# Sites of belonging: Fluctuating and entangled emotions at a UAE English-medium university

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## ABSTRACT

English-medium education in multilingual university settings (EMEMUS) hosts a complex concoction of emotions amongst stakeholders. English-medium instruction (EMI) dominates higher education in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). For students, EMI creates both affordances and pressures resulting in pride, confidence, anxiety, guilt, shame, and (un)belonging. For university teachers, navigating EMEMUS can be an 'emotion-laden process' involving shifting identities, energy-intensive teaching methodologies, intercultural demands and 'emotional labor'. This article presents findings from a phenomenological case study involving ten transnational university teachers and 110 Emirati undergraduate students at a UAE EMEMUS. Through metalinguistic reflections, participants discussed emotions and levels of belonging. Thematic analysis of the data revealed shifting positionalities which led to complex and entangled emotions. Intersecting identity aspects such as English proficiency, linguistic background, and language ideologies influenced emotional experiences. The article argues for greater recognition of stakeholders' emotional labor and sociolinguistic lived realities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to EMI.

## 1. Introduction

Emotions play a central role in all human lives, and they fluctuate over time and across settings. In English-medium instruction (EMI) higher education contexts, a complex concoction of emotions often exists amongst stakeholders. Pecorari and Malmström (2018) define EMI contexts as using English for instructional purposes without English itself being the subject taught. In EMI contexts, language development is not the primary intended outcome and English is usually the second language for most learners. EMI is not only about language and pedagogy, but it is also a sociopolitical, economical, and ideological phenomenon which affects whole university ecosystems inside and outside the classroom (Fenton-Smith et al., 2017). In this sense, the term 'English medium education' (EME) is more inclusive as it also includes research and the phenomenon of internationalization. The role of languages other than English also shape multilingual universities. Therefore, 'English medium education in multilingual university settings (EMEMUS)' is a useful acronym when discussing language ecologies in higher education contexts dominated by English (Dafouz et al., 2016). EMEMUS are on the rise globally due to the internationalization of higher education and widespread neoliberal agendas promoting English as a commodity (De Costa et al., 2020a, 2021). For students, EMEMUS create both affordances and pressures (Reynolds, 2021) which can lead to a range of socio-emotional experiences involving emotions such as pride, confidence, belonging, guilt, shame, anxiety, frustration, hopelessness, and alienation, amongst others. For university faculty members too, teaching and interacting in EMEMUS can be an 'emotion-laden process' (Gkonou et al., 2020) involving shifting identities, energy-intensive teaching methodologies, language anxiety or discomfort, and intercultural demands.

Whilst studies exploring stakeholders' attitudes toward EMI and pedagogical challenges have mushroomed in recent years (Dearden, 2015; Jenkins, 2014; Macaro, 2018), fewer studies have theorized emotions in EMEMUS or explicitly explored stakeholders' emotions, especially in the under-researched context of the Arabian Peninsula. Existing studies based in Gulf higher education have either looked more generally at experiences in EME, with emotions being part of a larger picture (El Gamal, 2018; Hopkyns, 2020; van den Hoven & Carroll, 2017), or at specific named emotions such as 'hope' (Hopkyns, 2023a) or 'shame' (Hillman, 2022) in relation to one group of stakeholders (usually students). There

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has yet to be a Gulf-based study looking at a range of emotions from multiple groups of stakeholders (e.g., students and faculty). This study aims to help bridge this gap in the knowledge base by exploring the effects of EME on a range of emotions and levels of belonging amongst both university faculty and students in a UAE government university.

In EMI research, there tends to be 'a relatively uncritical stance' (Block & Khan, 2021, p. 6) whereby the focus is placed on working within an existing frame rather than changing larger ideologies, ecologies, and policies. For example, EMI is often taken for granted as an inevitable circumstance which accompanies globalization, or as Block and Khan (2021) describe it, there is a 'general sense of TINA (there is no alternative)' where 'the genie has too long been out of the bottle to be put back in' (p. 7). While various coping strategies are advocated, there is little questioning of the bi-directional relationship between ideologies and policies connected to EME. As most research in high ranking applied linguistics journals is published in English by scholars who are based in the USA and UK (Curry & Lillis, 2018; Piller, 2022), the benefits of 'linguistic seigniorage' (O'Regan, 2021, p. 127) are complicit with the spread and imposition of neoliberal values and practices (Collini, 2012), thus benefiting those proficient in English in a similar way to how governments profit from printing their own money. In such cases, questioning of larger neoliberal ideologies behind EME tend to be sidelined due to a level of contentment amongst those with existing power.

Similarly, emotions research has traditionally lacked criticality. Myopic views have tended to frame emotions as internal and private feelings to be 'worked through' by individuals in their own minds, or as binary opposites of either positive or negative emotions. This article moves away from such notions by taking a poststructuralist sociopolitical approach to theorizing emotions in EMEMUS. Here, emotions are analysed in terms of what they do socially, as embedded in cultural, historical, and sociopolitical contexts (Benesch, 2019). Building on previous inroads made into emotions research in Gulf EMEMUS (Hillman, 2022; Hopkyns, 2020), this article aims to delve deeper into the emotional landscape of EMEMUS with the aim of better understanding context-specific dynamics. As the UAE is a context characterized by 'waves of change' (Hopkyns & Zoghbor, 2022), ongoing and up-to-date analysis of stakeholder perspectives is necessary.

This article will begin by providing the background to EMEMUS in the UAE and an overview of previous studies on emotions in Gulf universities. Following this, emotions are theorized through exploring the concepts of emotional labor, sticky objects, emotional rules, and sites of belonging as they relate to English-medium higher education. The study, which takes the form of a phenomenological case study, is then presented along with key findings. The article ends with a discussion of the findings and practical recommendations for stakeholders and policy makers.

