> <p><b>Researcher:</b> Are there any girls who might be talkative in Arabic but very quiet in English?  <b>Zainab:</b> Because maybe she shy or because she will, “I will do mistake and then they will laughing”, you know? That’s a very important point.  <b>Researcher:</b> Do you think that is a common problem? Do you think lots of girls might be shy or scared of making a mistake?  <b>Zainab:</b> Yeah, yeah. That’s it.</p>
<p><b>2. Unnaturalness of using an L2 with speakers of the same L1</b></p>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> To be honest, I know many girls here they became...they are senior here, so they talk to me in English, so this why I use this thing, you know? It’s like practicing with someone...it’s like conversation practice in English so I just keep talking with them, but, to be honest, it was strange to me, because she’s an Emirati or, okay, another girl maybe from Saudi Arabia, not Saudi Arabia, from Sudan, Egypt, and Syria, you know some of them just, you know they talk to me but isn’t much like her, she’s an Emirati girl and she speak to me in English! What is that? I said to myself, that’s very strange, she’s Emirati and I’m Emirati why she didn’t speak with me in Arabic? [...] So, it is strange to see Emirati people talk to you in English, you know, it is <i>Emirati to Emirati</i>, not Emirati to Westerners...</p>
<p><b>3. English versus Arabic</b></p>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> As we know, English it’s international language, we have to learn it, but on other hand we have to not forget the Arabic because it’s my...it’s...it’s our language, it’s tongue, mother tongue.</p>
<p><b>4. Non-enactment of EMI: Code-switching</b></p>	<p><b>Yamna:</b> So far I have this math professor that speaks in Arabic and English at the same time. And also with my other professor he does the exact same thing.  <b>Researcher:</b> Code-switching?  <b>Yamna:</b> Yeah, they change. Like, they’d say something in Arabic and then change it to English and then something in Arabic. It was, it was, it’s complicated!</p>
<p><b>5. Student MI preferences</b></p>	<p><b>Researcher:</b> If you could choose English or Arabic for mathematics which one would you choose?</p>

	<p><b>Aisha:</b> Of course I would choose Arabic.  <b>Asma:</b> Arabic.</p>
<b>6. Teacher competence in English</b>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> I had problem in mathematics because I choose – the first time I choose the...a Greece teacher called Markus, so he’s teach me – taught me mathematics in English so it was difficult to me to understand what he talking about.</p>
<b>7. Adverse impact of EMI on academic performance</b>	<p><b>Researcher:</b> If mathematics was in Arabic do you think the students would achieve more?  <b>Salama:</b> Yeah.  <b>Yamna:</b> Yes, if they were in an Arabic school and they come here and take math in Arabic I think they’d ace it. And same thing with English. If you were in an English school and come here and take math in English obviously...</p>
<b>8. Coping strategies</b>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> Then if I have some word I didn’t understand I will translate only <i>the word</i>, not the whole note. Because there is many students in faculty they translate the whole <i>lessons</i>, not only the note, so...and they use the Google translation [sighs]. So bad. So it is so bad.</p>
<b>9. English for the future of the UAE</b>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> English, it’s the general...general language around the world.  <b>Researcher:</b> Sort of like an international language, a global language?  <b>Maryam:</b> Yeah, so we have to learn English if we want to connect with others.  <b>Researcher:</b> For business, and travel, and study?  <b>Maryam:</b> Yeah, as a country we have a lot of business with other country so...they need the student, students who know to speak English, if they want to get job, so they try to find those student and give them job and let them connect with others.</p>
<b>10. English as a threat to the cultural and religious identity of the UAE</b>	<p>(Q13 in the questionnaire) “Learning English makes students more Westernised”:  SA: 4, A: 2, N: 4, D: 5, SD: 3, B: 2</p> <p>(Q14 in the questionnaire) “The English language is a threat to UAE culture and traditions”:  SA: 3, A: 2, N: 3, D: 5, SD: 6, B: 1</p> <p>(Q15 in the questionnaire) “The English language is a threat to Islamic values and customs”:  SA: 3, A: 2, N: 1, D: 6, SD: 6, B: 2</p>
<b>11. Benefits to students of Arabic L1 teachers</b>	
11.i) Knowledge of students’ L1	<p><b>Asma:</b> I think it is good because actually the first teacher I meet, Dr Ali, so he is from Egypt, so it is easy to connect with him, and he give us the easy language we can learn it.  <b>Researcher:</b> That’s interesting, so he was teaching English?  <b>Asma:</b> Yeah.  <b>Researcher:</b> Okay, but his first language is Arabic?</p>

