



The Impact of Using English Medium Instruction on Learners' Academic Performance and Their Learning Experience

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate the impact of EMI on students' learning experience and their perceptions towards the policy as little research has been conducted in this field. It supports the work of other scholars who have a critical attitude towards the EMI policy. This study provides a voice for voiceless learners who will talk about their academic performance. A mixed methods approach has been adopted to collect the research data. The triangulation was used in the study design to enhance the consistency of the data. A closed-ended questionnaire, interviews with both lecturers and students, and class observations were employed to collect the data. The findings revealed that the policy has not given the learners equal opportunities to study in the program stream. The learners at the institution under study were deprived of their human right to receive their education in their L1. This would create a negative impact on their attitudes especially those who are struggling due to their weak English although they were successful when they were studying in Arabic. Finally, appropriate measures need to be taken in order to better prepare the students for their study in English if the UAE intends to continue implementing the EMI policy at higher education institutions.

Keywords: EMI; EMI policy; academic performance; policy implementation.

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1. Introduction

1.1 The background of the problem

Language policies all over the world have been affected by the global spread of English. The Arab countries and especially Gulf countries have reformed their education systems in order to participate in a globalized world where English has become the language of business, science, communication, and academia [1]. Adopting English Medium Instruction (EMI) at the tertiary level was one of the steps that was taken in this regard [2]. In many countries in the Gulf area such as the UAE, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, and Kuwait public and private colleges and universities have replaced Arabic Medium Instruction (AMI) with the EMI policy at all educational levels [3]. The reason behind this decision is that using English as a medium of instruction prepares the learners for multicultural employment [4]. For learners who studied in schools where the medium of instruction is Arabic, this can be problematic [5,6]. For policy makers, English is the gateway that accelerates the national policy which was developed to replace an expatriate workforce with Gulf nationals. Policy planners in the Gulf area assume that the English language proficiency of the learners will improve by studying using English as a medium of instruction [7]. Troudi [8] concludes that according to educators in the Gulf area, Arabic cannot be used for scientific subjects due to the lack of Arabic resources and textbooks.

Adopting EMI has worried some researchers who shed light on the effect of using EMI on Arabic language, Islam, culture, and identity [9,10,11]. Pennington [12] states that Arabic language is about to become a foreign language in the Gulf countries. Accordingly, in January 2012 the Supreme Education Council in Qatar has taken a decision to adopt AMI in four colleges at Qatar University: business and economic, law, mass communication, and international affairs [13]. Similarly, Salem [14] claims that the Federal National Council in the UAE is planning to pass a law to promote the use of Arabic language as the medium of instruction in schools and universities.

The effect of EMI on the quality of education and learning process of students is considered as another problem. Al-Mahrooqi [15] and Al-Mamari [16] have observed that the English language level of school graduates is low, which requires the learners to enroll in Foundations programs at their higher education institution for one year before they can join the degree programs. Accordingly, learners face a number of problems when they study in English and have to write assignments, participate in discussions, read the textbooks, and understand lectures [17,18].

1.2 The rationale of the study

The researcher is a faculty member in the English Communications program at one of the higher education institutes. Part of the institution's vision is to offer the learners the best education in the most supportive and relevant way [19]. One of the learner's principles is that the graduate "can gather and process knowledge from a variety of sources, and communicate effectively in written and spoken English" [19].

Students can enroll in the degree programs after passing the last level (LSC 0306) of the English Communications program, which is an intermediate level. From the researcher's point of view, the English language level of some learners is very low. Such learners are offered some courses to support them with their English language and their

academic studies in addition to their courses in their program degree. Most of the lecturers in the bachelor programs are from countries where English is an L1 or L2 and they use English as the medium of instruction. From the lecturers' point of view, it is not their responsibility to help the learners with their English language as the main focus is to deliver their course material. In this situation the question is: how can the learners take an active part in the learning process? Although the main purpose behind adopting this policy is modernization and development, it is crucial to view EMI policy from a critical perspective.

1.3 The significance of the study

Most research on EMI has portrayed its adoption as a necessary step for development and modernization, although it has been recognized that EMI would be inconvenient for learners whose English language proficiency is low [20]. It might not equip the learners well for their future job [21]. Policy makers assume that using EMI can solve the problem of students with low English proficiency. This study is significant because it reports the insights of students whose learning experience has been affected by adopting EMI policy and whose low level of academic performance has not been considered by policy planners. This area has been rarely addressed in previous research. In addition, the current study aims to investigate the techniques employed by the learners to read in English as this is a main skill in students' academic achievement. It is important to shed some light on the impact of EMI policy on students' learning experience and their academic performance as it might hinder the learners from contributing effectively to their society.

1.4 The purpose of the study

This study aims to investigate the impact of EMI on students' learning experience and their perceptions towards the policy in the UAE context as little research has been conducted in this field. It supports the work of other scholars who have a critical attitude towards the EMI policy [22,13,16] . Most of the EMI literature has been conducted in Europe and East Asia, but this study is being conducted in a context where learners have the same Arabic mother tongue in order to investigate the effect of the policy on learners' academic progress from a critical stance. This study provides a voice for voiceless learners who will talk about their academic experience using EMI, which will fill the gap in research on EMI especially in the UAE context. Exploration of learners' perspectives can identify the actual outcomes of the policy and compare it with its intended aims.

1.5 Research questions

This research aims to investigate the effect of using EMI from the learners' perspective at one of higher educational institutions in the UAE. This study attempts to answer the questions below:

- 1- How do Emirati students in their degree programs perceive EMI?
- 2- What is the impact of EMI policy on the quality of learners' academic performance?
- 3- What are the difficulties that learners in the major stream face in understanding materials related to their field?
- 4- What is the impact of EMI policy on learners' academic achievement?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical framework

A postmodern critical approach based on critical applied linguistics has justified the current study. Three theories have influenced critical applied linguistics: critical theory, postmodernism, and post-structuralism.

