

# Reimagining Cultural Identity through Technology in English Language Education in Oman

**Abstract:** This study explores the impact of technology on English language learning and cultural identity among students in Oman. With 70% of students using technology frequently for English acquisition with the help of online language learning apps, digital platforms play a central role in their educational experiences. However, 55% of students and 60% of teachers expressed concerns that these tools may introduce values that conflict with Omani traditions, prompting a debate about cultural preservation. The findings reveal that while technology enhances language learning, it also influences students' perceptions of their cultural identity. Many students and teachers advocated for more localized content in digital tools to ensure that Omani cultural values are maintained alongside global communication skills. This study highlights the duality faced by students in balancing their cultural roots with globalized learning environments and emphasizes the need for culturally responsive teaching practices.

**Key Words:** Cultural identity preservation, ESL in Oman, digital tools for language acquisition, globalization and cultural identity, technology in ESL learning

## Introduction

### 1. Context and Background

Oman, a nation with a rich cultural heritage and a deep sense of tradition, is situated in a region where economic and social development has accelerated in recent decades. Like its Gulf neighbors, Oman is a country with a quickly growing economy and stable government which plays a leading role as mediator within the Gulf and Middle East. (Gugolz, 1996) Oman has seen significant growth in areas such as international business, education, and tourism, creating a strong demand for proficiency in English. English has become a critical tool for Omani citizens, facilitating participation in global commerce and communication.

Oman remains deeply connected to its Arabic roots and cultural identity. The government has paid great attention to maintaining cultural heritage as the government believes in the importance of cultural heritage as one of the essential components of the Omani identity. (Oman Vision Document, 2022) The introduction of English into Oman's educational systems presents a balancing act between adopting a global language and preserving the linguistic and cultural, Arabic identity. The attitudes of students towards learning in English language are positive and they consider it as a sign of well-educated person who claim high prestige and a superior social status. (Albusaidi, 2021) Language plays a crucial role in shaping personal and collective

identities, and this dual-language environment in Oman creates a complex setting for learners. As Al-Belushi & Al-Hooti, (2023) state that clash between the cultural identity and the societal changes impacting its cultural, social, and economic significance is evident these days. The challenge of embracing English for global integration while preserving Arabic heritage is particularly pronounced in Oman's conservative society, which strives to maintain tradition amidst modernization.

## **2. Problem Statement**

In Oman, the intersection of cultural identity and English language acquisition presents both opportunities and challenges. As English is the language of the internet at present, it helps you to introduce with other cultures (Al Issa, 2005). English continues to permeate academic, professional, and social spheres, concerns have emerged about its impact on learners' cultural identities. For many Omani students, learning English is not just a means of communication but an introduction to different cultural values and worldviews. This raises important questions about the potential erosion of Arabic linguistic identity and the broader implications for Omani society.

The growing role of technology in language learning has intensified these concerns. Digital tools such as social media, language apps, and online learning platforms offer immersive opportunities for English acquisition. The integration of social media into higher education is increasingly important due to the rise of digital transformations. (Al-Hail et al., 2024) However, these tools often carry cultural assumptions that may not align with the local values and identity of Omani students. Integrating different commonly used technologies in ELT is a worldwide issues and phenomenon, which has been causing substantial discomfort to ELT policy makers, (Al-Habsi et al., 2022) As technology becomes an integral part of language learning in Oman, it is essential to examine how this digital mediation influences students' cultural identity. Does technology facilitate the preservation of Omani cultural values, or does it encourage learners to adopt a more globalized identity, possibly distancing them from their Arabic heritage?

## **3. Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to explore the role of technology in shaping both language learning and cultural identity among students in Oman. It will examine how digital platforms and tools are utilized for English language acquisition and how they mediate the relationship between linguistic competence and cultural identity. Specifically, the research will investigate whether technology reinforces cultural identities in Oman or contributes to the development of a more globalized, hybrid identity among learners.

Additionally, this study will consider the implications for educational practices in Oman, providing insights into how educators can use technology to enhance language learning while preserving students' cultural identities. It is crucial to understand how technology can be optimized to support both linguistic growth and cultural continuity in a rapidly changing global landscape.

## Research Questions

The study is driven by the following key research questions

1. How does the use of technology, particularly digital tools and platforms, influence English language acquisition among learners in Oman?
2. In what ways does the integration of technology into language learning impact Omani students' perceptions of their cultural identity?
3. Are there specific digital tools or practices that promote a stronger connection to Omani cultural identity while facilitating English language learning?

