

EMI for Universities: How to Benefit from Embodying It into Educational Process

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Abstract

The article considers the role of the English language in global tertiary education (ESP/EAP, Adjunct ESP, EMI and ICLHE) and use a critical approach to analyze the current state of EMI integration into the educational process and tensions that arise due to conceptual gap in its adaptation to existing education policy. Applying a critical theory framework, the authors study the differences between EMI and internationalization that both instructors and university management adopt to curriculum design and pedagogy development. The research examines the ways internationalization and the EMI strategy affect curriculum design in universities; the ways university management incorporates global trends into curriculum design; the impediments that discourage the implementation of these programs identified by both educators and students. The researchers examine the EMI implementation under three dimensions: epistemology, teaching praxis, and ontological elements of students' development and use document analysis related to the administration, curriculum, and course syllabi of EMI programs, followed by interviews with actors of the international classroom to outline the most challenging issues tertiary teachers, students, and university management face in EMI programs implementation. Moreover, the article examines evolving EMI perspectives as a means to boost internationalization and to improve teaching quality via integrating the best practices into the local context, including the expansion of teaching competence in both English language and pedagogy, introduction of language prerequisites for applicants, a constant adaptation of the curriculum to meet competence requirements.

Keywords: EMI, HEI, curriculum development, internationalization, epistemology, pedagogy, teaching praxis.

ЕМІ в высшем образовании: как извлечь выгоду из его внедрения в образовательный процесс

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Аннотация

В статье рассматривается роль английского языка в высшем образовании (ESP / EAP, Adjunct ESP, ЕМІ и ICLHE) и используется критический подход для анализа текущего состояния интеграции ЕМІ в образовательный процесс, а также анализируются трудности, возникающие из-за концептуального разрыва в его адаптации к существующей образовательной политике. Применяя критическую теорию, авторы изучают различия между ЕМІ и интернационализацией. Данные разрывы приводят к разности в подходах к внедрению концепции преподавания неязыковых предметов на английском языке как преподавателями, так и руководством университета. В исследовании рассматриваются способы, с помощью которых интернационализация и стратегия ЕМІ влияют на разработку учебных программ в университетах; способы, с помощью которых университетское руководство учитывает глобальные тенденции в разработке учебных программ; препятствия, мешающие реализации этих программ. Исследователи изучают внедрение ЕМІ в трех измерениях: эпистемология, практика преподавания и онтологические элементы развития учащихся и анализируют документы, связанных с администрированием программ ЕМІ, а также приводят анализ интервью с участниками этого процесса, чтобы определить наиболее сложные проблемы, с которыми сталкиваются учителя, студенты, и руководство университета. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются перспективы ЕМІ как средства расширения интернационализации и повышения качества преподавания путем интеграции лучших практик в образовательную парадигму.

Ключевые слова: ЕМІ, ВУЗ, разработка учебных программ, интернационализация, эпистемология, педагогика, методика преподавания.

Introduction

Globalization and the Bologna process triggered the internationalization of higher education along with an increasing influence of the English language not only in academia, facilitating collaboration among scholars, but also throughout the whole system of tertiary education. There were several reasons behind this trend. In addition to

political, economic, and cultural integration, universities began the race for reputation and status that were reflected in the global university rankings. One of the key indicators taken into account when calculating the university ranking is the number of international students enrolled at a particular university. The need to attract students from all over the world stimulated the expansion of English not only as a subject compulsory at all levels of education but also as a language of instruction at courses designed to be conducted in English.

The tendency to use English as an international language of communication has dramatically increased not only in Europe due to the enlargement of the European Union but more recently, in Asia and Latin America, too. Besides geopolitical factors that greatly contribute to such expansion, outsourcing and job migration also promote its spread. Undoubtedly, higher educational institutions could not have been left behind the process. The tendency to use English as the language of instruction is considered normal and positive for several reasons (Airey, 2004):

- The publication of academic papers tends to be exclusively in English. Teaching in English is, therefore, seen as necessary to prepare students for an academic career.
- In many disciplines, the majority of textbooks are written in English.
- Using English as the language of instruction contributes to an increase in the number of visiting researchers at all levels of tertiary education.
- Courses in English attract more exchange students.
- The use of English as the language of instruction encourages lecturers to teach abroad and to promote their ideas in the academic world.
- Being fluent in English is a strong asset in the job market.

