EMI in Chinese Universities from the Perspective of Students

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Abstract. This study reviews the use of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) in higher education, particularly focusing on its implementation in non-English-speaking countries like China. EMI is increasingly adopted worldwide as a strategy for internationalization, offering students access to global academic resources and improving their English proficiency. However, challenges remain, including language barriers for both students and teachers, which can impact the quality of learning and teaching. The research explores how EMI influences students' academic performance and language skills, identifies factors affecting learning experiences, and discusses strategies for adapting to EMI. It also offers suggestions for improving EMI programs, emphasizing the need for standardized pronunciation, increased language support, and more opportunities for interaction. This review concludes by highlighting the importance of balancing language and content instruction in EMI to enhance its effectiveness globally.

Keywords: English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI); Internationalization; Higher education.

1. Introduction

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has been a popular strategy in higher education in an increasingly globalized world, especially in non-English speaking nations. In order to give students access to global academic discourses and promote international collaboration, EMI is utilized to teach academic subjects that are not specifically language-focused. The necessity to internationalize academic programs and draw in a diverse student body has propelled the quick expansion of EMI at institutions across the globe. Specifically, nations in Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Europe have adopted EMI as a component of their plans to improve educational quality and competitiveness internationally [1].

Even though EMI presents many advantages, like easier access to global research and better English skills, there are drawbacks to its adoption. Language difficulties affect both teachers and students, potentially lowering the standard of education as a whole. Although problems with language competency and the caliber of instruction still exist, EMI has emerged as a key focus for prestigious Chinese universities looking to raise their worldwide profiles [2]. The global prevalence of EMI, its effects on language development and academic achievement, and the difficulties experienced by teachers and students in EMI environments will all be covered in this paper

2. Literature Review

English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) has gained popularity as a teaching method due to the increasing globalization of education. English as a Foreign Language (EMI) refers to the use of English to teach academic disciplines that are not spoken by the majority of people in a place where English is not their first language. [3]. It is commonly contrasted with another type of bilingual education called Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL). EMI concentrates solely on using English as the medium of instruction without explicit language teaching, whereas CLIL combines the simultaneous teaching of language and content in multiple foreign languages [4]. This distinction emphasizes how EMI is content-driven, with English acting more as a means of disseminating academic knowledge than as the actual subject of instruction.

Since many nations have adopted this strategy to boost their international competitiveness, it is clear that EMI is becoming more and more popular in higher education worldwide. Latin America, Southeast Asia, and Europe have been very active in putting EMI programs into place [1]. The

implementation of EMI is viewed in many non-English speaking areas as a calculated step to draw in foreign students, promote international cooperation, and raise universities' profile internationally. This is a component of a broader movement in higher education toward globalization. In order to educate students for global professional settings where English frequently serves as the language franca, universities are implementing EMI programs. The number of EMI programs has grown dramatically, as Macaro et al. point out, reflecting the increasing acceptance of English as a critical language for academic and professional success [1].

The use of EMI in higher education has accelerated in China, especially in fields like business, engineering, and the natural sciences [5]. As part of a larger plan to internationalize education and raise Chinese universities' standing in the global economy, more EMI programs have been encouraged to be offered by Chinese colleges. The number of EMI courses provided has significantly increased as a result of this policy change, albeit there are still noticeable differences in how they are distributed among various university kinds. For example, EMI courses are more common at research-intensive universities than at smaller or less prestigious ones, which frequently struggle with faculty readiness and resource availability. National measures that support bilingual education are intimately related to the growth of EMI in China [5].

Depending on their academic experiences and language backgrounds, students' perspectives on EMI are varied and nuanced. Kuteeva emphasizes how students think about English in EMI situations in a variety of ways, including translingual practices, English as a lingua franca (ELF), and standard English [6]. While some students adopt the ideology of standard language, elevating their level of English proficiency above that of their colleagues, others adopt a more pragmatic perspective, emphasizing efficient communication over conformity to standard forms. As students deal with the difficulties of learning a second language, these various interpretations of English frequently mirror larger social and power dynamics. Translingual practices, in which teachers and students switch between languages, can sometimes empower students or uphold existing hierarchies in the classroom [6].

