

## Parents' Perspectives towards Implementing English-Medium Instruction at Tertiary Education in Oman

**Thuraya Khalifa Al-Riyami**

University of Technology and Applied Sciences Ibra, Oman

Corresponding Author: [thuraya\\_r@ict.edu.om](mailto:thuraya_r@ict.edu.om)

**Chinthana Sandaruwan Dayananda**

English Language Centre

University of Technology and Applied Sciences Ibra, Oman

Received: 11/18/2021

Accepted: 2/10/2022

Published: 3/24/2022

### Abstract

This study investigates parents' perspectives towards using English as a medium of instruction (EMI). Hundred and seventeen (117) parents who had children studying at higher education institutions (HEIs) in the Sultanate of Oman answered a questionnaire featuring 40 items with a 5-point Likert-scale response key. Findings indicate that, while many parents displayed favorable attitudes towards implementing EMI in HEIs, approximately half of them asserted that their children's English is not good enough to cope with EMI. Therefore, most of them believed that some courses at least should follow Arabic medium instruction. The study explores the advantages and disadvantages of EMI, and findings reveal that the majority of the respondents identify more advantages. It was also found out that the respondents assisted their children in several ways to cope with EMI. For instance, by financing their children to learn English in private institutions, encouraging children to translate their course materials into the Arabic language, and seeking the support of parents' friends to explain doubts and what children have not understood in the classroom.

*Keywords:* children's education, English as a medium of instruction, parents' perspectives , tertiary education, Oman, Arabic

**Cite as:** Al-Riyami, T. K. , & Dayananda, C. S. (2022). Parents' Perspectives towards Implementing English-Medium Instruction at Tertiary Education in Oman. *Arab World English Journal*, 13 (1) 145-160. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol13no1.10>

## 1. Introduction

English is considered a global language for science, business, technology, communication, and academia in many countries (Block & Cameron, 2002; Crystal, 2003). There is no denying the immense power status of English worldwide; Oman is no different, and English is an essential tool in modern Oman (Al Hajri, 2013; Al-Issa, 2015). English is considered the "key element in the development of the country and its effective integration into the modern world"(Al-Mahrooqi, 2012, p. 263). People in Oman use English to travel, pursue higher education, find a white-collar job, and communicate with other nations (Al-Issa, 2014; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2016). In the urban areas, English is moving from the status of a foreign language to that of a second language (Al-Ghatrifi, 2006; Khan, 2011).

Economically, Oman is almost dependent on oil, accounting for 80% of its income (Al Hajri, 2013). As a result, like the other Gulf States, Oman has attracted lucrative direct foreign investments from the west, especially from the USA and UK, to start their oil and gas businesses. These companies depend on the expatriate workforce, whose language of communication is English, to participate in Oman's modernization projects. All these factors influence the status of English. According to Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016), the discovery of oil has involved "the importation of the foreign expertise, capital, technology, and labor necessary to exploit them effectively, and contributed to the continued importance of English language in the Gulf States" (p.395).

The ever-growing significance of English has forced the Omani government to reform its education system to merge with the globalized world. One of these reforms is implementing English as the Medium of Instruction (EMI) at tertiary education to teach multiple disciplines, especially science and technology. According to Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova (2014), EMI has been implemented at (HEIs) in Oman since establishing the first Oman public university in 1986. Other HEIs replicated this in Oman, which has increased over the past three decades. These HEIs range from two-year colleges offering diplomas in various specializations to four-year colleges and universities offering Bachelor's degrees (Al-Lamki, 2006).

However, when students join HEIs, they start to learn in English instead of learning Arabic. This marks a remarkable shift in their life as a student. In schools, Arabic is the medium of instruction (Al-Jardani, 2015). Thus, 88% of the students who join tertiary education start by taking intensive English programs that prepare them to study their specializations in English (Al Shmeli, 2011; AL Bakri, 2017). Successful completion of English courses is a prerequisite in their specialization programs at the HEIs. Thus, English plays a significant role in deciding Omani students' future in HEIs (Al Hajri, 2013; Al-Jardani, 2015).

Therefore there are a lot of research on using EMI at HEIs in Oman (AL Bakri, 2017; Al Jadid, 2009; Al-Mahrooqi and Tuzlukova, 2014). Most of these studies scrutinize the issues related to EMI such as, the rationale behind implementing EMI (Collins, 2010), the impact of EMI on students' academic experience and language proficiency (AL Bakri, 2017), teaching methods used in EMI (Al Jadid, 2009) and challenges students face in EMI classes (Al Bakri, 2013). The participants of these studies are teachers, students, or both. However, Al Issa (2015) states "problems and solutions pertinent to teaching an international foreign language like

English should not and cannot be merely confined to and perceived through the teachers and students" (p. 583).

Therefore, securitizing various agents and agencies is a must to get a comprehensive understanding of a vital language policy like EMI. One of these agencies is parents, who have a significant role in shaping their children's educational experiences (Al-Mahrooqi et al., 2016; Al-Barwani et al., 2012; Shoup, Gonyea & Kuh, 2009; Simmons, 2008). Parents' perspectives in drafting education policies is however rarely addressed and taken into account in literature. Therefore, the current study aims to explore parents' perceptions about the implementation of EMI in HEIs in Oman.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Studies on EMI

#### 2.1.1 Studies from the Arab Gulf

There is a volume of research published on students' perception of EMI in HEIs in the Gulf. For instance, Alazemi (2017) investigated 100 students' perceptions of using EMI at HEIs in Kuwait through questionnaires, classroom observation, and focus groups. He found that students in Kuwait preferred to learn in English medium since it is fundamental to find well-paid jobs and ease their path if they want to complete their postgraduates. Majority of the participants (86%) in Alazemi's study "agreed that proficiency in English brings many academic benefits" (p.140). However, he illustrated that Kuwaiti HEIs face many difficulties due to EMI policies, including comprehending lectures, answering exam questions, and writing assignments. Therefore, he found that students rely on translation, forming study groups, and sometimes taking private tuitions (Alazemi, 2017).