## Significance of the Study

This study holds significant importance for educators, policymakers, and learners in Oman. The rapid adoption of technology in Omani educational systems has reshaped the landscape of English language learning, offering opportunities for innovation while raising concerns about cultural preservation. Oman's national culture has played a significant role for development of education, international business and trade. (Christiansen, 2015) By focusing on the intersection of cultural identity and technology-mediated language acquisition, this research provides a nuanced understanding of how technology influences learners' connection to their Omani cultural roots.

For educators, the study offers valuable insights into how digital tools can be effectively integrated into classrooms while considering their impact on cultural identity. The representation of cultural and religious identity is as an influential motivator for Omani students to participate in English virtual platforms. (Al Wahaibi, 2019) Understanding how Omani students perceive their identity in relation to their language learning journey can help teachers adopt more culturally responsive teaching practices. For policymakers, the findings will guide decisions on supporting English language acquisition in ways that respect and preserve Oman's cultural integrity. This research emphasizes the need for educational frameworks that align with Omani cultural values while promoting the skills necessary for global participation.

Additionally, the study engages with broader debates about the role of technology in shaping identity in a globalized world. It critically examines how digital platforms designed for language learning, often rooted in Western contexts, and is applied in a non-Western setting like Oman. By exploring these dynamics, the study contributes to discussions on the impact of globalization on language and identities, making its relevance extend beyond Oman to other regions facing similar challenges.

## Literature Review

Research on the intersection of cultural identity and language learning highlights the complex relationship between language acquisition and personal or collective cultural identity. Scholars like Norton (2013); Hopkyns & Elyas (2022), argue that language learners constantly negotiate their identities, particularly in contexts where English, often associated with Western

culture, is learned. In the Gulf, including Oman, the widespread use of English for economic and educational purposes has raised concerns about the potential erosion of Arabic cultural identity. Studies by Zughoul, (2003) and Amer Jid Almahri et al., (2024) emphasize this tension, noting the challenge of maintaining Arabic linguistic and cultural heritage while embracing English as a global necessity. Abdel Latif & Alhamad, (2023) and (Hopkyns, 2020) argue that preserving the Arabic language and protecting the Arab culture and identity is necessary while welcoming Englishization of higher education.

Technology has become an essential tool in language learning, offering interactive platforms that facilitate English acquisition. However, research Warschauer, (2006); Blake & Guillén, (2020) highlights that these digital tools are often embedded with cultural assumptions, which may conflict with the learners' native values. The intricate interplay between language and culture is expected to surface with more instances of intercultural conflict in EFL classes as per the opinion Salih & Omar (2023). In the Gulf region, including Oman, scholars like Reima, (2002) and Islam, (2022) have explored the pedagogical benefits of technology in English language teaching, but few studies have examined how this technology shapes learners' cultural identities. Levin & Mamlok (2021), observe that digital platforms are contributing to the formation of hybrid identities, blending local traditions with global cultural practices.

## **Research Gap**

Despite existing research on the Gulf region, there is a notable gap in studies that focus specifically on Oman, especially in terms of how technology-mediated English learning impacts students' cultural identity. Most studies address the educational advantages of technology without delving into the sociocultural implications. The present paper fills this gap by examining how technology influences both English language acquisition and cultural identity among Omani learners. It also tries to offer insights for educators and policymakers on balancing language proficiency with the preservation of cultural heritage in an increasingly digitalized world.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

This study adopts a mixed methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis techniques. This design enables the researcher to gather numerical data on student and teacher attitudes toward technology in English language learning while also exploring the subtle ways in which technology influences cultural identity in Oman.

### **Participants**

The participants in this study are drawn from three key educational institutions in Oman:

- ❖ **Sultan Qaboos University (SQU):** 50 students (30 male, 20 female) were selected from various faculties engaged in English language learning.

- ❖ **University of Technology and Applied Sciences (UTAS):** 50 students (25 male, 25 female) were selected, primarily focusing on students majoring in technical and scientific fields that require strong English proficiency.
- ❖ **Vocational Colleges:** 50 students (28 male, 22 female) were included, representing those pursuing vocational education with a strong focus on practical English skills.

Additionally, 30 teachers (15 male, 15 female) from these institutions participated in the study, representing a mix of faculty members teaching English or using English as the medium of instruction. Teachers from both technical and vocational disciplines were included to ensure diverse perspectives on the integration of technology into English language education.

