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Original Research

English-mediated access to Mandarin learning: Longitudinal evidence from Jordanian higher education

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Research has documented English use in multilingual Mandarin classrooms, but little is known about how beginners in Arabic-dominant universities experience English mediation over time or how those accounts relate to investment-related self-reports. This longitudinal mixed-methods case study examined beginning-to-end changes in five provisional questionnaire item groupings and students' accounts of English, Arabic and Mandarin during a 14-week beginner Mandarin course at a university in northern Jordan. Data comprised 34 matched questionnaires, repeated interviews with ten students, learner reflections, classroom observations and course documents. Mean scores rose in all five groupings. The largest differences concerned situated access, legitimacy and social support (mean difference = 0.69, $p < .001$, $dz = 0.94$) and imagined multilingual and professional futures (mean difference = 0.64, $p < .001$, $dz = 0.88$). Qualitative accounts described English as a bridge when it was accessible, served a defined purpose and was followed by Mandarin activity. Gatekeeper accounts concerned a hidden prerequisite, a benchmark based on long-established English ability, and the substitution of English explanation for Mandarin practice. Students also described Mandarin as a prospective specialist resource in an Arabic–English–Mandarin repertoire and reported changes in beginner legitimacy. The cohort-level increase coexisted with stable and declining individual profiles and with reports of both bridge and gatekeeper experiences. The bridge–gatekeeper distinction connects investment-related questions of access, legitimacy and anticipated capital with students' accounts of how multilingual classroom activity was sequenced in an Arabic-dominant setting. The study assessed questionnaire responses and reported experiences; English and Mandarin proficiency and causal instructional effects were not tested.

Keywords: *Chinese as a foreign language, English-mediated instruction, language investment, pedagogical translanguaging, multilingual identity, third-language learning, learner agency*

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Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

1. INTRODUCTION

English occupies an uncertain position in beginner Mandarin instruction at universities where it is already the principal additional language. Teachers and students can use English to explain grammar, consult digital resources and connect Mandarin with familiar academic routines. Access to these resources, however, depends partly on students' English competence. In a course with no formal English requirement, English-mediated instruction can create an unannounced prerequisite. An explanation that gives one student immediate access to a Mandarin task can impose a second comprehension demand on another. Sustained explanation in English can also reduce the time students perceive as available for Mandarin use. The research problem concerns the unequal access that can arise when a language intended to assist learning also conditions participation in it.

Jordanian higher education gives this problem a specific institutional character. Arabic is the principal language of national life and everyday interaction, whereas English has established academic, technological and professional value. Mandarin is introduced into an educational order already structured by these two languages. Research on Spanish in Jordanian higher education indicates that the value assigned to another world language depends partly on institutional pathways associated with English (Gogazeh et al., 2026). Mandarin can similarly be perceived as prospective specialist capital connected with translation, business, scholarships or contact with China. At the same time, opportunities to use Mandarin outside the classroom remain less immediate than they are for Arab students studying in China (Aatif, 2022). Students' investment in Mandarin therefore depends partly on whether the course makes its prospective value credible and participation attainable.

Research on multilingual Chinese-language classrooms confirms that English and other mediating languages are routinely present even where Chinese-only principles are endorsed. English has been documented in grammatical explanation, classroom management, elicitation and communication with beginners (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012; Zhang et al., 2022). Studies of translanguaging in Chinese-language education have also shown that learners and teachers use several linguistic resources to complete classroom tasks (Wang, 2019, 2020). Learners' responses to these practices vary. Hu et al. (2022), for example, found more favourable attitudes toward occasional teacher code-switching among elementary learners than among learners at intermediate levels. This evidence establishes that the perceived value of mediation depends on its purpose, timing and accessibility. The cited studies principally examine classroom language practices or learner attitudes in settings where Arabic does not have Jordan's institutional position. They do not explain how English mediation is experienced over time by Mandarin beginners whose educational histories are structured by both Arabic and English.

Investment theory helps specify what is at stake in that experience. Motivation research commonly addresses goals, effort and future self-images. Investment research examines whether participation gives learners access to valued resources and identities under particular social and institutional conditions (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013). A student can report a strong desire to learn Mandarin while feeling less entitled to participate when explanations or resources require stronger English. Another student can regard the same English-mediated practice as evidence that Mandarin belongs in an attainable multilingual future. Research on the ideal multilingual self further suggests that an additional language is evaluated in relation to languages already present in a learner's repertoire (Henry, 2017; Ushioda, 2017). For Jordanian students, Arabic can represent identity and local participation, English established academic capital, and Mandarin prospective specialist value. The position assigned to Mandarin can change as students encounter its demands, classroom uses and possible continuation routes.

Longitudinal research on Chinese-language motivation has documented changes associated with learner goals, classroom experience and proficiency level (Bo & Fu, 2018; Liu, 2023; Wen & Piao, 2020). Research on global English has considered its effects on motivation to learn additional languages (Zheng et al., 2019). Evidence remains missing at the intersection of these lines of inquiry. Existing studies do not follow beginner Mandarin students in a Jordanian university while connecting matched changes in self-reported investment with repeated accounts of English mediation. Hence, it is unclear when students describe English as giving access to Mandarin learning, when they experience it as restricting that access, and how these accounts relate to their self-report trajectories.

The present study addresses this gap through a longitudinal mixed-methods case study of a 14-week beginner Mandarin course at Jadara University. It examines beginning-to-end changes in five provisional groupings of self-reported investment and analyses students' early- and end-course accounts of English, Arabic and Mandarin. The study uses the terms *bridge* and *gatekeeper* to provide provisional labels for reported experiences. A bridge account describes English as assisting access to a resource or task followed by an opportunity for Mandarin activity. A gatekeeper account describes perceived access as dependent on English competence, comparison with a much longer history of English learning, or reduced opportunities for Mandarin use. The study measured questionnaire responses and participant accounts. English proficiency, Mandarin achievement and causal effects of instructional language were outside its measures.

The study addressed four research questions:

1. How did students' responses change from the beginning to the end of the course in the five provisional investment-related item groupings?

2. How did students describe English as a bridge to Mandarin learning over the course?

3. Under what conditions did students describe English as a gatekeeper that restricted their perceived access, legitimacy or agency in Mandarin learning?

4. How did cohort-level self-report patterns compare with students' longitudinal accounts of their Arabic-English-Mandarin repertoires?

The analysis connects matched self-report trajectories with repeated accounts from the same students while preserving the evidentiary limits of each source. It supplies longitudinal evidence from an Arabic-dominant university and proposes the bridge-gatekeeper distinction as a classification of students' reported experiences of English mediation. The classification identifies questions for subsequent testing concerning English proficiency, classroom language use, Mandarin achievement and sustained participation.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. English in multilingual Mandarin education

Mandarin teaching outside China is commonly discussed against a target-language-only ideal. Classroom research, however, documents multilingual practices even among teachers who formally support Chinese-only instruction. Wang and Kirkpatrick (2012) found that teachers used English for explanation, classroom management and interaction. Zhang et al. (2022) similarly reported that English served mainly for explanation and elicitation, while Chinese remained the principal language of instruction and target-language activity. English thus performed specific instructional functions without replacing Mandarin as the main object of learning.

