

# Navigating Identity: The Emotional Impact of English Medium Instruction on Saudi Undergraduate Students in a Rapidly Modernizing Society

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## Abstract

This study examines the socio-emotional impact of English Medium Instruction (EMI) on undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia and how various social and educational trends influence their attitudes, emotions, and perceptions of cultural identity. Using a qualitative research approach, the study employs focus group discussions and thematic analysis to explore students' experiences. Three focus group sessions were conducted, each comprising five female students from different faculties and academic years, totaling 15 participants. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews, allowing for in-depth discussions on students' challenges and coping mechanisms.

Findings reveal that while students recognize the advantages of English proficiency for academic success, employment, and communication, they also experience anxiety, cultural tensions, and societal pressure related to English language use. Students report feeling more comfortable using English in informal settings, such as conversations with friends, but experience heightened stress in formal or professional environments.

The results suggest that to alleviate the emotional and psychological burdens of EMI, educational institutions and policymakers should implement supportive strategies that address language anxiety and social isolation. The study highlights the need for inclusive learning environments that foster linguistic confidence and cultural integration while navigating the complexities of English as a dominant academic language in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:** English Medium Instruction (EMI), emotional factors, cultural identity, psychological factors

## 1. Introductions

Currently, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is undergoing rapid technological and social transformation, focusing on economic diversification, cultural openness, and the advancement of English language skills (Bawazeer, 2015). One crucial way in which this transformation is occurring is through the prioritization of English in various public sectors, including education. In 2021, the Saudi Ministry of Education announced that English instruction would begin in the first grade of elementary school, signaling a strong commitment to establishing broad English proficiency among students. Additionally, Saudi Arabia has recently implemented English Medium Instruction (EMI) in higher education, following the trend set by other Middle Eastern and North African nations. This policy aims to enhance economic and scientific development, with the Saudi government recognizing English as the global lingua franca and supporting the notion that progress is closely tied to English proficiency.

Despite the growing popularity of EMI in Saudi Arabia, little is known about its emotional and psychological impact on students. Previous studies have examined the linguistic and pedagogical effects of EMI (Fadel & Rajab, 2017; Gaffas, 2019; Alkhanani, 2021), but they have not explored the emotional and psychological consequences of widespread English adoption, particularly among younger generations. While Bawazeer (2015) and Assulaimani (2019) have analyzed the increasing role of English in education, their focus has been on instructional strategies rather than the effectiveness of language acquisition. This gap is significant because language shapes identity, and the emotional impact of educational policies can influence their success or failure (Barnawi & Al-Hawsawi, 2017; Alkhalil, 2021).

There has been substantial research on English education and student attitudes toward English (Unruh & Obeidat, 2015; Alharbi, 2022), but less attention has been paid to how these attitudes intersect with cultural identity and societal change. Muhammad and Abdul Raof (2020) and Al-Seghayer (2015) emphasize the role of English in academic and professional development, yet they do not address the potential threats EMI poses to Arabic language and culture. There is limited research discussing language, culture, and identity in Saudi Arabia, where language is deeply intertwined with cultural and religious belief systems.

This research aims to analyze the socio-emotional impact of EMI and the use of English in Saudi Arabia to address these gaps. The study seeks to examine students' emotional responses and perceptions of English in relation to their cultural identity, providing insights into language policy in the Kingdom. It contributes to the “affective turn” in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research by incorporating emotional and cultural factors into language learning studies (Aljehani & Mohebi, 2025; Daif-Allah & Khan, 2016; Hakim, 2019).

This study also explores the effects of rapid social, educational, and cultural change on student experiences with EMI. While the pedagogical outcomes of EMI have been widely researched, less attention has been paid to the emotional responses triggered by these rapid changes. Evidence from other MENA countries suggests that such policies can evoke resentment and frustration, with some students expressing feelings of alienation and resistance (Ahmadi, 2017). This concern is plausible, as language plays a fundamental role in shaping students' identity, values, and beliefs (Duranti, 2008). Sudden shifts in linguistic policies may therefore result in strong emotional reactions, which could undermine the success of EMI policies. If students perceive English as being imposed upon them, they may reject it rather than embrace it. A clear understanding of students' emotional responses to EMI policies is therefore crucial for evaluating the broader impact of English language promotion in public life.