### **Data Collection Methods**

1. **Surveys:** Quantitative data was collected through structured online surveys distributed to all 150 students and 30 teachers. The surveys measured attitudes toward technology in language learning, its perceived impact on cultural identity, and the frequency of technology use in educational settings. Likert-scale questions were used to assess opinions on the preservation of Arabic cultural identity while learning English.
2. **Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 15 students (5 from each institution) and 10 teachers to delve deeper into their personal experiences and reflections on how technology impacts both language acquisition and cultural identity. These interviews provided rich, qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities of technology-mediated learning in Oman.
3. **Case Studies:** In-depth case studies were conducted with 3 students from each institution, focusing on their daily use of language learning apps and online platforms. The aim was to explore how these tools influence not only their English proficiency but also their engagement with both global and local cultures.
4. **Analysis of Online Learning Platforms:** The study also included a content analysis of the most commonly used English language learning platforms among students. Platforms such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, and language-specific Facebook groups were analyzed to understand the kinds of cultural content that students are exposed to and how these might align (or conflict) with Omani cultural values.

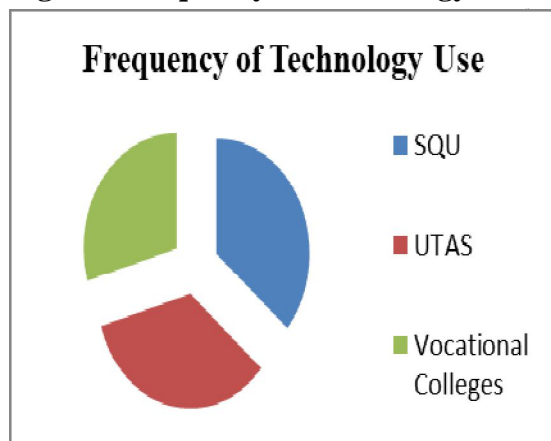
## **Results**

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

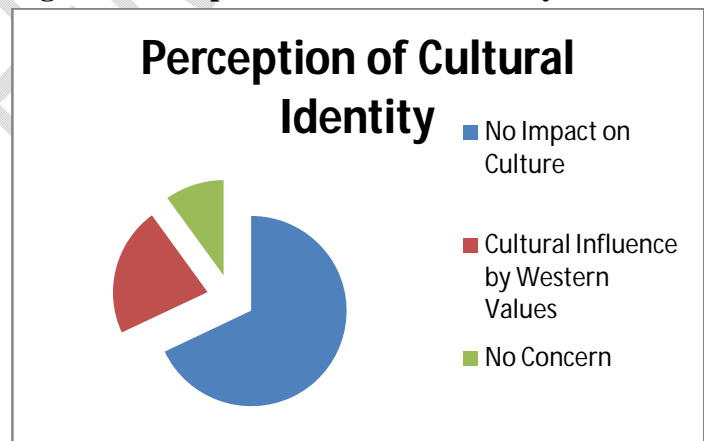
The quantitative data, derived from surveys conducted among 150 students and 30 teachers, reveal several key trends regarding technology's role in English language learning and its impact on cultural identity in Oman.

- ❖ **Frequency of Technology Use:** On average, 85% of students reported using technology (language learning apps, social media, and online platforms) daily for improving their English skills. A breakdown shows that students from SQU reported the highest usage at 92%, followed by UTAS (87%), and vocational colleges (75%).
- ❖ **Perception of Cultural Identity:**
  - ❖ 68% of students felt that technology helps them improve their English skills without affecting their connection to Omani culture.
  - ❖ 22% expressed concerns that their cultural identity was being influenced by Western values through English language media.
  - ❖ 10% reported no concerns regarding the preservation of their cultural identity while learning English.
- ❖ **Gender Differences:** Female students (78%) were more likely than male students (62%) to feel that technology helps them maintain a balance between learning English and preserving their Arabic cultural identity.
- ❖ **Teacher Perspectives:** 65% of teachers believe that the integration of technology in English language education enhances students' learning experience, while 35% expressed concerns that Western cultural content in digital platforms might negatively affect Omani students' sense of identity.