EMI offers teachers both chances and problems, in their opinion. The level of English competence among teachers is one of the primary obstacles. According to Jiang et al., Chinese EMI teachers frequently place more emphasis on subject material delivery than linguistic precision [2]. Rather than fixing every grammatical mistake, instructors typically take a practical approach, concentrating on making sure that pupils comprehend the academic content. Instead of being a platform for teaching languages, this focus on content is in line with the professors' broader views of EMI as a way to impart disciplinary knowledge. As a result, teachers frequently use useful techniques like code-switching or reducing language to promote understanding and sustain classroom engagement [2].

EMI programs' efficacy is assessed based on a number of criteria, such as the academic achievement and language growth of the students. According to McKinley and Galloway , EMI can improve students' English language skills, but it has a more complex effect on academic performance [7]. Even when their English improves, students in EMI programs may occasionally find it difficult to understand sophisticated academic material because of language hurdles. EMI students may benefit linguistically, but their content comprehension does not necessarily surpass that of students in courses taught in their native tongue, according to comparisons between EMI and non-EMI courses. Furthermore, a crucial indicator of EMI programs' overall efficacy is how satisfied teachers and students are with them. Surveys regularly show that although students value the chance to get better in English, they frequently find the language requirements of EMI courses difficult, especially when it comes to specialized academic jargon [7].

Even with the increasing amount of research on EMI, there are still a number of restrictions. The wide range of academic fields and higher education institution types where EMI is used are not yet adequately covered by current research. Research is frequently focused on particular domains, like business or engineering, leaving other topics unexplored. In addition, less is known about how students view EMI, specifically how they deal with language barriers and think about English in a classroom context. The paucity of comprehensive research on how EMI programs strike a balance

between language and content education represents another gap in the literature. There is a need for greater research into methods that can enhance students' language development without sacrificing the breadth of subject matter being taught, even though other studies concentrate on the practicalities of teaching English [6].

Addressing these gaps will help provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by EMI, enabling educators and policymakers to design more effective and inclusive EMI programs.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Participants

I invited three EMI students from the Internet, and two of them are my buddies. All of them took part in EMI projects when they were at college. They differ in age, gender, and educational background. I made it known prior to the interview that I would give a small gift as a thank you for the interview in order to guarantee the correctness of the data gathering. Throughout the study, confidentiality and anonymity will be rigorously upheld [8]. Every participant's personal information will be anonymized to preserve their privacy. Each participant will be assigned a unique code (e.g., Participant A, B, C, D, and E) to protect their identity. All collected data will be securely stored on a password-protected device, and only the researcher will have access to it. Following the conclusion of the study, all data will be permanently deleted. Along with being informed about how their data will be used, stored, and protected, participants also have the right to examine or request the deletion of their data at any time.

3.2. Materials

Semi-structured interviews will be utilized to learn about students' opinions about EMI in their college courses. The study uses interviews to gather data. The versatility and functional diversity of semi-structured interviews make them popular [9]. This approach gives interviewees more freedom to express themselves, enabling them to go into greater detail about their individual language learning experiences, difficulties, and strategies. It also enables researchers to modify the format and order of questions based on the conversation's progress, all while maintaining a clear interview topic. It was simpler to record both audio and video because the interviews were done online using Microsoft Teams. The first justification for conducting interviews online is that in-person interviews are constrained by distance, and I find the expense of travel to be prohibitive. As a result, I decided to use Microsoft Teams for my interview.