Thus, this study aims to contribute to the discussion on English language prioritization among undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia by addressing the following research questions:

- (1) What are the emotional and psychological impacts of English Medium Instruction (EMI) on undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia, and how do rapid social and educational changes influence their attitudes and feelings toward the English language?
- (2) How does the use of English influence the shaping of cultural identity among undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia?
- (3) What perceived pressures and motivations drive undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia to learn and use English, and how do they associate English proficiency with opportunities such as employment, social status, and international relations?

## 2. Literature Review

The introduction of EMI in Saudi Arabia reflects its desire to modernize and meet global standards. Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi (2017) and Aljehani and Modiano (2024) note that Saudi Arabia adopted EMI to diversify its economy and boost its global competitiveness. The implementation of EMI, particularly in higher education, shows that English is becoming a vital skill for academic and professional success. English instruction begins in first grade, highlighting the importance of English proficiency in the population (Assulaimani, 2019).

However, EMI implementation has been challenging. The rapid adoption of English in education has raised concerns about students and teachers' readiness to adapt. Bawazeer (2015) emphasizes the need for teacher training and curriculum changes to support EMI. Despite these efforts, the policy's ambitious goals and classroom outcomes differ, particularly in language acquisition and student engagement. This gap suggests that EMI implementation across educational levels requires more targeted interventions.

### 2.1 Emotional and Psychological Impact of EMI on Students

The emotional and psychological effects of EMI on students are complex. Hakim (2019) notes that students who must learn and perform in a foreign language often experience language anxiety. Mistakes, language complexity, and academic performance can cause anxiety. Fadel and Rajab (2017) examined Kings Abdulaziz University female students' emotional responses and found that English pressure can cause stress and alienation, especially in fields like computing and information technology, where English proficiency is essential.

Elyas and Al-Hoorie (2023) note that EMI emotional impact on Saudi education strains it. EMI can deeply affect students' self-esteem when they feel English is infringing on their native language and culture. Due to the strain of EMI on their first language and culture, they often lose interest in learning. Ahmed (2023) emphasizes critical language awareness and affective approaches in second language writing, suggesting that students' emotional engagement with the language is crucial to their learning. Alharbi (2022) found that Saudi students' emotional

responses to English affect their learning, which can help or challenge it. Hakim (2019) found that English anxiety increases student stress and lowers academic performance. In addition, Al-Seghayer (2015) and Assulaimani (2019) discuss English language education in the Kingdom, noting that students' emotional readiness to fully engage with the language often conflicts with the perceived importance of English for professional success. Alshareef et al. (2018) examine decision-makers' views on the language of instruction and find a conflict between EMI's strategic benefits and students' psychological burdens. In technical fields, where the pressure of EMI frequently evokes frustration, anxiety, and resistance, Unruh and Obeidat (2015) and Gaffas (2019) reveal the intense emotional turbulence Saudi students experience.

### *2.2 Cultural Identity and the Role of English in Saudi Arabia*

The growth of English in Saudi Arabia has brought a kind of cultural conflict that is not easily resolved. This social incorporation of English in education and in public places brings to the fore the issue of loss of the Arabic language and cultural practices which are so significant to the cultural self. According to Picard (2018), while English adoption aids Saudi Arabia to go global, it poses a risk to the culture. This conflict is even more manifest in institutions of learning that have the English language replace or augment the use of Arabic language in Saudi Arabia, a language heavily embedded in the culture and religion.

Alkhalil (2021) explores Saudi EFL education that indicates that the ideologies imply the society's standards and vision. There are, on one hand, aspects of globalization, modernization in which English plays a key role while there are also roles of English in the preservation of culture, maintaining the authenticity of a language in Arabic. Students should not lose their cultural identity but at the same time, they have to learn English. They may be in a state of confusion, or confusion of loyalties which such changes may bring to students who are not sure of their cultural orientation in a rapidly transforming society.

### *2.3 Perceived Pressures and Motivations for Learning English*

Saudi Arabians are put under various pressures by outside forces and internally, to acquire and use English. In his study, Alharbi (2022) has identified that Saudi students have the pressure to study English since it is considered a language that opens the door to better social status, employment opportunities, and integral academic achievement. This pressure is more so when English is used as the medium of instruction and the profession such as in engineering and medicine (Alshareef et al., 2018).