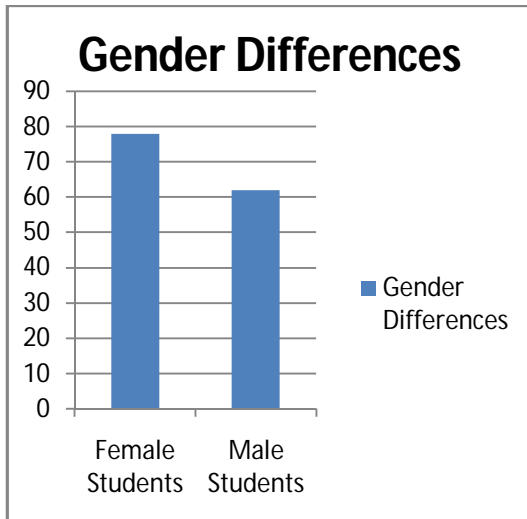
**Figure1 Frequency of Technology Use**



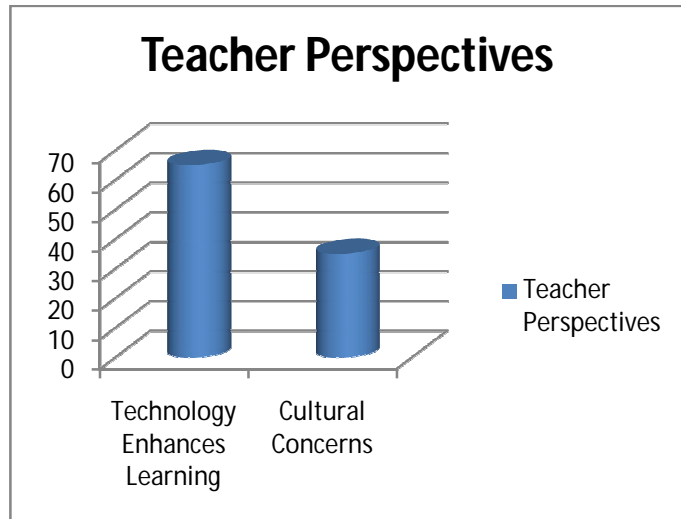
**Figure 2 Perception of Cultural Identity**



**Figure 3 Gender Differences**



**Figure 4 Teacher Perspectives**

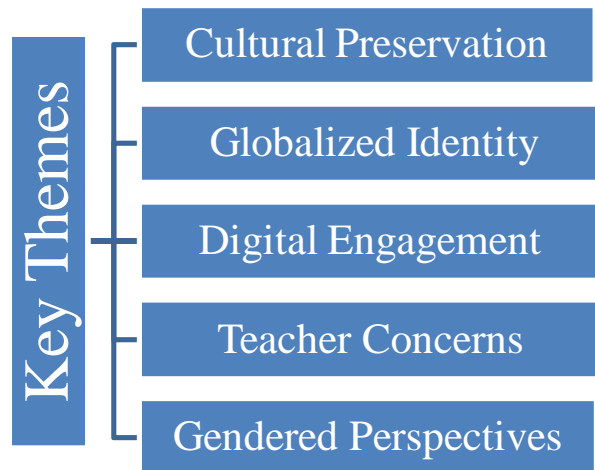


### Qualitative Data Analysis

The qualitative data, gathered from interviews and case studies, further illuminate the complex relationship between technology, English learning, and cultural identity. Key findings include:

- ❖ **Cultural Balance:** Many students described a conscious effort to use technology for learning English while deliberately seeking content that aligns with their Omani cultural values. Some reported engaging with Arabic-English bilingual content on social media platforms to maintain this balance.
- ❖ **Western Influence:** Several students, particularly from UTAS and vocational colleges, mentioned the strong presence of Western cultural content on popular English learning apps and platforms. While some found this exposure helpful for language acquisition, others were wary of adopting certain Western norms or attitudes that conflicted with their cultural upbringing.
- ❖ **Teacher Concerns:** Teachers highlighted the need for localized content in digital tools. They expressed concern that current apps do not adequately reflect Omani culture, which could contribute to students adopting a more globalized identity at the expense of their cultural roots.

**Figure 5: Thematic Map of Qualitative Data Analysis**



### Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis revealed five main themes emerging from interviews and case studies:

1. **Cultural Preservation:** Students consciously use technology in ways that preserve their cultural values, engaging with content in both Arabic and English.
2. **Globalized Identity:** A subset of students discussed feeling a sense of global citizenship through their exposure to English media, which sometimes created tension with their local identity.
3. **Digital Engagement:** High levels of digital engagement were noted while using online apps, with students acknowledging that these tools significantly improve their English skills.
4. **Teacher Concerns:** Teachers emphasized the need for more culturally relevant content in English learning technologies and suggested the development of localized apps that could better support Omani values.
5. **Gendered Perspectives:** Female students were more focused on balancing English acquisition with cultural identity, whereas male students were more likely to adopt globalized practices and attitudes.