## 2. EMEMUS in the UAE

Universities have changed in character in the twenty-first century, especially from the 1990s with the intensification of globalization. As with multiple areas of life, neoliberal ideologies dictate agendas with universities having become money-making establishments or businesses with students as customers or consumers (Giroux, 2014). The drive to graduate from universities ranked highly in world university ranking systems or 'champion leagues' (Collini, 2012, p. 18) has created global competitiveness closely tied to economic objectives. Part of the 'neoliberalization of institutions' (Martín Rojo & Del Percio, 2020, p. 2) is an increase of EMI and EME, due to the commodification of English as a form of capital or the framing of English as a golden ticket for economic and social success (Erling et al., 2017; Sah, 2020). The mission

statements and resultant language policies of EMEMUS tend to project a sense of hope and ambition related to enhanced faculty research capacity, quality in teaching, students' horizons being broadened, and increased prestige, status, and cultural capital both locally and internationally (Egron-Polak, 2012). However, in many contexts those embedded in the system report 'a dark side' to EMI (Block, 2022) in connection with 'epistemic injustice' (Williams & Stelma, 2022) and challenging lived experiences (Block, 2022; Cho, 2020; Hillman, 2022; Hopkyns, 2020; Selvi, 2014; Sah & Li, 2018).

Although the spread of EMI in higher education is a global phenomenon, its pervasiveness varies according to country and region. The UAE, which is one of the six Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), is characterized by the ubiquity of English both in education and wider society. Although the official language of the UAE is Arabic, English is used in multiple domains (Hopkyns et al., 2021) and is the dominant medium of instruction in universities. As a young country formed in 1971, the UAE has developed rapidly over the last fifty years. The discovery of oil in the region in the 1950s and 1960s led to a period of rapid transformation. Within this short space of time, the UAE transformed from a desert land mostly populated by Bedouin tribes, traders, and pearl divers, to a global hub with a multicultural and linguistically diverse population comprised of 88.5 percent transnational residents who collectively speak over 100 languages (World Bank, 2015). Although the UAE has a rich linguistic ecology, in most settings Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and English dominate linguistic landscapes and English is most commonly heard in public spaces such as malls and cafés. It should be noted, however, that language use varies according to spaces of belonging and interaction patterns. For example, in Cook's study of linguistic ecologies in cafés in the northern emirate of Ras Al Khaimah, bottom-up language policies varied according to district, customers and items on the menu (Cook, 2021). Al Mutawa (2020) also found that certain cafés in Dubai malls were populated almost exclusively by Emiratis and, therefore, Arabic was much more commonly heard than English in these spaces of belonging.

Although the 45 licensed higher education institutions in the UAE differ in type, such as international branch campuses, private universities, public universities and three major government institutions (UAE Ministry of Education, 2022), all share the commonality of being dominated by EMI. Only a handful of degree programs are offered in Arabic, such as Islamic Studies and Sharia Law (Hopkyns, 2021). While Gulf-based international branch campuses tend to have both international students and faculty (Hillman, 2022), UAE government universities, such as the one in the study, are mainly occupied by local Emirati students who have Arabic as their first language. Government universities hire mainly transnational faculty who teach through English (Gallagher, 2019), and not only instruction is dominated by English, but also university linguistic and semiotic landscapes, social spaces, library content, assessments, and research output.

Previous studies in UAE higher education have looked at certain emotions that students experience in EMI settings. For example, Hillman (2022) explored the concept of linguistic shame in the context of a Qatari international branch campus. It was revealed that students oscillated between emotions of pride and shame. Pride stemmed from attending a prestigious branch campus and speaking English well. Shame often stemmed from feelings attached to their identities as English speakers when at home. Family members, for example, often placed pressure on them to detach from their English-speaking selves and speak only Arabic. Hillman (2022) called for complex emotions to be more openly discussed in university settings, whereby students explore the social and political issues inducing such emotions. Hopkyns' (2020) study with Emirati university students, Emirati primary school teachers and international faculty members at a government university, also

revealed heightened and complex emotions around English as a global language and EMI. Prominent emotions discussed amongst Emirati participants included 'a conflict of desires' whereby high hopes surrounded the instrumental benefits of EMI for success in the job market but in contrast, there were frequent struggles and hardships related to the 'double burden' of learning content and language simultaneously and the effects of EMI on cultural identities. Such a gap between the 'neoliberal English dream' and 'difficulties on the ground' has also been reported in a range of global contexts such as China (Ou & Gu, 2018; 2020), Korea (Cho, 2020; Williams & Stelma, 2022), Nepal (Sah & Li, 2018), Saudi Arabia (Barnawi, 2018), and Turkey (Selvi, 2014). EME not only affects emotions in terms of academic achievement, but it also affects levels of belonging in the university. Alzeer (2018) explored spaces of belonging in a government university in Dubai and found tensions around transitional spatial practices. For example, it was found that Emirati university students tended to prefer sitting on the floor in groups which contrasted with expectations placed on students to sit at individual tables or in pairs as part of the culture of internationalized higher education. Alzeer (2018) also documented ways in which Emirati university students often 'create cocoons' which involves actively making 'their own spaces' of comfort and belonging as well as expressing belonging through uniformed dress (such as the black abaya and shaila). In terms of linguistic spaces of belonging, previous Gulf-based research has highlighted the gap between English-only policies and students' natural use of translanguaging, whereby English, Arabic, and other linguistic and semiotic resources are combined in communication. Student and faculty emotions around the lack of legitimization around translanguaging in educational spaces included guilt and shame (Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2021; Carroll & van den Hoven, 2017; Hopkyns et al., 2021). In the following section emotions are theorized and key concepts relevant to the study are discussed.

## 3. Theorizing emotions – emotional rules, sticky objects, emotional labor, and sites of belonging

Often emotions and feelings are used as synonyms. However, Gkonou et al. (2020) argue that the two concepts are distinct but highly interrelated. Whereas emotions depict physical manifestations or responses to an event or phenomenon, feelings refer to mental associations and reactions to an emotion (Barrett, 2017). In other words, emotions precede feelings. Traditionally, emotions tended to be theorized via a *biological approach* where they were seen as innate and universally shared, with everyone experiencing them in the same way regardless of context, culture, and history. A further way of theorizing emotions involves the *cognitive approach.* Here emotions are seen as sources of value that come from cognitions which appraise events or phenomena. In this way, emotions are experienced when people mentally process or evaluate what has happened to them.

In contrast to biological and cognitive approaches, *the poststructuralist / discursive approach* (Ahmed, 2004; Benesch, 2017) recognizes emotions as differing according to people's individual histories, social identities, cultural contexts and power. Emotions are shaped by collective cultural experiences and mediated by power relations (Benesch, 2019). In this sense, the poststructuralist approach places importance on what emotions *do* socially (Ahmed, 2004; Benesch, 2017), rather than what emotions *are*. In addition, rather than dividing emotions into binary 'positive' and 'negative' categories, there is recognition of the complexities and changeability of emotions together with the important role social environment plays (Gkonou et al., 2020; King & Ng, 2018).

