

RESEARCH ARTICLE

The attitude of International Arab EFL Students toward the English Language as a "Controlling" Force

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ABSTRACT

English is perceived as a neutral tool for worldwide communication among International Arab postgraduate learners. However, English is perceived as a systematic 'controlling' power that influences their academic success and cultural identity. The basic difference between dominance and control functions as the theoretical fulcrum of this study, turning it from just an observation of linguistic patterns into a critical investigation of power relations. "Control" suggests a systemic and active power that restricts speakers' choice, whereas "dominance" is sometimes exposed as passive or neutral. This study focuses on the views of eighteen Arab postgraduate learners toward English as a significant "controlling" power. The results show a multifaceted debate in which students perceive English as an fundamental professional need while concurrently opposing its effect on their national identity. Qualitative research gathers data. Eighteen foreign Arab students from the University of Utara Malaysia were interviewed. This research examines students' views of English as a "controlling" factor, its effects on Arabic, and their attitudes about its usage.

Keywords: English , dominant language , English language students , foreign language , cultural decline.

مقالة بحثية

تصورات الطلاب العرب الدوليين الذين يتعلمون اللغة الإنجليزية كلفة أجنبية تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها قوة "مسيطرة"

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الملخص:

نظر إلى اللغة الإنجليزية على أنها أداة محايدة للتواصل العالمي بين طلاب الدراسات العليا العرب الدوليين. ومع ذلك، يُنظر إليها أيضًا على أنها قوة "مسيطرة" منهجية تؤثر على نجاحهم الأكاديمي وهويتهم الثقافية. ويُشكّل الفرق الأساسي بين الهيمنة والسيطرة محورًا نظرًا لهذه الدراسة، محوّلًا إياها من مجرد رصد لأنماط اللغوية إلى بحث نقدي في علاقات القوة. تشير "السيطرة" إلى قوة منهجية وفعالة تُقيّد خيارات المتحدثين، بينما تُصوّر "الهيمنة" أحيانًا على أنها سلبية أو محايدة. تركز هذه الدراسة على آراء ثمانية عشر طالبًا عربيًا من طلاب الدراسات العليا تجاه اللغة الإنجليزية باعتبارها قوة "مسيطرة" مؤثرة. تُظهر النتائج نقاشًا متعدد الأوجه، حيث يرى الطلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كحاجة مهنية أساسية، بينما يعارضون في الوقت نفسه تأثيرها على هويتهم الوطنية. يجمع البحث النوعي البيانات من خلال مقابلات مع ثمانية عشر طالبًا عربيًا أجنبيًا من جامعة أوتارا ماليزيا. يدرس هذا البحث آراء الطلاب حول اللغة الإنجليزية كعامل "مسيطر"، وتأثيراتها على اللغة العربية، ومواقفهم تجاه استخدامها. الفرق الأساسي بين الهيمنة والسيطرة هو الفرق الأساسي بين الهيمنة والسيطرة، وتأثيرها على اللغة العربية، ومواقفهم تجاه استخدامها. تم جمع البيانات من خلال البحث النوعي. أُجريت مقابلات مع ثمانية عشر طالبًا عربيًا أجنبيًا من جامعة أوتارا ماليزيا. يدرس هذا البحث آراء الطلاب حول اللغة الإنجليزية كعامل "مسيطر"، وتأثيراتها على اللغة العربية، ومواقفهم تجاه استخدامها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية ، لغة مهيمنة، طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية ، لغة أجنبية ، التدهور الثقافي.

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1. Introduction

All over the world, English is used as an international language, with World Englishes (WE) representing the emerging varieties employed in different contexts. Recently, English has been represented as a lingua franca across business, academia, and In this definition, "control" is an active, systemic power that imposes 'systemic compulsion ' on EFL students. Learners think they have "no alternative" but to study English to access scientific content and global conversations. Sometimes called a 'necessary evil, ' this circumstance enforces a strict linguistic order on the student's native language [2, p. 115].

English is a 'controlling force ' that deliberately destroys the national language, decreasing its utility and cultural relevance even among its own speakers. Linguistic dominance is not ethically neutral; promotes one language above local linguistic identity[3, p. 18].