3.3. Procedures

The author gave the participants an overview of EMI before the interview started. My interview questions served as a guide for the author during the interview, although occasionally the author would modify or expand on them in light of the participants' responses from various perspectives. Microsoft Teams was used to record both the audio and video of the interviews. The author took notes on the main aspects of the participants' responses during the interviews. In order to replicate the interview language at the time, the author gathered the Microsoft Teams transcribed papers following the interviews, checked the notes with the documents, and played the audio repeatedly while making changes to the documents. The author used translation software to translate the transcribed papers after making necessary modifications and comparing them again to make sure no information was overlooked during the transcribing process because all of the participants were questioned in Chinese. The original data must be faithfully reflected in the translation. In order to accomplish this, requesting participants to verify can enhance the translation's legitimacy [10]. After the translation was finished, the author got in touch with the participants and handed them the final transcribed file in Chinese. She then asked them if the translation was accurate. The author will ensure that participants feel safe and at ease when sharing their stories by remaining supportive and nonjudgmental during the

interview process to reduce any possible stress [11]. Over the course of a week, the data was collected. The duration of each interview ranged from forty-five to one hour. Since the participants and I are both native Chinese speakers, all interviews were done in Chinese to guarantee understanding and straightforward communication while also honoring the participants' individual preferences.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. The Impact of EMI Courses on Academic Performance and English Language Proficiency

The EMI course has a multifaceted effect on students' academic performance and English language proficiency, according to the study of interview data. In the first place, the majority of interviewees felt that the EMI course had improved their academic performance, particularly in terms of gaining professional knowledge and global cutting-edge information. Students can access and use academic resources, literature, and journals more easily in the EMI course because many of them are written in English. For example, participant A pointed out: "The cutting-edge, high-quality papers are written in English. English teaching has improved my English reading ability and made me develop the habit of reading English materials." This is especially important for students who are engaged in research fields, because research often requires reference to international authoritative literature, which is mostly presented in English.

Additionally, students English writing skills are enhanced by the EMI course. Three participants said that one of their biggest learning problems was writing in English. For instance, a number of participants stated that they had to overcome the challenges of grammatical errors and unauthentic language in English writing. But as the EMI course progressed, students' proficiency in English writing grew dramatically, and they gained confidence when composing reports and papers. Enhancing writing abilities is crucial for academic and professional growth, particularly for those who intend to conduct academic research or publish articles in foreign publications.

The English language proficiency of students who enroll in the EMI course significantly improves. Speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English were all enhanced by the EMI course, according to the majority of pupils. Participant C stated: "The level of English speaking, listening, reading and writing has improved comprehensively, and a lot of professional vocabulary and writing methods have been accumulated." This demonstrates how the EMI course gives students access to a wide variety of linguistic environments. Frequent use of English in reading, listening, and communication has enhanced pupils' overall language proficiency.

However, students' academic achievement is also negatively impacted by their level of English ability. Some students stated that language problems caused them to struggle with studying and research. For instance, some participants reported that they initially found it challenging to adjust to the professor's accent, particularly that of foreign teachers, which made it challenging to understand the material covered in class. Additionally, it can be difficult to remember and use English language, particularly professional words. As stated by participant D, "The biological field is characterized by the extensive use of professional terminology and abbreviations. You won't comprehend these terms and acronyms at all if you haven't been introduced to them. This demonstrates that even while the EMI course offers students abundant opportunities for language usage and input, language barriers continue to have a significant impact on academic achievement.

4.2. Factors Affecting EMI Learning Experience

The factors affecting students' learning experience in EMI courses can be summarized as language level, teaching methods and cross-cultural communication.

4.2.1 Language level

Language proficiency is one of the most important elements influencing students' EMI learning experience, according to interview data. Many students reported that their poor linguistic background

made it extremely difficult for them to enroll in EMI courses initially. Participant B said "My English level is relatively poor, and I may not understand when I listen to English lectures." In addition to impairing pupils' performance in the classroom, this language barrier makes learning more difficult for them. Students who struggle with language typically require additional time to comprehend and assimilate the course material, regularly reading dictionaries and employing translation tools. Their ability to absorb information is somewhat impacted by this, which leads to their devoting more effort to comprehending the material.

4.2.2 Teaching methods

In EMI courses, instructional strategies are crucial. The majority of students stated that their comprehension was directly impacted by the teacher's pronunciation and the arrangement of the course material. As noted by participant E, "The teacher may need to try to pronounce as standard as possible during class." Students will find it more difficult to comprehend the course material if their teachers have unusual pronunciation, strong accents, or rapid speech rates. Students also stated that their learning experience will be impacted by various teaching philosophies. English instruction frequently demands more focus than Chinese instruction since students must simultaneously learn and comprehend the language in addition to the course material.

