EMI policy in the Saudi transnational higher education landscape: A case study of BSc Statistics teachers and students

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Abstract

Taking as an example one of the Saudi HE institutions, here given the pseudonym of Sun University (S.U.), this study examines EMI policy in a BSc in Statistics program from the perspectives of both teachers and students. Through document analysis and interviews, the study explores: the goals of the EMI program at S.U.; the forms of policy measures taken by the university to realize its goals; and the everyday experiences of the teachers of statistics and the students within the program. The findings have revealed that there is a connection between language goals / ideology, management and practices in SU's EMI program. Such a connection is reactive to the recent national level of transnational HE policy direction which emphasizes trans/internationalization at-home programs. Nevertheless, it was also found that there is an obvious gap between the support provided by SU's EMI policy and the everyday pedagogical needs of the individual stakeholders (i.e., the teachers and the students). This gap not only hinders the attainment of SU's EMI policy goals, but also exposes the ambiguities of TNHE (Transnational Higher Education) in the Saudi context.

1. Introduction

"Language policies generally seek to establish, regulate, and conform linguistic practices – whether explicit or implicit – that occur within an 'authorized' domain"; at the same time, "there are multiple levels (societal, institutional, and interpersonal) at which such policies are enacted" in a given social

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and educational setting (De Costa et al, 2020, p.1). What is of interest in this paper is why and how such policies are enacted at multiple levels in response to the growing phenomenon of English medium instruction (EMI) programs in the context of the Saudi higher education institution (HE), a site rarely studied in the current research literature.

Today, the EMI policy has been enacted at multiple levels in different geographical locations. But what does EMI mean? What are the driving forces behind the increasing implementation of EMI in HE across the world?

EMI broadly connotes "the use of the English language to teach academic subjects (other than English itself) in countries or jurisdictions where the first language of the majority of the population is not English" (Macaro et al, 2017, p. 37). Saudi Arabia (SA) is one such context: Arabic is the first and official language of its population whereas English is used as a foreign language (EFL) "to teach academic subjects other than English itself" at HE level, as I elaborate in a later section of this paper. Fundamental to the accelerating adoption of EMI in HE institutions worldwide including those of SA is that EMI is construed "by national governments as an important strategy to gain access to cutting-edge knowledge and enhance national competitiveness in innovation and knowledge production" (Hu, Li & Lei, 2014, p. 22). With generous financial and logistic supports from their respective governments, HE institutions across the world are using EMI policies in order to "increase individual and national competitiveness" (Huang, 2018, p. 436) in the global market; to attract local/international students, faculty members, and researchers (i.e., internationalization); to generate revenues for their academic programs; and to increase the rankings/ prestige of their universities in the global market (Barnawi, 2018; Piller & Cho 2013; Tupas, 2018). I take the position that these economically charged agendas and practices of EMI in HE institutions mean that "for the first time in recorded history *all* the known world has a shared second language of advanced education" (Brumfit, 2004, p. 166, italics in original). Indeed, the categorization of EMI as 'a universal second language' is questionable. Yet, it is axiomatic to argue that today EMI programs in HE institutions have been gathering momentum in a range of geographical locations, including Asia, Africa, Latin America, and Europe (see for example, Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, & Walkinshaw, 2017; Marco et al 2017; Sert, 2008; Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). Compared to the aforementioned geographical locations, Saudi Arabia is a newcomer to EMI in the contemporary transnational HE market. The notion of TNHE here is characterized by importing trans/international curricula, programs, course books and teaching materials, syllabi, teachers, consultants, and accreditations into EMI programs to gain global outlook and maximize financial profit (Barnawi, 2018; De Costa et al, 2020; Phan, 2016). Concretely, under Saudi Arabia's recent TNHE policy direction, little is known about the operations, orientation, and practices of EMI from the actual experiences of students and teachers: we do not yet know what effects EMI has on teachers and students in their everyday practices in the Saudi TNHE context. Given the countless sociocultural, economic, political, linguistic, and educational differences between Saudi Arabia and the other EFL countries (e.g., China, Japan, Singapore, Turkey) that are currently adopting EMI, it is imperative to investigate how

the Saudi-based findings of EMI programs could contribute to the existing research literature on EMI in TNHE contexts.

In what follows, I pinpoint EMI policies in the contemporary global HE market. I then explore the connection between EMI policies and TNHE, with the intentions of unpacking key concepts such as trans/internationalization and Englishization in the contemporary global HE market. After that I present the status of EMI policy in the Saudi TNHE context. Next, taking one of the Saudi HE institutions, given the pseudonym of Sun University (S.U.), as an example of a qualitative case, I examine how five teachers and four students engage with EMI in a B.Sc. program in statistics. Concretely, in this paper I address three research questions:

- RQ 1: What are the goals of EMI at SU both in general and in the BSc program in statistics in particular?

- RQ 2: What forms of policy measure have been taken in order to operate EMI in the statistics program? How do teachers and students view these policy measures?

- RQ 3: What forms of classroom pedagogical practices were adopted in the program? Why? How did both teachers and students view those classroom pedagogical practices in their everyday reality?