According to Phillipson's influential study, English is represented as a tool of linguistic and cultural domination, progressively becoming more important than native languages [4, p. 7]. This dynamic can lead to inequalities in postcolonial communities, as differences established during colonial times. Schooling in Kenya during the colonial era gave preference to the English language over other languages, promoting it to the position of main language while simultaneously reducing the significance of local or indigenous languages [3, p. 22]. These ideas suggest that English has ideological power that can push original or native languages aside and even change how people think about their original or native identities and history.

For EFL students in Arab societies, English has been perceived as a powerful 'controlling ' force. This illustrates the 'No Choice 'framework, where English dictates

international communication [1, p. 42]. The concept of dominance is sometimes framed as a 'neutral byproduct' of global usefulness parameters of academic and professional success. While EFL learners are concerned about

the about the negative impacts of English on their self-esteem, Baker (1992) and Dörnyei (2003) have mostly measured these views through quantitative surveys [5, p. 301]. To realize how EFL learners express and manage these feelings, a more detailed qualitative consideration is required. Students' beliefs can explain discrepancies, rationales, and complexities in—statistical data.

The most recent study investigates the pervasive and compulsory use of English both within and outside educational institutions. In this research, data is redefined as a controlling force. The study aims to know how pragmatic, skeptical overseas Arab students interpret English. They recognize its significance for development; however, they are aware that its consequences are linked to power dynamics and geopolitical history. Arab EFL postgraduate students—providing a unique insight into how those most intimately engaged in teaching English perceive the dominance topic. Through qualitative interviews, this research discovers the 'lived practices' of Arab EFL postgraduate students.

The study sheds light on the Arab setting, distinguished by its unique historical and political characteristics, while establishing a connection to broader postcolonial narratives. By conducting this research, the author aims to contribute to pedagogical techniques for language teaching by pinpointing students' specific requirements. Furthermore, the researcher proposes approaches to implementing

English in Arabic-speaking nations to promote individual development while honoring native languages and cultural identities.

This research investigates the following three questions:

1. Do Arab EFL students think that English, as a powerful "controlling" force, controls their native language?
2. Has English language learning made Arab EFL students feel a struggle with their Arab identities and their native language?

1.2 The Significance of this Study

The recent study is expected to be important to those who pay attention to the language and identity of their native language. It is also expected that the findings of this study will be important to scholars concerned with studying language control or its dominance, language maintenance, and language attrition, which have recently attracted much attention.

2. Literature Review

Language has been a powerful instrument of colonial dominance, utilized not only for communication but also to establish psychological and cultural dominance. Native languages were displaced when English was imposed in several colonies, which aided in assimilation and erased native identities. People express their viewpoint via language [6, p. 13]. In this context, colonial language policy is a 'culture bomb' that undermines indigenous self-esteem. These policies devalue native languages, severing an individual's link to their name, heritage, and collective history, fracturing self and community. Phillipson's influential theory, Linguistic Dominance (LD), claims that English becomes a vehicle of linguistic and cultural control [7, p. 55]. He defined LI as the creation and reinforcement of differences, including structural and cultural, between English and other languages, which then support and

preserve English's control [4, p. 28]. Thus, this notion should not be used to show that English is the only language exhibiting controlling tendencies in the present day. Consequently, the historical context of language control is not be limited to English; it is also be associated with other languages from different historical and geographical backgrounds. English permits transnational interactions across production, education, media , and finance. Moreover, universally recognized English-language cultural entities, such as music industries, film studios, and media outlets, have spread English far beyond the former boundaries of the British Empire [8, p. 112]. This widespread adoption of English is also attributable to infrastructural, material, and technological advantages that other imperial languages lack. Thus, Marginson and Brotherhood(2025) claim that English will maintain its global control [9, p. 89].

Similarly, postcolonial philosophers highlight the role of English as having a controlling force over others in the process of domination. Rao (2019) argued that colonial powers used language as a tool to control communication and the minds of colonized people [10, p. 202]. Rao (2019) believed that language was a key means by which colonizers culturally and psychologically dominated those they colonized. In many colonies, local languages were repressed in academic institutions and substituted with English or other dominant languages. This led to learners who saw the colonizer's language as a sign of status and intelligence. However, after achieving formal independence, the former colony continues to be linguistically and culturally oriented towards the colonial center. According to Rao's theory, which holds that the lasting result is **mental colonization**. English is psychologically associated with intellect and modernity, therefore younger

generations perceive Arabic as "traditional" or secondary.

