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A critical investigation into students’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their content learning and social equity in a HEI in Oman

By

Hilal Al Hajri

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University of Bristol

in accordance with the requirements for award of the degree of

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Abstract:

In Oman, English has been the exclusive medium of instruction in higher education (HE) for scientific, technological and business specialisations. However, little research has been conducted to understand the academic and socioeconomic impacts of implementing this English medium instruction (EMI) policy on students’ learning experiences. This study aims to fill in this gap by investigating HE students’ perceptions on the impact of EMI policy on their content learning and on social equity. It further aims at exploring participants’ perceptions of lecturers’ translanguaging practices to understand their impact on students’ access to content knowledge and on social equity in HE.

This qualitative study, informed by interpretivism and critical theory, obtained data from online semi-structured interviews with thirty students from a HEI in Oman. Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis approach was used to analyse data.

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, this study offers a fresh perspective to EMI research by relating students’ chances of success in EMI HE to their socioeconomic circumstances (Bourdieu, 2003). Findings indicated that participants entered HE with varying levels of English proficiency, mostly influenced by their families’ possession of economic and cultural capital. Consequently, participants had inequitable access to content knowledge and socioeconomic benefits since they stood at unequal distances from the linguistic capital valued by university. The study concluded that EMI policy in this HEI did not serve students’ academic and socioeconomic needs equally well.

Rooted in critical sociolinguistics, this study sought to highlight and legitimise participants’ nuanced perceptions of the globally-driven EMI policy. While all participants acknowledged the usefulness of English in the current globalisation era, some exercised their agency by questioning the legitimacy of EMI policy, and suggesting using English in HE in ways that can better empower them. One major response identified in the data to this policy was participants’ favourable perceptions of translanguaging practices. Findings demonstrated that participants and lecturers’ deployment of translanguaging practices, though surreptitiously, apparently enabled students to have better and more equitable access to content knowledge. This localised/contextualised understanding of students’ linguistic needs is integral for developing language-in-education policies that can more equitably serve students’ academic and socioeconomic needs.
Acknowledgements:

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My family has been an unending source of inspiration, encouragement, and strength throughout my doctoral journey. My deepest gratitude goes to my parents and aunts for their prayers, love and motivation that lent me the strength to go through the ups and downs of this doctorate journey. I am indebted to all my brothers and sisters whose encouragement and support carried me through this challenging endeavour. Particular thanks go to my sisters, Dr Fatima and Fatma for their thoughtful reviews and careful edits.

I am especially grateful to my wife and children for their boundless patience and endless sacrifices. Your dedication has been a constant source of motivation, and I will strive to make up for the stressful times you endured during my absence and preoccupation with my studies.

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I am profoundly thankful for Professor Ali Al-Issa. The discussions we had during the stage of research proposal writing helped me develop a focused research topic.

Finally, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the participants whose generous contributions and collaboration were invaluable to the completion of this study. I greatly appreciate your time and input, and I am honoured to have worked with such remarkable people.
Author’s declaration:
I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the University's Regulations and Code of Practice for Research Degree Programmes and that it has not been submitted for any other academic award. Except where indicated by specific reference in the text, the work is the candidate's own work. Work done in collaboration with, or with the assistance of, others, is indicated as such. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: Hilal Al Hajri                     DATE: 24 March 2023
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<thead>
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ELC</td>
<td>English Language Centre</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMI</td>
<td>English medium instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCC</td>
<td>The Gulf Cooperation Council</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GFP</td>
<td>General Foundation Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GPA</td>
<td>Grade Point Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HEIs</td>
<td>Higher education institutions</td>
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<tr>
<td>IELTS</td>
<td>The International English Language Testing System</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT</td>
<td>Information technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L1</td>
<td>First language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEP</td>
<td>Limited English proficient/proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MENA</td>
<td>The Middle East and North Africa region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOI</td>
<td>Medium of instruction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TA</td>
<td>Thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TL</td>
<td>Translanguaging</td>
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<tr>
<td>TLPs</td>
<td>Translanguaging practices</td>
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Chapter One: Introduction:

1.1. The nature of the problem:

In Oman, the English language has been used as the sole medium of instruction (MOI) for all scientific and technical specialisations and some humanities in higher education (HE) since the opening of the first university in 1986 (Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017). Specialisations such as medicine, engineering, science, information technology (IT) and business and management are only offered through English in almost all the higher education institutions (HEIs) in Oman. In other words, students aspiring to study these specialisations have no choice, but to study them in English. Meanwhile, Arabic is the MOI throughout the school years in the public, government-funded schools where the vast majority (85% of the total school students, the NCSI, 2020) of Omani students go.

Despite the government’s effort to improve students’ English proficiency and the dominant role of English in the private sector as a language of communication (a fuller account of these is provided in the Context Chapter), several studies and international reports demonstrate that most public school graduates lack the required English proficiency to readily access EMI HE and the labour market (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Ministry of Education and the World Bank, 2012; Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017; Al-Issa, 2020). Besides some pedagogic factors, students’ limited English proficiency (LEP) could be attributed to the fact that English language lacks social value outside HE and the private labour market among the majority of Omanis because Arabic is the dominant language of communication (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2014; Al-Jardani, 2017).

Although few in number, almost all the studies, that surveyed students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards EMI, reported that Omani students did face linguistic challenges when learning content through English language (AlBakri, 2013, 2017; Al-Mashikhi et al., 2014; Denman and Al-Mahrooqi, 2019; Al-Bakri and Troudi, 2020). Evidence from empirical studies conducted in various non-Anglophone countries suggests that students’ LEP and to a lesser degree teachers’ LEP can have an influence on the quality of students learning through EMI (Cho, 2012; Brown, 2018; Macaro, 2018). Notwithstanding these challenges and after the adoption of EMI policy for around four decades, there do not seem to exist any serious attempts to review the implantation of the policy by HEIs.
Given these realities, it is imperative that a special attention is directed toward the potential impact of using English as the only MOI on students’ learning of subject matter as well as on social equity. This study aims to add to the small, but growing literature of critical EMI studies which mostly focused on the academic impact of EMI policy (e.g., Troudi and Jendli, 2011; AlBakri, 2013, 2017; Troudi and Hafidh, 2017; Al-Bakri and Troudi, 2020). Before embarking on this endeavour, I need to make it clear that I am not by any means against learning English and I realise that English language can currently play a major role in helping individuals achieve their potential academically, professionally and economically. However, this research project concerns the policy that dictates the use of English language as the sole MOI for many specialisations in HE and how this policy could have an impact on students’ learning experiences and on social equity.

The issue of ‘social equity’ arises from concerns that access to English language does not seem to be available to all students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. Although there is a dearth of research into the potential socioeconomic impact of implementing EMI policy on social equity in Omani society, a review of the literature reveals some trends that may lead to increasing disparities in access to English language, a necessary means for success in HE. For example, recognising the importance of English language, wealthy and some middle-income parents are increasingly sending their children to EMI or bilingual private schools, enrolling their children in English courses and hiring private English language tutors (Al-Issa, 2020). These parents believe that proficiency in English language can help their children have better access to HE and the labour market (Al Riyami, 2016). Therefore, it is legitimate to ask whether students from different socioeconomic backgrounds have equal opportunities of success in EMI HE.

In short, this thesis aims to critically investigate undergraduates’ perceptions and experiences of learning subject matter in an English-only EMI policy context. The study specifically examines whether EMI policy equitably serves all students’ academic and socioeconomic needs. It explores students’ perspectives and experiences of the impact of the English-only EMI policy on their opportunities to access content knowledge and other life opportunities, such as, obtaining their desired level of qualification and future jobs. Finally, the thesis endeavours to explore students’ perceptions of lecturers’ trans languaging practices (TLPs) in terms of the impact of these practices on students’ access to content knowledge and on social equity in HE.
1.2. Rationale of the study:

1.2.1. Personal rationale:

My interest in this research project was driven by different motivations. Firstly, my nine-year experience at this HEI as an English language lecturer as well as an administrator drew my attention to potential challenges in implementing EMI policy in a HE context where English is a foreign language to students. From my experience, I noticed that almost all the new entrants into this HEI needed to enrol in the foundation programme to improve their English proficiency and become prepared to join their respective academic programmes. The majority of them were placed either in level 1 or level 2 in the English foundation programme, which is roughly equivalent to a beginner level. This indicated that many new entrants possessed extremely limited English proficiency. Consequently, a significant number of students were dismissed annually for failing to complete the foundation programme. For instance, according to the Progression and Retention report in the foundation programme in this HEI (2020), only 55.6% of 2018-19 cohort successfully completed the foundation programme and proceeded to enrol in their academic programmes. This high dropout rate is often attributed to students’ lack of motivation and carelessness. Though I do not deny that this may be a contributing factor, I believed there was another facet to the situation that merits investigation and analysis.

Secondly, I taught English courses to students who had already commenced their specialisations. Despite having completed the foundation programme, I observed that numerous students still had limited English proficiency. Thus, I was wondering how these students, with their limited English proficiency, could effectively navigate their learning of content knowledge in their respective specialisations. I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of students’ experiences with regard to acquiring content knowledge through a language that they had not yet fully mastered.

Moreover, as an administrator, I observed that some students frequently voiced concerns about their inability to satisfy the language requirement necessary for advancing to higher academic levels (see Chapter 2, Section 2 for detailed information on the language requirement at this HEI). One reason behind some students’ failure to meet the language requirement was their inability to afford taking the IELTS test. It meant that certain students were denied access to higher academic levels because they lacked the funds to take the IELTS exam. Consequently,
this raised the question whether the policy, that mandated fulfilling a language requirement as a prerequisite for progressing to higher academic levels, could potentially discriminate against students with limited English proficiency who lacked the financial means to take the IELTS test. Therefore, I recognised the critical need for investigating the impact of EMI policy on social equity in the Omani HE.

1.2.2. National Rationale:

This thesis aims to interrogate the monolingual assumptions underlying EMI policy in the Omani context that consider teaching through English-only can help all students have access to content knowledge and other socioeconomic benefits normally gained from participation in HE. Drawing on recent insights from translingual accounts of English, this study adopts a more dynamic and inclusive view of English that conceptualises language as a social practice where “[m]eanings emerge from activities” that students engage in during the meaning-making processes (Canagarajah, 2020, p.299). Drawing on these translingual perspectives, specifically the translanguaging theory, I question the monolingual EMI policy currently implemented in Omani HEIs and investigate whether it provides equal opportunities for all students to succeed in HE.

By espousing a social equity approach informed by Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the study endeavours to find out whether students with varying levels of English proficiency have equal opportunities to succeed in EMI HE. Put differently, I want to examine whether EMI policy, as it is currently implemented, enables all students, regardless of their English language proficiency, to benefit, on an equal basis, from their HE learning opportunities and to achieve the things they value, such as, obtaining the qualification they aspire to.

Reviewing the pertinent literature in the Omani HE context reveals that instrumentalist monolingual discourses of the usefulness of English-only MOI policy most often go unchallenged (AlBakri, 2017). There is indeed a scarcity of research into the impact that EMI policy can have on students’ disciplinary learning and on social equity in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)1 (Troudi and Hafidh, 2017). Thus, problematising the current EMI practices is

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1 The countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council are Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait.
a key aim of this research project to shed new light on how students’ learning experiences and chances of success can be differentially affected by EMI policy.

In previous EMI research, scant attention has been given to macro factors that can influence students’ perceptions of EMI. Therefore, informed by new perspectives offered by some critical sociolinguists, I will attempt to critically investigate how students’ perceptions of their learning experiences within EMI policy context can be shaped by macro aspects, such as the global and national discourses of the importance of English. This locality approach, which I more fully elucidate in the Literature Review Chapter, would prove useful in understanding and appreciating students’ various ways of perceiving and responding to a globally-driven EMI policy; it would illuminate how English can be incorporated in HE in ways that can empower them; and it would potentially help me to better inform language-in-education policy-making.

1.3. Research aim, objectives and questions:
1.3.1. Research aim:

The aim of this study is to explore students’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their content learning and social equity in a HEI in Oman. The study also aims at investigating students’ perceptions of the impact of lecturers’ TLPs on learning their specialisations and on social equity.

1.3.2. Research objectives:

Pursuing the following objectives will help accomplish the aims of the study:

- Review relevant literature of conceptualisations and ideologies of English language and social equity in higher education to theoretically situate the present study.
- Delineate the academic, social and economic context of the study to emphasise the necessity of conducting this research.
- Conduct interviews with HE students so as to understand their perceptions of the impact of English-only policy on their learning experiences and on social equity.
- Contribute to the international, regional and national contemporary debates about EMI.
- Draw out pedagogic and socioeconomic implications for EMI policy and practice.
1.3.3. Research questions:

The current study aims to answer the following research questions:

1- How do students at a HEI in Oman perceive the impact of (English-only) EMI policy on their content learning and social equity in HE?
   a. What are students’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their content learning?
   b. What are students’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their life chances?
2- What are students’ perceptions of the impact of lecturers’ translanguaging practices on their content learning and life chances?

1.4. Theoretical overview:

The overarching research questions revolve around linking students’ experiences of learning content within an EMI policy context to issues of social equity. To establish this link, I initially problematise the concept of language as a bounded system separate from students’ communicative practices. Instead, I embrace translingual perspectives on language, particularly the translanguaging theory, that perceive language, specifically English within this specific context, as a resource among various linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources that students can flexibly employ to access content knowledge (Garcia, 2009a; Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014; Pennycook, 2020). At the heart of this conceptualisation is the issue of social equity in education as the translanguaging theory legitimises the use of students’ entire linguistic repertoire, thereby promoting equitable access to content knowledge for all students. I use this theoretical framework to explore how the monolingual EMI policy can affect students’ ability to academically and socioeconomically benefit from HE. Additionally, it helps me account for how students’ use (or lack of use) of TLPs can either facilitate or hinder their access to content knowledge and how this eventually influences their perceptions of EMI policy. As a result, it contributes to the development of a more nuanced understanding of students’ perceptions of EMI policy.

To further illustrate the connection between students’ experiences of EMI in HE and issues of social equity, I employ Bourdieu’s theory of practice (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 1991; 2003; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990). This theoretical framework aids in elucidating the relationships between one’s possession of the linguistic capital, which is largely shaped by their socioeconomic backgrounds, and their experiences and perceptions of EMI policy in HE. Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the dialectical relationship between the theoretical triad of
habitus, capital and field was particularly helpful in understanding how EMI policy contributed to the exacerbation of social inequities in this HEI through providing students who possessed the linguistic capital valued by university with more opportunities to academically and socioeconomically benefit from HE, whilst creating obstacles to those with LEP.

Furthermore, to look beyond participants’ either favourable or unfavourable perceptions of EMI policy, I adopt the locality approach (Canagarajah, 1999; Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2010), which is elaborated in Chapter 3, Section 1. This approach enables me to understand their perceptions in light of how global and national discourses regarding the importance of English can shape these perceptions. Simultaneously, it allows for the exploration of how participants, as local actors, respond to these pressures. This localised understanding of students’ perceptions of EMI policy and their actual linguistic needs should, it is hoped, lay the foundation for the development of a more effective and equitable language-in-education policies.

1.5. Thesis overview:

After this introductory chapter, I introduce the context of the study in Chapter Two where I provide and discuss pertinent backgrounds of English language in Oman and EMI policy in HE. In Chapter Three, I review relevant literature and present the theoretical frameworks that inform my study. I specifically demonstrate how these theoretical perspectives can be useful lenses through which I can interpret the data and eventually provide fresh perspectives to EMI debates. Chapter Four describes and explains my philosophical stance and the methodological decisions of the study. I also engage in discussions of issues related to positionality, research ethics and data analysis. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, I present and analyse the findings of the study. In each of these chapters, I first present and then discuss the data that pertain to the main theme/s of the chapter. I analyse the data through the lenses of the theoretical frameworks that I sketched out in the literature review. Finally, I provide a conclusion of the thesis in Chapter Eight where I discuss the contribution, implications and limitations of the study and I offer recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two: Research Context:

A synopsis of the history and current status of English in Oman is provided, before moving on to discussing some implications of implementing EMI policy in the Omani HE context. Moreover, some pertinent details about the specific HEI where the study is conducted are delineated.

2.1. The national context:

2.1.1. The history of English language in Oman:

The relationship between Oman, a country in the Southeast of the Arabian Peninsula, and the British Empire dates back to the seventeenth century when a trade treaty was signed with the British East India Company in 1646 (Luscombe, 2020). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, the increasing presence of the French in the Indian Ocean motivated the British government to strengthen its relations with the Sultans of Oman which resulted in the signing of two significant treaties in 1798 and 1800 between the two empires (Dalziel, 1989). It is worth mentioning here that in most of the seventeenth, eighteenth and the first half of the nineteenth centuries the Omani Empire stretched from parts of the Arabian Gulf and Gwadar in current day Pakistan to various coastal territories in East Africa, like Zanzibar and Mombasa (Dalziel, 1989; Al-Hinai, 2000).

With the intense competition for hydrocarbon resources in the beginning of the twentieth century, Britain had another interest to strengthen its political and economic ties with Oman in order to secure exclusive oil-rights (Timpe, 1991; Al-Hinai, 2000). British oil companies signed several concession agreements with the Sultans in 1925, 1937 and 1944 whereby the companies were granted a license to explore oil in Oman (Al-Hinai, 2000; Clark, 2008). The reluctance of Sultan Said to utilise the oil export revenues to provide basic services, such as, education and health, to his economically impoverished people encouraged his son Sultan Qaboos, supported by the British, to lead a bloodless palace coup to overthrow his father in 1970 (Clark, 2008). This event was a pivotal moment in the modern history of Oman as Sultan Qaboos, upon his accession to the throne, immediately initiated numerous reforms to modernise the country. Education was among the top priorities of his development agenda.

Even though Oman was never a formal British colony, Britain played an active role in shaping the Sultans’ external as well as internal policies through a series of agreements (Dalziel, 1989;
Timpe, 1991; Al-Hinai, 2000). However, it is worth noting that the British presence in Oman was confined to the capital city of Muscat and a few coastal towns as the interior parts of Oman were not always under the Sultan’s control prior to 1970. Therefore, English use was mainly restricted to the elite in the capital city of Muscat (Al-Busaidi, 1995); English never penetrated into non-coastal parts of Oman (Al-Busaidi, 1995). Moreover, the informal imperial system embraced by Britain in Oman relieved her from providing education to Omanis; hence “[t]here was no British-inspired education” and “[t]here were no English-medium schools in Oman” (Al-Busaidi, 1995; p.90). English was formally introduced as a school subject in 1970 when the former Sultan Qaboos came to power. Although English language was not previously well-established in Oman, Omanis, according to Al-Busaidi (1995), willingly accepted the teaching of English in schools.

2.1.2. English language in contemporary Oman:

It is apparent that the Omani government is adopting a pragmatic and instrumental perspective of English that associates proficiency in English with modernisation, national development and economic competitiveness in the globalisation era (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2006, 2020; Barnawi, 2018). The official government rhetoric frequently emphasises the importance of English as the global language of economy, business, science and technology for enabling “Oman’s movement towards a knowledge-based economy” (The Education Council, 2018, p.17; Al-Issa, 2020). Thus, English obtained official economic, political and legislative support from the government which allocated a relatively large budget to promote the teaching and learning of English (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012). English has, indeed, been dominant in two domains: the private sector and HE. It is worth mentioning that Arabic is the MOI in public schools and English is taught as a school subject from Grade 1; although, EMI is used in some fees-paying private schools (Al-Issa, 2020).

With the discovery of profitable oil reserves in Oman and the exports of oil in 1967, English began to gain economic status as it became the language of communication in oil-production supernational companies (Al Riyami, 2016). As the majority of Omanis were not well-educated before the 1970s, these oil companies mainly recruited English-speaking expatriates from the West and the sub-continent and some English-literate Omanis who attended British-inspired schools in East Africa (Al-Lamki, 1998; Al-Busaidi, 1995). Increased oil revenues augmented the government expenditure on the development of public services, such as education, health,
housing and telecommunication, which helped expand the private sector, which in turn necessitated the recruitment of numerous expatriates from various nationalities (Sajwani, 1997; Al Hilali, 2020). As a consequence, English is used as a lingua franca in different private sector businesses, such as, tourism and hospitality industry, factories, telecommunication services, banking and insurance companies (Al-Issa, 2006). The non-Omani English-speaking expatriates continued to dominate the private sector (Al-Issa, 2020). Consequently, despite the large and growing number of Omani graduates from high schools, colleges and universities, a significant proportion of those graduates are often denied access to employment in the private sector mainly because they lack proficiency in English (Al-Issa, 2020), an issue that I elaborate on below. It is, indeed, not clear whether the use of English in the private sector is a deliberate government policy or a merely laissez faire situation.

English is, also, the sole MOI in all public and private HEIs for scientific and technology-based subjects, medicine, and some humanities, such as, economics (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2006, 2020). Although there is no overt official policy explicitly stating that EMI should be used in HE (AlBakri, 2017), this has been the practice since the establishment of the first university in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University, in 1986. Arabic as MOI is restricted to subjects oriented to the local culture, such as, Islamic studies, Arabic language and literature, some social sciences and law.

Upon transition to tertiary education, the bulk of students encounter linguistic challenges as they shift from Arabic MOI schools to EMI university programmes (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2014; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Thus, in order to assist students in meeting the linguistic level required by their disciplinary programmes, the government, in 2008, mandated that beginning from the academic year 2009-2010, all HEIs introduce a general foundation programme (GFP) which is “a formal, structured program of study [that] precedes the first formal year of higher education study” and focuses on four areas: English language, mathematics, computing and general study skills (Oman Accreditation Council, 2008; p.6; Al-Riyami, 2016; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). It is worth mentioning that English foundation programmes in some HEIs existed long before the introduction of the standardised GFP in 2008. Students who can demonstrate that they satisfy the required English proficiency and can pass the mathematics and computing exit exams are exempted from attending the GFP and can straightaway start their academic programmes.
At school level, the academic year 1998-1999 witnessed a major educational reform with the establishment of the new Basic Education System (Ministry of Education and World Bank, 2012). Among many improvements brought by the new system, English began to be taught from Grade 1 and the number of English lessons and the length of the periods were substantially increased. Almost two decades after the implementation of Basic Education System, many students still finish school incapable of using English effectively (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi, 2012; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2018). Thus, not less than 80 per cent of students enrolling in various public and private HEIs are required to attend GFPs for a period ranging from one academic semester to four academic semesters depending on their performance in a placement test they sit for upon their entry to the HEIs (Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017).

Even after students successfully exit the GFP and join their respective disciplinary programmes, drawing on anecdotal evidence (Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017) as well as empirical evidence (e.g. Ismail, 2011; AlBakri, 2013, 2017; Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2014; Al-Mashikhi et al., 2014; Denman and Al-Mahrooqi, 2019), students report that they still encounter some linguistic difficulties that affect their learning of the subject matter. As a matter of fact, even though EMI has been used in HE for almost four decades in Oman, research into how students experience learning their specialisations through a foreign language, i.e., English, is still at its infancy stage (AlBakri, 2017).

2.1.3 EMI policy and social equity:

The review of the national literature revealed a scarcity of research that explores the impact of implementing EMI policy in HE on socioeconomic equity in Omani society. However, the literature does occasionally, and indirectly, mention some issues that can be relevant to the relationships between the implementation of EMI policy in HE and social inequity in Oman. For example, a growing number of affluent Omani parents, mostly middle-class parents working in prestigious professions, are choosing private school education for their children because, among other reasons, they believe these schools help their children improve their English proficiency which in turn gives them an edge over public school graduates in joining and succeeding in HE and the labour market (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Tekin, 2015; Barnawi, 2018; Al-Issa, 2020). There has, also, been a rapid increase in the number of parents sending their children to the United Kingdom, India and the Philippines to attend English language
programmes during the summer holidays. Many fee-paying private schools teach science-based subjects through EMI from Grade 1, employ native English-speaking teachers and use imported textbooks produced by international publishers (Al-Issa, 2006, 2020; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012). The number of private schools has grown from two schools in the academic year 1972-1973 to 834 private schools in the academic year 2019-2020 (Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; the NCSI, 2020). In the academic year 2019-2020, the number of Omani students enrolled in the private schools was 111,449, constituting 15 per cent of the total school student population in Oman (ibid.), though more than half of those (63,653) were enrolled in kindergartens.

This increasing trend can potentially create a disparity in students’ opportunities to have access to English language. That is, private school students and those who can afford English courses are more likely to improve their English proficiency than students who lack these opportunities (Al-Busaidi, 1995; AlBakri, 2017). Therefore, it seems reasonable to inquire into how students’ varying levels of English proficiency can play a role in influencing their HE experiences.

The literature occasionally raises some concerns about the potential discriminatory effects of EMI policy in HE as it could advantage English proficient students; while, it might reduce, to a varying extent, limited English proficient (LEP) students’ chances of joining and successfully completing HE programmes (Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017; Barnawi, 2018). For example, AlBakri’s (2017) study reported that some students were denied access to their desired programme of study mainly because their English marks in Grade 12 (equivalent to high school in other educational systems) did not meet the English language level required for such programmes. Furthermore, while studying at the GFP in the most prestigious university in Oman, Sultan Qaboos University, it was found that “academic maladjustment, especially in English-medium environments, is the most important factor that leads students to dropping out.” (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2014; p.67). Al-Busaidi (1995; p.380) foresaw that “the use of English will be a great divider between those who are competent in the language and those who are not.”

It must be admitted, however, that the abovementioned empirical and anecdotal evidence is insufficient to claim that EMI policy in HE is indisputably inequitable. The reported findings and claims above are derived from studies that were not explicitly set out to explore the relationship between implementing EMI policy and social inequalities. Indeed, as far as I can
tell, it seems there is a dearth of research that specifically focuses on investigating how implementing EMI policy could have an impact on social equity in the GCC in general, and the Omani context in particular.

2.2. The institutional context:

The current study has taken place in a HEI in Oman, located in a small town outside the capital city of Muscat. This HEI offers three programmes of study: engineering, business studies and IT and students can graduate at either one of the three levels: a diploma (a two-year programme), an advanced diploma (a three-year programme) and a bachelor’s degree (a four-year programme). The college also has, like other HEIs in Oman, an English Language Centre (ELC) which is in charge of providing GFP to the newly enrolled students as well as offering English for academic purposes courses for students who already joined their academic disciplines. In the academic year 2020-2021, this HEI had around 2350 students across its three departments and approximately 1200 students in the GFP.

It is worth noting that this HEI implements a strict EMI policy. That is, English is the sole MOI for all courses except for two compulsory courses: ‘Arabic Language’ and ‘Oman Civilisation.’ Assessment is exclusively conducted in English.

2.2.1. Students at the HEI:

This HEI enrols students from the surrounding towns and villages and almost all students are Omanis whose mother tongue is Arabic. The entry requirements into this HEI are not very demanding which enable school leavers with overall average academic achievement to join university (Al-Riyami, 2016). Upon their entry to the GFP, students sit for an English placement test, and they are assigned to either of the four levels according to their placement test results. Students who fail twice in any of the levels are dismissed. The final grade that students obtain in a high-stakes English exam upon exit from the GFP determines which academic level (either a diploma [50-59 marks], an advanced diploma [60-69] or a bachelor’s degree [70 or more]) they are eligible to progress to, contingent on meeting an academic requirement of a certain Grade Point Average (GPA). Students who can obtain Band 4.5 and Band 5 in the international IELTS are given a second chance to progress to advanced diploma and bachelor’s degree respectively. Students must pay for IELTS, should they decide to take it.
2.2.2. Lecturers at the HEI:

According to the Statistical Yearbook 2020 (the NCSI, 2020), there are around 7174 academic staff at the HEIs in Oman in the academic year 2018/2019 (the latest available data), 29% of them are Omanis, yet the percentage of Arabic-speaking academic staff is unavailable. The percentage of Omanis in this HEI is much lower than their overall percentage at the national level, barely reaching 16% in the academic year 2013-2014 (the NCSI, 2015; this is the latest available data). At this HEI, the vast majority of lecturers at the academic departments (i.e., not including the ELC lecturers) are expatriates who are mostly from India, Pakistan, and the Philippines. There is a smaller proportion of Arabic-speaking lecturers and even fewer Omanis. Candidates applying for an academic position in the college should have either a doctorate or a master level with some teaching experience at HE.

2.3. Conclusion:

In this chapter, I presented and discussed, albeit briefly, some pertinent historical, political, economic and social context of English in Oman. The discussion, then, focused on the use of English as a MOI in HE and how its use is influenced by several educational and social factors. I, also examined the literature on English in Omani HE which occasionally raised some concerns about the potential detrimental impact of EMI policy on the quality of students’ learning of subject matter and on social equity, which renders this study important and timely. Finally, I provided some relevant information about the language requirements, students, and lecturers in the HEI where the study is taking place.
Chapter Three: Literature review and the theoretical frameworks:

This chapter serves a dual purpose. First, it delineates the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that underpin the current study. Second, it reviews relevant EMI studies. It is subdivided into three main sections. Section 3.1. attempts to situate my study within major ontological, theoretical and ideological debates about English language and its use as a MOI. The second section (3.2) delineates pertinent aspects of Bourdieu’s theory of practice and how his concepts of habitus, capital and field could inform issues of social equity in relation to EMI policy in HE. The last section (3.3) critically explores empirical EMI studies that have attempted to investigate issues of social equity and multilingual/translanguaging practices in HEIs.

3.1. The ontologies and ideologies of English language:

3.1.1. The ontologies of English language:

At the outset, it is necessary to delineate the contemporary debates about the ontologies of English language to lay the foundation for further discussion of EMI policy. Several recent scholars in the fields of applied- and sociolinguistics emphasise the importance of understanding the ontologies of English language for studying topics related to language policy and practice (Pennycook, 2018; Wicaksono and Hall, 2020). That is, the way we conceptualise English language influences how we approach language-in-education research. Pennycook (2022) emphasises the need to enquire further into the distinct ontological status of English as conceptualised by different people in different contexts in the world to understand how these conceptualisations affect their linguistic practices and beliefs.

“Ontology is the study of being” (Crotty, 1998; p.10); it poses questions about the nature of what is out there; and it concerns the existence of both material and abstract objects (Canagarajah, 2020). Linguists who engage with the ontological status of English language tend to ask questions about the nature of what is called English language, whether it is static or dynamic, and whether it is a single or multiple things (Canagarajah, 2020). The applied linguistics literature is increasingly becoming replete with controversies over the conceptualisation of English language. As with many other issues in social sciences, there is a spectrum of views about how English language is conceptualised; however, I am separating the two most dominant perspectives about the nature of English language for analytical purposes. These two perspectives are the monolithic and plurilithic accounts of English.
The monolithic perspective of English is rooted in the Swiss linguist Saussure’s structuralist and Chomsky’s cognitivist orientations to language (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014; Ortega, 2018). According to this paradigm, language is perceived as a self-contained, autonomous system of structures located in the mind and is independent of individuals’ communicative actions (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014; Ortega, 2018). From this perspective, the grammatical competence located in our minds shapes the meaning-making processes in our everyday social encounters (Canagarajah, 2013, 2020). Moreover, this static conceptualisation of English language reinforces the superiority of the socially-constructed ‘standard English’ which inevitably results in devaluing other vernaculars in formal education settings (Garcia and Li, 2014).

These monolithic assumptions of language have been dominant in language-in-education policy and practice research; however, they have been increasingly challenged by new plurilithic thinking of the nature of English (Canagarajah, 2013, 2020; Sharples, 2020; Wicaksono and Hall, 2020). For instance, it is argued that the notion that language exists as a prior bounded system independent from human communicative actions is untenable (Pennycook, 2007; Garcia and Li, 2014). Furthermore, this cognitivist and structuralist perspective has been criticised for separating language from its social and material settings in which it naturally functions as a resource in the meaning-making process (Canagarajah, 2013; Pennycook, 2017). It can be concluded that this static conception of language would not be of great help when I attempt to study the impact of English as an MOI on students’ learning and social equity, and it necessitates the search for a more dynamic and inclusive conceptualisation of language.

In the applied- and sociolinguistics fields, there has been a fundamental shift in the ontological debate about English language towards plurilithic accounts of English. I particularly focus on what has been known as ‘the translingual turn’ in the literature (Pennycook, 2020) as it is, I believe, more relevant to my argument in the current study for reasons I explain below. Within this translingual turn, language is increasingly “conceptualised as a series of social practices and actions by speakers that are embedded in a web of social and cognitive relations” (Garcia and Li, 2014; p.9, [italics in original]). Viewing language as a practice is to perceive it as an activity rather than a pre-existing system of structures, as an action we perform instead of a linguistic capacity we fall back on, “as a material part of social and cultural life rather than an
abstract entity” (Pennycook, 2010; p.2). On this account, language is seen to be located in social activity, instead of the mind (Ortega, 2018).

From the translingual perspective, people utilise language as a verbal resource alongside other semiotic resources and diverse physical resources in the meaning-making process (Canagarajah, 2020). In other words, meaning emerges from people’s engagement in situated communicative activities in which they deploy a range of semiotic and non-semiotic resources (Canagarajah, 2013, 2020; Hall, 2020; Ortega, 2018).

Concerning the conceptualisation of context, unlike the monolithic perspective that treats context as static and of less importance, the translingual perspective considers context as an integral part that constantly shapes and is shaped by language practice (Pennycook, 2010; Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014). This practice-based perspective goes beyond the tangible and immediate aspects of context as valid proof for claims to “accommodate invisible and dis-tant [yet relevant] influences in analysis of meaning-making practices” (Canagarajah, 2020; p.303; Pennycook, 2010). Pennycook (2010) asserts that thinking of language as a local activity should not be understood as strictly embedded in a spatiotemporal location; rather, locality/context must be thought of in a relational manner: in relation, for example, to national and global occurrences. This dynamic conceptualisation of context will prove useful in examining the impact of both students’ socioeconomic and cultural context and globalisation on their perceptions and experiences of EMI. It will also help recognise students as key local actors whose perceptions of EMI should be taken seriously by policymakers.

Another noteworthy tenet of the translingual conceptualisation of English is that it places greater emphasis on the agency of language users in the continuous process of meaning making (Garcia and Li, 2014). That is, human actors dynamically and strategically mediate the resources and networks of the linguistic practice they engage in to better realise their communicative intentions (Canagarajah, 2020; Hall, 2020). This new conceptualisation has given rise to the concept of translanguaging in the education linguistics and applied linguistics fields, which I elaborate in the next section.

### 3.1.2. Translanguaging:

The term translanguaging has gained popularity in recent decades in bilingual and language-in-education research (Sayer, 2013; Macaro, 2018). It has been developed to challenge the
monolingual perspectives that dominated the bilingual education research (Garcia, 2009a). Garcia (ibid.) argues that language-in-education policies in the 20th century were underpinned by what she calls ‘monoglossic belief’ which considers monolinguals’ linguistic practices as the norm and the only legitimate practices. Within such monolingual policy contexts, students’ use of their home linguistic practice (when different from school’s) at school is strictly prohibited (Creese and Blackledge, 2010), and considered a cognitive and linguistic deficiency (Garcia, 2009a; Garcia and Li, 2014). This precisely describes the context of this study as the implemented EMI policy dictates that lecturers strictly adhere to English-only teaching.

From the translanguaging perspective, there are several negative, perhaps unintended, consequences of implementing monolingual linguistic policies in bilingual educational settings. Garcia (2009b) maintains that teaching pupils in a language that they do not master often results in their failure. Moreover, according to Li (2011b, p.382), monolingual policies and pedagogic practices impede the development of student’s creativity and criticality “as they block the access to knowledge in different languages and modalities and reduce the self-confidence of the multilingual language user.” Besides these educational and psychological consequences, monolingual policies can have potential socioeconomic repercussions. Garcia (2009b) asserts that schools’ insistence on adopting monolingual policies marginalises children who have different languaging practices which eventually leads to limiting their academic and socioeconomic opportunities. Hence, I would argue, in line with Blackledge and Creese (2014), that monolingual perspectives based on the monolithic view of language as a bounded system are not adequate to study the complexity and diversity of bilingual education, and that we need a more dynamic and equitable theoretical framework for understanding linguistic practices in bilingual and multilingual educational contexts.