<p>11.ii) Advantageous for lower levels</p>	<p><b>Asma:</b> Yeah.  <b>Researcher:</b> And that could help you?  <b>Asma:</b> Yeah.</p> <p><b>Aisha:</b> Also, something I want to mention, we, when we come to, came to university, we was, we were in level I, so it was easy to learn.  <b>Researcher:</b> Okay. So you came in right at [foundation programme] level I?  <b>Aisha:</b> Yeah.  <b>Researcher:</b> Was it easy or difficult to adjust? Asma, you're saying it helped to have a teacher who could speak Arabic <i>and</i> English.  <b>Asma:</b> Yeah.  <b>Researcher:</b> And are you saying going in at level I made it easier, or more difficult? [Asma nods] It made it easier?  <b>Aisha:</b> Yeah.</p>
<p><b>RQ 2: Theme</b></p>	<p><b>Illustrative example</b></p>
<p><b>12. School not adequate preparation for HE</b></p> <p>12.i) MI and materials mismatch</p> <p>12.ii) The switch from an Arabic-medium school to EMI HE</p> <p>12.iii) Switch in teaching styles</p>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> You know, in high school and in school in general I studied mathematics in Arabic, even if the book is written in English. So the teacher in school didn't teach us in English, even [if] the book was in English.  <b>Researcher:</b> So your materials and textbooks might have been in English but your Arabic-speaking teacher would have taught the lesson in Arabic?  <b>Maryam:</b> Yeah, so...  <b>Researcher:</b> Was that confusing?  <b>Maryam:</b> Yeah, confusing, and we don't care about the...what written in the mathematics book, because she translated to us and she teach us in Arabic. Sometimes she didn't translate but she speaking Arabic, you know, she didn't speak in English.</p> <p><b>Bahkita:</b> In fact, it did not help us because most of our lessons we used the Arabic language. Lessons were studying English at the university have been difficult for us in the beginning.</p> <p><b>Aisha:</b> I think the best way to study at university is to be more responsible, not like in school because in school the teacher always repeat the information.  <b>Researcher:</b> And tells you what you have to learn and how you have to learn it, yeah?  <b>Aisha:</b> But now a lot of them don't do that.</p>
<p><b>RQ 3: Theme</b></p>	<p><b>Illustrative example</b></p>
<p><b>13. 'Washback' from IELTS</b></p>	<p><b>Maryam:</b> They, you know, pressure themselves to take the IELTS exam. And so they work hard for one day, two day, then okay, they got the IELTS exam, after that they go to the faculty...they don't know anything. They don't have any idea how to take the note or something so...</p>

<p>13.i) Resentment of and resistance towards IELTS</p>	<p><b>Zainab:</b> I think no need to take exam for IELTS. If I...if I...if I need English in my life...okay, I will do the [FP at the case institution] and then we'll have final exam and I have a mark...but if I bring [take] the IELTS I didn't need it in my life because my college it's all subject Arabic subject, only one subject from English but that's very, very easy.</p>
<p><b>14. An even unlevel playing field</b></p>	<p><b>Alanoud:</b> I think it's a fair because...all of them have to...get the exam, and they will improve their study in exam, so if they...if they do it well they will pass it, if they don't so they have to learn from beginning in...here in university.</p> <p><b>Alanoud:</b> We have different kind of students. Some of them learn English all of...all of study was in English in school and some of them are not, and some of them have in English and some in Arabic, so I don't think all the students are the same – have the same way in university.</p>