Critical theory was developed by several scholars [23]. According to Pennycook [24], this theory was connected with inequality, rights, and justice. The study sheds lights on inequality through learners' critical insights which come from the assumption that "an adequate critique of social and political inequality can lead to an alternative reality" [25]. Language policies should be adopted to solve communication problems in multicultural society in order to enhance social and economic chances and to reduce various forms of inequality [26]. When learners use their mother tongues for education and employment this could be a form of social justice. It can also be a kind of language protection. A question arises here: Can language rights be protected? The answer may depend on the government's perspectives and plans.

Some researchers define postmodernism as "thinking and doing practices, and an uncertain view that tries to take nothing for granted" [27]. Critical in applied linguistics indicates an awareness of the limits of knowing and because of that Pennycook [24] has called for a self-reflexive attitude to critical theory. As the country is not searching for an alternative to EMI, the postmodern-problematizing stance will be adopted in this study.

The assumption that institutions of higher education in developed countries such as the UAE benefit from using EMI will be doubted in the current study, hoping that can influence future plans regarding language policies. Adopting a different approach may create a number of problems, especially when challenging an assumption that the institutional bodies have seen as common sense. Ernest suggests that "if there is no progress, and there is little knowledge of what the other two educational research paradigms seek to establish, then the danger is that there may be no worthwhile outcome from the time and energy invested" [28]. The top-down nature of the EMI policy decisions makes it difficult to research the appropriateness of EMI policy in the UAE from a critical point of view.

The researcher is well aware that there will not be an immediate change in EMI policy, but this study would give an opportunity for the learners' voice to be heard which could have a positive impact and lead to future changes. According to Troudi, policies, attitudes, and practices changes are often slow, but it is important to raise awareness [29].

2.2 EMI language policy

Shohamy [30] defines language policy as a form of manipulation used by individuals in authority to turn theory into usage through education. The adoption of EMI in higher education is an example of language policy. Language policy in many countries all over the world has been affected by the global spread of English. Ferguson [31] claims that the number of EMI programs offered at universities in countries such as Denmark, Germany, and Sweden have escalated. Between 2002 and 2007, there was a 340 percent increase in EMI programs in European higher education [32]. Hu, Li, and Lei [33] and Kirkpatrick [34] have questioned the implementation of EMI in

China as it seen as an essential step for improving the quality of university programs.

The establishment of the EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) Research Center in 2014, in collaboration with the British Council, marked a significant milestone in the global promotion and study of EMI practices. The center's study, which encompassed 55 countries, revealed a growing global trend towards an accelerated demand for EMI [35]. This trend reflects a broader recognition of the advantages that English proficiency offers in a globalized world, where English often serves as the lingua franca in international business, academia, and technology.

In the context of Asia, several reviews, including those by Hamid, Nguyen, and Baldauf [36], Nunan [37], and Fenton-Smith, Humphreys, and Walkinshaw [38] demonstrate that EMI adoption is widespread across the continent. This trend can be attributed to the increasing emphasis on English language skills as essential for economic development and international competitiveness. Countries such as China, Japan, and South Korea have been particularly proactive in integrating EMI into their higher education systems to attract international students and enhance their educational standards.

In the Arab world, the prominence of English has been extensively documented. Habbash and Troudi [39] highlight the substantial benefits that English language proficiency brings to millions of learners in Gulf countries. These advantages include improved employment prospects, access to global knowledge, and enhanced communication skills in a world where English dominates many professional and academic fields.

The situation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) exemplifies the broader regional trend. Most higher educational institutions in the UAE have adopted EMI, making English the primary language of instruction. This mandatory use of English reflects the country's strategic goal of integrating more closely with the global economy and attracting a diverse student body. However, this policy also means that students in the UAE have no alternative but to pursue their studies in English, which can present challenges for those who are not sufficiently proficient in the language.

2.3 Reasons for EMI

The literature has reported several reasons for adopting EMI. The first one is related to the global spread of English. Many people see English as serving a global purpose, especially in academia and business as most resources on the internet and academic resources in different fields are mainly in English [40].

According to Doiz, Lasagabaster and Sierra [32] there are three reasons for using EMI in European institutions: preparing European students for global market, attracting international learners, and increasing the institutions' income. Moreover, universities can raise their profits by taking higher fees from overseas students than from European ones [20], and as a result this action will serve the institutions and the economy of the country [32]. Tollefson [41] states that the driving forces behind the promotion of EMI in universities are economic, financial, and political rather than educational.

One of the primary justifications for implementing English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) is the belief that

learning content through English will enhance students' mastery of the language [42,43]. This rationale is particularly appealing to national governments, which view EMI policies as a strategic tool for economic development [44]. In the UAE, the government acknowledges the critical role of English in scientific and technological advancement. However, this emphasis on English may inadvertently convey to young learners that Arabic is inadequate for acquiring knowledge. Troudi [8] argues that this perception marginalizes Arabic, reducing its educational significance, a direct consequence of EMI policies.

From a research perspective, there is a pressing need for extensive studies to evaluate the actual language acquisition and the academic content learned through EMI. Such research would provide a clearer understanding of the effectiveness and implications of using English as the medium of instruction.

In developing countries, the perception that high-quality education is synonymous with English education is another driver for adopting EMI [36]. However, this assumption is contested by several scholars. Quorro [45] and Brock-Utne [46] argue that using the first language (L1) as the medium of instruction is essential for meaningful and effective learning. Their studies suggest that L1 facilitates better comprehension and retention of academic content.

Habbash and Troudi [39] further support this view, indicating that the use of EMI in education does not necessarily expand learners' knowledge or enhance their ability to acquire the English language. Instead, it may hinder the educational process by creating additional language barriers, particularly for students who are not proficient in English.

In summary, while the adoption of EMI is often justified by the potential for improving English proficiency and driving economic growth, it also poses significant challenges. These include the marginalization of the native language, potential barriers to effective learning, and the need for comprehensive research to assess the true impact of EMI on language acquisition and academic achievement. The debate highlights the complexity of balancing the benefits of English proficiency with the need to preserve and promote the educational role of the native language.