In the UAE, Belhiah and Elhami (2015) explored students' and teachers' perceptions about the effectiveness of EMI to teach subject matter in six universities located in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Al Ain, Sharjah Ajman, and Ras Al Khaimah. Five hundred students and 100 teachers responded to questionnaires and structured interviews. They found that students viewed English as the language of academia and science, while they viewed Arabic as the language of the Quran. In addition, students perceived English language proficiency as vital to secure employment in the future. However, most participants in their study were struggling to learn their courses in English, so they expressed that they needed more Arabic in HEIs in the UAE to comprehend their lectures and get better grades. In the same vein, Troudi and Jendli (2011) investigated the impact of EMI on Emirati students' educational achievements and learning experience. The researchers administered a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire to 110 female students who studied different disciplines such as business, communication and media, education, and information technology at Zayed University. Following the analysis of the questionnaire data, 10 students participated in semi-structured interviews. They found that family background and parental attitudes towards English positively impact students' acceptance of EMI. They elaborated that students who had studied in private English-medium schools were more prepared to face the academic demands of EMI than their colleagues who learned English as a subject, among others in the curriculum of the government primary and secondary schools. In addition, they found that students associated English with the discourse of modernity, science, and academia while they associated Arabic with the discourse of identity,

religion, and heritage. They argued for the necessity of bilingual education in tertiary education in the UAE, a point shared by Belhiah and Elhami (2015) and Findlow (2006).

Similarly, in Qatar, Pessoa and Rajakumar (2011) investigated students' perceptions of EMI implementation at two universities through a survey, self-assessment of language abilities, focus groups, and interviews. They found that students viewed English as the language of business education and personal development. However, students admitted that EMI might affect their ability to use Arabic and their identity through exposure to western culture. However, the participants in this study expressed their preference for EMI.

In Saudi Arabia, Al-Jarf (2008) examined the students' attitudes towards EMI at the university level. She found that 96% of the students viewed English as a superior language since it is the language of science, research, technology, and the labor market. The study also revealed that 82% of the students considered Arabic as a language of religion, history, and heritage.

### **2.1.2 Studies from Oman**

Regardless of the growing body of research about EMI, studies in Oman are still relatively scarce (Al Bakri, 2017). Al-Mahrooqi and Denman (2016) investigated 60 science students' perceptions towards implementing EMI at a public university in Oman using a questionnaire. The study revealed that most participants believed that "English is the global language of science and technology" (p. 99), yet more than half preferred Arabic-medium instruction to study their specialization as students encountered many difficulties in reading and technical vocabulary related to their discipline. The students suggested using code-switching between English and Arabic during the lectures.

Another study by Al Bakri (2017) investigated students' perceptions of implementing EMI policy at a public HEI in Oman via distributing a questionnaire among 328 students studying in a public college in Oman, conducting 14 classroom observations, and interviewing 14 students. She found that students firmly believed that EMI should be used in Omani HEIs to enhance their English proficiency that is fundamental for Oman's job market. She also found that students did not support using Arabic as a medium of instruction at HEIs in Oman since it would "limit their job opportunities" (p. 194). Her study also revealed that students believed that their speaking skills flourished due to EMI. The study revealed that the students encountered some severe obstacles in reading. For instance, a lack of lexicon knowledge impedes comprehension skills. The study further highlighted EMI policy in HEIs negatively affects the quality of educational experience of Omani students. She also claimed that EMI hinders students' involvement in higher thinking endeavors such as expressing their argument, discussing issues, or asking questions. Furthermore, some of the participants in her study experienced frustration since they got delayed due to the EMI policy.

## **2.2 The role of parents in their children's education**

The literature classifies parent involvement into main categories: participation at school and involvement at home (Al-Harrasi & Al-Mahrooqi, 2014). The former relates to "attending classes, having meetings with teachers, participating and volunteering in school-related activities, and making decisions with school policymakers" (p. 273). However, the latter includes parents helping their children to check their homework, doing assignments, and talking

about general issues related to their schools. International literature has shown that parents' involvement in their children's education is usually positive and encouraging (Ceka & Murati, 2016; Maluleke, 2014).

Parents' active involvement in their children's education process brings in both positive and encouraging changes in students' life. In the context of Oman, a relatively small body of literature is concerned with the parental role in children's education in general and in English language education in particular. Al-Harrasi and Al-Mahrooqi (2014) studied Omani parents' involvement in their children's schooling. They used a questionnaire distributed to 40 Omani parents (20 male and 20 female) from one city in Oman. They found that 96% of Omani parents believed their involvement positively impacted their children's academic performance. The study also found that 90% of parents believed their involvement included helping their children with their homework, and 87% discussed school issues with their children. In addition, 92% of the parents in this study believed that their involvement would positively impact their children's school behaviors. The study further revealed that parents did not get involved due to many reasons. For example, most Omani parents believe that teachers are more knowledgeable than them, and therefore teachers should make decisions regarding their children's academic performance. Some parents believed that their involvement in their children's school is not essential.

Al-Mahrooqi et al. (2016) conducted another study on the involvement of Omani parents in their children's education. They administered a questionnaire to 391 parents of students in the Omani public school system. They found that Omani parents are generally aware of the significance of their participation in their children's development. They also believed that their involvement would lead to better school behaviors and increase their motivation to study. They consider the importance of their active involvement in several home-based and school-based endeavors such as tutoring in Arabic reading, math, computer skills, Geography, or other subjects. However, they found that the parents' actual level of involvement in their children's English language studies was not sufficient and that they were not likely to find a private English tutor for their children.