Key concepts which relate to emotions in EMEMUS include *sticky objects*, *emotional rules*, *emotional labor*, and *sites of belonging*. For the concept of 'sticky objects', Ahmed (2004) explains how

emotions allow individuals and the social to be 'delineated as if they are objects' (p. 10). Objects become sticky with affect through repetition, which leads to familiarity, naturalness, and inevitability. The neoliberal ideology attached to EMI is an example of a 'sticky object' as the association between 'English and success' is deeply ingrained in students' and teachers' psyches via repetition and familiarity. Such sticky objects thus become proxies for social norms. Exploring emotions can therefore uncover social norms, such as English as a commodity and the pressure caused by high stakes English tests. By recognizing the politics of emotions attached to sticky objects, those associated with inequality and injustice can be unraveled and challenged (Benesch, 2019). In this sense, the focus moves away from the interior as a way of analyzing emotions as 'the interiorization of well-being limits the exteriorization of injustice' (Prilleltensky, 2018, p. xxi).

A further relevant concept is 'emotional rules' (Zembylas, 2002, p. 196), which refers to expected displays of emotions according to context. Here certain emotions are considered appropriate in a specific role such as that of a teacher or student. There are certain professions, especially in the service industry, which have more emotional rules than others and more pressure for individuals in these roles to obey such emotional rules. Hochschild's (1983) seminal research on the emotions of flight attendants revealed that workplace feeling rules / emotional rules centered on displaying emotions of cheerfulness and calmness and avoiding displaying emotions such as anger. Similarly, in the 'people-centered' profession of teaching (King & Ng, 2018, p. 144) there is pressure to obey emotional rules such as positivity, liveliness, and happiness. When the pressure to obey emotional rules clashes with actual or genuine emotions, individuals have to employ 'emotional management' or experience 'emotional labor'. Hochschild (1979) explains that the former is carried out in the private realm whereas the latter applies to the public domain of work. Emotional labor is essentially 'the commodification of emotional management' (Benesch, 2017, p. 41), where emotional work becomes an aspect of a paid job. Emotional labor is theorized as the 'tension between emotional rules and teachers' training, expectations, and beliefs' (Benesch, 2019) causing them to 'actively negotiate the relationship between how they feel in particular work situations and how they are supposed to feel, according to social expectations' (Benesch, 2017, pp. 37-38).

An additional relevant aspect to the study is the under-theorized concept of 'belonging'. Belonging is a term which is often used interchangeably with home, identity, or citizenship (Walsh, 2014). Rather than belonging being fixed or stagnant, the concept of belonging is a dynamic process which can vary according to social context, social interaction patterns, and power relations within a given space (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It is a spatialized phenomenon where places, sites, spaces, territories, and landscapes connect physical objects to place through various practices of boundary making and inhabitation (Mee & Wright, 2009). Such 'sites of belonging' can be viewed as an emotional, contested, and politicized way of relating to place and space (Antonsich, 2010).

Previous research has found heightened emotions in both teachers and students in Second Language Learning (SLL) and EMI classrooms as well as in EME university social spaces (Benesch, 2017; De Costa et al., 2018, 2020b; Ding & Benesch, 2018; Hillman, 2022; Hopkyns, 2020; King & Ng, 2018; West, 2019; Yuan, 2021). For example, in the context of China, Yuan (2021) found complexities in EMI university teachers' emotions. Teacher participants discussed the additional workload they faced as they often had to 'juggle various demands (e.g., teaching, research, and publishing) and learn to integrate EMI with content teaching in various disciplines' (p. 1). Their efforts to adapt content for EMI classes was seldom credited by their institution when compared with research output, resulting in emotional labor in the form of frustration

and resentment. Yuan (2021) pointed out that teacher emotions were not only related to personal dispositions and psychological qualities but, in line with a post-structuralist perspective (De Costa et al, 2018), social and political experiences in EMI settings also affected emotional experiences. Furthermore, in South Korea, West's (2019) teacher participants discussed conflicting emotions around their neoliberal educational context. West's white American teacher participants felt unease and guilt around neoliberalism but at the same time wanted to preserve their racial and linguistic power and privilege. This led to a conflict between moral positions. For students in EMI contexts, mixed emotions often exist in relation to neoliberalism. Hopes for what English could do for them, as a commodity, contrasts with difficulties faced in relation to cognitive load, linguistic struggles, and a sense of cultural alienation (Hopkyns, 2020; Sah & Li, 2018; Selvi, 2014). In EMI contexts, Miller and Gkonou (2018, 2022) found that even stakeholders who think of themselves as 'happy', regularly experience emotional labor and their happiness is often intermingled with moments of unhappiness and emotional hurdles (Miller & Gkonou, 2022). Benesch (2017), in her book 'Emotions and English Language Teaching' found that certain aspects of teaching resulted in more intense emotional labor than others. These aspects included emotional labor in relation to high-stakes testing, responding to student writing, plagiarism, and attendance. Such areas of emotional labor combined with EMI neoliberal moral dilemmas may adversely affect teacher wellbeing (King & Ng, 2018). In the following section, we turn to the methodology and social context for the current study.

## 4. The study

The current study is part of a larger research project which investigates stakeholders' perspectives on English-medium universities in relation to language use, translingual practice, identities, and emotions. For the larger research project which began in 2019 and is ongoing, a phenomenological case study approach was taken, with the phenomenon under investigation being EMEMUS. From this larger research project, the current study narrowed the focus to look at parts of the data which concentrated on emotions. Both teacher participants (n =10) and student participants (n =110) wrote metalinguistic reflections as part of an open-response survey related to language use in EMEMUS. The questions on the surveys related to a range of subtopics including perspectives on EMI, translingual practice, and assessments in EMEMUS. The teacher participants were also asked to reflect on emotional labor as it relates to giving feedback, plagiarism, attendance, and language use. These areas were chosen based on key areas of emotional labor for teachers identified by Benesch (2017). Although few questions to participants explicitly used the word 'emotions', when analysing data through the lens of emotions work, rich insights could be gained, which highlighted the integral role of emotions in EMEMUS. When completing the metalinguistic reflections on emotions and EMI, both students and teachers were informed that they could use their full linguistic repertoires. However, upon collection of the responses, a vast majority of the reflections were in English only. This may have been influenced by English-only expectations in the EME setting.