Learner evidence indicates that the perceived value of English mediation depends on its timing, purpose and accessibility. Hu et al. (2022) found generally positive attitudes towards occasional teacher code-switching among international learners of Chinese, although elementary learners responded more positively than intermediate learners. Wang's (2020) study of Chinese programmes at three New Zealand universities also documented tension between monolingual teaching principles and the multilingual resources used in practice. These findings support selective use of English, but they do not establish that such use benefits all learners or all stages of learning. An explanation that gives one student immediate access to a Mandarin activity can impose an additional comprehension demand on another.

Much of the available research concerns multinational classrooms in China or institutions where English is the dominant academic language. Jordanian higher education presents a different linguistic setting. Arabic is the principal language of everyday communication and the language most students share, while English has established academic and professional value but is unevenly accessible. In this repertoire, Mandarin is an additional language whose institutional and occupational value is still developing. Recent Jordanian research suggests that students can value another international language as an addition to existing English-related capital (Gogazeh et al., 2026).

In this setting, the pedagogical value of English depends on the function it performs, students' access to it, the availability of Arabic for clarification, and whether mediation is followed by a genuine opportunity to use Mandarin in speaking, reading or writing activities.

2.2. Third-language learning and translanguaging

Third-language acquisition research provides a basis for understanding how Arabic and English can participate in Mandarin learning. Additional languages are not necessarily learned in a fixed sequence or through separate linguistic systems. Experience of learning another language can support metalinguistic awareness, cross-linguistic comparison and recognition of recurring patterns (Cenoz, 2013; De Angelis, 2007). For Jordanian students, English can consequently become a source of comparison in Mandarin learning even when Arabic is their stronger and more readily available language. The usefulness of that comparison depends on the learner's English resources and the demands of the Mandarin task.

Translanguaging theory directs attention to the full communicative repertoire through which multilingual speakers construct meaning (García & Li Wei, 2014; Li Wei, 2018). A beginner Mandarin classroom can involve Arabic discussion, English metalanguage, pinyin, Chinese characters, gesture, images, sound, translation and digital search. These resources contribute differently to comprehension and participation. Their educational value cannot be inferred simply from their presence in the classroom.

Pedagogical translanguaging provides a more deliberate account of how multilingual resources can be organised during instruction. Cenoz and Gorter (2020) propose the planned use of available linguistic resources at particular stages of a task, followed by reduced mediation as learners gain the capacity to act in the target language. A brief comparison in English, for example, can make a Mandarin word-order pattern more accessible when students understand the explanation and then apply it in Mandarin. The same comparison can add difficulty when English itself requires considerable processing, displaces a more accessible Arabic explanation, or occupies time intended for Mandarin use.

Evaluation of multilingual mediation therefore requires attention to accessibility, task sequence and the learner activity that follows it.

Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

2.3. Investment, capital and imagined multilingual futures

An account of instructional access alone does not explain why students commit effort to Mandarin or how they understand its place in their lives. Investment theory relates language learning to identity, access, legitimacy and the resources associated with participation (Norton, 2013). Darvin and Norton's (2015) framework connects learners' identities with the forms of capital recognised in particular social and institutional settings. Students can value a language while still withholding effort when classroom practices provide limited recognition, uncertain access or no credible route towards future participation.

Arabic, English and Mandarin can have different forms of value for Jordanian university students. In Bourdieu's (1991) terms, their value depends on the social fields in which linguistic resources are recognised. Arabic is closely associated with identity, local relationships and everyday participation. English has established academic and professional value through university study, international communication and employment. Mandarin can be perceived as prospective specialist capital linked to scholarships, translation, intercultural networks or China-related work. This value depends on accessible courses, qualifications and opportunities for continued learning.

Theories of imagined communities and future selves explain how present language learning becomes connected with forms of participation that students have not yet experienced (Dörnyei, 2009; Kanno & Norton, 2003). The ideal multilingual self is especially relevant when an additional language is learned alongside global English (Henry, 2017; Ushioda, 2017). Students need not displace English from their academic or professional identities to assign value to Mandarin. They can envisage an Arabic—English—Mandarin repertoire in which the three languages have differentiated purposes.

Motivation describes goals, intentions and anticipated future identities. Investment addresses the conditions under which learners consider participation legitimate, accessible and worth sustaining. English is implicated in both. Familiar English resources can help students envisage Mandarin as an attainable addition to their repertoire. English can also regulate access when instructional materials assume competence that the course has not formally required, when students judge a few weeks of Mandarin against many years of English learning, or when English explanation reduces their perceived opportunities for Mandarin activity. This conditional function provides the theoretical basis for the bridge—gatekeeper distinction.

2.4. The bridge—gatekeeper distinction

The present study uses *bridge* and *gatekeeper* as provisional analytical labels for students' accounts of English-mediated practices. The unit of classification is a reported experience of a particular practice under specified conditions. The labels do not assign a permanent property to English or classify individual students as fixed learner types.

A bridge account describes English as accessible to the learner, useful for a defined purpose and followed by an opportunity to engage in Mandarin. Examples include a brief comparison of word order, clarification of selected metalanguage or a vocabulary search that enables the student to resume a Mandarin task. English is classified as a bridge when the participant reports that it assists access to the subsequent activity.

A gatekeeper account describes a perceived restriction on access to Mandarin learning. Such an account can arise when materials assume unannounced English competence, when English displaces a more accessible Arabic resource, when students judge their early Mandarin development against a much longer history of English learning, or when extended English explanation reduces their perceived opportunities to use Mandarin. These conditions represent different forms of reported restriction: an additional prerequisite, an unrealistic benchmark or the substitution of English explanation for Mandarin activity.

The same instructional practice can receive different classifications at different times or from different learners. Its classification depends on perceived accessibility, the purpose and duration of mediation, the requirements of the task, the alternatives available and the opportunity for subsequent Mandarin use. The distinction is therefore a contextual classification of reported experience, not an ordered scale or a claim about measured instructional effects. The study did not assess English proficiency, systematically quantify classroom language use or test Mandarin achievement attributable to English mediation. The causal status and prevalence of the proposed classifications remain to be examined in future research.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

The study adopted a semester-long mixed-methods case-study design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The case comprised one beginner Mandarin course at the language centre of Jadara University, a private university in northern Jordan. It was bounded by a single cohort, institution and 14-week instructional period extending from October 2025 to January 2026.

The quantitative strand examined beginning-to-end changes in students' responses to 24 investment-related questionnaire items. The same items were administered in Weeks 1 and 14 and matched through confidential participant-generated codes. The qualitative strand examined how students described their experiences of Mandarin learning and the place of Arabic, English and Mandarin in their repertoires. Ten students participated in interviews

in Weeks 2 and 14. Learner reflections, observation notes and course documents supplied additional evidence concerning the course context and students' reported experiences.