Indigenous languages and the viewpoints they express are pushed into a secondary role, and English emerges as a major "controlling" force. The foundational postcolonial book, *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986), by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, advocates the use of African languages in literature and education while simultaneously criticizing the role language plays in colonial domination [10, p. 204]. Using personal information, Ngũgĩ demonstrates how the colonization of Africa used language to distinguish Africans from their culture. This was accomplished by elevating English to the status of a symbol of status and penalizing local languages in educational institutions. For him, language creates identity and memory and that colonial authority is aided by its suppression. Using the colonizer's language often leads to cultural assimilation, which can sometimes cause the colonized person to lose their original identity. Thus, colonial educational institutions had an important role in spreading English while also limiting the use of native. This situation created a linguistic hierarchy that thus devalued the significance of native languages. **Linguistic Hierarchy:** English functions as a gatekeeper for professional viability, creating a hierarchy that devalues the significance of native languages.

One of the main topics is the "cultural bomb," which he defines as a device that obliterates people's faith "in their names, in their surroundings, in their languages, in their history of struggle, in their abilities, in their solidarity, and ultimately in themselves" [6, p. 3].

Despite this, not all academics have a pessimistic outlook on the evolution of the English language. Control as "Systemic Compulsion" against Dominance when it

comes to "Neutral Utility". Traditional sociolinguistics often attributes the supremacy of English to its worldwide usefulness, which is a "neutral" outcome of its position in science, technology, and international commerce. The English language is seen by certain academics, such as Seidlhofer (2005), as a practical instrument free of cultural baggage [14, p. 339]. According to the World Linguistics Paradigm and similar notions, the English language is not limited to its "native" speakers at present; rather, it has developed in a variety of contexts across the world [14, p. 341]. Philipson (2012) asserts that the global prevalence of English is mostly attributable to historical factors, such as the subsequent influence of the United States and the expansion of the British Empire, as well as the practical advantages of a shared language [15, p. 21]. Thus, English may be a neutral instrument for global communication and information access. English may be used, but not to oppress.

Ali (2025) examined teaching English outside the language. Ali claims that English's rising popularity and the relationship between linguistic dominance and education have made teaching English a major economic force [16, p. 45]. Ali believes the British economy depends on English language education and acquisition, making it a commercial commodity. English language teaching is inextricably linked to power relations, as McKinney (2016) noted both the continuous effect of colonial discourse and the capacity for critical reflection and resistance [17, p. 102]. This shows that English may decolonize by embracing local absences and indigenous cultural significances. This aligns with language hybridity and globalization advocates. Per Hopkyns (2017), hybridity—mixing native and generic language

forms can weaken any standard [18, p. 55]. Strategic Hybridity uses "Arablish" and code-switching to "indigenize" English and give it an Arab identity rather than absolute control. This may mean accepting code-switching and other hybrid forms of communication as legitimate and recognizing regional Englishes, such as Saudi English. The "World Englishes" concept acknowledges the presence of numerous localized versions of English and suggests that no single variety, such as American or British English, should dictate native-language status or educational programs [19, p. 12].

Globalization is another factor that has contributed to English developing in recent years. It is a process that encourages individuals around the world to depend on one another. It happens within a single community, bringing individuals together to work for common aims.

This study establishes a definitive conceptual framework for the fundamental ideas used in the analysis.

It is done to ensure that the theoretical framework is consistent. Although the terms "control" and "dominance" are often used interchangeably in ordinary discourse, the researcher analyzes them as distinct elements to accurately reveal the experiences of Arab EFL students. Specific definitions are provided in the following taxonomy, which distinguishes among the pervasive presence of English, the systematic regulations governing its use, and the personal beliefs that shape students' identities.