The visible benefits of using English as the language of communication in academia and as the medium of instruction resulted in a considerable surge in the number of programs taught in English in European universities (Wächter & Maiworm, 2014). Asian countries such as South Korea, China, and Vietnam introduced visible changes to academic policies in the first decade of the 21st century (Kedzierski, 2016). The study conducted in 2013-2014 by Oxford EMI presents information about the current trends in EMI policy in some other parts of the world: Latin America (Brazil, Colombia, Uruguay); Africa (Nigeria, Ethiopia, Zambia); several Central European countries with socialistic background (Bulgaria, Hungary, the Czech Republic); and some former Soviet Union territories (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine) (Dearthen, 2014).

The discourse on English-medium teaching in higher education tends to use several acronymic terms and concepts to describe practices and approaches, such as Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Integrated Language and Content in Higher Education (ILCHE), and English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) (Schmidt-Unterberger, 2018).

The paradigm suggested by Schmidt-Unterberger (2018) describes five distinctive categories: Pre-sessional ESP/EAP, Embedded ESP/EAP, Adjunct ESP, EMI, and ICLHE. It may be stated that in Russian higher education institutions, EAP and ESP predominantly belong to the domain of the English language as a subject in the HE curriculum (Belyaeva & Freese, 2021). CLIL could be interpreted as a foreign language enrichment measure packaged into content teaching, more characteristic of a secondary school (Dalton-Puffer, 2011). Similarly, CLIL implies that teachers will normally be non-native speakers of the target language. Being content providers, they are not, in most cases, foreign language experts. In CLIL programs, typically less than 50% of the curriculum is taught in the target language.

ICLHE is characterized by an approach where subjects and disciplinary content are taught in a target language (usually not the first language of students) so it allows

students to focus on and learn to use the target language as they learn the subject content (Gustafsson & Jacobs, 2013).

In Europe, ICLHE is under the domain of foreign language learning, greatly supported by the need for internationalization and multilingualism. Bologna declaration is facilitating this trend. In the US, ICLHE work appears to be driven by becoming experts in professional communication which is strengthened by issues of first language proficiency. Due the ILCHE requirement to involve language specialists in syllabus design and course delivery, this practice is hardly applicable in Russia. It is, therefore, stated that English as a Medium of Instruction, which is currently implemented in most Russian higher education institutions (HEI), “has the potential to become the dominant term to embrace most of the English-taught courses and degree programs” (Belyaeva & Freese, 2021, p. 150).

Jimenez-Munoz (2015) argued that the rapid transition towards EMI had several flaws which hindered the teaching and learning of EMI in countries where English is a foreign language. The author pointed out that such a spread of EMI programs overlooked curricula and methodological adaptation. Accordingly, this would compromise the achievement of the intended outcomes.

Zumor & Qasem (2019) investigated the academic challenges faced by Arab students in EMI contexts. He found that using EMI in teaching and learning had a seriously negative impact on the comprehension of scientific content and assessment of most of the students as it caused anxiety, frustration, and embarrassment, leading ultimately to poor educational outcomes. He elaborated that in most Arab education institutions, the shift from Arabic medium instruction (AMI) to EMI in HE is a big challenge, given the inefficiency of the English language of most of the Arab students. They suggested ensuring quality English education in the foundation year and considering the option of “additive bilingual education”.

Ratna (2017) explained that the controversy behind using English as a medium of instruction stemmed from the challenges and benefits of EMI implementation. The results of her study showed that there were benefits of the implementation of the EMI in relation to the enhancement of EFL students’ speaking skills, EFL vocabulary, and self-confidence of students while speaking English.

Tamtam, Gallagher, Olabi, & Naher (2012) pointed out that there were numerous benefits and obstacles to the EMI approach. One of the major benefits was the increase of the chances for graduate students to get better jobs in the labor market as the general exposure to English increases in EMI programs. Moreover, the lack of proficient teaching staff became a major problem as they lack competencies to combine both developing the language skills and helping to learn the major subject. Moreover, students did not have enough EFL language knowledge that resulted in disinterest in learning.