The two strands were analysed separately and connected during interpretation. Integration examined whether individual questionnaire trajectories and qualitative accounts were compatible, complementary or divergent. Compatibility meant that the sources indicated related patterns while supporting different claims; complementarity occurred when qualitative material supplied contextual detail absent from the questionnaire; divergence occurred when an individual account differed from the cohort pattern or from that participant's numerical trajectory. The design did not use one strand to validate the other. The study investigated changes in self-reported investment-related responses and students' accounts of English mediation. It did not measure English proficiency, Mandarin achievement or systematic proportions of Arabic, English and Mandarin use. The absence of these measures and of a comparison group precluded causal attribution to the course or to English-mediated instruction.

Table 1
Longitudinal data sources and analytical functions

TIME	PARTICIPANTS OR SOURCE	EVIDENCE	ANALYTICAL FUNCTION
Week 1	Consenting eligible students	Initial questionnaire	Document initial investment-related responses, imagined futures, anticipated capital, repertoire positioning and perceived barriers
Week 2	Ten purposively selected students	Early-course interviews	Elicit language biographies, enrolment decisions, expectations and early accounts of English, Arabic and Mandarin
Weeks 2–13	Cohort and course context	Learner reflections, observations and documents	Provide contextual evidence concerning multilingual mediation, perceived participation, constraints, critical incidents and institutional positioning
Week 14	Matched cohort and interview subsample	Final questionnaire and repeated interviews	Document beginning-to-end questionnaire change and revisit students' early-course accounts
Integration	Matched cases and cohort	Participant-level matrices and joint displays	Examine compatibility, complementarity and divergence between questionnaire trajectories and longitudinal accounts

3.2. Setting and course

The case course was a new, face-to-face beginner Mandarin course comprising three contact hours per week for 14 weeks, or 42 contact hours in total. Instruction covered pinyin, tones, basic principles of stroke order and character radicals, and introductory topics including greetings, family, academic fields, time, purchasing and selected cultural content. Course assessment consisted of participation (15%), mid-semester oral and written examinations (35%) and a final examination (50%). Grades and examination results were not used as research outcomes. The instructor held a master's degree in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages and the relevant qualifications for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. The course took place at an Arabic-dominant institution. Students generally had several years of prior English study, although their English proficiency was not assessed for this research. Mandarin was therefore introduced into an educational repertoire already involving Arabic and English.

Course materials and observational records indicated that selected explanations, digital applications, web resources and cross-linguistic comparisons used English. Arabic was available for peer interaction and clarification, while Mandarin was used for classroom routines and beginner target-language activities. The study imposed no experimental language policy and did not systematically quantify the proportion of instruction conducted in each language. It documented the multilingual practices occurring during the course and students' accounts of those practices. Course enrolment was administratively separate from research participation. Declining or withdrawing from the research had no effect on grades, certification or eligibility for future language-centre opportunities.

3.3. Participants and recruitment

Thirty-eight students were enrolled in the course. Thirty-six were eligible for the research because they were at least 18 years old. Thirty-five eligible students

Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

consented and completed the Week 1 questionnaire, representing 97.2% of the eligible class. Thirty-four completed the Week 14 questionnaire and were successfully matched, giving a between-wave retention rate of 97.1%. The participant who did not complete the final measurement had withdrawn from the university during the semester. The matched cohort comprised 20 women and 14 men, aged 18—24 years (M = 20.4, SD = 1.4). Participants were studying English Language and Literature (n = 14), Translation (n = 9), Business Administration (n = 6), or Computer Science and Information Technology (n = 5). The cohort represented 94.4% of all eligible students in the class. It nevertheless remained a small, self-selected sample from one course and was not intended to represent students at other Jordanian institutions. A purposive qualitative subsample of ten students was selected after the initial measurement to provide variation in gender, academic major and initial questionnaire profile. The subsample comprised six women and four men, included all four academic fields represented in the cohort and contained differing initial profiles. All ten students completed both interviews. Recruitment and written consent were handled by an independent research assistant who had no grading responsibilities. Neither participation nor the decision to decline affected students' academic standing or access to language-centre services.

Table 2
Participant flow and data completeness

STAGE	N	PERCENTAGE OR NOTE
Enrolled in the course	38	Total course enrolment
Eligible students aged 18 or older	36	Two students were excluded because they were under 18
Consented and completed Week 1 questionnaire	35	97.2% of eligible students
Completed Week 14 questionnaire	34	97.1% retention from Week 1
Successfully matched questionnaire pairs	34	Primary quantitative sample
Completed both interviews	10	Longitudinal qualitative subsample

3.4. Data sources and instruments

3.4.1. Mandarin Investment and Imagined Futures Questionnaire

The Mandarin Investment and Imagined Futures Questionnaire was developed for the present setting with reference to investment theory and research on additional-language motivation and multilingual future selves. It contained 24 core statements administered in Arabic and rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Appendix A presents English translations of the administered items.

Before data analysis, the items were assigned to five theory-informed groupings: (i) imagined multilingual and professional futures; (ii) anticipated symbolic and material capital; (iii) situated access, legitimacy and social support; (iv) agency and persistence; and (v) repertoire and institutional positioning. These categories were regarded as provisional item groupings, not as validated latent constructs or established questionnaire subscales. The full item-to-grouping allocation appears in Appendix A. The Week 1 questionnaire also collected contextual information concerning prior language exposure, reasons for enrolment, perceived barriers and intentions to continue learning Mandarin. The Week 14 questionnaire included separate questions concerning experienced difficulty, out-of-class engagement, continuation plans and critical incidents. These wave-specific questions were not included in the five grouping scores.

Three applied linguists reviewed the items for theoretical relevance, clarity and cultural appropriateness. Four students who were not enrolled in the course then completed cognitive pre-testing. These procedures supplied preliminary content and response-process evidence. The sample was too small to examine or confirm the proposed five-group internal structure. Internal-consistency coefficients for the provisional groupings ranged from .81 to .89 at Week 1 and from .84 to .91 at Week 14; these coefficients were reported descriptively and were not interpreted as evidence of structural validity.

A score for each grouping was calculated as the mean of its constituent items. The descriptive overall profile was the unweighted mean of the five grouping means, giving each theory-informed grouping equal influence despite the final grouping containing four items and the others containing five. There were no missing item responses in the

relevant questionnaires. The one participant without Week 14 data was excluded from the paired analysis and no value was imputed.

The Week 1 administration constituted an initial measurement taken at the beginning of the course, not a pre-course measure of students who had received no exposure to instruction. Some items may also have acquired a more experience-based meaning by Week 14. Beginning-to-end differences therefore describe changes in responses to the same statements; strict longitudinal measurement invariance has not been established.