Phenomenology, which was founded by Edmund Husserl, was deemed a suitable approach for the study as it investigates people's lived experience and how they make sense of lived experiences in the context of their personal and social worlds (Smith & Nizza, 2021). Phenomenology is 'the study of structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view' ('Phenomenology', 2003, p. 1). A central part of phenomenology is 'intentionality' whereby the participants are directed toward reflecting on the meanings of an experience or an object of

significance. In the case of the current study, the phenomenon participants reflected upon was EMEMUS in relation to emotions. Phenomenology was combined with the case study approach as participants were bound by time and place (based at the same EMI university in the UAE during the same time period), and the phenomenon of emotions in EMEMUS was explored from multiple angles (teacher and student perspectives) (Creswell, 2007; Yin, 2014). Metalinguistic reflections were seen as an appropriate data collection tool as telling stories through reflective writing or narrative inquiry (Barkhuizen, 2017) can aid self-reflection and help retrospective interpretation of emotional labor experienced. Miller and Gkonou (2019) point out that teacher accounts of 'critical incidents' in their teaching practice and experience can be particularly helpful for understanding the complexities of their emotions due to the long-lasting effects and high emotional impact of critical incidents. Through the phenomenological case study approach, the study aimed to collect rich qualitative data revealing insights into emotions and emotional labor in EMEMUS. The study was primarily guided by two research questions:

RQ1: To what extent do transnational university teachers experience emotional labor in their EMEMUS?

RQ2: How does English-medium education (EME) affect Emirati university students' emotions and levels of belonging?

The participants in the study included ten university faculty members and 110 university students. Tables 1 and 2 provide the biographical data for the participants in the study. Purposive sampling was used to select the teacher participants in order to gain a wide range of perspectives from teachers with various backgrounds, knowledge of additional languages (Lx) and years of experience teaching at the university (Table 1). Due to the fact that almost 90 percent of the UAE's population are transnational residents, there are comparatively few Emirati teachers in higher education (Gallagher, 2019). For this reason, the teacher participants in this study are from countries other than the UAE. Cluster sampling was used for the student participants as they were already in pre-arranged classes. As seen in Table 2, most student participants were female due to the gender imbalance of the university. In 2018 the Ministry of Education reported that 74% of UAE HE students were female (Sim, 2020). Most of the students at the university (especially in the Dubai campus) are female, which may be due to the fact that many young male Emiratis complete military service after graduating from high school and then go straight into a government job. Studying abroad (usually in an anglophone country) is also more common amongst male Emirati students.

The data from the metalinguistic reflections were analysed thematically. Six stages of coding were used which included familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and labeling themes, and reporting the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). To achieve the purpose of authenticity, representative quotes were taken from the data to demonstrate the main themes identified and to show participants' perspectives in their own words. Ethical procedures were followed during the study which included gaining ethical clearance from the university, obtaining signed consent forms from participants, briefing them about the purpose of the study, and assuring anonymity and confidentiality of the participants and the university. For the reporting of the findings, pseudonyms were used.

## 5. Findings

The findings section is divided into two parts: Teachers' emotional labor and students' emotions and sites of belonging.
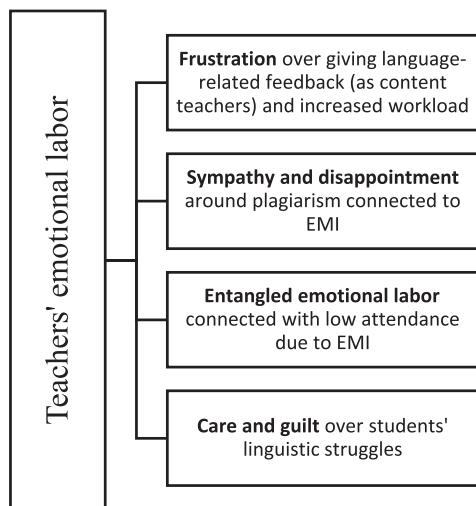
**Table 1**
The profiles of teacher participants.

| # | Pseudonym | Country | Gender | College / Department & courses most often taught | Years at the university | First language /Native-like proficiency | LX |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Mark | Canada | Male | Humanities & Social Sciences (HSS) – English Composition | 9 | English | French, German, Irish, Japanese, Arabic |
| 2 | Geoff | UK | Male | HSS / Business – Business communication | 9 | English | French, German, Korean |
| 3 | Jackie | UK | Female | Education – Early childhood education | 10 | English | French, Russian, Arabic |
| 4 | Matthew | Ireland | Male | HSS - English Composition | 9 | English | Irish, French |
| 5 | Darrius | New Zealand | Male | HSS – Language and literacy in schools | 10 | Persian and English | French |
| 6 | Fahad | Pakistan | Male | HSS - Language and literacy in schools | 6 | Urdu and English | Punjabi, Pashto, Hindko |
| 7 | Heba | Egypt | Female | Education - Early childhood education | 2 | Arabic and English | French, Turkish |
| 8 | Jennifer | New Zealand | Female | HSS - English Composition | 9 | English | Maori, Korean, Arabic |
| 9 | Ayesha | USA | Female | HSS - Early childhood education | 8 | English | Spanish, Arabic, Patois |
| 10 | Lina | Germany | Female | HSS – English in the professions | 6 | German and English | French |

**Table 2**
The profiles of the university students.

| # | Gender | Pseudonyms | Nationality | Years at the university | First language | LX |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1-110 | 103 females, 7 males | A range of pseudonyms used for participant quotes shared | All Emirati | 2-4 | Arabic | English (all), Turkish, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Persian, French, Spanish, Hindi, Urdu, Tagalog, Swahili (at mixed proficiencies). |



**Fig. 1.** Teachers' emotional labor: overview of themes.

### 5.1. Teachers' emotional labor

Based on the areas of emotional labor identified in Benesch (2017), the teacher participants were asked to reflect upon aspects of teaching in their EMEMUS including emotions relating to four key areas: feedback, plagiarism, attendance, and linguistic struggles. Although these four areas were used as a starting point, participants expanded their responses to include perspectives on other areas of significance too, as seen in the Findings section. Fig. 1 shows the main named emotions or entangled emotions attached to the four main aspects.