Purpose and objectives of the study

The challenges of EMI implementation at university programs are driven by both internal and external factors. The internal factors are derived from poor language proficiency and capacities of EMI learning, while the external factors are related to lecturers’ problems, curriculum issues, and high tuition fees. It is essential to review the current structure of the courses in order to adapt western curriculum and teaching methodology to the present context. Appropriate and logical arrangement of courses, as well as the cautious recruitment of qualified non-native teaching staff for EMI programs, is imperative.

EMI Professional Development Programs aimed at improving lectures’ skills in delivering content in English are crucial to overcome the internal obstacles. Such

programs help to improve such professional competencies as the ability to carry out cross-linguistic and cross-cultural interaction in both general and professional spheres of communication, the ability to use psychological and pedagogical technologies in professional activities.

The research questions guiding this project are 1) How do internationalization and the EMI strategy affect curriculum design in university? 2) How does university management incorporate global trends into curriculum design? 3) What impediments discouraging the implementation of these programs are identified by both educators and students?

Literature review

EMI Development for Higher Educational Institutions

The fact that universities are drivers of development in any country has been the predominant status quo for any educational policy. In the pursuit of better results in education, the practice of selecting the so-called leading universities is widespread. Leading universities are considered to be those that receive financial support from the government, are promoted in international rankings, attractive for business owners who hire graduates, and appealing for other universities to form partnerships.

The policy to support universities through the system of grants does not pertain to Russia only. Several countries enforced the programs for academic excellence to promote their universities in international ranking systems and to advance their academic research to an international arena. China has implemented a series of projects called World First-Class University and First Class Academic Discipline Construction (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2017), which aims to develop elite Chinese universities and their individual faculty departments into excellent institutions by the end of 2050. In Japan, the project "The Top Global University" (Top Global University Japan, n.d.) was launched in 2014 to provide prioritized support to those universities that are leading the internationalization of education in the country. The projects in both oriental states aim to encourage and deepen interactions and partnerships with the world's top universities, reforming education systems. The paramount significance of this initiative is to refine education systems to help students develop the ability to act globally and accelerate other globalization initiatives.

In Germany, the "Excellence Initiative" was implemented in 2005-2017 by the German Council of Science and Humanities and the German Research Foundation (DFG, n.d.). The principal objective was to promote cutting-edge research and to create outstanding conditions for young scholars at universities, to deepen cooperation between disciplines and institutions, to strengthen international cooperation of research, and to enhance the international appeal of excellent German universities.

Russia launched the Project 5-100 (Ministry of Science and Higher Education of the Russian Federation, n.d.) in 2013 to maximize the competitiveness of selected leading Russian universities in the global research arena and education market. One of the tasks of the selected universities was to improve the system of tertiary education, develop joint educational programs with leading international and Russian universities, recruit foreign applicants to study at Russian universities, and implement international and internal academic mobility programs.

Kazan Federal University was among 15 universities selected to participate in Project 5-100 since the first days of its implementation. Being on the border between Eastern and Western cultures for more than 200 years, KFU successfully integrates traditional university education with research. Although the language of instruction of the majority of HE programs is Russian and research is conducted in Russian, English is viewed as the

key to boost international research cooperation, increase student and faculty mobility and the number of international joint programs.

Egypt, continuously being a cultural and educational hub for many Arab countries, has always demonstrated a great capacity for human capital development, primarily through the education system. The 2000s might worthily be defined as the dawn of educational reforms in Egyptian tertiary education as the government clearly appreciates the role of academic mobility among students and teachers, which will consequently stimulate economic growth. In 2016 the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) adopted the country's Strategic Vision for Education to 2030 where key performance indicators in higher education may be achieved particularly but not exclusively through "Adopting the "Egyptian Diplomas Equivalence System" and the recognition of higher education certificates; Human capital development for the teaching staff; Activating the role of research centers in higher education institutions" (Egypt Vision to 2030, n.d.). Thus, along with the new curricula design more aligned with labor market needs, quality assurance and accreditation tools enhancement, EMI instruction is currently gathering its pace in Egypt.

Helwan University, established in 1975, claims a unique position within Egyptian HE aiming to provide high-quality academic programs in technology and art. This leading Egyptian university promotes the ideas of development especially in the light of economic and social challenges that the continent faces. The extended internationalization of the region and its role as a trailblazer in the African continent promotes an increased demand in the programs taught in English and by EMI specialists.