The term translanguaging was originally used to refer to a pedagogic practice. It was Cen Williams who first coined the term translanguaging in Welsh in 1994 (Garcia, 2009b; Sayer, 2013). Translanguaging pedagogy describes a linguistic arrangement where the languages of input and output are deliberately alternated in bilingual classrooms (Garcia and Li, 2014); that is, students might be asked, for example, to read a text in one language and discuss about it in another language (Baker, 2001; Sayer, 2013). Ofelia Garcia borrowed the term and expanded it to become a broader and more encompassing theoretical construct that is based on the linguistic practices of bilinguals which she describes as the normal mode of communication in most communities around the world. Garcia’s social approach to translanguaging pays a special
attention to issues of social equity in bilingual education (Garcia, 2009a&b). Li Wei, approaching translanguaging from a more psycholinguistic perspective, relates his understanding of translanguaging to the notion of languaging “which refers to the process of using language to gain knowledge, to make sense, to articulate one’s thought and to communicate about using language” (Li, 2011a, p.1223). He stresses the potential of translanguaging, as an applied linguistics theory, to help researchers explore the creative and dynamic linguistic practices of human beings when they participate in social interactions that require the deployment of various linguistic and semiotic resources (Li, 2018).

I realise the importance of these different approaches to my understanding of translanguaging; however, I mainly draw on Garcia’s conceptualisation because it is more aligned with issues of social equity in education, which are at the heart of my study. This does not, by any means, entail that I cannot make use of other approaches to translanguaging, which significantly intersect, but rather that I mostly utilise Garcia’s work in delineating the theoretical framework of this study.

Garcia and Kano (2014, p.261) define translanguaging as:

\begin{quote}
  a process by which students and teachers engage in complex discursive practices that include all the language practices of students in order to develop new language practices and sustain old ones, communicate appropriate knowledge, and give voice to new sociopolitical realities by interrogating linguistic inequality. [Italics in origin]
\end{quote}

It follows from the definition that in real communicative activities, bilinguals draw on all their linguistic and semiotic resources which are seen as forming a single repertoire (Garcia, 2009a; Garcia and Li, 2014; Pennycook, 2020). The translanguaging lens enables researchers to capture the fluid and dynamic language practices of bilinguals (Garcia, 2009b; Sayer, 2013). I must, however, acknowledge that not all my participants are bilinguals in the strict sense of the word, yet I am drawing on this theory because it can best capture the complex issues arising from being taught content in a foreign language.

The reason I am adopting the abovementioned definition of translanguaging in this study is because that I am more concerned with the pedagogic implementation of the translanguaging theory. Cen Williams observed that translanguaging was a successful strategy in high schools in Wales (Baker and Wright, 2017). In short, translanguaging in education refers, not only to accepting and tolerating students’ use of their full linguistic and semiotic repertoire, but also to
the strategic and purposive use of this repertoire to achieve pedagogic and socioeconomic goals (Garcia, 2009b; Creese and Blackledge, 2010).

Albeit briefly, I need to clarify why translanguaging rather than codeswitching is a better lens through which I can better analyse the linguistic and semiotic complexity of the educational context where this study is taking place. Garcia (2009b) considers translanguaging as an overarching term that includes and goes beyond codeswitching. That is, translanguaging is a more encompassing theoretical construct than codeswitching since it (translanguaging) takes into account not only the linguistic resources of bilinguals, but also other semiotic resources, such as, mathematics and multimodal resources, like, visual aids, drawing and technological affordances when analysing students’ meaning-making and communicative processes in educational contexts (Sayer, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014; David, 2019; Alhasnawi, 2021). This point is of vital importance to the current study because although the HEI where the study is taking place adopts a monolingual English-only teaching policy, the reality can be much more complex, and students and teachers apparently use multilingual, multi-semiotic and multimodal resources in the learning and teaching processes. These resources include, *inter alia*, various varieties of English language, such as, Indian English, Filipino English, and British English, Modern Standard Arabic, the local vernaculars of Arabic, the mathematic discourse and other multimodalities. Thus, the translanguaging theory, underpinned by a plurilithic and flexible perspective of language, is better suited to develop a better understanding of the fluid and dynamic linguistic and semiotic practices of teachers and students that either help or hinder students’ learning of their specialisations.

### 3.1.2.1. Translanguaging can promote content understanding:

Relevant to the point I have just mentioned, despite the monolingual instruction policies, a growing body of evidence suggests that students in bilingual and multilingual educational contexts continue to flexibly utilise their entire linguistic repertoire to access content knowledge and to improve their linguistic capabilities (Cummins, 2007; Garcia, 2009b; Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia and Li, 2014; Airey, et al., 2017; Baker and Wright, 2017; Macaro, 2018; Galloway et al., 2020). However, students’ translanguaging in classrooms often happens surreptitiously since the institutions’ linguistic policies forbid mixing languages (Garcia, 2009b; Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Canagarajah, 2011; Garcia and Li, 2014). Cummins (2007) argues that instead of leaving it to chance, it would be more effective to render ‘cross-
lingual transfer’ a legitimate pedagogic practice in the teaching of bilingual students. This is significant for my study as I aim to investigate the impact of lecturers’ flexible and dynamic utilisation of students’ entire linguistic repertoire on their access to content knowledge.

Another significant reason for drawing on the translanguaging theory in this study is because it is less concerned with language per se, but rather with investigating the students’ use of language in the meaning making processes (Sayer, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014). That is, two of the main goals behind the use of translanguaging in education are to maximise students’ in-depth understanding of content and to improve their weaker language (Williams, 2000; Baker, 2001; Garcia, 2009b; Creese and Blackledge, 2010; Garcia and Li, 2014; Baker and Wright, 2017). This is, indeed, of vital importance to my research context since previous research has indicated that tertiary education graduates lack English language skills as well as deep comprehension of their specialisations (Al-Lamki, 1998; AlBakri, 2017; Al-Issa, 2020); hence, the need to examine the issue using a theoretical framework that explicitly seeks to improve students’ understanding of subject matter and their linguistic skills.

Translanguaging can potentially promote a fuller and deeper understanding of content in several ways. First, when information and texts are presented to students in a way that considers their linguistic abilities, this can possibly increase students’ engagement in classroom discussions which in turn can enhance students’ understanding of the subject matter (Williams, 2000; Cummins, 2007; Garcia, 2009a; Garcia and Li, 2014; 2015). Creating a translanguaging space enables learners to truly demonstrate what they know (Garcia and Li, 2014). Second, implementing translanguaging pedagogy helps students activate their previous knowledge which is an essential base that can facilitate learning new content (Cummins, 2007; Garcia, 2009a; Baker and Wright, 2017; Sharples, 2020). Adopting translanguaging teaching and learning practices could enable students to utilise their prior knowledge and allow them to build on this knowledge base.

3.1.2.2. Translanguaging can promote social equity in education:

Besides the significance of translanguaging for students’ linguistic and cognitive capability, the abovementioned definition refers to the importance of translanguaging for the issue of social equity which is a primary concern of the current study. The translanguaging theory draws our attention to the notion that linguistic practices are entangled in issues of power that
advantage some people and oppress others (Garcia, 2009a; Garcia and Li, 2014; Tikly, 2016). Garcia (2009a) maintains that bilingual education needs to concern itself with issues of equity because, regardless of the excellent quality of bilingual education programmes in technical terms, such programmes cannot be successful unless they are alive to issues of social justice. Therefore, translinguaging theory strives to provide the theoretical support for a pedagogic approach that is based on principles of social justice and that aims to promote inclusive and equitable linguistic policies (Garcia, 2009a&b; Garcia and Li, 2014; Tikly, 2016).

The translinguaging approach attempts to equitably build on all students’ linguistic repertoire and enable emergent bilinguals to participate in learning processes on a par with more advanced ones (Tikly, 2016). Educational institutions have long adopted monolingual instruction policies, silencing learners who are not sufficiently proficient in the school MOI; hence, limiting their academic and career opportunities (Garcia, 2009b). The translinguaging theory has a critical agenda in wanting to promote a language-in-education approach that explicitly aims to transform the academic and social life of those who language differently and to strive for a more just world (Garcia, 2009a; Blackledge and Creese, 2014; Garcia and Li, 2014, 2015).

Practically speaking, an effective bilingual pedagogical approach should ensure that all students have equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities (Garcia, 2009a). Teachers can achieve equality of participation, according to Garcia (ibid.), through allowing students to use all their linguistic and semiotic resources. An equitable pedagogic approach, also, should ensure that bilingual students, regardless of their linguistic abilities, have access to all curricula and programmes (ibid.). In a nutshell, Garcia (ibid., p.320) emphasises that “[a]n equitable pedagogy under no circumstances forbids a student to use either language.”

The emphasis of the translinguaging theory on issues of social equity was a fundamental reason for adopting it as a lens to investigate EMI policy. Many previous studies of EMI have overlooked the potential impact of this policy on social equity; thus, the critical need to shed some light on this matter.

3.1.2.3. Critiques of translinguaging:

Although translinguaging appears to be a useful and promising approach to language-in-education practices, its implementation in EMI contexts is not without its challenges. For example, students’ attitude towards mixing languages is a crucial factor for the success of
translanguaging teaching and learning (Williams, 2000). Some students might opt to depend solely on their stronger language; while others might favour the exclusive use of the more prestigious language in the learning process (Baker and Wright, 2017). In two studies conducted in different geographical locations by Canagarajah (2011) and Galloway et al. (2020), many participants preferred to stick to the monolingual policy of their institutions and to be taught exclusively through official MOI.

Furthermore, Canagarajah (2011) acknowledges that the pedagogical practices of translanguaging are not yet well developed as most studies used to theorise translanguaging were conducted in everyday social life contexts, and not in classrooms. Even the studies that have been conducted in classroom settings, as reported by Garcia and Li (2014), examined translanguaging practices in primary and secondary schools and mostly in bilingual societies. It can be argued that the translanguaging pedagogy has not been sufficiently examined in HEIs (Doiz and Lasagabaster, 2016).

Finally, a valid criticism of the translanguaging theory is that it overemphasises the agency of bilinguals in maximising learning and communicative practices through TLPs; while it does not pay sufficient attention to the structural constraints that can limit its potential. For example, one practical challenge for the implementation of translanguaging pedagogy is the difficulty of convincing educational policymakers of the potential of translanguaging (Garcia and Li, 2014). It can be argued that students who learn academic content through a foreign language cannot adequately benefit from what the translanguaging theory can offer without official support that legitimises TLPs in HEIs. However, despite all these challenges, and possibly many others, conducting more research can provide more answers and help understand what translanguaging as a pedagogic approach can and cannot do.

### 3.1.3. Ideologies of English language:

The discussion shifts now to deal with the ideologies of English language, with a particular focus on the ways the global spread of English is perceived by different schools of thought. Pennycook (2020) stresses that it is not enough to understand the nature of English language only; we must raise ideological questions to understand the effects of the expansion of English in different parts of the globe.
I would argue that we need to come to grips with the ideologies pertinent to the global spread of English for several reasons. Firstly, asking ideological questions about the global spread of English helps us examine the impacts and consequences of this phenomenon and how English is entangled in local networks of power relations and resistance (Pennycook, 2020; Wicaksono and Hall, 2020). In other words, it is of great importance to understand the role English plays in the world, and how it is perceived, resisted and appropriated in various parts of the world.

Secondly, several scholars argue that the adoption of EMI policies by national governments and HEIs in different parts of the world, as in Oman as indicated in the Context Chapter, are mostly driven by economic and ideological motives (Pennycook, 2001; Shohamy, 2012). Therefore, it is essential to understand the major ideologies that explain the spread of English and EMI policies in the world so as to comprehend how students’ perceptions of these policies can be influenced by such ideologies. For these reasons, the literature on the ideologies of English and its global spread needs to be presented and scrutinised in order to have a better and deeper understanding of the influences of English and EMI policy on students’ education. However, because the spread of EMI policy is inseparable from the processes of globalisation (Macaro, 2018), it is important to first give a brief account of the globalisation phenomenon.

3.1.3.1. Globalisation:

Globalisation has almost become “the cliché of our times” (Held et al., 1999; p.1). The use of this term is so widespread, yet it is so complex and hard to define. The social sciences literature is replete with various and sometimes contrasting perspectives of globalisation which are best viewed as part of a continuum. At one extreme, globalisation is seen, in its neoliberal form, as the advent of a single global market that establishes transnational networks of production, trade and finance, challenging the nation-state’s authority over national socio-economic activities (Held et al., 1999). At the opposite extreme, sceptics believe globalisation is a myth and the flow of investment, trade and capital is mainly intensifying between three major blocs which are North America, Europe and Asia-Pacific, to the exclusion of many other parts of the world (Held et al., 1999; Held & McGrew, 2003). Because space does not permit discussing these views in details, the review focuses on the transformationalist perspective of globalisation since it better informs my study for reasons I delineate shortly.
Central to the transformationalist perspective is the notion that the contemporary globalisation is historically unprecedented such that not only all nation-states, but also virtually all communities, in one way or another, are influenced by the processes of globalisation. In this study, I adopt, for reasons I explain below, David Held and colleagues’ conceptualisation of globalisation, who define it as:

*a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions – assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact – generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power.* (Held, et al., 1999, p.16; italics in original)

Held et al. (1999, pp.16) identify ‘flows’ as the movements of people, physical items and symbols across time and space, whereas they describe ‘networks’ as “regularized or patterned interactions between independent agents, nodes of activity, or sites of power.” This definition, indeed, encompasses several aspects of the contemporary globalisation; however, I will only elaborate on a few points which are most relevant to the current study.

First, the notion that nation states and communities are increasingly becoming enmeshed in wider global processes should not be taken to mean that the world is integrated and there exists a global egalitarian society; in fact, far from it (Held et al., 1999). Transformationalists perceive globalisation as a process (or a set of processes) that are replete with contradictions (Tikly, 2001). That is, globalisation “simultaneously engenders cooperation as well as conflict, integration as well as fragmentation, exclusion and inclusion, convergence and divergence, order and disorder” (Held and McGrew, 2003, p.7). Put differently, globalisation is a process of unbalanced development, resulting in the enmeshment of certain nation states and societies (mainly capitalist ones) in the global order and the marginalisation of others (Giddens, 1990, 2003; Tikly, 2001). Consequently, these global processes have increased inequalities of wealth and power within and across countries arguably because “[p]olitical and economic elites in the world’s major metropolitan areas are much more tightly integrated into, and have much greater control over, global networks than do the subsistence farmers of Burundi” (Held and McGrew, 2003, p.28). This conceptualisation is of particular relevance to this study as it deems it necessary to raise questions about the ability of a globally-driven (as I argue below) EMI policy to offer equitable chances of access and success in HE.
Second, regarding nation states, transformationalists argue that although globalisation does not replace the nation state, it has undermined its power to control national occurrences (Marginson, 1999). The transformationalist perspective of the nation state, however, allows for the possibility of nation states and societies to resist the pressures of globalisation and to respond differently, based on their distinct politics, economies, cultures and histories, to the global forces (Tikly, 2001; Held and McGrew, 2003; Kedzierski, 2016).

While applied linguists and sociolinguists’ perspectives converge to suggest that globalisation plays a role in the spread of English in the world, their views about the ideologies behind the global spread of English and its potential impact on local communities widely diverge. There is, indeed, a spectrum of perspectives on this issue, ranging from the instrumentalist perspective that celebrates the universal usefulness of English (e.g., Crystal, 2012) to the rights-based perspective which condemns its spread (e.g., Phillipson, 1992). However, I focus the discussion on a rather different perspective which can better inform the current study.

The proponents of this perspective are mindful of the real forces behind English expansion; however, they are critical of the deterministic nature of most rights-based perspectives. They are also aware of the potential socioeconomic advantages of English for those who can afford learning it, yet they do not accept that English benefits all in an equitable manner. Alastair Pennycook, Suresh Canagarajah and Jan Blommaert are three leading scholars who are most identified with this view and whose work substantially informs this study. I do not claim that these scholars share the same perspectives on this matter, but there are certain commonalities in their conceptualisations of how to approach the impact of globally-driven language policies on the locals in various parts of the globe, which I elaborate below.

This perspective, which I will call throughout this thesis ‘the locality approach’, is premised on the notion that language is a social and, hence, a local practice. Blommaert (2010) acknowledges the discriminatory power of globalisation as it does advantage some people and disadvantages others, yet he emphasises that we should look at its impact from the local’s perspectives. He urges us to investigate how different individuals within the same society perceive language, how it affects their life and what they can do with language to have a nuanced understanding of the complex impact of a global language like English. This kind of research can better help us reveal and confront social inequities caused by language policies.
There is indeed a dire need to conduct such research as “there are people whose fate may depend on such diagnoses, accounts and judgments.” (Blommaert, 2010, p.198).

A significant implication of this conceptualisation is that we need to focus on how language is perceived and practiced locally to understand how the global spread of English influences various societies and not only assume its beneficial or detrimental effects (Pennycook, 2010; Blommaert, 2010). This is especially important for this study as it aims to fundamentally question the legitimacy of the taken-for-granted EMI policy and its presumed impartial usefulness for all through investigating HE students’ perceptions on its impact on their learning and life chances.

Canagarajah (1999, p.2) explains some of the main tenets of this perspective:

subjects have the agency to think critically and work out ideological alternatives that favor their own empowerment… It recognizes that while language may have a repressive effect, it also has the liberatory potential of facilitating critical thinking, and enabling subjects to rise above domination… The intention is not to reject English, but to reconstitute it in more inclusive, ethical, and democratic terms. [italics in original]

One major strength of this perspective, as this quote indicates, is its emphasis on the agency of individuals and their various methods to appropriate a language that has been imposed on them by either colonialism or globalisation or, indeed, both for their own benefits. At the methodological level, there is a significant advantage of this perspective. When researching students’ lived experiences and their everyday linguistic practices and perceptions, it urges us to devote considerable attention to macro-level global and national social, economic and political factors that can potentially affect students’ perceptions (Canagarajah, 1999).

This locality approach provides a useful way to deal with the ideologies of English. It allows us to understand the impact of these ideologies through the perspectives of locals and in a way that better empower them. Moreover, this approach that is cognizant of the Eurocentrism of sociolinguistics can greatly enhance my contribution to the limited local literature that examines and explains the sociolinguistics of the GCC in its own right (e.g., Troudi and Al Hafidh, 2017; Al-Kahtany et al., 2016; Al Zumor and Abdesslem, 2022). This local sociolinguistics derives its legitimacy from being developed based on the particularities of this region and through the eyes of its people in a way that respects their ways of knowings (Pennycook, 2018).
The locality approach on English ideologies aligns well with the translanguaging conceptualisation of language use in education where English is perceived as a resource that people flexibly use along their other linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources to achieve communication (Garcia and Li, 2014; Canagarajah, 2020; Pennycook, 2020). In this study, I use these intertwined conceptualisations of language ontologies and ideologies as a framework to investigate my research topic.

To sum up, this section has attempted to offer a synopsis of pertinent literature on the theoretical conceptualisation of English language and the ideologies accounting for its global spread in the world. Realising the significance of learning English and how it can empower individuals in the current globalisation era, this section has, however, shown that current dynamic views of MOI encourage us to question and challenge monolingual language-in-education policies that can have detrimental impact on the quality and equity of bilingual programmes. Moreover, despite the powerful hegemonic forces behind the global diffusion of English language, it is crucial that we investigate the agency of students and teachers in different periphery communities to respond to such pressures. This agency is, nonetheless, not absolute as it can be constrained by some structural factors. The following section introduces Bourdieu’s theory of practice which can complement our understanding of the relationship between implementing a strict EMI policy and issues of social equity in HE.

3.2. Bourdieu’s theory of practice:

In the current study, I am drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice to unpack and investigate the relationships between participants’ perceptions on the EMI policy and the macro-level factors that are likely to influence their experiences and perceptions. Bourdieu’s theory of practice offers a lens through which I can highlight the relationship between one’s socioeconomic background and their perceptions and experiences of EMI policy in HE. Bourdieu provides us with theoretical tools to analyse the sophisticated mechanisms through which the HE system, by adopting dominant discourses (the necessity of English-only MOI policy in this case), unwittingly plays a role in ‘reproducing’ social inequalities (Naidoo, 2004), while simultaneously allowing for the agency of individuals to resist and/or appropriate the said policy. Therefore, it is crucial that I investigate participants’ perceptions of their experiences in relation to broader socioeconomic factors, such as their socioeconomic backgrounds, to better understand students’ EMI experiences. In the following lines, I elucidate
Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the relationship between HE and society, and his principal theoretical concepts that pertain to the topic at hand.

Central to Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the social world is his rejection of the sociological dualisms between structure/agency, objectivism/subjectivism and structuralism/hermeneutics (Bourdieu, 1977; Moore, 2004; Maton, 2014). Bourdieu breaks with objectivists approaches by virtue of their deterministic and mechanistic treatment of social practices, leaving little room for agency (Bourdieu, 1989). Simultaneously, Bourdieu abandons all subjectivist approaches that overemphasise agents’ voluntarism and free will to construct the social world (Bourdieu, 1977; Johnson, 1993). To overcome this opposition, Bourdieu (1977) emphasises the dialectical relationships between the objective structure and agents. These complex and multi-layered relationships underlie Bourdieu’s sociological analysis of the social world, and they will prove useful in analysing participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their learning and life chances.

Bourdieu, through conducting empirical research on the French educational system, developed a theoretical framework that explains how educational systems contribute to the reproduction of the structure of the distribution of cultural capital among social classes (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Jenkins, 1992; Bourdieu, 2003). The culture (including language and certain discourses about language) that the school transmits is more or less closely aligned with that of the dominant groups; therefore, students who come from privileged classes are better placed, by virtue of already having the instruments of acquiring this culture, to achieve more academically than students who are less familiar with the dominant culture (Jenkins, 1992; Bourdieu, 2003; Nasir and Hand, 2006; Thomson, 2014). Bourdieu (2003, p.73) maintains that these instruments (including linguistic proficiency) are prerequisite for students’ success in the education system, yet they “are very unequally distributed among children from the different social classes”. He goes on to explain that education systems that require a prior familiarity with the dominant culture mostly benefit advantaged students who possess, through their family upbringing and their previous education, the necessary tools to acquire the transmitted knowledge (Thomson, 2014).

In accordance with this conceptualisation, it is worthwhile to explore participants’ various opportunities of acquiring English and the socioeconomic factors that influence this acquisition. Moreover, it is also significant to investigate how participants’ levels of English
proficiency upon arrival to university can shape their learning experiences and their chances to work their way through university. Therefore, any meaningful analysis of participants’ perceptions of their chances of academic success will have to account for, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), the relations between the education system and participants’ socioeconomic backgrounds where their families occupy different positions in the social space; positions that are at various distances from the academic culture. However, it would be an oversimplification to assume that this process happens in a mechanistic and deterministic way, for Bourdieu provides us with a sophisticated model to account for the role of school in reproducing dominant culture, and, hence, perpetuating the status quo.

At the heart of Bourdieu’s model of the role of culture in perpetuating social inequities is the concept of symbolic power. Unlike physical and economic coercion, symbolic power is an invisible power by which certain discourses are imposed on groups and classes in such a manner that they are accepted as legitimate (Bourdieu, 1991; Jenkins, 1992). The function of symbolic power is succinctly described by Kramsch (2021, p.6) as follows:

This power, says Bourdieu, constitutes, that is, creates, the reality we usually take as given. It is not a divine power that can create the physical world ex nihilo, but it can create perceptions (visions) of and beliefs about the world that can prompt people to take action and thus transform the world physically and economically. [italics in original]

For symbolic power to influence those who are subjected to it, it must be recognised as legitimate; hence, simultaneously, misrecognised as self-evident and natural order (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993; Kramsch, 2021). The recognition and misrecognition are of vital importance here: they highlight the notion that the function of the symbolic power is always dependent on a shared belief of the legitimacy of the established order of things. This belief is common to the extent that even those who are worst affected by its deliberate or unintentional consequences take it for granted (Bourdieu, 1991; Bourdieu, 1993; Kramsch, 2021), and it often goes unquestioned (Bourdieu, 1977). Therefore, they fail to see how such power relations and discourses contribute to the reproduction of social inequalities. That is, they misrecognise how symbolic power advantages some groups of society and disadvantage others (Bourdieu, 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Bourdieu, 1993).

Having briefly introduced Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of symbolic power, it is worth discussing how the education system is entangled in the transmission of power and privilege and, hence, the reproduction of social inequalities. The educational system, according to
Bourdieu, seeks to disguise its contribution to the distribution of powers behind the irreproachable appearance of equality and meritocracy (Bourdieu, 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Jenkins, 1992). Put differently, educational systems achieve legitimacy by pretending to base their selection solely on merit, skills and talent, and claiming that they treat all students as if they were equal where they could all participate on a par in the learning process (Jenkins, 1992; Thomson, 2014).

However, in reality, upon entry into educational systems, and higher education in particular, students are equipped with varying levels of linguistic proficiency and cultural competence which have been gained based on the investment of time, effort and money that students and parents make in preparation for the intended level of study (Jenkins, 1992; Bourdieu, 2003). What actually happens, according to Bourdieu and Passeron (1990), is that educational systems transmute social inequalities (possessing varying levels of economic and cultural capital) into academic inequalities, which results in a systematic bias against those who have less access to cultural capital.

However, one needs to be cautious when applying this model to the analysis of the relations between an individual’s chances of success at an educational stage and his socioeconomic backgrounds. Bourdieu and Passeron (1990) warn that social background, including family upbringing, must not be regarded as the only factor responsible for determining individuals’ practices and perspectives in every case. That is because the restrictions that are attributed to the social origin only function through a particular configuration of factors whereby, they are materialised in an ever-changing structure (ibid.). Therefore, the current study will specifically consider the role of the linguistic factor in influencing students’ learning experiences and their chances of progressing to the academic level (i.e., either diploma, advanced diploma, or bachelor’s level) they aspire to.

To make a better use of the explanatory power of Bourdieu’s model, it is necessary to discuss its principal pillars, namely, field, habitus, and capital. The philosophical basis for the development of these ‘thinking tools’, as Bourdieu prefers to call them, is to transcend the false dichotomy mentioned above between subjectivism and objectivism. Explaining the philosophical underpinning of those concepts, Johnson (1993, p.4) states that: “Bourdieu sought to develop a concept of agent free from the voluntarism and idealism of subjectivist accounts and a concept of social space free from the deterministic and mechanistic causality inherent in many objectivist approaches.” Thomson (2014) maintains that Bourdieu developed
the co-constructed and interconnected triad of field, habitus and capital to go beyond the theoretical debate over the superiority of either social structure or human agency. Field and habitus should be seen as being inseparable and mutually constituting (Grenfell, 2014; Maton, 2014). The dialectical relationships between these concepts will prove to be key for the analysis of my data as illustrated in Chapters Five and Six. Below, I elaborate on all the three concepts, and I attempt to demonstrate how they can help me analyse and understand the topic at hand.

Habitus, a complex and slippery concept, is perhaps the most frequently cited of Bourdieu’s thinking tools, yet it is, as Maton (2014) cautions, the most misunderstood and misused of Bourdieu’s concepts. Habitus is developed to act as a mediation between structure, characterised by social regularities, and human agency, characterised by relative creativity (Bourdieu, 2003). Bourdieu (1977, p. 72) defines habitus as:

*habitus*, systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be objectively "regulated" and "regular" without in any way being the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them and, being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. [italics in original]

I need to unpack this rather complex definition. Based on this definition, the dispositions are ‘durable’ in that they last over an individual’s lifetime, and they are ‘transposable’ in that they can generate practices in a variety of different domains of life (Johnson, 1993; Maton, 2014). By ‘structured structures’, Bourdieu is emphasising that habitus is the product of the objective structures, such as language, economy and so on (Bourdieu, 1977, 1989, 2003). That is, a person’s habitus, which is “the mental structures through which they apprehend the social world” (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 18), is shaped by their past and present social conditionings, in particular, family upbringing and education experiences (Reay, 1998; Moore, 2014). The notion of ‘structured structures’ highlights the influence of the regularities of objective structures and a person’s history on his/her practice, but it by no means mechanically determines and limits their creativity. That is, human practices are not merely ‘obedience to rules.’

This is where the ‘structuring structures’ comes in. The habitus is responsible for ‘structuring’ and producing practices, beliefs and perceptions (Bourdieu, 1977, 2003; Johnson, 1993; Maton, 2014). Bourdieu uses this notion of ‘structuring structures’ to
account for human agency and individuals’ relative ability to transform social practices (Bourdieu, 1977). However, Bourdieu emphasises, once more, that human freedom and creativity are not absolute, and they are limited by the historically and socially-situated conditions that have shaped the production of the habitus (ibid.). In a word, habitus is the principle for the continuity and regularity that we observe in social practices; while, it is simultaneously “the principle for the transformations and regulated revolutions” (ibid., p.82).

Habitus showcases individual’s distinct ways of thinking, acting, feeling and being (Maton, 2014). These actions, perceptions and attitudes can only be accounted for by relating the current conditions where the habitus is functioning to the objective structures (e.g., previous education and family economic status) that have defined the social conditions that generated the habitus (Bourdieu, 1977). Despite the significant role that our past plays in shaping our habitus that, as we said, produces our practices and perceptions, we are often, according to Bourdieu (ibid.), ‘unconscious’ of it and, instead, we are more aware of our most recent experiences. Since habitus cannot be empirically observed, the role of the researcher is to analyse the practices and perceptions of individuals, which are produced by the habitus, in order to understand the social conditions and structuring principles that have shaped the habitus (Maton, 2014).

Finally, habitus does not work in its own and it is the relationship between a habitus and a field that gives meaning for practice. Individuals’ practices and perceptions do not exist in a vacuum, but rather within contexts characterised with social regularities (Johnson, 1993). That is, we cannot understand individuals’ practices and perceptions from the point of view of their habituses alone as the habitus only represents one dimension of the social life; the social fields where individuals operate is as pivotal (Maton, 2014). Thus, to account for what social space brings to bear on agents’ perceptions without succumbing to the determinism of objectivist social approaches, Bourdieu developed the concept of field (Johnson, 1993).

Bourdieu postulates that the social world (i.e., the field of power) is composed of multiple fields (Thomson, 2014). These multiple fields within the field of power are not equal; that is, the dominant fields, such as the political field and the economic field, affect, but do not control, what happens in subordinate fields (ibid.). Although fields enjoy some autonomy, they are structurally homologous with other fields, the economic field in particular (Johnson, 1993). The homology occurs with the aid of the process of transmuting various kinds of capital to other forms (Moore, 2014), a point that I will return to later when discussing the concept of
capital. However, the fields members are not aware of the relationship between the fields and
the field of power because fields work to conceal their contribution to the field of power, and
hence to the reproduction of social inequalities (Moore, 2014; Thomson, 2014).

Bourdieu defines a field as:

... a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who
dominate and people who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of
inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in
which various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field.
All the individuals in this universe bring to the competi-tion all the (relative)
power at their disposal. It is this power that defines their position in the field and,
as a result, their strategies. (Bourdieu 1998b, as cited in Thomson, 2014, p.72)

This definition encompasses several pertinent features of the concept of field. First, social fields
are characterised by hierarchal structures where field members occupy ‘dominant’ and
amount of specific resources that are possessed in relation to other occupants.” Bourdieu uses
the term ‘capital’ to describe these particular resources (Bourdieu, 1997). Those who are
privileged to possess large amounts of this capital which is valued in the field are more likely
to successfully navigate the system, and vice versa. This conceptualisation is of vital
significance for this study as it helps me relate participants possessions of linguistic capital
valued by university (i.e., English) to their perceptions of the impact of the policy on their
learning experiences.

Another prominent aspect of this conceptualisation is that it allows for the study of individuals’
agency and their strategies to maintain or improve their positions in the field (Johnson, 1993;
Moore, 2014). That is, the field members implement strategies where they use all the
knowledge, linguistic abilities and skills at their disposal in order to maximise their chances of
success (Johnson, 1993; Thomson, 2014). Because “[u]nder normal circumstances, no one
enters a game to lose” (Johnson, 1993, p.8), in the current study, I need to highlight participants’
strategies to navigate their learning and how their ability to deploy strategies can impact on
their perceptions of EMI policy. I shift the attention to the last, but not least, of Bourdieusian
concepts, capital which “can be understood as the “energy” that drives the development of a
field through time.” (Moore, 2014, p.102).

Capital, which is traditionally associated with the economic field, is another significant concept
that Bourdieu contributed to the social sciences (Bourdieu, 1997). Bourdieu extended the term
to encompass different types of capital, such as cultural capital (e.g., different types of knowledge and language), social capital (e.g., social networks and family relations) and symbolic capital (Moore, 2014; Thomson, 2014). Bourdieu (1997, p.47) explains the purpose of developing this concept:

The notion of cultural capital initially presented itself to me, in the course of research, as a theoretical hypothesis which made it possible to explain the unequal scholastic achievements of children originating from the different classes by relating academic success, i.e., the specific profits which children from the different classes and class fractions can obtain in the academic market, to the distribution of cultural capital between the classes and class fraction.

This theorisation of capital is of particular importance for the current study as it emphasises the often-overlooked connection between academic success and the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital among individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. This is based on the conceptualisation that capital can be exchanged within and across fields (Moore, 2014). For instance, the economic capital can be transformed into academic capital, by equipping individuals with the skills and competences necessary for success in the educational system, which, in turn, can be transformed to economic capital when the individual gets a lucrative job in the labour market. However, it must be noted that “[p]ossession of economic capital does not necessarily imply possession of cultural or symbolic capital, and vice versa.” (Johnson, 1993, p.7; italics in original). Yet still there is an intrinsic connection between capital exchange and social inequality (Moore, 2004). Overlooking, intentionally or otherwise, this relationship, which characterises the majority of studies that examined students’ experiences of EMI in HE, results in an incomplete picture of understanding these experiences; a gap that this study seeks to help fill.

Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p.116) emphasise that the linguistic competence, as a form of cultural capital, of students at HE, which is unequally distributed among students belonging to different social classes, “constitutes one of the best-hidden mediations through which the relationship … between social origin and scholastic achievement is set up”. However, they caution that social origin should not be considered the only factor that can independently determine an individual’s practices, perceptions and attitudes (ibid.). Hence, I emphasise the dialectical relationship between Bourdieu’s triad of habitus, capital and field for a better understanding of students’ EMI experiences.
As I endeavour to understand students’ experiences and perceptions of EMI policy in HE, the concepts of habitus, field and capital prove useful in several ways. Firstly, they provide us with a theoretical tool to think relationally about individuals’ practices and perceptions of their social world (Maton, 2014). That is, when analysing students’ experiences and perceptions of the policy, I should go beyond the direct perceptions to capture the social conditions that influenced the production of these perceptions. I should also attend to the dialectical relationships between the habitus of participants, as manifested in their perceptions of their EMI experiences, and the field where those participants are acting. Moreover, when analysing participants’ experiences in terms of the opportunities to improve English prior to joining college, the concepts of habitus and capital will help me understand students’ academic progress and their chances to complete their studies to the level they aspire to. Ultimately, the explanatory power of Bourdieu’s theory of practice can help to shed new light on the relationship between EMI policy in HE and issues of social equity.

3.3. Review of relevant previous EMI research:

The literature review shifts now towards scrutinising the major findings emerging from the empirical research that has been conducted in the field of EMI in HE. This review places particular emphasis on studies that specifically examined students’ perceptions of EMI policy in relation to issues of social equity and multilingualism/translanguaging in HE. The last two decades have witnessed a surge of academic interest in the phenomenon of using EMI in HE. Numerous researchers from around the globe have reported a dramatic increase in the number of HEIs that offer EMI programmes (Mazrui, 1997; Coleman, 2006; Sierra et al., 2012; Wächter and Maiworm, 2014; Dearden, 2015; Airey et al., 2017; Brown, 2018; Macao, 2018; Macaro et al., 2018). As mentioned above, this increase is predominantly attributed to HEIs and national governments’ desire to internationalise HE and to produce English proficient graduates who are capable of participating in a competitive global job market (Spolsky, 2004; Coleman, 2006; Earling and Hilgendorf, 2006; Phillipson, 2009a; Ricento, 2010; Sierra et al., 2012; Wächter and Maiworm, 2014; Williams, 2015; Kedzierski, 2016; Tikly, 2016; Brown, 2018; Macaro, 2018). Nevertheless, it is not reasonable to assume that students’ English proficiency will improve simply by teaching content knowledge through EMI (Galloway et al., 2020). Hence, it would be naïve to suppose the guaranteed socioeconomic usefulness of EMI policy for individuals, and there is, in fact, a dire need to critically investigate this growing phenomenon in HE (Galloway et al., 2020).
To date, the greater part of previous empirical research into EMI in HE has focused on surveying teachers and students’ attitudes towards the implementation of EMI policy. However, there seems to be a scarcity of research that attempted to investigate the impact of EMI policy on students learning of the subject matter and on social equity (Shohamy, 2012; Troudi and Al Hafidh, 2017; Macaro et al, 2018). Even a lesser number of studies have been set out to explore students’ responses to this policy.