2.   Literature review

2.1   Understanding EMI in the contemporary global HE market

As stated earlier, EMI generally refers to 'the teaching of academic subjects in the English language in non-English-dominant countries' (e.g., Barnawi, 2018; Dearden 2015; Tupas, 2018; Phan, 2016). Nevertheless, as scholars like Baker and Huttner (2017), as well as Block and Moncada-Comas (2019), argue, we should recall that there are three different kinds of EMI program in the contemporary HE landscape. These three programs are summarized by Block and Moncada-Comas (2019, p. 2) as follows:

(1) student-mobility programs, which include the reception and incorporation of students from a range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds, leading to the emergence of multiple, novel varieties of English (e.g. Englishes as lingua francas); (2) … 'internationalization at home' programs, where it is the curriculum for local students that is internationalized and this curriculum is delivered in locally emergent Englishes; and (3) Anglophone-context programs, which … would not be EMI programs, in the strictest sense of the term, even if the internationalization of HE has brought with it the culturally and linguistically diverse populations and the emergent new varieties of English that characterize program type.

Together, the above three distinct categories suggest the reality that EMI programs have multiple dimensions and complexities that need to be critically unearthed and analyzed in order to better

understand the role that different orientations and practices play in EMI classrooms in different geographical locations. In this regard, Dafouz and Smit (2016) postulate a "ROADMAPPING framework" consisting of components that can be utilized to unearth and analyze the multiple dimensions and complexities of EMI programs in action.

Their six components are:

(1) EMI is not a monolingual practice; instead, it is construed as part of a wider multilingual environment; (2) there should be academic disciplines on EMI in practice; (3) "the who-what-where-why-when-and-how of the management of language and content in the EMI curriculum" (Block & Moncada-Comas, 2019, p. 2); (4) the different players involved in EMI programs; (5) the orientation, processes and practices of EMI; and (6) the wider material conditions under which the EMI is operating (i.e., the global HE market, trans/internationalization discourses, and Englishization of HE). Collectively, the aforementioned different categories of EMI programs have increased the investigations and publications on EMI programs in different HE settings and contexts (see, for example, Barnawi, 2021a; De Costa et al., 2020; Murata 2018; Wachter and Maiworm 2014). When EMI in a given HE context takes place, it is usually part of a wider neoliberally driven transnationalization policy taken by a university. According to De Costa et al. (2020), EMI is enabled through transnational HE policies/practices. Therefore, EMI policies need to be situated within the broader context of TNHE, where EMI is construed as a neoliberal aspect of TNHE processes. In the following section, I unpack these issues.

2.2 EMI and TNHE contexts

Neoliberalism broadly means the "philosophy of sustaining entrepreneurial and competition-seeking practices under the umbrella of free markets" (Phan & Barnawi, 2015, p. 546). Under the guise of sociopolitical and economic liberty, neoliberalism encourages relentless competition, free market ideologies, profit-generation, individualization, flexibility, self-branding, self-interest, accountability, privatization, efficiency, and consumerism (see, for instance, Barnawi, 2018; Block, Gray & Holborow, 2013). EMI programs are aspects of neoliberally-driven transnational HE policies and practices. As Phan (2016) convincingly argues,

In creating their own programs, [HE institutions in different geographical locations] often draw on existing programs, materials, course syllabi, and lectures from other English-medium programs developed elsewhere. They also invite academics from other institutions to offer advice concerning the shape content of their programs and curricula, and some institutions also contract a group of international academic and advisor to develop English medium programs that are internationally competitive (p. 7).

Such transnational HE policies and practices are evident in countries such as South Korea (Piller & Cho, 2013), China (Li, 2009), Japan (Huang, 2012), Singapore (De Costa, 2010), Nigeria (Iroegbu & Maxwell, 2017) and Vietnam (Phan, 2016), to name a few. Today, under the banner of neoliberalization and globalization, HE institutions in different parts of the world are aggressively competing among themselves to promote their global outlook, generate revenues, attract international academics and students into their programs, and compete in the global ranking system (De Costa et al., 2020; Phan & Barnawi, 2015). These EMI policies and practices are often required by global ranking systems such as the Times Higher Education World University, Quacquarelli Symonds Limited (QS) World University Rankings, and the Academic Ranking of World Universities. These ranking bodies often allocate points to the numbers of: international students, EMI courses offered, international teachers, publications and the like. As De Costa et al. (2020) state, "placement in these rankings brings prestige and monetary gain to both the universities and the nation hosting the institution; thus … an institutional interest also becomes a national one" (p. 3). Such neoliberally-driven EMI policies in transnational HE institutions are meant to provide economic benefits to society in a given context, "due to competitive goods and services" (De Costa et al, 2020, p. 2). Nevertheless, neoliberalism generates various challenges and social inequalities to EFL learners and even restricts their choices through the guise of political liberty (Holborow, 2012). In their oft-cited study *Neoliberalism as Language Policy*, Piller and Cho (2013) reported that neoliberally-oriented EMI policies taken up by universities in South Korea, including competition for global rankings trans/internationalization of academic programs and the like, have restricted the academic freedom of teachers as well as students at the expense of TNHE policy and practice. This suggests that, as Holborow (2012, p. 32) argues, "the tensions and the relationship between neoliberalism and applied linguistics [including English in EMI] ... is best described in terms of how [such a neoliberal] ideology makes its appearance in language". I agree with the point made by De Costa et al. (2020) that "this neoliberal ideology that undergirds higher education is overlooked, and thus warrants further applied linguistic investigation … because English becomes both the driver and vehicle through which neoliberal impulses are realized. Put differently, the powerful role that English plays in advancing this hidden neoliberal ideology regrettably often goes unnoticed" (De Costa et al. 2020, p.2).