Methodology

To address the research questions, we conducted document analysis related to the administration, curriculum, and course syllabi of EMI programs. Among the papers to be examined the authors focus on the Federal State Educational Standards of Higher Education 3++ (n.d.), the Procedure for the Development and Approval of Higher Education Programs adopted by KFU (Kazan Federal University, n.d.), Kazan Federal University Admission Policy, and Curricula for Programs, using English as a medium for instruction (the Russian Federation) (Kazan Federal University, n.d.).

To evaluate the state of EMI programs in Egypt the authors referred to Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research (MHESR) official documents regarding tertiary level, publications related to implementing a major new education reform program known as Education 2.0 (EDU 2.0), and Curricula for Programs, using English as a medium for instruction (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, n.d.).

The aim of in-depth interviews that followed the analysis of the documents was to acquire a robust understanding of the current situation and challenges in HEIs in both countries regarding programs, using English as a medium for instruction and the state of internationalization in general. The sample consisted of teachers and students who are the main actors in internationalized classrooms. The interviews aimed to gain a more nuanced understanding of their experiences. The number of teachers interviewed at Kazan Federal University was 22, all of them with PhD Degree and with experience of teaching in EMI programs. The Egyptian participants were 15 PhD Degree teachers. The total number of students interviewed at Kazan Federal University was 73, and 54 students were interviewed at Helwan University in Egypt. Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

Results

Careful consideration of the papers related to the administration of EMI programs in both countries revealed several similar problems related to their implementation that prevent from achieving full capacity and the desired outcome.

The regulatory documents in Egypt are far from being as rigorous as in Russia, and there is still the lack of understanding of the specifics of programs where English is used as a medium of instruction. One of the main obstacles mentioned by both teachers and students that hamper the success of EMI conducted programs is low competence in L2. There is no administratively fixed mechanism to accept only those students whose L2 is sufficient enough on some equal scale or equivalent to B2/C1 according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Not being an elite university, the management body is reluctant to implement such mechanism seeing it as an obstruction to enrollment of large numbers of international students. It leads to a loss of interest among students and prevents deep understanding of the content.

I don't understand much of the lecture... I feel I made the wrong choice... (Helwan University student).

Since we don't understand the core of the course and the way professor delivers the material is boring we ask him/her to switch to L1, hoping it will help... (Helwan University student).

Both the manner of delivery and the level of English are poor... (Helwan University student).

Identical problems were observed after studying the regulatory documents imposed by both KFU management and State regulatory Authorities. According to the Federal State Educational Standards of Higher Education 3++, the programs delivered in English have the same set of courses as the ones in the native language. The number of syllabi per each academic year varies from twelve to fifteen with the workload equal to 60 ECTS while the average number of courses in similar universities worldwide does not exceed ten. The administrative pressure forces educators to fully follow the accepted framework of program realization with some courses considered irreplaceable at the national level but unnecessary at the international stage.

The epistemic beliefs lying behind the curriculum design reflect the common perception that translation of the content is enough to label the course conducted as an EMI one. As we see from the interview analysis such attitude complicates adequate understanding of learning outcomes and shapes the different final product that cannot be considered as the equivalent to be granted the same diploma.

I have just translated the same content I teach in native language to conduct in English speaking classes... (KFU professor).

I don't see much difference in what is taught via EMI and in Russian... (KFU student).

The problem for my EMI classes that I have to prepare a lot... and sometimes I simply say what I used to say for local students... (KFU professor).

I am not stimulated to spend extra time to think carefully about difference in outcomes for the same syllabus but taught in English... (KFU professor).

These interview fragments prove the discrepancy between ultimate objectives of the EMI supported program and the regular curriculum. The epistemology tends to be misinterpreted and results in poor understanding of why the university needs such educational products.

The other serious issue discovered during the study is related to the lack of the entrance requirements compliance with the goals of the program. The administrative perspective of EMI course design implies the second language (L2) awareness at B2 level does not put it as a prerequisite to be admitted to conduct lectures. There is no legal requirement to submit a language certificate or to conduct open lectures in front of the panel. As a result, the lack of proved EMI praxis tends to be deficient that seems to frustrate both parties, i.e. the lecturer and students. Despite administrators' insistence on teaching only in English, both teachers and students neglect the rule, and some content is taught in a local language. The proportion of the content delivered via EMI is difficult to trace since there is no practice to reveal and report related problems.