2.4 The loss of L1 domain

A number of researchers such as Macaro [43] and Phillipson [47] have shown a concern about the loss of L1 domain in many fields such as business, higher education, and research publications. They noticed that science subjects have been taught in English which leads publishers to publish scientific work in English not in the author's national language. However, institutions that benefit financially from attracting international students have shown less concern about the loss of L1 domain. Kirkpatrick [34] study reveals that six out of eight public institutions in Hong Kong are using EMI, which weakens the Chinese language, especially when considering the language of few people and ignoring the mother tongue of the majority.

In the Arab world, Habbash and Troudi [29] study shows that there is a linguistic-cultural dualism which comes as a result of using EMI where English symbolizes technology, modern life, and employability while Arabic represents religion, tradition, and backwardness. The findings of Findlow [48] indicate that the learners in the

UAE link English with internationalism, business, and modernity, while Arabic is associated with religion, emotion, and traditions. Another study conducted by Habbash and Troudi [39] which investigated the teachers' and the learners' perspectives regarding use of EMI in public schools points out that Arabic is relegated to a second-class status due to the reliance on English as a medium of instruction. Several scholars, including Troudi and Al Hafidh [49], Hunt [50], and Ismail [4], have expressed concerns about the threat that English poses to the Arabic language. This issue has garnered attention in the UAE, as noted by Pennington [12]. According to these scholars, Arabic risks being marginalized and confined to local use, while English is accorded superior status and prestige, thereby undermining the national language's role and significance.

In summary, the increasing prevalence of EMI and the subsequent dominance of English in educational and professional fields contribute to the erosion of L1 domains. This shift poses a significant threat to the cultural and linguistic heritage of non-English-speaking countries, as it promotes English at the expense of native languages, leading to broader implications for cultural identity and linguistic diversity. Policy planners claim that the reasons for the adoption of EMI policy are mainly educational, but in fact they are ideological, political, financial, and social.

3. Methodology

This chapter contains the procedures followed throughout the study. It introduces a complete description of the research approach, the instrument, the sample, and the data analysis and results.

3.1 Research approach

Research approach can be defined as “a strategy that will guide the research in the whole process of the study” [29]. In this study, the researcher has adopted a mixed methods approach which is defined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as an emergent methodology of research that advances the systematic integration of quantitative and qualitative data within a program of inquiry. This approach is used to interpret the participants' perspectives regarding their academic experience using EMI, in addition to critically viewing the effect of the EMI policy on students' learning progress. Qualitative data have been collected using classroom observations and semi-structured interviews, while quantitative data have been collected using a closed-ended questionnaire. This approach enables the researcher to develop a comprehensive understanding of the problem under investigation.

3.2 Instrument

Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls and Ormston [51] state that the credibility of evidence can be displayed by providing a clear account of the research methods. The triangulation used in mixed methods design enhances the consistency of the data. The instruments used are provided below.

3.2.1 Questionnaire

A closed-ended questionnaire (Appendix A) was adopted and employed to collect the quantitative data to show the participants' general tendencies regarding EMI. To ensure the validity of the research tool, the questionnaire

items were formulated according to the research questions and the literature on EMI. It contains the participants' demographical information such as age, gender, nationality, date of registration at the college, the level studied in the Foundations program, English language proficiency level, current GPA, and number of years studied at government or/and private schools. The biographical section consists of 50 items that explore the learners' attitudes towards the use of EMI and their academic experience. The participants were given a translated version of the questionnaire (Appendix B) to ensure that they would understand all the statements clearly.

3.2.2 Semi-structured interview

The researcher considered the guidelines provided by Wellington [52] in order to formulate the interview questions to achieve the study's key issues. The interview consisted of 25 questions and the focus was on allowing the learners to express their opinion about emergent issues related to their learning experience using EMI. Four lecturers in the Business and Engineering departments and a total of 15 students in both departments were interviewed. To help the participants (who are still learners of English) feel comfortable and to be able to express themselves as clearly as possible they were interviewed in Arabic. The consent form (Appendix C) was signed before starting the interview.

3.2.3 Classroom observation

Ritchie [51] suggests that observational data helps us to gain direct information about individuals' practices rather than depending on what they say. Six 50-minute Business and Engineering sessions - three for each major - were observed. The intention was to observe the learners' interaction and participation in the class discussion. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured to all participants.

3.4 The research sample

This study took place in a higher educational institute in Madinat Zayed in the Western region. This campus was chosen purposely as the researcher has access to the college, so it was easy to contact the participants. Based on the researcher's experience, the students usually use their L1 (Arabic) as a tool for learning.

The participant sample comprises 4 lecturers as the researcher was unable to interview more lecturers. Two of them were non-native speakers of English in the Business department and two were Arab lecturers from the Engineering department. All of them have a Ph.D. degree in their major. Thirty-seven female students and 13 male students who study business and Electrical Engineering responded to the questionnaire and were observed and 4 male students and 11 female students were interviewed.

The students' ages range from 17-19 years old. All of them have studied English as a second language for 14 years. The learners are living in the same neighborhood, which means their demographic backgrounds are similar.

3.5 Data analysis and results

This study aims to investigate the effect of the EMI policy on students' learning experience from a critical stance

in order to identify the actual outcomes of the policy and compare it with its intended aims. To achieve this goal, four questions were formulated. A mixed methods approach was adopted, and three instruments were used to collect the data. SPSS program was used to analyze the quantitative data and interpret it.

The researcher coded the questionnaire items and indicated the gender and level of study in order to prepare the data for statistical analysis. Fifty students were enrolled in the study, 13 males (32.4%) and 37 females (67.6%). There were 6 1st year participants (6.5%) and 44 2nd year participants (93.5%) and mean scores for the questionnaire factors were roughly the same as shown in Table (1).