As a primary focus of the current study is to investigate the impact of EMI policy on students’ content learning, the following review of the literature specifically scrutinises findings from empirical studies that explored HE students’ perceptions on the impact of EMI on their academic achievement. Put differently, in this review, I attempted to include, though I do not claim this is a systematic review of the literature, empirical studies that explored the impact of EMI on students’ learning of content knowledge in HE. EMI studies that investigated EMI in other phases of education, such as primary and secondary education, were not included. In the following lines, I specifically discuss the findings from the identified studies that are most directly relevant to the focus of this research.

The conclusions drawn from the empirical studies that attempted to investigate the effectiveness of EMI programmes, in terms of enhancing students’ learning of the subject matter, have been contradictory and inconclusive (Macaro, 2018; Macaro et al., 2018). While several empirical studies have demonstrated that implementing EMI policy in HEIs negatively, yet to varying degrees, impacts students’ learning of the subject matter (Vinke, 1995; Neville-Barton and Barton, 2005; Airey and Linder, 2006; Airey, 2009, 2010; Hellekjær, 2010; McLaren, 2011; Cho, 2012; Al-Bakri, 2013, 2017; Alhamami, 2015; Shamim et al., 2016; Al Azemi, 2017; Al-Bakri and Troudi, 2020), other studies found that using EMI in HE does not pose significant challenges to students’ learning of the content of their academic programmes (Joe and Lee, 2013; Dafouz et al., 2014).

Students’ poor English proficiency and to a lesser extent teachers’ low English proficiency appear to be the most reported reasons behind the detrimental impact of implementing EMI on students’ learning of the subject matter (Cho, 2012; Brown, 2018; Macaro, 2018; Galloway et al., 2020). Some potential impacts of EMI policy on the quality of students’ learning are manifested in the simplification of the curriculum and the reduction of classroom interaction as indicated by a number of empirical studies (Airey and Linder, 2006; Airey, 2010; Al-Bakri,
Most studies exploring the impact of EMI policy concentrate on identifying pedagogic benefits and consequences of implementing this policy in HE. As the primary focus of most previous EMI studies is the pedagogic implications of EMI policy, they rarely attempted to problematise the issue of students’ lack of English proficiency as a potential challenge to students’ learning experience in HE. Moreover, the role of EMI policy in promoting social inequity and acting as a gatekeeper to HE and employment have received scarce attention. That is, issues of social equity and how EMI policy may lead to discrimination against LEP students are at the periphery of EMI research (Tikly, 2016).

Although the socioeconomic impact of EMI policy has received considerable theoretical attention mostly from critical standpoints (Pennycook, 1994, 2007; Mazrui, 1997; Phillipson, 2004, 2017; Tollefson and Tsui, 2004; Shohamy, 2006, 2012; Ricento, 2010; Tollefson, 2013), only a modest number of empirical studies have investigated this issue (e.g., Troudi and Jendli, 2011; Sultana, 2014; Shier, 2016). Therefore, the remaining of this section presents and scrutinises the findings of previous empirical studies that investigated the impact of EMI policy on social inequities, and, also, studies that explored students’ perceptions of incorporating multilingual practices, such as translanguaging practice, in EMI programmes.

The primary criterion for selecting studies in sub-section 3.3.1. was that they explicitly or partially addressed issues of social inequalities in EMI programmes, which is a central concern of this study. Another criterion was that these studies were conducted in contexts where students had no choice but to pursue their desired specialisations through EMI, mirroring the situation of my participants.

For studies in sub-section 3.3.2., the reviewed studies specifically examined students’ beliefs regarding the use of multilingual/translanguaging practices in EMI programmes. These studies specifically investigated students’ beliefs about their lecturers’ use of L1 in EMI programmes. These are particularly relevant as my second research question explores participants’ perceptions of the impact of lecturers’ translanguaging practices on their content knowledge and social equity.
The rationale behind this selection and the in-depth review of these studies in both sub-sections was their direct relevance to the primary focus of this study; hence, they can better help me understand the landscape of EMI research in these specific areas. This would more usefully inform the theoretical and methodological decisions of the current study.

3.3.1. Studies exploring the impact of EMI policy on socioeconomic inequities:

Troudi and Jendli’s (2011) study that explored Emirati university students’ experiences of EMI is one of the earliest studies that demonstrated how students’ schooling backgrounds shape their EMI experiences in HE in the GCC. Though it was a small-scale study (i.e., reporting on semi-structured interviews with 10 students from a single university) and it primarily focused on the pedagogic and cultural (i.e., the impact of EMI policy on the status of Arabic language) consequences of EMI policy, there were, still, some relevant findings to the issues of social equity. For instance, participants who attended private primary and secondary schools (where English is the MOI) held more favourable attitudes towards EMI than participants with public school background. This latter group was much more likely to encounter linguistic challenges when learning academic content through EMI, especially in the first years as they transferred from Arabic MOI schools to EMI university. Another significant finding that emerged from this study was the growing trend of many Emirati families using English as a language of communication at home, mostly through hiring English-speaking nannies from some Asian countries. Thus, students from affluent families had greater opportunities to enhance their English proficiency not only by attending private schools, but also through day-to-day use at home and elsewhere.

Another small-scale, yet with more focus on the social repercussions of using EMI in HE was carried out by Sultana (2014) in Bangladesh. Employing a mixed-method approach, the researcher sought to obtain students’ perceptions (by means of a questionnaire) and understand their experiences (through semi-structured interviews) of learning in EMI universities, with a particular focus on the role of students’ socioeconomic backgrounds in shaping their experiences. The most important finding from the questionnaire data was that students needed to have adequate proficiency to be able to participate in classroom discussions and extra-curricular activities. Confirming Troudi and Jendli’s (2011) findings, Sultana reported that students from Bangla MOI school background had substantially more linguistic challenges to
cope with the demand of content learning through EMI than students who went to EMI private schools.

Findings from the interviews illuminated the discriminatory impact of EMI policy, marginalising students from poor families during classroom discussions and activities. The study concluded that EMI policy in Bangladesh served “the interests of the privileged participants who had the perfect combination of linguistic, economic, cultural, and symbolic capitals” (Sultana, 2014, p.35).

A more recent PhD study, conducted in Pakistan by Shier (2016), set out to understand the impact of EMI policy on the academic trajectories of students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. The study also attempted to investigate how students resisted, appropriated, or subordinated to this policy. By studying the social impact of EMI through the lenses of post/neo-colonial theories, Shier endeavoured to illustrate how education in general and language-in-education policies in particular were used to subjugate the colonised people.

One important finding of this study was that students’ English proficiency played a significant role in shaping their academic trajectories. For instance, while one student’s English proficiency enabled him to secure a scholarship in a prestigious business school in Pakistan, and subsequently win an opportunity to study in the United States, lack of English proficiency forced another student to shift his specialisation from science to social sciences, limiting his/her future job opportunities. Despite coming roughly from the same low social class, students developed different English proficiency levels due to several factors including, students’ place of residence and parents’ level of education.

In terms of participants’ reaction to EMI policy, findings revealed that Pakistani students had genuine perplexity over how to best respond to EMI policy. While they mostly subordinated to the power of English, and believed in its utilitarian function in today’s globalised world, participants demonstrated some resistance to the gatekeeping role of EMI policy and its detrimental impact on their local languages and cultures.

Despite the theoretical and methodological strengths of this study, it had some limitations. Firstly, as the author herself confessed, the study overwhelmingly concentrated on the experiences of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, and did not have a comparison group from higher classes. Secondly, although Shier convincingly explained the influence of
global discourses of English hegemony on shaping decision-makers and students’ perception of English, she did not sufficiently elaborate on students’ techniques to resist and appropriate EMI policy to better serve their academic needs.

Overall, there are, indeed, several key points that I can take from those reviewed studies. Findings revealed that although the vast majority of students favoured EMI policy for pragmatic reasons, students’ experiences of accessing, learning and succeeding in HE were substantially influenced by their socioeconomic statuses. This implies that more research is needed to empirically investigate whether the EMI policy provides equal opportunities for all students to succeed in HE. Methodologically, these studies have demonstrated that employing qualitative methods as data collection tools proved to be useful. Students’ lived experiences concerning their learning in an EMI policy context significantly vary; hence, the great importance of adopting qualitative methods to gain more in-depth understanding of the nuanced differences between students’ experiences. In the next subsection, I consider studies that attempted to explore students’ perceptions on the use of students’ L1 along with English in EMI settings and the implementation of translanguaging in HE contexts.

3.3.2. Studies exploring the use of multilingual/ translanguaging practices in EMI contexts:

Galloway et al. (2020) maintain that recent empirical research into multilingualism and translanguaging in HE has called into question the English-only monolingual policies and practices in EMI settings. Nevertheless, there is still a need for empirical evidence to support the use of translanguaging practices, particularly in HE as I mentioned above that most empirical research on translanguaging teaching and learning practices has been conducted at school level (Doiz and Lasagabaster, 2016). Although not all adopt a translingual or translanguaging perspective, the studies I review below inquired about the place of students’ L1 in EMI policy contexts.

Two recent studies that investigated students’ beliefs on their lecturers’ use of L1 merit some attention here. Macaro et al.’s (2020) study in China and Galloway et al.’s (2020) study in Japan and China attempted to examine students’ attitudes towards lecturers’ use of L1 in EMI programmes. Both studies adopted mixed-methods approach, gathering data through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The overarching conclusion drawn from these studies was that students were in favour of lecturers predominantly using English with use of
L1 restricted to occasions where communication breakdown and comprehension problems take place.

In Galloway et al.’s (2020, p.410) study, students were quite critical of their lecturers’ use of [students’] L1 and considered this practice as an indication of lecturers’ limited English competence and ‘for not being ‘strict’’. This was because students considered improving their English proficiency a principal goal of enrolling in EMI programmes; thus, English-only was believed to be necessary for achieving this goal. Nonetheless, students wanted lecturers to use L1 when they encountered understanding challenges. There were, however, some nuanced differences. For instance, Galloway et al. (2020) reported that Japanese home students were less critical of L1 use than international non-native English speaking students who disapproved of multilingual practices in EMI programmes.

Summing up, these findings, useful as they were, shed some light on some factors that influenced students’ perspectives on the use of L1, such as, lecturers’ and students’ level of English proficiency and students’ motivation to enrol in EMI programmes; however, researchers did not provide sufficient details about the socioeconomic backgrounds of the students, and whether they had the freedom to enrol in EMI or alternative MOI programmes of the discipline of their choice. Doing this could have brought to light the notion that students’ learning experience and their perspectives of English-only EMI could be shaped by their socioeconomic backgrounds and their English proficiency levels. Moreover, the reviewed studies in this subsection made no explicit reference to the potential impact of TLPs or use of L1 (these are not synonymous) on issues of social equity. That is, they did not investigate the role of TLPs in promoting, or otherwise, social equity among students from various backgrounds.

In summary, this brief review of previous studies that either investigated the impact of EMI on social equity or examined the use of multilingual/translanguaging practices in EMI contexts revealed significant findings which informed the theoretical and methodological design of the current study. The most important conclusion drawn from those studies is that there is still much that need to be done to render language-in-education policies more effective and more socially equitable. Therefore, the present study more explicitly addresses the issue of social equity in EMI policy context by adopting Bourdieu’s theory of practice that can profoundly help examine the impact of EMI policy on students’ content learning and social equity in Omani HE. It also
adopts recent conceptualisations of language-in-education that treat language as a resource and that seek to empower all students by rendering students’ and lecturers’ TLPs legitimate and necessary to maximise learning and enhance social equity in education.

3.4. Conclusion:

This review of the literature has dealt with two pertinent areas of my research topic: the conceptualisations and ideologies of English language use in education and social equity in HE. Contemporary perspectives on these topics render the topic at hand timely and relevant.

Concerning ontologies of English language, the dominant monolithic accounts of English, that conceptualise language as a self-standing system, independent of context and that has pervaded applied linguistics and educational language policy and practice research, are increasingly challenged by plurilithic conceptualisations that understand language as a set of social practices significantly influenced by various political, social and cultural contexts (Canagarajah, 2013; Garcia and Li, 2014; Hall, 2020). The recent translanguaging accounts of English provide us with the theoretical basis to investigate how students flexibly and dynamically use languages, semiotics, and other multimodalities as resources to improve their access to content knowledge, and, hence, increase their chances of success in HE (Garcia, 2009a).

Drawing on the locality approach, I address EMI policy from a conceptualisation that although globalisation and other local macro-level political and economic forces can play a role in shaping the policy and students’ perceptions of the policy, equal or more attention should be devoted to having a contextualised understanding of how students perceive and make sense of EMI policy and its impact on their academic and social life. In other words, I believe that “there is agency and there is constraint in relation to policy – this is not a sum-zero game” (Ball, 2006, p. 48). Thus, in pursuit of understanding the impact of EMI policy on students’ learning and social equity, the research questions are formulated to investigate students’ responses to and ways of appropriating the policy, bearing in mind that students’ experiences of the policy are always influenced by larger macro factors which need to be accounted for when analysing these experiences.

Previous studies that attempted to investigate the impact of EMI policy on social equity were not framed within a solid sociological theory of social equity in education. In the present study, Bourdieu’s theory of practice provides a useful lens for interrogating participants’ perceptions
of the impact of EMI policy on their learning and life chances. Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital and field will help highlight and understand the nuances and complexities of participants’ varied experiences of navigating their learning within an English-only policy setting.

Last, but not least, there is a critical agenda to interrogate the taken-for-granted assumption that EMI policy serves students equally well. The study aims to give an opportunity to all students to voice their own views and concerns about the implementation of a strict English-only EMI policy. The critical agenda extends to investigate students’ perceptions of their lecturers’ TLPs in order to develop a better understanding of language-in-education practices and how these relate to issues of social equity in HE.
Chapter Four: Research Methodology:

The purpose of this thesis is twofold. First, I investigate students’ perceptions and lived experiences of learning in an EMI policy context, with particular focus on its impact on their learning experiences at university and their life chances (i.e., opportunities to progress to higher qualifications and access to the job market). Second, by problematising the monolingual (i.e., English-only) EMI policy practices, the study aims at exploring students’ perceptions and experiences of translanguaging teaching practices, and how these practices can impact their access to content knowledge and to other academic and socioeconomic benefits. The first aim is to interrogate the widely held assumption that EMI policy serves all students equally well to achieve their academic and socioeconomic goals. Concerning the second aim, beside seeking to understand students’ perspectives of lecturers’ translanguaging practices, there is a critical agenda in wanting to challenge the English-only EMI policy, and to draw attention to alternative language-in-education practices.

To address these aims, the following research questions were posed:

1- How do students at a HEI in Oman perceive the impact of (English-only) EMI policy on their content learning and social equity in HE?
   a. What are students’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their content learning?
   b. What are students’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their life chances?

2- What are students’ perceptions of the impact of lecturers’ translanguaging practices on their content learning and life chances?

In this chapter, I first discuss the philosophical assumptions underpinning the methodological decisions in this study. After elaborating on my positionality, I introduce the research design where I describe the data collection method and the recruitment of participants. Next, I delineate the data analysis procedures. Finally, I address the ethical considerations in this study.

4.1. Philosophical assumptions:

It has become a widely accepted practice in social science research tradition that the research approach and methodological decisions are informed and influenced by the worldview held by the researcher. A worldview, or a paradigm, is defined as “a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action.” (Mertens, 2015, p.8). Research communities subscribing to each paradigm share common
(though not identical) philosophical assumptions about the nature of reality (i.e., ontological assumptions) and the nature of knowledge (epistemological assumptions) (Mertens, 2007; Punch and Oancea, 2014). Fundamentally, debates about ontology revolve around whether there exists a single reality or multiple realities; whereas, epistemological assumptions are concerned with the relationship between the observer (knower) and what is to be observed (the would-be-known) (Mertens, 2007; Grogan and Simmons, 2012). The ontological and epistemological views of qualitative researchers, as Taylor et al. (2016) contend, range from believing in a single reality that can be objectively known to denying such a reality and insisting on the subjectivity of all knowledge. Taylor et al. (2016) add that the majority of qualitative researchers hold a position that falls between these two extremes. I explain, in the following subsections, how the ontologies and epistemologies of interpretivism and critical theory can complement each other in informing the methodological decisions of this study in order to achieve the dual aims delineated above.

4.1.1. Interpretivism:

Defying a long tradition of positivist social science research that presumes the existence of a stable, unchanging social reality that can be discovered using objective methods, by disinterested researchers, the interpretive paradigm emphasises the multiple, socially constructed realities that can be interpreted differently (Merriam, 2002; Cohen et al., 2018). Lincoln et al. (2011, p. 115) aver that “we construct knowledge through our lived experiences and through our interactions with other members of society.” Researchers working within the interpretive paradigm are interested in understanding people’s interpretations of these realities from people’s own perspectives (Ewert, 1991; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). That is, the epistemology of interpretivism emphasises the subjective nature of knowledge (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

As a central aim of this thesis is to have an in-depth understanding of students’ perceptions and experiences of EMI policy, the interpretive paradigm can readily lend itself to capturing the varied ways students interact with policy as it is implemented and make sense of its impact on their learning experiences. Simply put, participants can have varied and sometimes contradictory perceptions and experiences of EMI policy; thus, it is, I believe, vitally important to give them the opportunity to describe in their own words how each of them experiences and
feels about learning content through English-only. These unique perceptions and experiences significantly contribute to our understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

Adopting interpretivist worldview, I consider people deliberate and creative and they actively engage in constructing meaning about their social world (Cohen et al., 2018). However, the meanings that form a basis for and emerge from people’s interpretations are context specific (Cohen et al., 2018). More precisely, the data we (as researchers) get from participants and the knowledge we generate are always shaped and influenced by our (researchers’ and participants’) lived experiences and our interaction with the context (Lincoln et al., 2011). Hence, I pay special attention to the different factors (e.g., the socioeconomic backgrounds of participants, the nature of their specialisations and the global and national discourses around the global status of English) that shape context due to the significant role context plays in influencing individual’s experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).

Another fundamental tenet of the interpretive paradigm that renders it more appropriate for informing this study is its insistence on studying social phenomena in all their complexities, rather than concentrating on a limited number of variables (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Cohen et al., 2018). The nature of the topic at hand is rather complex; hence, it requires a research approach that is capable of attending to the various factors that influence students’ EMI learning experiences and the varying interpretations that students can make about these experiences.

From the interpretivist perspective, researchers are the key instrument for data collection and data analysis (Merriam, 2002; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007), and they are actively involved in understanding and interpreting the meaning of participants’ lived experiences (Lincoln et al., 2011). As understanding complex social phenomena is the primary goal of interpretive research, “the human instrument, which is able to be immediately responsive and adaptive, would seem to be the ideal means of collecting and analyzing data” (Merriam, 2002, p.5). Interpretivist researchers embrace the idea that research is a value-laden enterprise (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). The onus is, thus, on the researcher to be self-critical and reflexive, to follow rigorous research procedures and to openly report their values and biases (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007). I further elaborate on my positionality below.
The interpretive paradigm substantially informs the methodology of the current study, yet it cannot by itself address all the study aims due to its limitations. Interpretivist research has been accused of being apolitical and accepting, rather than questioning and challenging the status quo (Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Taylor et al., 2016). It neglects the relationship between people’s interpretations and the forces of external factors and circumstances (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). Hence, the interpretive paradigm’s account of social phenomena could be partial and incomplete (Giddens, 1977).

Habermas argues that individuals’ understandings of social phenomena may result from ‘distorted social and self-knowledge’ (Ewert, 1991, p.353). Carr and Kemmis (1986, p.95) explain that “[s]ocial structure, as well as being the product of the meanings and actions of individuals, itself produces particular meanings, ensures their continuing existence, and thereby limits the kind of actions that it is reasonable for individuals to perform.” (Italics in original). They, further, emphasise the intrinsic political nature of education as it affects the life chances of individuals and affects their access to the kind of life they value (Carr and Kemmis, 1986). This notion is of paramount importance for the purpose of my study as there are several socioeconomic factors that may have profound influence on students’ perceptions and experiences of the policy under scrutiny. Further, EMI policy can itself limit students’ abilities to equally participate in the learning process. Hence, a critical approach is required to provide a more complete picture of the impact of EMI policy on students’ learning and social equity, and how it can privilege some students and marginalise others.

Before proceeding to the discussion of critical theory, it is important to emphasise that Habermas, one of the founding fathers of critical theory, does not reject the previous paradigms, i.e., positivism and interpretivism (Scott, 1978; Cohen et al., 2018). Rather, critical theory “requires the mastery of the analytic and interpretive sciences, not the exclusion of them” (Ewert, 1991, p.376). Nevertheless, Habermas is critical of their universal application “as the exclusive criterion for determining the validity of all forms of knowledge” (Ewert, 1991, p.348). Thus, I subscribe to the notion that interpretivism and critical theory are compatible and can be simultaneously used to inform a single study.
4.1.2. Critical Theory:

Several tenets of the critical paradigm are relevant to the purpose of the current study. Ontologically, critical theorists hold the position that the larger political and socioeconomic factors substantially affect how individuals construct their realities, privileging certain forms of realities to the exclusion of others (Merriam, 2002; Mertens, 2007; Grogan and Simmons, 2012). Epistemologically, recognising that knowledge is socially and historically located, and it is by no means neutral, researchers working within critical theory strive to expose privileged knowledge that helps maintain the status quo (Usher, 1996; Canagarajah, 1999; Mertens, 2007).

By taking a critical stance, researchers aim to unmask ideologies and norms that serve the interests of the privileged people in society and which they use to oppress others and limit their access to knowledge (Gottlieb, 1981; Usher, 1996). It must be emphasised here that the oppression and marginalisation of certain groups can be an unintended consequence of certain policies. Regardless of the reasons behind marginalisation, through ideology critique, which is the main approach of critical paradigm, critical researchers, including myself, aim at exposing the political and social ideologies and practices that prevent individuals from achieving their potential (Ewert, 1991; Usher, 1996). The aim of ideology critique is to enable participants to self-reflect and be enlightened about the conditions that may have led to their disempowerment (Carr and Kemmis, 1986).

A more relevant and specific strand of critical theory to the purpose of my study would be that of critical applied linguistics and sociolinguistics. I would particularly draw on the works of Alastair Pennycook, Suresh Canagarajah and Jan Blommaert. Though those scholars might not share identical critical views of language, language use and language policies, they all have usefully conceptualised how language is increasingly entangled in issues of power, equity and marginalisation. Hence, they offer alternative and more appropriate conceptualisations of how to conduct language-in-education research, which I called the ‘locality approach’ in the Literature Review Chapter. I elaborate on a few significant points in direct relation to the philosophical assumptions underpinning my study.

The first point is that practical language-in-education concerns cannot be separated from questions of power (Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2010). A direct implication of this is that
accounting for the macro political, economic and social factors that influence students’ language use and beliefs is indispensable for understanding participants’ perceptions of the EMI policy. Hence, I would argue, in line with Ozga (1990; p.359), that any successful attempt to understand the impact of an educational policy on people will have to incorporate “structural, macro-level analysis of education systems and education policies and micro-level investigation, especially that which takes account of people’s perceptions and experiences.”

Adopting critical approaches to language-in-education research, I believe it is necessary to interrogate the taken-for-granted neutrality of EMI policy and to investigate the impact of contextual factors on students’ perceptions of the policy.

Critical applied linguists and sociolinguists, also, underscore the urgent need to develop critical applied linguistics and sociolinguistics as localised practice (Pennycook, 2018). This is crucial because “much applied linguistic work – whether ‘critical’ or otherwise – is based on Global North contexts and theories” (Pennycook, 2018, p.127). This relatively fresh perspective in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics is inspired by new perspectives from the Global South, particularly de Sousa’s *epistemologies of the South* which aim to “allow the oppressed social groups to represent the world as their own and in their own terms, for only thus will they be able to change it according to their own aspirations” (de Sousa, 2018, p.1). Although this study does not fit squarely within this latter school of thought which is most often associated with decolonisation, I still strongly support those critical scholars’ argument for the inclusion of locals, not only as ‘research subjects’, but also as legitimate contributors to knowledge building (Pennycook, 2018). In keeping with these critical perspectives, this study aims to focus on the local level to investigate what English means to students, what they do/want to do with it, and how it helps or hinders their achievement of academic and socioeconomic goals (Blommaert, 2010).

In line with the critical paradigm, critical applied- and sociolinguistics stresses the agency of individuals to resist and appropriate the language policies that are imposed on them (Pennycook, 1994; Garcia and Li, 2014; Canagarajah, 2020). That is, students, as well as teachers, have the ability to appropriate EMI policy to serve their needs and interests (Canagarajah, 1999). In resisting EMI policy, I have to clarify that I am not calling for [Arabic] ‘linguistic purism,’ nor advocating for the elimination of English from the HE domain. Rather, I seek to highlight students’ and lecturers’ TLPs that they consciously or subliminally employ to resist and appropriate the English-only EMI policy, with the aim of promoting more socially
just language policies, in the sense of being more inclusive of students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. In other words, the focus here is not simply on encouraging flexible language use in educational contexts, but rather “[t]he more important focus is on what fixed or fluid language practices enable.” (Pennycook, 2022, p.11). The aim is to ensure that the classroom is an inclusive place where students, regardless of their proficiency levels, can participate on a par in the meaning-making processes. Seeking to enhance social equity is a fundamental principle of the critical theory in general and critical applied- and sociolinguistics in particular (Pennycook, 2001; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018).

4.2. Positionality:

By embracing interpretivist and critical worldviews, I acknowledge the value-laden nature of research. Cohen et al. (2018, p. 302) maintain that qualitative “researchers are not neutral; they have their own values, biases and world views, and these are lenses through which they look at and interpret the already interpreted world of participants.” Thus, it is the duty of researchers to be aware of and to transparently report their values and biases (Etherington, 2004). Here, I first, reflect on my insider/outsider position in the current study and how it may impact on collecting and analysing data and reporting my findings.

In this study, I might be perceived as both an insider and outsider, an ambivalent position created by the type of relationship I have with my participants. I am considered an insider for several reasons. Firstly, I share the same nationality, language and cultural background with my participants. Secondly, I have worked in the HEI where the study will take place for nine years, as an English language lecturer (seven years) and as an administrator (two years).

On the other hand, I can also be regarded as an outsider because the phenomenon I am investigating pertains to learning subject matter through English, and not learning English per se. Being an English language lecturer, I consider myself as an outsider because I am not familiar with teaching subject matter through English; hence, I, as a practitioner, do not have particular prior assumptions about the type of learning experiences students might have in this EMI policy context. Another significant factor that can render me as an outsider to my participants is the age difference. Although I am less than 20 years older than the eldest interviewee, the fact that they all were born around the turn of the twenty first century make their experience with English language significantly different than mine. This generation has
had greater exposure to authentic English through TV channels, social media and online videogames (Al-Issa, 2020) (though these are not equally available to all students); a situation that might have affected current students’ motivation to learn English and their attitudes toward the language.

Being an insider can have a number of advantages. For instance, it can help me establish good rapport with my participants, which in turn can encourage them to reveal their real experiences (Hockey, 1993, as cited in Hellawell, 2006; Hodkinson, 2005). My insider knowledge can, also, help me to better understand their perceptions and concerns, and hence improve and enrich the research data (Brannick and Coghlan, 2007; Punch and Oancea, 2014). Meanwhile, the insider position is a double-edged sword. Brannick and Coghlan (2007), for instance, maintain that over-reliance on preunderstandings during interviews can lead researchers to assume that they know too much and, hence, stop probing for clarifications and fuller accounts of interviewees’ perspectives. To overcome this inherent limitation of insider status, Hellawell (2006, p. 487) recommends that:

“the researcher should be both inside and outside the perceptions of the ‘researched’. That is to say that … both empathy and alienation are useful qualities for a researcher. I use the word ‘alienation’ here in its strictly Brechtian sense of distancing or making strange.”

The strategy here is to “see the familiar as strange” (Foster, 1996, as cited in Hodkinson, 2005).

I understand that I am bringing my own perspectives of EMI policy and prior knowledge of the research context to the current study. For instance, I realise that due to my familiarity with research context at the institutional level and the community at large, I have a preconception that many students have inadequate level of English proficiency which may render their learning of subject matter difficult. I am aware that such pre-understandings and tacit knowledge may have some influence on how the data are collected and interpreted. However, the awareness of my biases, experiences and values throughout the research processes can help me to be reflexive and self-conscious about how these biases might shape the data collection and data analysis.

For data collection, I strived to recruit a diverse sample with the intention of gaining different perspectives of the issue at hand (I more fully describe my sample below). Moreover, I maintained my critical distance through setting aside my preconceptions and asking fairly
neutral interview questions that did not push interviewees to have certain perspectives. The neutrality of the interview questions was maintained by asking a critical friend to review the interview schedule to minimise the bias in the questions. Furthermore, to guard against over-reliance on my preunderstandings during interviews, I did not take anything for granted, and I always prompted interviewees to provide a full account of their perspectives (Hodkinson, 2005). Regarding data analysis, I consistently attempted to be self-conscious about how my biases might influence the interpretation of the data and the conclusions I reached. This self-consciousness minimised the reliance on my preconceptions when interpreting data and reporting findings.

4.3. Research Design:

A small-scale qualitative study is the research design adopted for carrying out this research. Qualitative approach is selected because it appears to me the best fit for the purpose of the current research project for various reasons. Qualitative approaches fit well with research informed by the interpretive and critical theory paradigms adopted in this study (Merriam, 2002; Hammersley, 2013; Creswell and Creswell, 2018; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). In keeping with interpretivism, the primary focus of qualitative researchers is on in-depth understanding of people’s experiences of social phenomena from participants’ own perspectives (Hammersley, 2013; Taylor et al., 2016; Leavy, 2017; Creswell and Poth, 2018). Researchers using qualitative approach endeavour to achieve depth of understanding “by talking directly with people, … and allowing them to tell the stories unencumbered by what we expect to find or what we have read in the literature” (Creswell, 2007, p.40).

Central to qualitative approach, researchers attempt to develop a holistic account of the phenomenon under study (Creswell and Poth, 2018). That is, instead of reducing social phenomena to a limited number of variables, qualitative researchers investigate issues in all their complexities, taking into consideration the many factors, including context, involved in understanding the topic at hand (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Taylor et al., 2016; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). This characteristic of qualitative research fits well with the critical theoretical conceptualisations of English language and language-in-education policies, underpinning the current study as both conceptualisations acknowledge the complex nature of their constructs; hence, the need for a holistic account of issues related to EMI policy. Pertinent to these conceptualisations is that contextual factors play a substantial role in
influencing student’ experiences of English and EMI policy; context is of paramount importance for qualitative researchers to “understand how events, actions, and meaning are shaped by the unique circumstances in which these occur” (Maxwell, 2013, as cited in Creswell and Poth, 2018, p.97).

In accordance with critical theory, some qualitative researchers seek to empower marginalised groups to share their accounts of social phenomena, to give them opportunities to voice their concerns and to overcome the misrepresentation of these people in official and academic discourses (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Hammersley, 2013). Relevant to my topic, EMI policy has been the default language-in-education policy since the establishment of HE in Oman. This policy has seemingly benefited some students and disadvantaged others. There were hardly any empirical studies that have given a chance to those who are disadvantaged to candidly talk about their experiences of the policy in the Omani context, except for AlBakri’s (2017) and Al-Bakri and Troudi’s (2020) studies. Thus, adopting flexible and open-ended qualitative methods, the current study endeavours to give participants from various socioeconomic backgrounds the chance to narrate their EMI experiences and to report their understandings of the EMI policy as legitimate knowledge.

4.3.1. Data Collection Method:
4.3.1.1. Semi-structured interviews:

The broadest definition of interview as a research method is “a con-versation between two people which is designed to obtain research data to meet objectives of research” (Cohen et al., 2018, p.508). The qualitative research interviews are akin to normal everyday conversations, but with a purpose and a structure (Kvale, 1996). Through these relaxed and conversational interviews, a qualitative researcher attempts to build and sustain rapport with his/her participants, which eventually encourages them to spontaneously express their perceptions and reflect on their experiences (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Taylor et al., 2016). In practice, however, establishing rapport with participants is not an easy task as it might seem, as it requires certain skills, such as the skill to be a good listener (Leavy, 2017). Trust can also be built by assuring participants that data will not be used to harm them (Bogdan and Biklen, 2007).
The qualitative research literature is replete with various terms used to refer to interview research and its different types, such as ‘qualitative interviews’ (Kvale, 1996), ‘in-depth interviews’ (Leavy, 2017), unstructured interviews and semi-structured interviews (Bryman, 2016, Cohen et al., 2018). In this study, I am adopting the semi-structured interview for reasons I elaborate on below.

The flexibility of the semi-structured interview encourages many novice researchers, like myself to employ it as the primary research method (Bryman, 2016). It would be extremely challenging and quite impractical for me to approach my interviewees with just a broad idea of the topic I wanted to investigate (as is the case with unstructured interviews); hence, the need for an interview guide to help me maintain a focus and to ensure that the interview would not wildly go off topic. On the contrary, in line with interpretivism, semi-structured interviews allowed me to deliberately be open to new ideas about the research topics as raised by interviewees and not to impose my preconceptions on them (Bryman, 2016; Cohen et al., 2018). The flexibility of semi-structured interviews enabled me, also to probe for clarification, elaboration and details; thus, the depth of interviewees’ responses was improved which in turn enhanced my understanding of the topic under investigation (Hammersley, 2013; Cohen et al., 2018).

Moreover, in keeping with critical theory, I employed semi-structured interviews to offer students the opportunity to freely express their points of view on EMI policy, the legitimacy of which is hardly questioned in the Omani HE context. In order to maintain a balance in the power relation between the interviewer and the interviewees, I, despite the existence of the interview guide, provided ample opportunity for participants to raise their own concerns and thoughts about the influence of EMI policy on their learning experience and social equity (Barbour and Schostak, 2005). Considering the interviewees as partners in the meaning-making process, I recognised the themes they came up with as legitimate knowledge, and I did not restrict them to only discussing and reflecting on the topics I have brought with me. Moreover, allowing the participants to choose a convenient time for the interview greatly helped me balance the power differential between myself and the interviewees (Connelly and Peltzer, 2016).

An apparent disadvantage of qualitative interviews in general and semi-structured interviews in particular is that they are susceptible to bias and subjectivity (Cohen et al., 2018). However,
through carefully delineating the interview process as well as my positionality, it would hopefully be possible for readers to understand how I interpreted the data and reached the findings (Griffiths, 2013). Furthermore, I refrained from revealing my preconceptions, opinions and prejudices during the interviews in order to understand interviewees’ own perspectives and experiences of the topic at hand (Hammersley, 2013).

In order to maximise participants’ opportunities to express their perceptions as authentically as possible, the interviews were conducted in participants’ mother tongue, Arabic. Driven by a critical agenda, it was a priority for me to remove any restrictions that could reduce participants’ ability to describe their experiences. After transcribing the interviews in Arabic, I translated them into English to conduct the initial analysis via NVivo, which does not function in Arabic. I did my utmost to make sure that the translation was as accurate as possible. I took care to ensure that the translation of educational terms and key words was largely consistent across participants’ interview transcripts. However, there were some challenges. For example, some participants described some courses as ‘مواد نظرية’, ‘مواد حفظ’ and ‘مواد دسمة’ to refer to courses that either had theoretical content (rather than practical content) or were text-heavy. These were sometimes used interchangeably. It was not precisely clear what they meant by these labels. Therefore, to avoid confusion during data analysis, I tried to offer the closest literal translations: ‘theoretical courses’, ‘memorisation courses’ and ‘content-heavy courses’ respectively.