Al-Barwani et al. (2012) investigated 92 parents who have children in Omani HEIs about their perceptions of their role. They found that parents in Oman believed that their role in their children's higher education was vital. Indeed, they viewed "this role as a duty that needs to be fulfilled and thought it to be as crucial as the role of their children's higher education teachers" (p.13). They also reported that Omani parents' role exemplified through staying in contact with their teachers, following up on their academic progress, solving problems that their children encountered, and offering financial support.

As we can see, most studies conducted in Oman focused on parents' involvement in school education that has different expectations than HEIs. Hence, it may be problematic to apply findings from studies conducted on schools to HEIs. In addition, available literature focuses on Omani parents' involvement in their children's higher education in general. Research does not explicitly address parents' role in assisting their children in coping with EMI, which is considered one of the most important policies that affected Omani students' progress in their HEIs. Therefore, the current study is one step toward addressing the relative absence of topic-

based research on parents' perspectives on EMI at HEIs in Oman and how they assisted their children to cope with the educational policy.

## **Methodology**

### ***Research questions***

This study primarily examines parents' perspectives towards EMI in HEIs in Oman. In doing so, the research attempts to address the following questions:

1. What are parents' attitudes towards implementing EMI at HEIs in Oman?
2. What are the challenges encountered by students due to EMI?
3. How do parents assist their children in coping with challenges caused by the implementation of EMI?
4. What are the advantages and drawbacks of implementing EMI at HEIs in Oman from parents' perceptions?

### **Data collection methods**

The current study employed a three-part questionnaire in Arabic, which is the participants' native language. The first part sought participants' demographical details. The second part included forty items reflecting the main themes highlighted in the background of the study. This part of the questionnaire featured a five-point Likert scale, with responses ranging from strongly agree to disagree strongly and a neutral option. Questions 1-11 investigate parents' attitudes towards implementing EMI at HEIs in Oman. Queries (12-20) aimed to discover challenges encountered by students due to EMI from parents' perspectives. In addition, the ways parents assisted their children to cope with these challenges were covered from questions 21 to 30. Questions 31 to 35 address the advantages of implementing EMI. Questions 36 to 40 aimed to investigate the drawbacks of EMI.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study were 117 parents from different parts of Oman. Snowball sampling was used to select the sample. After the researchers identified potential participants, these parents were approached and asked to volunteer. Those parents who agreed to participate were later requested to identify others they thought would also be interested in participating. Subsequently, the second group of respondents was then approached and asked if they were interested, with the process continuing in this manner. The participants consisted of 64.7% females and 35.3% males. About half of the participants (49.6%) were between 35 and 45 years old, 24.8% were between 46 and 55 years old, and 22.2% were below 34 years old.

Regarding their educational background, 41.6% of the participants had their Bachelor's degree, while 28.2 % had their diploma, and 19.7% of the parents had their postgraduate studies. In addition, 41.3% of the participants had one child, 33.7% had two children, and 25% had more than three children studying at HEIs in Oman. Their English language proficiency was rated average, above average, and good. Percentage wise, it was 35%, 30% and 20% respectively.

### **Data analysis**

Figure 1 highlights parents' attitudes towards implementing EMI at HEIs in Oman. An overwhelming majority, 85.5%, attributed a higher employability rate to English medium education. Focusing on the relevance of EMI at HEIs, 80.6 % of the respondents claimed that

EMI at HEIs is relevant, and only 23.1% of respondents did not advocate similar sentiments. 74.4% of parents concurred that EMI should continue regardless of the potential low grades their children may obtain in their respective courses due to the lack of language competency. Meanwhile, 66.7% of the parents were well aware about the social prestige associated with EMI in higher education. They considered that English medium education places their children in high esteem in society. Another vital aspect of EMI in higher education from parents' perspective is the requirement of a higher level of language competency to be a successful learner. Most HEIs in the Sultanate of Oman conduct academic programs in Science and Technology streams. In line with this stream of disciplines, Most of the respondents, 64.9%, perceived attributes of the English language in the field of science and technology. They identified English as the language of science and technology. Overall, a striking percentage of parents project optimistic and ambitious perspectives towards implementing EMI at HEIs despite their children's lack of language competency level. In the meantime, a large majority of the respondents acknowledged the importance of EMI in the HEI's for higher employability rate. However, a considerable proportion of the respondents did not find the implementation of EMI desirable at HEIs.