#### 5.1.1. Frustration over giving language-related feedback and increased workload

Teachers commented on emotional labor they experience when giving language-related feedback on students' work. There was a mismatch between expectations and reality which related to English proficiency. For example, Mark commented on having spent time carefully explaining class assignments and expecting a collection of well-written papers to be submitted based on the models he had shown. In reality, due to low English language proficiency, many assignments either had a high density of errors or the guidelines had not been followed. Such a discrepancy between expectations and actuality resulted in emotional labor. Here, feelings of frustration and hopelessness had to be managed by teachers as well as their workload being negatively impacted due to increased time needed to give language-related feedback. This was compounded by the fact that content teachers did not identify as language teachers and felt giving language-related feedback should not be part of their role. In Extracts 1 and 2, Mark and Lina explain a concoction of emotions, with frustration at the center.

Extract 1:

> Assignments can take a long time to grade because we have a lot of students who are not the right level. When you are trying to mark those papers, it's extremely difficult because they haven't followed the models or done what you've asked them to do. It's exhausting when you're trying to give them feedback. It's also frustrating because the students haven't been paying attention in class and they have turned in a paper which doesn't have the elements you've asked for like APA referencing. You have to give them the best grade you can, the fairest grade, but it just makes our job a lot more difficult. I guess the biggest emotion I feel is frustration. (Mark)

Extract 2:

I feel that this is not a real EMI university. We pretend that this is an English-speaking university, and these are English-speaking students, yet we do not apply EMI or CLIL methods. I feel that students are neglected, faculty over-whelmed. (Lina)

Low English proficiency in students together with lack of recognition for students as second language learners not only affected teachers' emotional labor in relation to giving feedback but also the general wellbeing of both students and teachers.

### 5.1.2. Sympathy and disappointment around plagiarism connected to EMI

Teachers commented on plagiarism being an issue in their EMI classes. There was a general agreement that linguistic struggles often led to either ineffective paraphrasing (for example, substituting awkward synonyms such as 'tomfoolery' in place of 'fun') or full 'copy-paste'-style copying. Other teachers stated that essay mills are problematic globally, so plagiarism is not automatically a result of EMI. In Extract 3, Geoff articulates the complexities around the relationship between EMI and plagiarism.

Extract 3:

I don't know if plagiarism is directly connected to EMI because essay mills are going on everywhere. It's going on in UK universities. However, I do think EMI plays a role in plagiarism because some students struggle with the level of English which is required of them in the university. (Geoff)

Teachers identified plagiarism as an emotionally laden element of their jobs which was exacerbated by the EMI context. Emotions fluctuated according to the degree of plagiarism and the reasons behind it. For example, Mark identified three types of students in his EMI classes: those who cope well, those who struggle and unintentionally plagiarize, and those who plagiarize on purpose (for a range of reasons). In each of these cases a different emotional response is evoked ranging from sympathy to disappointment, as seen in Extract 4.

Extract 4:

I think there are three groups of students. There are students who come in with high English skills who can cope, perhaps they've been to private school. Then, there are students who are trying but just find the level of the work expected of them too high and so they are kind of cornered and forced into plagiarism. Finally, there's a third group who just want to get through as quickly as possible and are not even really trying and just are going to cheat for that reason. When I see something that is plagiarized, it is contextualized by which of those groups that I think is doing it. If I think that someone is plagiarizing because it is just too hard for them then I feel a certain amount of sympathy. If I see something that is entirely plagiarized, then my main emotion is disappointment because there's a sense that you've been let down by the students. (Mark)

Extracts 3-4 demonstrate that although plagiarism is recognized as an issue faced in general classrooms globally, the daunting nature of producing work in English in EMI contexts was seen to exacerbate plagiarism cases and in turn increase teachers' emotional labor.

### 5.1.3. Entangled emotional labor connected with low attendance due to EMI

When asked about emotions around attendance and its relationship to EMI, teachers voiced a range of perspectives. It was recognized that while attendance issues may be present in any classroom, EMI was seen as amplifying such issues as students who struggle with English-medium content may have cause to be more frequently absent due to a desire to avoid negative emotions felt in EMI classrooms. Teachers discussed the connection between EMI and attendance by stating that in some cases students stopped attending or stopped paying attention due to loss of confidence connected to receiving low grades and low language proficiency. Loss of confidence then led to loss of motivation or will to engage, as voiced by Geoff in Extract 5.

Extract 5:

Poor attendance and attrition are often related to the EMI environment because some students drop out because they are frustrated with their grade, or they are unhappy with the grades they've been getting and that can be related to struggling in the EMI environment. (Geoff)

Emotions connected with attendance were seen to be particularly difficult due to strict attendance policies at the university and the need for teachers to follow these policies. Mark discussed the contrast between emotional rules around the task of taking attendance and the emotional labor often experienced by teachers. In this sense, taking attendance is often assumed to be a neutral, quick, and simple procedure which takes place in the first five minutes of class. However, taking attendance caused emotional labor for teachers due to its connection with classroom management, as seen in Extract 6.

Extract 6:

Attendance is definitely an issue. In the EMI university where I work, attendance is mandatory. It's always been quite a frustrating process because you spend quite a lot of the class taking attendance because students are late coming in and you want to get going with your class but you can't because when they come in late, they immediately start talking about whether they've been marked late or present. For them, it's a big thing because if they miss too many classes they'll be suspended. (Mark)

Jackie explained that on Zoom and for hybrid learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, emotions around attendance were heightened. A lack of control was emphasized here, as seen in Extract 7.

Extract 7:

On Zoom, it (attendance issue) was even worse. Students were coming in at different times and it wasn't always clear whether they were in the class or not, so it was a hard process. Last semester, we had hybrid classes which made attendance even more difficult with some students in the class and others on Zoom. (Jackie)

In Extract 7, Jackie indirectly refers to the scarce use of video cameras on Zoom amongst Emirati female university students, which is often due to cultural and linguistic factors related to modesty and fear of making mistakes with English online (Hopkyns, 2022; 2023b). Furthermore, in Extract 8, Geoff discussed the gap between emotional rules around attendance and actual emotions, which resulted in emotional labor on a daily basis.