3.4.2. Repeated semi-structured interviews

Ten students completed an early-course interview in Week 2 and a final interview in Week 14. The Week 2 interview examined language biographies, enrolment decisions, perceived resources, imagined communities, anticipated barriers and the expected place of Mandarin in relation to Arabic and English. Because instruction had already begun, these interviews were viewed as early-course accounts and not as pre-course baseline data.

The Week 14 interview revisited each participant's earlier account and asked what had remained stable, what had changed, which experiences had influenced the participant's relationship with Mandarin and what the participant intended to do next. The early interview asked when English might help Mandarin learning or make it more difficult. The final interview used the terms *bridge* and *restrict access*. Responses to these direct questions were identified as elicited material. The bridge—gatekeeper distinction was therefore used as a theory-informed analytical classification and was not presented as a wholly inductive discovery.

Participants could use Arabic, English or both during the interviews. The twenty interviews lasted between 25 and 45 minutes (M = 32 minutes) and were audio-recorded with written permission. Arabic was the principal interview language, with occasional English code-switching during discussion of academic matters.

The independent research assistant transcribed the recordings and translated Arabic passages into English. The author checked the Arabic-to-English translation in four of the twenty interview transcripts, representing 20% of the interview set, against the corresponding audio recordings. Published quotations are English translations of Arabic transcript extracts, lightly edited for syntactic clarity without altering their intended meaning. Passages originally spoken in English were retained in their original wording.

3.4.3. Learner reflections, observations, documents

Short written reflections were collected in Weeks 4, 8 and 12. They asked students to describe occasions when Mandarin felt accessible or inaccessible and when Arabic or English affected their perceived participation. Reflections required separate consent and did not contribute to course grades. Thirty-two members of the matched cohort provided reflections in Week 4, 29 in Week 8 and 33 in Week 12, producing 94 texts.

The independent research assistant conducted non-participant observations of six 50-minute lessons between Weeks 2 and 13, totalling 300 minutes. Observation notes recorded opportunities for student talk, patterns of participation, responses to errors, peer support, teacher feedback, learner initiative and uses of Arabic, English and Mandarin. Descriptive field notes were kept separate from subsequent analytical comments. The observations provided contextual examples; they were not used to calculate language-use proportions or direct participation outcomes.

The documentary corpus comprised the official 14-week syllabus, the course-enrolment announcement and the mid-semester oral and written assessment rubrics. These materials were examined for the instructional expectations communicated to students and for representations of Mandarin's educational, cultural and prospective professional value. Observations and documents were used to contextualise participant accounts and did not constitute independent measures of language achievement or identity change.

3.5. Data-collection procedure

The institutional ethics committee of Jadara University approved the study on 5 October 2025. Approval was obtained before recruitment, consent and collection of any research data. The independent research assistant then obtained written consent from eligible students.

At the beginning of the first instructional week, before students had received substantial Mandarin instruction, participants generated confidential codes and completed the initial questionnaire. The codes permitted records to be matched over time without names appearing in the analytical dataset. Early-course interviews were conducted in Week 2. Reflections were collected in Weeks 4, 8 and 12, and the six classroom observations were distributed between Weeks 2 and 13. Course documents were collected during the same period.

In Week 14, participants completed the same 24 core questionnaire items in the same order. They also answered the separate final-wave questions. The ten members of the qualitative subsample completed final interviews that revisited their Week 2 accounts. Before analysis, questionnaire records were checked for matching accuracy, data sources were connected through the participant codes, and identifying information was removed from the analytical files. Participant flow was documented from enrolment and eligibility through consent, completion, matching and attrition.

Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

3.6. Quantitative analysis

Questionnaire data were checked for item direction, completeness and matching before grouping scores were calculated. Analyses used the 34 participants with matched Week 1 and Week 14 questionnaires. No final-wave value was imputed for the participant who withdrew.

For each provisional grouping, Week 1 and Week 14 means, standard deviations and paired mean differences were calculated. Paired-samples t-tests assessed beginning-to-end changes. Distributional checks indicated departures from normality in some paired-difference distributions, so Wilcoxon signed-rank tests were conducted as sensitivity analyses. Pairs with a zero difference for a particular grouping were omitted from the corresponding signed-rank calculation.

The five planned grouping comparisons were regarded as one family, and the Holm procedure was applied to control the familywise error rate. Because all five unadjusted grouping-test values were below .001, the adjustment did not alter the inferential conclusions. Results include means, standard deviations, mean differences, 95% confidence intervals and paired standardised effect sizes. The paired effect size was calculated as

$$d_z = \frac{\text{mean paired difference}}{\text{standard deviation of the paired differences}}$$

Ceiling responses were examined because high initial scores could restrict the amount of observable increase. A grouping mean of 5.00 was classified as a ceiling response. Four participants had a ceiling-level grouping at Week 1 and nine at Week 14. These counts were handled as descriptive indicators of possible score compression.

Before mixed-methods integration, overall questionnaire trajectories were classified using a prespecified descriptive convention. An overall-profile change greater than +0.20 was classified as an increase, a change from −0.20 to +0.20 inclusive as approximately stable, and a change below −0.20 as a decrease. The band prevented very small numerical differences from being assigned directional meaning. It was not a validated threshold for reliable individual change.

Subgroup comparisons were not conducted because the cohort was too small to support stable estimates or protect confidentiality. Statistical significance was not interpreted as evidence that the course or English mediation caused the observed questionnaire changes. The analyses concerned questionnaire responses and did not assess Mandarin proficiency, grades or observed participation.

3.7. Qualitative analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis was used to examine the interview transcripts, learner reflections, observation notes and documents (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis combined a deductive focus on identity, capital, ideology, legitimacy, imagined futures, language mediation and perceived access with openness to meanings not specified in advance.

Analysis proceeded through familiarisation, initial coding, preparation of participant-level temporal summaries, comparison of early- and end-course accounts, cross-case analysis, theme development, theme review and analytical writing. Each interviewee's matrix connected the Week 2 account, experiences reported during the course, the Week 14 account, the participant's intended next step and the corresponding questionnaire profile. Cross-case analysis examined recurring patterns as well as divergent and negative cases.

The bridge—gatekeeper distinction was used as a provisional classification of reported experiences. A bridge account described English as accessible and useful for a defined purpose followed by an opportunity for Mandarin activity. A gatekeeper account described perceived access as dependent on English competence, comparison with a much longer history of English learning, displacement of a more accessible Arabic resource or reduced opportunity for Mandarin use. Because both interview protocols contained direct questions about helpful and restrictive English use, material arising from those questions was marked as elicited. Accounts arising elsewhere in the interviews, reflections or other sources were distinguished from this prompted material.

A second qualitative researcher served as a critical colleague. This researcher reviewed selected extracts, questioned theme boundaries and challenged interpretations that favoured programme success. The author retained responsibility for the final analytical decisions. The procedure was used for reflexive challenge and was not presented as an inter-rater reliability exercise.

All ten paired interview cases contributed to the analysis. Six cases were selected for detailed presentation after case-level and cross-case analysis because they represented contrasting longitudinal accounts of a learning bridge, benchmark comparison, a hidden prerequisite, reimagined professional futures and additive multilingual positioning, substitution, and situated legitimacy. The remaining four cases contributed to category development but were not quoted at length.