Higher stakes of English proficiency in Saudi Arabia also contribute to these forces. From the Gaffas (2019), English is considered as the key to better job and status, as a result, students study this language with enthusiasm and concern. Thus, unlike education, economics and, in particular, social success is significant motivation to learn English. This view of language learning can also lead to stress and burnout as students try to meet their families, educators, and students' high expectations.

Efforts to balance EMI benefits with Arabic language and cultural preservation will likely shape English language education in Saudi Arabia. Assulaimani (2019) and Alkhannani (2021) suggest that EMI's success will depend on more holistic educational strategies integrating English with other subjects and promoting Arabic language appreciation. This involves adding Saudi cultural values to curricula and supporting teachers and students through EMI.

For Saudi English education's future, EMI emotional and psychological effects should be better understood. Hakim (2019) and others argue that language education policies must consider student well-being and academic outcomes. To ensure that EMI helps students develop, educational environments must be sensitive to their emotional and cultural needs. Addressing these challenges help Saudi Arabia balance and improve language education to support its modernization and cultural preservation goals. Based on the research objectives and gaps, the stud develops the conceptual framework:

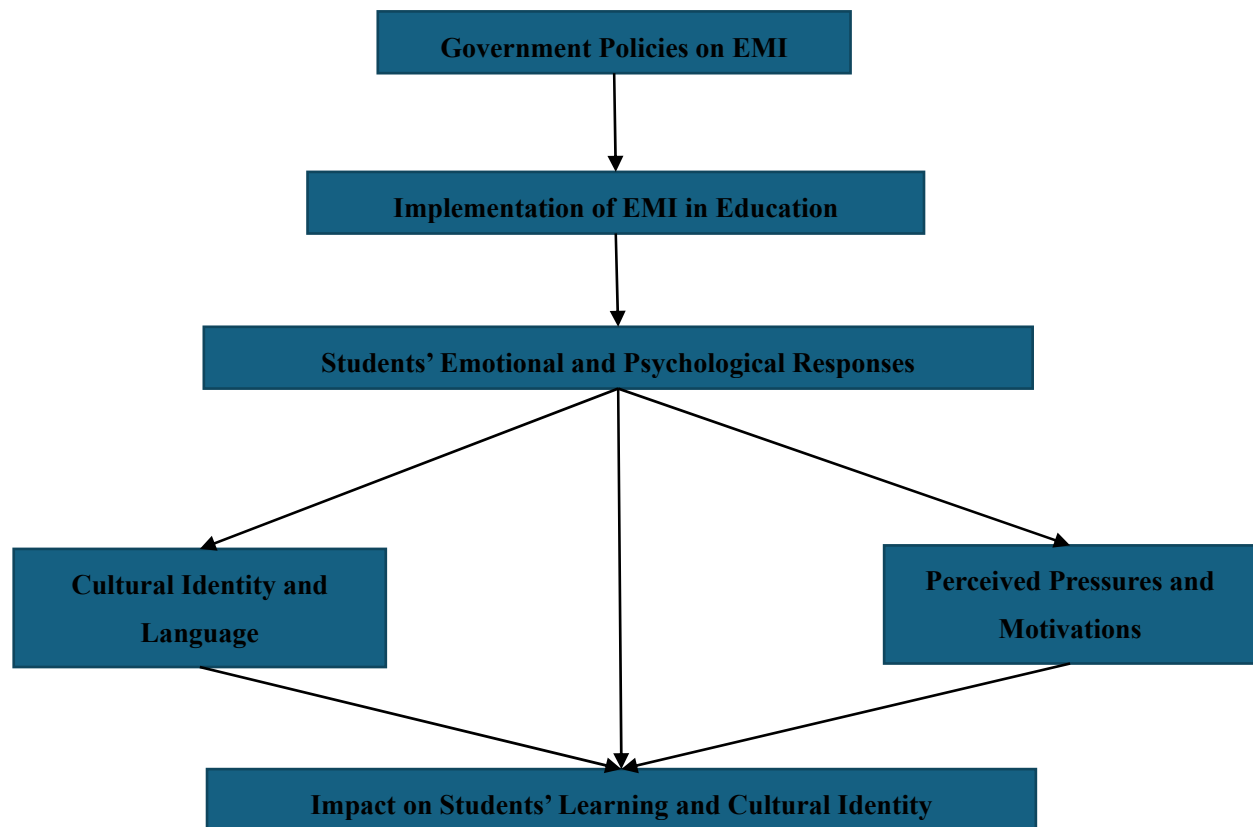


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Research Method

Focus groups are ideal for this study because they allow for an in-depth examination of students' emotional and psychological responses to EMI. Qualitative methods are ideal for capturing the intangible aspects of human experiences, perceptions, and emotions (Creswell, 2014). Focus groups, in particular, allow participants to express their thoughts and feelings in a group setting, fostering diverse perspectives and group dynamics (Morgan, 1997). Due to its supportive environment for discussing sensitive and deeply personal topics, this method helps explain how cultural identity and perceived pressures affect students' EMI experiences (Krueger & Casey, 2015). This study uses focus groups to reveal how EMI affects students, providing rich, contextual insights for culturally sensitive educational policies.

#### 3.2 Data Collection Procedure

To explore the affective impact of the growing prioritization of English language in Saudi Arabia on undergraduate university students, this study will employ a qualitative approach using focus groups. Focus groups are particularly well-suited for exploratory research where the aim is to gain insights into students' attitudes, feelings, beliefs, experiences and reactions (Gibbs, 1997). The study used a purposive sampling technique by targeting undergraduate students from 3 Saudi universities. Five students were taken from each of 3 universities so there were total of 3 focus groups with 15 students. Students were recruited from Jazan University, King Saud University, and King Abdul Aziz University in Saudi Arabia.

This study recruited participants using multiple methods to ensure diversity and representativeness. The students of English-medium courses received email invitations to recruit. These emails explained the research purpose, participation, and confidentiality. Flyers were also distributed in libraries and student centers to reach students who have not been reached by email. Influential course instructors also announced the study in class and encouraged students to participate. Multiple recruitment strategies brought in a diverse range of students, enriching the data.

The study conducted three focus groups, each consisting of 5 participants. Each focus group lasted approximately 40-50 minutes, and was conducted in Arabic. The discussions were guided by a set of semi-structured questions,