## Appendix J: Sample of coded transcript

- Researcher: So when you first came to university...See, you went to secondary school where most or everything was in Arabic, and you came to [the case institution] where most or everything is in English, right? The teachers speak English, the signs are English, all your lessons are in English, how did you feel when you first came here, Aisha?
- Aisha: I felt worried. It is good for us, but it has some learning difficults. But I must learn it. [*Fear: Fear of commencing EMI HE after having attended an Arabic-medium school*]
- Researcher: Okay, it is a big change, right? To go from an Arabic school to an English university. What about you, Asma, what do you think?
- Asma: I think it is good because actually the first teacher I meet, Dr Ali, so he is from Egypt, so it is easy to connect with him, and he give us the easy language we can learn it. [*Benefits to students of Arabic L1 teachers: Knowledge of students' L1*]
- Researcher: That's interesting, so he was teaching English?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay, but his first language is Arabic?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: And that could help you?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: That's interesting.
- Asma: Because he used the easy and good word, it's from English.
- Aisha: Also, something I want to mention, we, when we come to, came to university, we was, we were in level I, so it was easy to learn. [*Benefits to students of Arabic L1 teachers: Advantageous for lower levels*]
- Researcher: Okay. So you came in right at [foundation programme] level I?
- Aisha: Yeah.
- Researcher: Was it easy or difficult to adjust? Asma, you're saying it helped to have a teacher who could speak Arabic *and* English.
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: And are you saying going in at level I made it easier, or more difficult? [Asma nods] It made it easier?
- Aisha: Yeah.
- Researcher: Okay.
- Aisha: I'm like her.
- Researcher: Okay, great. How do you think – or do you think – your secondary school helped you prepare for university? Because it's a big jump, right? High school, Arabic, all girls, with Arabic teachers – Emirati teachers, then you come to university, it's all English, with foreign teachers, and you told me all your teachers at high school are female, right?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: And you come to [the case institution] and most the teachers are male, so you have lots of new experiences, right? So, do you think your high school helped you prepare for university?

Asma: Well, my English teacher is, she's from America, so that's easy to talk with someone in English and I think that's help me, but for studies, no. [*School not adequate preparation for HE: The switch from an Arabic-medium school to EMI HE*]

Researcher: Okay, so your teacher, your English teacher at school, was from America?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: Did you have the same, Aisha?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: And that helped you prepare for *English* at university?

Asma: Not to prepare for English, they help us to ... to connect with other people they didn't understand Arabic.

Researcher: Okay, that's interesting. You said it helped with English but not with other things, for example, were there any big shocks coming to university, any big differences?

Asma: No, the studies in school didn't help me ... for university.

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

Asma: The materials, we study in school, it didn't tell you or didn't help you about English.

Researcher: Do you think it's true that at school the teachers *tell you* what you have to learn, but here at university, some of the teachers, they don't make it so clear, they expect you to sort of find out for yourself what you need to learn. Do you think that might be true?

Asma: Yeah

Aisha: I think both of them are good.

Researcher: Okay....

Aisha: Because I think the teacher must let the student search about the information and the knowledge. Also, we must give them a lot of – what is it?

Asma: Information

Aisha: Yes, information about the materials. About my high school, actually it helped me but not too much because the teacher there they not have they were not having, I can't say it...

Asma: Experience?

Aisha: No.

Researcher: Sufficient experience to teach you?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: They did not have sufficient experience to teach you? Okay, you're talking about other lessons, not English, now?

Aisha: No, English, because they don't have any degree, but their mother language is English so they find a job.

Researcher: Okay, so they could help with the language, but maybe not with the study of English.

Aisha/Asma: [In unison] Yeah.

Researcher: Do you have any experiences of English medium instruction at university, any good experiences or any bad experiences?

Aisha: I had. It was mathematics. It was very terrible and difficult for me because, well, when I was in the school I learn maths in Arabic but now ... all in English, yeah, but, you know, it was difficult for me to learn the vocabulary and the, you know, the question, how does it work. It was difficult for me.

Researcher: So, was it the *mathematics* that was difficult, or learning the mathematics *in English* that made it difficult for you, or both?

Aisha: No, I was good in maths in school in Arabic, but in English it was terrible for me.

Researcher: Okay. That's a very interesting insight.

Aisha: And I fail in this course.

Researcher: Oh, sorry. How many hours a week did you have at school of mathematics?

Aisha: Every day.