In the next section I present the status of EMI policy in the Saudi TNHE context. Then I introduce the research site, the research design and the participants in the study.

3. The rise of EMI policy in the Saudi TNHE context

Although the English language has been taught as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia since the foundation of its education system, including HE, back in 1926, the teaching of academic subjects, other than English itself, in English across local universities officially began only in 2005. From that point,

with generous financial and logistic support from the government, all local universities introduced a foundation year (also called a preparatory year program) aiming to prepare students for their EMI programs (Barnawi, 2021b). Since then, HE policy reforms across the country have led to what Brutt-Griffler (2002) describes as the "macro-acquisition of English", rendering it a medium of instruction in the Saudi HE system. The foundation year program has led local universities to recruit hundreds of English language teachers from Asia, Africa, North America, Australia, and Europe to meet the ever-increasing demand for language teachers across the country. It was also during this time that international commercial publishers such as Pearson Longman, Oxford University Press, Cambering University Press, McGraw Hill, World English and others invaded the Saudi HE market with their various products, goods, services (e.g., textbooks, exams, CDs, DVDs, teacher's manuals, online materials, after-sales training programs). The King Abdallah Scholarship Overseas Program, introduced in 2005, has also allowed thousands of Saudi students and their families to complete their degrees overseas, in locations such as North America, Australia, Europe, Asia and the UK. The Saudi Vision 2030, introduced in 2016, demands that local universities compete in the global ranking system and aim to be among the top 200 universities in the world. This top-down policy direction has created fierce competition among local universities, in that internationalization of their academic programs, international accreditation, building partnerships with Western universities, getting publications into top-ranked journals, and full EMI degrees have become their top priorities. In early 2020, the government also announced a New University Law that allowed foreign universities to open branch campus across the country. The primary goal of this New University Law is, according to the government, to increase competition among HE institutions and boost their global outlook (See, Barnawi, 2018/2021, for detailed discussions on these issues).

Recent socio-economic and technological transformations, and projects such as Neom City (which focuses on building world-class smart city technologies), the Red Sea Project (which focuses on global tourism), and Qiddiya (a global entertainment megaproject) have not only attracted an international workforce into the country and made English the language of labor, but they have also "helped create the necessary conditions for the present-day dominance" of the EMI policy across local universities (Barnawi, 2018, p. 55). This neoliberal EMI policy, in the end, has resulted in Saudi TNHE institutions having to be involved in the preparation of their linguistically competent students for the demands of the job market. It is under the aforementioned conditions that that the neoliberal EMI policy is now alive and kicking in the Saudi TNHE market. English has become the language of the job market for Saudis. English language has become "an element of human capital, in the acquisition of which individual actors may have a good reason to invest" (Grin, 2001, p. 66). That is, as Codó (2018, p. 71) describes, "contemporary labor is linguistic, and language is contemporary labor".

The above conditions have combined to create what Kedzierski (2016, 379) describes as "the crystallisation of a shift in educational philosophy – a shift from pedagogical to market values. By placing economic imperatives at the centre of education policy, including language-in-education policy,

this reasoning reflects an understanding of education as human capital formation", and although his point relates to East Asia this is also the case in the Saudi TNHE market. According to Baker and Huttner's (2017) three distinct forms of EMI program discussed earlier, it is important to note that EMI policy in the Saudi TNHE context fall under the category of "internationalization at home programs". That is, local curricula are internationalized and delivered in English. This is also evident in the case of SU as shown below.

4. Research site: Sun University and its commitment to neoliberal EMI policy

This study was conducted at one of the largest Saudi public universities, given the pseudonym of Sun University (S.U.), located in the western region of the country. It is listed as one of the top 200 universities in the QS World University Rankings. Its academic programs are accredited by top international accreditation bodies such as the Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET) and the Accreditation Council for Business Schools and Programs (ACBSP). English is the medium of instruction across the university, except for Arabic Language and Islamic studies. The university has about 82,152 students, both male and female. It offers Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees and Doctorate Degrees in all disciplines including Bachelor of Science (B.Sc.) in Statistics, the focus of this study. All students admitted into the university have to successfully complete their foundation year program, which consists of four levels of Intensive English for Academic Purposes, before joining their specialized programs.

The BSc in Statistics aims to "graduate statistical specialists who can serve both public and private sectors' organizations with their requirements that involve dealing with data and information to enable them to accomplish their mission, objectives, and support them in the process of decision-making" (Sun University, 2021). 'Professionalism, 'leadership' and 'life experience and scientific advancement' are the key characteristics of the statistics program identified by the university. The program has both local and international faculty members from Asia, neighboring Arab countries, and North America. International textbooks and materials from McGraw Hill, Wiley, and Pearson Education are widely used across the program. Taken together, the above snapshot of SU shows its strong commitment to the neoliberal EMI policy in the contemporary Saudi transnational HE context.

5. Methodology

This study used a qualitative case study in order to gain insights into both students and teachers experiences of EMI policy in a real-life context (Yin, 2003). Concretely, it attempts to address the following research questions, as presented earlier:

- RQ 1: What are the goals of EMI at S.U., both in general and in the BSc program in statistics in particular?