which allowed for a focused yet flexible exploration of the research. The questions were designed to elicit participants' emotions, perceptions, and experiences related to the growing presence of English in various domains of Saudi society.

### 3.3 Data Analysis

The focus groups were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis, a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This involved familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Several strategies were employed to ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, including member checking (respondent validation), peer debriefing, and maintaining an audit trail. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, and confidentiality was maintained throughout the research process.

## 4. Results

### 4.1 Demographics

Table 1 shows that focus group participants covered various academic fields, and years of study. 15 students participated, 5 in each of the 3 focus groups. There were a total of 15 female students aged 20–23 participating. These students majored in engineering, business, IT, law, and medicine. Participants also represented 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th academic years. This diversity ensures that focus group discussions reflect the students' academic journeys and the challenges and experiences of their fields. Based on their academic background and progression, the findings suggest that the insights gathered are likely representative of the broader student population, providing a comprehensive understanding of how EMI affects students' learning experiences, cultural identity, and perceived pressures.

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Focus Group	Gender	Age	Year of Study	Major
Group 1	Female	20	2nd Year	Engineering
Group 1	Female	21	3rd Year	Business
Group 1	Female	22	4th Year	IT
Group 1	Female	23	1st Year	Law
Group 1	Female	20	2nd Year	Medicine
Group 2	Female	21	3rd Year	Engineering
Group 2	Female	22	4th Year	Business
Group 2	Female	23	1st Year	IT
Group 2	Female	20	2nd Year	Law
Group 2	Female	21	3rd Year	Medicine
Group 3	Female	22	4th Year	Engineering
Group 3	Female	23	1st Year	Business
Group 3	Female	20	2nd Year	IT
Group 3	Female	21	3rd Year	Law
Group 3	Female	22	4th Year	Medicine

### 4.2 Themes and Sub-themes

Thematic analysis of focus group discussions with Saudi female undergraduates revealed several key insights into their EMI experiences (see Table 2). Table 2 includes the number of references and sources. The references mean the total number of repetitions of the same word in all 3 focus groups. The sources show the total number of focus groups. The main themes were perceptions of Learning English, Physical Sensations While Speaking English, cultural and Identity Impacts, the Social Context of English Use, and Pressure to Learn English. The three focus groups consistently referenced these themes and their sub-themes, demonstrating EMI complexity and multifaceted nature. Positive and negative perceptions of learning English were a major theme. Many participants mentioned the job prospects and global communication benefits of learning English. One participant stated, "English opens doors to global opportunities," emphasizing the value of English for career advancement. Nine

references from all three focus groups supported this sentiment, indicating that students agreed on the practical benefits of learning English (see Table 2). In addition, the analysis raised concerns about the drawbacks of learning English. Ten focus group references mentioned language learning stress and pressure, with one student saying, *"I feel so much pressure; it is overwhelming."* EMI is complicated because students weigh the benefits of English proficiency against its emotional and psychological challenges.