3. Methodology

3.1 Reign and Participants

The participants were 18 international Arab postgraduate students at the University of Utara Malaysia. Their ages were 29 to 48, and there were 7 females and 11 males. The Arab students were represented by five

Yemeni students, five Saudi students, four Jordanian students, and four from Iraq.: offering a high-density 'contact zone' for Arab researchers in a globalized academic context. Furthermore, the researcher's insider position as a PhD candidate at this school fostered rapport and confidence, enabling the collection of genuine accounts of delicate identity conflicts and language apprehensions. The participants are actively engaged in postgraduate research at both the Master's and Doctoral levels. Participants used English in their recent academic study and for daily communication during their stay in Malaysia. The interviews were conducted in English for that reason.

3.2 Study Design

The researcher employs a qualitative method, as qualitative research elucidates a research problem by delineating trends in a population's beliefs or opinions [12, p. 58]. Semi-structured interviews provide a microcosm of population viewpoints and beliefs. This qualitative research categorizes and evaluates participants' varied experiences using theme analysis to find the overall meaning. According to Ahmed(2025), the qualitative method can yield insights from individual participants through interviews; however, it is not suitable for reaching large target populations in the same method as quantitative surveys [13, p. 201].

3.3 Collection of Data

The interviews were collected from 18 international students through an online poll using Google Forms. Lim(2025) states that a questionnaire serves as an active tool for gathering responses to the identical inquiries of 'What?', 'Where?', 'How?' and 'When?' from participants, enabling the researcher to describe specific features within designated categories [12, p. 62]. After, conducting a descriptive and comprehensive analysis to reveal students'

beliefs. Interviews were performed in English. The interviews were mostly done in English for two reasons. First, it suited the main purpose of the study was to find out what professional English speakers believed about English as controlling force. They were ready to share their own experiences in the language they were being taught when they spoke English. Second, the participants taking part are international students who learn English in schools and businesses on a daily basis, thus this is a natural and authentic method for them to talk to each other. The interviewer, who spoke Arabic and English, told the participants that if they needed to communicate something more emotionally or clearly, they could switch to Arabic. A few individuals performed this for a short time, and then those segments were translated into English when they were written down.

The study's interviews successfully cover four areas: personal background, the function of English in the home country, and influences on identity. However, the recent study highlights a "crucial theoretical pivot" between passive/neutral dominance and active/systemic control. The notion's "No Choice" paradigm may be illustrated by more precise prodding for certain broad demands. The research's interview questions were:

1. Did you think that the study of English is an individual choice or a systematic requisite that needs academic perseverance? In your native country, is English considered to be a neutral instrument of learning, or does it function as a 'gatekeeper' that influences professional standing and perceived intelligence?
2. Do you perceive that a 'culture invasion' from English media (such as Netflix or social media) is supplanting local customs or causing the younger generation to get disconnected from standard Arabic?

3. Do you use 'Arabish' or other types of code-switching to 'indigenize' English, therefore aligning it with your Arab identity instead of allowing it to dominate you?

Participants spoke about their beliefs and experiences in interviews that lasted 55 to 70 minutes. The semi-structured format ensured that each participant spoke on important topics, but it also let them wander off on tangents. For instance, some participants discussed disparities among generations, trips overseas, and so on, which led to great insights. Participants asked probing questions to gather additional information. If a participant said, "Yes, the English language supports our career," some participants in interviews may ask for an explanation, give examples, or ask about the relationship of English to its Arabic?" Before asking the questions, there were short, unbiased definitions of the term "dominance." For instance, "Some researchers say "English is a powerful "controlling" force which controls others, do you think so?" The goal was to inform each participant know. This ensures that all participants understood and could speak about the topic.

All interviews were recorded on audio after the participants' agreement. The records were written down word for word. The participants' answers were translated into English sections of the audio that were in Arabic as they were being written down. The researcher and one of colleagues who spoke both languages fluently revised some of the translated answers to ensure they were essentially the same. This investigation lasted four weeks, from the middle of September to the middle of November 2025.