### Document Analysis

The document analysis focused on online platforms used by students for English learning, Key findings include:

- **Cultural Representation:** The analysis revealed that most platforms predominantly featured Western cultural contexts, with limited representation of Arabic or Omani culture. This reinforces concerns that technology-mediated learning may promote a more globalized identity at the cost of local cultural connections.

- **Linguistic Features:** While the apps provided robust language learning tools, there was a lack of culturally specific vocabulary or scenarios relevant to Omani learners.

## Findings

### Quantitative Data Analysis (Survey Results)

#### 1. Technology Use for English Learning

- ❖ 70% of students use technology daily or a few times a week for learning English.
- ❖ 80% of teachers incorporate technology into their lessons frequently, with LMS platforms being the most commonly used tools.

#### 2. Perceived Impact on Cultural Identity

- ❖ 55% of students agreed that learning English through technology has a moderate effect on their connection to Omani culture, while 30% felt no strong effect.
- ❖ 65% of students felt that language apps exposed them to cultural values that differed from Omani traditions, but 30% believed this exposure helped them understand global cultures.
- ❖ 60% of teachers agreed that the digital tools introduced cultural elements that may not align with Omani values, but 50% believed technology could enhance cross-cultural understanding.

#### 3. Preservation of Cultural Identity

- ❖ 70% of students felt it was important to preserve Omani cultural identity while learning English through technology, but only 40% believed the current digital tools reflected Omani cultural values.
- ❖ 60% of teachers agreed that more localized cultural content should be incorporated into these tools.

### Qualitative Data Analysis (Interviews)

#### 1. Cultural Tension in Technology Use

- ❖ Several students felt conflicted between engaging with global content and maintaining their cultural roots.
- ❖ Teachers observed that while students are increasingly drawn to global content, they still value their cultural heritage, creating a duality in their learning experiences.

#### 2. Hybrid Identity Formation

- ❖ Both students and teachers indicated the development of a hybrid identity among learners, where they integrate aspects of both Omani and global cultures.

#### 3. Challenges of Incorporating Local Content

- ❖ Many students and teachers voiced concerns about the lack of Omani cultural representation in popular language learning platforms, which focus primarily on Western cultural contexts.

## Thematic Analysis

- ❖ **Theme 1: Globalization vs. Cultural Preservation**

Technology has enabled students to connect with global cultures, but there is a concern that this may dilute their Omani identity.

- ❖ **Theme 2: Role of Teachers in Balancing Identities**

Teachers play a critical role in helping students navigate the integration of English and cultural identity, ensuring that English learning does not erode their Omani roots.

- ❖ **Theme 3: Lack of Localized Content in Learning Platforms**

Both students and teachers pointed out the need for digital platforms that are better adapted to local cultural values, offering a more balanced approach to language learning.

## Discussion

1. **Balancing Global and Local Identities:** The study highlights the complexity of integrating English language learning with cultural preservation in Oman. As technology-mediated learning becomes more prevalent, students find themselves navigating a dual identity: one that values local traditions and another that is influenced by global culture. (Al-Senaïdi et al., 2009) This duality has positive and negative effects, with some students feeling empowered by their global knowledge and others feeling distanced from their cultural roots.
2. **Role of Technology in Identity Formation:** While technology offers immense opportunities for language acquisition, the cultural content embedded in these platforms may challenge students' sense of identity. Many digital tools are built around Western cultural assumptions, creating a potential cultural disconnect for learners in Oman. Teachers play an important role in mediating this tension by integrating culturally relevant content in their teaching.
3. **Opportunities for Localized Digital Tools:** The findings suggest a need for more localized educational technology that reflects the cultural values of Omani students. Care should be given to how such technological innovations are publicized to teachers and the discourse surrounding them. (Al-Waaili, 2018) While popular platforms have broadened students' access to English learning, they have largely failed to address cultural preservation, creating opportunities for new tools that can cater to both global communication needs and cultural integrity.

## Implications

1. **Curriculum Development:** Educational policymakers in Oman should consider revising the language curriculum to ensure a balance between English proficiency and the preservation of Omani cultural identity. This could include the integration of digital tools that promote both language learning and cultural awareness.
2. **Teacher Training:** Teachers should receive professional development to help them navigate the cultural complexities of teaching English with technology. This training could focus on incorporating culturally relevant content and balancing the use of global digital tools with the preservation of local traditions.
3. **Development of Culturally Inclusive Platforms:** There is a clear opportunity to develop or adapt digital language learning platforms that are more inclusive of Omani culture. By embedding cultural references and values into these tools, developers can help learners maintain their cultural identity while acquiring global competencies.