Sometimes we ask the professor to switch to L1 because we find it difficult to understand the subject... and he/she always does... (KFU student).

Even if the professor conducts in English, when given the task we switch to L1... we find it easier to communicate that way... (KFU student).

I find it very inconvenient to stick to L2 all the time and break the rule... (Helwan University student).

When I see that students do not follow me I start speaking Russian ... I myself feel much more comfortable speaking L1... (KFU professor).

These responses indicate the inconsistency between all members of the process. On the one hand, both students and professors accept EMI as a key element of the program. On the other hand, the absence of clearly defined regulations allows loose adaptation. Since ontological elements of students' development are not discussed at the administrative level, they are not incorporated into the life and learning of today's students.

Although universities insist on an increased number of courses conducted in English and view it as a prerequisite for competing with other world universities, the lack of clear procedure to implement such courses slows down the success that could be achieved if properly managed. These problems are easy to avoid once all the dimensions mentioned above (epistemology, teaching praxis, and ontology) are formulated as one single mission and thoroughly elaborated at all levels.

Discussion

In the course of the conducted analysis the authors identified that Universities of both countries, Kazan Federal University and Helwan University in particular, face identical impediments preventing HEIs from implementing the EMI concept to its full capacity. Despite the fact that EMI strategy resulted from the globalization trend at the governmental level, the state has not provided the mechanisms that assist universities on their way to L2-taught programs. Moreover, the complicating issue is the legislative framework that does not allow universities a certain degree of freedom to make the curricula more flexible and adaptable to the international standards. Thus, one of the proposed solutions for the universities with a significant position in the educational market is to develop their educational standards that would consider all possible hindrances and pitfalls on the way

to fully internationalized curricula. However, the issue of the entry requirements cannot be resolved by the university only and requires deep investigation of the ministerial procedures.

The local issues of course content delivery presupposes the revision of university policies, namely employment policy and staff selection procedures, training policy, involving implementation of the courses for EMI practitioners covering academic language issues, cross-cultural teaching approach as well as global syllabus design.

Students, on their part, require an adaptation period before full immersing into L2 academic programs, as most of the applicants are predominantly not exposed to the EMI environment in secondary education. Interview results reveal that high ESP or General English score cannot guarantee high achievements in L2 courses. Introduction of the pre-modules in the curriculum can eliminate the tension, reduce initial stress and contribute to learning outcomes.

As the assurance and development of the quality education is primarily the task of any HEI, university administrative procedures regulating EMI joint academic programs demand the establishment of an international office or a department authorized with EMI syllabi and curricula design. Furthermore, this new division needs to be empowered with the right to implement approaches and methods of academic programs' quality assurance, which will fully meet the local and international educational standards, ultimately improve the quality of teaching and increase the effectiveness of an academic program, motivating academic staff and students to strive toward excellence.

Conclusion

The obvious benefits offered to universities realizing several educational programs via EMI are indisputable. EMI provides a great potential for participation in international research and wider access to grant - supported initiatives. English language exposure enhances the attempts of a particular university to strive for equality, best practices application, better management, and global academic community integration. The diversity of students creates the unique atmosphere of talent that adds value to the content taught and to the final result appraised both by employers and community.

Despite these unquestionable advantages the constraints to achieve the desired level of integration between the indisputable benefits and managerial practices are immensely vast. The university management should elaborate one clear vision of students' final achievements along with the teaching strategies and methodologies implemented throughout the education procedure specifically in EMI joint academic programs with foreign universities. The toolkit that students will obtain should certainly be measurable, meeting the requirements of the university itself but, what's more essential, the current and future needs of the global labour market. Moreover, a unique approach and specific requirements to syllabus design in these partnership programs with foreign universities should be designed on the state level.

There are four levels necessary to enhance the development of EMI programs: the level of teachers' competence in pedagogy and EMI awareness; the language prerequisite for students enrolled to EMI programs; the constant audit of curriculum design effectiveness in fostering competence development; the encouragement of the university management to undertake extra workload to conduct such programs. Only the synergy of all these elements can produce mutually beneficial results.

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