- RQ 2: What forms of policy measure have been taken in order to operate EMI in the statistics program? How do teachers and students view these policy measures?

- RQ 3: What forms of classroom pedagogical practices were adopted in the program? Why? How did both teachers and students view those classroom pedagogical practices in their everyday reality?

A qualitative case study is often used to gain "an in-depth exploration from multiple perspectives of the complexity and uniqueness of a particular project, policy, institution, program [EMI program in the case of this study] or system in a 'real life' situation" (Simons, 2009, p. 21). The 'what', 'why', and 'how' posited in the above research questions are fundamental elements of the case study approach (Yin, 2003). The case study is a approach useful in analyzing complex phenomena such as the EMI policy in a TNHE context from a range of individual viewpoints. Importantly, this approach helps to identify the commonalities and differences related to EMI experiences among individuals or groups in a given social and educational context. Furthermore, a case study is relevant when "a variety of evidence from different sources, such as documents [and] interviews [as in the case of this study] is used to analyze a complex phenomenon" (Rowley, 2002, p. 17). Crucially, a qualitative case study allows us to benefit from what Yin (2003, p. 14) refers to as "the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis''. In this study, Dafouz and Smit's (2016) 'ROADMAPPING framework', consisting of six components, presented earlier, guided my inquiry into EMI policy in the Saudi TNHE context. Throughout my data analysis and discussions, I shall flesh out, to different degrees, the six components of their roadmapping that need to be considered when investigating EMI policies in action.

5.1 Participants

The participants of this study were four Saudi male BSc statistics students and five male teachers at S.U. All participants were selected based on their willingness to join the study. It is crucial to acknowledge that in Saudi Arabia education is provided free from primary school through to postgraduate levels. Additionally, Arabic is the official language as well as being the medium of instruction from primary school through high school. Prior to joining their 100% EMI-oriented BSc in Statistics program, these students had studied English as a foreign language as a subject in a high school for 45 minutes per session, four sessions per week. Additionally, they had all successfully completed their foundation year program at the university which consists of four models of intensive (skill-based) English for Academic Purposes (i.e., equal to B1 in the Common European Framework for Reference-CEFR). Although the four students who took part in this study were at various levels of their EMI

programs, their differing experiences elicited by this study help capture the effects of the EMI policies within their program. Two of the five teachers were two local, and there was one each from India, Pakistan, and Egypt. Tables 1 and 2 below provide a comprehensive background to the participants of the study.

Table 1: *Student backgrounds*

Pseudonym	Academic level/year	Language proficiency
Badur	Senior	Completed foundation year
Naji	Sophomore	Completed foundation year
Khalid	Senior	Completed foundation year
Talal	Junior	Completed foundation year

Table 2: *Teacher backgrounds*

Pseudonym	Nationality	Qualification	Teaching experience in SA
Faris	Saudi	PhD	12
Noor	Saudi	MA	16 years
Hamdallah	Egyptian	PhD	11 years
Rabi	Indian	PhD	11 years
Shah	Pakistani	PhD	12 years

5.2 Data collection and analysis processes

The data for this study emerged from two sources: (i) analysis of documents (flyers, program manual, etc.) and (ii) semi-structured interviews with both teachers and students. All the data were collected between 2020 and early 2021. After I had obtained the necessary consent forms from all participants, each of them engaged with me in a single interview of about 80–100 minutes. While I communicated with the students in a mixture of Arabic and English, I interviewed all the teachers in English. I used Carspecken's (1996) guidelines to devise the interview protocols. That is, I grouped the interview questions into three topics: overall teaching and learning experiences in the EMI program; views about EMI curriculum; and experiences of classroom pedagogical practices and assessments.

In addition to the above, I utilized Carspecken's (1996) reconstructive analysis as a guideline for discursively analyzing the data of this study. That is, I read through the EMI policy documents at SU as well as the participants' interviews. I then analyzed and codified the data, and at the same time compared the responses within/across individuals. Finally, I classified the codes into themes, then compared them with existing literature. In the process, I paid attention to the 'what', 'how', and 'why' questions of the EMI policy in the Saudi TNHE in general and at SU in particular.

6. Findings and discussion

6.1 EMI policy is a national strategy for claiming quality of academic programs

Almost needless to say, "the values and prestige associated with a language constitute the most significant ideological beliefs in language policy" (Hu et al., 2014, p. 28). The findings of RQ 1 revealed that the EMI policy is viewed by SU as a national strategy for: claiming the quality of academic programs; increasing the local and international employability of its graduates; competing in the global ranking leagues; and attracting international faculty members, consultants and students (Byram 2012). This was evident in its vision which boldly stated that: to be a "World Class University with sustainability and community engagement", and that "Knowledge Development, Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship" in education are SU's top priorities (SU Policy Document, 2021). The university has also established an international advisory board whose members come from local business and industrial companies, and from international institutions in Europe, Australia and North America. The goals of this board are to enhance the program's educational outcomes and align them with the immediate needs of the job market. Furthermore, in order to show its commitment to quality education through its EMI policy, SU has built international partnerships with a range of universities across the world. As clearly stated in a document of the university,

International cooperation is a necessary approach, and a pivotal trend in the path of any university that seeks sound development, meaningful excellence, refined quality, and to be among the ranks of effective and global universities… . Therefore, international partnerships represent an important axis for the social structure of universities in the contexts of their development, controlling the quality of their performance, and activating their role in their small and large worlds, especially in the post-globalization era (SU Policy Document, 2021).