3.4 Analysis of the data

During this research, the researcher used thematic analysis to extract the study's topics from participants' interview responses. Several stages are included in the

data analysis:

1. Coding: It was used to code of coding a portion of the interview material was prepared for qualitative analysis.

2. Extracted Theme: The researcher investigated a method to organize codes into broader themes. The researcher organized comparable codes by specifying recurrent themes in participants' answers. For instance, codes describing job advantages, educational benefits, and worldwide access were grouped under an initial topic on the advantages of English. There was a theme of cultural/linguistic peril, with codes regarding the deterioration of Arabic, feelings of loneliness, and the influence of Western culture. To achieve validation, the researcher assessed each theme against the study's data to ensure it was clear and distinct from the others.

3. Categorization and Refining :In the process of reviewing the matters and determining their content : In conclusion, the researcher was able to categorize three core themes that were reflective of the participants' interview responses: "*English is a Powerful Means of Opening Doors for its Users*," "*Cultural Attrition*," and "*Negotiated Agency: Identity Hybridity and Stragic Resistance*" are the four themes that will be discussed in this article. The researcher gave careful consideration to the themes, and for each theme, several insightful quotations were selected. The researcher confirmed and categorized three fundamental themes of this study, the researcher assessed the themes through the lens of a theoretical framework and research topics, as presented in the study's findings and discussion. The coding procedure was mostly inductive, meaning the data produced the codes. The researcher also paid attention to themes from previous studies, such as Phillipson (2008, 2012), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), Schmid (2011), and Dwyer and

Buckle (2009), made participants feel uncomfortable, such as "controlling," "dominance," and "identity," when these emerged in the responses of the participants who took part. The researcher worked with several professional colleagues to code the study data. The researcher discussed our code differences and reached an agreement. We reviewed the transcript and pertinent material together until the researcher could agree on everything. This practice of going back and forth ensured that the codes were grounded in both theory and facts.

A qualitatively trained colleague, not part of the study, reviewed a sample of coded transcripts and the coding system to verify the validity of interpretations and address biases. The researcher takes notes while coding to explain how to choose themes for the study.

3.5 Ethics in Research

The researchers conducted the interviews with an open mind and did not try to promote their own opinions. The participants in this study were clearly informed that there were no "correct or incorrect" answers, and that the goal was to obtain ideas from their honest points of view. The Ethics Committee at UUM approved the research. It was up to each student whether to participate, and they all signed a document granting permission. Their information would be kept confidential, and they were assured they could leave at any time, as previously stated. To keep participants' identities secret, the researcher left out identifying information when the presenting of the study data (For instance, if someone made a negative comment about a particular professor or educational institution, the researcher made it more generic in the quotation). Pseudonyms used were used. Now that the researcher has gone over the technique, let us look at the research findings. The

researcher used ellipses in quotations to illustrate minor changes for clarity or brevity, and used some words in brackets to clarify for the reader.

4. Findings

The participants in this study, who were 18, expressed contradictory and complex thoughts about the important role of English in their academic and everyday lives and in their Arabic communities during the interviews. The themes of this study are presented in a clear sequence: first, addressing English's benefits; second, concerning the challenges and consequences; and finally, regarding how students navigate these aspects.

4.1. *English is a Powerful Means of Opening Doors for its Users*

The concept of English as an essential "key" to global prospects was the central theme among the 18 study participants. Though their views presented a contradictory association: English is both a "means of opening doors" and a systematic gatekeeper that requires cultural and linguistic sacrifices. Participants' responses refer to this paradoxical relationship in which English is regarded as a necessity for global mobility, yet it marginalizes their identities.

According to the participants' responses, English is a form of "Linguistic Capital," a term referring to the external dominance of English in the global job market. This suggests that the learners' competence in the dominant tongue, successfully producing a Linguistic Hierarchy in which English plays a fundamental role, is seen as a "visa" for the Arabic speaker. S10 indicates this dependency:

S10: " English is my only way out of a local circle. English is the language of the 'Big World'. If you are unable to offer it, the door will not only be closed but also be locked.

The degree I got in Arabic is the beating heart of my life, but my English credential is my passport."

This comparison of the "passport" approves that participants view English as **systemic control means**; while their own native language, Arabic, remains the "heart," it absences the efficient power to grant passage into the "Big World."