Extract 8:

Attendance is one of these issues we deal with on a daily basis where we are very frustrated but we're not supposed to show that to the students. We're supposed to have a calm and professional demeanor and interaction with the students. So, the dissonance between the external face and your internal feelings is something that causes stress for teachers (Geoff).

When asked about emotions around attendance, Matthew discussed how teachers did not always follow emotional rules around staying calm and positive. Those who let their frustration show faced another form of emotional labor in the form of resultant emotions of shame and transgression, as voiced in Extract 9.

Extract 9:

> Some teachers decide to just show it (genuine emotions), even though they are not supposed to. In the UAE context, students actually respond to it and sometimes they apologize or there might be a temporary change in behavior, which will not last. In my department, there have been cases of teachers leaving the classroom altogether. They storm out because they are so frustrated and can't handle the class anymore. After that, classes come to their office with flowers. Personally, I've never done that because I feel that doing that is like saying you can't do your job properly and you can't manage your class which shows that you can't cope. (Matthew)

It was recognized that even if teachers generally followed emotional rules, emotions could not be disguised entirely. Furthermore, there was the sense that teachers' emotional labor in relation to EMI was not recognized or appreciated by the university, as voiced by Jackie in Extract 10:

Extract 10:

> You can't hide your emotions entirely. I mean we are not robots. It's just a case of deciding what level of emotional response is allowable or appropriate in a classroom setting. I don't think the university has given any clear guidance on what emotions are allowed or not allowed in the classroom, but I do think there's a lot of pressure on us to be ideal teachers. There is an expectation that we give 110% for the students. We're all doing that, but at the same time I'm not sure we're really given the support we need to achieve that. (Jackie)

Other teachers felt personal or cultural emotional rules overshadowed university emotional rules, in the sense that teachers' cultural backgrounds affected displays of emotions. Matthew made the point that 'in multinational environments, not every culture has the same viewpoint' with regard to personal emotional rules and this may lead teachers to manage emotions differently.

### 5.1.4. Fluctuating emotions of care and guilt over students' linguistic struggles

Emotions around students' linguistic struggles in EME contexts were complex. Firstly, teachers commented on the diversity of students in their classes in terms of schooling backgrounds and how this affected the EME experience. Teachers also commented on the UAE context whereby students did not actively choose EME. Teachers who witnessed students struggling linguistically felt mainly care and sympathy, as Mark's reflection indicates in Extract 11. However, although teachers recognized EMI as problematic in many ways, there was also a somewhat guilty acknowledgment from Anglophone teachers that they themselves were directly benefiting from mandatory EMI in UAE higher education in terms of job security and hiring practices favoring 'native English speaker teachers (NESTs)' (Daoud & Kasztalska, 2022). Jennifer's reflection articulates this point in Extract 12.

Extract 11:

> My feelings for students who are struggling linguistically is sympathy. I feel sympathy that students can't choose to do their degree in Arabic. They don't have that choice. (Mark)

Extract 12:

> I see advantages and disadvantages with EMI. I'd like to see options for Arabic instruction (even though this could have negative repercussions for my own employment – EMI is my bread and butter!). There are obvious reasons for the need and desire to have EMI universities in the UAE but there are dangers surrounding some loss of culture, language, and identity. (Jennifer)

Teachers suggested policy changes which would allow for greater agency for students in terms of deciding on the medium of instruction as well as an increased level of belonging in university spaces, as seen in Matthew's comment in Extract 13. Further suggested changes related to lessening the linguistic and cultural gap between transnational faculty members and Emirati students through continuous professional development sessions on culturally responsive pedagogies, as Ayesha suggests in Extract 14.

Extract 13:

> I can see the benefits of doing their degree in EMI for them to be successful internationally but at the same time, it would be sensible to offer Arabic-medium degrees too. Some students are frustrated by not having the level of English they need to do well, and this may negatively affect their sense of belonging in the university. (Matthew)

Extract 14:

> Faculty need to challenge their perceptions and biases. They need to reconcile negative feelings or animosities. Faculty should take Arabic classes, at least introductory level, and they would benefit from continuous PD around cross-cultural training, inclusion of people/places/things, and culturally responsive pedagogies in order to both reach and teach students. (Ayesha)

As seen in Extracts 11-13, teachers' emotions fluctuated. On the one hand EMI was seen as problematic for some students and it was felt that more options should be available, such as Arabic-medium degrees. On the other hand, there was a recognition that EMI kept teachers' employment secure as English speakers in a position of power. There was also a sense of added responsibility to 'reach and teach' students via culturally responsive pedagogy.

### 5.2. Students' emotions and sites of belonging relating to EMI

The student participants (n = 110) wrote metalinguistic reflections on a range of sub-topics relating to EMI. Such sub-topics included language use, cultural identities, and levels of belonging in EMEMUS. Four main themes emerged relating to emotions (Fig. 2). Emotions impacted by EMI centered around high-stakes English tests, EME as a 'sticky object', agency around medium of instruction (MOI) and translingual identities.

### 5.2.1. Frustration related to high-stakes English tests and EMI

When sharing perspectives on high-stakes English tests in their EMI university, students voiced frustration and a sense of unbelonging. For example, a level of discomfort was felt in relation to the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), which is commonly used as an entrance and exit exam for the university. Emirati university student, Laila, made the short but powerful statement 'The IELTS, it is not for us' when reflecting on its content, difficulty, and format. Other students commented on the gatekeeper status of high stakes English tests which caused hopelessness and pressure, as voiced by Maitha in Extract 15.
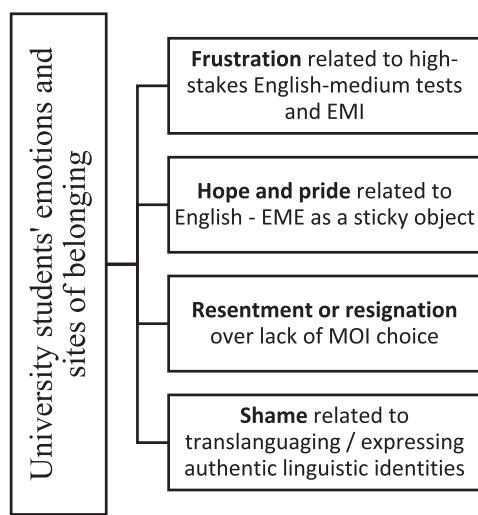
Extract 15:

**Fig. 2.** University students' emotions and sites of belonging– overview of themes.

IELTS is a barrier. I have taken it many times, sometimes more than once in a semester. My score never changes much. I feel stress and pressure. Like kind of what's the point. (Maitha)

Other students discussed the notion of unbelonging in relation to cultural and linguistic divisions between their mainly Anglophone teachers and themselves as EMI students. Emotions such as intimidation, nervousness, stress, anxiety, and reticence were associated with EMI classrooms. Such emotions led some students to feel like a 'failure', as voiced by Hessa in Extract 16.