This neoliberal education policy direction is present – indeed, omnipresent – in the BSc in Statistics program document, which presents the view that the EMI policy could help students "advance in responsibility and leadership and contribute as active partners in the economic growth and the sustainable development of the Saudi society". In addition it allows them to "engage in professional development and/or graduate studies to pursue flexible career paths amid future technological changes" (SU Policy Document, 2021). In this context, trans/internationalization features prominently in SU's EMI program; i.e., it is seen as an essential tool for the university to enhance its international credibility (Jenkins 2013). This indicates that there are "different actors involved" in the internationalization activities of S.U., including local and international industries/ institutions as well as "the practices and processes constituting [its]EMI" policy (Dafouz & Smit, 2016, p. 1). Overall, SU's current EMI efforts echo the Saudi TNHE policy direction, presented earlier.

6.2 EMI and TNHE in action

6.2.1 Transnational education helps us realize our EMI policy

The findings of RQ 2 confirmed De Costa et al.'s (2020) convincing argument that transnational education facilitates EMI policy and vice versa in the contemporary HE context. Strikingly, the Department of Statistics at SU has undertaken a range of measures to manage and realize its neoliberally-driven EMI policy throughout its program. These measures include the use of international commercial textbooks (e.g., from McGraw Hill and Pearson Longman) and course materials as well as the establishment of partnerships with international institutions from Europe and North America. It has a statistics lab equipped with international references, software and learning resources such as DVDs, CD, test bank, statistics simulation programs, and online materials. It also has international teachers from North America, Asia, Europe and Arab neighboring countries such as Jordan, Egypt, and Sudan. The department is currently seeking international accreditation for its BSc in Statistics program, as reported by **Faris**, one of the teachers. The aforementioned transnational endeavors further support the contention that EMI is an aspect of transnational HE (Barnawi, 2021; Phan, 2016). That is, "In creating their own programs, [HE institutions in different geographical locations] often draw on existing programs, materials, course syllabi, and lectures from other English-medium programs developed elsewhere" (Phan, 2016, p. 7).

6.2.2 Teachers and students' views of EMI-TNHE policy at SU

Strikingly, in the view of the five teachers who took part in this study, the above policy measures were considered essential steps in preparing students for the job market needs and making them locally and globally competitive. In particular, **Faris** felt that the current transnationally-oriented learning environment in the Department of Statistics had exposed students to an "international standard of education". **Noor** reported that today's "job market requires language skills. The current policy is strategically preparing them" for such an essential goal. **Rabi** shared that "without English language it is difficult for Saudi students to secure a job even in their own country". With the EMI policy, **Shah** felt, the Saudi HE system is "taking the correct path". **Hamdallah** opined that the EMI policy is "a good investment" within an HE system. Combined, these responses echo the idea of English education forming human capital in the Saudi context. That is, an economic imperative has been placed at the heart of the EMI policy direction in many non-English-dominant countries in which English has been construed in a largely instrumentalist way. In many non-English-dominant societies, including Saudi Arabia, as Kedzierski (2018) argues, "under late modernity, language has moved beyond its traditional role as a social practice and has been turned into a commodity (packaged, marketed and sold in shadow education markets)" (p. 279).

Unfortunately, the commodification of language in many EFL contexts has resulted "in the displacement of traditional ideologies in which languages were primarily symbols of ethnic and national identity" (ibid.). These accounts were captured in the responses shared by the five teachers who took part in this study; they were concerned that the current EMI policy measures taken by their university could bring about: 'pedagogical challenges' (**Faris** and **Hamdallah**); 'inequalities' (**Shah**); 'loss of Arabic language with its strong cultural heritage' and 'eclipse of reasons' (**Rabi**). The further responses shared by **Faris**, **Rabi** and **Hamdallah** below succinctly capture these concerns.

Faris felt that

Our program now has international textbooks and materials, but much of the information is presented in complex language which causes a challenge to learners to understand what is needed. This is a major pedagogical challenge we are facing, especially students whose English proficiency is low. So not all students can benefit from such an education policy.

Rabi asserted that

With teaching science courses in English, knowledge orientation is not given much preference. Here, it is an exam-oriented game: everybody needs to pass with high grades to seek jobs in the market. We are teaching in English to prepare students for predefined sets of exams. As international teachers we were not given the power or authority to stop some unhealthy teaching practices. In the long term this will destroy our students' reasoning, critical thinking skills and other intellectual abilities, even in Arabic.

Hamdallah declared that:

Our students' understanding of the books is a major problem here; they are written in advanced English, which cannot be easily understood by the students. They may find it difficult to understand the questions, even when translating key terms and ideas. They need to develop their English; we found that they are unable to understand exam questions whether mid-term, projects or assignments.

By juxtaposing the responses shared by the teachers above with students' experiences below, we notice that both students and teachers have similar concerns pertaining to the EMI policy measures taken by the Department of Statistics at SU. In general, it was found that only one student, **Naji**, was in favor of the EMI policy in the BSc in Statistics program:

I like studying statistics in English, because you can easily learn it in Arabic after learning in in English, but not vice versa. And you will need English if you work in an international company where they only use English.