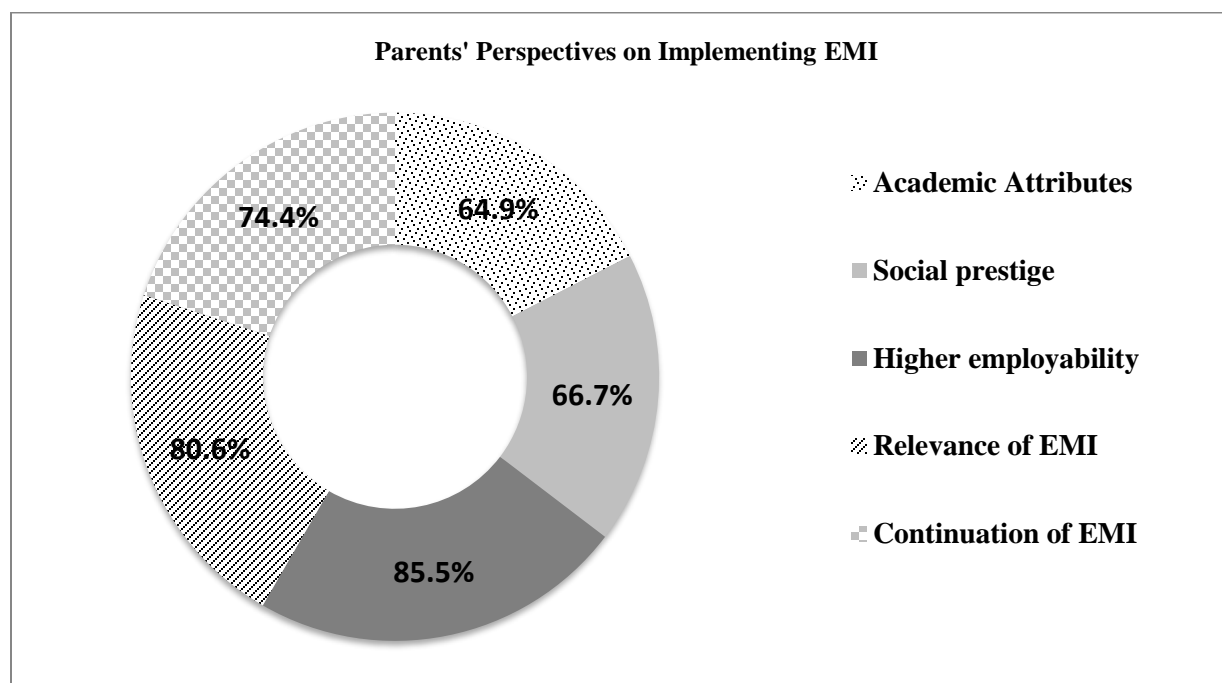


Figure 1. Parents' attitudes towards implementing EMI at higher education institutions in Oman

Table 1 summarizes parents' perspectives on the challenges encountered by students due to the implementation of EMI at HEIs. The challenges focused in the questionnaire fall into three broad categories – challenges related to the lack of overall language competency, challenges caused by language apprehension, and challenges related to specific language skills. Insufficient competency level indeed causes poor understanding or some comprehension difficulties. Majority of respondents (70.7%) confirmed that their children's ability to read and understand course materials is not at a satisfactory level. Further, more than half of the respondents claimed that the children face difficulty understanding the course, course delivery, and understanding exam questions and answering them. The figures for these challenges stand as 61.5%, 56%, and 56.9%, respectively. Meanwhile Majority of parents associated low comprehension and

performance in examinations to lower competency in the language. Focusing on the second challenge, a clear majority, 57.7%, of parents stated that their child is afraid of making mistakes during class discussions. The requirement of specific language skills such as, technical vocabulary, writing, speaking, and presentation skills forms the third challenge. 56.1% viewed that their children find difficulties in understanding technical vocabulary, while only 46.7 % attributed to the difficulty in English writing. However, parents marked a noticeable shift in perspectives concerning speaking. 56.5% of parents confided in their children's speaking skills, while only 31.3% perceived speaking skills as a potential challenge. Similarly, 45.7% of parents showed high esteem for their children's presentations skills, whereas only 38.8 regarded it as a challenge.

Over half of participants perceive a lower level of competency causes a lack of understanding of the course, course materials, and course delivery. Also, apprehension caused by fear of making mistakes was seen as another potential constraint in implementing EMI at HEIs. Simultaneously, parents identified challenges specific to some language skills like technical vocabulary and writing. However, a considerable majority of participants did not figure out speaking as challenging as other constraints identified in the survey.

Table 1. *Challenges encountered by students due to EMI from parents' perspectives*

No	Challenges	Contributory Factors	Percentage Agreed	Percentage Disagreed
1	<b>Poor overall competency</b>	• Poor understanding and comprehension difficulties	70.7%	17.2%
		• Understand the course	61.5%	36.7%
		• Understand course delivery	56%	26.7%
		• Understand the questions and provide answer	56.9%	28.4%
2	<b>Language apprehension</b>	• Fear of making mistakes in the class discussions	57.7%	26.7%
3	<b>Specific skills requirement</b>	• Technical vocabulary	56.1%	26.7%
		• Writing skills	46.7%	37.9%
		• Speaking skills	31.3%	56.5%
		• Presentation skills	38.8%	45.7%

The current study explores how parents assisted their children to cope with the challenges posed by EMI implementation at HEIs. Table three below details practical measures that parents initiated to support children to overcome challenges. According to the data, parents' assistance is threefold: direct, indirect, and zero assistance. Direct assistance could fall into two broad classifications. The first is parents as a source of motivation. Ninety and half (90.5%) of parents encouraged their children to translate difficult words into the first language, Arabic. This phenomenon is common among students in HEIs. Secondly, parents encouraged children to seek peer support for explanation and understanding. 80 % of parents encouraged peer learning among their children. From a pedagogical perspective, peer learning is seen as a more productive approach and learning strategy. In addition, 71.3% of parents claimed they discuss EMI issues with their children at home, while only a marginal percentage (11.3%) did not discuss the issues at home with their children. Regarding the second category of parental assistance, parents contacted other stakeholders of their children's education, such as teachers, private educational institutes, and private tutors. The class teacher is a prominent stakeholder of



education. More than a half of parent (67%) inquired class teachers directly about their child's progress. In line with the parents' involvement with education stakeholders, 69.5% and 56.8% of parents had registered the child in a private institute and hired a private tutor respectively for extra support. Zero parental assistance in coping with the challenges related to EMI implementation at HEIs is due to some valid reasons. For example, 45.7% of parents contended that the child's maturity level does not require their assistance. However, exactly half of the parents (50%) deny this, and they opined that they should assist the child despite the satisfactory maturity level. In this vein, 38.2% of parents hold the college responsible for the availability of effective platforms or communication channels to inform parents about their children's progress. However, 34.8% refuted this claim. Interestingly, 41.7% of parents did not assist their children, as they did not feel qualified enough. However, the same percentage of parents disagreed with the statement. Findings revealed 53% of parents believe that their assistance is not necessary on the premise that teachers know more about their students. Nonetheless, 39.5% of respondents denied this.

In short, parents in this study assisted their children through direct assistance by encouraging their children to learn the language through translating English materials into first language (L1), encouraging peer learning, and engaging in direct discussions with their children about issues caused by EMI. Parent also extended their indirect support by contacting the teacher to inquire about the child's progress and registering their child at a private institution, or hiring a private tutor for extra help. Based on the findings, parents' assistance could depend on parents' perception about child's maturity, parents' qualifications, and effectiveness of college communication methods about their child's progress. Meanwhile, a considerable majority claimed that they did not need to assist their children, as teachers know better about their children.