Physical Sensations While Speaking English explores students' emotions in Table 2. In formal settings like classrooms and exams, anxiety and nervousness were common. Eleven references from two focus groups described students' physical sensations like a racing heart or trembling hands when speaking English in class. One participant said, *"My heart races every time I have to speak English in class,"* expressing the pressure. Three references from two focus groups showed that some students felt more confident and empowered when speaking English with friends. This context-dependent variation in emotional responses suggests that the English-speaking environment strongly influences students' confidence and anxiety.

Cultural and identity impacts were another major theme, with students experiencing cultural dissonance and adaptation during EMI. The analysis found 13 references from two focus groups where students said English's pervasive use disconnected them from their Arabic culture. One participant said, *"I feel like I am losing a part of myself every time I speak English,"* demonstrating the cultural impact of EMI. This cultural dissonance shows how students struggle to maintain their culture while succeeding in a globalized, English-dominated world. Not all students disliked this cultural shift. Six references from two focus groups described students adopting English as part of their modern identity. One student said, *"Using English makes me feel more connected to the modern world,"* suggesting that EMI can lead to global citizenship rather than cultural identity loss.

The Social Context of English Use also shaped students' EMI experiences. Focus groups showed that students' emotional responses to speaking English varied greatly by context, formal or informal. Fourteen references from two focus groups showed that students felt anxious and nervous in formal settings like schools and exams, where the stakes were higher. In informal English conversations with friends and family, students felt more relaxed and confident. One participant said, *"I feel more confident speaking English with friends than in class,"* showing how social context affects language comfort. Consideration of situational factors affecting students' EMI experiences is crucial.

Perceived Pressure to Learn English captured the social and educational pressures that motivate students to learn English. Fourteen references from two focus groups showed that students felt intense pressure to learn English, often due to societal and family expectations. One participant stated, *"Everyone expects you to be fluent in English,"* demonstrating the widespread belief that English proficiency is necessary for academic and professional success. Female students, who may face cultural and familial expectations that complicate language learning, felt this pressure more. Despite these pressures, students saw the benefits of learning English. Thirteen references from two focus groups linked English proficiency to better job prospects and social status, with one student saying, *"Knowing English means better job prospects and higher status."*

The findings show the complex relationship between EMI pros and cons for Saudi female undergraduates. English is essential for career advancement and global communication, but learning it has emotional and psychological costs. Many students report anxiety, stress, and cultural dissonance, highlighting the need for a more supportive EMI approach. However, positive experiences of cultural adaptation and confidence in informal settings suggest that with the proper support, students can navigate EMI and develop a strong global and cultural identity. As shown in Table 2, focus groups consistently referenced themes and sub-themes, emphasizing the importance of context in shaping students' EMI experiences. The findings suggest that educational institutions should consider contextual factors when designing and implementing EMI programs. Educational environments that reduce anxiety and support cultural identity can help students learn English without compromising their mental health.

Finally, the thematic analysis of focus group discussions with female undergraduate students illuminates Saudi Arabia's complex EMI. A delicate balance exists between English learning's benefits and its significant emotional and cultural challenges. These students' experiences demonstrate the need for educational policies and practices that meet their diverse needs as Saudi society modernizes and globalizes.

Table 2. Themes and sub-themes

Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Descriptions	References	Sources
Perceptions of Learning English	Positive Aspects	Participants identified benefits such as job opportunities and global communication.	1, 4, 7, 9	1, 2, 3
	Negative Aspects	Challenges mentioned include stress, pressure, and loss of cultural identity.	2, 5, 8, 10	1, 2, 3
Physical Sensations While Speaking	Anxiety and Nervousness	Participants reported feeling nervous and anxious when required to speak English.	3, 6, 11	1, 2
	Confidence and Empowerment	Some participants felt more confident when speaking English in familiar settings.	3, 12	2, 3
Cultural and Identity Impacts	Cultural Dissonance	The use of English created a sense of disconnect from Arabic culture.	5, 9, 10, 13	1, 3
	Cultural Adaptation	Participants described adapting to English as part of a modern identity.	6, 14	1, 2
Social Context of English Use	Formal vs. Informal Contexts	Different emotional responses were noted in formal settings (e.g., school) vs. informal ones (e.g., with friends).	4, 7, 15	1, 2, 3
	English in Professional Settings	English was seen as essential in professional and business contexts.	8, 12, 16	2, 3
Perceived Pressure to Learn English	Social and Educational Pressures	Participants felt pressured to learn English due to societal expectations.	7, 11, 14	1, 3
	Opportunities and Benefits	English was linked to career opportunities and higher social status.	8, 9, 13	2, 3