Researcher: So why do you think universities in the UAE are mainly in English? Mathematics, we used to have IT in English. Why do you think all these courses are in English, and can you think of any advantages and disadvantages of having these lessons in English in higher education in the UAE?

Asma: I think that the English is the language for future, so we can work in this language more than Arabic, [*English for the future of the UAE*] and I think the disadvantage for that is it is not easy to learn, because I have my mother language, it's better than other language.

Researcher: Okay, what do you think, Aisha?

Aisha: I think, study this materials in English it's better for all of university, because a lot of student they are not Arabic, so it is easy to understand this material. Also some teacher here maybe from Arab, they from Arabic country but they speak different accent or like that. A lot of student they didn't understand them. So, if they speak English all of the student can understand them.

Researcher: Okay, you mean, if the teacher is from for example Tunisia or Algeria, very different Arabic?

Aisha: Yeah.

Researcher: True. Okay, good point.

Aisha: Also, the disadvantage for this, I think the university pay a lot of, pays a lot of money for teacher who teach this materials. Also, student takes a lot of time to pass this, or to learn this, in English.

Researcher: Okay, so you've identified some advantages and disadvantages, okay. So Asma, I think you're saying that English is like the language of the future, like the main language of business and...

Asma: Yeah

Researcher: ...science and economics.

Aisha: Also, it unite...all of the world.

Researcher: It's international, it's an international language. However, on the other hand it does take a lot more work for the students to study in that language. Is that fair to say? So, on the one hand it's a very important international language...

Aisha/Asma: [In unison] Yeah.

- Researcher: So what about the way you learn? Do you think the way you learn in the classroom is affected by having your lessons in English rather than Arabic, or do you think you learn the same way? Or do you think you have to change the way you learn when you come to university from secondary school?
- Asma: I think it changed my way of study.
- Researcher: Oh, really? How?
- Asma: I don't know but, I tried to find the good way to study in English, but in Arabic I have one way and I always do it and I tried to do that in English – I love to write, when I study I love to write – so I...
- Researcher: You mean making notes?
- Asma: Yeah, so I do that in Arabic, and in English till now I don't take something that is seriously, but I tried to do the same way when I do it in Arabic, but it's difficult. It's more difficult. Because I have some words that I don't understand and I should to translate and other things.
- Researcher: So you have identified this problem, how do you work around it? Do you sometimes make notes in Arabic or use a dictionary or look for translations, or do you not make notes? How do you deal with this difference?
- Asma: I try to understand, I try to understand it, organise it in Arabic in my mind and after that try to study it again and put it in notes. I think that is what happens.
- Researcher: And this is different from how you studied at secondary school?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Aisha: I think the best way to study at university is to be more responsible, not like in school because in school the teacher always repeat the information. [Switch in teaching styles]
- Researcher: And tells you what you have to learn and how you have to learn it, yeah?
- Aisha: But now a lot of them don't do that.
- Researcher: Do you or do any of your classmates or friends feel scared about speaking up in English in class?
- Asma: Yeah, I think some of the people they didn't speak in class because they are shy. [Fear: Fear of using English before one's peers]
- Researcher: Would you ever talk with another Emirati in English, or would it feel strange speaking English with someone else who you know speaks Arabic?
- Aisha: I hate this thing. Because I think if you want to practice your language it is okay, but only to say, to see the people, 'I have another language' it's bad for me. I hate those people. Really! [Unnaturalness of using an L2 with speakers of the same L1]
- Researcher: My first degree was in German...
- Aisha: Yeah...
- Researcher: And when I was asked to speak German with another English student I felt very uncomfortable – it did not feel natural.