The interviews were conducted between May and September 2021. Each interview lasted between forty to sixty minutes, and they were all audio-recorded. All interviews were conducted online via Microsoft Teams which was the official online learning platform at this HEI during the pandemic, Covid1-19. I used this application because I believed that participants were familiar with it. During interviews, participants did not report any serious technical issues, apart from occasional slow internet connection. Participants were given the freedom to decide the date and time of the interview.

4.3.1.2. The interview guide:

Prior to going to the field, researchers using semi-structured interviews prepare a list of ‘fairly specific’ topics and questions to be covered during the interviews, often called ‘an interview guide’ (see Appendix A), yet the questions tend to be open-ended, and their wording and
sequence are not strictly followed (Bryman, 2016, p.468). Further, the interviewees enjoy a
great deal of freedom in how they respond to the interview questions (Bryman, 2016; Leavy,
2017).

I prepared a tentative, yet quite detailed interview guide. It needed to be reasonably detailed
because, as a novice researcher, it helped me concentrate on the pertinent topics for answering
the research questions and not to deviate from the research aims (Leavy, 2017). Nonetheless,
the interview guide was flexible enough to capture unanticipated themes and topics as voiced
by interviewees (Bogdan R & Biklen, 2007).

Prior to conducting the actual interviews, I used a draft of the interview guide to carry out two
pilot interviews. The pilot interviews helped me improve the interview guide, my questioning
techniques and building rapport with interviewees. Based on the pilot interviews, I rephrased
and rearranged some interview questions to enhance the flow of interviews, and I added some
prompts because the interviewees provided fresh insights into the interview topics. One
example of the changes I made was that I made some questions sound less formal so as to make
interviewees feel that the interview was just like an everyday conversation. This helped
maintain rapport with participants and encouraged participants to speak openly about their
learning experiences and perceptions of EMI policy.

4.3.2 Recruitment of participants:

Purposive (or purposeful) sampling which is a widely used technique by qualitative researchers
was used to recruit the participants (Cohen et al., 2018). The premise behind using purposive
sampling is that participants with greater experience and knowledge of the studied phenomenon
are more likely to furnish the researcher with rich data to better understand the research
problem and answer the research questions (Leavy, 2017; Cohen et al., 2018; Creswell and
Creswell, 2018). The selected people need to reflect the various factors and attributes that may
influence our understanding of the issue under investigation (Cohen et al., 2018).

I recruited 30 undergraduate students from an Omani HEI for the semi-structured interviews
(see Appendix B for relevant details of participants). The students had various experiences of
the EMI policy with respect to their year of study, level of English proficiency and
specialisation. Different characteristics determined each sub-group in my sample, as
demonstrated in the table below. Some interviewees were in their last academic year by virtue of the long and rich experience they had had with learning subject matter through EMI. I also selected a group of students in their first or second year to explore how they were managing their learning in order to progress to higher academic levels. Level of English proficiency, which was determined based on their high school English grades, was another factor I considered when recruiting my participants. All participants attended Arabic MOI public schools.

Finally, I selected students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. The main criterion for this selection was the participants’ family income as demonstrated in students’ records at the HEI. That is, participants who were identified as ‘belonging to low-income families’ were mostly living on government’s social security pensions, and less often on retirement benefits. On the other hand, participants identified as ‘belonging to middle-income families’ mostly came from families where either or both parents held well-paid professions in the government or the private sector.

As a point of clarification, Bourdieu is applying his concepts of habitus, capital and field to social ‘classes and class fraction’ (Bourdieu, 1997); however, I am not using class-based stratifications in this study for various reasons, prominent among which is the fact that the class system in Oman is not as clearly defined as it is in many capitalist countries. Therefore, I decided to deal with the topic in terms of family’s possession of economic and cultural capital as factors influencing participants’ access to opportunities to improve their English language and the unequal distribution of these forms of capital in society.

The initial plan was to conduct interviews with four participants from each of the eight categories as depicted in the table, totalling 32 participants. However, I could not manage to recruit four participants across the categories because of the low response rate in some categories. I was strict that the recruited participants clearly demonstrated the characteristics of their categories; therefore, I did not seek to fill all categories when the targeted participants did not respond to the interview invitation.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Participants with good English proficiency</th>
<th>LEP Participants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Participants belonging to middle-income</td>
<td>Participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>families</td>
<td>Participants belonging to low-income families</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>First and second year (Diploma) Participants</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third (Advanced diploma) and Last year (Bachelor’s degree) Participants</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>30</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Eight categories of participants.

4.4. Data analysis:

In qualitative research, data analysis is carried out to transform the collected data into meaningful interpretations, explanations and accounts of the phenomenon under investigation (Cohen et al., 2018). The data analysis process involves, among other tasks, exploring the dataset, categorising data into codes, identifying and fine-tuning patterns and themes, and synthesising themes in order to create a coherent and meaningful account of the data (ibid). The process of data analysis is not as straightforward as it might seem to be since “there is no simple formula or recipe for this” (Patton, 2002, as cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p.643). ‘Fitness for purpose’ is the basic principle of conducting rigorous qualitative data analysis (ibid); however, for a novice qualitative researcher like myself, such principle, useful as it is, was of little help since it required plenty of empirical experience to be able to identify what was fit for purpose. Therefore, a decision was made to adopt a systematic qualitative data analysis method, which was Braun and Clarke’s (2006) thematic analysis (TA) approach, to facilitate and enhance the rigour of the data analysis in this thesis.

Before embarking on defining TA and justifying the use of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach, I need to emphasise a few factors that qualitative researchers need to be aware of when analysing qualitative data. To begin with, data analysis is influenced by various factors such as the paradigm(s) underpinning the research project, the theoretical framework that guides the interpretation of the data and the context (Cohen et al., 2018). Another significant
factor that influences data analysis is the subjectivity of the researcher (Hammersley, 2013; Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Through self-reflexivity, as I mentioned earlier, I attempted to maintain constant awareness of how my philosophical assumptions, prior knowledge and culture could influence the data analysis process (Etherington, 2004; Hammersley, 2013).

Second, Connelly and Peltzer (2016) warn against ‘premature closure’ which happens when the researcher stops the analysis at the surface level codes and categories of participants’ accounts on the topic at hand and they do not engage in in-depth analysis of data. This necessitated that the researcher follows a rigorous and systematic data analysis procedure and spends sufficient time familiarising oneself with the data, organising codes, developing themes and integrating the themes in order to tell a convincing and comprehensive story about the data (ibid). In a nutshell, efforts were made so that the analysis did not stop at the description level, and it went deeper into the data to develop sophisticated interpretations of the phenomenon.

Relevant to the previous point, the researcher needs to give a transparent account of the data analysis process in order to improve the trustworthiness of the findings (Cohen et al., 2018). When I introduce the TA approach I am adopting below, I illustrate the actual steps that data have gone through beginning from transcribing and translating the data until discussing and reporting findings.

Despite its popularity as a means for qualitative data analysis, the literature indicates that there is little agreement on the definition of TA and how it is conducted (Bryman, 2012). Therefore, selecting a systematic, yet flexible TA approach can better help me make sense of my data and develop a conceptually informed account of the topic at hand; hence was the choice of Braun and Clarke’s (2006) approach. Braun and Clarke (2006, p.79) define TA as “a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data.”

This particular approach has been chosen because of its practicality, flexibility and fitness for purpose. It is practical because, as Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise, it does not require the researcher to have sophisticated theoretical and technical knowledge that other qualitative data analysis approaches do; hence, it is more accessible to novice researchers. However, it has the potential, through its well-defined procedure, to help researchers develop a systematic and rigorous account of data. It is flexible in the sense that it gives you the freedom to choose the theoretical framework(s) that can best inform your use of this approach of TA (Braun and
Moreover, this model can be used within a variety of research paradigms, ranging from positivism to critical theory which means that it is compatible with the interpretive and critical paradigms underpinning this study (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Clarke and Braun, 2018).

This approach is also flexible in the sense that it allowed for both inductive and deductive methods of generating themes (ibid). While the theoretical frameworks I am adopting in this study have had a bearing on the way I formulated my research questions and interview questions, and analysed the data, I distanced myself from theory during the processes of identifying and generating initial codes and themes and when I related themes to research questions. In a nutshell, I attempted to move backwards and forwards between the inductive (bottom-up) and deductive (top-down) approaches of data analysis. That is, when I had the first readings of the dataset, I inductively identified codes and generated initial themes. This preliminary analysis helped illuminate issues related to some key concepts, such as, inequity, capital, agency, appropriation and power which I had already encountered during my review of the literature; therefore, I, deductively, tried to understand and analyse participants’ data through the lenses of the theoretical frameworks.

Braun and Clarke’s (2006) TA approach involves six phases. Braun and Clarke (2006) stress that the data analysis process is by no means linear; it is, instead, a recursive process that requires the researchers to go back and forth throughout the six phases. The table below demonstrates the six phases of this model and how I went about analysing my data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase name</th>
<th>My actions</th>
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| Phase 1 familiarizing yourself with your data | - As I conducted the interviews myself, I had some initial thoughts about data,  
- Since the interviews were conducted in Arabic, they were transcribed verbatim in Arabic.  
- I, then, translated the Arabic transcripts into English, which further added to my initial thoughts about the data. |
| Phase 2 generating initial codes               | - I used NVivo to help with organising the data into codes,  
- The whole dataset was explored for the generation of codes, giving equal attention to each participant’s transcript (see Appendix C for an example of interview coding). |
| Phase 3 searching for themes                  | - The actual analysis process began here through identifying initial themes and sorting the codes into those themes,  
- Coded data extracts were matched with the emerging themes, |
Phase 4 reviewing themes
- I reviewed the themes against the research questions,
- Themes were refined in the sense that broad themes were split into two or more sub-themes, themes that lacked relevant data evidence were discarded, and closely similar themes were merged together,
- I ensured that codes were coherent within the themes and the themes in general fit together to tell a coherent story about the topic at hand (see Appendix D for the summary of themes and pertinent codes).

Phase 5 defining and naming themes
- I continued refining the themes and making sure that they were internally consistent, and they cohered with other themes.
- I made sure that each theme had sufficient and relevant data extracts to support it and vividly answer the research questions.
- I assigned concise and self-explanatory names for the themes.

Phase 6 producing the report
- I ensured that I went beyond description to providing analytical interpretations of the data at sufficient depth,
- I made sure that the overall analysis of the phenomenon was coherent, concise, comprehensive and convincing.

Table 2: The six stages of data analysis

4.5. Ethical considerations:
Despite the availability of countless sets of research ethical guidelines and codes of practice produced by various official institutions, handling all the ethical issues that are anticipated or that might emerge during the data collection process is by no means an easy task as “[t]here are rarely easy, ‘black- and-white’ decisions on ethical matters” (Cohen et al., 2018, p.153). Nevertheless, abiding by the School of Education’s code of ethics, I adhered to all ethical procedures and attempted to make ethical decisions throughout the research process (see Appendix E for the completed Ethics Form, and Appendix F for the Ethics Form Approval). I obtained informed consents (see Appendix G for a sample Consent Form) from all the participants after I sent them a participant information sheet (see Appendix H) where I explained to them the overall aim of the research and the potential risks and benefits that might result from their participation.

Participation was voluntary and interviewees were informed that they had the right to quit at any time and for whatever reason (Silverman, 2010). The principle of “do no harm” was strictly followed (Leavy, 2017, p.32). I did all I could to ensure all participants’ confidentiality and non-traceability through using pseudonyms and disguised study location and leaving out any
information that might render their identities traceable (Kvale, 1996; Punch and Oancea, 2014). Moreover, I did not keep any paper-based personal data of my participants. All participants’ details and the interview audios and transcripts have been securely kept in an encrypted device which can only be accessed by the researcher. These will be discarded when this project is finished.

The criteria outlined above for the purposive sampling in this study required that I look at students’ records, including information about their parental job status, income and other relevant information. I adhered to the institutional protocol to gain access to these records, submitting all required documents and providing a detailed explanation of the research’s significance. I consequently secured a letter of permission from the deputy general director and, subsequently, the dean at this HEI. As a result of following the appropriate channels, I was able to search students’ records for candidates who met my selection criteria and to take notes of their personal details, such as mobile numbers, emails, parental occupation and income and English marks in Grade 12. To ensure and maintain confidentiality, I secured this sensitive information in an encrypted device which I could only access. Moreover, no printed copies were made of these personal details. Participants’ personal information will be securely discarded upon the completion of this research project.

I recognised the right of participants to know as much detail about the study as possible in order to make informed consents. However, there were concerns that revealing all the aims of the study might influence participants’ responses (Silverman, 2010; Punch and Oancea, 2014; Bryman, 2016). This was indeed an ethical dilemma that I encountered. It is quite a common dilemma, as Bryman (2016, p.143) maintains that “[i]t is rarely feasible or desirable to provide participants with a totally complete account of what your research is about.” Moreover, Punch and Oancea (2014) question the validity and authenticity of research that provides a full account of the research aims to participants. To resolve this dilemma, several scholars contend that it is ethically justifiable to initially withhold the specific purposes of the study in order to obtain participants’ natural perspectives on the topic under investigation (Kvale, 1996; Silverman, 2010; Punch and Oancea, 2014; Bryman, 2016). Therefore, in the Participants’ information sheet, I introduced the research aims in a general and neutral way.

Another ethical consideration that I carefully handled pertains to the issue of power dynamics in research interviews. As a partially insider researcher with preconceptions about the policy
under investigation and research context, there were concerns that I might impose my agenda and my pre-determined ideas on the interviewees. What made these concerns a serious issue was that although qualitative researchers aim to empower participants by giving them voice in interviews (Merriam, 2002; Creswell and Poth, 2018), Kvale (2006, p. 484) posits that there is nothing inherently empowering about conducting interviews and that “[t]he research interview is not a dominance-free dialogue between equal part-ners.”

To deal with this asymmetrical power relations between myself as a researcher and my participants, I strived to create an atmosphere whereby interviewees could freely express their experiences and perspectives of the policy (Taylor et al., 2016). Allowing participants to decide the day and the time of the interview potentially gave them a sense of control which eventually contributed positively to the balance of the power relations. Moreover, as I mentioned previously in this chapter, I did not disclose my perspectives of EMI policy during the interview, and I guarded against asking leading questions. I want also to emphasise that I have been away from university throughout my four-year doctorate scholarship during which I have not held any position there; hence, I exercised no authority over my participants and many of them would have joined university after I left for my study.

Finally, one research question concerns examining participants’ perceptions on lecturers’ translanguaging practices; therefore, I had to guarantee the non-traceability of lecturers. I never asked participants to mention the names of the lecturers who employed TLPs. Also, to protect their identities, I concealed all their details, such as nationalities, departments and the courses they taught during transcription of interviews. Moreover, because Arabic nouns, pronouns, verbs and adjectives clearly indicate gender, I used ‘s/he’ in translation to disguise lecturers’ gender. I believe taking these precautions, besides disguising the name of the HEI, can help render lecturers’ identities non-traceable.

4.6. Quality in qualitative research:

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study, I have adhered to quality criteria for qualitative research suggested by some scholars, such as Geertz (1973), Richardson (2000) and Tracy (2010). Specifically, I can assert that my study is marked by credibility, rigour and sincerity.
Credibility, which “refers to the trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings” (Tracy, 2010, p.842), in this study was established through the utilisation of ‘thick description’ and the principle of ‘showing rather than telling’ (ibid.). The construct of thick description which was originally developed by Geertz (1973) “aims to describe particular acts or events in relation to their cultural context” (Denscombe, 2010, p.328). I endeavoured to provide, in the context chapter, a relatively detailed account of the political, economic, social and educational context of English language and EMI policy in Oman. Furthermore, the data were consistently interpreted against a backdrop of this local specificity of EMI policy. For example, in Chapter six, I illustrated how participants’ instrumentalist perceptions of EMI policy were influenced by national discourses emphasising the importance of English in the globalisation era. Thus, delving beneath the surface to investigate how larger political and economic factors could shape students’ perceptions helped develop a more robust understanding of the topic at hand.

Moreover, my efforts to inclusively incorporate direct quotes from interviews, presented separately from my own interpretations at the outset, played a significant role in establishing credibility. One reason behind this was to enable readers to develop their own understanding of the phenomenon based on raw data. Tracy (2010) contends that credible qualitative research is characterised by ‘showing rather than telling’. Showing sufficient data is contrasted here to telling audience what to think about the study topic.

Rich rigour is another criterion that defines the goodness of qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). According to Tracy (ibid.), rich rigour pertains to making informed and transparent decisions about samples, settings, data collection and analysis procedures that are appropriate for the study specific topic. In my study, this was achieved through several means, such as recruiting diverse sample and employing a rigorous data analysis process. Participants were employed using rigorous selection criteria to ensure that multiple perspectives of EMI policy could emerge during interviews (see Section 4.3.2. above). This was done to guard against privileging my own perspectives.

Rich rigour was also maintained by following a meticulous process of data analysis. I clearly elucidated the processes through which I transformed and organised raw interview data into codes and themes that constituted the backbone of the findings and analysis chapters.
Moreover, in the literature review chapter, I carefully presented and explained the theoretical frameworks that underpinned the analysis of my data.

The final hallmark of quality in this study is its sincerity. Tracy (2010, p.841) defines sincerity as:

Sincerity means that the research is marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher’s biases, goals, and foibles as well as about how these played a role in the methods, joys, and mistakes of the research.

Sincerity is a crucial element of excellence in qualitative research, and it can be achieved through self-reflexivity and transparency (Richardson, 2000; Tracy, 2010; Adler, 2022). Self-reflexivity stands out as one of the most celebrated practices that helps establish trustworthiness in qualitative researchers’ work (Dodgson, 2019). Self-reflexivity was maintained in various aspects of this research project. First, I have explicitly stated my personal rationale for conducting this study, my positionality vis-à-vis my participants and the study topic and my biases and preconceptions. In section 4.2. above, I delineated how I remained self-conscious about the potential influence of my biases on my data collection and analysis processes. Moreover, the consistent use of the first-person voice serves as a reminder of my very presence and influence in the processes of data collection and interpretation (Tracy, 2010).

Transparency, defined as “honesty about the research process” (Tracy, 2010, p.842), is considered a crucial factor in improving sincerity in qualitative research (Adler, 2022). Hence, I have attempted to be transparent about the entire processes of data collection and analysis as demonstrated throughout this chapter and the following chapters. For example, I clearly stated how I gained access to students’ demographic and socioeconomic details to select a diverse and information-rich group of participants. I also outlined how I developed the interview guide and how I carried out the data analysis. Detailed descriptions of the sample, ethical considerations and data analysis processes can be found in the Appendices.

In the analytical chapters (Chapters 5, 6 and 7), I took great care to incorporate a range of perspectives on EMI policy and translanguaging practices, including those that may at times appear contradictory. I was also transparent about the theoretical lenses through which I analysed my data which I clearly elucidated in Chapter Three.
It is hoped that implementing these measures of credibility, rich rigour and sincerity would ensure the trustworthiness of the study and would thus improve its overall quality.

4.7. Conclusion:
This chapter has attempted to elucidate the philosophical assumptions that underpinned the methodological choices in this study. It has also discussed researcher’s positionality, how this positionality might have influenced data collection and analysis and how this influence was mitigated. It went on to describe the research design, research method and participants. Moreover, the chapter described the data analysis process, specifying how the researcher arrived at the conclusions he drew from the data. Finally, the chapter concluded with a detailed account of how the researcher ensured that the study was conducted in accordance with ethical standards of the School of Education, and it has delineated how he anticipated and handled some ethical issues.
Chapter Five: The impact of EMI on participants’ learning experiences:

In chapters 5, 6 and 7, I draw on the interpretive and critical theory paradigms to present and analyse findings pertinent to my research questions. That is, while I attempt to investigate the experiences of participants in terms of understanding their perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their learning and life chances and their perspectives of lecturers’ translinguaging practices, I simultaneously aim at interrogating and exposing the taken-for-granted assumptions of the neutral and impartial usefulness of EMI policy. I use ‘life chances’ throughout these chapters to mean specifically students’ chances of progress to the highest academic level in this HEI (i.e., bachelor’s degree), and broadly any socioeconomic benefits people normally gain from participating in HE. I, also, interrogate these findings, which were entirely derived from interviews with thirty undergraduate participants, through ‘problematising’ the EMI practice and exposing how the policy affects students differently.

In chapter 5, I explore three themes related to the impact of EMI policy on participants’ content learning. Chapter 6 examines the impact of EMI policy on students’ life chances (theme 4). Chapters 5 and 6 address Parts a and b of Research Question 1 respectively. Addressing the second research question, Chapter 7 focuses on examining participants’ perceptions on how lecturers’ TLPs could impact their learning experiences and social equity in HE (theme 5).

I used Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus, capital, field and symbolic power as lenses through which I could interrogate the findings and reveal how participants’ habitus and possession of linguistic capital shaped their learning experiences and life chances within an English-only policy context. I, also, used translingual perspectives, particularly the translinguaging theory, to question the detrimental impact of the monolingual English-only policy on students’ learning of content, to emphasise participants’ translinguaging strategies to navigate the system in a more equitable way, and to advocate a more inclusive and socially-just translingual policy.

This current chapter addresses three main themes. The first theme explores the disparity in accumulated linguistic capital upon entry into the HE field. The second theme focuses on how access to content knowledge is substantially influenced by participants’ possession of linguistic capital. The third theme highlights how the use of multilingual, semiotic and multimodal resources mitigated the detrimental impact of EMI on participants’ learning. Within these themes, I first present the pertinent findings, and, then, analyse the findings in relation to the
theoretical constructs of habitus, linguistic capital, field, agency, appropriation and translanguaging.

In this chapter, for the purpose of the analysis, I mainly focused on reporting and discussing the data of sixteen participants (Their pseudonyms are highlighted in Appendix B) because I believed this would help me to provide rigorous and in-depth analysis of their trajectories starting from their opportunities to learn English since school-age to their current HE learning experiences. Another reason to spotlight the data of half the participants was that there was some degree of similarity between the responses of interviewees who belonged to the same category (please refer to the sampling section in the Methodology Chapter).

Several factors were considered when selecting those participants from the entire sample. It was ascertained that data of participants from across categories (e.g., participants from low-income and middle-income families, participants with high and limited English proficiency, participants from various specialisations and years of study) were fairly equally presented and analysed. Secondly, the richness and depth of some interviews were a major factor behind their selection. Thirdly, some participants’ interviews were selected because they offered unique perspectives on the investigated issues; perspectives that deviate from the dominant ones. Finally, as the following sections demonstrate, the data reported and analysed in these themes incorporated diverse perspectives that adequately reflected the rest of the data.

5.1. Theme 1: The disparity in participants’ possession of the linguistic capital upon entry into university can be attributed to the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital in society:

The first identified theme helped set the scene and emphasise the disparity, upon entry to university, in participants’ possession of the linguistic capital, English, which is essential to successfully navigate the system. Here, I report and discuss participants’ opportunities to acquire the foreign language and the socioeconomic factors that played a role in this acquisition. Although the availability of these opportunities varied from one participant to another, it often followed a general pattern, influenced by the participant’s family’s possession of economic and cultural capital which are unequally distributed in society. I specifically examine the selected participants’ different trajectories of learning English before they joined university.
Data revealed that participants could be categorised into three groups in terms of their opportunities to improve English before enrolling in university and beyond the English lessons in public schools, which several studies found to be ineffective in equipping students with adequate levels of English proficiency (e.g., Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Ministry of Education and the World Bank, 2012; Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017). As analysis in this theme is specifically guided by Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital, the categorisation of participants was based on their socioeconomic backgrounds based on data which were primarily derived from participants’ interviews and their records at university.

The first group consisted of four limited English proficient (LEP) participants; three of them (Ali, Fahad and Farah) belonged to low-income families, and one (Asad) belonged to a middle-income family. Those participants reported that they did not have any opportunities to improve their (English) linguistic capital. Asad and Fahad respectively reported “lack of time” and “[l]ack of interest and the financial conditions” as the reasons for not having opportunities to improve their English. When asked about her opportunities, Farah (an advanced diploma, accounting student with LEP) said: “Nothing. College is the reason behind our acquisition of English.” Ali (a diploma, engineering student with LEP) primarily attributed the lack of opportunities to the financial situation of the family:

> The first reason is the financial situation. Besides, these things [institutes that provide private English courses] are available in the capital city; they are not available in regions [outside the capital]. You either go to the capital city or you go abroad. It’s not worth it; it’s expensive. (Ali)

The second group comprised seven participants who relied on opportunities that required their families to invest financially to improve their linguistic capital. They predominantly belonged to middle-income families (Hafsa, Jasem, Mazin, Saba, Taif and Zainab), except for one (Nadia) who belonged to a low-income family. The opportunities they had varied from having private tuition, attending English language courses and picking up English from a foreign domestic worker. It is evident that all these opportunities required financial investment made by participants’ families. It also indicates that parents would not invest part of the family income in their children’s English learning unless they realise the importance of English language as a linguistic capital that could benefit their children in some way in the future, implying a possession of a cultural capital besides the economic capital.

Talking about these opportunities, some participants in this group elaborated that:
I had private tuition almost from Grade 5 to Grade 9. It was a very excellent experience; the teacher was Egyptian, and s/he used to clearly communicate information to me all the time. All the grammar s/he taught me I will never forget, and s/he used to teach me and let me memorize many terms that pertain to the syllabus that I study. S/he helped me a lot. (Hafsa)

From Grade 3 to Grade 6 or 7, I learnt English with an Indian lady, a private tutor. I learnt for five or six years. All the school teachers noticed the difference between those who attended the private tuition with this tutor and those who only learned English in school…. my father was very concerned that we learn English at that time, so we did everything to learn English. We learned much and we learned with more than one private tutor. (Mazin)

Researcher: Did you have any opportunity to improve your English beyond the formal government school education prior to joining university?
Taif: I had private tutors. My father enrolled me in private schools and I benefited a lot from them.

Researcher: At what grades did you attend in private schools?
Taif: Grade 7 and Grade 11. My English was poor, but it has improved a lot now.

Researcher: Were these schools bilingual?
Taif: They weren’t schools; I studied with private tutors. People who teach English.
(Taif interview).

It began when I was in the elementary school. We had a Filipino housemaid. You know Filipinos speak English; they don’t know Arabic. I was still a child, so I picked up English language quickly. I learned English quickly. (Zainab)

The third group included 5 participants with good English proficiency. Those participants depended on opportunities that required minimal or no financial investment to improve their English proficiency. Aside from Zahra who belonged to a middle-income family, they all belonged to low-income families (Ibrahim, Merriam, Reem and Susan). The techniques those participants used to improve their English included, inter alia, reading books, watching movies and YouTube, playing video games and having conversations with siblings in English. One common characteristic among all participants in this category is that they realised the significance of English language as a valuable linguistic resource for HE when they were still at school, and they invested time to improve their English proficiency. This is exemplified in Reem’s (an advanced diploma, engineering student) rationale for the desire to improve her English at school age:

Because I knew that I would join higher education, and it’s known to us that specialisations are taught in English in higher education. (Reem)

Family also played a role in prompting some participants (Merriam and Susan) to acquire the language, indicating the possession of a form of cultural capital by these families. Some participants in this group shared their experiences of learning English:
The beginning was in primary school. I used to play electronic games, and most of them were in English. For example, when I came across a new word, I translated it and it took root in my mind, so when I come across it somewhere else, I immediately know it. And word after word, I have developed good vocabulary until this day...[Moreover] There is an app called Discord; you sign in and talk to anyone available.... On a daily basis... 6 years ago. Since I began, it was entirely in English, not Arabic; ... that's why at school my English was perfect. So it is normal for me to read and speak, but writing is the least I practice. (Ibrahim)

I didn’t have private tuition and I didn’t attend institutes. I depended on the teacher’s explanation and self-study. It depends on your passion for the language. English language is a skill; whether you want to improve it or not. (Zahra)

*Researcher: How was your experience in developing your English?*

Merriam: Because I love the language, it was easy. I sought help from my family and from the teacher I used to study with in school. And I also read books in English. Praise be to Allah, my language improved.

*Researcher: What was the role of your family in helping you improve your English?*

Merriam: Mam and dad supported me by giving me gifts and taking me on trips. Brothers supported by giving me the translation of words and explaining some grammar for me. (Merriam interview)

In the above, I presented aspects of participants’ trajectories of learning English prior to their entry to university, emphasising pertinent socioeconomic and cultural factors that influenced these trajectories. Data revealed that participants’ experiences of opportunities to learn English differed significantly.

**5.1.1. Discussion of theme 1:**

In this first theme, I devote some space to discuss participants’ trajectories of English learning prior to joining university. The overall finding was that English language as a form of cultural capital was not equally available and accessible to all participants. I am using Bourdieu’s constructs of habitus and cultural capital as lenses to analyse and interrogate the findings pertinent to this theme. These concepts helped me analyse the data, with a particular focus on whether English as a form of cultural capital which is a prerequisite to success in the HE field was equally available to all participants.

Before I begin the analysis, it is crucial that I remind the reader of some pertinent sociocultural aspects that might have influenced participants’ exposure to English prior to joining university. I specifically highlight two relevant factors, namely, the minimal English use in society and the
perceived poor quality of English lessons in public schools. I emphasised in the Introduction that several previous studies consistently demonstrated that English language lacks social merit in the Omani society beyond its conventional arenas, such as the private labour market, HE and private schools (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Gonzalez et al., 2008; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2014; Al-Jardani, 2017). Concerning the second factor, several previous studies conducted in Oman showed that school graduates generally possessed insufficient English proficiency to directly join their EMI specialisations (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Ministry of Education and the World Bank, 2012; Al-Issa and Al-Mahrooqi, 2017).

In this particular context, the prevalent medium of communication at home, in school and in the community at large was Arabic, mostly the Colloquial Arabic and some modern standard Arabic. English, as concurred by all participants, was rarely used outside university. It was within this sociolinguistic environment that almost all participants acquired their linguistic repertoire. That is, two significant factors, which were language in society and English teaching in school, that were expected to play a key role in the formation of the linguistic habitus of all participants, did not often include English as a valuable linguistic capital.

I turn now to discuss the key findings in this theme, namely the opportunities participants had, or lacked, to improve their English prior to joining university. I have grouped participants into three categories: participants who lacked any opportunity beyond the English lessons in the public school; participants whose families financially invested in the development of their English, and participants who depended on non-financial sources to improve their English.

The overall finding indicated that participants entered the academic field equipped with varying levels of linguistic capital that is indispensable to success in HE. I begin by discussing the category of participants whose parents had the economic capital to invest on their acquisition of the linguistic capital. Six out of seven participants in this category belonged to middle-income families (Hafsa, Jasem, Mazin, Saba, Taif and Zainab); whereas, one participant (Nadia) belonged to a low-income family. Unfortunately, there is nothing in the data that can account for the reasons behind Nadia’s ability to invest financially in learning English, but her LEP as she self-reported cast some doubts on the quality of the private tuition she had access to. The analysis primarily focuses on the experiences of the other six participants.
The experiences of those students clearly indicated that their parents financially invested in their English learning. These investments took different forms, including hiring private tutors and English-speaking housemaids and enrolling children in English courses. Children themselves apparently had the will to invest time and effort in learning English. Bourdieu theorises that there need to be an investment of time and enthusiasm by the student and investment of money by families to acquire a linguistic capital as a form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 2003). To advance and perpetuate their social positions, privileged families (in terms of richness in economic capital as well as cultural capital) are more likely to invest in cultural practices that can secure academic profitability to their children in the long-term (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; ibid.).

Mazin’s experience best exemplified Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the inculcation of the cultural capital. Data indicated that his father, a school principal, had the economic capital and the cultural capital in the form of the awareness of the importance of English language for future academic and career chances, hence, the necessity for his children to acquire this linguistic capital. This was obvious when Mazin (a proficient English student from a middle-income family) said that: “my father was very concerned that we learn English at that time, so we did everything to learn English” (Mazin). Besides the investment of cultural and economic capital on the part the father, Mazin himself had the desire to devote time and effort in learning English which successfully resulted in his acquisition of this linguistic capital. A fundamental aspect of Bourdieu’s theorisation of the relationship between economic capital and cultural capital is that time is essential to mediate the transformation of economic capital into cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1997). Mazin had to have approximately six years of private tuition to improve his linguistic capital.

The dimensions of time and enthusiasm on the part of the student are essential to understand the process of the inculcation of cultural capital as the experience of Jasem, an LEP participant, could demonstrate. With respect to the role of time, Jasem’s experience with learning English could illustrate how not spending sufficiently prolonged period of time inculcating the linguistic capital, despite the presence of the economic capital, could lead to failure in acquiring the target, linguistic capital. Jasem maintained that:

I enrolled in private tuition when I was in Grade 11. The private tuition helped me learn how to read in English. I learned the English alphabets in Grade 9 and learned reading in Grade 11. (Jasem)
Jasem began to invest in the development of his English quite late in his school life, i.e., two years before joining university, when he had private tuition and started to merely learn how to read in English. This apparently was not sufficient to help him acquire the linguistic capital. Secondly, Jasem ostensibly lacked enthusiasm to acquire the language which is evident in the following quote about his opportunities of learning English:

I wish I took the private tutor’s advice seriously. He used to advise me to memorise English words, but unfortunately, I didn’t memorise words. (Jasem)

This apparently indicated a lack of intrinsic interest in learning the language. The inclination to invest in cultural capital is crucial to success in its inculcation (Bourdieu, 2003).

Here, I want to emphasise that the economic capital in itself is not sufficient to acquire cultural capital as it has to be accompanied by investment of time, effort and enthusiasm. That is, I am not suggesting any causal relationship between the possession of economic capital and the development of linguistic capital.

The second category, consisting of LEP participants, all belonged to low-income families except for Asad. They did not invest in whatever way to improve their English linguistic capital. Asad, despite belonging to a middle-income family, did not invest in learning English due to lack of time and interest, both essential to the acquisition of cultural capital. The other three participants (Ali, Fahad and Farah) explicitly attributed the lack of opportunities to improve their English to the lack of economic capital and lack of interest. The point that I want to emphasise here is that the lack of economic resources on that part of the latter three participants’ families constitutes a fundamental impediment to their access to the linguistic capital.

The third category, comprising five participants with good English proficiency, all, except Zahra, belonged to low-income families. Those participants relied on opportunities that required minimum or no economic investment to improve their English proficiency, such as reading books, watching YouTubes and movies and practicing English with siblings. They all shared a common attribute which was that they realised the importance of English language and, hence, they had enthusiasm to invest time and effort into acquiring this linguistic capital. Despite the absence of opportunities that required economic capital, those participants managed to acquire the linguistic capital by virtue of their awareness of the academic and economic benefits that English can bring them, as well as their willingness to invest time and effort in learning English.
Moreover, family, having cultural capital in the form of knowledge of the academic significance of English, had a great role in promoting their children to acquire the language, as explained by Merriam. Obviously, the possession of the cultural capital on the part of students and their families significantly contributed to the inculcation of the linguistic capital as demonstrated by the experiences of those students who all currently have good English proficiency. The accumulation of this linguistic capital resulted from a long process of inculcation and acquisition (Johnson, 1993) which those participants were apparently ready to engage in.

I use Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and cultural capital to account for these differences. The habitus of most participants with good English proficiency were shaped by past social conditionings, particularly family upbringing, that helped them to acquire English. These included financial investment in learning English and parents’ possession of cultural capital. On the contrary, the formation of LEP participants’ habitus mostly lacked the economic and cultural capital for the inculcation of the linguistic capital. Nevertheless, I must admit the inherent difficulties in attempting to explain the complex and diverse factors that played a role in participants’ abilities to acquire the language; nevertheless, these concepts of Bourdieu have proved useful in making sense of how participants’ opportunities of learning English prior to joining university were substantially shaped by their families’ possession of economic and cultural capital.

I here emphasise the relevance of the concept of cultural capital to my attempts to interpret findings within the next themes in the sense that I cannot understand and explain the inequality in participants’ experiences of learning content in English—only unless I take into consideration the inequal distribution of this linguistic capital among students from various socioeconomic backgrounds.