Table 1: The demographic results

Variable		N	%
Gender	Female	37	67.6
	Male	13	32.4
Level of study	First year	6	6.5
	Second year	44	93.51
School attended	Mean ± SD		
Registered at college	3.21 ± 0.88		
Self-evaluation of language proficiency	3.02 ± 0.89		

3.5.1 Answering the research questions

Before answering the research questions the data were checked for normality and outlier values. The results revealed that all mean scores for dependent variables were reasonable, with no outside values and the Shapiro-Wilk test for normality was not statistically significant (p= 0.116), which indicates the data are normally distributed and a parametric test can be used.

The first research question was How do Emirati students in their degree programs perceive EMI? The researcher calculated the mean and standard deviation of total questionnaire scores. The result revealed that the mean score of students’ perception was 3.49± 0.53. This indicates the students’ perceptions toward EMI policy was medium (mean = 2.33 - 3.66) and they believe in the necessity of using EMI even if that has affected their marks.

Table 2: Independent t-test results of students’ perceptions differences by the gender

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T-test	Sig. value	decision
male	13	3.56	0.49	106	1.794	0.076	Not statistically significant.
female	37	3.36	0.60				

Table (2) revealed that there was no statistically significant mean differences of students' perceptions score by the gender (male 3.55 vs. female 3.36) .t (106) 1.794, p =0.076. This means that the participant sample does not agree with EMI policy, which means that both genders have similar perceptions regarding EMI policy.

Table 3: Independent t-test results of students' perceptions differences by the gender

Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	T-test	Sig. value	decision
male	13	3.50	0.43	103	1.683	0.072	Not statistically significant.
female	37	3.31	0.50				

Table (3) revealed that there were no statistically significant mean differences in students' perception score by gender (male 3.50 vs. female 3.31) .t (106) 1.683, p =0.072. This indicates that the participant sample does not admit that they face difficulty in understanding the academic material.

To find out whether gender, level of study, and other subscales (school attended, registered at college, self-evaluation of English proficiency) can significantly predict student's perception of EMI, a stepwise multiple linear regression was used, and the results are shown in Table (5).

Table 4: Stepwise multiple linear regression analysis for study variables

Variables		Beta	t	Sig.
A	Gender	-.099	-713	.478
	Education Level	.022	1.706	.091
B	School attended	.110	11.932	.000
	Registered at college	.128	14.127	.000
	Self-evaluation of English proficiency	.115	12.174	.000

A. excluded variables; B. included variables.

Table (4) presents three subscales which were found to be statistically significant predictors for student perceptions toward EMI policy. $P < 0.001$ for all, where the gender and educational level were not a statistically significant predictors for student's perception toward EMI policy $p > 0.05$ for all. To sum up, the data provided information about the respondents' views and experiences of practices that related to the use of English as a medium of instruction.

3.6 Study limitations

The study faced several notable limitations that impacted the depth and breadth of data collected. Firstly, gathering data from six different lecturers proved challenging, primarily due to the timing of the mid-term exams. This period constrained the availability and willingness of potential interview participants, leading to a reliance on

convenience sampling rather than a more rigorous purposive sampling method. Consequently, the representativeness of the lecturer data may be compromised, as the sample may not accurately reflect the broader lecturer population.

Additionally, investigating the challenges learners encounter while writing their assignments presented significant difficulties. Of the 15 learners involved in the study, only three provided a writing sample. Some learners reported that they had not been required to complete a written assignment by the time of the interview, limiting the availability of relevant samples. Furthermore, those who did submit their writing samples were often unable to articulate the specific challenges they faced during the writing process. This lack of detailed explanations hindered the ability to collect comprehensive, in-depth data on the learners' writing challenges.

Overall, the limitations of this study include the constrained lecturer sampling method due to mid-term exams, the insufficient number of writing samples from learners, and the learners' inability to clearly explain their writing challenges. These factors collectively restricted the depth of data and insights that could be obtained, potentially affecting the study's findings and their generalizability.

4. Discussion

In this study, the effect of the English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) policy on students' learning experience was investigated. The data analysis revealed that the mean score of students' perception towards the EMI policy was medium, indicating that students believe in the necessity of using EMI even if it has affected their marks. There were no statistically significant differences in perception scores by gender, indicating that both male and female students had similar views on the EMI policy.

Furthermore, the data also showed that there were no statistically significant differences in perception scores by educational level, indicating that both first year and second-year students had similar perceptions towards the EMI policy. The stepwise multiple linear regression analysis identified three subscales as statistically significant predictors for students' perceptions towards the EMI policy, whereas gender and educational level were not found to be significant predictors.

In this section, the findings will be presented in detail to answer the four research questions.

4.1 Learners' perceptions regarding EMI policy

The findings revealed that the majority of the students (74%) believe in the need to use EMI. Twelve participants out of 15 agreed with the use of EMI which can be connected with their assumption that EMI can help them learn English. It is found that 97.4% of the participants believe that their English proficiency can be improved by learning the content through English which matches Chapple's [42] findings. It is clear that the learners support the use of EMI because they think they can improve their English language, but a question can be raised here: how much content will they comprehend using a language they are still trying to learn?

However, only 16.3% of the participants believed in using Arabic language as medium of instruction at college.

Some of them explained that as EMI hinders profound comprehension, they have to learn the language before the content. One of the students pointed out that if the country does not use its own language, its development will be inhibited. Using English will not benefit the country, which agrees with Solloway's point of view [1]. Al-Mashikhi [53] supports the use of AMI as a tool to improve the country's economy, education, and culture. They assert that language is not merely a means of communication, but also a symbol of identity. One participant suggested that they should be given the right to choose the language in which to study. She added that in other countries learners have the right to study using their L1, so why this option is not applicable here? Students' right to study using their L1 is denied, and this affects not only the individual but also the society's language and culture.

4.2 Learners' academic experience

Most of the participants (83.6%) said that their English skills have improved, some of them reported their improvement was related to learning new words. The findings of the current study reveal that using EMI can result in a degree of improvement in learners' English skills.

93.8% of the interview participants reported that the period they spent studying English at school had not prepared them to study in English at college and they had to join the Foundations program before joining their degree programs. Baporikar and Shah [5] point that 78% of UAE learners have to study in an English Foundations program. The results show that 62.5% of the questionnaire participants had to start with level 2 (LSC 0209) in the English Foundations program which means that their English level was below what is required to study an undergraduate program using EMI.