Cultural dissonance is the students' feeling of disconnect from Arabic culture, while cultural adaptation is embracing English as part of a modern identity. Whether the focus is on cultural identity or English integration needs to be clarified. The findings would be clearer if the narrative and table terminology were consistent and clearly differentiated. This consistency improves the research's presentation and coherence, making it easier for readers to understand the students' complex experiences. Identifying areas for consistency improvement may clarify the findings.

## 5. Discussion

This study on the emotional and psychological effects of English Medium Instruction (EMI) on Saudi female undergraduate students highlights the balance between the benefits of learning English and the emotional challenges it presents. Previous research has shown that Saudi Arabian students acknowledge the global advantages of English proficiency but also experience significant pressures and anxieties. Alharbi (2022) and Al-Seghayer (2015) emphasize that English is crucial for career growth and global communication. The findings of this study show that students perceive English as a "gateway to global resources" and a means to "open doors to global opportunities." In Saudi higher education, English proficiency is closely tied to social mobility and professional success, particularly in fields requiring international engagement (Alshareef et al., 2018; Muhammad & Abdul Raof, 2020).

The study also highlights the emotional and psychological difficulties female students face when learning English in a non-native environment. The literature often discusses the pressure associated with learning English, especially in formal settings like classrooms and exams. This study vividly captures students' anxiety and sense of helplessness when speaking English in such environments. Hakim's (2019) research on language anxiety among Saudi students found that using English in formal academic settings heightens stress levels. Many students in this study reported feeling emotionally drained when learning a language in a high-pressure setting, as reflected in the quote: "My heart races every time I have to speak English." However, students' confidence in English varies

depending on context, emphasizing the emotional complexity of EMI. Some participants felt more confident speaking English with friends, while others struggled in formal academic settings. This aligns with findings from Daif-Allah and Khan (2016) and Braun and Clarke (2006), who argue that the context in which English is used strongly affects students' emotions. Students tend to feel less anxious in informal settings, where they do not fear being judged, while in formal academic settings, higher expectations create stress and self-doubt. This contrast suggests that the emotional impact of EMI is shaped by the specific context in which English is used.

The study also explores the cultural implications of EMI, particularly regarding students' sense of identity. Some students expressed concerns that using English distances them from their Arabic roots, while others viewed English as a path to modernity and global integration. Research by Al-Roomy (2015) and Assulaimani (2019) highlights similar cultural tensions among Saudi students engaging with English. EMI can lead to feelings of alienation and cultural loss, especially for female students, who may feel that learning English requires adopting Western values that do not fully align with their cultural traditions. At the same time, English language skills can empower students, allowing them to connect with the world and access opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. This complex relationship between language and identity is a key part of EMI's emotional and psychological effects.

The societal pressure to learn English is also deeply embedded in Saudi culture and education. The study shows that female students view English fluency as essential for professional success and social status. This pressure is well-documented in the literature on language learning in non-native contexts and is not unique to Saudi Arabia. Picard (2018) and Unruh and Obeidat (2015) argue that English serves as a tool for upward mobility in many countries, placing a heavy burden on students to succeed. One student's statement, "*Everyone expects you to be fluent in English,*" reflects the high expectations placed on learners, particularly on female students, who may face additional cultural and familial pressures. The findings of this study show that these expectations are emotionally overwhelming. The pressure to achieve English proficiency and the fear of failure contribute to stress, anxiety, and a sense of helplessness. This supports prior research on language learning anxiety, which highlights that excessive pressure to perform well in a second language can have negative psychological effects (Gaffas, 2019; Hakim, 2019). The study underscores the need for educational policies that prioritize students' emotional well-being alongside academic success.