To conclude, findings from this theme indicated that participants were not able to acquire the linguistic capital in an equitable manner. The unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital in society was the main factor behind this disparity. The presentation and the analysis of the disparity of access to opportunities to acquire the linguistic capital is of paramount importance to understanding the impact of EMI policy on participants’ experiences of content learning and progress to higher academic levels. Bourdieu (2003, p.84) emphasises that: “academic success is directly dependent on cultural capital and on the inclination to invest in
the academic market.” One successful strategy to acquire the linguistic capital is through the investment of economic capital, in the forms of hiring English-speaking nannies and private tutors, and enrolling children in EMI private schools or English courses; a strategy that is more readily accessible to the well-off (Swartz, 1997). Hence, it can be concluded that since participants entered HE, which requires the possession of English as a prerequisite for success and progress, with unequal levels of linguistic capital, then this could be an instance of inequality to students who join university with LEP.

5.2. Theme 2: Participants had unequal opportunities for access to content knowledge:

In this theme, I endeavour to present and discuss findings relevant to participants’ perceptions of the impact of the monolingual English-only policy on their experiences of learning subject matter. The key finding in this theme indicated that participants did not equally benefit from the educational opportunities offered by university because this policy enabled participants with good English proficiency to more readily access content knowledge; whereas, it constituted a barrier for some LEP participants.

I present here findings that pertain to how participants experience learning of their specialisations in an English-only policy context. I, first, introduce the positive perceptions, mostly held by participants with good English proficiency, of the impact of English-only policy on students’ learning experiences with respect to the degree to which they feel comfortable learning their specialisations through English only, their understating of content and lectures, and their ability to communicate with lecturers and engage in classroom interaction. Second, I present the perceptions of participants who experienced the negative impact of English-only policy on their content learning.

Almost all participants with good English proficiency expressed that they felt at ease when learning their specialisations through English-only. Words and phrases like ‘comfortable’, ‘convenient’, ‘easy’ and ‘not difficult’ are common in the responses of participants with good English proficiency. For instance, Hafsa (a diploma, human resources management student with good English proficiency) asserted that: “Regarding my specialisation, human resources, the courses are easy, and the words are simple”. Likewise, Susan (a diploma, human resources management student with good English proficiency) claimed that:
Yes, it is comfortable, because like what I said, there is no difficulty, most of the words we use in our real life. We do not face much difficulty. (Susan)

Concerning understanding the subject matter, proficient English language participants expressed that English-only instruction helped them understand content. For instance, Taif (a diploma, IT student with good English proficiency) asserted that:

It helps us a lot [to understand content] because everything in the computer is in English; everything we use is in English, so English helps us a lot. (Taif)

They maintained that English language better helped them have in-depth understanding of their respective specialisations. Ibrahim (a diploma, IT student with good English proficiency), for example, stressed that:

For me, the depth is more in English because I understand English, and I understand the terms in English more than in Arabic. (Ibrahim)

Regarding understanding lectures, all participants with high English proficiency averred that they understood at least 80 per cent of the lecture content when the lecturer uses English only (in participants’ own words: Hafsa: “I understand 80%”; Ibrahim: “9/10”; Mazin: “I have no problem”; Merriam: “almost 90%, or let’s say 95%”; Reem: “85%”; Susan: “I can smoothly understand content”; Taif: “almost 90%”; Zahra: “I can understand 80% of what the teacher says” and Zainab: “I can fully understand”). Zainab (a diploma, business studies student with good English proficiency), for example, stated that: “Personally speaking, I can fully understand…When the teacher explains content, I understand all the points he explains.” (Zainab).

Participation in classroom discussions is another aspect of English proficient participants’ learning experience where they indicated an increasing level of confidence. Virtually all participants with high English proficiency argued that English was never a barrier to their classroom interaction and oral activities. Susan, for instance, asserted that:

Sure, I have self-confidence. The students should be self-confident. Giving presentations helped us gain confidence... I have confidence in myself when I speak in front of the students, and I don’t get nervous. (Susan)

Yet, participants admitted that classroom discussions were, in general, quite rare due to several factors, like teachers’ styles of teaching, online mode of teaching, and most importantly students’ LEP. Clarifying the role of English in minimising students’ participation in classroom discussions, Merriam (an advanced diploma, engineering student with good English proficiency) said that:
The English language reduces class participation because the student does not understand, so s/he is ashamed to say an answer when s/he does not have the language. That's why there is little participation. (Merriam)

A similar finding was reported by Airey (2010) and Airey and Linder (2006) where Swedish students asked and answered fewer questions when they were taught in English, rather than Swedish; even though, most of their participants were competent in English.

On the other hand, LEP participants found studying their specialisations through English-only difficult and uncomfortable. Ali, for example, said that:

[I]'s not comfortable. … English is difficult for us. We studied in Arabic at school. When we entered college, the language of instruction is new to us. (Ali)

Ali plainly attributed the difficulty of learning content to the MOI, English.

Similarly, Saba (an advanced diploma, IT student with LEP) argued that:

Because our mother tongue is Arabic, sometimes the English language causes us an obstacle; because there are many words that we do not know and that are new to us in some courses (Saba)

Concerning understanding the subject matter, this group of participants mainly attributed their struggle to understand content to their LEP. Asad (an advanced diploma, human resources management student with LEP) maintained that:

Studying is difficult. What makes it difficult? English language. As we pass a semester in the diploma, the more difficult it becomes, and the reason is also the English language. Whenever we study a subject, it is denser and contains ideas that students do not understand in English. (Asad)

This is hardly surprising. Indeed, several studies conducted in Oman, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and other parts of the world reported students’ LEP as the main challenge to learning content in EMI programmes (Oman: Al-Mashikhi et al., 2014; AlBakri, 2017; MENA: Troudi and Jendi, 2011; Alhamami, 2015, 2022; Shamim, et al., 2016; other parts of the world: Cho, 2012; Brown, 2018; Galloway et al., 2020).

LEP participants (Ali, Asad, Fahad, Jasem, Nadia and Saba) believed that English-only instruction was a barrier to in-depth understanding of their specialisations. Fahad (an advanced diploma, engineering student with LEP) elucidated how learning through English prevented in-depth understanding of the subject matter:
Studying in English does not make you delve deeper into the specialisation, but study it in a superficial way. If we delve deep into the specialisation, we will encounter more difficult terms and content, and students do not have good English proficiency that would allow them to delve deeper into the specialization. It will be more difficult [to delve deeper into the specialisation]. (Fahad)

The perceptions of LEP participants of their understanding of lectures were substantially lower than their counterparts who had higher English proficiency. The understanding of lectures widely varied among LEP participants ranging from as low as 5 percent (Jasem) to 80 percent (Fahad); others rated their understanding in between (e.g., Asad: “40-50% only”). Saba, for instance, claimed that:

When the professor explains, in the beginning we do not understand, and then when we go home and study alone, we try to understand the content; and this takes us a long time. (Saba)

I realise that it is not only participants’ linguistic capital that influenced their comprehension of lectures as participants asserted that the presence of mathematics in their courses and lecturers’ use of multimodalities (e.g., writing, drawing, etc…) helped alleviate their lack of understanding of lectures. I highlight these nuances in the following theme.

Another aspect of the learning experience that LEP participants reported that they gained minimum advantage from was classroom interactions, except for group discussions where students surreptitiously use all their linguistic resources. The majority of this category participants (Ali, Asad, Nadia and Saba) indicated that they did not have confidence to participate in classroom discussions due to the language barrier. Asad, for instance, asserted that:

I don't feel confident; I haven't reached the level that makes me feel confident when I talk for a long time or include new terms that I didn't talk about before…. [that is because of] Lack of self-confidence when speaking in English, while if the dialogue was in Arabic, there would be a lot of participations, discussions and deep understanding of everything. (Asad)

Concerning asking and answering questions in the classroom, most LEP participants indicated that students asked and answered fewer questions. Ali explained his experience in respect to this issue:

I basically don’t understand the teacher’s question. Even when I understand his question, I don’t know how to reply… I don’t know how to respond in English, unless I open the book and read the answer. (Ali)
To sum this topic up, participants talked about how English-only policy facilitated or hindered their learning of the subject matter. The overall finding in this theme was that participants’ perceptions on the impact of EMI policy on their content learning experiences significantly differed. While proficient English participants found it easier to make use of the learning opportunities, LEP participants seemed to face tremendous challenges to utilise these opportunities due to the language barrier.

5.2.1. Discussion of theme 2:

Here, I discuss how the EMI policy differently influenced participants’ access to content knowledge. This can be mostly, though not exclusively, attributed to the relationship between participants’ possession of the linguistic capital and their academic success. However, I would hasten to add that this does not happen in a deterministic manner as access to knowledge was also influenced by several other factors, such as the presence of mathematics in some courses and the practical nature of others, as will be elucidated in the next theme.

It is Bourdieu’s theoretical model of the dialectical relationship between social structures and human agency that helps me come to grips with the impact of EMI policy on participants’ learning experiences of content knowledge. An in-depth analysis of this dialectical relationship between the field and participants’ habitus and cultural capital would help to have a fuller understanding of the impact of EMI policy on university students’ learning and social inequalities, which I consider the main contribution of this study. By the field, I specifically refer to the HEI where the study is taking place with particular focus on the monolingual English-policy adopted by this HEI. In addition, the translanguaging theory provides me with a theoretical framework to question the legitimacy of the monolingual EMI policy as demonstrated by some participants’ negative perceptions of the policy’s detrimental impact on their access to content knowledge.

It is critical to remind readers that participants arrived at university equipped with varying levels of English proficiency which is a prerequisite for success in an English-only policy HE. It is true that a foundation programme is offered to all new entrants where they can study English language for a period that can extend up to five academic terms, depending on their performance on a placement test. However, participants’ current self-rating English proficiency levels are predominantly reflective of their English proficiency levels upon graduation from high school
(Grade 12) as indicated by their final scores in English. That is, participants (Ibrahim, Mazin, Merriam, Reem, Susan, Taif, Zahra and Zainab) who obtained good marks (70 or more) in English in high school rated their English proficiency level as ‘very good’ or ‘excellent’. On the other hand, participants (e.g., Ali, Asad, Fahad, Farah, Jasem, Nadia) who obtained lower marks (69 or less) rated their English proficiency as ‘below average’, ‘average’ and ‘good’.

Evidence from previous studies in the Omani HE context confirms this finding in the sense that these foundation programmes do not sufficiently prepare students to study their respective academic specialisations through English-only (e.g., Ismail, 2011; Al-Bakri, 2013, 2017; Al-Issa and Al-Mahroqi, 2017; Al-Bakri and Troudi, 2020). This is also consistent with findings from a study conducted by Shamim, et al. (2016) in Saudi Arabia which reported that both students and teachers were dissatisfied with the English language programme as it did not adequately prepare students to study science courses through EMI.

The inequalities posed by the English-only policy in access to content knowledge is manifested in the data in two main areas: ability to understand content and lectures and ability to engage in English-only classroom interaction. English proficient participants maintained that learning their specialisations in English-only helped them understand content at sufficient depth, as Taif and Ibrahim demonstrated above. They also did not seem to face serious issues concerning lectures’ comprehension since they reported understanding around 80% to 100% of lecture content. Those participants, also, had confidence to communicate with their lecturers, to ask them questions, to answer their questions and to give presentations in English. This helps illustrate the advantages enjoyed by participants with high English proficiency within this policy context.

On the other hand, findings indicated that the English-only policy created tensions and barriers to the learning experiences of most participants with LEP. Concerning understanding content, participants explicitly linked their lack of content understanding to their LEP, as Ali’s and Asad’s quotes demonstrated. With respect to in-depth understanding of content, participants pointed out that lack of knowledge of vocabulary and technical terms and lack of time were the reasons behind their belief that English-only policy does not encourage in-depth understanding of content (Fahad’s quote). Furthermore, they also highlighted the challenges they faced when they attempted to understand content from lectures. Saba’ quote above illustrates that she did not understand lecturer’s explanation of content and her comprehension came from self-study.
Overall, LEP participants understanding of lectures was substantially less than their counterparts with good English proficiency.

The English-only policy, moreover, contributed to minimising the participation of LEP participants in classroom activities. Many of them indicated that they did not have confidence to speak in English in the classroom, as Asad’s quote vividly demonstrates. They hesitated to ask and answer questions in the classroom because they were afraid of making mistakes, or simply because they did not possess the language to decode lecturer’s questions, to articulate an answer, or to formulate a question in English to ask the teacher (Ali’s quote above). That is, English-only policy significantly contributed to the exclusion of many participants with LEP from participating in and, hence, benefiting from classroom interactions, eventually preventing them from utilising a significant source of knowledge building.

Indeed, the detrimental effects of implementing EMI policy on students’ learning experience in HE have been documented by a small, yet growing number of empirical studies in the MENA region. In Oman, Al- Bakri and Troudi (2020, p.30) questioned the quality of academic knowledge that students gained in EMI programmes. They argued that writing, a key academic skill, “is reduced to an information-gathering activity” due to students’ limited linguistic ability. Even worse, they reported that more than a quarter of their student sample (28%) admitted to engaging in plagiarism to complete writing assignments. In Saudi Arabia, Shamim, et al. (2016), who conducted a qualitative study in a government university that adopted EMI policy, concluded that their participants lacked English proficiency to adequately comprehend lectures, understand prescribed textbooks, and respond to exam questions solely in English. This adversely affected the quantity and quality of student learning, a result that was substantiated by findings from Alhamami’s (2022) study. In Tunisia, it was found that EMI negatively affected students’ ability to actively engage in specialised classroom interaction (Badwan, 2019). Finally, in Libya, Tamtam, et al. (2013) reported that using English-only made it difficult for students to understand science, which, in turn, adversely influenced their performance in exams.

While my study confirms the detrimental effects of EMI on student learning which have been demonstrated by previous research, it further extends existing literature by providing in-depth theoretical explanations of how EMI policy inequitably influenced the learning experiences of students with different levels of English proficiency, initially shaped by their socioeconomic
backgrounds. Put differently, my research builds upon and expands the current body of literature on EMI policy by conceptually linking the academic impact of EMI policy to issues of social equity. Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice and the translanguaging theory, I demonstrate below how the implementation of EMI policy in this HEI is intrinsically inequitable.

I would explain the differences in participants’ EMI experiences through the relationship between one’s habitus and the structure of the field which is characterised by varying levels of ‘fit or mismatch.’ Maton (2014). That is, the more an individual’s habitus and cultural capital, particularly the linguistic capital in this case, are aligned with the requirements of the field, the more convenient they find it to succeed in that field, and vice versa. Put another way, participants who, before joining HE, acquired the linguistic capital that the HEI deemed necessary to succeed in learning a certain specialisation, were more likely to ‘feel at home’ when learning content is through that linguistic capital as expressed by almost all participants with high English proficiency. This was evident in the data as most participants with good English proficiency expressed that it was comfortable to study in English, and they had self-confidence to actively engage in classroom discussions which were predominantly in English. English proficiency paved the way for those participants to more fully exploit the learning opportunities presented by university and to accumulate more cultural capital in terms of better understanding of content knowledge and technical skills as well as more English acquisition.

On the contrary, when there is a mismatch between one’s internalised (linguistic) habitus and the linguistic capital favoured in university, students are more likely to experience tensions, challenges and unfavourable opportunities for success (Bourdieu, 2003; Maton, 2014; Thomson, 2014). Ali, for instance, illustrated this ‘mismatch’ when emphasised the fact that English as a MOI was unfamiliar to him as he used to learn content in Arabic in school. Other participants like Ali repeatedly reported various linguistic challenges that substantially prevented them from having convenient access to content knowledge owing to their LEP. The lack of harmony between participants’ (linguistic) habitus and the language imposed by the field created a situation where participants, often unwillingly, excluded themselves from classroom activities. By and large, because they lacked the linguistic capital, the majority of participants within this category had less opportunities to benefit from their learning experiences.
All in all, findings within this theme illustrated how the fit and mismatch between participants’ (linguistic) habitus and the linguistic capital imposed by the field greatly influenced participants’ learning experiences. In keeping with Bourdieu’s theory of practice, I would argue that when the possession of a linguistic capital that is not equally distributed in society is placed as a condition for success by a HEI, this eventually results in favouring some students who possess that capital, all the while creating barriers to others with low levels of that capital (Bourdieu, 2003). That is, participants who possessed the linguistic capital upon entry into HE were advantaged from the outset because success and progress in the HE field require the possession of this capital; whereas, their counterparts with a limited amount of that capital were disadvantaged.

These findings can further be explained through the translanguaging theory which fundamentally seeks to expose the detrimental effects of strict monolingual language policies on the learning of students who do not sufficiently master school’s MOI (Garcia, 2009a; Garcia and Li, 2014). This theory emphasises that students with limited proficiency in the school language cannot meaningfully engage and fully benefit from participation in the learning processes (ibid.). This is evident in the reported learning experiences of LEP participants who could not adequately make use of the learning opportunities in this EMI policy context. Moreover, proponents of translanguaging theory have unmasked the discriminatory function of monolingual policies which prevent emergent bilinguals from participating on an equal footing in the learning processes (Garcia, 2009b). Clearly, my participants did not have equal chances of access to content knowledge within this milieu of a strict monolingual English-only policy because they did not have similar levels of English proficiency.

Through the analysis of the first two themes, I attempt to explicitly link students’ opportunities of access to content knowledge to the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital in society. By so doing, I break with EMI studies that examine this phenomenon from an educational-only perspective (e.g., Hellekjær, 2010; Cho, 2012; Joe and Lee, 2013; Dafouz et al., 2014; Galloway et al., 2020) in isolation from social factors that can influence students’ academic performance.

To conclude, the concept of ‘fit and mismatch’ between participants’ (linguistic) habitus and the linguistic capital enforced by the field (i.e., the HEI) proved useful in understanding how the field created possibilities for some participants who possessed the linguistic capital most
valued by the institution (i.e., English), whilst it created difficulties for LEP participants. In practical terms, an unfortunate, though probably unintended, consequence of this policy is that it significantly prevented LEP participants from reaching their learning potential and academic achievement. On the contrary, the policy enabled the English proficient participants to take better advantage of their learning experience. Therefore, based on these findings, I can argue that the current strict English-only policy contributes to exacerbating inequalities between students who managed through their family upbringing to accumulate the linguistic capital valorised by this HEI and those who did not have the opportunities to acquire it. This finding substantiates concerns raised by critical scholars who warned against the discriminatory effects of EMI policy on students who lack the economic capital to acquire English in the MENA region (Troudi and Jendli, 2011; AlBakri, 2013; Abdel Latif, 2017; Troudi, 2022).

This finding is indeed hardly surprising, yet it is often overlooked by policymakers and most researchers in the Omani context. It is, therefore, critical that we understand the linguistic challenges that many students encounter because of this English-only policy so as to reverse its effects on the social equity in HE.

5.3. Theme 3: Using multilingual, semiotic and multimodal resources mitigated the detrimental impact of EMI on students’ learning:

In the previous theme, I attempted to demonstrate how participants had unequal opportunities for learning their specialisations due to their varying levels of English proficiency; however, in this theme, I endeavour to address the complexities and nuances involved in understanding participants’ access to content knowledge. Indeed, besides English language proficiency, there were other factors, such as some semiotic (e.g. mathematics) and multimodal resources prevalent in some specialisations as well as students’ and lecturers’ translanguaging and multimodal practices, that also influenced participant’ content learning. I highlight these factors in order to have a deeper understanding of participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their learning.

In the following, I first present findings pertinent to how semiotic and multimodal resources distinct to certain specialisations rendered content more accessible to many participants. Next, I report the translanguaging practices that participants used as strategies to navigate their learning in an English only policy context. Finally, employing the translanguaging theory and
Bourdieu’s theory of practice, I seek to interpret how these factors influence participants’ perceptions of EMI through shaping their access to content knowledge.

Findings revealed that understanding of content does not solely depend on students’ ability to decipher linguistic codes, but also on other semiotic resources, such as the mathematics discourse, and multimodal resources, such as technology affordances and hands-on type of courses. The comments below demonstrate how participants believe that different features of their specialisations influenced their access to content knowledge. For example, participants majoring in some mathematics-based specialisations, such as accounting, claimed that the prevalence of mathematics in their specialisations facilitated access to content. Farah, an accounting student, maintained that:

> It is true that the teacher speaks in English, but in our accounting specialisation, the academic content is mostly mathematical problems that are easy for us to understand… All what we study is mathematical problems, even when the teacher speaks in English, we understand him/her. (Farah)

In the same vein, when the content taught in a course included mathematics, it was easier for students to participate in classroom activities. Ali, for instance, explained that:

> If the question is about a mathematical problem, I can respond… It’s only numbers and I know numbers in English… However, if the question is about theory, I don’t know how to respond in English. (Ali)

Similarly, access to content knowledge and skills was less challenging in specialisations that some participants considered as more practical (e.g., involving hands-on learning activities) than theoretical in nature, such as IT. Nadia (a diploma, IT student with LEP), for instance, argued that:

> [We can understand content] because our courses are practical, unlike the theory-based specialisations where students face difficulty in understanding, so they have to translate everything they study. (Nadia)

Likewise, Ali described how understanding of content in practical courses was easier than theoretical courses:

> In theory [sessions], it is difficult, but in practical sessions, it is much easier…. Practical sessions are easier than theoretical sessions. I mean it’s practical; the teacher does it before you and you do it after him/her. (Ali)

Moving on now to present the strategies that participants employed to navigate their learning. The most recurrent strategies in participants’ interviews revolved around translanguaging practices. Other less consistently cited strategies included memorisation and silence which I do
not elaborate on here for lack of space. I report below various ways participants used their whole linguistic, semiotic and multimodal repertoire to enhance their access to content knowledge.

The reported TLPs included participants’ and some lecturers’ utilisation of various linguistic resources (Arabic and English), semiotic resources (mathematics discourse) and multimodal resources (technology affordances and hands-on activities) to support students’ content learning. These translinguaging practices ranged from simple word-to-word translation to carrying out translinguaging classroom discussions. In what follows, I present participants’ translinguaging practices and how these shaped their learning experiences.

All participants, though varyingly, drew on their full linguistic repertoire to understand content. Participants, particularly those with LEP, asserted that they used translinguaging practices as a strategy to understand content. For example, Asad, an LEP participant, maintained that:

I adopted translation [as a strategy] to help me understand when I started studying at the diploma level. I study in both Arabic and English so that the information is instilled in my head with more accuracy and comprehension. The Arabic language plays a role in accurately conveying information to me. (Asad)

Sometimes in order to understand content, some students needed to translate whole lessons. This was highlighted in Fahad’s interview:

We must translate sometimes in order to understand…Some students don’t understand English, so it takes them a long time to understand the lesson… Some students don’t understand the entire lesson, so they translate it completely. (Fahad)

Even participants whose English proficiency was good had to implement strategies so as to improve their access to content. For instance, Susan admitted that:

We use translation, and this is something that makes it easier for us as human resources students… we, as human resources students, made it easy for ourselves and translated the course’s materials into Arabic so that we could understand it in Arabic, and then when we study it in English, we will already be familiar with content…We almost translate all the chapters of all the courses. (Susan)

Participants also talked about how L1 was used to make sense of lectures’ content. One strategy LEP participants implemented was that they needed to translate the lecture’s content after the lecture in order to comprehend what the lecturer was talking about. Jasem (a diploma, engineering student with LEP) reported that:

What I do is this. It takes much of my time, but I have got used to it. I understand little hints from the teacher and I note down some ideas. After the lesson, I look
up the new terms and I memorise them. Later, I [listen to] the lesson recording again, so I can understand what the teacher was saying. (Jasem)

Another common translinguaging strategy amongst LEP participants was to ask their classmates who were able to understand the lecturer’s explanation of content. Ali expressed that: “we ask our classmates about content when we don’t understand the teacher” (Ali). Needless to say, they asked their classmates in Arabic and their proficient counterparts probably responded using both Arabic and English to establish the link between English terms and the Arabic explanation. Likewise, Fahad stated that: “I seek help from friends… Students ask the student who understands rather than asking the teacher” (Fahad).

Several participants (Fahad, Merriam, Saba, Susan and Taif) mentioned a frequent strategy that some lecturers used to help students comprehend lectures. Lecturers who did not share the same L1 with students requested the students who managed to understand the content of the lecture to explain to their classmates in their L1. For instance, Taif shared her experience regarding this technique:

The teacher lets a student explain to his/her classmates. I remember once in one class, the teacher explained a point and no one understood it except me and a few girls. The teacher asked me to explain it to the students in Arabic. (Taif)

And sometimes lecturers themselves used TLPs to explain content. Arabic-speaking lecturers, though they mostly used English to deliver content as required by the policy, did occasionally use Arabic to facilitate students’ comprehension of lecture’s content. Reem, for instance, elaborated on this:

I studied X course [with an Arabic-speaking lecturer]. S/he used to explain in English and then repeat the explanation in Arabic. (Reem)

Paradoxically, some lecturers who are non-Arabic speakers also adopted TLPs. The following extracts from Zainab’s interview illustrated this technique:

Zainab: Last semester, we studied X Course. The teacher put the titles (different types of business) of the slides in Arabic. He wrote, for example, “الربا”, “الاحتكار” [usury and monopoly], and so on. It was very easy. All students were enthusiastic and actively participated in discussions. We could memorise words. He wrote the titles which were the types of different businesses.
Researcher: Did he know Arabic?
Zainab: No, he didn’t. He just wrote the Arabic words between brackets.
Researcher: Can you tell me more about this experience?
Zainab: I felt it was very good… S/he wrote the main points and titles in Arabic. It was about the types of businesses. S/he even wrote the "المحرمات" between brackets which means the forbidden businesses [in Islam].

Researcher: *What was the impact of this on students’ understanding of content?*

Zainab: It was very good. I even remember a word that means “احتكار” [monopoly]; he wrote it in Arabic [in the slides]. When you read the word in Arabic, you immediately understand [the concept]; you don’t have to read the full explanation. [Zainab interview]

Drawing on their whole linguistic repertoire also promoted participants’ classroom interaction in terms of enabling students to ask questions. Some LEP students used translation applications to help them formulate questions to ask the teacher in English. Zahra described this technique:

I witnessed a situation that a student before going to ask the teacher, he opened an app and wrote the question in Arabic and translated it into English and then said it to the teacher. (Zahra)

Another significant TLP that some participants identified as key for improving their learning experience was the use of various multimodal resources, such as gestures, drawing, writing and visual aids. Ali reported that lecturer’s drawing on the whiteboard improved his understanding of lecture’s content:

I don’t understand the teacher when s/he speaks unless s/he writes on the whiteboard. When s/he draws something and explain about it, I can understand. If s/he only talks, I don’t understand him/her. (Ali)

Drawing on multimodal resources, also, helped participants communicate with their lecturers. Mazin described how some LEP students in their final year at university communicated with lecturers:

other students face a great difficulty. They can’t answer [verbally in English] at all. I mean it’s impossible, they can’t answer. They try saying a word in Arabic and a word in English, it’s all mixed up, and *they use signs.* [my emphasis]

In short, all participants drew on all their linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources to access content knowledge. The degree to which they relied on their L1 was significantly influenced by participants’ possession of the linguistic capital (English) and also by the nature of the specialisations and particular courses in terms of whether they involve certain semiotic resources, such as mathematics, or other modalities.

5.3.1. Discussion of theme 3:

In this section, I, first, analyse how the semiotic and multimodal resources specific to certain specialisations could help mitigate inequalities of access to content knowledge. Next, I examine
participants’ strategies to improve their chances of success in this monolingual English-only policy context. Finally, I conclude by drawing some conclusions that link the themes discussed in this chapter together.

Despite the detrimental effects of EMI policy on some participants’ learning experiences that were discussed in theme 2, this does not imply that they were doomed to failure because data demonstrated that there were some semiotic and multimodal aspects pertinent to some specialisation which facilitated students’ access to content. Moreover, all participants implemented strategies to help them succeed in their studies.

To understand participants’ learning experiences, as human practices, I invoke Bourdieu’s concept of the dialectical relationship between participants’ habitus and cultural capital and the field. The field here pertains to specific features of the three specialisations taught in this HEI, namely engineering, business studies and IT in terms of the linguistic, mathematical, technical and practical knowledge and skills required to access content. The translanguaging theory is also used to explain how participants (and sometimes lecturers) flexibly used various linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources to access content knowledge. It also helps to theoretically support and legitimise participants’ TLPs and strategies to enhance their chances of success.

Findings clearly indicated that participants’ ability to learn content was influenced by some semiotic and multimodal resources distinctive of some specialisations. More precisely, data demonstrated that specialisations that are more mathematics-based (e.g., accounting and many engineering courses) and those which are more practical than theoretical (e.g., IT and several practical engineering courses) enabled participants to have better access to content knowledge and to meet the learning outcomes. Farah’s quote above illustrated that she could more easily understand content because it mostly consisted of mathematical problems which, according to her, does not require high English proficiency to comprehend.

Similarly, the multimodal resources in some IT and engineering courses (such as technological affordances, illustrations, hands-on activities) facilitated participants’ comprehension of content, as Nadia’s and Ali’s extracts demonstrated. Furthermore, the prevalence of mathematics codes in some courses made it possible for Ali to participate in classroom activities which he could not do when lecture’s content was mainly encoded in English as evident in the previous chapter. This resonates with findings from an EMI study carried out in Saudi Arabia.
which revealed that students were able to comprehend math when the teacher used English-only because “it was mainly numbers and the teacher could solve the problems on the board” (Shamim, et al., 2016, p.41). That is, the presence of semiotic resources (‘numbers’) and multimodal resources (‘solving the problems on the board’) facilitated students’ access to content in mathematics courses, even when taught exclusively in English.

To account for these findings, I capitalise on the translanguaging theory’s conceptualisation of languaging practices as including not only multilingual resources, but also other multi-semiotic and multimodal resources which together form an integral part of the meaning-making processes that participants engage in to make sense of the subject matter (Garcia, 2009a; Moore et al., 2020). That is, despite some participants’ lack of English proficiency, they were able to access content knowledge through mobilising other semiotic and multimodal resources, as illustrated above. This finding confirms results from a recent study conducted by Tai (2021) who demonstrated that secondary school teachers’ mobilisation of multilingual (i.e. English and Chinese) and multimodal (iPad writing, gestures, drawings, visuals) substantially improved students’ comprehension of subject matter. Utilising these resources helped alleviate the negative effects of English-only teaching on participants’ learning of content; therefore, some participants (Fahad and Farah) held less unfavourable perceptions towards EMI policy, despite their LEP. These are evident in their responses to a question about general perceptions of EMI policy as they respectively said: “It’s better we study engineering in English” and “The decision to teach in English will benefit students in the future.”

It is this nuanced understanding of students’ perceptions of EMI that helps me contribute to EMI research in the sense that the semiotic and multimodal resources prevailing in some specialisations can substantially shape students’ perceptions of EMI. Hence, researchers need to consider these factors when examining students’ perceptions of EMI policy.

Another way to explain these findings is through Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the interplay between habitus and field. According to Bourdieu’s theory of practice, human practice (participants’ learning experiences) does not only result from one’s habitus, but rather from the relations between agents’ habitus and the circumstances of the field where they operate (Maton, 2014). As participants’ specialisations (the field) afford alternative means of acquiring content knowledge, besides language, and the participants’ habitus allowed them to utilise these means, participants belonging to such specialisations (e.g., accounting and IT) were less likely to
oppose English-only teaching. In other words, as “no one enters a game to lose” (Johnson, 1993, p.8), participants capitalised on the semiotic and multimodal resources that were offered by the field to improve their positions in the field and to maximise their chances of success in navigating the system. The theorisation of the interplay between one’s habitus and the field helped interpret participants’ varying perceptions of EMI policy based on their abilities to acquire knowledge and skills pertinent to their specialisations, notwithstanding their English proficiency levels.

I turn now to discuss participants’ strategies to enhance their access to content knowledge. Despite the challenges that participants, particularly those with LEP, faced when learning their specialisations through English-only, they still had agency and they could strategically improve their chances of success in such context. In their endeavour to pass their academic courses and eventually obtain their desired academic qualifications, participants employed various translanguaging strategies.

Findings indicated that all participants relied, to varying degrees, on their entire linguistic and semiotic repertoire to improve their access to content knowledge. Participants translated course materials, ranging from a few terms to whole chapters (as Asad’s and Fahad’s quotes indicated above); they translangaged during classroom discussions when interacting with their lecturers and classmates (as Zahra’s quotes illustrated); and they mobilised multi-semiotic and multimodal resources to understand content (as Ali’s and Mazin’s quotes demonstrated). Participants, particularly those with LEP, frequently needed to deploy their full linguistic repertoire to understand content, make sense of lectures and to facilitate communication with lecturers and classmates. They flexibly and dynamically used TLPs to make their learning experiences more academically rewarding and more inclusive.

Findings also suggested that participants benefited from lecturers’ translangaging practices. Lecturers’ use or tolerance of TLPs (See Reem’s, Zainab’s, Taif’s and Zahra’s quotes above) seemed to greatly improve students’ understanding of content. Lecturers’ TLPs also served another important function which was including ELP students in the learning processes. The quotes above indicated that lecturers’ TLPs opened doors for LEPs to benefit from lectures and classroom discussions, without which they would be excluded as demonstrated in the previous chapter where lecturers strictly adhered to English-only policy.
These findings are consistent with previous studies suggesting that the use of Arabic by students and teachers in EMI lessons significantly improved students’ comprehension of the subject matter and lectures and enhanced students’ engagement in classroom discussions (Tamtam, et al., 2013; Alhamami, 2015; Shamim, et al., 2016). Participants with lower English proficiency levels in Shamim, et al.’s (2016) study disclosed that they translated whole textbooks word for word into Arabic to aid their understanding of science subjects. Alhamami (2015, p.117) indicated that all instructors in his sample used Arabic in EMI classes for various purposes, including “translating new scientific terms; translating exam questions to make sure that the students understood them; and explaining difficult equations, theories and cases.” Teachers in Tamtam, et al.’s (2013) study in Libya agreed that the use of Arabic led to better classroom interaction and discussions.

Notwithstanding the acknowledged importance of incorporating students’ L1 alongside English in EMI programmes, my study contributes to existing literature in the MENA region in several ways. Firstly, it demonstrates how students’ ability to draw on their full linguistic repertoire can influence their perceptions of EMI policy. Secondly, drawing on insights from the translanguaging theory and through analysis of my data, I explain that it is not only language (i.e., Arabic and/or English) that provides access to content knowledge, but rather students, and sometimes teachers, dynamically and flexibly deploy a host of semiotic and multimodal resources to enhance their access to the subject matter. Finally, despite the documented evidence of the efficacy of employing students’ L1 to improve their understanding of content and promote social equity, I argue that the potential of translanguaging cannot be maximised without a political will that recognises it as an effective language-in-education policy over the current strict monolingual English-only policy, emphasising the dialectical relationship between agency (students’ and some teachers’ inclination to use L1) and structure. I elaborate on these points below.

Susan’s quote above is worth special attention. Notwithstanding her good English proficiency, she reported that she and other human resources management students had to translate whole chapters to facilitate their understanding of content. It is apparently this TLP as a strategy that rendered content more accessible to Susan and her classmates, and without which access to content knowledge would not be as straightforward. It is worth noting here that Susan had an overall positive perception of the impact of EMI policy on her learning (See theme 2). The point I want to stress here is that because of Susan’s ability to draw, though surreptitiously, on her
entire linguistic repertoire, she probably developed an impression that EMI policy did not have a detrimental impact on her access to content knowledge; hence, the favourable perception of the policy. Consequently, I emphasise the notion that understanding students’ perceptions of EMI policy requires going beneath the superficial support of English-only policy and delving deeper into the complex factors involved in shaping these perceptions.