Naji's positive perception of current EMI program could contribute "to the valorization of English by linking the language with career and educational opportunities [which is often] enjoyed by the privileged few" in non-English dominant societies (Hu et al., 2014, p. 31). In contrast, **Badur**, **Khalid** and **Talal** felt that being in a 100 percent EMI program had: affected their Grade Point Average (GPA) (**Badur**); put them under "enormous pressure" (**Khalid**); and taken away the "joy of studying at a university" (**Talal**). In other words, despite taking intensive English courses before joining the program

and being senior in the statistics program, **Badur** felt that he had several difficulties in the program and that his GPA had dropped because of the unhelpful use of the English language:

Yes, English was the reason behind the difficulties I had with the courses. The many theories and vocabularies we had to master in English made me feel that my language was not up to the level. I failed some courses, like 211 and the theory of probabilities, because a lot of the information was in English, and I was lost.

Talal reported that he felt that the English courses of the foundation year program did not necessarily prepare students well enough to study statistics in English, so the misalignment needs to be addressed:

I did not have any problems with the English courses taught in the Foundation Year. My teachers were helpful and used English all the time. They helped us even when we did not understand. But after that, these courses did not help us understand statistics, as we did not study English for statistics. I think there is a problem here (**Talal**).

What we can infer from the above responses is that students are grappling with the language demands of EMI at S.U., despite that fact that the university has created a top-down transnationally-oriented learning environment for the students so that they can have maximum exposure to EMI context. The exposure to English includes the presence of 100 percent EMI courses, international teachers, DVDs, textbooks, syllabus, and so on.

Importantly, the responses presented above show that EMI has negative effects on students' disciplinary (i.e., B.Sc. in Statistics) and language learning in the Saudi TNHE. The responses are consistent with findings from previous studies relating to China and Europe that documented the negative effects of disciplinary and language learning in EMI programs (e.g., Airey 2012; Börkman 2010; Hu 2009). The negative effects on content learning reported by the students – effects which they attributed to the everyday classroom pedagogical strategies devised by teachers in the EMI program – resulted in lack of opportunities for them to negotiate meaning. Next I elaborate on these issues.

6.3   EMI classroom pedagogical strategies at SU

Language classroom pedagogical practices in a given EMI context connote "the day-to-day strategies adopted by teachers/students to teach/learn English and disciplinary content" (Hu et al., 2014, p. 34). The findings from RQ 3 revealed that the following are widely adopted across the BSc in Statistics program: lecturing, PowerPoint (PPT) slides associated with commercial DVDs and CDs, the translation of complex scientific terminologies into Arabic (in the cases of **Faris**, **Noor** and **Hamdallah**), problem-based learning' (**Faris**), 'drilling and memorization' (**Shah**), 'pedagogy of sympathy' (**Rabi**), and 'recorded sessions for revision purposes' (**Hamdallah**). The pedagogical assumptions behind these strategies are that they will: explain complex scientific terms and concepts; simplify the key processes and the principles of statistics; and help solve complex statistical cases or

problems. To cope with the demands of language, these teachers offered different reasons, as captured in the examples below:

Rabi and his pedagogy of sympathy

The realities of these students with English are complex here. We always have mixed-level students in our classrooms. So, if we don't keep in mind the course learning outcomes, we might end up teaching students something which is beyond their capacity. That is why I strictly follow the course objectives and its intended learning outcomes. I can see that even students with low proficiency in English get excited when I teach in English. They often ask me to continue teaching in English instead of me asking some advanced students to translate the lesson to them in Arabic. I sincerely appreciate their invitation, but I am also sympathetic to the fact that they are having problems in the classroom. To ensure classroom participation, I warn these students with low proficiency that I'm going to ask them questions. And if they do not answer me, this means I will fail them. That is why they need to feel free to ask questions in Arabic; that is not a problem. Their classmates could help them with their answers. This how I motivate and engage them in classroom, and emotionally support them.

Noor and his classroom engagement strategies

I always use PPT and explain in English to keep students engaged in classes. These are science students; it is better for them to learn in English anyway. They knew that, before they joined this course. In rare situations I use Arabic to help students out, but they must study in English. Also, classes now are recorded so they have the chance to replay the sessions. The university has offered extra classes and tutoring. Also, we now have a YouTube channel. So, a student who does not understand English will still get the same information in Arabic without any problems by using these powerful 21st-century engagement tools.

Faris and his memorization strategies

I think that students have to study statistical terms thoroughly, in order to understand and be focused in class. To make this happen I have two strategies. First, I translate statistical terminologies into Arabic (e.g., 'mean' is *Al Wasat Al Hisabi*). Second, I let them practice solving statistical problems; this helps them better understand and memorize the terms. So I think we do not have a problem with the terminology related to statistics, such as 'mean', 'mode' etc. I notice however, that students tend to forget on purpose after completing a course, so as teachers we have to remind them of the terms and so on. I would say that it is natural since statistics, like language, has to be practiced. Also, I noticed as an academic advisor that most of the students who join the department do not actually like it, or they had to join it after achieving low scores in the Foundation Year Program.