3.8. Mixed-methods integration

Quantitative and qualitative data were analysed separately before integration. The participant-linking code connected the ten interviewees' questionnaire profiles with their early- and end-course interviews, reflections and relevant contextual material. Participant-level comparison matrices were then prepared to connect questionnaire trajectories with longitudinal accounts. Selected comparisons are reported in Section 4.6. Integration remained at the level of interpretation. The questionnaire assessed

general investment-related responses, intentions, perceived access and self-positioning. It did not assess English mediation directly. Interviews and reflections examined students' descriptions of English mediation in greater detail. A qualitative account was therefore not used to explain the cause of a numerical change, and agreement between sources was not viewed as validation of either source. Cohort-level patterns were compared with individual cases to identify convergence and heterogeneity. Particular attention was given to approximately stable and declining questionnaire profiles, accounts that qualified positive cohort tendencies, and instances in which English was described as both immediately comprehensible and restrictive of subsequent Mandarin activity.

3.9. Ethics, positionality and research quality

Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional ethics committee of Jadara University before recruitment, consent or data collection. Written consent was independent of course registration and assessment. Participants could decline individual questions or withdraw without consequences for their academic or administrative records. Identifying information and temporary linkage files were stored separately from the analytical dataset, and raw recordings were not made publicly available.

The author was Director of the language centre in which the course was taught and held administrative oversight of its curriculum. The author had no grading responsibility, did not recruit or interview participants, did not approve their final grades and had no line-management authority over the instructor's promotion or the research assistant's employment. This institutional position nevertheless created a potential power imbalance and a risk of favourable interpretation.

To reduce these risks, recruitment, interviewing, transcription and initial de-identification were conducted independently. The author received de-identified participant-level questionnaire and qualitative data only after grades had been submitted. Limited access to four interview recordings was required for the stated translation check. Reflexive notes documented interpretations that might favour programme success, and the analysis actively examined disappointment, resistance, non-continuation and cases that differed from the cohort tendency.

Research quality was supported through repeated data collection, matched participant records, inclusion of discrepant cases, multiple contextual sources, a dated analytical record and external critical challenge (Nowell et al., 2017). Quantitative reporting included all five provisional groupings, attrition, effect sizes, confidence intervals, multiple-comparison control and sensitivity analyses. The attainable sample was defined by the bounded course cohort, and no claim of national representativeness was made (Lakens, 2022).

4. RESULTS

4.1. Participant retention and data completeness

Of the 35 participants who completed the initial questionnaire, 34 completed the Week 14 questionnaire and were successfully matched, giving a between-wave retention rate of 97.1%. The participant without final-wave data withdrew from the university during the semester. All ten members of the qualitative subsample completed both interviews. The quantitative analysis therefore included 34 matched questionnaire pairs, and the qualitative analysis included ten complete sets of early- and end-course interviews.

4.2. Investment-related questionnaire responses

Mean scores were higher at Week 14 in all five provisional item groupings (Table 3). Mean differences ranged from 0.56 to 0.69 points on the five-point response scale. The largest difference occurred in situated access, legitimacy and social support (M_{diff} = 0.69), followed by imagined multilingual and professional futures (M_{diff} = 0.64). Standardised paired differences ranged from d_z = 0.76 to 0.94. The Wilcoxon signed-rank sensitivity analyses produced the same inferential conclusions as the paired-samples t-tests. The unweighted mean of the five grouping means increased from 3.64 at Week 1 to 4.26 at Week 14. Under the prespecified ±0.20-point descriptive convention, 28 participants had increased overall profiles, four had approximately stable profiles and two had decreased profiles.

Four participants had a score of 5.00 in at least one provisional grouping at Week 1, compared with nine at Week 14. No participant had an overall-profile mean of 5.00 at Week 1; three had an overall-profile mean of 5.00 at Week 14. These results concern responses to investment-related questionnaire items. Mandarin proficiency, grades and classroom participation were not included in the quantitative measures.

4.3. English as a bridge to Mandarin learning

Participants described English as assisting Mandarin learning when it gave them access to a specific explanation, familiar learning procedure or English—Mandarin resource. Bridge accounts included the use of English for grammatical comparison, selected metalanguage and digital vocabulary searches. Participants also reported that the English-mediated stage was followed by an opportunity to speak, read, write or otherwise work in Mandarin.

P01, a Translation student with an increased questionnaire profile, associated English with familiar language-learning procedures at the beginning of the course (Week 2): *'I am studying Translation, so my English is good. I think English will help me understand Mandarin grammar because I am used to learning languages in that way. I want to add Mandarin to my Arabic and English so that I can stand out in the job market'.*

Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

Table 3
Beginning-to-end change in provisional item-grouping scores (N = 34)

PROVISIONAL ITEM GROUPING	WEEK 1 M (SD)	WEEK 14 M (SD)	MEAN DIFFERENCE	PAIRED PROCEDURES	dz	dz 95% CI
Imagined multilingual and professional futures	3.72 (0.64)	4.36 (0.51)	+0.64	t(33) = 5.14, p < .001; W = 482, p < .001	0.88	[0.48, 1.27]
Anticipated symbolic and material capital	3.85 (0.58)	4.41 (0.47)	+0.56	t(33) = 4.88, p < .001; W = 465, p < .001	0.84	[0.44, 1.23]
Situated access, legitimacy and social support	3.41 (0.71)	4.10 (0.58)	+0.69	t(33) = 5.46, p < .001; W = 510, p < .001	0.94	[0.53, 1.34]
Agency and persistence	3.32 (0.68)	3.94 (0.61)	+0.62	t(33) = 4.41, p < .001; W = 440, p < .001	0.76	[0.37, 1.14]
Repertoire and institutional positioning	3.91 (0.60)	4.47 (0.48)	+0.56	t(33) = 4.98, p < .001; W = 478, p < .001	0.85	[0.46, 1.25]

At Week 14, P01 described a sequence in which a grammatical explanation in English was followed by Mandarin speaking practice: *'English was definitely helpful as a bridge when the instructor explained word order in English. I understood it immediately. What I liked was that we did not stay in English; we quickly applied the explanation in Mandarin speaking practice. I feel much more legitimate as a beginner now, and I can see Mandarin becoming a valuable specialist skill'.*

Other bridge accounts referred to English—Mandarin applications, online dictionaries and familiar grammatical terminology. These accounts described students' perceived access to learning resources and subsequent Mandarin activity.

4.4. English as a gatekeeper

Three categories of reported gatekeeping were identified: benchmark comparison, hidden prerequisite and substitution. The categories describe participants' accounts of English-mediated practices. They do not constitute estimates of how prevalent each experience was in the complete cohort.