The translanguaging theory is used as a lens to capture the nuances of participants’ strategy implementation. The translanguaging theory helped illuminate academic, cognitive and social advantages of using translanguaging practices as a strategy to improve students’ learning. Though not officially recognised, findings demonstrated that the implementation of this strategy by participants as well as some lecturers served three key functions: it rendered content knowledge more accessible and comprehensible to most participants; it helped activate previous knowledge that was encoded in their L1 (see Zainab’s quote above); and it made the educational process more inclusive. Creating an inclusive environment for all students, regardless of their linguistic proficiency, is a fundamental aim of the translanguaging theory (Garcia, 2009a&b). As TLPs naturally occur in bilingual classrooms (Baker and Wright, 2017) and evidence in this study indicates that they served educational as well as social purposes, it seems logical to question why their use is not yet legitimised.

The TLPs as a strategy to improve understanding of content and to feel part of the learning process helped participants regain their agency. However, this is not to argue that these TLPs within the current English-only policy context are considered a ‘panacea’ for all the cognitive and communicative challenges that many participants faced. That is because there were obstacles to the deployment of this strategy. This is illustrated through examples from participants’ narratives. First, as findings demonstrated, some lecturers, following the policy, did not permit L1 use in the classroom, preventing students from utilising their full linguistic repertoire. Second, the strict adherence to this monolingual English-only policy created a situation in which LEP participants lacked self-confidence to participate on a par with their English proficient counterparts in classroom discussions. Thus, these structural elements constrain participants’ capability to create a translanguaging space for themselves within this strict monolingual policy context. I take this as evidence that participants’ agency and creativity are not unlimited and social structures (i.e., the EMI policy in this case) have an influence on participants’ ability to implement their strategies. This is, however, not to deemphasise
individual agency, but rather to suggest that there should be an institutional will to endorse translanguaging as a MOI policy for the translanguaging practices to achieve their potential.

5.4. Summary of Chapter 5:

In this chapter, I discussed findings pertinent to participants’ opportunities to acquire English prior to joining university and their perceptions of the impact of the English-only policy on their learning experiences. Using Bourdieu’s theory of practice, this investigation allows me to establish the relationship between participants’ chances of success in EMI HE and their socioeconomic backgrounds. Evidence in this chapter suggests that it is potentially misleading to attribute academic achievement or failure solely to individual’s academic aptitudes or self-motivation because it was the possession of the linguistic capital, though not exclusively, that most advantaged or disadvantaged participants in terms of access to content knowledge. This resulted in inequalities in access to content knowledge between participants with good English proficiency and those with LEP as reflected in the striking differences in their ability to benefit from the learning opportunities offered by university.

However, this does not happen in a deterministic manner since students’ access to content knowledge was also influenced by other key factors, such as, mathematics skills and other multimodalities. The prevalence of these semiotic and multimodal resources in some courses and specialisations seemed to promote understanding of content and inclusion in such courses. That is, this apparently undermined the detrimental impact of the policy on participants’ learning, and eventually, played a role in influencing their perceptions of EMI policy.

Finally, another aspect of participants’ learning experiences that played a part in shaping their perceptions of EMI policy was their deployment of their entire linguistic and semiotic repertoire. Using TLPs served educational as well as social functions in the sense that it rendered content knowledge more accessible to all students and it helped included participants who lacked the linguistic capital valued at university. Most importantly, it helped participants regain their agency; however, for students to make the most of TLPs, there will have to be a political will that officially recognise their potential for improving learning quality and equity in HE.
In a nutshell, taking all these factors into account helped better understand the divergent and sometimes contradictory perceptions of EMI held by participants belonging to different socioeconomic backgrounds, English proficiency levels and specialisations. The next chapter explores participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their life chances.
Chapter Six: The impact of EMI on participants’ life chances:

This chapter attempts to answer Part b of the first research question. The central purpose is to investigate the impact of EMI policy on social equity in a HEI in Oman. The chapter focuses on whether EMI policy offers students equitable opportunities for progress to higher academic levels in this HEI (i.e., advanced diplomas and bachelor’s degrees) and other socioeconomic benefits people normally gain from completing HE. It is assumed that the academic level a student graduates with can substantially determine the job they can secure in terms of pay, benefits and status. It is worth mentioning here that I drew on the entire dataset for reporting and discussing findings in this chapter and the following one.

6.1. Theme 4: EMI policy offers unequal opportunities for students to socioeconomically benefit from HE:

In this theme, I deal with two distinct, yet related issues pertaining to the EMI impact on students’ life chances; hence, the need to divide it into two sub-themes. I first, present and discuss participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their progress to higher academic levels. I specifically focus on their perceptions on the requirement of a language level as a condition for progress in this HEI (obtaining a certain grade in a high-stakes English proficiency test as a condition for progress, see the Context Chapter). Secondly, I report and analyse their perceptions of EMI regarding how it could impact their access to the labour market.

6.1.1. Sub-theme 1: The gatekeeping function of the language requirement (IELTS):

With respect to participants’ perceptions on the impact of EMI policy on students’ opportunities for progress to higher levels, I could identify two sharply contrasting views; although, there was space of others in between these extremes. The first view was that English-only policy had no bearing on students’ opportunities for progress. This perspective was particularly, though not only, held by participants with good English proficiency. Asma (a bachelor’s degree, IT student, with ‘reported’ good English proficiency), for instance, strongly emphasised the notion that the language requirement is a fair policy:

Yes (it is fair), because if there was no English language requirement, all students would have completed the study, some students don’t deserve [to complete their
studies]. To obtain IELTS is a prerequisite to progress to higher diploma and bachelor’s degree. It is a fair thing. (Asma)

Zahra (an advanced diploma, accounting student, with good English proficiency) justified the language requirement:

This, I feel, is very positive for students; the job market now requires English. You won’t be recruited if you don’t mention in your CV that you’re competent in English. This will help them [students] to improve their English, so they will have no difficulty in joining the labour market. (Zahra)

Farah averred that the policy had no role to play in students’ progress to higher levels:

When the student moves from one level to another, it depends on his/her efforts on his/her studies and his/her review of the lessons; the English language does not have a big role (Farah)

In similar fashion, Susan emphasised that it is students’ hard work and motivation that decided their progress, not EMI policy:

This depends on the student and his/her desire; whether s/he wants to complete his/her studies or not. I don’t think it depends on English language. Very few students drop out because of English language (Susan)

This stance was, indeed, common among proficient English participants who believed that students’ progress to higher levels was primarily dependent on their abilities, hard work and motivation, and that the policy did not constitute a barrier to their progress.

It was not only participants with good English proficiency who believed in the legitimacy of the requirement of a specific proficiency level as a condition for progress to higher levels, but also some LEP participants whose progress was hampered by this institutional policy. Nadia (a diploma, IT student with LEP) maintained that:

The English language basically helps you in your studies and your professional work as well. The English language will be needed in my job, since I specialize in information technology, so most of the electronic systems depend on English, so I must have a background in English. (Nadia)

Nadia justified the policy based on the importance of English for one’s studies and work later on despite the fact she herself was negatively affected by this policy. She described her experience regarding this policy:

Now I want to progress to bachelor’s degree, but I need to obtain IELTS, why should this happen to me? This is beyond student’s ability… This is beyond student’s ability to the extent that s/he will give up his/her future dreams. (Nadia)
These ambivalent feelings about the policy were not uncommon among some participants whose progress was hindered or delayed by the policy.

On the contrary, some participants held a belief that English-only policy (specifically the language requirement policy) did constitute a barrier to students’ advancement to higher levels. LEP participants described their experiences concerning how the policy obstructed their progress and expressed their perceptions on this matter. Moreover, even participants who managed, thanks to their possession of the linguistic capital, to progress to higher levels reported how the policy prevented many students from continuing their studies.

Describing his overall perception of the requirement of a certain English proficiency level as a condition for progress, Essa asserted that:

> This is a negative thing for sure. If you are not good in English, you don’t have the right to earn a bachelor’s degree in engineering. (Essa)

Ali narrated his experience concerning this policy:

> I have the required GPA that allows me to progress to advanced diploma, but the by-law now requires that we get IELTS to progress… [therefore] I have a problem. I have a good GPA, but I have a problem with IELTS I must apply for IELTS in order to progress to advanced diploma… Now I will try to get IELTS. If I couldn’t, there is no power and no strength save in God, I will quit… I don’t want to quit. If I wanted to quit, I would have quit earlier. I want to complete my studies. (Ali)

Similarly, Mazin clearly described how the policy affected the progress of many students:

> No, it doesn’t affect my progress, but it [this policy] has an impact on many students. I mean there were smart students whose GPAs were 3.7 or 3.9, I mean their GPAs where higher than ours. My GPA was a bit low, it’s approximately 3 and theirs was 3.7. However, because of their limited English proficiency, they left the college with a diploma or advanced diploma. They couldn’t advance to the bachelor’s degree. They tried to take IELTS more than once. I knew one student who attempted IELTS two or three times, but he couldn’t get the required score. They all try but in vain. Those were students who were with us and we knew them well. They left the college with a lower qualification because of the language barrier. They were very good students and their GPAs were high. I say it’s unfair that such students drop out. (Mazin)

The idea that students satisfied the GPA requirement for progress, but they struggled to satisfy the language requirement was frequently reported by participants.
Findings also demonstrate that many students did not attempt to take IELTS because they either had a belief that IELTS was difficult for them, so they could not obtain the required band or because they could not financially afford it. Asad elucidated students’ experiences with IELTS:

The student who did not obtain the required grade to complete the bachelor’s degree [in Level 4] is obliged to do IELTS test, but because the test is in English and they have a firm belief that they will not get the required grade, they consider it a waste of time and money, so they don’t do it. There is talk among students that IELTS test is beyond their abilities and that they will not succeed in it, so they are satisfied with not taking risks and, hence, graduate with a diploma. (Asad)

Therefore, participants, particularly those lacking in English proficiency, wished that the language proficiency requirement would be cancelled as a condition for progress. Ali expressed that:

No, there is no justice at all. On the contrary, they are oppressing the students. If the IELTS is cancelled and [progress] depends on the GPA, it would be better and better. (Ali)

To conclude, findings showed that while many participants with good English proficiency believed in the equity of EMI policy, most their LEP counterparts described how the policy limited their chances of progress to higher academic levels.

6.1.1.1. Discussion of Sub-theme 1:

Drawing on Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the point of departure for analysing participants’ perceptions and experiences of the impact of English-only policy on their academic progress is to break away from “the presuppositions inherent in the commonsense view, which sees academic success or failure as an effect of natural aptitudes” (Bourdieu, 1997, p.47). Thus, the central argument in this sub-theme, as it has been in the previous chapter, is to emphasise the relationships between one’s possession of linguistic capital as a form of cultural capital and the chances of success in the educational system, which is primarily grounded on Bourdieu’s fundamental theoretical contribution to the conceptualisation of the relationship between higher education and society (Swartz, 1997; Naidoo, 2004; Reay, 2004). I have shown in the first chapter that participants entered the field with varying levels of English proficiency where this disparity was largely attributed to socioeconomic factors, including family’s possession of economic and cultural capital.

Participants’ perceptions and experiences of the impact of English-only policy on students’ chances of progress to higher academic levels widely varied. Whereas some participants, who
perhaps unsurprisingly happened to be mostly those with good English proficiency, believed that the policy did not play a role in students’ progress, others, overwhelmingly those with LEP considered the policy, and the language requirement in particular, as a ‘barrier’ to their progress.

The imposition of language requirements seemed to more directly serve as a gatekeeper because it controlled who could advance from the diploma stage to the advanced diploma and bachelor’s degree stages. This language requirement which is imposed by the monolingual English-only policy is increasingly used as a means for inclusion and exclusion from HE. Many scholars, mostly subscribing to critical perspectives, have long emphasised the gatekeeping function of English language that renders entry to and success in various levels of education more accessible to the elite which leads eventually to increasing the gap between the haves and have-nots (Pennycook, 1994, 2007; Tollefson and Tsui, 2004; Ricento, 2010; Tikly, 2016; Phillipson, 2017). A few studies in Oman and the MENA region have indicated that EMI policies can contribute to creating social inequalities (Al-Busaïdi, 1995; Troudi and Jendli, 2011; Abdel Latif, 2017; AlBakri, 2017; Troudi, 2022). However, I attempt, in this study, to further develop this line of argument by empirically and theoretically illustrating how a monolingual English-only policy creates and maintains inequalities between students belonging to families that possess different levels of economic and cultural capital.

Findings demonstrate that some English proficient participants, particularly those belonging to middle-income families (e.g., Asma and Zahra), believed in the fairness of the English language requirement policy, and they thought it equitably served all students. Influenced by the fact that English is the language of the labour market (particularly the private sector), Zahra acknowledged the legitimacy of this policy, and perceived that it is for students’ own good. I understand this justification as an influence of the globalisation discourses of the importance of English for economic prosperity, which I more fully examine in the next sub-theme.

Students’ success in high-stakes English proficiency exams was attributed to educational factors, such as, hard work, effort and determination (as Farah’s and Susan’s quotes indicated above). It was not only English proficient participants who believed in the equity of the policy, but also some LEP participants who managed to progress to higher academic levels (e.g., Farah). The habitus of those participants, which was partially constructed by their successful learning experiences through English-only, along with the meritocratic discourse advocated by university might have produced their positive attitudes towards the policy, and made them
believe that success and progress were not determined by the policy per se, but rather by the student’s effort and dedication.

By contrast, the majority of LEP participants expressed their concerns that the language requirement policy was limiting their chances of progress to higher academic levels (e.g., Essa’s and Ali’s quotes). They described the policy as a ‘barrier’ to their progress. They asserted that the policy denied them access to higher academic levels despite fulfilling the GPA requirement and having the willingness to continue their studies. Ali’s quote plainly exhibits his self-determined motivation to progress to higher levels. Even some participants with good English proficiency (e.g., Mazin) reported that many of their classmates were forced to quit university despite their excellent academic performance (as reflected by their high GPAs). This indicates that many LEPs were excluded from the system (with the minimum qualification, i.e., a diploma) largely because they could not satisfy the language requirement as measured by high-stakes English proficiency tests. Put differently, they were eliminated because they did not possess the linguistic capital valued in university.

I use Bourdieu’s theory of practice to interpret and interrogate these findings. The policy that requires the satisfaction of language requirements as a condition for progress serves as a gatekeeper simply because obtaining the required grade (what is equivalent to Band 4.5 in IELTS for advanced diploma and Band 5 for bachelor’s degree) in a high-stakes English proficiency test ultimately depends on one’s possession of the linguistic capital which was, as findings revealed in the first theme, not equitably acquired by participants. This is, I believe, one reason why almost all English proficient participants did not see the policy as a barrier to their progress because they could, thanks to their linguistic capital, easily satisfy the language requirement by transmuting their linguistic capital into academic attainment that bestows a neutral and meritocratic appearance on their achievement. On the contrary, those who could not fulfil the language requirement explicitly described the policy as a barrier because they foresaw that it would exclude them from HE despite their hard work (as demonstrated by their excellent or good GPAs) and their motivation (Ali’s quote).

This point which is at the heart of Bourdieu’s model is key to understanding how the educationally profitable linguistic capital, which is unequally distributed in society, is transformed into a valid academic criterion for success and progress which, in turn confers upon it a value of academic neutrality based on equality of opportunity and meritocratic achievement
(Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Jenkins, 1992; Naidoo, 2004). What basically happens in this process is transmuting socioeconomic advantages into academic advantages (or otherwise, socioeconomic inequalities into educational inequalities) and legitimising it by bestowing on it an appearance of equity and meritocracy (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Moore, 2004; Naidoo, 2004). By disguising social inequalities and making it impeccably appear as academic merits, the education system can exercise its symbolic power through making stakeholders believe in the legitimacy of its selection criteria (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Swartz, 1997). This leads us to an interesting finding in this sub-theme which I address in the following lines.

Some LEP participants had ambivalent feelings about English-only policy and its impact on their progress. As exemplified by the case of Nadia, who, on the one hand supported the legitimacy of the policy (her quote above indicates a firm belief in the legitimacy of English as a language of HE and the labour market), but later she expressed her frustration with the policy as she could not obtain the required language score to progress to bachelor’s degree, on the other. This complex situation can be partially understood through Bourdieu’s concept of ‘symbolic power.’ Nadia apparently took the fact that English is the MOI in HE and the language of communication in the private sector for granted and as a self-evident fact of life. That is, her belief reflected the HEI’s discourse about the importance of English for HE and the labour market. This shared belief of the legitimacy of the policy is the foundation on which ‘symbolic violence’ could exercise its power even on those most disadvantaged by its sanctions (Bourdieu, 1989). She emphasised the legitimacy of English-only policy, despite its negative impact on her progress, because she failed to see that this policy served the interests of some students more than others. Thompson (1991, p.23) explains the function of the symbolic power on subordinate groups:

To understand the nature of symbolic power, it is therefore crucial to see that it presupposes a kind of active complicity on the part of those subjected to it. Dominated individuals are not passive bodies to which symbolic power is applied, as it were, like a scalpel to a corpse. Rather, symbolic power requires, as a condition of its success, that those subjected to it believe in the legitimacy of power and the legitimacy of those who wield it. [italics in original]

However, when her progress was at stake, Nadia began to exercise her agency by expressing her frustration, asking: “why should this happen to me?” and maintaining that this language requirement was beyond students’ ability. The symbolic power did have an impact in making many students believe in the legitimacy of the policy, yet when their own chances of progress
were in jeopardy, they might begin to express a kind of disapproval of the policy that limited their opportunities.

Contrary to Nadia’s experience, Ali had a negative attitude towards English-only policy, and he never demonstrated that he believed in its legitimacy throughout the interview. He constantly challenged the policy by advocating more Arabic in teaching and learning. He even questioned its legitimacy and expressly appealed for the cancellation of the language requirement and the retention of the GPA as the only condition for progress. I take this as evidence of participants’ agency to resist the EMI policy by questioning its legitimacy and suggesting modifications to its implementation. When the symbolic power of EMI policy was not recognised as legitimate by Ali, he was openly critical of the policy, and he recommended the adoption of alternative language-in-education policies.

To sum up this sub-theme, drawing on Bourdieu’s theory, I have consistently argued throughout these two chapters that due to their family upbringing, students did not have equal opportunities to acquire English; thus, to determine their progress based on a capital that is inequitably distributed among students is to perpetuate the social inequalities and to do so in a way that presents it as a meritocratic criterion. Jenkins (1992, p.70) succinctly explained how social inequalities are perpetuated through HE:

Bourdieu argues that the system consecrates privilege by ignoring it, by treating everybody as if they were equal when, in fact, the competitors all begin with different handicaps based on cultural endowment. Privilege becomes translated into ‘merit’.

This, once more, helps me to argue against discourses that portray EMI as a necessary means to successful academic and socioeconomic life for all (Crystal, 2012). Indeed, data in this sub-theme and the previous chapter have demonstrated that EMI policy as it is currently implemented in this HEI creates unequal opportunities for students to academically and socioeconomically benefit from participation in HE. I further develop the argument against neutral perspectives of the usefulness of EMI policy in the next sub-theme.

6.1.2. Sub-theme 2: Unequal opportunities to socioeconomically benefit from HE:

In this sub-theme, I, first, present participants’ perceptions of the potential impact of EMI policy on their opportunities to join the labour market. Findings demonstrated how these,
mostly instrumentalist, perspectives were influenced by national and global discourses of the importance of English language. I, then, report findings that indicated that despite participants’ recognition of the value of English language, they still questioned the legitimacy of the English-only policy. Going deeper beneath the instrumentalist view of English as key to success in HE and the labour market revealed contradictions, complexities and nuances that characterised participants’ perceptions and experiences of EMI policy.

Drawing on the works of some critical sociolinguists (e.g., Jan Blommaert, Alastair Pennycook and Suresh Canagarajah), I attempt to investigate the effects of the global and national discourses of the usefulness of English from the perspectives of the locals (i.e., participants) who are living the experience of learning their specialisations through EMI policy and how they respond to a language policy backed up by global and national discourses. I specifically, highlight the dilemma that many students faced because of this monolingual policy where they realised the importance of English for their academic and professional success on the one hand, and they simultaneously, as demonstrated in the current and previous chapters, experienced real challenges in navigating their learning within this policy context, on the other hand.

To begin with, participants showed awareness of the transformations taking place in the linguistic landscape in the world and in Oman and that these were driven by global forces. One manifestation of the changes that are happening was the dominance of English as a global language. Several participants reported this fact when emphasising the need to study their specialisations through English. Sentences and phrases like “English is the most widely used language” (Abdullah), “English is the language of communication with the world” (Merriam), and “[English is] the dominant language in the world” (Saba) are not uncommon in the data.

The majority of participants noted the importance of English as a key requirement to access and succeed in the labour market. It was, indeed, the most prevalent reason that many participants cited to support EMI policy. Fahad, for instance, explained that:

Because when we go to the labour market, we will have to use English. It’s better we study engineering in English. (Fahad)

Hassan (a diploma, engineering student, with LEP) described the importance of EMI for future job opportunities:

From my point of view, the benefits are that the English language will make you get a job faster compared to those who do not study in English. Because you
practiced the English language and studied in English, … the companies have
greater demand for those who studied in English only. (Hassan)

Likewise, Taif justified EMI policy since it prepared students for the labour market:

It increases [students’] opportunities, because everything at the labour market
requires English. You can hardly find a job that doesn’t require English. And the
fact that you have a high level of English increases your chance of getting a job.
(Taif)

Despite the apparent approval of EMI policy in terms of its usefulness for future job
opportunities by virtually all participants, the English-only policy seemed to present a dilemma
for some participants, mostly those with LEP. Said (a diploma, engineering student, with LEP),
for example, maintained that:

English is the language of communication now, but we face difficulty because we
were not accustomed to leaning in English since we were children. We didn’t
practice the language; we did not master the language to the degree that we study
[content] through English. The official discourse forces us to learn this language.
If we don’t learn this language, we won’t complete our study and we will not get
anywhere. (Said)

This quote vividly depicts the dilemma that some students faced when learning their
specialisations through an English-only policy. That is, whilst this participant realised the
significance of English and the academic and socioeconomic benefits he could gain if he
acquired it, he found it challenging to study content through English-only because his English
proficiency was limited. This was, indeed, the primary reason, though not the only, that some
participants demonstrated some resistance to the English-only policy and, hence, they
questioned its legitimacy. This was evident in their seemingly contradicting perspectives on the
policy itself as many of them initially expressed their support of it, but later when talking about
its gatekeeping function to the labour market, they began to critique it.

Maha (an advanced diploma, accounting student, with LEP) expressed her dissatisfaction with
the role English plays for access to the labour market:

I think it is unfair, because there are smart students who are unable to
communicate in English, and other students are not good in their specialization,
but they have a very good [English] speaking skill, so I feel this is unfair and it
must change, but how? I do not know. (Maha)

Similarly, Abdullah (an advanced diploma, engineering student, with good English proficiency)
elaborated on the impact of EMI policy on students’ access to the labour market:

I think it has a direct impact. It deprives you of many things. Your level of English
may deprive you of a job and the like…. Its potential impact, as you can see now,
is that there is a scarcity of jobs because the workforce, who are the people who seek for jobs, do not have sufficient qualifications.... Because language [English] is fundamental to getting the required qualifications. …This is the true problem. (Abdullah)

One way some participants suggested to respond to the detrimental impact of the monolingual English-only policy was the use of both students’ linguistic resources in teaching and learning. Asad recommended that:

Studying in English is interesting, but we need to study some courses in Arabic, because the labour market needs both English and Arabic languages. Justice must be achieved by studying the courses of this department in both Arabic and English. (Asad)

I devote the next theme to the discussion of participants’ perceptions of TLPs and how they impact their access to content knowledge and other socioeconomic advantages; however, I concentrate here on participants’ ways of resisting and appropriating the policy. I believe this manifests how local people could respond to globalisation (EMI as advocated by globalisation), and, hence, defying the perspectives that assume a deterministic impact of globalisation.

6.1.2.1. Discussion of sub-theme 2:

Findings within this sub-theme indicate that participants recognised the importance of English as a necessary tool for access to the labour market. The reported instrumentalist perspectives of EMI policy seemed to reflect national and global discourses of the importance of English language, which I discussed in the Context Chapter and the Literature Review. Findings also demonstrated that the powerful push for English in HE and the labour market created a dilemma for some participants, mainly those with LEP. Moreover, it was found that participants were still able to exercise their agency and question the legitimacy of EMI policy.

This complex situation required that I drew on the locality approach, which is rooted in critical sociolinguistics, that more directly attempts to understand locals’ responses to a globally-driven policy like EMI. The theoretical strength of these critical, but not deterministic perspectives lies in the fact that while they acknowledge the real impact of globalisation on linguistic policies and practices at national levels (Pennycook, 2001; Blommaert, 2010; Tollefson, 2013), they emphasise the importance of understanding the complex and unpredictable ways globalisation affects communities (Blommaert, 2010). Even more importantly, these perspectives stress the compelling need to investigate how individuals and societies varyingly respond to the impacts of globalisation and not assume its either beneficial or detrimental effects.
One significant implication of this understanding of the impact of globalisation is to go beyond the apparently favourable perceptions of learning content through English-only to investigate how participants accept, resist or appropriate the policy. Hence, adopting these perspectives, I would argue, would help better understand the nuances of the ambivalent perceptions and experiences of participants while foregrounding their creative imaginations of how best to respond to the tensions created by the global impact on their local experiences. These, in turn, should be seriously considered when developing national language policies.

In this discussion, I do not aim to provide neat and tidy answers. Rather, I attempt to present the situation in all its complexities. I will first discuss how participants’ perceptions of the potential impact of EMI policy on their future jobs revealed an influence of global and national discourses of English. Secondly, I emphasise the notion that notwithstanding participants’ recognition of the importance of English for their socioeconomic success, they questioned the legitimacy of the monolingual English-only policy. At this point, I stress the agency of participants to respond to the pressures of globalisation, as manifested in the EMI policy. Understanding the nuances of participants’ perceptions of EMI policy in terms of its role for access to the labour market and their various responses to it should eventually inform national language policies that must equitably serve students’ academic and socioeconomic needs.

Participants showed awareness of the linguistic transformations that are occurring in the world in general and in Oman in particular, specifically those that pertain to the rise of English as the dominant language in the current era of globalisation, as Abdullah’s, Merriam’s and Saba’s quotes demonstrated above. Participants associated English with current and future academic and socioeconomic benefits; thus, the majority of them were cognisant of the HEI’s decision to adopt EMI policy (e.g., Fahad, Hassan and Taif). They, indeed, took it for granted that English was the legitimate language of HE because it could give them access to the labour market.

These findings provide evidence that globalisation does have an influence on participants’ perceptions of EMI policy. Participants’ perspectives that English is key to access and success in the labour market are inextricably connected to the processes of globalisation (Coleman, 2006; Crystal, 2012; Macaro, 2018). Kedzierski (2016, p.377) maintains that: “proficiency in
English is now increasingly being accepted as a ‘global norm’… essential for access to and success in the modern labour market.”

These results are in accordance with findings from many EMI studies that surveyed students’ attitudes towards EMI in different countries in the MENA region. In Oman, AlBakri (2013) claimed that the majority of students supported EMI policy for practical and pragmatic considerations. In the GCC, Al-Jarf’s (2008) study in Saudi Arabia revealed that around ninety per cent of her student sample were in favour of EMI and associated English with modernity, cutting-edge knowledge and success in life. Similar findings were reported by Ellili-Cherif1 and Alkhateeb’s (2015) study in Qatar where participants stressed the importance of English for higher academic studies and future jobs.

In other parts of the MENA region, several studies revealed positive attitudes held by students towards EMI as English is increasingly associated with employment and mobility (Tamtam et al., 2013 [in Libya]; Badwan, 2019 [in Tunisia]; Belhiah, 2022 [in Morocco]). Whilst I concur with most of the abovementioned researchers who highlighted the role of globalisation in shaping students’ favourable perceptions of EMI, this study endeavours to further question this taken-for-granted policy and offer a more nuanced, local understanding of how globalisation influences students’ perceptions, and how students respond to this global phenomenon.

Besides the globalisation discourses of the empowering effect of English, participants’ favourable perceptions of EMI policy might have been further influenced by national discourses that relate proficiency in English to the modernisation and advancement of economy. In a national policy document labelled ‘the Reform and Development of General Education document’, it was stated that:

The government recognizes that facility in English is important in the new global economy. English is the most common language for international business and commerce and is the exclusive language in important sectors such as banking and aviation. (Ministry of Education, 1995, as cited in Al Issa, 2006, p.198)

Indeed, many local scholars reported the emphasis that the government places on English as a necessary instrument to improve the national economy and enhance the employability of the Omani youth (Al-Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa and Al-Bulushi, 2012; Al-Issa, 2020). Consequently, ‘The national strategy of education 2040’, which acts as the “primary source for the development of policies on the reform of the educational sector in the Sultanate” (The
Education Council, 2018, p.11) has consistently overemphasised “alignment between education and the labour market” (ibid, p.15) as the primary aim of education. This alignment necessarily entails more focus on English because it has been the language of communication in the Omani private labour market since 1970. These official discourses could have had a role in shaping participants’ perceptions of EMI policy as Said’s quote above directly illustrates.

In keeping with critical sociolinguistics accounts of globalisation, I understand participants’ inclination to acquire proficiency in English because it can bring them many academic and socioeconomic benefits within this national context. Indeed, scholars from different orientations acknowledge the value of knowing English in the current globalisation era (Phillipson, 2009a). However, we should not naively believe that adopting EMI policy in HE will inevitably lead to economic prosperity for all students. As discussed in this chapter and the preceding one, it was evident that English-only policy did not provide equitable access to academic and socioeconomic benefits for all students in this HEI.

Discourses that market English as a panacea that can help people achieve their academic and socioeconomic goals (e.g., Crystal, 2012) very often go unchallenged (Phillipson, 2009b; Troudi, 2022). As the analysis in this theme attempts to go beyond the apparent approval of the policy held by many participants, I highlight and analyse participants’ perceptions that departed from the conventional narratives of the unquestionable usefulness of EMI policy. The discussion here builds on Blommaert’s argument that for us to understand the impact of globalisation on individuals’ and societies’ linguistic practices and beliefs, we should look at the local level (certainly without losing sight of the real global pressures) “if we want to understand what people actually do with language, what language does to them, and what language means to them, in what particular ways it matters to them.” (Blommaert, 2010, p.188). This conceptualisation offers the possibility of revealing and foregrounding the complexities involved in understanding participants’ perceptions of EMI policy and its impact on their life chances. It, hence, helps me contribute to the ongoing debate over the language-in-education policy in HE in this part of the globe, as explicated below.

Despite this strong push for English and EMI policy in HE, some students still demonstrate some resistance to the policy. For instance, in Said’s quote above, despite his initial recognition of the importance of English for his future opportunities, he made it clear that he faced challenges when learning content through English. Hence, he condemned the policy that
compelled students to learn their specialisations through English only and the discourses that legitimised it. Likewise, Abdullah explained how the EMI policy could prevent students from obtaining their desired qualifications and, hence, lower their chances of securing good jobs. Maha, also, expressed her concern that students’ LEP could reduce their opportunities to access the labour market. Here, these participants, as many others, were exercising their agency through their attempt to critically expose how the policy, backed up by global and national discourses, created a real dilemma for them, and some of their colleagues.

These ambivalent attitudes were prevalent among some participants, specifically those with LEP. That is, whilst they acknowledged the necessity of English as a mobile linguistic capital that could empower them and provide them with access to many socioeconomic benefits, they, also, highlighted the real pedagogic and socioeconomic challenges that result from the policy and that could prevent them from achieving their academic and socioeconomic goals.

This dilemma is worth unpacking. By analysing this dilemma through the locality approach, I attempt to obtain a nuanced understanding of the real effects of globalisation on shaping participants’ perceptions of EMI policy (Canagarajah, 1999; Blommaert, 2010; Pennycook, 2010). More fundamentally, I endeavour to expose and challenge the discriminatory power of this policy.

To begin with, Blommaert (2010, p.194) asserts that English as a global language in the current era of globalisation, is “always empowering or disempowering.” Hence, it is the role of critical researchers to examine the ways the globalising of English creates “opportunities as well as constraints, new possibilities as well as new problems, progress as well as regression” at the local level (Blommaert, 2010, p.153). Pennycook (2007, p.101) explicitly describes the delusive promises and exclusionary effects of English:

This thing called English colludes with many of the pernicious processes of globalisation, deludes many learners through the false promises it holds out for social and material gain, and excludes many people by operating as an exclusionary class dialect, favouring particular people, countries, cultures and forms of knowledge.

Participants’ complex and contradictory perspectives of language and language policies and practices revealed much about how what appeared at the surface level as a useful and empowering language policy to all students, was indeed, a discriminatory one. While English empowered some students, like Mazin who said: “If I am to get a job, the reason will be my
English” (Mazin), it excluded other students from HE with the minimum qualification, a diploma, or no qualification at all, as highlighted in the previous sub-theme. The latter group’s mixed feelings about EMI resulted from their belief of the usefulness of English and simultaneously their inability to navigate their learning in an English-only policy context. Those participants, who could not adequately benefit from English-only teaching, were indeed deluded by the misleading promises of the universal life-changing opportunities brought by English-only policy.

One major way of appropriating English-only policy that emerged in the data was participants’ request for more room for Arabic in HE, as exemplified in Asad’s quote above. The whole next chapter is devoted to discussing translanguaging practices, yet I emphasise here the idea that participants did not simply accept the status quo of English-only policy, but they proposed an alternative that they believed could equitably lead to better academic achievement. This conceptualisation restores the agency of participants (Canagarajah, 1999). It is here, however, where I need to emphasise that participants’ agency to resist and appropriate policy is not by itself enough to bring desired changes to the implementation of the policy when students’ linguistic needs are not seriously considered by policymakers.

It is hoped that such analysis can foreground students’ voices and highlight their actual linguistic needs that can help them achieve their academic needs and improve social equity in HE. Thus, to minimise the detrimental academic and socioeconomic effects caused by a market-driven language-in-education policy, I would suggest that policymakers need to consider actual students’ linguistic needs in order to develop equitable language-in-education policies. Simply put, I would argue, in line with Macaro (2018), that there is a dire need for a comprehensive EMI policy review that takes into consideration not only the requirements of the market forces, but also students’ academic and socioeconomic interests. Students should be included as legitimate actors in the development of language-in-education policies.

Before concluding this sub-theme, and in keeping with the critical sociolinguistics of the globalising of English language, it is worthwhile to situate my discussion of participants’ perceptions of English and EMI within the broader national and regional (i.e., the MENA region) debate around the role of English in HE. These ongoing scholarly debates are best viewed as falling along a continuum. At one end of the spectrum are the views that neutrally perceive EMI policy and consider it a necessary tool for the modernisation of economies (e.g.,
Al-Lamki, 1998; Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Al-Mahrooqi and Denman, 2016; Badwan, 2019). Such perspectives call for more use of English in education. For example, to tackle the issue of students’ low English proficiency at HE, Al-Mahrooqi (2012; p.268) suggested that “the Ministry of Education could consider teaching either maths or science in English [at school level] and thus increase exposure to the language.” Proponents of these perspectives also recommend enforcing stricter entry language requirements for EMI programmes (AlHassan, 2022). Troudi and Jendli (2011) contend that advocates of more EMI in HE in the GCC employ narratives of social mobility, economic and technological progress, global connectivity and trade. These apolitical stances were based on simplistic views of EMI which assume that English is equitably accessible to everyone, and it can empower all on a par, which my data is revoking.

At the opposite end of the spectrum are some critical perspectives that caution that the exclusive use of English as a MOI could lead students to neglect their mother tongue, and hence their own culture and identity (Al-Jarf, 2008; Alhamami, 2015; Al-Kahtany, Faruk and Zumor, 2015; Alotaibi, 2020). These viewpoints call for the revival of Arabic as a language of science as it had been for a millennium and urge Arab governments to establish policies to protect and promote the Arabic language in HE (Al-Jarf, 2008).

I would argue that each of these perspectives focuses on one dimension of the issue and overlooks other important aspects. While the former perspective overemphasises the socioeconomic benefits that students, who can afford to learn English, can gain through EMI programmes, they neglect the detrimental effects of EMI policy on the status of the Arabic language and social equity. On the other hand, the latter stance does not sufficiently emphasise students’ willingness to improve their English proficiency which they see as a pathway to employment and social mobility.