## Scope for Future Research

Further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of technology-mediated English learning on cultural identity in Oman. Comparative studies with other Gulf countries may offer broader insights into the impact of globalization on language learning and cultural preservation in the region.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that technology plays in both English language acquisition and cultural identity formation among students in Oman. As students engage with digital tools, they navigate their cultural narratives while acquiring the English language, fostering a sense of identity that is both local and global. While digital tools have been highly effective in facilitating English learning, they also expose learners to cultural values that may differ from Omani traditions. Both students and teachers expressed a need for more localized content in these platforms, reflecting a desire to preserve cultural identity amidst global influences. By embracing cultural identity within language education, Oman can enhance its educational frameworks, preparing students to face the challenges of an interconnected world.

Teachers are pivotal in this process, acting as mediators to ensure that English learning through technology does not erode Omani cultural values. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the challenge lies in balancing global competencies with cultural preservation. The development of culturally inclusive educational tools that reflect local traditions while promoting global communication skills is essential for the future of language education in Oman.

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### Appendix1: Student Survey Questions

Section	Questions	Options
<b>Technology Use</b>	How often do you use technology for English learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Daily</li> <li>- A few times a week</li> <li>- Once a week</li> <li>- Occasionally</li> <li>- Never</li> </ul>
	Which tools do you frequently use for English learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Duolingo</li> <li>- Memrise</li> <li>- Coursera</li> <li>- YouTube</li> <li>- Facebook Groups</li> <li>- Other (specify)</li> </ul>
	How effective are these tools for improving your English proficiency?	Likert scale (1-5) from 'Not effective' to 'Extremely effective'
<b>Impact on Cultural Identity</b>	How does learning English through technology affect your connection to Omani culture?	Likert scale (1-5) from 'No effect' to 'Very strong effect'
	Do you feel technology-based platforms introduce cultural values different from Omani culture?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strongly disagree</li> <li>- Disagree</li> <li>- Neutral</li> <li>- Agree</li> </ul>

Section	Questions	Options
		- Strongly agree
	How important is it that technology used for English learning reflects Omani cultural values?	Likert scale (1-5) from 'Not important' to 'Extremely important'
<b>Attitudes Toward Balancing English and Culture</b>	Do you think using apps has led to adopting non-Omani cultural practices?	- Yes - No - Not sure
	How comfortable are you balancing English learning and Arabic identity?	Likert scale (1-5) from 'Not comfortable at all' to 'Extremely comfortable'
	Does using technology encourage a globalized identity over a local one?	- Strongly disagree - Disagree - Neutral - Agree - Strongly agree
	Should Omani culture be more integrated into English language learning apps?	- Strongly disagree - Disagree - Neutral - Agree - Strongly agree

### Appendix 2: Teacher Survey Questions

Section	Questions	Options
<b>Use of Technology in Teaching</b>	How often do you incorporate technology in your teaching?	- Daily - A few times a week - Once a week - Occasionally - Never

Section	Questions	Options
	Which tools do you use for teaching?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Duolingo</li> <li>- BBC App – YouTube</li> <li>- Learning Management Systems (LMS)</li> <li>- Other (specify)</li> </ul>
<b>Cultural Impact of Technology</b>	Do the tools introduce non-Omani cultural values?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strongly disagree</li> <li>- Disagree</li> <li>- Neutral</li> <li>- Agree</li> <li>- Strongly agree</li> </ul>
	How important is it for tech used in teaching to reflect Omani culture?	Likert scale (1-5) from 'Not important' to 'Extremely important'
	Does technology help students balance global integration with preserving their cultural identity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strongly disagree</li> <li>- Disagree</li> <li>- Neutral</li> <li>- Agree</li> <li>- Strongly agree</li> </ul>

### Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Group	Questions
<b>Students</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How has technology influenced your English learning experience?</li> <li>2. Do you feel distanced from Omani culture?</li> <li>3. How do learning apps impact cultural identity?</li> </ol>
<b>Teachers</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does technology impact students' learning?</li> <li>2. Does tech challenge students' cultural identity?</li> <li>3. How can Omani culture be better reflected in digital tools?</li> </ol>

UNDER PEER REVIEW