4.2.3 Cross-cultural communication

In EMI courses, cross-cultural communication is yet another crucial element that influences students' educational experiences. Many students reported that communicating with foreign lecturers and classmates presented linguistic and cultural difficulties. "Foreign teachers are more upbeat and humorous," stated participant C. During class breaks, a foreign lecturer in his sixties or seventies even dons a cowboy hat and plays the ukulele. Because of this cultural divide, kids find communication to be unfamiliar and difficult. Students also reported that they frequently misunderstand each other in group discussions and cooperative learning because of disparate accents and emotions. Students must develop their cross-cultural communication skills and have an understanding of the communication styles used in various cultural contexts in order to better adjust to this cross-cultural academic setting.

4.3. Strategies for adapting to EMI courses

In order to better adapt to EMI courses, students have adopted a variety of strategies, including improving language skills, using teaching resources and adjusting their mindsets.

4.3.1 Improving language skills

Participants have responded to language challenges by improving their language skills in a number of ways. Before enrolling in the EMI course, many students will first undergo extensive training in speaking and listening in English. The suggestion that participant E made was: "Learn English listening before undergraduate studies, talk in English, get familiar with it at the beginning, and don't feel embarrassed." Second, students frequently use online dictionaries and translation software to help them understand the material in class. This is especially true when they are faced with professional terminology, as these resources help them grasp it more quickly.

4.3.2 Using teaching resources

Participants believe that the textbooks and ppts provided by teachers are the most important resources in their learning. Many students mentioned that the content of the textbooks and ppts helped them better understand the course content and professional knowledge. In addition, students also mentioned that auxiliary tools such as Google Translate also played an important role in the EMI course, helping them overcome language barriers, especially in the writing and reading process.

4.3.3 Adjusting the mindset

In the interview, a number of participants stated that changing one's perspective is essential to adjusting to the EMI course. According to one participant, "Speak more and practice more, pure listening is not very helpful." Students think that engaging in class discussions and speaking with

teachers and fellow students are crucial strategies to enhance language proficiency and academic achievement in the EMI course. Students can progressively adjust to the English environment and boost their confidence with practice and regular engagement.

4.4. Suggestions for improving the EMI course

The following areas were the primary focus of the ideas made by participants to enhance the EMI course.

Students frequently suggested that teachers' pronunciations be standardized. They thought that during instruction, teachers should try to minimize strong accents and utilize standard pronunciation. They contended that this would improve students' comprehension of the course material.

Students also suggested expanding the number of language support classes. They suggested that the institution add more academic English-related courses, like English for Academic Purposes (EAP). These classes would enhance students' academic writing and speaking abilities while also assisting them in better adjusting to the English academic environment.

Students also underlined how crucial it is to enhance classroom engagement and practice chances. Some students suggested boosting classroom interaction and offering more opportunities for group discussions in order to improve oral skills and academic success. They felt that by doing this, they would be able to improve their language proficiency through real-world use.

5. Conclusion

In higher education, EMI has proven to be a potent instrument for internationalization, especially for non-English speaking nations looking to establish themselves in the worldwide academic community. Teaching academic subjects in English improves students' employability in a global labor market and gives them vital access to worldwide research. EMI is not without its difficulties, though. The success of EMI depends heavily on the English language proficiency of both teachers and students. Even though EMI can greatly enhance language proficiency, students' academic progress may be hampered by inadequate language support, especially in non-English speaking nations. Similar to this, teachers frequently find it difficult to balance teaching difficult material with preserving language proficiency.

Since EMI has grown quickly in China, it is now evident that further assistance is required to guarantee its successful deployment. The intricacy of EMI's integration into the educational system is highlighted by problems including pupils' differing degrees of English ability and the requirement for additional teacher training in language instruction. More research is needed to solve these issues and enhance the educational experience for teachers and students as EMI grows. Future EMI program success worldwide will depend on striking the correct mix between language support and content delivery.

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