Table 2. *How parents help their children to cope with these challenges*

Types of Assistance	Details of the Assistance	Percentage Agreed	Percentage Disagreed
<b>Direct Assistance</b>	• Encourage translation into Arabic	<b>90.5%</b>	<b>6.1%</b>
	• Encourage peer support	<b>80%</b>	<b>7.8%</b>
	• Discuss issues with the children	<b>71.3%</b>	<b>11.3%</b>
<b>Indirect Assistance</b>	• Inquire the class teacher about the child's progress	<b>67%</b>	<b>29.6%</b>
	• Enroll the child at a private educational institute for extra support	<b>69.5%</b>	<b>25.3%</b>
	• Hire a private tutor	<b>56.8%</b>	<b>39.5%</b>
<b>Zero Assistance</b>	• Maturity level of the child	<b>45.7%</b>	<b>50%</b>
	• College's facilities to inform about the child's progress	<b>38.2%</b>	<b>34.8%</b>
	• Lack of qualifications	<b>41.7%</b>	<b>41.7%</b>
	• Responsibility of teachers	<b>53%</b>	<b>39.5%</b>

Figure 2 illustrates parents' perspectives on the advantages of implementing EMI at HEIs. There are four advantages: social empowerment, higher studies, job prospectus, and language proficiency. A staggering majority of parents acknowledged the above advantages that EMI could bring to their children. Majority viewed higher studies (93%), job prospectus (87.9) as the key benefits of EMI. Meanwhile, (85%) identified language proficiency as another critical benefit of EMI at HEIs. At the same time, only a negligible percentage (7.1%) viewed

otherwise. However, regarding the social empowerment embedded in the language, 68.5% of parents acknowledged social mobility attributable to proficiency in the English language. In comparison, 19.55% did not believe in the social empowerment associated with the EMI.

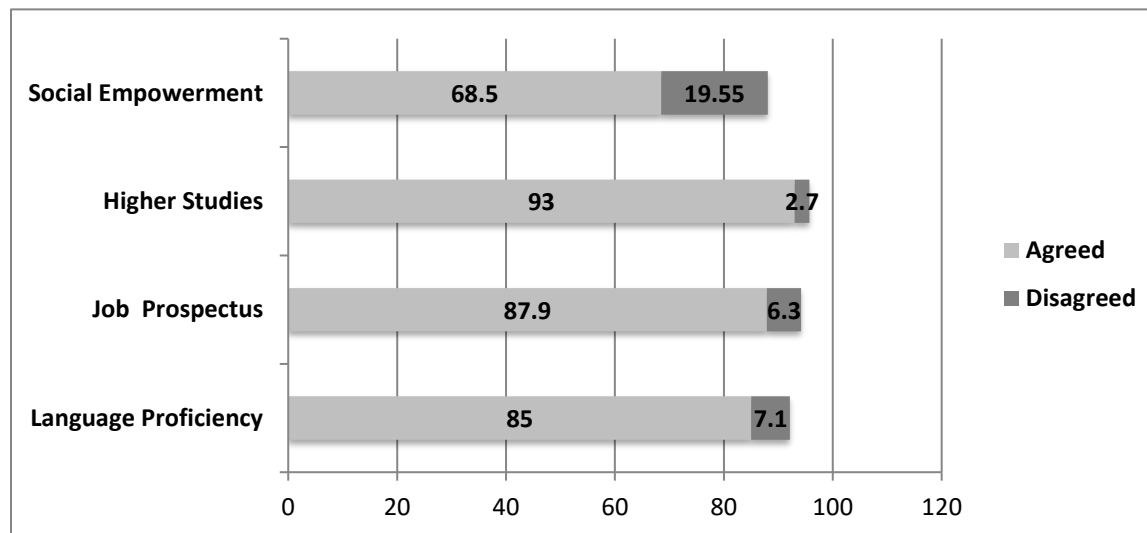


Figure 2. Advantages of implementing EMI at HEIs in Oman from parents' perspective  
 The questionnaire next focused on the potential disadvantages of implementing EMI at HEIs. The questionnaire inquired into four disadvantages. For instance, the influence of EMI on the L1 (Arabic), time consumption, identity, and low proficiency and the impact on students' grades included as the potential drawbacks of the implementation of EMI. Over a half of parents (51.8%) viewed that EMI would cause lower proficiency and grades, while only 26.1% believed otherwise. Nearly half of the participants, 46.9%, viewed that students will have to spend more time adapting to EMI. Meanwhile, 44.6% of parents denied that EMI has a negative influence on L1. Only 31.3 % opined that EMI negatively affects their L1. As of identity, 27.4% believed that EMI affects students' identity as Arab students.

All in all, time consumption and lower proficiency are the most concerning potential disadvantages of EMI application. However, implementing proper strategies to overcome the challenges identified in the research and different pedagogical approaches, such as promoting independent learning could effectively address these disadvantages.