Benchmark accounts occurred when participants compared their first semester of Mandarin with their much longer experience of learning and using English. At Week 2, P02, whose questionnaire profile decreased, expressed concern about the time required to learn another language: *'I am excited to learn Mandarin, but I am concerned about the time it will take. I learned English for more than ten years and still have to practise it. Three languages are too much mental load'.* At Week 14, P02 reported evaluating early Mandarin reading and pronunciation against established English reading ability: *'I felt discouraged. I began to compare my slow progress in Mandarin with how easy it is for me to read English. The tones and characters took too much time. Sometimes the English explanations slowed down my Mandarin practice because I kept translating from Mandarin to English to Arabic in my head'.*

Hidden-prerequisite accounts concerned English-language resources in a beginner Mandarin course that had no formal English entry requirement. P03, whose questionnaire profile remained approximately stable, described English as adequate but insecure at the beginning of the course: *'Arabic is my primary language for everything. My English is all right but not perfect. I took Mandarin classes because I wanted to do something new, but I hoped the book would not be too complicated'.* At Week 14, P03 referred specifically to English-based applications and websites: *'I liked the class, but English was an obstacle. There was no English requirement, yet the English-based applications and websites created a second comprehension challenge for me. The course was still worthwhile, although my aspirations did not change greatly'.*

A Week 8 learner reflection from P08 described a similar experience with a digital character-writing application: *'The digital character-writing application is entirely in English. I spent so much time trying to understand the English explanation of 'stroke order' that I forgot to practise the characters. It was as if there were another wall in front of me'.*

Substitution accounts occurred when participants reported that extended explanation in English reduced the time or opportunity they perceived as available for Mandarin activity. At Week 2, P05, an English major, initially expected English to make Mandarin grammar and characters more accessible: *'I am an English major, and I feel very comfortable when the instructor uses English. I thought I would need English to understand the structure of Mandarin and its complicated characters'.* At Week 14, P05 distinguished the immediate accessibility of an English explanation from the opportunity to speak Mandarin: *'I was discouraged from*

speaking Mandarin by the amount of time we spent analysing grammar in English. I found the explanation easy to follow and comfortable to read, but it delayed my opportunity to speak Mandarin. I did not speak as much as I wanted to'.

4.5. Reported professional futures, additive multilingual positioning and situated legitimacy

Two related patterns accompanied the reported bridge and gatekeeper experiences: reimagined professional futures and additive multilingual positioning, and situated legitimacy. These patterns concern participants' accounts of their prospective language repertoires and their entitlement to participate in Mandarin learning. They were analytically related to the bridge—gatekeeper distinction but were not classified as additional bridge or gatekeeper categories.

Reimagined professional futures and additive multilingual positioning appeared in P04's paired account. At Week 2, P04, a Business Administration student, described English as the principal linguistic resource associated with international trade and assigned Mandarin a general market value: *'I am studying Business Administration, and everybody knows that English is the language of international trade. I decided to learn Mandarin because China is a large market, but at this point I still think English is my strongest asset'.* At Week 14, P04 described Mandarin as a distinct specialist resource in an Arabic—English—Mandarin repertoire: *'Mandarin is a separate specialist skill from English. English helped me gain access to scholarships and business documents, but now I have another perspective. I describe my professional identity as Arabic—English—Mandarin'.*

Situated legitimacy appeared in P06's account of classroom participation. At Week 2, P06, a Computer Science student, compared their English with that of Translation students and expressed concern about making errors: *'I was concerned that my English was not as fluent as the English of the Translation students, and I was afraid of making mistakes in front of the class'.* At Week 14, P06 reported that perfect English was unnecessary for learning Mandarin. The same account referred to occasional searches in English, clarification from peers in Arabic and participation in Mandarin classroom activities.

Contextual records documented the use of English in selected digital resources and explanations, Arabic in peer clarification, and Mandarin in classroom routines and beginner learning activities. These records were descriptive and did not provide frequency estimates for the use of the three languages.

Table 4
Bridge–gatekeeper categories and related reported patterns

RELATION TO THE BRIDGE–GATEKEEPER	ANALYTICAL LABEL	DESCRIPTION IN PARTICIPANT ACCOUNTS	ILLUSTRATIVE QUALITATIVE SOURCES
Bridge	Learning bridge	English helped students understand explanations, follow learning procedures or access resources before they used Mandarin.	P01 paired interviews; other interview and learner-reflection accounts
Gatekeeper	Benchmark	Participants compared their initial progress in Mandarin with a much longer history of learning and using English.	P02 paired interviews
	Hidden prerequisite	English-language resources added a comprehension demand in a course with no formal English entry requirement.	P03 paired interviews; P08 Week 8 learner reflection
	Substitution	Extended explanation in English reduced the time or opportunity participants perceived as available for Mandarin speaking or practice.	P05 paired interviews
Related reported pattern	Reimagined professional futures and additive multilingual positioning	Mandarin was described as a distinct specialist resource added to an established Arabic–English repertoire.	P04 paired interviews
	Situated legitimacy	Participation in Mandarin learning was reported despite insecurity about comparative English fluency or beginner status.	P06 paired interviews

Note. The sources listed in the final column illustrate the reported patterns and do not represent their frequency in the cohort. All ten paired interview cases contributed to the qualitative analysis, together with the learner reflections and contextual records.

Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

4.6. Questionnaire trajectories and selected longitudinal accounts

The overall questionnaire profile increased at cohort level, while the participant-level distribution included 28 increased, four approximately stable and two decreased profiles. Table 5 presents the six cases selected for detailed longitudinal reporting. The mixed-methods comparison included three contrasting questionnaire trajectories: P01 had an increased profile, P02 had a decreased profile and P03 had an approximately stable profile. P04, P05 and P06 are included for the additional longitudinal patterns identified in their qualitative accounts.

P01's increased profile accompanied a learning-bridge account in which an English explanation was followed by Mandarin speaking practice. P02's decreased profile accompanied a benchmark account in which initial Mandarin reading and pronunciation were compared with established English reading ability. P03's approximately stable profile accompanied a hidden-prerequisite account in which English-language materials added a comprehension demand. These pairings juxtapose questionnaire trajectories and qualitative accounts observed for the same participants; they do not identify the cause of the numerical changes.

Table 5
Selected longitudinal participant accounts

CASE AND FOCAL REPORTED PATTERN	WEEK 2 ACCOUNT	WEEK 14 ACCOUNT
P01: Learning bridge	Expected English to assist with Mandarin grammar through familiar language-learning procedures and associated Mandarin with professional differentiation.	Reported that an explanation of Mandarin word order in English was followed by Mandarin speaking practice; also reported greater legitimacy as a beginner and prospective professional value for Mandarin.
P02: Benchmark	Expressed interest in Mandarin but was concerned about the time and cognitive demand involved in maintaining three languages.	Reported comparing initial Mandarin reading and pronunciation with established English reading ability and described repeated Mandarin–English–Arabic translation as slowing practice.
P03: Hidden prerequisite	Described English as adequate but insecure and expressed concern about the complexity of course materials.	Reported that English-based applications and websites added a second comprehension demand despite the absence of a formal English entry requirement.
P04: Reimagined professional futures and additive multilingual positioning	Described English as the principal resource for international trade and Mandarin in terms of the general value of the Chinese market.	Described Mandarin as a distinct specialist resource in an Arabic–English–Mandarin professional repertoire.
P05: Substitution gatekeeper	Expected familiar English explanations to make Mandarin grammar and characters more accessible.	Reported that extended analysis of grammar in English reduced the opportunity perceived as available for speaking Mandarin.
P06: Situated legitimacy	Compared their English unfavourably with that of Translation students and expressed fear of making errors in class.	Reported that perfect English was unnecessary for Mandarin learning and referred to English searches, Arabic peer clarification and participation in Mandarin activities.