This theme employs terms such as Dominance, Control, Hegemony, and Linguistic Imperialism to accurately classify participants' Dominance, Control, Hegemony, and Linguistic Imperialism to accurately classify participant replies. The widespread address it as the "language of the big world ." When a student such as S10 refers to the "locked door" confronting individuals lacking English proficiency, it signifies a systemic device employed for gatekeeping. Ultimately, perceiving an English degree as a "passport" while relegating the home tongue to the "heart" exemplifies hegemony (ideological internalization) of being alive. Moreover, the structural displacement of the indigenous language and cultural identity is classified as Linguistic Imperialism.

Similarly, Participants said that in the absence of this language capital, their academic and professional efforts would go unnoticed. S18 signifies this concept: S18: " For me, English is a powerful instrument. It enables me to communicate with people all over the world, publish my academic works, and be treated with respect at global-scale conferences. Without it, my voice would stay confined to the confines of my country."

According to participants' responses, it seems that participants approach the English language through the prism of utility-driven dominance. English has been effectively positioned as the only tool for professional and scientific academic growth, according to

Phillipson (2012), the "corporate empire" of English has been effective in doing so [20, p. 441]. In this context, the academic institution serves as a strategic "contact zone" where EFL students actively seek this language capital to compete globally.

On the other hand, a more in-depth analysis of the participants' responses reflects that this "opening of doors" is not considered a neutral advantage. Instead, it is seen as a dominant force because your decision to learn English is not really an excellent choice at all; rather, it is something necessary for living. This "power" is tied to a system in which the native language is often undervalued in fields considered highly respected. While learning English may improve an individual's prospects for accessing the academic, scientific, and commercial realms, the data indicate that it typically makes it more challenging to interact in one's native language. Therefore, this lends credence to the study's core premise, which indicates that the English "power or force" is intrinsically associated with its role as a systemic means of control, in which it is necessary for the learner of English as a foreign language to adopt the language of the "Other" to be heard.

4.2. The "Cultural Bomb" and gradual erosion of Native identity are examples of cultural attrition

The second topic that emerged from the participants' responses is Cultural Attrition, which may be defined as the slow, internal erosion of native language and cultural heritage. In contrast to the first theme, which focuses on the value English holds in others' eyes, this theme emphasizes the internalized dominance that leads to the devaluation of the native language. Participants report significant "intellectual discomfort" when they perceive English as supplanting Arabic in their cognitive and social lives. Similarly,

Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's (1986) notion of the "cultural bomb," a mechanism that estranges the colonized from their history and environments [27, p. 3].

S15: "I have noticed a decline in my mother tongue while writing my academic research. I often contemplate English frameworks and then try to translate them into Arabic. It is a type of cultural annihilation; I am forfeiting the significant means that link me to my forebears."

This perception of "cultural annihilation" holds that participants view their language transition not only as learning a new skill, but as an essential alteration of their native identity. This indicates the English "power" as an overpowering force that reorganizes the speaker's cognition. According to participants' views, English is seen as a sign of modernity, hence diminishing the status of the native language. S3 reflects this cultural pressure:

S3: "In my colleagues use 'Arabish' as if it indicates modernity. Though it seems to me that I am being overtaken. English has transcended its position as a mere second or foreign language; it has become a dominant influence, leading me to see my own language as 'archaic' or 'unscientific'."

This concept of Arabic as "archaic" reflects a psychological hierarchy in which "progress" is equated with Westernization. So, the participants' views show that the English "control" extends beyond the educational aspect and into EFL learners' native identities. This notion is called backward lexical transfer, or attrition, when English as a foreign language actively inhibits Arabic. According to Schmid (2011), this attrition is not merely a passive loss of learners' native vocabulary but also a structural reconfiguration brought about by the systemic pressure of English's dominance [24, p. 12].

Ultimately, this degradation creates a psychological hierarchy in which the native language is confined to "informal" or "domestic" contexts, whilst English is exalted as the language's intelligence and "progress." Participants' responses state that the "power" of English is not only an improvement of the learner's skills, but an intrusive force that requires the erosion of native cultural identity. Consequently, the participants are experiencing a linguistic trauma type in which the acquisition of a global language is usually seen as a loss of cultural identity.