- Asma: Yeah!
- Researcher: It just felt strange.
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: And it felt like I was pretending.
- Researcher: What about you, Asma, would you feel uncomfortable or unnatural?
- Asma: Yeah.
- Researcher: However, what about if it is your little baby brother or sister, and you want to help them with their homework?
- Aisha: Sometimes I talk with them in English to help (?) them think about meaning.
- Researcher: You told me that your first teacher was from Egypt – his mother tongue, his L1 was Arabic – and that might have helped you with English, so, however, when you study maths and IT I don't think all of your teachers are from Britain, or Australia, or America, right? Some will be from Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, you know, Algeria, Tunisia. Can all of them speak very good English, or not, or is this ever a problem or does it not matter, it is a problem for you?
- Aisha: I have, I had, one teacher he was from, he is from Morocco. When he spoke English his language it was very bad. You know, *yanni*, the accent it's, he mixed it between the accent of Morocco and English, and I hate that. [*Teacher competence in English*]
- Researcher: Do you think that affected your learning at all? Did that have an impact on your learning? Did that make it more difficult to learn that subject?
- Aisha: Yeah, it was.
- Asma: The last year I had an Australian teacher, she teach me English, I don't like the accent. I cannot understand what she say and sometimes when I write what she say I delete the 'r' because she eat it! And I try all my best but she, it's really, something is difficult. I tried to found like American and British they are different from Australia.
- Researcher: Different students go to different schools in different emirates, and they have different amounts of English, and some students have Arabic teachers teaching English from the Emirates, or from Algeria, or Tunisia; some students have teachers from England or Australia. Some people have English every day for two hours, some only have it once a week for one hour. And they all come to the university and everyone has to get IELTS 5 to go to faculty and start their degree programme. Do you think that's fair, or not? What do you think, Asma?
- Asma: Yeah, I feel that's fair because the IELTS will, if everyone take IELTS it will be the same level so that will help them to be the same level to understand the subject. [*An even unlevel playing field*]
- Aisha: I agree with that but I think the university must think about the different levels or how they taught them in the school.
- Researcher: Do you think university is the same for all students, no matter which emirate they come from?

- Aisha: I think the student must look and search about....the chance the university give it for us. It doesn't matter if you are poor or very rich.
- Researcher: So you think the university gives everyone the same opportunities, the same chance?
- Aisha: Yeah. Also, it's free, university.
- Researcher: Is it difficult to study subjects such as mathematics in English? Do you think if you had for example mathematics in Arabic you could study it faster, or do you think you could study more and go deeper, or do you think it would be the same?
- Aisha: No, it's not the same, because, I think the mathematics it has a lot of vocab, hard vocabulary. And I know all of this vocab when I am maybe, maybe when I am in Grade 3. *[Adverse impact of EMI on academic performance]*
- Researcher: In Arabic. You knew the terminology, the mathematics vocabulary.
- Aisha: Yeah, yeah, all of them. So, it was easy for me to learn it in Arabic, but in English...Also, I will understand more fast.
- Researcher: If you could choose English or Arabic for mathematics which one would you choose?
- Aisha: Of course I would choose Arabic.
- Asma: Arabic. *[Student MI preferences]*
- Aisha: You know, if I will go to business, I will choose it in English, but if it doesn't work with me I don't want it, you know, in English, so I will forget it if after I study it in English, and that's what's happened.

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## Tables

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## Abbreviations

ADEC	Abu Dhabi Education Council
AED	United Arab Emirates dirham
AUS	American University of Sharjah
CEPA	Common Educational Proficiency Assessment
CLIL	Content and language integrated learning
CMC	Computer mediated communication
ECAE	Emirates College of Advanced Education
EFL	English as a foreign language
ELF	English as a lingua franca
ELT	English language teaching
EMI	English medium of instruction
ESL	English as a second language
FE	Faculty of Education
FL	Foreign language
FST	Faculty of Science and Technology
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HCT	Higher College(s) of Technology
HE	Higher education
IELTS	International English Language Testing System
KHDA	Knowledge and Human Development Authority
KUSTAR	Khalifa University of Science, Technology & Research
LEP	Limited English proficiency
L1	First language/mother tongue
L2	Second language
L2MI	Second language medium of instruction
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MI	Medium of instruction
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOHESR	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
MSA	Modern Standard Arabic
NEP	No English proficiency
PI	The Petroleum Institute
PPSMI	Pengajaran dan Pembelajaran Sains dan Matematik dalam Bahasa Inggeris
RAK	Ras Al Khaimah
RQ	Research question
TEFL	Teaching English as a foreign language
TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages/Teaching English as a second or other language
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
TL	Target language
TOEFL	Test of English as a Foreign Language
TTCI	Tape-transcribe-code-interpret

UAE  
UAEU  
ZU

United Arab Emirates  
United Arab Emirates University  
Zayed University