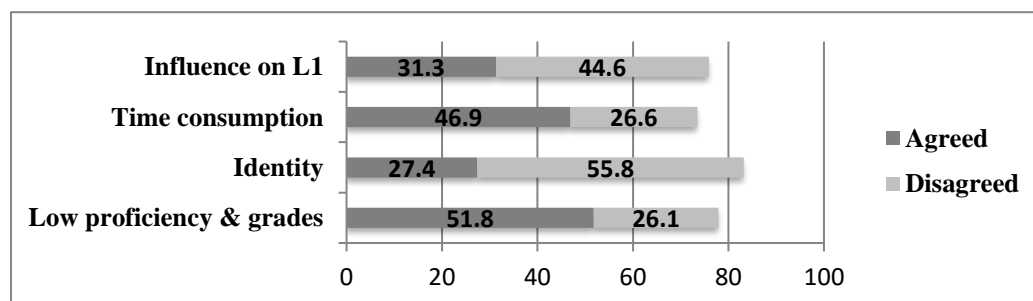


Figure 3. The drawbacks of implementing EMI at higher education institutions in Oman from parents' perceptions

## Discussion

This study examined parents' perspectives towards using EMI in HEIs in the sultanate of Oman. An overwhelming majority of parents displayed favorable attitudes towards implementing EMI in HEIs in Oman since it is the language of science and technology, their children must study their college courses in English. Moreover, most-parents in this study were pleased that their children studied their academic programmes in English and believed that it is appropriate to implement EMI at HEIs in Oman for some attributes of the language. First, Omani society recognizes the crucial role of English in "academic prosperity, future careers, and personal gains" (Alazemi, 2017, p.229).

Moreover, mastering English is one of the criteria for getting a white color job in Oman; parents realize that learning through English will open ample opportunities for their children's employment. In other words, Omani parents "acknowledged the international status of the English language and its important role in global communication, development, and employment" (Al Bakri, 2013, p. 61). However, approximately half of the parents asserted that their children's English is insufficient to cope with EMI.

Therefore, there is a demand to overcome students' struggles at HEIs in Oman by modifying EMI policy and adopting bilingual education since parents in this study prefer it. 82% of them believed that at least some programmes should be conducted in Arabic at HEIs in Oman, and students in other studies too shared similar views (Ismail, 2011; Al Bakri, 2013; Alazemi, 2017). Unfortunately, bilingual education is "rarely if ever on the agenda and discussed in the Arab World" (Ismail, 2011, p.242).

Regarding parents' opinions about some of the challenges encountered by their children due to EMI policy, the findings reveal that over half of participants believe that their children have a lower level of English proficiency that could lead to a lack of understanding of their course materials and negatively affects their academic performance. Also, apprehension caused by fear of making mistakes is seen as another potential constraint in implementing EMI at HEIs. At the same time, parents identify challenges specific to some language skills like technical vocabulary and writing. In recent years, the Omani government and educationalists have expressed serious concerns about the low English proficiency among students at HEIs. Researchers have expressed many reasons for this, including teacher-centered instruction, teachers' use of traditional methods, students' lack of motivation, and students' reliance on memorization (Al-Badwawi, 2011; Al Issa, 2015; AL-Jadidi, 2009; Ismail, 2011).

Regarding how parents helped their children cope with EMI, the parents in this study asserted they assisted their children through direct assistance by encouraging them to learn the language and translating English materials into L1. Al Bakri's findings (2013) in a similar vein revealed that students depend totally on digitally translating the reading materials due to a lack of understanding texts in English.

Parent also extended their indirect support by contacting the teacher to inquire about the child's progress and registering their child at a private institution, or hiring a private tutor for extra help. According to Al-Issa (2010), parents in Oman who can afford the fees of private institutions and private tutoring do not hesitate to enroll their students to help their children cope

with the demands of English. However, these fees are considered high and can reach \$25 per hour (Al-Issa, 2010, p.184). In addition, the results show that parents believe that HEIs lacked such programs that kept parents informed about their children's progress.

The study shows that almost half of the parents believed that teachers know better than the parents; thus, they did not get involved in their children's studies. Al-Harrasi and Al-Mahrooqi (2014) also viewed that "most Omani parents seem to be affected by the cultural notion that teachers are knowledge authorities" (p.282)

When talking about the advantages of implementing EMI at HEIs, the majority of the participants believed that one benefit of EMI is finding a job. Al Mahrooqi (2012) also revealed that students' knowledge of English offers advantages in seeking good jobs. In Oman, most private and public sectors will not offer candidates the job if they have low English proficiency despite their competencies in their subjects. Another advantage of EMI from parents' perspectives is that EMI helped students improve their English proficiency. A common belief in the Gulf is that students can improve their English language skills while studying in their degree programs via EMI (Ismail, 2011; Al Bakri, 2013; Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2014; Alazemi, 2017). Another key advantage of EMI from parents' perspectives is that children look more prestigious if they learn their courses in English. Abdel-Jawad and Abu Radwan (2011) claimed "English has been perceived as a symbol of prestige and an assertion of a superior social status" (p.130). In the same vein, Al Bakri (2013) found that students in her study believed that learning via EMI makes students sound prestigious and well-educated. This phenomenon is not only in Oman but also in other Gulf countries (Alazemi, 2017; Habbash and Troudi, 2015; Al-Jarf, 2008), Turkey (Nurlu, 2015), and Korea (Kim, 2011). Indeed, English has become the means to maintain power and social status in different parts of the world. According to Pennycook (2001), English has "become one of the most powerful means of inclusion into or exclusion from further education, employment or social positions" (p. 81).

Even though parents have expressed positive sides of implementing EMI, some parents are concerned about potential drawbacks. For instance, half of the parents believed that their students get low grades due to the EMI policy at HEIs. Also, almost half of the parents agreed that their children would get a higher grade if they studied in Arabic and students do not fully understand their lectures in English, which would negatively affect their academic progression and grade. This finding is consistent with literature from Oman (Al Bakri, 2017; Isamil, 2011), Kuwait (Alazemi, 2017); UAE ( Troudi & Julndani, 2011), Saudi Arabia (Habbash and Troudi, 2015), Turkey (Nurlu, 2015) and Korea (Kim, 2011). Another frequent drawback of EMI is the ability of students to use Arabic. This corresponds to Al-Qhatani's study (2016), which found that although Saudi parents preferred EMI, they feared that EMI has negatively impacted their children's ability to use Arabic. Regarding the effects on their children's identity, the majority of the parents thought that their children's identity would not be affected by using EMI.