4.3. *Negotiated Agency: Identity Hybridity and Strategic Resistance*

The notion of English as an important "key" to global prospects was shared by all 18 participants. According to participants' responses, the cultivation of negotiated agency and strategic resistance. This theme states that EFL learners actively resist the notion of being subjected to linguistic imperialism, in contrast to the earlier two themes that focused on the control and supremacy of English. Dwyer and Buckle (2009) refer to this as the "space between," using English for professional progression while maintaining a subversive cultural and emotional distance. [7, p. 61].

Participants discussed a deliberate attempt to use English as a "tool" while preventing it from changing their native identity. This is evident in the practice of what is named "translanguaging", in which EFL learners seamlessly navigate between languages to assert their hybrid identity. As indicated in S8's response ,what is this **strategic compartmentalization**: S8: " I use English during my PhD study, yet I am still emotionally linked to my first language, Arabic." I converse in 'Arablsh' with my friends, not because of a lapse in my Arabic competence, but as a way to signify my being between two cultures. I use

my instrument to construct my future whilst safeguarding my essence.

This use of "Arablsh" is not a linguistic weakness sign, but rather an **intentional hybridity** in which the participant "indigenizes" English's dominance to protect their cultural identity. Similarly, the findings suggest that participants view their academic excellence in English as a requirement for being heard within a system that would otherwise silence them. S12 's response emphasizes this **Calculated Opposition**:

S12: "My opposition is calculated." I excel in their grammar and academic style to ensure my voice resonates internationally. Upon exiting the classroom, I revert to my original language. I am using the power of English to ultimately strengthen my own culture.

The above findings align with Canagarajah's (2011) notion of codemeshing and strategic resistance, whereby learners use English as the dominant language to access instructional institutions where English is seen as "gatekeeping," while simultaneously challenging the linguistic hierarchy. [8, p. 401].

Using hybrid forms of "Arablsh" is understood here not as a lack of ability, but as an aware endeavor to keep identity.

The recent study reveals that for these researchers, the impact of English is contested. They recognize its control as an external fact within international academic institutions, but they counter its dominant impact by compartmentalizing its use. This dual life helps individuals capitalize on the benefits of English while safeguarding their native language heritage. Consequently, the participants' responses demonstrate that, despite academic institutional pressure, the learner retains a degree of autonomy that facilitates the coexistence of a worldwide professional identity and a local cultural

essence , finally proving that "English's control" can be navigated by **strategic resistance**.

5. Discussions

The researcher conducted this study in a complex sociolinguistic environment in which Arab postgraduate EFL students at the University of Utara in Malaysia use English not only as a foreign language but also as a "controlling power" shaping their scientific, academic, and cultural experiences. The integration of the three principal themes: English is a Powerful Means of Opening Doors for its Users, cultural attrition, and negotiated agency, offers a thorough understanding of the "intellectual discomfort" essential to contemporary postgraduate learning.

The first significant discovery regarding English as a Means of Opening Doors supports the notion that participants consider "English" a form of Linguistic Capital. For S10 and S18, English is perceived as an essential "passport" for worldwide mobility. This supports the claim of Phillipson's (2012), the English "corporate empire" plays a effectively role for a worldwide dominance, positioning the language as an unavoidable arbiter of practiced validity [20, p. 441]. The "control" element of this theme is evident in the absence of choice: Arab international EFL learners do not acquire English out of intrinsic desire but rather due to systemic compulsion that externally constrains their language autonomy.

Cultural Attrition is the second theme that underscores the psychological toll of this systematic control. The documented decline in native Arabic fluency and the rise of "Arabliish" exemplify what Ngūgī wa Thiong'o (1986) refers to as the "cultural bomb" [27, p. 3]. The participants' apprehension over the potential loss of their identity or the feeling of being dominated by

English patterns suggests that linguistic imperialism is not just an external political issue but also an internal cognitive concern. Schmid's (2011) concept of language attrition further supports the view that the high-status L2 (English) induces a structural reconfiguration in speakers' comprehension, often to the detriment of the L1 (Arabic) [24, p. 12].