Instead, this study recommends developing a sociolinguistics distinctive to this part of the world, and that takes into consideration the diverse and complex linguistic, academic, socioeconomic and cultural needs of the locals. This sociolinguistics will lay the foundation for the formulation of language-in-education policies that aim to equitably empower students academically, socioeconomically and culturally. This recommendation is consistent with recent scholarship in the MENA region advocating for the development of clear language-in-education policies grounded in a contextualised understanding of the country’s economic and social needs.
as well as students’ pedagogic, socioeconomic and cultural needs (Al-Issa, 2020; Al Zumor and Abdesslem, 2022; Troudi, 2022). This study can move this latter perspective forward by empirically investigating students’ actual experiences with EMI policy and their perceptions of its impact on their learning and on social inequalities.

The focus of this sub-theme has been on participants’ perceptions of EMI policy with respect to its impact on participants’ access to the labour market. Through analysis of the data, it emerged that these perceptions were influenced, but not determined by global and national discourses of the economic importance of English. The analysis was guided by the locality approach which conceptualises that globalisation has real effects on societies; however, it is only through investigating locals’ perspectives that we can develop an understanding of these effects. Findings revealed that the influence of globalisation was reflected in virtually all participants’ accounts of EMI policy. Nevertheless, their recognition of the significance of English in the contemporary era of globalisation did not prevent them from critiquing the English-only policy both on academic and socioeconomic grounds. By foregrounding participants’ diverse and complex perceptions of English-only policy, I seek to urge policymakers to reconsider the adoption of a globally oriented and market-driven language-in-education policy and, instead, engage diverse local stakeholders in the development of these policies.

One key strategy that participants recommended and reported using to resist and appropriate the English-only policy was the incorporation of all their linguistic resources (i.e., Arabic and English) in the teaching and learning processes. They needed English because it could give them access to cutting-edge specialised knowledge and to the labour market, but using it alone acted as a barrier to the learning and progress of many participants, hence the plea for the inclusion of Arabic in the teaching and learning of their specialisations. This leads us to the second research question which enquires into participants’ perceptions of and reflections on their lecturers’ TLPs with respect to their university learning experience and life opportunities, which is addressed in the next chapter.

6.2. Summary of Chapter 6:

The theme discussed in this chapter has captured participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their socioeconomic chances. In the first sub-theme, it turned out that participant’
perceptions on the language requirement policy imposed by the HEI sharply differed. While some participants, mostly those with good English proficiency, believed in the equity of the policy, others, particularly LEP participants, considered the policy a barrier to their progress to higher academic levels. It was concluded that participants did not have equal opportunities to progress to their desired level of qualifications because they possessed varying levels of the linguistic capital which was necessary to satisfy the language requirement imposed by university. The disparity in the possession of the linguistic capital can be attributed to participants’ socioeconomic circumstances and family upbringing, as I elaborated in the previous chapter.

In the second sub-theme, participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their access to the labour market revealed some complexities and contradictions. Whereas many students held positive perceptions of the policy due to the importance of English as key for access to future socioeconomic benefits, some participants held ambivalent feelings about the policy. Recognising the role of global and national discourses of the necessity of English for economic development in shaping students’ perceptions, it was more fundamental to explore how participants, as local actors, experience and respond to a globally-driven language policy. This conceptualisation helped illuminate participants’ actual linguistic needs; hence, the urgent need to take these into consideration when developing language-in-education policies.

The next chapter addresses participants’ perceptions of lecturers’ TLPs with respect to their impact on their access to content knowledge and other socioeconomic benefits that are normally obtained from participation in HE.
Chapter Seven: Participants’ perceptions on translanguaging practices:

In this chapter, I present and analyse data that pertain to my second research question: “What are students’ perceptions of the impact of lecturers’ translanguaging practices on their university learning experiences and life chances?” I investigate participants’ perceptions on whether lecturers’ TLPs can enable students to have better and more equitable access to content knowledge and socioeconomic benefits. I believe these TLPs did not receive sufficient attention in previous EMI studies, specifically in the GCC. As highlighted in the Context Chapter, TLPs are strongly discouraged in this HEI.

7.1. Theme 5: Translanguaging practices can more equitably improve students’ content learning and promote social equity in HE:

The reported TLPs ranged from lecturers’ translation of unknown words to lecturers’ tolerance with the fluid and dynamic utilisation of linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources in classroom discussions. I begin with a presentation of participants’ perceptions of TLPs in terms of either facilitating or hindering their access to content knowledge. Next, I present participants’ perspectives of TLPs with respect to improving or hindering their socioeconomic opportunities. Finally, I analyse these data in the light of translingual conceptualisations of language and language use in education, particularly the translanguaging theory.

When, during interviews, introduced to a simplified definition of the translanguaging theory, illustrated with concrete examples of common classroom TLPs from the literature in both Arabic and English (see Appendix A1), participants’ responses towards TLPs varied considerably. It is worth mentioning here that participants’ perceptions of TLPs were not only based on the given definition and the examples, but, most importantly, on their previous experiences as many of them had studied a course with a lecturer who partially implemented TLPs. More precisely, the simplified definition and specifically the illustrative examples helped participants recall actual TLPs that they had experienced while learning subject matter, which fostered their reflection and discussion. It is worth noting that though I included the whole dataset in the analysis of this theme, I often opted to present and discuss here the data of participants who had experienced being taught by lecturers who adopted or tolerated TLPs. I believe their experiences of teaching TLPs lent more credibility to their perceptions.
Participants’ perspectives towards lecturers’ TLPs might best be viewed as falling on a spectrum. At one end of the spectrum, the perspectives that lecturers should stick to English-only policy; whereas, at the other end, the views that teaching should be predominantly in Arabic. The majority of participants held perceptions that could be placed around the centre, tolerating the use of TLPs and highlighting their pedagogic and socioeconomic advantages. For the purpose of analysing findings pertinent to this theme, I classified perceptions of TLPs into two categories: those that supported them and the ones that opposed them, though there were some contradictions and nuances that I would attend to. Participants who generally supported lecturers’ TLPs quoted educational as well as socioeconomic reasons. On the contrary, those who opposed TLPs mainly quoted economic (economic in the sense that English-only instruction, rather than TL type of instruction, would better prepare them to access and succeed in the labour market) reasons.

Participants’ positive perceptions of TLPs concentrated on how lecturers’ fluid and dynamic use of both linguistic resources (Arabic and English) could lead to better and faster understanding of content, improved lecture comprehension and increased and effective classroom interaction. Many participants believed that lecturers’ use of TLPs led to faster and more accurate understanding of the lesson’s content. For instance, Hassan reported how lecturer’s mobilisation of students’ linguistic resources helped him to quickly master content:

I took a course called X with an [Arabic-speaking] teacher. S/he used to explain content in English and if we didn’t understand, s/he repeated the explanation in Arabic. We used to understand quickly. (Hassan)

Lecturers’ drawing on all students’ linguistic resources was also reported to contribute to enhanced comprehension of lectures. Muna (a bachelor’s degree, engineering student, with good English proficiency) provided an example of how lecturer’s fluid use of students’ linguistic resources helped them understand the lecture’s content:

A similar example was when I took X course and the teacher was [Arabic-speaking] as well. S/he used to explain content in English, but s/he used to say some of the complex X terms in Arabic. That helped us understand and the flow of the class was not disturbed. Sometimes, there were deep concepts that were difficult to explain in English, so s/he used to explain them in Arabic. S/he used to use English terms, but s/he explained them in Arabic. Some terms are difficult in English; they are quite long, so s/he used to write them on the whiteboard and give us the meaning in Arabic. This helped us establish a link between the English term and its meaning in Arabic. We could understand it. (Muna)
This quote demonstrates how lecturer’s use of students’ linguistic resources (both Arabic and English) and multimodalities (writing on the whiteboard) helped students understand content and acquire English terms.

Mohammed’s (a bachelor’s degree, engineering student with good English proficiency) quote below illuminates how lecturer’s TLPs, though limited, substantially enhanced students’ lecture comprehension. He said that:

I also encountered an [Arabic-speaking] teacher in one of my specialisation courses; s/he used to teach in English; however, when some students don’t understand, s/he explains to them in Arabic. S/he was doing his/her best to talk in English for students. You know s/he is obliged to teach in English… s/he is certainly obliged to teach in English …so … uh… s/he repeats the explanation several times [in English] and later s/he speaks in Arabic and most students understand his/her points. (Mohammed)

Jasem emphasised that TLPs could speed up the delivery of content during lectures:

s/he [the teacher] explains the gist of the text in Arabic in two minutes. When we read the text in English, we don’t understand the English terms. The teacher doesn’t want us to spend too much time reading the text. Therefore, the teacher explains the gis in Arabic if he knows Arabic. (Jasem)

Concerning classroom interaction, all participants emphasised that if lecturers allowed students to draw on all their linguistic resources, students would have more confidence and motivation to participate in classroom discussions which would significantly increase and become more effective. Participants emphasised that permitting TLPs would encourage many students, especially those with LEP, to ask and answer questions. Reflecting on her own experience, Maha described how allowing TLPs could improve classroom interaction:

There will certainly be a great interaction, because what we notice now when participation is in English, very few people participate and respond. If students were allowed to participate in Arabic, everyone would participate because everyone has the answer. But, why don't they participate in English? Because some students do not know how to formulate the sentence or say it correctly in order to answer. (Maha)

Muna, once again, provided an illustrative example of how lecturer’s TLPs could foster classroom interaction:

Mr./Ms. X [Arabic-speaking lecturer, who as Muna said, allowed TLPs in the classroom discussions] taught the X Course. We used to have classroom discussions on a daily basis. S/he made us think deeper and broader. (Muna)

In the same vein, Merriam reported common TLPs adopted by some lecturers to improve classroom interaction:
The most common thing is that the teacher doesn’t mind the use of Arabic during classroom discussions. And in case one student doesn’t understand a certain concept and another student understands it, the teacher will tell the latter to explain to his/her classmate in the language s/he prefers. This technique is used by teachers. When an [Arabic-speaking] teacher notices that a student can’t say his/her question in English, s/he allows him/her to ask the question in Arabic. (Merriam)

Overall, many participants believed that adopting TLPs would help all students participate on a par in the educational process. That is, lecturers’ use or tolerance of TLPs, it was reported by several participants, helped include many students, who would not otherwise have been able to participate, in classroom discussions. Ali, for instance, argued that:

Now when s/he [lecturer] explains in Arabic, … I will understand when s/he explains to me in Arabic. Yet, there are students who understand English, they are proficient in English, maybe they studied more than us, they attended [English] courses or other things, so we can keep pace with them. (Ali)

Ali emphasised here how legitimising TLPs would put him on an equal footing with other English proficient students who were fortunate enough to improve their English proficiency.

I now shift to the presentation of perspectives that unfavourably portrayed TLPs. Two participants, Mazin and Asma, insisted that English-only teaching, rather than TL teaching, better helped them to understand the subject matter. Mazin, for example, asserted that:

I understand more in English. I am used to learning in English. If you teach me in Arabic, I will find it difficult. I will need more time to understand in Arabic. (Mazin)

Similarly, Asma contended that:

I prefer that the teacher explains in English. In case a student doesn’t understand something, the teacher, then, can explain that to him/her in simple English, in English. This can help the student to better acquire the language. (Asma)

It is worth noting that both Mazin and Asma are final year bachelor’s degree students with good English proficiency.

The major drawback of implementing TLPs perceived by several participants (Abdullah, Asma, Essa, Fahad, Hafsa, Hassan, Jasem, Maha, Mohammed, Muna, Reem, Saba, Sultan, Susan, Yasser, Zahra and Zainab) was the notion that students might rely heavily on Arabic to the extent that they would neglect English. Farah cautioned that:
It’s better to have the teaching in English at college. If you teach students in Arabic and English in the same class, they will favour Arabic more and neglect the English language. (Farah)

The potential negative impact on students’ performance in (monolingual English-only) exams was another significant challenge to the implementation of TLPs as reported by some participants (Abdullah, Essa, Jasem, Susan). Susan offered an example of how lecturer’s TLPs could result in poor students’ performance in exams:

there was an [Arabic-speaking] teacher who taught a different section/class used to display the slides in English, but s/he explained content in Arabic. The student faced difficulties in exams because they understood the curriculum in Arabic, not English. They got lower marks because of this kind of teaching. (Susan)

Other participants (Asma, Essa, Farah, Reem, Susan, Yassir and Zahra) rejected TLPs on economic grounds, rather than pedagogic grounds. For example, Reem maintained that:

The disadvantage of using Arabic [alongside English] is that the student will acquire terms in Arabic, so s/he won’t be able to say or use a single term in English in the workplace or in a job interview. (Reem)

This takes us to participants’ perceptions of the potential impact of lecturers’ TLPs on students’ future prospects. The vast majority of participants believed that implementing TLPs at university would substantially improve students’ opportunities to complete their studies. No one argued the opposite. Said, for instance, contended that:

if we were being taught in both Arabic and English, learning would be trouble-free. I will find it easier to progress to higher levels. Yet, since we are studying in English, I find it difficult to progress [to a bachelor’s degree]. (Said)

Concerning the potential impact of TLPs in HE on future job opportunities, participants’ perceptions differed significantly. Those who believed TL teaching and learning could enhance employability attributed that to two factors. First, gradates would have better knowledge, skills and understanding of their specialisations because they could access content knowledge using their entire linguistic repertoire. Second, some jobs require an understanding of specialisation not only in English, but also in Arabic because the employee would have to deal with Arabic-speaking clients. Nadia posited that:

when the student applies for a job, they see his performance and experience, they will not only focus on English. Perhaps in Arabic he will perform with more experience and more skill. The fact that the student graduates from the college with a certificate with two languages, s/he will have excellent experience, skill and sufficient knowledge of the specialisation. And even the communication with co-workers in the institutions will not be all in English, there is some communication in Arabic. (Nadia)
Another practical advantage of TLPs for future jobs relates to the fact that jobs in the government sector require knowledge of the specialisation in Arabic. Hafsa asserted that:

It will improve [students’ future prospects], because, for example, the interviews for government jobs are in Arabic. And then in the workplace, it’s all in Arabic. (Hafsa)

On the contrary, other participants believed that TL teaching could hinder students’ job opportunities. Zahra, for example, argued that:

At the moment, s/he doesn’t realise its [English] importance because s/he wants to easily get high marks and a high GPA, so s/he prefers Arabic. However, the student will realise the importance of English when they require him/her to use English in the interview for joining the labour market. (Zahra)

Likewise, Susan maintained that:

It [using TLPs) may hinder if the employer uses one language. The student will have both languages, but most of his understanding will be in Arabic, so it will be difficult for him if at work they only use English. (Susan)

Having presented participants’ perceptions of and reflections on the impact of TLPs on their learning experiences and academic and socioeconomic opportunities, the next section provides a discussion of these findings.

7.1.1. Discussion of theme 5:

In this theme, I continue to draw on the works of critical applied linguists and sociolinguists who offer contemporary conceptualisations of language. Central to these new conceptualisations is the notion that language is a mobile and dynamic resource (Blommaert, 2010; Williams, 2017). These conceptualisations, particularly the translinguaging theory, are particularly useful for understanding and analysing this theme because they not only legitimise the use of students’ entire linguistic repertoire, but also emphasise how mobilising students’ linguistic resources can improve equity in education (Garcia, 2009b). By bringing these concepts into play, I explicate the lecturers’ TLPs reported by participants and highlight how they think these practices can more equitably help students access content knowledge and improve their life opportunities.

Before commencing on analysing my data, I want to highlight an important point. Although I do not have first-hand evidence of students’ and lecturers’ actual TLPs (i.e., I did not conduct
classroom observations), I believe drawing on participants’ perceptions that are based on actual TLPs could provide me with valuable data.

Participants, from across a range of English proficiency levels, specialisations and years of study, believed that lecturers’ TLPs had the potential to foster students’ understanding of content, improve in-depth understanding of specialisations and increase lecture comprehension (see Muna’s, Hassan’s, Mohammed’s and Jasem’s quotes above). All participants who reported being taught by lecturers who implemented TLPs, regardless of participant’s overall perception of TL, acknowledged that their understanding of content substantially improved. This is in accordance with the translanguaging theory which emphasises that drawing on the whole learners’ repertoire results in fuller and more accurate understanding of the subject matter (Williams, 2000; Garcia, 2009a&b). That is because “for emergent bilingual students, knowledge cannot be accessed except through language practices with which they’re already familiar.” (Garcia and Li, 2014, p.80). These findings, I would argue, substantiate theoretical perspectives that view linguistic codes as resources that learners can flexibly and dynamically deploy in their meaning-making endeavours.

In the same vein, participants agreed that adopting TLPs could improve inclusion by increasing effective classroom interaction and participation. Evidence from actual TL teaching classroom (see Muna’s and Merriam’s examples above) revealed that students actively participated in classroom discussions. This finding is hardly surprising because essentially “students cannot engage in meaningful discussion, comprehension or designing and redesigning of texts with only a set of emergent language practices.” (Garcia and Li, 2014, p.73). For students’ active engagement in meaningful classroom discussions, according to the translanguaging theory, all their linguistic and semiotic repertoire has to be employed (Garcia and Li, 2015). Unlike the situation in monolingual English-only classrooms where students mostly remained silent as discussed in Chapter 5, students took more active role in TL classrooms. A similar finding was reported by Williams (2000) who found that implementing TL teaching methods improved students’ active engagement in classroom discussions. Adopting TLPs opened doors to students who lacked the linguistic capital to participate in English-only lessons. Ali’s quote illustrates how TL classrooms can create a space for all students, irrespective of their language proficiency, to equally participate and benefit from classroom discussions (Garcia, 2009a).
Overall, many participants, regardless of their English proficiency levels, believed that adopting TL teaching would make education more equitable. They thought that TL teaching would be fair to all students in the sense that they would have equal access to content knowledge. LEP participants have long found refuge in TLPs, and they believed legitimising these practices would substantially enhance their learning experience and would make them participate on a par with those with good English proficiency, as Ali’s quote above indicated. Improving social equity is a major principle behind the translanguaging theory, and this could be achieved by including all students’ linguistic resources in the teaching and learning processes (Garcia, 2009a).

These results agree with those of previous studies that examined students’ and teachers’ attitudes towards Arabic-English bilingualism in HE. For instance, in Belhiah and Elhami’s (2015) study in the UAE, both students and teachers were in favour of using both languages in teaching for pedagogic, socioeconomic and cultural reasons. In Libya, Tamtam et al. (2013) found that most of their teacher sample believed that Arabic-English bilingualism in HE would improve both students’ academic achievements and future prospects.

This study expands existing literature of multilingualism in HE in the MENA region in two ways. First, adopting the translanguaging theory, I theoretically support students’ natural and flexible use of their entire linguistic repertoire to increase their chances of success in HE. Second, I explicitly link the implementation of translanguaging practices to the promotion of social equity in HE. In other words, I highlight the potential of adopting translanguaging practices in HE to create a more inclusive and equitable learning environment where all students have equal opportunities to succeed.

On the other hand, there were some negative perceptions of the impact of TLPs on students’ academic achievement. Asma and Mazin who believed that they better understood content through English-only self-rated their English proficiency as ‘very good’, and they were final year students which means that they spent at least four years learning content through English-only. They were successfully navigating this EMI policy system. Moreover, because they strongly believed that English is key for access to the labour market, they thought TLPs might limit their chances of improving this linguistic capital. Therefore, it was not surprising that they opposed TLPs.
The other argument used to oppose TLPs was the assumption that using students’ mother tongue along with English in teaching could lead many to neglect English and predominantly use Arabic to access content knowledge. There is indeed no evidence to support this assumption. Findings in Chapter 6 demonstrated that virtually all participants valued English language as a necessary mobile linguistic resource in the current globalisation era which indicates that they were willing to acquire it. They just wanted to learn it in their own way; a way that does not prevent them from achieving their academic and socioeconomic goals.

Participants also opposed TL teaching practices because they thought they would have detrimental impact on their exam performance. Exams at this HEI are conducted under a monolingual English-only policy where translation of questions is strictly prohibited. Participants (e.g., Susan) reported that students who were taught content predominantly through Arabic did badly in exams, despite their good comprehension of content. Participants were worried that their somewhat TL understanding would not be of much use in monolingual English-only exams. There is, indeed, no sufficient data to substantiate this concern; therefore, I will leave this topic for further investigation. Nevertheless, scholars subscribing to translingual conceptualisations of language highlight the grave injustice that monolingual assessment can do to students’ academic progress as it substantially limits their, especially those with LEP, ability to demonstrate their understandings and knowledge (Shohamy, 2006; Garcia and Li, 2014).

Finally, some participants opposed TLPs in teaching not based on pedagogic, but rather on economic grounds. They believed that it would be better for students to understand their specialisations in English-only because it is English that they would need in order to access the labour market. This is, I believe, one more manifestation of the influence of globalisation discourses on participants’ perceptions of EMI as discussed in Chapter 6. That is, despite their recognition and acknowledgement of the usefulness of TLPs to the majority of students, they still insisted that English-only would better serve their academic needs. Participants who held this view were successful students pursuing specialisations that were broadly mathematics-based, such as accounting (e.g., Farah and Zahra), or practical in nature, like IT (e.g., Asma). It implies that the participants’ linguistic capital was sufficient for them to navigate the system without having to rely on another less mobile, as they perceived it, linguistic resource, as I explained in Chapter 5.
Participants’ perceptions of the impact of TLPs on students’ socioeconomic opportunities is the last point I discuss in this theme. Participants overwhelmingly indicated that adopting TLPs could substantially improve students’ opportunities to progress to the highest academic level in this HEI, a bachelor’s degree. That is because the language barrier which is currently a major cause of students’ elimination from this HEI, as discussed in Chapter 6, would be neutralised.

TLPs, as believed by many participants, could improve opportunities of getting jobs. Students would potentially graduate with good knowledge of their specialisations and adequate proficiency level at both languages, Arabic and English; hence, they could compete for jobs in both the Arabic-dominant government sector or the English-dominant private sector labour market (see Nadia’s and Hafsa’s quotes). These local details of the linguistic requirements at the national level and how students perceive them need to be seriously taken into account when examining EMI at HE. This, however, does not imply that implementing TLPs can definitely improve students’ weaker language, as my findings are not sufficient to support such a claim.

On the other hand, some participants (e.g., Zahra and Susan) insisted that it was English-only teaching that would better enable students to perform well during job interviews and tests that are exclusively conducted through English in the private sector and some government sectors. Apparently, this sentiment was based on the assumption that lecturers’ TLPs would make students heavily dependent on their mother tongue for content knowledge acquisition, which meant that students would graduate with poor English proficiency and limited knowledge of academic content in English. This could be a valid critique of TLPs which requires further research.

In short, I would argue, in line with critical sociolinguists, it is through investigating individuals’ linguistic perceptions and reported practices that we can arrive at a more balanced understanding of students’ responses to the impact of a global phenomenon, like EMI. In this theme, it was obvious that many participants favoured TLPs because they felt they better empowered them to access content knowledge, and they believed these practices could promote social equity in HE. I believe this is one form of resistance that participants showed to the top-down monolingual English-only policy. I emphasise participants’ agency to opt for an alternative language-in-education policy that can more equitably help them meet their academic and socioeconomic goals.
7.2. Summary of Chapter 7:

In response to the second research question, this final theme dealt with participants’ perceptions of the potential impact of lecturers’ TLPs on their learning experience and future prospects. The majority of participants, irrespective of their English proficiency levels, specialisations, year of study, believed that adopting TLPs would more equitably serve their academic needs, and would enhance social equity in HE. However, there were some perspectives that opposed TLPs and preferred maintaining the current EMI policy. Those were predominantly held by participants who possessed the linguistic capital, English, and who pursued specialisations that were mostly mathematics-based or practical in nature. A key aim of the current study was to provide participants with an opportunity to freely voice their perceptions of TLPs which have long been ignored in the Omani HE. Participants’ favourable perceptions of TLPs should be recognised by policymakers and efforts should be made to accommodate all students’ linguistic resources to enhance the quality and equity of HE.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion:

This concluding chapter begins with a summary of the major findings in this study. It then discusses the study’s main contributions to knowledge before drawing useful implications for policymakers, university administrators and lecturers. Finally, after addressing the research limitations, it provides recommendations for future EMI research.

8.1. Summary of key findings:

This study has been an attempt to shift the focus of EMI research away from educational-only perspectives and to situate it in relation to the issue of social equity. Relating students’ chances of success in an EMI policy HE context to socioeconomic factors significantly contributed to our understanding of students’ perceptions of EMI policy. The adopted theoretical frameworks proved useful in explaining not only the regularities, but also the contradictions and complexities in participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on content learning and on social equity. They also helped highlight the factors that played a role in shaping their perceptions.

In the first research question, I investigated participants’ perceptions of the impact of EMI policy on their access to content knowledge and other future socioeconomic advantages. The main finding was that participants’ chances of success and progress in HE seemed to be substantially influenced by their possession of the linguistic capital, which was in turn shaped by their families’ possession of cultural and economic capital. This was evident in the notable differences between the ability of proficient English participants and LEP participants to equally benefit from the academic and socioeconomic opportunities offered by university. This might be unsurprising, yet overlooking this growing pattern can increase the gap between the haves and have-nots. My research offers a fresh perspective to the EMI debate through empirically highlighting the inherently inequitable nature of English-only policy when implemented in a HEI where its members stand at unequal distances from the linguistic capital most valued by university, thus, the urgent need to adopt a more inclusive and socially equitable language-in-education policy.
Using Bourdieu’s triad of habitus, capital and field, I could explain that this does not happen in a mechanic and deterministic way, since participants’ academic success was also influenced by other semiotic and multimodal resources available in some specialisations and participants’ ability to employ strategies, mainly mobilising TLPs. Although these latter factors did not apparently neutralise the detrimental effects of EMI policy, understanding them contributed to our comprehension of the ambivalent perceptions held by some participants of the impact of the policy.

Another significant finding was that participants’ perceptions of EMI policy were influenced by global and national discourses of the importance of English as a language of science and business in the current era. Almost all participants held instrumentalist perspectives of EMI policy as they believed English could give them access to content knowledge and to the labour market. However, some participants criticised the policy on academic and socioeconomic grounds despite their enthusiasm to learn English. The locality approach as theorised by some critical applied linguists and sociolinguists helped account for participants’ nuanced and complex perceptions of the globally-driven EMI policy. These perceptions of participants as local actors need to be perceived as legitimate knowledge that should be seriously considered when developing language-in-education policies.

For the second research question, I explored participants’ perceptions of lecturers’ TLPs that emerged from the data as a potential alternative to the strict English-only policy. Participants reflected on their experiences of being taught by lecturers who used or tolerated TLPs. Most participants, irrespective of their English proficiency, seemed to believe that adopting TLPs could improve all students’ opportunities of success and progress in HE. This is, however, not to deny that there were some participants who opposed the adoption of TLPs in HE since they believed English-only teaching would better prepare them for the labour market. Overall, policy makers should seriously consider participants’ favourable perceptions of TLPs as they were perceived to more equitably help students achieve their academic and socioeconomic goals.

8.2. Contribution to knowledge:

This study makes several contributions to EMI research and knowledge in general. Firstly, the foremost contribution was the worthwhile attempt to link EMI research to issues of social
equity. EMI has often been studied from apolitical perspectives. There is small, yet growing literature in the MENA region that has indicated the discriminatory effects of EMI policies in HE on students with LEP ((Troudi and Jendli, 2011; AlBakri, 2013; Troudi, 2022). This study adds valuable insights to the existing literature by systematically examining the link between students’ learning experiences and their socioeconomic backgrounds. Using Bourdieu’s theory of practice, I emphasised the relationship between students’ chances of success in EMI HE and the socioeconomic circumstances that have shaped their opportunities to acquire English. Investigating this relationship, which is by no means deterministic or mechanistic according to Bourdieu’s model (Johnson, 1993), could illuminate the insidious ways through which HE privileges students who possess the linguistic capital that is indispensable for success; while, it disadvantages others who lack this capital. Addressing this relationship is integral to understanding students’ perceptions of EMI policy as evidence indicated how these generally varied according to students’ linguistic capital which was inequitably distributed among students from different socioeconomic backgrounds.

A critical conclusion drawn from this study is that the current EMI policy implemented at this HEI contributes to exacerbating inequalities among students from various socioeconomic backgrounds. This can eventually serve as a mechanism that perpetuates socioeconomic disparities within the Omani society; hence, the urgent need to revise this policy and develop more inclusive and equitable language-in-education policies in Omani HE.

Secondly, another key contribution relates to how adopting translanguaging conceptualisation of language was useful in having in-depth and nuanced understanding of students’ experiences of learning content through EMI. Several previous EMI studies in the MENA region have demonstrated how using both Arabic and English in teaching and learning could improve students’ academic achievement (Tamtam, et al., 2013; Alhamami, 2015; Shamim, et al., 2016). However, this research conceptually and empirically expands the literature on multilingualism in EMI programmes in several ways. Conceptually, adopting a dynamic and flexible conceptualisation of language enabled me to recognise English as a resource among a range of linguistic, semiotic and multimodal resources that contributed to students’ access to content knowledge in a strict English-only EMI policy context. Identifying these resources and the role they played in facilitating students’ access to content knowledge was critical to developing a better understanding of students’ perceptions of EMI policy effects on their learning experiences. Furthermore, this conceptualisation fundamentally shifts the focus from
English as a bounded linguistic system to what students want to do with this linguistic resource; hence, more attention is given to the agency of students to emphasise their actual linguistic needs (Blommaert, 2010).

Empirically, I showed that the prevalence of some semiotic and multimodal resources in certain specialisations potentially influenced participants’ perceptions of EMI policy. Drawing on Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of the dialectical relationship between habitus and field and on the translangusing theory, I could demonstrate that participants who managed to access content knowledge primarily through semiotic (i.e., mathematics) and multimodal resources were less likely to be critical of EMI policy. Understanding this influence helped me account for some ambivalent perceptions where some participants supported English-only policy despite their LEP. This represents a significant factor that EMI researchers should carefully consider when investigating students' attitudes towards EMI policy. The acquisition of content knowledge in EMI programs is not exclusively dependent upon English proficiency; rather, it is also shaped by a myriad of linguistic, semiotic, and multimodal resources which vary across courses and specialisations.

Moreover, my findings illustrated that students’ and some lecturers’ translangusing practices enabled LEP students to participate rather on an equal footing with their counterparts with good English proficiency in the learning processes. This highlighted the potential of translangusing practices to provide all students with inclusive and equitable learning opportunities that can improve their chances of success in HE. Translangusing practices could not only improve students’ academic achievement, but also could potentially enhance social equity within this strict English-only language policy context. This is a major contribution of my study.

Last, but not least, this study endeavoured to fill an important gap in the literature by offering insights into how to, both theoretically and empirically, investigate the impact of a globally-inspired policy on locals’ learning experiences in a non-Western society. The locality approach provided me with a framework for explaining and legitimising students’ various ways of responding to the globalising discourses of English. At least in the MENA region, scholars often overlooked students’ actual linguistic needs when addressing EMI policy and their perspectives were either influenced by the demands of the market in the globalisation era, or otherwise by nationalistic pro-Arabic discourses. I argue that instead of assuming beneficial or detrimental effects of a globally-driven policy, it might be more productive to investigate how students, as key stakeholders, perceive and experience the policy; hence, language-in-
education policies are developed to more effectively and equitably serve students’ academic, socioeconomic and cultural needs.

It is hoped that this study has amplified students’ voice that has long been silenced and excluded from the language-in-education policymaking processes. By foregrounding students’ perspectives, aspirations, apprehensions and challenges, it is envisaged that constructive change can be initiated so that language-in-education policies in this part of the world are developed to equally serve the interests of all students.

8.3. Implications for policy and practice:

The findings of the current study have some implications for policymakers, university administrators and lecturers:

8.3.1. Implications for policymakers:

The findings of this study have several significant implications for language policies and planning in Omani HE. Policymakers at the national level are urged to:

1. **Review the implementation of EMI policy:** Evidence from this study and previous studies (AlBakri, 2013, 2017; Al-Bakri and Troudi, 2020) suggests that EMI policy as it is currently implemented in Omani HEIs has detrimental effects on the quality of students’ learning as well as social equity in HE. This necessitates that policymakers conduct a comprehensive, nation-wide review of the implementation of the policy to evaluate its effectiveness. This could be accomplished by gathering data from different stakeholders, including students and lecturers, through surveys, interviews and classroom observations. Data can also be obtained through tracking students’ progression and retention rates over a period of time, such as the past five years and relating this to students’ levels of English proficiency and their socioeconomic backgrounds. Analysis of such data can reveal significant information not only about the academic effectiveness of EMI policy, but also about its role in relation to issues of social equity.

2. **Reconsider the philosophical foundation for language-in-education policies:** The current EMI policy in Omani HE seems to be ideologically driven by globalisation discourses and the forces of the market (Barnawi, 2018; Al-Issa, 2020). Evidence in this study suggests that implementing a globally-driven policy without careful
consideration of its detrimental impact on students’ learning experiences can have grave repercussions on social equity. Therefore, whilst it is important to take the requirements of the labour market into account when developing language-in-education policies in HE, I, in accordance with Al Riyami (2016), call for policymakers to pay equal or more attention to students’ and society’s actual linguistic, socioeconomic and cultural needs when developing language-in-education policies. That is, our response to global pressures should be based on a localised and contextualised understanding of our needs, with the aim that language-in-education policies equitably serve all students’ academic needs and should enhance social equity in HE. This can be achieved through conducting comprehensive needs assessment using different methods and recruiting a diversity of key stakeholders, including students, teachers, researchers, administrators, employers, local scholars and community members. By employing a combination of various methods, such as surveys, focus group discussions, interviews and national forums, policymakers can gain a thorough understanding of students’ linguistic needs, ensuring that language-in-education policies are developed to equitably meet the academic, socioeconomic and cultural needs of all students.

3. **Place social equity at the centre of language-in-education policies and planning:** This study demonstrated that EMI policy did not equitably help students to benefit from participation in HE. Therefore, I would argue, in line with Garcia (2009a), that we cannot develop academically effective language policies unless we ensure that all students have equal opportunities for success in HE. Policymakers must give careful consideration to social equity as an essential element in the formulation of language policies.

4. **Involve all stakeholders in the development of language policies:** One way to ensure that language-in-education policies are effective and equitable is to include all stakeholders in the policy development processes. Stakeholders encompass diverse groups of students, teachers, university administrators, parents, researchers, employers and community members. The voices of those people must be heard, and their input should be incorporated in the formulation of the policies. For example, the majority of participants in this study believed that using both Arabic and English in teaching content could result in better understanding of the subject matter. Moreover, some participants indicated that they were in favour of studying their specialisations in both Arabic and English, so they could be well prepared to work in both the Arabic-speaking public sector and the English-speaking private sector. Involving students as legitimate
participants in the language-in-education policymaking can ensure that such perspectives are incorporated in future language planning.; hence, more effective and equitable language policies can be developed.

Relevant to this point is the suggestion offered by some local scholars that ministries of education should not heavily rely on foreign experts for setting language-in-education policies as those often have inadequate knowledge of local culture, values, beliefs and social systems (Belhiah and Elhami, 2015; Al-Issa, 2020). I, therefore, recommend, in accordance with this argument, that local scholars are more involved in the development of language policies, certainly not to the exclusion of foreign experts if needed.

5. **Formulate a coherent language-in-education policy for HE:** In Oman (Al-Bakri, 2017) as well as in some other parts of the MENA region (AlHassan, 2022; Al Zumor and Abdesslem, 2022; Troudi, 2022), there seems to be some ambiguity regarding language-in-education policies in HE. Hence, there is a dire need for policymakers to formulate a clear language policy in the interest of the government’s economic plans, the labour market, students and the community at large. Once again, I emphasise that social equity should be at the heart of such policies, so that HE is accessible to all students on the basis of merit, regardless of their English proficiency levels, and that all students can equitably benefit from participation in HE. Evidence presented in this study suggests that translanguaging practices could improve social equity in HE as it rendered content knowledge more equitably accessible to all students and it allowed students to participate on an equal footing in the learning processes.