But in fact the classroom pedagogical practices such as translation, PPT, memorization and the like used by teachers were not well appreciated by the students. It turns out that teaching statistical courses by translating difficult vocabularies and the like seems to create additional pressures on and confusion in the students. It was also found that students seem to prefer learning from each other than from their teachers in the program. In this sense, Naji said that he felt that the teaching strategies presented by his

teachers in the program were not helping them to learn a lot; instead, he responded, "working with classmate", hiring "private tutor" and watching "YouTube channels" were the most effective strategies for understanding the course during the program. In support of this point, Badur reported that

The difficulty was actually with the contents of the courses themselves, which were entirely in English. I constantly translate to Arabic about 100 words and another 100 sentences which were confusing to me, and stressful. Also, my teachers used to teach in English, which was not easy for me. They used to tell us that we could visit them in their office at certain times at the end of each class. But, for me as a student, if I go to them in their office, they teach in English again. Some classmates have very good English and so I always learn from them.

Khalid asserted that

I use booklets/notebooks to write and record words and concepts in English and translate them into Arabic in all subjects. These were very useful because we were taught by non-native speakers of Arabic. He added,

Am I allowed to speak freely? Honestly, we can give credit to the Department for choosing non-native Arabic speakers to teach statistics. But these teachers spoke English with an accent that was not comprehensible to us. We had a teacher, who was either Indian or Pakistani, who spoke English with an accent that we could not understand. We communicated it to the Department – which blamed our low level of English, not the teacher. They said that he was one of the best in the Department. It is true that he was good, and that our English was not perfect, but they should still choose teachers who speak better, comprehensible English

Khalid's concern was supported by **Talal**, who stated that

We memorized everything. We did not understand the content. We had some teachers from Asian countries with obscure English accents. Also, we could not understand their PowerPoint presentations and the definitions in the book. I translated a lot of the courses, in order to pass exams. I think PowerPoint Presentation is not a useful technique because the teachers just read from the slides. As for the online classes, almost all teachers are unable to teach online. They read from their slides – they just show the slides and read them. I think they need training to teach online. He added,

it is common here for students to focus on the course summaries and on private tutors. Also, I asked a colleague to help me out. This does not mean that university teachers were not useful. They used to explain things in class, but during exams we would have difficulty because of using the English language.

What we can infer from the above responses is that the students seemed to view their EMI program as both a content and a language learning opportunity. Yet, their teachers seem to take it as "an instructional approach to content learning, rather than as a tool for learning English" (Galloway, Kriukow, & Numajiri 2017, p. 33). Hence the language aspect within the EMI program continues to be

neglected by teachers, thereby contributing to widening the gap between content knowledge and linguistic proficiency among students.

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Overall, I am convinced by the observation of Spolsky (2009, p. 6) that "language behavior is determined by proficiency." The experiences shared by both teachers and students above seem to stem from their inadequate command of English for statistics purposes in particular, and of English for academic purposes in general. These findings are consistent with the findings of previous studies conducted in Asia (e.g., Tupas, 2018) and in Europe (e.g., Airey 2012). It has been reported that due to an inadequate command of specific forms of language (i.e., English for Academic Purposes) both teachers and students use various coping strategies to mitigate their language problems. In the case of SU's EMI program, any potential collaborative learning strategies and other opportunities for student interaction which eventually lead to language learning are absent from everyday classroom practices (Hynninen 2012). This indicates that at SU there is a gap between the learning goals for specific language (here, for the BSc in Statistics) as against general language.

6.4   Assessment practices at SU

As far as the assessment practices are concerned, the findings showed that group projects and regular assignments (**Faris**), mid-term exams, final exams, and multiple-choice tests (MCQ) (**Shah**, **Noor**, and **Rabi**), and homework (**Hamdallah**) often featured in the BSc in Statistics program. These teachers affirmed that, as in their various classroom pedagogical practices, such forms of assessment help to improve their students' knowledge, skills and competence in statistics. On this topic, **Faris** reported that

For us, learning is a matter of targeting three areas: knowledge, skills and competence. We assess in these areas in different ways: midterm exams, group projects, and regular assignments. We noticed that students who did the assignments did not have any issues with the exams, whereas students who did not do their assignments well face issues with the on-campus exams. Also, we do a project where each group creates a survey, collects data, analyzes the data and writes a report, and comes to discuss the results with the teacher.

In similar vein, **Noor** reported that "the Foundation Year has only MCQ exams and homework. We also ask our students to use some computer software to analyze data. So they do not have to write in English

a lot". Likewise, **Shah** attested that with MCQ and computer software and homework "we are more concerned with their answers and mathematical knowledge rather than English which is minimally needed anyway when answering questions and solving math problems. They just need to tick and choose". **Rabi** stated, "Although I use a lot of MCQ, assignments and short quizzes, I do not pick on language elements in exams".

Notably, the idea of EMI teachers (including teachers of statistics in the case of this study) not correcting their students' English is common practice in the contemporary EMI-oriented HE context. Many scholars (e.g., Airey, 2011; Barnawi, 2021; Block & Moncada-Comas, 2019) have observed "how the allegiance to a disciplinary identity … [e.g., a professor of statistics] is systematically invoked and the prospect of acting as an English language teacher is systematically minimized, if not rejected outright" (Block & Moncada-Comas, 2019, p.1). The above findings show that teachers of statistics at SU seem to be challenged by the prospect of acting as teacher of both content and language. Paradoxically, despite the top-down 100 percent EMI policy measures taken by SU and its Department of Statistics, the above findings show that language learning was not being taken by teachers of statistics as a main goal in their everyday classroom pedagogical practices.