Although all the above challenges, Negotiated Agency is the third theme that presents a more optimistic viewpoint. The participants are not passive victims; rather, they exhibit a nuanced kind of "strategic resistance." By categorizing English as a "professional suit" (S9) or using "Linguistic Camouflage" (S3), they navigate peer evaluations while simultaneously pursuing their academic objectives. This conduct proves Canagarajah (2011) notion of code meshing, whereby disadvantaged academics use the dominant language to contest the system within [8, p. 401]. Moreover, the researcher's position as an "insider" at UUM, as elucidated by the framework of Dwyer and Buckle (2009), was essential in revealing these genuine accounts of resistance that an outsider could have overlooked [7, p. 61].

Ultimately, the discourse highlights that while the preeminence of English facilitates entrance to the "Big World," its supremacy requires constant effort to keep identity. The participants' experience at university of Utara is characterized by a dual reality: achieving worldwide influence and keeping their cultural essence.

6. Implications

Several main implications can be drawn from the earlier analysis and discussion sections. Initially, humans understand the mechanisms of linguistic control. Thus, academic institutions may use this understanding to equip their students to use English as a worldwide lingua franca by

introducing fundamental debates into the academic curriculum, as proposed by certain participants. To mitigate the "gatekeeper" influence of English, it is essential for academic institutions to have certain "culturally relevant materials," such as translating scientific publications into Arabic or supporting bilingual research journals, to maintain Arabic's significant presence in public areas despite the proliferation of English. This is the second topic that requires attention.

Therefore, making investments in teaching of Arabic and media of a high level, to integrate Arabic literacy and content production with English proficiency. Thirdly, pedagogical methods such as bilingual education and culturally relevant materials can assist learners in identifying English acquisition as a development of their own native identity, but not a diminishment. These thoughts will be elaborated upon in the next section concerning implications.

To summarize the discussion section, Arab International students can balance the advantages and disadvantages of English, evidenced by their ability to adapt and perform well. Instead of just accepting English control over them, they indicate they can use English while still valuing their native language, Arabic. Thus, English is both a neutral language and a Trojan horse, as Arab international students view it, and those students are actively dealing with this fact

7. Limitations of the Study

This research emphasizes Arabic-speaking international postgraduate students who study at the University of Utara Malaysia, where English is a foreign language and the only language of their education in the 2024-2025 academic year. The limited sample size of ten students, coupled with its focus on Arab postgraduate

EFL students studying different specializations and English, the language of their education and communication within and outside UUM, potentially restricts the generalizability of the results to the entire Arab student population. Given their educational backgrounds, the participants may have a heightened awareness of language issues compared to the overall populace. Future studies could broaden the research's scope to include undergraduate EFL students or, instead, compare perspectives across postgraduate students specializing in English with those in other specializations. In addition, the examination of self-reported feelings and beliefs provides observational research with the opportunity to explore the practical manifestations of these perspectives, such as behaviours including code-switching and language choice across a variety of circumstances. The perceived depth and thematic coherence of the study's data show that the insights are considerable and indicative of a broader tendency. This suggestion is made despite the restrictions stated.

8. Conclusion

This research examined the attitudes of international Arab EFL postgraduate learners toward English as the "controlling" power. The results shed light on these specialists, English roles not just as a neutral instrument of communication but also as a complex arena of universal pressure and identity struggle. This research suggests that while English is essential for global academic participation, its dominance reveals an ingrained language hierarchy.

This hierarchy establishes a dual reality by providing "cosmopolitan" social capital and facilitating entry into global professional spheres, while simultaneously acting as a "cultural bomb" that threatens local linguistic traditions. A significant result of this study is the transition from

passive receipt of this controlling force to the active negotiation of agency. Through the "indigenization" of English and the use of hybrid forms such as "Arabliish," participants effectively alleviate complete cultural dislocation, suggesting that a worldwide professional identity may coexist with a native cultural essence.

Finally, these data state that English-language training must transfer beyond a singular "English-only" paradigm. Instructive frameworks, especially in the context of international higher instruction, should use a pluricentric approach that assists students' local linguistic identities to decrease the "controlling" effects of English. Institutions may allow their students to engage with the universal system while preserving their native cultural integrity by developing an educational environment in which English is taught as a subordinate tool alongside local history, instead of opposing it.

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