Extract 16:

The teachers who give the material are of English nationality, so sometimes the student feels unable to participate. This is because of his poor English, which causes him to have negative feelings, and sometimes he feels like a failure, as I sometimes feel if I have difficulty choosing a word that I do not know the meaning of in English. (Hessa)

Extracts 15-16 show a range of adverse emotions connected to high-stakes English tests and EMI classes with an overall sense of 'unbelonging' in the educational context.

*5.2.2. Hope and pride related to English - EME as a sticky object*

A notable pattern within the student data was the contrast between generally positive ideologies surrounding EME but often difficult emotional experiences on the ground. Students expressed positive ideologies regarding what EME represented, often holding high hopes and expectations in relation to visualizing their future English-speaking selves (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). Such positivity surrounding 'the concept or idea of EME' is connected to neoliberal ideologies in society, which have then been internalized by students as they become 'neoliberal subjects', believing in the capital of English for the construction of their ideal future selves. Manan et al. (2022) name such an unquestioning belief in the future benefits of EME as 'English medium fever'. In this sense, EME has arguably become a 'sticky object' which induces certain emotions due to the familiarity of the discourse around the phenomenon as both beneficial and necessary. Even if students are struggling in the EME environment, emotions generally remain hopeful due to the promised benefits EME will bring. Such a view is voiced by Hessa in Extract 17.

Extract 17:

From my point of view, I see that the English language for me is not good enough, but I strive to develop it for the future. English language is wonderful and helps a lot in raising the achievement level of students who are proficient in it. I also encourage students to practice the language to avoid the negative feelings they have during the lessons. (Hessa)

Students also expressed positive emotions such as pride toward their bilingual identities (Arabic and English) due to receiving their education through the medium of English. However, often alongside pride associated with English were emotions of fear around preserving the Arabic language in the face of EME and the dominance of English in society at large. In Extract 18, Reem voices this viewpoint.

Extract 18:

English does not develop negative feelings, because we can speak two languages now and that is magnificent. I hope only for the future generation to use Arabic more in their home and this generation too. (Reem)

Such conflicted emotions around English, as seen in Extract 18, have been recognized as a 'double-edged sword' (Hopkyns, 2014), where hopes are high, but the reality is more challenging.

*5.2.3. Resentment or resignation over lack of MOI choice*

Although emotions such as hope and optimism were prevalent in the data, other emotions such as resentment and resignation were also expressed, especially in relation to the lack of choice over MOI in UAE higher education. In Extract 19, Mariam points out the disjunction between expectations for a 'pleasant' English-only university and the hardships students face due to linguistic struggles. Such English-only expectations and linguistic struggles affected her ability to communicate feelings and led to feelings of resentment, inauthenticity, and lack of belonging.

Extract 19:

English-medium education in majority of our universities is incorrect. It would be preferable if we had English classes and exams for some individuals who spoke English. However, it (EME) is incorrect to reside in a pleasant English university. We are unable to fully communicate our feelings, and I, for one, believe that I am not myself. As an Emirati student, doing assessments and conversing in our own language will be much more beneficial. Learning English at a suitable level is beneficial to us and will relieve tension. (Mariam)

Other students voiced concerns over the effects of EME on their Arabic-speaking selves, as seen in Hind's reflection, in Extract 20.

Extract 20:

English-medium education affects students because they learned in English so when it comes to Arabic, they become weak in them and have problems with writing and reading. (Hind)

Together with resentment over mandatory EME was a sense of resignation. In this sense, students were not always content with the lack of choice over MOI but also saw it as futile to think beyond EME. There was a notion that EME 'just is' and it represented the indisputable way forward. Such notions can be seen in Fatima's reflection in Extract 21.

Extract 21:

English-medium education causes mainly negative emotions, but it's also different from one person to another. I see many girls have low achievement levels, identities, and sense of belonging and this affects our society negatively. As (name of the university) students, I feel we need to work hard so we can preserve our language and our Arabic identity. (Fatima)

Fatima's reflection echoes findings from Block and Khan's (2021) research whereby there is a general sense of 'TINA (there is no alternative)' amongst EMI students, despite conflicting emotions.

### 5.2.4. Shame related to translanguaging / expressing authentic linguistic identities

A final prominent theme in the student data included emotions around language use in the EMI context. Students commented on the naturalness and authenticity of using full linguistic repertoires as translingual speakers. However, while most students had neutral emotions around translingual practice in EMI contexts, approximately one third of the students voiced negative emotions around such practice in EME settings. Reflections by Sara, Amina, and Abeer in Extracts 22-24 articulate feelings of 'guilty multilingualism' (Manan et al., 2022) with emotions of shame, guilt, or transgression attached to using their full linguistic repertoires in the EMI classroom.

Extract 22:

The two languages should not be mixed because this weakens our mother tongue and does not improve any of these languages. (Sara)

Extract 23:

I feel that this (translanguaging) is something bad and I stopped using this way in writing for a long time because this blurs the language. And sometimes I feel that this way of writing is silly. (Amina)

Extract 24:

Either talk/type in English or Arabic. I feel like it's unnecessary to mix both in different letters/numbers. However, I am guilty myself of doing so in the past. (Abeer)

The contrast between natural translingual practice amongst plurilingual individuals and English-only expectations / language purity ideologies negatively affects levels of belonging in EMEMUS. The following section will discuss the findings in relation to poststructural and discursive approaches to emotions.

## 6. Discussion

Findings revealed fluctuating and entangled emotions and levels of belonging amongst stakeholders. Intersecting identity aspects such as English proficiency, linguistic background, and language ideologies influenced emotional experiences of stakeholders in EME spaces. Shifting positionalities relating to spaces and interaction patterns led many students and teachers to experience an 'emotional rollercoaster' (Gkonou et al., 2020).