Beyond emotional and psychological challenges, the study highlights EMI's impact on students' cultural identities. The findings suggest that while learning English empowers students, it can also create cultural displacement. Female students may feel that proficiency in English requires them to adopt new values and behaviors that conflict with their traditional identity. Some students described this as "cultural conversion", emphasizing the tension between embracing English for modernity while striving to maintain their cultural heritage. Previous studies, such as those by Bawazeer (2015) and Barnawi and Al-Hawsawi (2017), also explore how English challenges and reshapes students' cultural identities. Many female students in this study acknowledge the professional and social advantages of mastering English, as reflected in the quote: "*English is necessary if you want to get a good job.*" This is consistent with findings by Alshareef et al. (2018) and Fadel and Rajab (2017), who argue that English proficiency improves job prospects, particularly in international industries.

However, the study presents a more nuanced perspective on how students perceive English proficiency and social status. While many students view English as a means of advancement, others fear it may diminish their cultural identity. This suggests that the impact of EMI on social status is not uniform and may differ depending on individual perspectives. Research by Alkhalil (2021) and Gaffas (2019) explores how students navigate the pressures of English learning in different ways. Overall, this study provides insight into EMI's emotional and psychological effects on Saudi female students. While English offers clear benefits for career progression and global communication, it also creates significant emotional and cultural challenges. These challenges are not unique to Saudi Arabia but are reflective of broader trends in non-native language learning.

This study contributes to EMI research by highlighting how students navigate cultural identity, with some experiencing dissonance while others see English as a tool for global integration. It also reveals the context-dependent nature of language anxiety, where students feel comfortable in informal settings but anxious in academic and professional spaces. Additionally, it sheds light on the gendered pressures of EMI in Saudi Arabia, as female students face heightened expectations to master English for career and social mobility. These insights emphasize the need for EMI strategies that address not only linguistic proficiency but also psychological and cultural well-being.



Table 3. Answers to research questions

Research Questions	Main Themes	Sub-Themes	Quotes
1. What are the emotional and psychological impacts of EMI on undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia, and how do rapid social and educational changes influence their attitudes and feelings toward the English language?	Perceptions of Learning English	Positive Aspects	"English opens doors to global opportunities."
		Negative Aspects	"I feel so much pressure; it's overwhelming."
		Physical Sensations While Speaking	<p>Anxiety and Nervousness: "My heart races every time I have to speak English."</p> <p>Confidence and Empowerment: "I feel more confident speaking English with friends."</p>
2. How does the use of English influence the shaping of cultural identity among undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia?	Cultural and Identity Impacts	Cultural Dissonance	"Speaking English feels like I'm losing a part of myself."
		Cultural Adaptation	"Using English makes me feel more connected to the modern world."
3. What perceived pressures and motivations drive undergraduate students in Saudi Arabia to learn and use English, and how do they associate English proficiency with opportunities such as jobs, social status, and international relations?	Social Context of English Use	Formal vs. Informal Contexts	"I feel different using English at school versus at home."
		English in Professional Settings	"English is essential if you want a good job."
		Perceived Pressure to Learn English	<p>Social and Educational Pressures: "Everyone expects you to be fluent in English."</p> <p>Opportunities and Benefits: "Knowing English means better job prospects and higher status."</p>

## 6. Conclusion

This study explores the emotional and psychological effects of English Medium Instruction (EMI) on Saudi female undergraduates. English as a tool for global opportunities and a source of stress is a complex dynamic that matches previous research. English proficiency is essential for career advancement and social mobility, but the related pressures and anxieties highlight the need for a more balanced approach to EMI that considers student emotional well-being. The study also shows students' cultural tensions, particularly in how English learning affects their identity. Some students feel disconnected from their Arabic roots, while others see English as their path to modernity and global citizenship. This conflict between cultural preservation and global integration is a major emotional impact of EMI, suggesting that students face both linguistic and cultural challenges.

The study also shows how societal pressures push students to prioritize English learning over their mental health. The high expectations placed on female students to learn English, especially for professional success, add to their emotional stress. Pressure emphasizes the need for educational practices that support students' emotional well-being and academic success. This study adds to the literature on EMI emotional and psychological effects,

particularly in non-Western contexts. It advocates for a more holistic approach to EMI that acknowledges the complex relationship between language learning, cultural identity, and emotional well-being and emphasizes the need for supportive educational environments to address these issues.