### **Recommendations**

The current study revealed that most parents perceive the importance of English as the language of sciences, technology, and employment. However, most parents prefer Arabic as the medium of instruction to teach at least some courses at HEIs, and Student participants share similar perspectives in other studies (Al Bakri, 2013; Ismail, 2011; Alazemi, 2017). Therefore, this study

recommends that bilingual education where HEIs afford their programs both in Arabic and English. Such a program could "enriched, sustained forms of instruction that allow [students] to receive support in their first language while learning a second language" (Thomas & Collier, 2003, p. 64). Implementation of bilingual education could be challenging, as it requires many amendments to the current EMI policy, including the syllabus, teachers, and assessments, among others. The Omani government has been heavily funding the education sector for almost three decades to raise students' proficiency in English via purchasing textbooks and equipment, bringing consultants, hiring teachers, and helping English language conferences and symposiums, yet the outcomes remain below expectations.

Therefore, based on parents' and students' perceptions of EMI, effective strategies should be investigated and implemented to streamline EMI at HEI's. This initiative will help overcome obstacles that both students and parents encounter under EMI to a greater extent. Also, further research on EMI in the Gulf region and other contexts, where English is taught as a foreign language, can be carried out to figure out the gaps and opportunities of EMI in the Omani contexts. One can also look into the feasibility of introducing EMI in secondary education, which would be easier to implement the studies in the HEIs. The research findings reveal that a significant proportion of the respondents receive EMI in favorable terms. Parents' positive attitude towards EMI could be utilised effectively to increase parents' involvement in promoting EMI at HEI's.

This study also recommends that HEIs should make ensure that they are equipped with programs that encourage parents to contact their children's progress. With the development in technology, HEIs can easily benefit from Web 2.0 tools such as *Edmodo* to keep parents informed about their children's performance and get more involved in their education. Such involvement can have a powerful impact on student's academic progress in HEIs. In addition, consistent examination of the parents' satisfaction with these programs and their participation in the HEIs can be helpful to look for ways to develop it and maximize their involvement.

The study found that almost half of the parents believed that teachers know better than the parents. Therefore, Al-Harrasi and Al-Mahrooqi (2014), recommend that the HEIs in the Sultanate of Oman should work hard to "reform the image of the teacher in parents' minds and let them understand that the role of the teacher has changed nowadays with the existence of technology" (p.283). In other words, parents should realize that teachers are no longer the only resource of knowledge, and parents could cooperate with teachers to achieve the purpose of the HEIs. According to Maluleke (2014), parents' awareness on the teacher's role and the role played by modern technology in language education can be enhanced through conducting regular meetings with parents or sending letters, text messages to them to find out ways to optimize and flourish students' learning experience in HEIs. Further research to explore views of parents, administrators, and policymakers on implementing bilingual education in HEIs in the sultanate and the steps required for this pragmatic shift. More research on perceptions of different education stakeholders on effective mechanisms and strategies to overcome the issues encountered in EMI is required. Research in this area could potentially enhance the quality of EMI at HEI's and minimize the potential obstacles that EMI could create. The current research sample consists of 117 parents. However, involving more parents representing all the HEIs in

Oman would demonstrate a more solid and broader perspective on the implementation of EMI at HEIs in Oman.

### Conclusion

The study explored parents' perspective towards using EMI in an Omani university through the administration of a 40-item questionnaire among 117 parents who had children studying at HEIs. The findings revealed that the majority of participants demonstrated positive attitudes towards implementing EMI in HEIs in Oman. Yet, about half of the parents admitted that their children's English is insufficient to cope with EMI policies implemented in HEIs. Therefore, most of the parents in this study preferred to have some courses taught in Arabic. The findings also revealed that parents helped their children by sending them to private institutions to improve their English, advising them to translate their learning materials into Arabic, encouraging them to seek peer support. Although this is a small-scale study, it contributes to the literature that examines parents' perspectives on the implementation of EMI at HEI's. However, further research is needed to deeply investigate parents' perceptions of EMI by implementing qualitative research. In addition, more research is ideal to study students' perspectives on their parents' involvement and its effects on their academic achievement. Further research can focus on elements of successful involvement of parents in their children's higher education.

### About the Author;

**Thuraya Khalifa Al-Riyami** has experience in English Language Teaching for more than 19 years. She earned her Master's Degree from Ohio University, USA, in Applied Linguistics and her Ph.D. in Education from the University of Exeter, UK. She has published several research papers in local, regional, and international refereed academic journals and has participated in several international conferences worldwide. Her research interests include critical pedagogy, critical thinking, learners' identity, and language communication skills. ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9710-4580>

**Chinthana Sandaruwan Dayananda** is an English language educator with over a decade of experience in a variety of contexts in Sri Lanka and Oman. He holds an MA in Linguistics from Sri Lanka and a CELTA certificate. He is currently based at University of Technology & Applied Sciences, Oman. His research interests are learner autonomy, distance education, and communication skills. ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2645-9613>

### References

- Alazemi, A. (2017). *Teaching of academic subjects in English and the challenges Kuwaiti students face* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Exeter, UK.
- Abdel-Jawad, H. R. & Abu Radwan, A. S. (2011). The status of English in institutions of higher education in Oman: Sultan Qaboos University as a model. In A. Al-Issa and L.S. Dahan (Eds.), *Global English and Arabic: Issues of language, culture and identity* (pp.123-151). Oxford: Peter Lang.
- Al-Badwawi, H. (2011). *The perceptions and practices of first year students' academic writing at the colleges of Applied Sciences in Oman* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Leeds, UK.
- Al-Bakri, S. (2017). *Effects of English medium instruction on students' learning*