8.3.2. **Implications for university administrators:**

University administrators are encouraged to:

1. **Evaluate and enhance the effectiveness of English foundation programmes:** Findings from this study, along with previous research conducted in the Omani context, raise some questions about the efficacy of foundation programmes in adequately preparing students for the linguistic demands of their EMI programmes (Al-Bakri and Troudi, 2020). Evaluating these programmes should be a priority for university administrators. The evaluation and enhancement of these programmes can be accomplished through obtaining feedback from stakeholders, reviewing the curriculum
and aligning it with subsequent EMI programmes, establishing language support services, and implementing evidence-based teaching and assessment practices.

2. **Review the implementation of EMI policies**: Students’ concerns about EMI policy cannot continue to be ignored. I would suggest that university administrators regularly review the implementation of EMI policies in their HEIs by surveying the perceptions of students and lecturers. These surveys’ results can help administrators identify the strengths and weaknesses of EMI policies and make improvements that promote equitable access to content knowledge. Students’ perceptions and beliefs should be treated as legitimate knowledge that need to be seriously taken into consideration when reforming language-in-education policies. Evidence derived from this study suggests that most students are in favour of translanguaging practices; hence, there is an immediate necessity to embrace and implement such practices to improve students’ access to content knowledge and promote social equity in HE.

3. **Establish mechanisms for coordination between content lecturers and language teachers**: University administrators are encouraged to devise a strategy to bridge the gap between students’ LEP levels and their abilities to adequately understand their specialisations. Besides supporting translanguaging practices, administrators should promote coordination between content lecturers and language teachers, so as to design, for example, English for Specific purposes courses that can better equip students with the language required to access content of their respective specialisations.

4. **Provide professional development opportunities for content lecturers on inclusive translanguaging practices**: I urge the university administrations and the heads of academic departments to offer training programmes on implementing translanguaging practices to all content lecturers. These professional development workshops should cover topics, such as, recent conceptualisations of language-in-education policies and practices, the significance of multilingualism and translanguaging for enhancing social equity in HE and practical, hands-on training on implementing inclusive translanguaging practices in classrooms. Moreover, content lecturers should be provided with the required resources to facilitate their implementation of translanguaging practices.

5. **Revise the language of assessment**: University administrators are urged to revise the strict English-only policy currently implemented in both teaching and assessment. Findings indicated that students, especially those with LEP, underperformed in exams due to this strict policy since they either did not adequately understand exam questions,
or they struggled to adequately articulate their ideas in writing. Hence, I would suggest that translanguaging is adopted in tests in EMI programmes to ensure that all students have equal opportunities to demonstrate their understanding of the subject matter.

8.3.2. Implications for lecturers:

Content lecturers at various specialisations are urged to:

1. **Be aware of students’ varying levels of English proficiency:** Content lecturers should always remember that students do not possess similar levels of the linguistic capital (English); thus, they need to be aware that EMI policy does create challenges to the learning of many students with LEP, as this study has demonstrated. Being aware of these difficulties should encourage content teachers to implement teaching strategies to cater for the different linguistic needs of students who may struggle with language.

2. **Implement inclusive pedagogical practices:** Content teachers are urged to adopt inclusive pedagogical practices to ensure that all students, regardless of their English proficiency levels, have equitable access to content knowledge and equal opportunities to participate in classroom activities. Results from this study indicated that implementing translanguaging practices could assist with creating equal opportunities for students to benefit from their learning experiences. The HEI is obligated to offer content lecturers training and professional development on the implementation of inclusive teaching practices.

3. **Collaborate with language teachers:** There should be a systematic collaboration between content teachers and language teachers to ensure that the language support that students receive is tailored to their actual linguistic needs. It is the duty of the HEI to facilitate this collaboration and furnish all necessary resources to sustain it.

4. **Incorporate equitable assessment:** Evidence indicates that EMI created barriers to the learning of many students. It follows from this that it is likely that students, especially LEP students, might significantly underperform in examinations and other forms of assessment as these are conducted under a strict English-only policy. Therefore, content teachers need to mitigate any underperformance that is mainly caused by students’ LEP. They can conduct a thorough post-examination analysis to identify where students underperformed because of language deficiencies. They can also implement translanguaging practices in exams to ensure that students can adequately understand the questions and can fluently express their understanding of the subject matter.
5. **Implement translanguaging teaching practices:** Findings indicated that participants favourably perceived lecturers’ TLPs and many believed they significantly helped them have accurate and equitable access to content knowledge. Therefore, lecturers can consider using pertinent TLPs to render content more accessible to all students and to make learning more inclusive. I urge content lecturers to actively explore and identify the semiotic and multimodal resources that can assist their students in having a better and equitable access to knowledge.

8.4. **Limitations of the Study:**

This study has several key limitations. To begin with, the results reported herein cannot be generalised beyond the study context (i.e., the particular HEI) as the knowledge produced is context specific. Numerous factors can influence students’ perceptions of EMI policy which can be different from context to context, even within the same country. Qualitative researchers often do not aim to generalise their findings beyond the setting where the study takes place (Maxwell, 1992; Winter, 2000). However, the concept of transferability in qualitative research can render my findings useful in other similar settings in two ways (Tracy, 2010). First, I assume that my attempt to demonstrate how using Bourdieu’s framework to expose inequity caused by EMI policy can help other EMI researchers recognise the relevance of the framework in understanding their own contexts. Second, the rich description of the context, methodology and sample that I have tried to achieve in this thesis can help readers resonate with the findings as they might overlap with their own situations (Tracy, 2010).

Another significant limitation pertains to the alignment between the research design and theoretical framing of the study. As my study relates to examining a language policy through a critical perspective, it would have been beneficial to include an analysis of national and institutional policy documents and conduct interviews with policymakers as part of this doctoral study. The inclusion of these supplementary methods could have offered valuable context and profound insights into the broader policy landscape and the perspectives of influential decision-makers. The absence of these data sources may limit the comprehensive understanding of the study's findings within the larger policy context. However, the reason that I did not analyse policy documents was that until the date of my thesis submission, no formal policy document existed that explicitly prescribed the adoption of English as the medium of instruction in higher education. Furthermore, the reason that I did not conduct interviews with
policymakers is due to the small scope of this doctoral study, and that I aimed for in-depth understanding of students’ experiences of learning content within a strict EMI policy.

The third limitation concerns the lack of sufficient details about some pertinent demographic data on participants’ parents, specifically their level of education and their English proficiency levels. These are key constituents of parents’ cultural capital which can potentially influence the development of their children’s cultural capital, including English proficiency. Students’ records at university did not include these details; therefore, I mainly drew on economic factors, such as parents’ jobs and whether students’ families live on social security pensions, to analyse students’ opportunities for acquiring English prior to joining university. A more comprehensive account of economic, social and cultural factors that can shape students’ acquisition of English would substantially improve our understanding of equity of access to English, and, hence their equitable access and success in HE.

A final limitation concerns findings pertinent to the efficacy of TLPs in improving students’ access to content knowledge and promoting social equity in HE. The analysis of these findings was dependent on students’ interviews. That is, data were not obtained from direct classroom observations, and did not include input from lecturers. Moreover, not all participants had experiences of being taught by lecturers who used TLPs to reflect upon during the interview. Nevertheless, for the analysis of participants’ perceptions of TLPs, I included data of participants who had actual TL experiences, which added credibility to their narratives. Therefore, I believe this should not affect the trustworthiness of my data analysis as the analysed perceptions were based on real experiences.

8.5. Recommendations for further research:

This study suggests some areas for future EMI research. Firstly, this study demonstrated that EMI policy can have discriminatory effects on students with LEP who mostly come from low socioeconomic backgrounds. However, given the small-scale nature of my study, more empirical research is needed to further investigate the impact of EMI policy on social equity. I would recommend conducting large-scale studies to examine the relationship between students’ socioeconomic backgrounds and their chances of success in HE. These should include relatively larger and more diverse samples of HE students who specialise in different academic disciplines from different HEIs, and who belong to families that possess different amounts of
economic and cultural capital. These studies should also recruit different stakeholders, such as, teachers, university administrators and policymakers. Moreover, they should employ different methods of data collection, such as, interviews, focus groups, classroom observations and document analysis. These studies shall hopefully produce robust findings that can substantially inform language-in-education policy decisions, so more socially equitable policies are developed.

Secondly, my findings indicated that adopting EMI policy had detrimental effects not only on the learning of LEP students, but also, though less seriously, on the learning of students with high English proficiency. For instance, many participants reported that classroom discussions were infrequent because most LEP students could not participate in them. Consequently, proficient English-speaking students were deprived of a valuable learning opportunity, i.e., to engage in debates that could potentially enhance their comprehension of the subject matter. Hence, further research is needed to explore the quality of all students’ learning within EMI policy context.

In addition, evidence from this study suggests that LEP students did not adequately benefit from the English foundation programme which was designed to equip them with the linguistic abilities that would enable them to smoothly transition to their EMI academic programmes. As this point was not the focus of the current study, I would recommend that future studies investigate the effectiveness of English foundation programmes.

Moreover, the potential of TLPs in facilitating both content learning and social equity is another area that merits further investigation. To develop a fuller understanding of TLPs’ role in students’ learning, I would recommend that future studies consider conducting classroom observations and interviews with both students and lecturers. Policymakers and university administrators may be also involved in these studies. The participation of decision makers in these studies is vitally important because my study has shown that TLPs cannot fulfil their potential when their implementation is not officially recognised.

Furthermore, the potential of TLPs to improve students’ weaker language needs to be carefully investigated. My participants raised concerns that students would neglect English if students’ mother tongue was to be used in teaching. Clearly this is an area for further research. We cannot assume that implementing TLPs in teaching content can automatically improve both students’ linguistic resources.
Finally, my findings have demonstrated that participants recognised English as an important global language that could bring them academic and socioeconomic benefits; however, they articulated nuanced understanding of how English can simultaneously be empowering and disempowering. I would strongly suggest, in line with Blommaert (2010), that greater research attention is paid to how students as local actors perceive English language, what English can actually bring them, and how it influences their lives. This localised understanding can substantially inform national language-in-education policymaking and make language policies serve the interests of all people, not the market or the elite.
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Spolsky, B. (2004) *Language policy.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (Key topics in sociolinguistics). Available at: https://www.cambridge-


Appendices:

Appendix A: Interview guide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R Qs</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Why did you decide to study business studies/engineering/IT? What made you interested in that?</td>
<td>- comfortable, - time, - attitude</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>What is it like being taught business studies/engineering/IT in English?</td>
<td>- breadth of content (includes whether time is enough to cover the prescribed content) - depth of content - access to specialised knowledge [textbooks, other resources]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Do you think learning in English is a good way to learn business studies/engineering/IT?</td>
<td>- teachers’ language, - technical vocabulary, - mitigation: ways to improve lecture comprehension.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>How do you rate your English? And to what extent do you understand lectures when the lecturer uses English only?</td>
<td>- amount of English used, - teacher-to-students, - students-to-students, - students-to-teachers, - participation in the meaning-making process, - asking questions - ways to overcome interaction challenges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>How do you see the classroom interaction in terms of using English? In other words, do you feel confident when communicating in English in class?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>How is your interaction/communication during e.g., practical sessions, tutorials, lecturers’ office hours, in terms of language use?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Do you think the classroom interaction reflects your everyday communication outside university in terms of language use? Why?/ why not?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Did you have any opportunity to improve your English beyond the formal government school education prior to joining university? If yes, what were these opportunities? If no, why?</td>
<td>- private school, - private tutoring, - English summer schools abroad or in Oman, - others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>How do you think the English-only language policy affected/ is affecting your academic choices and progress?</td>
<td>- access to HE. - access to the desired specialisation, - GPA, - progress to your desired level of qualification, - your own examples, - examples of other students you know well, - equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>What do you think the benefits and challenges of the English-only language policy are, in terms of improving or limiting your future prospects?</td>
<td>- achieving your desired level of qualification, - drop-outs, - improving your chances to social status and well-paid jobs, - equity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Do you think the English-only language policy can have long-term impact on the social equity in the Omani society? What is this impact?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>To what extent do you think students should have some say in whether they are taught in English or Arabic or both in higher education?</td>
<td>- students’ voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Do you use Arabic when learning your courses? If yes, why and how do use it? And how much do use it? If no, why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Please have a look at these examples (see Appendix A1). Which one/s happen/s in your classes? How often do they happen?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Do you think using (or allowing you to use) both Arabic and English in the same class can facilitate or hinder your learning experience?</td>
<td>- building on previous knowledge/experiences, - classroom participation, - access to specialised knowledge, - understanding of subject matter, - approaching teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Do you think using both Arabic and English in learning your specialisation can improve or hinder your future prospects?</td>
<td>- access to the desired specialisation and level of qualification, - equity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>What are the opportunities and challenges of using both English and Arabic in learning business studies/engineering/IT at your institution?</td>
<td>alignment with the language of communication at job market</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix A1: Translanguaging definition and examples:

| Translanguaging definition and examples sheet: | المثال العملي على: 
| Definition: | التعريف: |
| Translanguaging is a teaching and learning theory that recognises and legitimises the use of all the linguistic resources at students’ disposal [Arabic and English in our context] in order to facilitate students’ learning of subject matter and to improve their weaker language. | هي نظرية تعليمية تؤيد وتقر استعمال استغلال جميع قدرات الطلاب اللغوية (اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية في سياقنا الحالي) أثناء العملية التدريسية لأجل مساعدة تعلم المحتوى الدراسي وأجل تطوير اللغة الأضعف لديهم. |

| Examples: | الأمثلة: |
| 1. Students read a text about a certain topic in English and the lecturer explains it to them in Arabic and English. | 1. يقرأ الطلاب نصًا تدريسيًا باللغة الإنجليزية ومن ثم يقوم المحاضر بشرح النص باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية. |
| 2. The lecturer shows PowerPoint slides which are written in English and talks about them using both Arabic and English. | 2. يعرض المحاضر شرائح برنامج العرض ‘PowerPoint’ ومن ثم يتحدث عن محتوى الشرائح باللغتين العربية والإنجليزية. |
| 3. The lecturer allows you to give your answer in Arabic when you cannot say it in English. | 3. يسمح للمحاضر بإجابة عن الأمثلة باللغة العربية عندما لا تتمكن من إعطاء الإجابة باللغة الإنجليزية. |
| 4. The lecturer does not prevent you from using Arabic when you have group discussions. | 4. المحاضر لا يمنع من استخدام اللغة العربية في النقاش أثناء العمل الجماعي في مجموعات. |
| 5. The lecturer explains a concept in English and then repeats the explanation in Arabic. | 5. يشرح المحاضر فكرة معينة باللغة الإنجليزية ومن ثم يعيد شرحها باللغة العربية. |
| 6. The lecturer resists to Arabic when he/she feels that students could not understand a certain concept in English. | 6. يبلغ المحاضر لاستخدام اللغة العربية عندما يشعر أن الطلاب لم يتمكنوا من فهم فكرة معينة حاول مساعداً شرحها باللغة الإنجليزية. |
| 7. The lecturer uses some teaching materials written in Arabic, but he/she explains them in English. | 7. يستخدم المحاضر مواد دراسية باللغة العربية ويقوم بشرحها باللغة الإنجليزية. |
| 8. The lecturer allows you to use some Arabic when participating in the class discussion. | 8. يسمح للمحاضر باستخدام اللغة العربية عند مشاركتك في النقاشات الصفية. |
### Appendix B: Participants details:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonyms</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Level of study</th>
<th>Specialisation</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Family socioeconomic status</th>
<th>English proficiency level</th>
<th>Self-rated English proficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Abdullah</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>7.5/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Ali</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>good</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Asad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>Mid-income (school teacher)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Asma</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>Mid-class (nurse)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Essa</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electronics &amp; Telecommunications</td>
<td>Mid-income (school teacher)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Above good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Fahad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Farah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Not that good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Hafsa</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Hassan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electronics &amp; Telecommunications</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Heba</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Ibrahim</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Software Development</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>3.5/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Imran</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Below average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Jasem</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma first Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Not yet specialised</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Khadija</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Software Development</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Maha</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>okay</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Mazin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Mid-income (school principal)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Merriam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 Mohammad</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electronics &amp; Telecommunications</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 Muna</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Bachelor</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Nadia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Software Development</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 Reem</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Saba</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Software Engineering</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 Said</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electrical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 Salah</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Mechanical Engineering</td>
<td>Low-income (on social pension)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 Sultan</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Mid-income (municipality manager)</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26 Susan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>Low-income (Retired on pension)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27 Taif</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Software Development</td>
<td>Mid-income (government employee)</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>9.5/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28 Yassir</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Electronics &amp; Telecommunications</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>6/10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 Zahra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 Zainab</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma Second Year</td>
<td>Business Studies</td>
<td>Human Resources Management</td>
<td>Mid-income</td>
<td>Good</td>
<td>Very good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix C: Example of coding an interview transcript in NVivo 12:

I meant that whether the use of new terms during the lecture help or hinder your understanding of the lecture? It hinders during the lecture when the terms are new.

How do you overcome this challenge?
We manage to overcome it, but it will be a waste of time if we do not know these terms before.

Do you feel confident when you speak in English in class?
Sometimes not; I don't feel confident when I speak English in the class.

Do you lack confidence because you don't understand the ideas of the lesson or because of the language?
Sometimes because of both reasons; and it all lies in the language.

How do you see the lecturer's communication with students in terms of language use?
Sometimes the lecturer is not able to communicate the information to the students; Because some students are not familiar with the new terms or the concept that the teacher is talking about, this causes a breakdown in the communication between the teacher and the students.

How do teachers overcome this obstacle?
Sometimes through translation; that the teacher tries to translate the content into Arabic, or let a student translate.

How does the teacher translate when s/he doesn’t know Arabic?
S/he translate through the smartphone or by asking a student to translate.

Does this frequently happen in lectures or is it rare?
It's very rare.

How do you see the students' communication with each other during group work in terms of language use?
The Arabic language is mostly used in the discussion, but the basic terms and symbols are in English.

What do you think the reason for the students' use of the Arabic language?
Because the Arabic language is easier for as as students.

How do you see the students' communication with the lecturer in terms of language use?
We, as students, discuss in English with the teacher, and we do not use another language, because the teacher is an expatriate. Even if the lecturer is an area, we are required to speak English in the classroom.

How do you see students' participation in class discussions?
Yes, discussions take place if we do not understand, or if the teacher asks us a question, then we discuss the question and we answer. The discussion is in English.

Do these discussions exist in abundance or are they few?
Currently, few, but there were many discussions when teaching was face-to-face.
Communication challenges are normal in the classroom, but the teacher's role and effectiveness in overcoming these challenges are crucial. One key strategy is to create opportunities for students to practice and improve their English skills, such as through pair work or group discussions. This not only enhances language proficiency but also builds confidence and fluency.

For instance, the teacher might initiate a game or activity that requires students to communicate in English, allowing them to practice pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary in a fun and engaging way. By making the classroom a dynamic and interactive space, teachers can effectively address communication barriers and foster a welcoming environment for all learners.

To ensure effective communication, teachers should also be aware of cultural differences and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. This could involve using culturally relevant materials, encouraging students to express their thoughts and feelings in English, and creating a respectful and inclusive classroom atmosphere.

In summary, by focusing on creating opportunities for practice, adapting teaching strategies to accommodate diverse learners, and maintaining an inclusive classroom environment, teachers can significantly enhance communication within the classroom and improve student outcomes.
How do you think the English-only language policy has affected/ is affecting your academic choices?
No, it didn’t affect. All specializations are in English, so we do not have a chance to choose another specialization in Arabic; meaning the English language was imposed on us.

Does English language affect your progress to higher levels?
Yes, it has affected. Yet, I am saying it's not because of the language itself, but because of teaching.

What do you mean?
In terms of curricula, in terms of teaching in general; it’s true that the language has a strong impact, but it doesn’t affect understanding much.

Do you mean that the level of the student in the English language does not affect his/her progress to higher levels of study?
It varies from student to student, for example, my progress to the Bachelor’s degree was delayed, but what I think is that the English language does not affect me much, in terms of the curriculum or the explanation, in terms of the explanation of the curriculum.

So how did it affect you?
On the one hand, for example, we got lower grades. In terms of the explanation of the curriculum, for example, we do not understand the curriculum in general, correctly and completely. Certainly, there are points in the curriculum that we did not fully understand.

Do you mean that the language has no role in your understanding of curricula?
It plays a major role in communicating the information in these courses.

Now, does language have a role, or does it have no role in the student’s reaching higher levels, since teaching is in English only?
Now, if we do not understand the content in English, we can translate it into Arabic.

You mentioned that your progress to bachelor’s degree was delayed, what caused this delay?
Because of the online teaching we couldn’t discuss with the teacher much, so our grades went down.

Was your delay in reaching the Bachelor due to your GPA or because of the English language degree at Level 4?
Because of the GPA.

Do you have the required English mark to access the bachelor’s degree?
Yes, I have got IELTS.

When did you get the IELTS?
Two years ago.

Did you get the required IELTS band from the first attempt?
No, I didn’t get it from the first attempt; I got it from the third attempt.

You got Band 5?
### Appendix D: A summary of themes and relevant codes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Theme 1: The disparity in participants’ possession of the linguistic capital upon entry into university can be attributed to the unequal distribution of economic and cultural capital in society</td>
<td>Opportunities to learn English; EMI/ English and Society; Participants’ perspectives about learning English at public schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Theme 2: Participants had unequal opportunities for access to academic knowledge:</td>
<td>Participants' ratings of their English Proficiency; How comfortable is it to study through English?: English-only impact on understanding content; English-only and in-depth understanding; English-only and understanding lecturers; English-only and classroom interaction; Visiting lecturers during office hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Theme 3: Using multilingual, semiotic and multimodal resources mitigated the detrimental impact of EMI on students’ learning:</td>
<td>Strategies to improve classroom interaction; Mathematics facilitates understanding; Other factors that influence understanding of content; Translanguaging facilitate interaction during group work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Theme 4: EMI policy offers unequal opportunities for students to socioeconomically benefit from HE</td>
<td>Participants' general perspectives on EMI policy; Students' opportunities depend on their hard work, not English; English as a barrier to progress to higher levels; English as a gatekeeper to the labour market; Suggestions to improve equity in HEI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Theme 5: Translanguaging practices can more equitably serve students’ academic and socioeconomic needs:</td>
<td>Translanguaging achieves justice between students; Translanguaging improves content understanding; Translanguaging facilitates classroom interaction; Translanguaging facilitates lecture understanding; Challenges to implementing translanguaging; Translanguaging helps improve students' English proficiency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: School of Education Research Ethics Form (completed):

Name: Hilal Al Hajri
Proposed research project: A critical investigation of students’ perceptions and experiences of the impact of EMI policy on students’ content learning and social justice in a HEI in Oman
Proposed funder(s): Ministry of Higher Education, Research and Innovation (The Sultanate of Oman)
Discussant for the ethics meeting: Salma Al Saifi
Name of supervisor/s: Professor Bruce Macfarlane and Dr. Robert Sharples
Has your supervisor seen this submitted draft of your ethics application? Yes.

Ethical issues discussed and decisions taken as related to:

1. Researcher access/exit:
After gaining the ethical approval from the School of Education at the University of Bristol, I will seek appropriate permission from the gatekeepers at the HEI where the study is carried out. I will first write a letter to the vice chancellor of this HEI to gain permission to access the particular college where the study will take place, which will be anonymised when I report the study results. In the letter, I shall explain the rationale and the purpose of the study and the potential participants whom I wish to interview. After obtaining permission, I shall contact, through an email, the Dean of the college where I intend to conduct the study. Once again, I shall elucidate the aims of the study, the type of method I am using, intended participants and the potential benefits of the study. I will ask the dean for his/her kind support to facilitate the process of recruiting participants through requesting the concerned department to provide me with some necessary details about participants, such as, their overall marks in the General Foundation Programme, their GPAs and some information about their socioeconomic backgrounds. Having worked as a lecturer and held an administrative position at the college this might make access to these details easier. After obtaining the required details, I will start contacting potential participants via email and WhatsApp.

Concerning the exit from the research field, I will inform participants that I might keep in touch with them for some time after the data collection is completed. I might need them to clarify some of their responses or provide me with additional information about certain points. I will thank all participants for their time, effort and invaluable contribution. I will also thank the college administration and staff who facilitated my access to the required participants’ details for their collaboration. Moreover, after completing my research project, I will also offer both the participants and the college administration a summary of the study findings.

2. Power and participant relations:
Throughout the four-year doctorate scholarship during which this study is conducted, I do not hold any teaching or administrative position in the institution where the study takes place. This can hopefully help minimise the power relationships arising from the dual roles of a lecturer and a researcher. However, being identified by some of my participants as a former lecturer and a researcher might influence my relationship with the interviewees. For instance, Kvale (2006, p. 484) argues,

The researcher determines the time, initiates the interview, decides the topic, poses the questions and critically follows up on the answers, and also closes the conversation. The research interview is not a dominance-free dialogue between equal partners.

To handle this asymmetrical power relation with my participants, I will constantly remind myself of the following matters. First, as a qualitative and a critical researcher, empowering individuals should be a paramount goal of conducting my research (Merriam, 2002; Bogdan and Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2007). Thus, I will give
interviewees more opportunities to share their own stories and voice their concerns if I am to enhance the trustworthiness of my research. Second, I will respect the interviewees and consider them as authorities over their own experiences and knowledge (Leavy, 2017). At the practical level, I need to be a good listener in order to demonstrate to my participants that I do care about their learning experiences and that our relationship is that of equal partners. Furthermore, I will attempt to be mindful of and attentive to the ways that differences and inequalities, particularly those associated with, socioeconomic status, can impact on my relationships with participants and on my interpretations of the data.

3. Information given to participants:
An information sheet has been prepared and annexed hereto (see Appendix 1). The sheet contains some details about the purpose of the study, the reasons why participants are selected, what I expect from them and most importantly their ethical rights which I elaborate on below. Given the critical nature of the study, I will be vigilant in not revealing my beliefs to participants before and during the data collection process and I will make sure that it is only the general aims of the study are presented to the participants. I will refrain from exposing my presuppositions in order to obtain open, honest and authentic data, uncontaminated by the researcher’s bias, from participants. The participants are also informed that collected data will only be used for research purposes, and in case I decide to publish some of the findings, participants are ensured that their identities will not be traceable. It is worth noting that the information sheet is written in both English and Arabic, to ensure that they fully understand its content.

4. Informed Consent and Participant’s right of withdrawal:
Prior to data collection, I will make sure I obtain participants’ informed consent (see Appendix 2). I will make it clear that their participation is voluntary, and that they have the right to withdraw at any moment during the data collection process with or without providing any reason. Besides the informed consent form that participants need to duly sign, I will verbally explain to interviewees, before interviewing each participant, that their participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw their consent any time they wish so during or shortly after the interview. It will also be made clear to participants that consent cannot be withdrawn after I have anonymised the data. In case a participant decides to withdraw his/her consent just before, during or right after the interview, I will fully respect his/her decision and I will work to find a substitute with similar characteristics. I realise that this is a challenging and time-consuming task, yet respecting my participants’ free will is my priority.

5. Complaints procedure:
In the (hopefully unlikely) event that participants as well as gatekeepers have some concerns and complaints about any sort of research misconduct, they can immediately report it to either my first supervisor whose contact details are provided in the information sheet (subject to his approval) or to the head of the research committee at the college level. This complaint procedure is explained in the information sheet.

6. Safety and well-being of participants/researchers
Participants’ safety and well-being are of paramount importance to me. As the interviews will either be carried out in the university premises or online, it is anticipated that participants’ and my own safety is never physically endangered. Participants will be assured that their responses will remain confidential and will never affect their grades or academic progress in anyway. To maintain individual participants’ wellbeing, the interview with each informant will be conducted at his/her most convenient time and in a university venue where they feel comfortable.
In the case that face-to-face interviews are not permitted due to Covid-19 restrictions, I will conduct online interviews through the Microsoft Teams application which is the official online learning platform at the college. I will be using Microsoft Teams because students are familiar with it and I anticipate that they will feel comfortable using it. To avoid placing a financial burden on participants, I will work to cover any expenses for their access to the Internet.

7. Anonymity/confidentiality:
To ensure confidentiality, the study will not report any private data that can render participants’ identities identifiable or traceable (Punch and Oancea, 2014). Several strategies are employed to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of participants’ identities. Participants will be given pseudonyms and efforts will be made to disguise the name of the HE institution. Moreover, I will attempt to anonymise the data as quickly as possible so that participants’ privacy is protected. The association between participants and their pseudonyms is strictly limited to the researcher and any personal information will be stored completely separate from the dataset.

8. Data collection and data analysis:
During the data collection process, I will be guided primarily by principles of respect for all participants regardless of their gender, socioeconomic backgrounds, GPAs or English level. I will attempt to minimally interrupt their busy study timetables and I will schedule interviews at their most convenient time. I will also make sure that I only collect the required data and not more; the interview schedule will help me observe this ethical principle. Moreover, while interviewing, I will refrain from imposing my preconceived beliefs about the topic at hand on the interviewees.

Data analysis will be conducted in accordance with ethical research principles. Prior to conducting the data analysis, I will send a copy of the interview transcript to each participant to check the accuracy of their responses. Moreover, I will avoid any misrepresentation of the findings (Cohen et al., 2018). I recognise that my values and preconceptions of EMI policy might have influence on the data analysis process; however, I will endeavour to maintain neutrality through being vigilant and self-reflexive of my biases. I will never ignore and hide findings that do not match my beliefs and I will never overemphasise data that fit my preconceived viewpoints. I will attempt to “consider rival interpretations and explanations of the findings” (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 138).

9. Data storage and Data protection:
All data in all its various forms will be securely stored. Abiding by the principles of the Data Protection Act and the National Foundation for Educational Research, a number of measures will be implemented to ensure the safeguarding of data. The audio files of the interviews will be immediately transferred to my account on University of Bristol OneDrive and deleted from the recording device. I will avoid sending data via email or saving it in unprotected portable storage devices to guard against any accidental loss of data. Moreover, as abovementioned, I will endeavour to anonymise the data right away after the data collection process. The transcripts will be kept in a locked cabinet that is only accessible to the researcher. The data in its various forms will be destroyed three months after the final result of my dissertation is announced.

10. Responsibilities to colleagues/academic community:
I realise that one of my ethical obligations towards the academic community is to not by any means jeopardise the integrity and reputation of educational research; hence, I shall maintain high standards of educational research...
practices and observing ethics throughout the research processes (Cohen et al., 2018). Put differently, I shall strive to conduct good quality research so as to contribute to the enhancement of the reputation of the educational academic community. I have always sought to gain advice and approval from my supervisor with regard to basing my research on solid theoretical foundation, formulating appropriate research questions, using rigorous methodology and obtaining ethical approval prior to commencing data collection and analysis. I will explicitly acknowledge their contributions to my research.

If you feel you need to discuss any issue further, or to highlight difficulties, please contact the GSoE’s ethics co-ordinators who will suggest possible ways forward.

Signed: HILAL AL HAJRI (Researcher)  signed: (Discussant)
Date:
Appendix F: Confirmation of ethical approval:

Ethics Online Tool: application signed off

Research Governance and Ethics Officer <Liam.McKervey@bristol.ac.uk>
Tue 27/04/2021 10:50

To: Hilal Al Hajri <bi18392@bristol.ac.uk>

Your online ethics application for your research project "A critical investigation of students' perceptions and experiences of the impact of EMI policy on students' content learning and social injustice in a HEI in Oman" has been granted ethical approval. Please ensure that any additional required approvals are in place before you undertake data collection, for example NHS R&D Trust approval, Research Governance Registration or Site Approval.

For your reference, details of your online ethics application can be found online here:

http://www.bristol.ac.uk/red/ethics-online-tool/applications/117989
Appendix G: Consent form sample:

English:

Consent Form

Name of Research Participant: Maya Salih Alzayed

Date: 8/6/2021

I confirm that I have read, understood, and agree with the following consent form:

1. I have been provided with a copy of the research protocol and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about it.

2. I understand that participation in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

3. All information provided by me will be kept confidential and only used for research purposes.

4. The researcher will use the information obtained in this study only for research purposes and will not be used for any other purpose.

5. I consent to the recording and transcription of my responses during the interview.

6. I consent to participate in this research.

Signature: ____________________________
Date: ____________________________

Arabic:

استمارة الموافقة

عنوان البحث: دراسة نقدية لتصورات الطلاب وتجاربهم حول تأثير سياسة استخدام اللغة الإنجليزية في التدريس على تعلم الطلاب للمحتوى الدراسي وعلى العدالة الاجتماعية في إحدى مؤسسات التعليم العالي في عمان.

الباحث: هلال الحجري

بيانات التواصل مع الباحث:

النقال: ٤٠٣٧٧٤٩٩ / ٨٤٥٣٤٢٠٨٣٤٤٠٠

البريد الإلكتروني: bi18392@bristol.ac.uk / halhajri85@gmail.com

ضع علامة (√) إذا كنت توافق على الآتي:

● لقد أطلعت وفهمت ورقة معلومات المشارك ولقد أعطيت الفرصة لطرح الأسئلة والأسئلة والاستفسار عن الدراسة ومشاركتي فيها.

● أدركت أن مشاركتي في هذه الدراسة تطوعية، وأنه بإمكاني سحب موافقة المشاركة من قبل الباحث (تقريبًا بعد شهر من إجراء المقابلة).

● سيتم الاحتفاظ بكل المعلومات التي أقدمها بسرية تامة.

● سيتم استخدام المعلومات التي أقدمها للPublication purposes only and will not be shared with others without your consent.

● أوافق على تسجيل المقابلة صوتياً.

● أوافق على المشاركة في هذه الدراسة.

اسم المشارك: ____________________________
التاريخ: ____________________________

التوقيع: ____________________________
Appendix H: Participant information sheet:

**Study Title:** A critical investigation of students’ perceptions and experiences of the impact of EMI policy on students’ content learning and social justice in a HEI in Oman

**Researcher:** Hilal Al Hajri

**Researcher’s Contact information:** Mobile: [Redacted], Email [Redacted]

**Supervisors:** Prof. Bruce Macfarlane (First supervisor) and Robert Sharples

This research project is being conducted as a requirement for the completion of the Doctor of Education degree from the School of Education at the University of Bristol, United Kingdom. I would like to invite you to take part in my study. I would appreciate it if you could spare some minutes to carefully go through this information sheet before you make your decision concerning your participation. I will be glad to answer any questions you may have about the information given or your participation in general. I can be reached through my contact details above.

**The purpose of the study:**
This study aims at investigating students’ perceptions and experiences of the English medium instruction (EMI) policy and its impact on their learning of subject matter and social justice. I mean by ‘the English medium instruction (EMI) policy’ the use of English-only in teaching and learning various specialisations at university. I am also interested in exploring students’ perspectives on their use of both Arabic and English in learning content and the potential impact of using both Arabic and English on their learning and on social justice.

**Why have you been chosen?**
You have been chosen because I believe you have distinct and valuable experience of learning in an EMI policy context. Your experience and the attitudes you have developed towards the EMI policy are of great importance to enhance our understanding of this policy.

**What I expect from you?**
Should you choose to take part in this study, I will contact you through email and WhatsApp to arrange for an approximately 40-minute interview. The interview can be conducted at your most convenient time during the months of May and June 2021. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, we will have an online interview through Microsoft Teams and the conversation will be in Arabic. The interview will be audio-recorded.

**Are there any potential risks?**
Participation in the study poses minimal risks to you. Either you decide to take part/ or not take part in the study, this will have no impact on your grades and academic progress. The information that you will provide in the interview will be fully anonymised, and your identity will be kept strictly confidential.

**What are your ethical rights?**
Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw at any time without any explanation. However, consent cannot be withdrawn beyond the point when the data are anonymised and pseudonyms are assigned; this step will be performed approximately a month after the interview is conducted. Prior to this I shall send you a copy of the transcript for you to check the accuracy of your responses.

**Who to contact if there is something wrong?**
If you have any concerns about the conduct of this study, please do not hesitate to contact my supervisor Prof. Bruce Macfarlane, Professor of Education at the University of Bristol at [Redacted] or Dr. Thuraya Al Riyami, the head of the Research Committee at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibra at [Redacted]

If you are happy to take part in this study, please fill in the consent form that is attached to this letter. Thank you very much for reading this information sheet.