36.95 % of the participants mentioned that they feel that their level is not good enough that to enable them to study in English. 29.4% claimed that they are ready to study using EMI, but they expect to face some obstacles. A number of participants stated that the obstacles they faced were beyond their expectations. Classroom observations suggested that most of the learners are not ready to study using EMI as they never gave a full answer or asked a complete question but rather offered fragments such as "*what meaning of ...*". Some learners were unable to ask in English, they asked in Arabic, and learners with good English translated the question into English for non-Arab lecturers. All these learners assume that they are ready for EMI since they passed the final level (LSC0306) in the Foundations program. Sivaraman [54] concluded that "learners are not comfortable in classes taught in English even after foundations training". Accordingly, it is clear that implementing EMI policy does not give the learners equal opportunities to learn which might have an impact on their future careers and the country's national development.

A number of participants claimed that the difficulty of the content and the ability of the lecturers to deliver the material have an effect on their comprehension as the lecturers' main concern is to deliver the content regardless of whether the learners have understood or not. It was noted in the classroom observations that only two Arab lecturers spent some time on clarifying the meaning of some words in English and Arabic. In addition, it was observed that none of the lectures tried to engage the learners in any kind of class discussion, which indicates that learners are provided with shallow content knowledge which supports the findings of Wilkinson's [55] study .

This is a major educational issue that should be considered, and because of that it is important to raise awareness among policy makers in order to open the door for possible changes regarding implementation of EMI.

4.3 Understanding content material

86% of the questionnaire participants pointed out that they have to do a lot of reading in their major study. A course book which learners refer to as a handout is the main reading core in each course. Learners are not offered a reading list that they have to cover within a period of time as common for university students. One of the participants mentioned that “*We do not have any course book. But the lecturers give us some papers to read.*” Such a situation creates different perceptions among learners regarding the content material. The researcher had a chance during class observations to look at the handout’s students have which varied from 40 -55 pages and were prepared mostly by the department. Each student received photocopied material which was compiled from books, online resources, and journals and it does not contain any colored picture or graphs. Learners’ assessments are based on the information provided in the handout, so the lecturers have to cover all of it.

Some participants mentioned that the lecturers rarely ask them to check other resources such as books which are available in the college library. The findings reveal that the content material for each subject is limited. Shen [56] claims that most learners in Taiwan who study using EMI complain about the number of reading assignments they have per week. None of the current study’s participants complained about the reading material they have to do in each course which could be related to the claim that Arabs in general lack reading culture [57]. King [58] raised a concern regarding the amount of reading load that learners in the UAE have, and whether it meets the international standards since accreditation and validation bodies depend on the content material in learners’ programs.

Learning English is one of the reasons for implementing EMI policy because most of the academic material is in English. The questionnaire data reveal that some learners read beyond the required texts in order to understand the content material rather expanding their knowledge which can be connected to the lack of English proficiency. This would suggest that the knowledge learners gain in a certain field is restricted to the information in the handout which is rather like studying at school than college.

4.4 The impact of EMI policy on learners’ academic achievement

One of the regulations in the college is that the lecturers are not allowed to answer any question from students during the exam time regardless the type of question to in order to ensure complete silence in the exam room to enable the learners to focus on their exam. Accordingly, 43.6% of the questionnaire participants reported that they did not answer correctly because they did not comprehend the question. 91.1% of the interview participants mentioned that they face difficulties in understanding exam questions. 13 participants acknowledged that they write incorrect answers because they misunderstand what is required from the question and the lecturers do not answer when they are being asked during the exam time. A number of participants said that sometimes they understand the question, but they do not know how to express their ideas in English, which matches the findings of Al-Bakri [59].

When the participants were asked about their academic satisfaction, 89.6% of them said that the exam results did not satisfy them as the hard work they did preparing for the test did not result in satisfactory grades. According to the findings, they were very disappointed because their low achievement was due to language barriers, not connected to lack of effort.

When the learners were asked about their expected learning experience using EMI, 97.8% said that their study would be easier if it was in Arabic. Tollefson and Tsui [60] suggest that “for overall academic performance, investment in mother tongue learning has long term benefits”.

According to the above-mentioned findings a question has been raised about whether the current EMI policy serves all learners equally and allows them to participate effectively in their society.

Overall, the findings suggest that students generally perceive the EMI policy in a similar manner, regardless of gender or educational level. The data provided valuable insights into students' views and experiences regarding the use of English as a medium of instruction. Further research could explore additional factors that may influence students' perceptions of the EMI policy, such as language proficiency and academic performance. This study contributes to the understanding of the impact of the EMI policy on students' learning experiences and provides implications for educators and policymakers to improve the implementation of the policy.

5. Conclusion

This section will present the research Conclusion, Implications for practice, and Recommendations.

5.1 Conclusion

The first question explored the learners' perceptions of EMI. Some students accepted the policy, and a small number supported its implementation as a way to improve their English language proficiency. For others, EMI is not desirable, but they believe it may increase their job opportunities. A limited number of the participants preferred studying through AMI due to their belief that English hinders profound understanding of the content material, and it affects the use of their L1 (Arabic).

The effect of EMI on the quality of students' learning experience was investigated by the second question. Although the participants felt ready after studying in the Foundations program, they were still having problems in studying using EMI. The majority of the participants agreed that their language skills had been improved, but this happened a result of studying in the Foundations program rather than in the degree programs. All participants attributed difficulties in comprehending the content material to teaching style. A number of participants preferred Arab lecturers as they provide explanation in Arabic. A very important point was that EMI has a negative effect on learners' mental wellbeing resulting in frustration, low self-esteem, and avoiding attending class as they feel bored when they do not understand.

The third question investigated the difficulties learners face in understanding the content material related to their major. The reading load is very small as it is limited to handouts, summaries, and some online resources. The

main obstacle that hindered comprehension was unknown vocabulary. Learners were used to translating the text or guessing the meaning to overcome this problem.