Interestingly, although teachers cited different types of assessment practice in the current EMI program, students reported that they were not actually benefiting from them. In order to obtain high grades and pass their courses, students use a range of strategies to navigate the current assessment practices. **Badur**, for example, reported "I used to translate the questions on Google and then study online in Arabic, on YouTube, then I answer the assignment questions". **Talal** said "during exams, I searched online materials for Arabic explanations of different theories, questions and so on. I purchase some useful reference in Arabic. I also focus on summary of lessons only". These were, he said, "the most effective ways for passing exams with high grades". For **Khalid**, memorizing "question and answer sheets" given by teachers; "hiring private tutors during exam time"; and constantly "visiting teachers during their office hours" were his usual strategies for passing exams and ensuring graduation with a high GPA. In contrast, however, **Naji** stated that using the appropriate 'statistical vocabularies" to do his assignments and/or answer "exam questions are the most important thing". This is because, as he elaborated, "teachers do not really penalize us for our spelling or grammatical mistakes in assignments and exams because they know that we have challenges with English".

The varying exam study strategies shared by the students above may help them pass their courses throughout the program. Yet, such strategies do not encourage deep learning. Furthermore, "hiring private tutors" and/or "purchasing useful references in Arabic" may not be affordable to all students in EMI programs. As such, the SU's EMI policy would seem to contribute to the creation of inequalities among students. Such distressing findings accord with Hu's (2009) study of the negative effects of EMI policy on students in China, as well as studies by Costa and Coleman (2013) and Wilkinson (2013) in Europe: these scholars consistently argue that access to English "is inexorably intertwined with the availability and deployment of other types of capital" (Wilkinson, 2013 p. 49), be they symbolic,

financial and/or materials. From a language policy point of view, it seems clear that SU's EMI policy, including classroom pedagogies and assessment practices, exerts what Hu et al., (2014, p. 34). call "a palpable influence on individuals' language practices" reinforcing practices such as memorization, translation, summarization of lessons and other short-cut endeavors.

7.   Putting it all together: Feelings of guilt and implicit self-blaming in teachers

During the interview, the five teachers were further asked to critically reflect on their own pedagogical assumptions in order to identify some areas of complexities, complicity and inaction. The findings show that issues of institutional power, feelings of guilt and implicit self-blaming are the running themes in their responses, as captured below. **Faris** felt that the 100 percent EMI policy adopted in the Department of Statistics to comply with the university's transnational education policy seemed to put both students and teachers at odds:

I assure you that more than 50 per cent of our students want to quit studying statistics in English, which reflects negatively on their scores and GPAs. As a result, they are unable to leave to study another major and they get stuck with us, which again reflects badly on students and teachers. We can't see a solution to this problem in the near future. So we rarely find a student who is willing to study statistics (**Faris**).

What we can infer from **Faris**'s response is that the top-down EMI policy adopted at SU seems not only to take away the teacher's agency, but also to force them to actually contribute to the inequalities created by the current policy. **Shah** added fuel to the fire when he clearly acknowledged that statistics is a complex and abstract subject and that having a degree is not the issue – it is all about the ability to teach the subject:

Between you and me, we sometimes need to blame ourselves. It is easy to find people with a doctoral or master's degrees in statistics. But it is not easy to teach statistics or to find a good professor in statistics. Because statistics itself is difficult to teach … so how come we demand students to acquire knowledge of statistics in a different language?

Shah's earnest assertion raises three important questions: (i) Should we take it as merely a personal experience, a judgmental statement? (ii) Is his statement empirically substantiated? and/or (iii) Should EMI students blame **Shah**, the department, the university or themselves for the problems? While these questions need further investigation, it is tempting to say that such an implicit self-blaming game in EMI is still unvoiced in the current research literature. **Shah**'s intriguing statement was taken up by **Noor** who also stated that "some tutors give the learners wrong information and to save their faces, they blame the course coordinator. They often complain that international textbooks in use are not customized and they do not have simple supplementary materials".

8.   Conclusion

This study, taking one of the Saudi HE institutions dubbed SU as an example case, examines the EMI policy in Saudi Arabia, a rarely studied site. It explores: the goals of the EMI program at that particular university; the forms of policy measures taken by the university to realize its goals; and the everyday experiences of the teachers of statistics and the students within the program. Overall, the findings reveal that there is a connection between language goals or ideology, management and practices in SU's EMI program. Such a connection is reactive to the recent national level of TNHE policy direction, which emphasizes what Baker and Huttner (2017) describe as [trans/] internationalization at home programs". Strikingly, the national, institutional and individual aims of the EMI program in the context of this study were centered on the perception of proficiency in English language in order to "facilitate access to cutting-edge technologies, help build international expert networks, enable individual and knowledge mobility, and support R&D efforts, amongst other" (Kedzierski, 2016, p. 381). In order to realize the aforementioned goals, this study drew on a range of EMI policy measures at national, institutional and individual levels (Barnawi, 2021).

The findings reveal that there is a clear gap between SU's EMI support policy and the everyday pedagogical needs of the individual stakeholders (i.e., teachers and students). This apparently obvious gap not only hinders the attainment of EMI policy goals at SU, but also exposes the ambiguities of TNHE in the Saudi context.

I conclude that in order to critically conceptualize the complex and dynamic relationships in the language policy within the contemporary Saudi TNHE context, there is a need for further studies that specifically examine the gap between its language policy and the effects of its practice.

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