Note. The cases were selected for detailed presentation after case-level and cross-case analysis. They illustrate longitudinal variation in participants' accounts and do not indicate the prevalence of each pattern in the qualitative sample. Questionnaire trajectory classifications are reported for P01–P03 because these cases were used for the descriptive mixed-methods comparison. The table does not attribute the qualitative accounts to changes in questionnaire scores.

The questionnaire and qualitative materials addressed different aspects of the students' experience. The questionnaire documented changes in five provisional investment-related item groupings. The interviews and reflections documented participants' accounts of English mediation and of the positions assigned to Arabic, English and Mandarin. No direct statistical association between the questionnaire changes and the qualitative categories was tested.

The cohort-level increase therefore coexisted with increased, approximately stable and decreased individual profiles and with both bridge and gatekeeper accounts among the selected cases.

5. DISCUSSION

The cohort reported higher investment-related questionnaire scores at Week 14, although individual profiles included increases, approximate stability and decreases. The qualitative accounts were similarly varied. Students described English as assisting access to Mandarin when it served a defined purpose and was followed by Mandarin activity. They described restriction when English added an unannounced prerequisite, became a benchmark for early Mandarin learning or reduced perceived opportunities to use Mandarin. These findings connect changes in reported investment with the conditions under which students experienced English mediation in an Arabic-dominant university.

5.1. Change in self-reported investment

Mean scores increased in all five provisional item groupings, with the largest mean difference in situated access, legitimacy and social support. The increase suggests that many participants came to report more favourable perceptions of Mandarin's future value, their access to learning, and their capacity to continue. Studies of Chinese-language motivation have likewise associated changes in learner orientations with goals and course experience (Bo & Fu, 2018; Liu, 2023; Wen & Piao, 2020). Investment theory gives this change a social and institutional context. Investment concerns whether language learning offers access to valued resources and identities and whether learners regard participation as legitimate (Darvin & Norton, 2015; Norton, 2013). Participants' responses encompassed anticipated capital, access, legitimacy, persistence and repertoire positioning during the course. The observed differences concern self-reported investment-related responses in this cohort. They provide no evidence of improvement in Mandarin proficiency, academic performance or observed participation and do not establish effects attributable to the course or its use of English.

5.2. English as a bridge and gatekeeper

Students assigned English different pedagogical meanings in beginner Mandarin education. Previous research documents its use for explanation, elicitation and interaction in multilingual Mandarin classrooms (Wang & Kirkpatrick, 2012; Zhang et al., 2022).

In the present accounts, English assisted access when it was comprehensible, answered a defined need and led back to Mandarin activity. P01 reported an English explanation of word order followed by Mandarin speaking; other accounts referred to familiar grammatical terminology, dictionaries and digital resources connected with Mandarin tasks.

The bridge label therefore depends on accessibility, instructional purpose and the opportunity to work in Mandarin after mediation. Hu et al. (2022) found more favourable attitudes towards occasional teacher code-switching among elementary learners than among learners at intermediate levels. Timing and purpose may therefore affect how learners report such mediation.

Gatekeeper accounts described three different restrictions. The hidden prerequisite concerned English-language materials in a course with no formal English entry requirement. P03 and P08 reported that English-based applications or explanations added a second comprehension demand. The benchmark concerned comparison between a few weeks of Mandarin study and many years of English learning. P02 associated this comparison with discouragement and reported that repeated movement among Mandarin, English and Arabic delayed practice. Substitution concerned the allocation of classroom activity. P05 found an English explanation accessible but felt that extended analysis reduced the opportunity to speak Mandarin.

The categories concern access to instructional resources, expectations about the time required for additional-language learning, and the activity available after an explanation. Research on translanguaging has established the presence of multilingual resources in Chinese-language classrooms where monolingual principles retain institutional authority (Wang, 2019, 2020). The present cases indicate that their educational meaning also depends on learner access and classroom sequence. The same practice could receive different classifications from different learners or at different times. An English explanation may give one student access to a Mandarin task and impose another demand on a peer. Bridge and gatekeeper therefore classify reported experiences under specified conditions.

5.3. Longitudinal integration and multilingual positioning

The cohort-level increase coexisted with heterogeneous individual profiles and with both bridge and gatekeeper accounts. P01's increased profile accompanied a learning-bridge account, P02's decreased profile accompanied a benchmark account, and P03's approximately stable profile accompanied a hidden-prerequisite account. The distinction is contextual and categorical. It is not an ordered scale. The questionnaire documented general investment-related responses, intentions, perceived access and self-positioning, while the interviews and reflections examined English mediation in particular situations. An aggregate increase can coexist with disappointment, unequal perceived access and reduced opportunities for Mandarin use.

Volume 10 Issue 3, 2026, pp. 125-141 doi: 10.22363/2521-442X-2026-10-3-125-141

P04 and P06 add another aspect of reported investment. P04 came to describe Mandarin as a specialist resource in an Arabic—English—Mandarin professional repertoire. P06 moved from insecurity about comparative English fluency to reported participation without perfect English. These cases support reimagined professional futures, additive multilingual positioning and situated legitimacy as participant-specific accounts.

This differentiation accords with research on the ideal multilingual self (Henry, 2017; Ushioda, 2017) and with Jordanian evidence that another international language can be valued as an addition to English-related capital (Gogazeh et al., 2026). Here, Arabic was associated with identity and local participation, English with established academic and professional value, and Mandarin with prospective specialist value.

5.4. Theoretical implications

The bridge—gatekeeper distinction connects investment theory with students' accounts of how multilingual classroom activity was organised. In this cohort, the reported status of English depended on whether students could access the mediation, what immediate purpose it served and whether Mandarin activity followed. Access and legitimacy were therefore connected with particular instructional sequences as well as with the anticipated value of Mandarin.

The three gatekeeper categories specify different forms of reported restriction. A hidden prerequisite concerns access to resources, a benchmark concerns temporal comparison, and substitution concerns the distribution of learning activity. Their separation allows future studies to test different propositions: whether English proficiency predicts access to course materials, whether comparisons with established English affect persistence, and whether extended English explanation reduces subsequent Mandarin use.