The effect of EMI on learners' academic performance was explored by the fourth question. The learners acknowledged that sometimes they give incorrect answers because they did not understand the exam questions, which resulted in unsatisfactory marks. Few students felt that AMI would enhance their performance as some courses do not depend on language proficiency, but on mathematical equations.

To sum up, in the learners' opinion, the improvement of their learning experience is the college's responsibility. According to learners, hiring more Arab lecturers and giving some courses in Arabic may solve the language problem. The learners suggest that the curriculum should be revised, and the quality of lecturers and the teaching techniques should be enhanced. Only one student felt that learners should be responsible for their own learning as the college has offered what is required.

5.2 Implications for Practice

Several implications emerge after reviewing learners' perceptions on the EMI policy and its effect on their academic experience. Although EMI would be an appropriate strategy to equip students with the necessary professional skills to function effectively in the job market, it has to be contested for several reasons.

Policy makers have not taken into consideration that learners are linguistically not ready to study in English. Learners' learning experience provided evidence that they are able to understand the course material after translating it into Arabic which means that students try to comprehend the language of the content material rather than the content itself. The dependence on Arabic translation indicates that learners' English level is not appropriate for studying in the degree programs using EMI. In such a situation, English is a barrier that prevent the effective interaction between the students and the lecturers [3].

According to the findings, the policy has not given the learners equal opportunities to study in the program stream. Students' English language competence is related to their ability to deal with course content material, it is not only related to their ability to succeed.

The suitability of the EMI policy has to be questioned as Arabic and English are needed for students' future employment. Accordingly, students' Arabic may not be used efficiently in workplaces, especially in the public sector. Learners are not provided with appropriate conditions for English language learning as they were provided with incomprehensible input and as a result the output was limited.

The learners at the institution under study were deprived of their human right to receive their education in their L1. This would create a negative impact on their attitudes especially those who are struggling due to their weak English although they were successful when they were studying in Arabic.

Overall, the quality of academic knowledge gained has to be questioned as what is expected from students in regard to reading and writing is below what is expected from students who study in their L1.

5.3 Research recommendations

Appropriate measures need to be taken in order to better prepare the students for their study in English if the UAE intends to continue implementing the EMI policy at higher education institutions. Accordingly, schools have to enhance the quality of English language teaching as Foundations program can be supportive in raising student English level but is not sufficient for developing students' language competence to the adequate level for academic study.

It would be a good idea to introduce AMI in all higher educational institutions as Arabic is unofficially used by lecturers and helps students comprehend courses' material. In addition, English is used as a lingua franca in the UAE, so it is recommended to offer courses for English for academic purposes (EAP) and for specific purposes (ESP) in order to enhance learners' English level.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Students Questionnaire (English Version)

Effects of English medium instruction (EMI) on students’ learning experiences and quality of education in content courses in a public college in the UAE

Part 1

Dear Student

Please complete the information about yourself.

1. Age _____

2. Gender: male female

3. Nationality: Omani Other: _____

4. Which type of school did you attend?

Government Private Government and Private

5. How long did you attend the government and/or private school(s)?

Government _____ years Private _____ years

6. When did you register at this college? 20 ____

7. Did you study English in the Foundation program? Yes No

8. If **yes to 7**, which level did you **first** study?

Level 1 Level 2 Level 3 Level 4

9. In which department are you studying now?

Engineering Business

10. At which stage are you in your study now?

First year Second year Third year Fourth year

11. How would you rate your English language proficiency?

Very weak weak average above average good

12. What is your current GPA? _____

Part 2

Please read the statements on the following pages and **circle the number** which best reflects your learning experience in this college. There are no right/wrong answers. The numbers 1 2 3 4 5 refer to the following responses:

(1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) undecided, (4) agree, (5) strongly agree.

Statements 1-18	strongly	disagree	un-	agree	strongly
	disagree		decided		agree
1. Learning through English can improve my English language proficiency.					
2. Scientific subjects should be taught in English.					
3. I believe that all subjects should be taught in Arabic at this college.					
4. English is more important than Arabic in education.					
5. I need to study in English to get a good job.					
6. Learning through English will affect my ability to use standard Arabic (fus'ha).					
7. Beside English, I need Arabic in my future job.					
8. Some subjects should be taught in Arabic at this college.					
9. I feel comfortable speaking English in class.					

10. I rarely participate in class out of fear to make mistakes in speaking English in front of my classmates.					
11. Sometimes I do not understand what the teachers say in class.					
12. I usually ask questions in class when I do not understand.					
13. I can easily take notes in English during the class.					
14. I feel comfortable asking my content teachers (non-Arabic speakers) questions outside class.					
15. My English listening skills have improved because all classes are in English.					
16. I feel that my English language is not good enough to study in English.					
17. I ask my friends to explain if I do not understand what the teacher says.					
18. My content teachers re-explain if students do not understand.					
19. I need to translate many words into Arabic to understand the course material.					
20. I have to do a lot of reading in English for my study.					
21. My reading skills have improved because I study in English.					
22. I find it difficult to understand technical vocabulary.					
23. My friends help me to understand the course material.					
24. Our content teachers spend a lot of time explaining vocabulary.					
25. I try to expand my knowledge through reading resources related to my study in English.					
26. I stop reading when I do not understand the text.					
27. I find it difficult to understand long English texts.					
28. Reading in English is difficult because my grammar is weak.					