Teachers in the study mainly reflected on how the linguistic struggles of their students impacted their role as teachers in an EMEMUS setting. Teachers linked students' low proficiency in English to emotional labor such as spending an extended time giving feedback, dealing with cases of plagiarism, and stress around low attendance which was partly brought about by students avoiding classes if struggling with the content. Teachers discussed emotional rules around such areas, such as expectations to maintain a calm

and pleasant demeanor despite feeling overwhelmed and experiencing internal emotions of frustration. Following such emotional rules caused emotional labor, especially when such efforts were not recognized by the university. This echoes findings from Yuan's (2021) study where teachers were expected to calmly manage the extra demands of EMI teaching while thriving in a 'publish-or-perish' academic world, with credit primarily attached to research output. Conversely, for teachers who disregarded emotional rules by displaying genuine emotions of frustration or anger, feelings of transgression, shame and embarrassment followed. Faculty, who were mainly from Anglophone countries, also highlighted the emotion of guilt over English being the global language and students having no choice but to take their degrees in English. In this way, the system of EME, larger neoliberal ideologies and power dynamics were blamed rather than the students themselves. Such findings point to moral dilemmas surrounding neoliberalism in EME, as also seen in West's (2019) study in the context of South Korea.

Prominent emotions discussed amongst the Emirati university students mirrored teachers' emotions in some ways. For example, many student emotions related to English proficiency and English as a gatekeeper, especially regarding high stakes English tests. However, students' emotions also centered around the notion of belonging in the university space. Specifically, the data revealed a gap between EMI as a 'sticky object' representing the neoliberal promise of a better life and the hardships brought about by the 'double burden' of learning content and language simultaneously. Complex emotions not only related to language but also to cultural spaces of belonging. Prominent examples of cultural identities jarring with EME included the perceived unsuitability of English tests such as the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and ingrained notions that translanguaging did not belong in EMI classrooms. Emotions around EMI therefore fluctuated between pride, enthusiasm and high hopes associated with 'English medium fever' (Manan et al., 2022) and frustration over linguistic struggles, resentment over lack of choice regarding MOI and 'guilty multilingualism' (Manan, et al., 2022). Such findings are supported by previous studies in the Gulf where English tests such as IELTS were found to be culturally biased in terms of cultural content from the west (Freimuth, 2022), and language purity beliefs in EME contexts affected students' sense of belonging (Hopkyns & Elyas; 2022; Hillman, 2022; Al-Bataineh & Gallagher, 2021).

Based on the study's findings, three key recommendations can be made: 1) Greater recognition of complex emotions and emotional labor in EMEMUS; 2) Emotions as a springboard for critical discussions about EMI policies; 3) Context-specific reforms based on discursive strategies related to emotional labor.

Firstly, greater recognition of complex emotions and emotional labor in EMEMUS is needed. From a political perspective, drawing attention to the twin concepts of emotional rules and emotional labor allows the clashes between the two concepts to be observed. By revealing the disjunction between how teachers (and students) are 'supposed to feel' (feeling rules / emotional rules) and the effort it takes to manage or mask genuine feelings (emotional labor), problematic institutional beliefs can 'be tapped into for transformational purposes' (Benesch, 2019, p. 178). As Benesch (2019) recognizes, from a poststructuralist discursive approach, the purpose of emotions research is:

not to alleviate emotional labor, but to shine a light on it so that it can be seen as unavoidable tension between competing interests. Instead of attempting to eradicate emotional labor, it can be drawn upon as a tool to address incompatibilities and work toward better conditions for teachers and students. (p. 178)

Such sentiments and recognition of complex emotions and emotional labor should be incorporated into teacher training courses, classrooms dialogues, and continuous professional devel-

opment sessions, rather than the role of emotions being sidelined or ignored in the name of promoting expected behaviors (feeling / emotional rules).

Secondly, the study of stakeholder emotions can act as a springboard for critical discussions about EMI. Through such critical discussions, the stickiness of the concept of EMI can be unpacked. Challenging the 'TINA (there is no alternative)' status of EMI can help bridge the gap seen in the student data between high hopes and difficult realities. Problematizing aspects of EMI in open forums can create circles of solidarity rather than teachers and students experiencing conflicts privately, which can lead to self-blame and doubts about their pedagogical or scholarly competence. By highlighting emotional tensions as an unavoidable feature of EMI, stakeholders can consider their choices and work toward more appropriate context-specific policies and practices (Benesch, 2019).

Finally, on a practical level, context-specific reforms around identified areas of emotional labor need to be implemented. Based on the findings from the current study, such reforms could include greater English language support for students which should take the form of English language teachers working alongside content teachers to best support students (Carroll, 2022; Hillman, 2021; Jones et al., 2022). Tailored sessions with English language teachers in well-resourced writing centers should focus on specific areas including the avoidance of plagiarism and developing academic skills such as using models and managing time etc. Greater promotion and legitimization of translingual practice in EMI classrooms would also allow students' authentic linguistic and cultural identities to be part of their university experience. Previous studies globally and in the Gulf have found enhanced sense of belonging when the L1 is embraced in EMI contexts (Carroll, 2022). In this sense, rather than feeling shame around translingual practice, using full linguistic repertoires should be reframed as a resource, where no language should be banned from the classroom.

## 7. Conclusion

This article has shared findings from a phenomenological case study with 120 participants (110 Emirati university students and ten transnational university teachers at a government UAE university), where fluctuating and entangled emotions and levels of belonging related to EMEMUS were revealed. The article concluded that teachers' emotional labor related primarily to linguistic struggles and low English proficiency of their students which influenced areas of their teaching experiences including giving feedback, plagiarism, and attendance. Emotional rules and expectations for teachers to present a cheerful, calm, and pleasant demeanor contrasted with genuine emotions of frustration, guilt, compassion, sympathy, and lack of recognition. The article also revealed that students' emotions fluctuated between pride and hopefulness attached to English in education and a sense of unbelonging related to linguistic and cultural challenges as well as expectations for standardized English leading to a sense of 'guilty multilingualism' in EME spaces. Based on the study's findings three recommendations were put forward which include greater recognition of stakeholders' emotional labor and sociolinguistic lived realities rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to English-medium education, critical discussions problematizing EMI as a 'sticky object', and the need for context-specific pedagogical reforms. Such courses of action would be concrete moves in the right direction in terms of improving conditions for stakeholders in EMEMUS.

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