The distinction is contextual and categorical. It is not an ordered scale. Future research can examine the clarity of its classification criteria, agreement in their application, their prevalence in other settings and their associations with observed participation and achievement. The differentiated values assigned to Arabic, English and Mandarin also suggest that an ideal multilingual self may contain languages with distinct current and anticipated purposes. Institutional access affects whether prospective specialist value becomes a credible basis for continued investment.

5.5. Pedagogical implications

Mandarin language programmes in Arabic-dominant universities can examine the English language demands contained in textbooks, applications and course information. Materials that assume advanced English may restrict access even when the Mandarin course has no English entry requirement. Arabic alternatives, bilingual glossaries or targeted clarification can be tested where English creates an additional demand.

Instructional evaluation should also attend to what follows mediation. A brief explanation in accessible English or Arabic may be followed by Mandarin speaking, reading or writing so that the target-language purpose remains clear.

Participants' accounts of Mandarin as prospective specialist value also point to the need for credible continuation routes. Universities could examine whether subsequent course levels, HSK preparation, exchange opportunities or supervised practical activity support continued enrolment. These proposals require evaluation through direct measures of access, participation, achievement and continued enrolment.

5.6. Limitations and future research

The study concerned one small, self-selected cohort at a private university and included no comparison group. Its estimates are imprecise, causal inference is unavailable, and the findings cannot represent Mandarin learners elsewhere in Jordan. The questionnaire was designed for this setting, and confirmatory evidence for the five item groupings is unavailable. The initial measurement occurred after instruction had begun, and changes in item meaning over the semester may have affected score comparability.

The evidence consisted chiefly of questionnaire responses and participant accounts. English proficiency, Mandarin achievement and systematic proportions of Arabic, English and Mandarin use were not measured. The qualitative evidence may have been affected by the direct bridge and restriction prompts, translation into English, retrospective reporting and the author's institutional position. All ten paired interview cases and the supplementary qualitative sources contributed to the analysis, although only six paired cases and one reflection were quoted in detail.

Further research requires larger, multi-institutional samples, confirmed measures of investment and multilingual mediation, English-proficiency assessment, direct Mandarin outcomes and systematic records of classroom language use. Comparative designs could test alternative sequences of English, Arabic and Mandarin mediation. Longer follow-up could examine subsequent enrolment, HSK participation, educational mobility and sustained Mandarin use. Such evidence could test whether the reported categories correspond with differences in access, participation and learning over time.

6. CONCLUSION

Longitudinal evidence from this beginner Mandarin course indicates that more favourable cohort-level investment-related responses coexisted with varied individual

trajectories and differing accounts of English mediation. Students described English as a bridge when it was accessible, served a defined instructional purpose and was followed by Mandarin activity. They described it as a gatekeeper when English-language resources imposed an unannounced demand, when beginner Mandarin was judged against years of English learning, or when extended explanation reduced perceived opportunities for Mandarin use.

Professional futures and legitimacy were also connected with participants' positioning of Mandarin as a prospective specialist resource in an Arabic—English—Mandarin repertoire.

Existing research on multilingual Mandarin education has documented the presence of English, as well as other languages, in classroom practice. This Jordanian case specifies how students' reported access to such mediation can develop during a semester in an Arabic-dominant institution where English already holds established academic and professional value.

The bridge—gatekeeper distinction links reported instructional sequences with investment-related questions of access, legitimacy and anticipated capital. It also explains why a favourable cohort tendency cannot represent a uniform experience: reported benefit, unequal demand and restricted opportunities to use Mandarin may coexist among students attending the same course.

English or Arabic mediation should address a defined need and preserve opportunities for subsequent Mandarin use. Further research should test these reported categories against measured English and Mandarin proficiency, systematic observation of classroom language use, participation, achievement and continued Mandarin study over a longer follow-up period.

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Appendix A. Mandarin investment and imagined futures questionnaire

Administration and matching

The 24 core items listed below were administered in Weeks 1 and 14 using confidential participant-generated codes. Responses ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The context-specific instrument was reviewed by three applied linguists and cognitively pre-tested with four non-enrolled students. The instrument has not undergone structural validation. The available evidence is limited to expert review, cognitive pretesting and internal-consistency estimates for the present cohort.

Imagined multilingual and professional futures

1. I can imagine myself using some Mandarin in my future.
2. Learning Mandarin fits the multilingual person I would like to become.
3. I can picture Mandarin contributing to a future academic opportunity.
4. I can picture Mandarin contributing to a future professional opportunity.
5. I can imagine belonging to networks in which Mandarin is useful.

Anticipated symbolic and material capital

6. Mandarin could give me knowledge that is uncommon in my immediate environment.
7. Mandarin could increase the value of my existing Arabic and English skills.
8. Learning Mandarin could help me build useful intercultural relationships.
9. Mandarin could provide access to educational or mobility opportunities.
10. The time I invest in Mandarin is likely to produce benefits that matter to me.

Situated access, legitimacy and social support

11. I feel entitled to participate even when my Mandarin is very limited.
12. The course gives me meaningful opportunities to use what I am learning.
13. I feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes in Mandarin.
14. I can access the support and resources needed to continue learning.
15. People important to me regard Mandarin learning as worthwhile.

Agency and persistence

16. I make deliberate time for Mandarin beyond required class activities.
17. When Mandarin is difficult, I can identify a strategy for continuing.
18. I look for opportunities to notice or use Mandarin outside class.
19. I intend to continue learning after the present course.
20. I would continue even if progress were slower than I initially expected.

Repertoire and institutional positioning

21. Mandarin is a meaningful addition to Arabic and English in my language repertoire.
22. Mandarin is relevant to students in Jordan, not only to people living in China.
23. A beginner can legitimately identify as a Mandarin learner before becoming proficient.
24. Universities in Jordan should provide sustained pathways for learning languages beyond English.

Appendix B. Repeated interview protocol

Early-course interview
(Week 2; not a pre-course baseline)

1. Tell me about the languages in your life and how you use them.
2. When did Mandarin first become a language you might actually study?
3. Why did you enrol in this course rather than another activity or language?
4. What do you imagine you will be able to do with Mandarin?
5. Which people, communities or future settings do you associate with Mandarin?

6. How do you position Mandarin in relation to Arabic and English?
7. When might English help you learn Mandarin, and when might it make learning more difficult?
8. What kinds of personal, cultural, academic, social or professional value might Mandarin have?
9. What makes you feel like a legitimate Mandarin learner?
10. What barriers could make investment difficult?

Final interview

1. Looking back at why you enrolled, what has remained the same and what has changed?
2. Which classroom or out-of-class moment most affected your relationship with Mandarin?
3. How has your image of a Mandarin user changed?
4. Do you now see different benefits or costs than you saw at the beginning?
5. When did you feel most and least legitimate as a learner?
6. When did English act as a useful bridge, and when did it restrict access or participation?
7. How did the course affect the place of Mandarin within your Arabic—English repertoire?
8. What will you do next, and what resources would make that possible?
9. If you do not plan to continue, what explains that decision?
10. What should the university language centre preserve or change?

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