29. I try to guess the meaning of words from the context without translating them into the Arabic language.					
30. I make sure I understand every word in the text.					
31. Writing is an important skill in my specialization.					
32. Because my technical vocabulary is weak, I find it difficult to do a writing assignment in my specialization.					
33. When I write in English I make grammar mistakes.					
34. My content teacher is more concerned about the content of my assignment than the correctness of my English language.					
35. When I have to write an assignment in my specialization, I often copy sentences/paragraphs from the internet because my English language is weak.					
36. My writing skills have improved because I have to write a lot of assignments in my specialization.					
37. My content teachers help me improve my writing skills through correcting my mistakes.					
38. I always make spelling mistakes when I write in English.					
39. I can express myself clearly in writing in English.					
40. I find it difficult to write in English because I do not know a lot of vocabulary.					
41. I always ask my friends to check my written assignments for mistakes.					
42. I ask someone from outside the college to support me in my writing projects.					
43. Because my writing is weak, I first write in Arabic and then translate it into English.					
44. Because my English is weak, I get low grades.					
45. My GPA would be higher if the courses were taught in Arabic.					
46. Sometimes I do not answer correctly in the exam because I do not understand the question in English.					
47. It is important to study in English even if I get low grades.					

48. I would spend less time studying the content if it were in Arabic.					
49. I memorize the content in order to pass quizzes and exams.					

Thank you for completing the questionnaire

Dear student

If you would like to participate in a further stage of the research, an interview, please provide your contact details below.

Name:

Mobile number:

.....

Email:

Appendix B: Students' Questionnaire (Arabic Version)

عزيزي الطالب

الرجاء اكمال البيانات عن نفسك.

1. العمر: _____
2. الجنس: ذكر أنثى
3. الجنسية: _____
4. في أي نوع من المدارس درست؟ حكومية خاصة
5. كم سنة درست في المدرسة الحكومية _____ و/أو الخاصة _____
6. في أي عام سجلت في هذه الكلية؟ 20____
7. هل درست في قسم البرنامج التأسيسي للغة الإنجليزية؟ (English Foundation Programme)
نعم لا
8. إذا كان جوابك نعم لإسؤال رقم 7، في أي مستوى بدأت؟
المستوى الأول المستوى الثاني المستوى الثالث المستوى الرابع
9. في أي قسم تدرس حالياً؟ _____
10. في أي مرحلة دراسية أنت الآن؟
دبلوم سنة أولى (certificate) دبلوم سنة ثانية (diploma)
دبلوم عال (higher diploma) الإجازة (bachelor)
11. كيف تقدر كفاءتك اللغوية في اللغة الانكليزية؟
ضعيف جدا ضعيف متوسط أعلى من المتوسط جيد
12. ما هو معدلك التراكمي العام؟ (GPA) _____

القسم الثاني

الرجاء قراءة الجمل الموجودة في الصفحات التالية و الإجابة عنها على حسب تجربة تعلمك في الكلية التقنية. لا توجد أجوبة خاطئة/ صحيحة. يجب عليك أن تقرر التالي:

- (1) لا أوافق بشدة (2) لا أوافق (3) لست متأكد (4) أوافق (5) أوافق بشدة

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لست متأكد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	الجملة 1-17
					1. أتعلم باللغة الإنجليزية من الممكن أن يقوي كفاءتي في اللغة الإنجليزية.
					2. المواد العلمية يجب أن تعلم باللغة الإنجليزية.
					3. الطلاب الذين يتعلمون باللغة الإنجليزية هم أكثر نجاحا في الحياة من الذين يتعلمون باللغة العربية.
					4. أنا اعتقد أن اللغة العربية يجب أن تكون لغة التعلم في هذه الكلية.
					5. اللغة الإنجليزية أهم من اللغة العربية في التعلم.
					6. أحتاج للتعلم باللغة الإنجليزية لإيجاد عمل جيد.
					7. أتعلم باللغة الإنجليزية من الممكن أن يؤثر بشكل سلبي على قدرتي على استعمال اللغة العربية الفصحى.
					8. إلى جانب اللغة الإنجليزية، أنا أحتاج إلى اللغة العربية في مهنتي المستقبلية.
					9. بعض المواد يجب أن تدرس باللغة العربية في هذه الكلية.
					10. أشعر بالراحة عند التكلم باللغة الإنجليزية في الصف.
					11. أنا نادرا ما أشارك في الصف نتيجة خوفا في ارتكابي الأخطاء أمام زملائي في الصف.
					12. أحيانا لا أفهم ما يقوله المدرس في الصف.
					13. أنا عادة أسأل المدرس في الصف في حال لم أفهم.
					14. من السهل علي أن أسجل ملاحظات باللغة الإنجليزية في الصف.
					15. أشعر بالراحة عند سؤال مدرس اختصاص (غير ناطق باللغة العربية) خارج نطاق الصف.
					16. تحسنت لدي المهارات السماعية باللغة الإنجليزية لأن جميع محاضراتي باللغة الإنجليزية.
					17. أشعر بأن لغتي الإنجليزية ليست جيدة بما فيه الكفاية للدراسة بها.

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لست متأكد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	الجملة 18-36
					18. أطلب من أصدقائي أن يشرحوا لي إذا لم أفهم ما يقوله المدرس.
					19. المدرس الاختصاصي يساعد الطلاب و يعيد الترح في حال عدم فهمهم.
					20. إنني بحاجة إلى ترجمة العديد من الكلمات لفهم المادة المقررة.
					21. يجب علي أن أقرأ كثيراً باللغة الإنجليزية في مجال دراستي.
					22. قدراتي في القراءة تحسنت بسبب دراستي باللغة الإنجليزية.
					23. أجد صعوبة بفهم المفردات المتعلقة بالاختصاص.
					24. أصدقائي يساعدونني بفهم مقرر المادة.
					25. مدرسي المواد الاختصاصية يقضون وقتاً طويلاً بتدريسنا المفردات.
					26. أحاول أن أوسع معرفتي عبر قراءة المصادر المتعلقة بدراستي باللغة الإنجليزية.
					27. أتوقف عن القراءة عندما لا أفهم النص.
					28. القراءة باللغة الإنجليزية صعب لأن النحو عندي ضعيف.
					29. أجد صعوبة بفهم النصوص الإنجليزية الطويلة.
					30. أحاول أن أفهم معاني الكلمات من النص.
					31. أتأكد بأن أفهم كل كلمة بالنص.
					32. الكتابة مهارة مهمة في اختصاصي.
					33. عندما اكتب باللغة الإنجليزية أرتكب أخطاء بالنحو.
					34. مدرس الاختصاص يكون قلق على محتوى الواجب أكثر من صحة اللغة الإنجليزية.
					35. عندما يطلب مني كتابة واجب في اختصاصي، غالباً ما أنقل جمل/مقاطع من الإنترنت لأن لغتي الإنجليزية ضعيفة.
					36. مهاراتي في الكتابة تطورت و تحسنت لأنه يجب علي كتابة الكثير من الواجبات المتعلقة باختصاصي.