- experiences and quality of education in content courses in a public college in Oman* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Exeter, UK.
- Al-Bakri, S. (2013). Problematizing English medium instruction in Oman. *International Journal of Bilingual and Multilingual Teachers of English*, 207(1172), 1-15.
- Al-Barwani, T. A., Albeely, T. S., & Al-Suleimani, H. (2012). Parental involvement in higher education in Oman. *Journal Pendidikan Malaysia*, 37(1), 13-24.
- Al Hajri, F. (2013). *An evaluation of the effectiveness and predictive validity of English language assessment in two colleges of Applied Sciences in Oman* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Edinburgh, UK.
- Al-Harrasi, S., & Al-Mahrooqi, R. (2014). Investigating Omani parents' involvement in their children's schooling. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, 117(2), 272-286.
- Al-Ghatrifi, Y. (2006). *An Investigation into the English Teachers' Perceptions of the PRIT Course in the Sultanate of Oman* (Master's thesis). University of Leeds, UK.
- Al-Issa, A. (2010). Factors influencing critical thinking in the ELT context. In R. Al Mahrooqi & V. Tuzlukova (Eds.), *The Omani ELT symphony: Maintaining linguistic and socio-cultural equilibrium* (pp. 169-202). Sultan Qaboos University, Oman.
- Al-Issa, A. S. (2014). A Critical examination of motivation in the Omani English language education system. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 5(2), 406-418.
- Al-Issa, A. (2015). Making a case for new directions in English language teaching research at an Omani university: A critical qualitative content analysis report. *The Qualitative Report*, 20(5), 560-595.
- Al-Jadidi, H. S. (2009). *Teaching English as a foreign language in Oman: an exploration of English language teaching pedagogy in tertiary education*. (Doctoral dissertation). Victoria University, Australia.
- Al-Jarf, R. (2008). The impact of English as an international language (EIL) upon Arabic in Saudi Arabia. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(4).
- Al-Jardani, K. S. (2015). The need for bridging the gap between general and tertiary education in Oman. *English Linguistics Research*, 4(2), 45-48
- Al-Lamki, S. (2006). The development of private higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: Perception and analysis. *International Journal of Private Education*, 1, 54-77.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R. (2012). A student perspective on low English proficiency in Oman. *International Education Studies*, 5 (6), 263-271.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., & Denman, C. (Eds.). (2014). *Issues in English education in the Arab world*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R. & Tuzlukova, V. (2014). English communication skills and employability in the Arabian Gulf: the case of Oman. *Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences & Humanities* 22 (2), 473 – 488.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R & Denman, C. (2016). Proficiency and communicative competence in English and employability in the Arabian Gulf. In R. Al-Mahrooqi & C. Denman (Eds.), *Bridging the gap between education and employment: English language instruction in EFL contexts* (pp.389-409). New York: Peter Lang.
- Al-Mahrooqi, R., Denman, C., & Al-Maamari, F. (2016). Omani parents' involvement in their children's English education. *Sage Open*, 6(1), 1-12.
- Al-Qhatani, Z. (2016). Saudi parents' attitudes towards using English as a medium of instruction in private primary schools. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics & English Literature*. 5 (1), p. 18-32.

- Al Shmeli, S. H. (2011). Higher education in the Sultanate of Oman: Catching up rapidly. In M. Martin & M. Bray (Eds.), *Tertiary education in small states: Planning in the context of globalization* (181-191). IIEP Policy Forum: UNESCO publications. Retrieved from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0021/002121/212196E.pdf>
- Belhiah, H. & Elhami, M. (2014). English as a medium of instruction in the Gulf: When students and teachers speak. *Language Policy*, 14 (1), p. 3-23
- Block, D. & D. Cameron (eds.) (2002). *Globalization and language teaching*. New York: Routledge
- Ceka, A., & Murati, R. (2016). The Role of Parents in the Education of Children. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 7(5), 61-64.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English As A Global Language*. 2nd Ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Findlow, S. (2006). Higher education and linguistic dualism in the Arab Gulf. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*. 27 (1), p. 19-36.
- Habbash, M. & Troudi, S. (2015). The Discourse of Global English and its Representation in the Saudi Context: A Postmodernist Critical Perspective. In Raddawi, R. (Ed.). *Intercultural Communication with Arabs*. 57-75
- Ismail, A. (2011). *Language planning in Oman: Evaluating linguistic and sociolinguistic fallacies* (Doctoral dissertation). Newcastle University, UK.
- Khan, S. (2011). *Factors Affecting the Motivation of Expatriate English as a Foreign Language (EFL) Teachers in the Sultanate of Oman* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Exeter, UK.
- Kim, K. R. (2011). Korean professor and student perceptions of the efficacy of English-medium instruction. *Linguistic Research*. 28 (3), p. 711-741.
- Maluleke, S.G. (2014). *Parent involvement in their children's education in the Vhembe district, Limpopo*. Unpublished (Med dissertation) Pretoria: University of South Africa.
- Nurlu, M. (2015). EMI in Turkish universities. *Modern English Teacher*. 24 (2), p. 12-14.
- Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pessoa, S., & Rajakumar, M. (2011). The impact of English-medium higher education: The case of Qatar. *Global English and Arabic: Issues of language, culture, and identity*, 153-178.
- Shoup, R., Gonyea, R. M., & Kuh, G. D. (2009, June). Helicopter parents: Examining the impact of highly involved parents on student engagement and educational outcomes. In *49th Annual Forum of the Association for Institutional Research, Atlanta, Georgia*. Retrieved from <http://cpr.iub.edu/uploads/AIR> (Vol. 202009).
- Simmons, A. N. (2008). A reliable sounding board: Parent involvement in students' academic and career decision making. *NACADA Journal*, 28(2), 33-43.
- Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2003). The multiple benefits of dual language. *Educational Leadership*, 61(2), 61-61.
- Troudi, S, & Jendli, A. (2011). Emirati students' experiences of English as a medium of instruction. In Al-Issa, A. & Dahan, L. S. (eds). *Global English: Issues of language, culture, and identity in the Arab world*. Oxford: Peter Lang Publishers