This study suggests that emotional and psychological factors should be considered alongside linguistic and academic outcomes to understand EMI. The effects of EMI on students go beyond language proficiency to include cultural identity and emotional well-being. This perspective promotes a more comprehensive EMI theoretical framework that incorporates psychological and cultural factors into non-native language learning analysis. These findings have important policy implications. Educational institutions should offer EMI-related emotional and psychological support. Counseling, language anxiety workshops, and cultural sensitivity training could help students cope with English learning stress and cultural tensions. Institutions can create a more supportive learning environment that promotes academic and emotional success by providing these resources.

Policymakers should also promote a more balanced EMI approach that reduces societal and familial pressures on students to learn English. Family and community awareness campaigns about language learning's psychological effects help create a more supportive environment. Such initiatives would encourage a shift from language proficiency to a more holistic understanding of students' needs. This focus on female undergraduates limits its generalizability to other students. Saudi Arabia is gender segregated, so male students' experiences might differ greatly, and the findings may not fully reflect gender diversity. Future research should include both to determine if male and female students face similar emotional and psychological challenges.

To track the long-term emotional and psychological effects of EMI on students, future research should include longitudinal studies. Such studies may reveal how students' experiences change over time and whether early interventions can mitigate some of this study's negative effects. Expanding the research to include more educational contexts and cultural backgrounds would help explain the complex dynamics of EMI in non-native settings.

This research has its limitations. First, it focuses only on university students, who are not the youngest learners. Their experiences with EMI might be very different from those of younger students in primary or secondary school, who are still developing their language skills and sense of identity. Future research could look at how EMI affects younger students, especially in terms of language anxiety and cultural adaptation. Another limitation is that while this study explores how EMI influences cultural identity, it does not dive deeply into its broader effects on the Arabic language. Questions about whether EMI is leading to a decline in Arabic proficiency or changing how students use Arabic in academic and professional settings remain open for further study. Lastly, the study's small sample size means that while the findings provide valuable insights, they may not reflect the full range of experiences among all Saudi students. Future research with a larger and more diverse group of participants could help paint a clearer picture of EMI's impact.

### **7. Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate**

The work was carried out at University of Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. This study was approved by the ethics committee at the University of Jeddah, with reference number attached to the approval file. The research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines

Consent for publication. All participants provided written informed consent to participate in the study.

### **8. Data Availability Statement**

The data supporting the results of this study will not be publicly available due to the nature of the data collected. The survey data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request. However, access to the data is restricted due to privacy concerns, as the dataset includes information that could potentially be used to identify participants. Aggregated data without identifying information may be shared upon request, subject to approval.

### **9. Authors' contributions**

Not applicable

### **10. Acknowledgements**

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## Appendix

### Focus Group Questions

- (1) What do you feel are the positive aspects of learning English and being exposed to it? What are the negative aspects?
- (2) Think about times when you have been required to speak English. What are the most significant sensations in your body, at such times? To put the question another way: for you, how does it *feel* to speak English, physically?
- (3) Does it feel different speaking English to foreigners compared to speaking English to fellow Saudis?
- (4) When you think about the English language, or hear it in KSA, what emotions arise? Why do you think you feel these emotions in response to English?
- (5) Do these feelings differ, in different contexts? For example, consider the difference between English used in a school compared to English used in a place of business. Does the language have different associations in these different places?
- (6) Do you ever use English in informal contexts, such as communicating with family and friends? If so, how does the use of English impact such communication? How does communicating in English feel different to communicating in Arabic?
- (7) Do you feel pressured to learn and use English? If so, where does this pressure come from?
- (8) Do you perceive the English language to be associated with benefits and opportunities in KSA, such as jobs or social status? If so, how do you feel about such a situation?
- (9) What role do you think English plays in shaping cultural identity in Saudi Arabia? How does this affect how you perceive the language?
- (10) How do you think the growing presence of English in KSA affects traditional Arabic language and culture? How do these changes make you feel?
- (11) How do you feel about the way English is taught in schools in Saudi Arabia?
- (12) How does exposure to English-language media (such as movies, TV shows, and music) impact your feelings toward the language?
- (13) How do you feel about the potential for English to bridge or create gaps between different communities and generations in Saudi Arabia?
- (14) How do you perceive the English-speaking nations of the world, and the citizens of these nations?
- (15) How do you perceive the relationship between KSA and these nations?
- (16) Do you feel English is important to KSA? Why (or why not)?

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