أوافق بشدة	أوافق	لست متأكد	لا أوافق	لا أوافق بشدة	الجملة 37-50
					37. مدرسبي الاختصاصيين بساعدونني على تطوير و تحسين مهاراتي الكتابية عن طريق تصحيح أخطائي.
					38. دائما أرتكب الأخطاء عند كتابتي باللغة الإنجليزية.
					39. يمكنني أن أعبر عما أريد كتابته بوضوح تام باللغة الإنجليزية.
					40. أجد صعوبة بالكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية لأنني لا أعرف الكثير من المفردات.
					41. دائما أطلب من أصدقائي أن يتأكدوا من عدم وجود أخطاء في كتابتي.
					42. أطلب من أحد من خارج الكلية مساعدتي بمشارعي المتعلقة بالكتابة.
					43. لأن كتابتي باللغة الإنجليزية ضعيفة، أكتب بالعربي أولا و من ثم أترجمها إلى اللغة الإنجليزية.
					44. التعلم باللغة الإنجليزية لا يؤثر على علاماتي بشكل سلبي.
					45. لأن لغتي الإنجليزية ضعيفة، أحصل على علامات ضعيفة.
					46. درجاتي في المعدل التراكمي العام (GPA) كانت من الممكن أن تكون أعلى لو أن الصفوف كانت تدرس باللغة العربية.
					47. أحيانا لا أجاب بشكل صحيح في الامتحان لأنني لا أفهم السؤال باللغة الإنجليزية.
					48. من المهم أن أدرس باللغة الإنجليزية حتى و لو حصلت على علامات ضعيفة.
					49. سأهضي وقتا أقل بالدراسة، لو أن المواد كانت تدرس باللغة العربية.
					50. أنا أحفظ المضمون كي أتجح في الاختبارات.

شكرا لك لإتمام الاستبيان

عزيزي الطالب

إذا كنت ترغب بالمشاركة في مقابلة يرجى تزويد بيانات الاتصال بك:

الاسم:

رقم الجوال:

البريد الإلكتروني:

Experience in the UAE

Having read the information sheet, I have been fully informed about the aims and purposes of the research project.

I understand that:

There is no compulsion for me to participate in this research project and, if I do choose to participate, I may at any stage withdraw my participation and may request that my data be destroyed.

I have the right to refuse permission for the publication of any information about me.

Any information which I give will be used solely for the purposes of this research project, which may include publications, conference presentations and seminars.

If applicable, the information which I give, may be shared with the thesis supervisor of this research project in an anonymized form.

All information I give will be treated as confidential.

The researcher will make every effort to preserve my anonymity

.....

(Signature of participant)

.....

(Date)

.....

(Printed name of participant)

One copy of this form will be kept by the participant; a second copy will be kept by the researcher.

Contact phone number of researcher's office: 022062139

If you have any concerns about the project that you would like to discuss, please contact:

Researcher: Fathia Alfaran; email: falfaran@hct.ac.ae

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. Attitudes towards studying in English/Arabic

1. How do you feel about studying your courses in English at this college? Elaborate.
2. Do you think your English language proficiency has improved after you joined the foundation programme/after you joined your specialisation? If yes, in which area has it improved most: speaking, listening, reading, writing? Explain how/why.
- 3- Do you think you are well prepared for studying in English?

2. Quality of academic experience

- 4- Since you are studying via English, do you need to do extra academic efforts? If yes, what kind of effort and how much?
5. When you attend a class, what do you usually do? How do you feel?
Prompts: listen / take notes/ copy from the board/ participate in class discussions/ solve problems/ ask the teacher/friend
6. Are there any challenges/difficulties that you face? Prompts: understanding lectures/asking the teacher/taking notes
7. How do you study at home?
9. When you need support in your study (college or home) what do you do?
10. What support does the college provide the students with to study in English?

3. Reading

- 10- What are you required to read in your major?
- 11- In order to expand your knowledge, do you read resources related to your study other than the textbook assigned to you?
- 12- When you read a text related to your study, do you face any difficulty in comprehending the text?
Prompts: terminology/ technical vocabulary/general English vocabulary/sentence structure (grammar)/ length of text/difficulty of the content (regardless of the English language)

13- Can you read a text from your course book/handout? What do you do to understand the text?

Prompts: translate unknown words/ whole text/try to guess meaning from context
try to get the main idea/use background information/ask a friend

4. Writing

14- Do you need to do a lot of writing in your specialisation? If yes, what kind of writing do you have to do? How many?

Prompts: summary/reports/research paper/power point presentation

15- When you face a problem in writing your assignment, does your subject teacher support you? If yes, how?

16- When you write an assignment, does your content teacher provide you with feedback on your English language/content? If yes, do you understand the feedback you receive from your teacher?

17. How are your assignments assessed? Content and /or language?

18- Can you show me one/some of your assignments? Did you face any difficulties in writing this/these assignment (s)? If yes, specify:

Prompts: weakness in vocabulary/spelling/grammar (sentence structure)/
genre of writing/ organisation/paraphrasing/summarizing/referencing

5. Academic performance

19- Are you content with your performance in your major? If no why?

20- Do you sometimes face difficulties during the exam? If yes, what kind of difficulties?

21- Do you think it is possible that your subjects are taught in Arabic?

22- What kind of grades do you think you would have if courses were taught in Arabic?

23- If the courses were taught in Arabic, how would your university experience be? This is in relation to your understanding of the content of your study area and your overall experience.

24- In your opinion, how could the college improve the learning experience of the students?

25. Would you like to add any comments regarding this issue?

Thank you for your valuable feedback